



Wales: Wellbeing as Sustainable Development

Abstract Wales is at the global forefront on legislation on sustainable development, with the origins of this dating back to the original legislation on devolution in 1998. The most recent legislation, the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 clearly links duties on sustainable development to public sector reform and concepts of prevention, collaboration, integration, involvement and long-term thinking. The Act places equal weight on all aspects of wellbeing, directly challenging the economic dominance in policy-making. In implementation, a strong culture of performance management for public services has arisen which some commentators argue detracts from its original aim of sustainable development. Early indicators of impact can be seen, particularly in relation to the development of thinking and practice on adverse childhood experiences.

Keywords Sustainable development · Participation
Future generations · Welsh Government · Public sector reform

We knew that it would not be easy. Only a few countries have ever done this. Only in Wales are we ambitious enough to legislate for wellbeing goals for sustainable Wales... Wales remains committed to sustainable development and is bold and confident enough to take this step. We are a small country, but that does not mean that we should not be ambitious.

Carl Sargeant AM, former Minister for Natural Resources speaking in 2014 (National Assembly for Wales [2014](#))

INTRODUCTION

Wales is at the global forefront of legislation on sustainable development, going further than all other legislatures in requiring public bodies to safeguard the interests of future generations. But while they are lauded internationally their story is far from common knowledge in policy circles in the UK. Within Wales, there is a sense that the transformation has not yet been as wide-reaching as its architects had hoped.

CONTEXT

The Assembly has 60 members, known as Assembly Members (AMs) elected for five-year terms under an additional member system. Forty of the AMs represent geographical constituencies, elected under the First Past the Post system. The remaining 20 AMs represent five electoral regions, each including between seven and nine constituencies, using the d'Hondt method of proportional representation. The Assembly must elect a First Minister, who selects ministers to form the Welsh Government. The electoral system encourages coalition government.

The Welsh Assembly was initially the weakest of the three devolved legislatures, and Welsh legislation most entwined with English Law. However successive Acts have enhanced its powers. These Acts, in 2006, 2011, 2014 and 2017 have brought the powers closer into line with the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly, most notably providing for tax-raising powers and establishing a Welsh Revenue Authority. There is now a substantial body of Welsh legislation leading to specialisms in Welsh public policy and Welsh law.

Wales voted narrowly for a devolved assembly in 1997 (50.3–49.7%) and the powers of the Secretary of State for Wales were transferred on 1 July 1999, granting the National Assembly of Wales the power to decide how the Westminster government's budget for devolved areas

is spent and administered. While initial support for the Welsh Assembly was muted, the 2011 referendum on the right to make primary legislation found 63.5% of the population in favour of the extension of powers, suggesting growing popular support for the institution (Chaney 2016). Between 1999 and 2018 there have been five elections for the National Assembly. Welsh Labour has always been in government in Wales, either as a minority administration (2011–2016) or in coalition with the Liberal Democrats (1999–2007 and 2016–present day) or Plaid Cymru (2007–2011).

The UK and international comparisons on wellbeing published by the OECD (see Table 2.2) show consistent strengths in housing, safety and community support. Wales scores poorly compared to the 12 regions of the UK on health however and on access to broadband. People in Wales report lower levels of life satisfaction than those in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

CATALYSTS

Wales has a deep commitment to sustainable development. The Government of Wales Act 1998 included a requirement on it to make a scheme setting out ‘*how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to promote sustainable development*’, with requirements to keep the scheme under annual review, to remake or revise it when a new government was formed, and to carry out an effectiveness review of the scheme at the end of each government term. The duties were renewed in the Government of Wales Act 2006, which created a clearer separation between the legislature and the executive and hence placed the duty on the newly established executive body rather than the National Assembly (Table 4.1).

Politicians played a clear role in promoting the sustainable development strategy with early leadership provided by Sue Essex AM (Minister for Environment, Transport and Planning 2000–2003 and Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services 2003–2007) who was instrumental in getting the Assembly’s commitment to sustainable development inserted into the original Government of Wales Act. Support for civil society involvement in sustainable development came from the establishment of Cynnal Cymru (Sustain Wales), which was formed in 2002 and helped to promote the duty of sustainable development.

There have been three sustainable development strategies which operationalised this duty: Learning to Live Differently (2000–2003),

Table 4.1 Timeline for the development of the Welsh wellbeing framework

Government of Wales Act 1998 creates a statutory duty on Welsh Government to promote sustainable development	1998
First Sustainable Development Strategy ‘Learning to Live Differently’ published	2000
Cynnal Cymru/Sustain Wales established	2002
Second Sustainable Development Strategy ‘Learning to Work Differently’ published	2004
First Sustainable Development Indicators published	2005
Government of Wales Act introduces sustainable development duty	2006
Reduction in number of departments within Welsh Government	2007
One Wales, One Planet policy introduced which identified sustainable development as the central organising principle of the Welsh Government	2009
Sustainable Development Charter launched	2010
Commissioner for Sustainable Futures appointed	2011
Launch of The Wales We Want	2014
The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 passed	2015
Commissioner for Future Generations established	2016
First deadline for wellbeing assessments from public bodies	2017
First annual wellbeing reports due from public bodies	2018

Source Original

Learning to Work Differently (2004–2008) and One Wales: One Planet, The Sustainable Development Scheme of the Welsh Assembly Government (2009–2016). One Wales: One Planet identified its ambition to make sustainable development the central organising principle of the Welsh Government. The policy included a strategy for delivering sustainable development, comprised of actions grouped around resource use, environment, economy and society. It set out a number of headline indicators for sustainable development, including wellbeing. These 44 indicators were reported on annually and progress indicated through a traffic lights system (Statistics for Wales 2015). It is this date that I have taken to refer to the implementation of the wellbeing framework. While other aspects were in place before, it is the identification of a central unifying concept (in this case sustainable development) that differentiates One Wales; One Planet from other policy initiatives.

In a thorough review of the sustainable development strategy, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) found that there was strong political and managerial leadership on sustainable development but that this was not consistent across the organisation, with some seeing the duty

as belonging to the Sustainable Development branch team rather than a whole-of-government responsibility. Embedding the approach was further hampered by the lack of formal requirements to assess policies for their impact on sustainable development.

While the report authors note they were seeking policy or programme changes that had a clear cross-sectoral approach, rather than activities that focused on improving one domain of wellbeing, the identified policy successes focused strongly on environmental programmes (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2011). The examples of success given include (but were not limited to) the Arbed Programme, which had a positive impact on climate change, tackling fuel poverty and improving the local economy by creating Welsh jobs, and the Climate Change Strategy 2010, which while focused on improving outcomes in one domain (environment) includes cross-sectoral initiatives to deliver on the commitments.

Conversations on mechanisms to strengthen the duty as a central organising principle therefore began relatively early in the process. The 2011 Welsh Labour manifesto tackled the issue by committing to putting sustainable development into legislation—with the aim of: *‘embedding sustainable development as the central organising principle in all our actions across government and all public bodies’* (Welsh Labour 2011, p. 93). The manifesto commitment was secured by Jane Davidson MLA who had been a powerful advocate for environmental issues, leading the campaigns for the plastic bag charge and the focus on recycling targets. Ms Davidson stood down at this election and was therefore not involved in its further development.

Welsh Labour also committed to setting up a new Sustainable Development Commission, following the abolition by the UK Government earlier in 2011. Initially this was a non-statutory post of Sustainable Futures Commissioner. No such parallel move was made in Scotland or Northern Ireland, further cementing its credentials as a government taking sustainable development seriously. The Commissioner was supported by Cynnal Cymru, providing a level of independence from the centre of government.

The Bill was also influenced by the publication of a Wales case study as part of broader cross-jurisdictional research into the use of alternative indicators in policy. It found that the sustainable development indicators were not used effectively across Welsh Government policy-making due to a variety of barriers that result in them not being seen as having a

meaningful role within the policy-making process (Michaelson 2013). These barriers were clustered around four key themes:

- A lack of relevance for key audiences (including a lack of a strong narrative, context and meaning; too many indicators across Welsh Government and poor design and selection of individual indicators)
- A lack of connection to priorities and action (including tensions about how the sustainable development indicators should relate to other priorities and a reluctance to prioritise within indicator sets)
- Perceptions that the Sustainable Development Indicators distort the true priorities of the Welsh Government (for example, being seen as too weighted to environmental issues, being seen as a false technocratic solution)
- Political pressures affecting the use of indicators (including, a lack of fit between the evidence from indicators and the factors driving political decision-making and pressure on politicians to be seen to be taking quick action).

It was clear by this point that the aim of putting sustainable development at the heart of the work of the Welsh Government was being hampered by the complexity of the communication. The shift in language from sustainable development to wellbeing was therefore intentional, as Sophie Howe Commissioner for Future Generations in Wales told me: *'framing it in that way was thought to be more easily understandable to people'*. While sustainable development is a broad concept, it is often marginalised by stakeholders who see it solely in relation to environmental issues (Whitby et al. 2014). The use of the word wellbeing was seen as having a broader appeal. A further important point was made by interviewees. Wellbeing, by this time, was a word that had already been incorporated into Welsh legislation, with the passing of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014. Though it should be noted that the definitions are quite different, with the prior Act citing a range of dimensions of personal wellbeing, rather than the definition that is within the later legislation of which is more clearly a statement of societal wellbeing (linked to economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing).

There were, at the time, separate attempts to bring in performance management approaches akin to Results Based Accountability through

the Programme for Government.¹ This approach makes clearer distinctions between outcomes, outcomes indicators and performance indicators. The overall aim was to assess policy areas and programmes and increase joined-up working. But no effort appeared to be made to link the Sustainable Development Indicators to the Programme for Government indicators, leading to confusion and an understandable prioritisation of the Programme for Government targets.

In May 2012, the Welsh Government launched an initial consultation on plans for a new piece of legislation, the Sustainable Development Bill but taking into account these findings and a general shift in narrative, the working title was changed to the ‘Future Generations (Wales) Bill’ and then finally to the ‘Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015’. The political stewardship of the Bill also changed. Initially it was introduced by Jeff Cuthbert, AM Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty (2013–2014). Following a reshuffle it became the responsibility of Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Natural Resources.

The shift in language and approach had a mixed effect on galvanising a broader movement for change. For over two years the Welsh Government and the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, Peter Davies, held what was claimed to be Wales’s biggest National Conversation on ‘The Wales We Want’ which encouraged people to take part in a different type of conversation beyond the short-term pressures of everyday life. The report of the shows the success of this open and inclusive model with engagement of almost 7000 people (Commissioner for Sustainable Futures 2015). The role of public engagement and participation was essential to this phase however it is interesting to note that it is not now referred to very often.

COMPONENTS

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 places a legal duty on all public bodies to carry out sustainable development, and improve and achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Understanding the Welsh legislation requires careful reading.

¹It is worth noting here that Results Based Accountability and Outcome Based Accountability, referred to in the chapter on Northern Ireland are in fact the same thing. RBA is only referred to as OBA in England and Northern Ireland.

In summary the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 requires a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development:

- by taking action which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met,
- without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,
- by taking account of the sustainable development principle,
- and following the five ways of working, and
- in setting objectives for well-being and taking action to achieve them (Davies 2016).

It is therefore not the most straightforward of frameworks to understand or implement. As noted in the introduction, it goes further than other examples of duties on sustainable development by requiring public bodies *‘to undertake a process in accordance with the principle directed towards the achievement of a particular outcome’* (Davies 2016, p. 44). The Act stops short of requiring these objectives to be met.

The wellbeing objective set by public bodies must maximise the organisation’s contribution to each of the seven national Well-being Goals (see Box 4.1). But importantly, it is their own objectives that they are under a duty to seek to achieve, not the broader well-being goals.

Box 4.1: The Seven National Well-Being Goals for Wales

- i. A prosperous Wales. An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.
- ii. A resilient Wales. A nation which maintains and enhances a bio-diverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).
- iii. A healthier Wales. A society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

- iv. A more equal Wales. A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).
 - v. A Wales of cohesive communities. Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
 - vi. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
 - vii. A globally responsible Wales. A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.
-

The Act also contains Five Ways of Working which public bodies need to evidence that they have considered in applying the Sustainable Development Principle to carry out sustainable development and improve and achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. These are:

- Long-term: The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
- Integration: Considering how each public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
- Involvement: The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.
- Collaboration: Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
- Prevention: How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales [2018a](#)).

These correspond closely with what is already known about the potential impact of wellbeing as a narrative for public policy but the articulation is clearer than in other examples, and the linking of principles with ways of working in legislation is unique in the UK.

On 14 November 2016 the Welsh Government published their objectives, which reflect the government’s aspirations for change over the longer term. These were further revised in the Prosperity for All Programme for Government which set 12 objectives. Figure 4.1 shows the alignment between the programme for government and the governments’ well-being objectives.

These national objectives are monitored through 46 national indicators (see Table 4.2), which are monitored through an annual report.

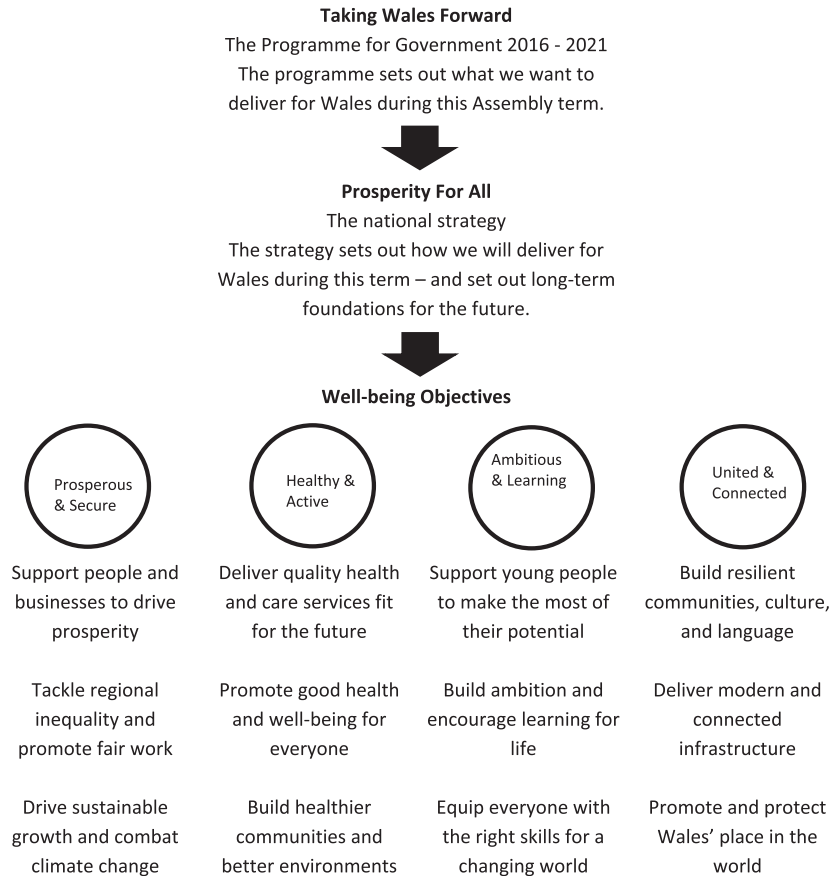


Fig. 4.1 Prosperity for all: The national strategy—Well-being statement (Source Welsh Government 2017b)

Table 4.2 National indicators for Wales

<i>Material conditions</i>	<i>Quality of life</i>	<i>Environment</i>
Material deprivation (%, objective)	Healthy life expectancy (years, objective)	Non-recycled waste (number, objective)
Income inequality (%, objective)	Child development (%, objective)	Air pollution (number, objective)
Innovative businesses (%, objective)	Low birth weight (%, objective)	Renewable energy capacity (number, objective)
Gender pay gap (%, objective)	Skills level of the population (%, objective)	Soil quality (number, objective)
Productivity (index, objective)	Adult healthy behaviours (%, objective)	Ecological footprint (index, objective)
Gross disposable income (£, objective)	Educational attainment (%, objective)	Housing at flood risk (number, objective)
Job satisfaction (%, subjective)	Child healthy behaviours (%, objective)	Energy performance of housing (%, objective)
Social return on investments (£, objective)	Influence over local decisions (%, subjective)	Museums and archives holding archival/heritage collections meeting UK accreditation standards (number, objective)
Employment rate (%, objective)	Access to services (%, subjective)	Quality of historic environment assets (number, objective)
Quality of work (%, objective)	Perception of crime (%, subjective)	Greenhouse gas emissions (number, objective)
Economic activity (%, objective)	Satisfaction with neighbour- hood (%, subjective)	Greenhouse gas emissions by consumption of global goods and services (number, objective)
	Respect and belonging (%, subjective)	Areas of healthy ecosystems (number, objective)
	Volunteering rate (%, objective)	Biological Diversity (index, objective)
	Mental wellbeing (index, subjective)	Quality of blue space (%, objective)
	Loneliness (%, subjective)	
	Housing quality (%, objective)	
	Prevention of homelessness (%, objective)	
	Attendance at arts, culture and heritage events (%, objective)	
	Welsh use (%, objective)	
	Welsh speaking (%, objective)	
	Physical activity (%, objective)	
Total: 11 10 objective, 1 subjective	Total: 21 14 objective, 7 subjective	Total: 14 14 objective

Source Welsh Government (2017d)

Other public bodies must determine their own well-being objectives and action to achieve them.

The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales was created to ‘disrupt business as usual’ by promoting the principles of the Act, and to support public bodies as the legislation is implemented. The Commissioner also has responsibilities for ongoing monitoring of implementation of the Act, alongside the Auditor General for Wales (Menzies 2017). The creation of a statutory body with responsibility for monitoring the Act was a direct response to the closure of the Sustainable Development Commission—locating the powers in legislation was seen as a mechanism for ensuring its survival when the political composition of the government changed.

The link between the well-being framework and its origins in sustainable development were strengthened in September 2017 when the Welsh Government provided a mapping tool, linking the wellbeing goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (Welsh Government 2017d).

CONTRIBUTION

A New Narrative on Wellbeing

The original aim of the wellbeing framework was to challenge the dominance of short-term and economic decision-making by requiring action across the domains of wellbeing. The environmental roots of the framework have carried forward into the main narratives around its implementation.

Finding the balance between environmental and social domains of wellbeing has not been straightforward. The Sustainable Development Alliance (a network of 30 organisations working for a thriving environment in Wales) campaigned strongly in favour of the need for legislation (Sustainable Development Alliance 2014). But there were disagreements as the Bill was under scrutiny on the extent to which environmental issues were being addressed. For example, Chris Johnes analysis for think tank Egino argued: ‘*It does not treat the three pillars of sustainable development equally: it is much more focused on the social pillar and is more of a public sector reform bill than a sustainable development one*’ (Johnes 2013, p. 3). The Stage 1 report cited stakeholder concerns that these issues were being omitted or under-represented in the Bill (National

Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee 2014a), the Minister Carl Sargeant AM was clear in his response:

This is not an environmental Bill. We will have an environmental Bill. This is a sustainable development and well-being Bill and I do not accept that the environment is not considered in this Bill at all. (National Assembly for Wales Environmental and Sustainability Committee 2014a, p. 15)

During Stage 2 amendments direct references to ‘climate change’ were inserted into the first two goals and the second goals were amended to include a more explicit reference to the concept of environmental limits in the context of a resilient environment. During Stage 3 proceedings a definition of sustainable development was included with a stronger requirement to carry out sustainable development.

Environmental groups also argued for specific targets to be introduced, not just indicators. The Welsh Government succeeded in arguing that this would not be necessary. However, the question of whether the indicators can tell us enough about the progress of Wales, and how it is aligned to performance management of public services was not resolved during the legislative scrutiny stage.

Policy debates on the proposed M4 relief road have brought the issue of the balance between the economy and the environment to the forefront. In September 2017 the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales wrote to the independent inspector for the M4 Corridor Around Newport Public Local Inquiry, William Wadrup, raising concerns about how the Welsh Government had interpreted their duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (National Assembly for Wales 2018). In this additional evidence, the Commissioner, Sophie Howe made a number of substantial comments that show the change in approach between the original sustainable development strategies and the wellbeing framework:

I need to stress that while the terminology remains the same: ‘sustainable development principle’, its meaning under the Act has changed. I would therefore expect all public bodies covered by the Act and those taking decisions within them to demonstrate how they are doing things differently. I would expect to see reference to the new sustainable development definition and consideration of short term/long term needs and an

explanation as to how they have reached their decision using the five ways of working. (Howe 2017b, p. 2)

This suggests a much higher burden of proof is expected under the new legislation and an explicit balancing of current and future needs which is far more challenging to normal practice in policy development and decision-making.

She goes on to discuss the balance between the economic pillar of wellbeing and environmental, cultural and social pillars, in particular: *'one pillar cannot override the others... The balancing in this revolutionary Act means giving as equal as possible weight to each element and not allowing one to tip the scale'* (Howe 2017b, p. 2). In arguing that the M4 relief road requires trade-offs to be made between the different pillars of wellbeing, Ms Howe believes that the Welsh Government are in danger of setting a damaging precedent and reducing the power of the Act to force change in policy-making.

Her final set of concerns relate to the application of the Act to individual policy decisions. Evidence from the Welsh Government suggested that it is their view that it is the collective endeavour of the government, as a public body, that must achieve the wellbeing objectives. Ms Howe is clear that her interpretation is that each individual decision must seek to achieve all the wellbeing objectives set. To argue that decisions can relate to one department or to one domain of wellbeing is, she argues, to undermine the spirit of the legislation. The decision on the M4 will not be made until towards the end of 2018, for the above reasons it will be a test of the Act, both in terms of its substance and in terms of the power of the Commissioners' Office to lead change.

Horizontal Integration

The collective approach to wellbeing is reinforced in a number of ways in Wales, for example, as one of the five ways of working. In the annual report on progress towards the wellbeing goals highlights that *'it is not a report about the performance of any organisation, but the collective change we are seeing in Wales'* (Welsh Government 2017a).

The Welsh Government acknowledges that the issues facing Wales can only be tackled through new ways of working, including joined-up programmes. The Welsh Government has set out its desired approach to integration which specifically includes shifting to a 'whole of government

approach’, with commitments to a cross-departmental working and taking a life-course approach, recognising that people do not live their lives by policy boundaries, or by the public services they receive (Welsh Government 2017b).

In its first decade, the Welsh Assembly Government took a traditional approach to organising government departments. Since 2007 successive reforms have reduced the size of the top tier of the civil service, initially to seven Directorates and then to four Groups—headed by the Permanent Secretary, two Deputy Permanent Secretaries, and the Director General for Health and Social Services (who is also Chief Executive of NHS Wales). The size of the civil service has also decreased by around a fifth over the course of a decade, in reaction to the reduction in the block grant to the Welsh Government from the UK government (Welsh Government 2018). The Group structure is further sub-divided into directorates which align to the areas of responsibility devolved to the Welsh Government to administer (Welsh Government 2017c). The senior civil service have their own personal objectives aligned to the wellbeing goals and ways of working and the Permanent Secretary has initiated a wider review of the performance management, progression arrangements, leadership training and other development programmes (Auditor General for Wales/Welsh Audit Office 2018).

A civil service business improvement programme ran from February 2015 to March 2017 to develop the organisation to better meet the needs of Ministers. One of its innovations was the creation of a new Cabinet Office to provide greater strategic capability to support the First Minister and Cabinet in driving and coordinating the business of government. Further activities are ongoing, with the Cabinet Office supporting the implementation of the new ways of working across the civil service.

There is already a strong sense of the development of wellbeing as the golden thread linking different policy areas. Frameworks that articulate a strong link include:

- The Early Years Outcomes Framework
- Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action
- NHS Wales Outcomes and Delivery Framework
- The Public Health Outcomes Framework.

These frameworks each have their own outcomes and indicators but aim to be complementary to the wellbeing goals and ways of working. The

alignment at policy level is meaningful, but there is limited evidence so far of changes to practice within these policy areas.

The Finance Committee's report of its Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2018–2019 commented specifically on the Decarbonisation programme (Welsh Assembly Finance Committee 2017). The Welsh Government has set an ambitious target for the public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030. As with previous comments on the draft budget, the investment in decarbonisation was welcomed but there was a concern that the activities were disconnected and a request for greater strategic alignment of decarbonisation activities. In reflecting on current progress, Sophie Howe, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales notes: *'it [the energy efficiency in housing programme] has a benefit in terms of the potential to give work, employment opportunities, contracts to local SMEs, it has benefits to people in communities in terms of reducing heating bills, keeping people warm, it has a benefit to health in terms of keeping people out of hospital due to cold weather conditions and the like. So we're starting to see them thinking in that broader context in terms of how they're taking that work forward'* (National Assembly for Wales 2018, para. 13).

The statutory nature of the wellbeing framework in Wales means that it automatically applies to all public bodies. The duty is on the 44 bodies to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle in their work. While this is far-reaching, it cannot be said to encompass all public services in Wales. There are some interesting anomalies. Firstly, the Welsh police forces are not included as policing is not a devolved function (though the Public Service Boards are required to invite the police boards to participate, and all have done so). Secondly, some bodies are not classed as public bodies under the Act, including Estyn (the schools inspectorate), the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Wales Ambulance Services Trust. Further, a detailed report by the Auditor General for Wales highlighted that the duties do not apply directly to private sector or third sector bodies delivering public services or subsidiary bodies (2017).

Vertical Integration

The relationship between Welsh Government and Welsh local government has been tense for some time. As a small jurisdiction, the relationship between central government and local government can struggle as

both sides seek to protect, their own powers and responsibilities. Welsh local government does not always welcome the activity of the Welsh Government in its areas, seeing this as duplication or event displacement of their role (see for example, the debates over the Welsh Government Communities First programme which funded projects in areas of multiple deprivation (National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee 2017)).

Welsh Government and local government in Wales sought a new relationship from 2010 when local outcome agreements were established, drawing directly on experiences in Scotland. Local authorities were asked to set out their outcomes and align them to the strategic objectives of Welsh Government. In return, they received a grant for achieving the outcomes, though this represented only 1% of an authority's income. They were nevertheless an important signal of a move away from New Public Management towards outcome-based accountability.

Welsh local government has also been significantly affected by austerity policies. The Welsh Local Government Association identifies that since 2010 there has been a cut of £720m from local services resulting in budget reductions of between 20 and 50% (Welsh Local Government Association 2015). The Welsh Government has prioritised protecting the health budget, from 2013–2014 onwards, NHS spending has steadily increased as a proportion of the Welsh resource budget since, to reach 48% in 2017–2018, up from 43% in 2011–2012 (Ogle et al. 2017).

Tensions have also been heightened by recurrent debates over the correct 'size' of Welsh local government and whether the 22 local authorities should be in some way slimmed down. The policy was on hold following the Brexit vote, as the Welsh Government agreed to suspend proposals for the merger of local authorities in the Draft Local Government (Wales) Bill initially published in 2015. In early 2018, this option was back on the table with the publication of a green paper.

It is within this context that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is being implemented. Stage 3 amendments to draft Bill had sought to remove the sections relating to establishment, participation, scrutiny and functions of public service boards. These amendments were lodged by the Welsh Conservatives and supported in part by Plaid Cymru due to concerns about adding an extra layer of bureaucracy and removing democratic voice at local level.

The successful passing of this section of the Act placed a statutory duty on 44 key public bodies, including local authorities and Local

Health Boards (which together make up 30 of these public bodies), to improve social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing in Wales in pursuit of the seven national well-being goals. The Act strengthened the previous Local Services Boards (introduced in 2007). The 19 reinvigorated Public Services Boards (PSB) for each local authority area are integrated decision-making bodies for local public services which must include the local authority, the Local Health Board, the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authority, and the Natural Resources body for Wales. The PSB must also invite Welsh Ministers, the Chief Constable within the local authority area, the Police and Crime Commissioner for the police area, a representative of Certain Probation Services, and at least one body which represents relevant voluntary organisations in the locality to become a member.

PSBs are not themselves responsible for the delivery of public services, they are responsible for the integrated planning of public services. In their first two years of existence, PSBs have been required to:

- assess the economic, social, environmental, and cultural wellbeing in the area (the well-being assessment)
- set objectives which are designed to maximise their collective contribution to the seven well-being goals; publish a Local Well-being Plan on the steps it will take to meet their objectives, consulting widely on their assessment of local well-being and their Plan and begin working to deliver on these objectives.

Assessment Phase

The first well-being assessments produced by PSBs in 2017 outline place-based priority outcomes, such as children have a good start in life; young people and adults have good jobs; people have a decent standard of living; and people are healthy, safe and independent. But in assessing them, the Commissioner concluded that there was still much work to do to link activities between different sectors and a tendency to return to traditional ways of working (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2017). The report also queried the extent to which the Act was being seen as transformative, with some authorities seeing the wellbeing assessments and plans as a continuation of Single Integrated Planning (Cardiff, Swansea and the Vale) while others took a more radical approach based on life stages (Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire) or

a more strategic approach looking at local determinants of wellbeing (Monmouthshire, Powys, Cwm Taf) (Netherwood et al. 2017).

In the review of the first wellbeing assessments carried out by the 19 Welsh Public Sector Boards, the Commissioner for the Well-being of Future Generations identified the limitations of current thinking on wellbeing:

- A tendency to revert to describing wellbeing in traditional ways rather than relating local data to the wellbeing goals as defined in the legislation
- A lack of capability and confidence in relation to looking at the long-term
- A lack of meaningful consideration of the interconnections between issues and what data means in different contexts and communities (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2017).

The impact of these plans is hampered by a plethora of local strategies. Local authorities and their partners have numerous duties placed upon them to produce plans and strategies which are aimed at improving the well-being of people in their area. Many of these plans and strategies show overlap and duplication, and the many competing priorities and extensive partnership structures used to pursue these have resulted in too much complexity and reduction in operational efficiency amongst public bodies. One confusion example is that the Welsh Government also legislated for Population Assessments under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014, using a different definition of wellbeing.

The use of wellbeing in relation to two separate local assessments, occurring at a similar point created confusion (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2017). The Well-being assessments and the Local Well-being Plans run parallel to other local planning documents, and while they are meant to take account of each other there is no sense of a unified set of interlinked plans. As the WLGA Labour Group notes:

The presence of two Acts covering much the same ground on the wellbeing and partnership agenda creates duplication and means an additional set of pieces in an already over-elaborate jigsaw of joint working across Wales. (Welsh Local Government Association Labour Group 2016)

The group called for a ‘radical delayering’ of the Welsh public policy landscape.

Objective Setting

Those bodies that fall under the Act (two-thirds of which are local bodies) are required to set their own wellbeing objectives. In 2017 there were 345 wellbeing objectives set by the 44 public bodies. The Office of the Commissioner for Future Generations of Wales analysed these and found a number of themes. The vast majority of public bodies (80% or above in each case) set objectives that relate to what the Commissioner has referred to as their core business of: health and social care; organisational strategy or management; communities and education. Seven in 10 public bodies referred to the environment and slightly less to the economy (66%). Culture, a key aspect of wellbeing in the Act was included in objectives for 61% of public bodies, with less set objectives relating to connectivity (transport and digital, 55%) or equality (48%) (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2018b). There are therefore valid questions over the extent to which the message of collective responsibility for the wellbeing goals has been implemented and whether the emphasis given to culture and the environment in the legislation is being met by policy change within public bodies.

Participation

Prior to devolution in Wales there was an underdeveloped civic infrastructure. Non-governmental organisations with policy remits, where they existed at all, were often small off-shoots of UK organisations and their opportunities to engage were limited to formal consultations with the Welsh Office. The introduction of a new tier of democracy via the Welsh Assembly has turned the business of policy in Wales into a dynamic process with a civil society that contributes actively to rich debate. For example, in response to a consultation on lobbying in Wales, Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN) set out:

We believe that the National Assembly for Wales has established a pattern of open and inclusive government which gives the opportunity to all kinds of organisations, as well as individual electors, to influence in an open and democratic way elected representatives and government. (National Assembly for Wales Standards of Conduct Committee 2018, p. 11)

However relative to the Scottish or UK governments, the space for open policy dialogue appears limited and there are concerns about the relative size of the third sector in Wales (Wales Council for Voluntary Action 2018).

The wellbeing goals, Welsh Government objectives and national indicators do not place emphasis on democracy and participation. The Welsh Government national indicator set measures influence over local decisions and volunteering rates but not wider measures of democratic participation (voter turnout or trust in institutions). Democracy does not feature at all in the national strategy Prosperity for All (Welsh Government 2017b).

The Wellbeing Statement developed to supplement the current Programme for Government (Prosperity for All) outlines the key features of the Welsh approach to participation with the public to date:

- Continuing dialogue with delivery partners and stakeholders
- Insight from the assessments of local wellbeing carried out by PSB, and subsequent work on well-being objectives by public bodies provided important insight into the sustainability issues at the local level, and the priorities for public bodies
- Permanent Secretary engagement with over 1000 staff across the Welsh Government
- Work on the Valleys Taskforce and its innovative approach to involvement provides insight into how best to engage citizens in the issues that affect them (Welsh Government 2017b).

It is notable that two of these relate to communication within public services, rather than direct engagement of the public (and one requires us to assume that the public are included in the definition of a stakeholder). There is a risk here of conflating joined-up working within government with participation of citizens and the third sector (which are themselves commonly confused but require separate consideration). Some interviewees raise concerns that the focus on statutory partners and formal mechanisms may crowd out the opportunity for genuine participation from civil society and citizens themselves.

In late 2017, the Welsh Government and WWF Cymru announced that they are collaborating on a series of workshops to explore the Well-being of Future Generations Act's implementation and its effective delivery. These aim to bring together Welsh Government senior officials

and a wide range of third sector organisations to share perspectives and experiences of the Act, discuss areas of good practice and improvement and to apply this learning to a cross cutting, high level area of Welsh Government policy.

At local level, the approach to public participation and engagement has continued through into the development of well-being assessments by the Public Sector Boards, with independent analysis showing that many had consulted with communities about what wellbeing meant to them though concerns were raised that this was too focused on the existing structure of services rather than being user or future focused (Netherwood et al. 2017).

The third sector has also raised concerns about the extent of their involvement in PSBs development of local wellbeing assessments. Some perceived the assessments as being a top-down approach to create plans and documents that may not resonate with local issues and concerns (Welsh Council for Voluntary Action 2017). This experience is not uniform across Wales—a number of PSBs have moved away from an assumption of local government control to Chairs and/or vice-Chairs who come from other public bodies or non-governmental organisations.

Further, the nature of the evidence presented by the third sector, based on case studies and qualitative evaluations, did not fit well with the overall quantitative approach to monitoring wellbeing through national indicators. There has been little support for local authorities or their partners on how to consider different types of evidence to build an overall picture of wellbeing to ensure their local frameworks have resonance with citizens.

One indication of the direction of travel is the introduction of participatory budgeting with commitments made to develop this approach further. Participatory budgeting sessions are expected to inform future Welsh Government budgets, though to date this has not happened and so it remains an aspiration rather than an action at this time. The complexity and jargon of budget documents was identified as a specific barrier to public engagement in the budget process by Oxfam Cymru (Richards 2017).

Overall therefore we see a mixed picture on participation, with strong rhetoric and some exemplary practice in PSBs. Together this does not add up to a coherent picture of the role of citizens and civil society organisations in the development and delivery of wellbeing.

Prevention

Prevention is one of the five ways of working identified in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. Welsh Government has identified the need for a clearer focus on preventing ill health, improving emotional resilience and reducing the levels of homelessness. The need for prevention is explicitly linked to the barrier of silo-based working (Welsh Government 2017b).

There are many examples of preventative working in Welsh public services, particularly in health and social care. Many of these pre-date the current wellbeing framework, such as the Together for Health Strategy 2011–2016.

Overall, financial pressure, particularly on local government budgets limit the ability of Welsh and local government to pursue programmes of preventative spend. Many of the universal services that provide much-needed infrastructure for preventative programmes are being cut, such as libraries, parks and community spaces (Welsh Local Government Association 2015).

Box 4.2: Case Study: Fairbourne Moving Forward

Gwynedd Council's project on Fairbourne: Moving Forward is focused on mitigating the impacts of climate change for a coastal community. Fairbourne can no longer be saved from rising sea levels caused by climate change. By 2050 (and based upon current scientific predictions) the village will be returned to the sea.

Innovate to Save (a NESTA and Welsh Government programme) is supporting the establishment of a Fairbourne community interest company (FCIC), which will buy homes from homeowners in the village allowing them to move from the area and reinstating a level of choice about moving away. Vacant homes will then be rented out (via local authorities, charities, groups, organisations) to disadvantaged members of society. This project will be produced and refined in collaboration with the existing community in order to maintain its support with the integration of new incoming residents from vulnerable groups (such as older people, people with mobility requirements, ex-service people, families with young/vulnerable children). These homes will be maintained by local tradesmen whose businesses have suffered due to villagers not undertaking home improvements to their

homes, which have been devalued considerably, which will contribute to sustaining the economy in the area.

The project involves experts from Gwynedd Council, YGC, Natural Resource Wales, Welsh Government, Royal Haskoning DHV, North Wales Regional Emergency Planning Group, the Emergency Services, Welsh Water and the local community.

While the project is in the early stages of development it is a strong example of a wellbeing approach (linking economic, social and environmental outcomes) and of acting now to reduce the further negative impacts of climate change on the residents. Further information is available at <http://fairbourne.info/>

In the debates around the draft budget 2018–2019 concerns were again raised that the aspirations for prevention were not being realised through the distribution of public funds. The Sustainable Development Alliance argued that this was complicated by the number of different legislative definitions of prevention, and the different understanding of prevention between professional groups. In particular, they argued that prevention is about far more than preventative health spending (Meikle 2017). A key fault line appears to be between a health definition based on early identification and targeting of at risk groups, and other approaches which focus further upstream or are universalist in nature. The Welsh Government has established a Third Sector Partnership Group to explore the issue of the definition of prevention.

Sophie Howe (Commissioner for Future Generations) told me that the lack of a definition of prevention is problematic for implementation, along with the difficulties caused by austerity: *‘It’s a bit of a perfect storm in a way, less money, less capacity, less focus on innovation but there’s less focus on training and raising people’s heads up. But I think the Act is starting to help in challenging that.’*

An area of significant policy development in Wales has been on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). While this predates the Office of the Commissioner for Future Generations, they have identified it as a priority area for action. Bringing together the ways of working on long-termism and prevention, the aim is to improve the wellbeing of future generations by reducing harm in early childhood. The impact of the national work on ACEs can be seen filtering through to the local

wellbeing action plans where 16 out of the 19 Public Service Boards have identified ACEs as one of their priorities. It is early to review in terms of witnessing social change, but the policy intention is crystallising around the need to support children to safeguard the interests of future generations.

Budgeting

Early in the process of the implementation of the wellbeing framework, the Welsh Assembly Finance Committee took an active interest in the extent to which draft budgets aligned with the well-being goals and objectives.

The Welsh Assembly Finance Committee was critical of the lack of connection between the well-being objectives and the ways of working and the draft budget. In its report on the draft budget 2017–2018, they referred to the link between the wellbeing goals and the budget as ‘limited’. They recommended that a strategic integrated impact assessment be carried out for future budgets to show how the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 had impacted on the development of the budget. Here the Committee was looking for evidence of wellbeing as the golden thread linking decisions on the budget across departmental lines.

For the following year’s budget, a strategic integrated impacts assessment was indeed carried out and it was possible to identify some areas where integrated thinking had taken place, for example in the links made between decarbonisation and the capital investment in the 21st-century schools programme. In her evidence to the Committee on the following year’s budget (2018–2019), the Commissioner for Future Generations was scathing about the speed of change to the budget process, arguing that a greater number of references to the Act in the draft Budget did not automatically mean that changes were being made to the allocations, and she queried whether there was more ‘saying’ than ‘doing’ (Howe 2017a). In later evidence to the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee she pointed out that while only 10% of the health and well-being of a nation is reliant on health-care services, the Welsh Government allocates 49% to health-care services (National Assembly for Wales 2018). Similar points were also made by the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action and the Sustainable Development Alliance. While recognising

that it is early days for a new approach, these stakeholders were frustrated that the narrative around collective action to achieve the goals appeared to have little impact on budget decisions that were still framed around traditional departmental boundaries. There are questions here about the ability of the wellbeing framework to counteract existing power structures.

Further concerns were raised about the impact of short-termism in budgets on the ability of public bodies to implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Here the Welsh Government is curtailed by its own funding arrangements with the UK Government which are agreed on a year-to-year basis. To challenge short-termism, the Welsh Government is called on to set clear directions of travel to provide as much certainty as possible, within the overall structure of annualisation.

CONCLUSION

While the central organising principle of sustainable development was set in 2009, it proved difficult to ascertain any impact of this until the passing of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. The Act has reset the understanding of sustainable development and the mechanisms for carrying it out and the discussions I had all started from 2015 as the point at which any impact could be ascertained.

The original narrative of environmental wellbeing remains strong, particularly in the interventions of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. But a strong culture change narrative has also arisen in public services which is more in keeping with performance management than sustainable development and it will be a challenge to maintain focus on all domains of wellbeing. Early commitments to participation of citizens appear to have given way to a linked, but not identical, need for greater third-sector involvement in service and policy planning.

REFERENCES

- Auditor General for Wales. (2017). *Discussion Paper: The Governance Challenges Posed by Indirectly Provided, Publicly Funded Services in Wales*. Cardiff: Audit Wales.
- Auditor General for Wales/Welsh Audit Office. (2018). *Reflecting on Year One: How Have Public Bodies Responded to the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?* Cardiff: Auditor General for Wales/Welsh Audit Office.

- Chaney, P. (2016). Social Policy in Wales. In P. Alcock, T. Haux, M. May, & S. Wright (Eds.), *A Students Companion to Social Policy* (pp. 174–180). Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.
- Commissioner for Sustainable Futures. (2015). *The Wales We Want Report: A Report on Behalf of Future Generations*. Cardiff: Cynnal Cymru/Welsh Government.
- Davies, H., 2016. The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Duties or Aspirations? *Environmental Law Review*, 18(1), 41–56.
- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. (2017). *Well-Being in Wales: Planning Today for a Better Tomorrow*. Cardiff: Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. (2018a). *Well-Being of Future Generations Act* [Online]. Available at: <https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>. Accessed Feb 2018.
- Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. (2018b). *Well-Being in Wales: The Journey so Far*. Cardiff: Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
- Howe, S. (2017a). *Finance Committee, Draft Record of Proceedings* [Interview] (23 Nov 2017a).
- Howe, S. (2017b). *The M4 Corridor Around Newport Public Local Inquiry: Letter to the Inspector*. Cardiff: Office of the Commissioner for Future Generations.
- Johnes, C. (2013). *Understanding the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill*. Cardiff: Egino.
- Meikle, A., 2017. *Finance Committee Record of Proceedings* [Interview] (15 Nov 2017).
- Menzies, R. (2017). *From a Shared Vision to Inclusive Implementation: Innovative Approaches to Developing Government Frameworks on Wellbeing*. Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust.
- Michaelson, J. (2013). *The Use of Sustainability Indicators in the Welsh Government*. London: New Economics Foundation.
- National Assembly for Wales. (2014). *The Record of Proceedings 09/12/2014* [Online]. <http://www.assembly.wales>. Accessed Aug 2018.
- National Assembly for Wales. (2018). *Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee* [Online]. Available at: <http://record.assembly.wales/Committee/4589#C66284>. Accessed 2018.
- National Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee. (2014a). *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill Stage 1 Committee Report* [Online]. <http://www.assembly.wales>. Accessed Aug 2018.
- National Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee. (2014b). *The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill Stage 1 Committee Report*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

- National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee. (2017). *Communities First—Lessons Learnt Full Report*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.
- Netherwood, A., Flynn, A., & Lang, M. (2017). *Well-Being Assessments in Wales: Overview Report*. Cardiff: Netherwood Sustainable Futures/Cardiff University/MarkLang Consulting.
- Ogle, J., Luchinskaya, D., & Trickey, M. (2017). *Austerity and Local Government in Wales: An Analysis of Income and Spending Priorities 2009–10 to 2016–17*. Cardiff: Wales Public Services 2025.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2011). *Effectiveness Review of the Sustainable Development Strategy*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Richards, H. (2017). *Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings* [Interview] (15 Nov 2017).
- Standards of Conduct Committee. (2018). *Lobbying*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.
- Statistics for Wales. (2015). *Sustainable Development Indicators*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Sustainable Development Alliance. (2014). *Well-Being of Future Generations Bill: The Need for a Strong New Law*. Cardiff: Sustainable Development Alliance.
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action. (2018). *Third Sector Data Hub* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/the-third-sector-data-hub>. Accessed June 2018.
- Welsh Assembly Finance Committee. (2017). *Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2018–19*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.
- Welsh Council for Voluntary Action. (2017). *Response to National Assembly for Wales Committee Inquiry into Local Approaches to Poverty Reduction*. Cardiff: Welsh Council for Voluntary Action.
- Welsh Government. (2017a). *Well-Being of Wales 2016–2017*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government. (2017b). *Well-Being Statement 2017: Prosperity for All, The National Strategy*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government. (2017c). *Welsh Government Consolidated Accounts 2016–17*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government. (2017d). *National Indicators—Mapping to Well-Being and UN Sustainable Development Goals*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government. (2018). *Welsh Government Staffing Levels* [Online]. Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/hrd/publications/180504-wg-staff-numbers.pdf>. Accessed June 2018.
- Welsh Labour. (2011). *Standing Up for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Labour.
- Welsh Local Government Association. (2015). *Localism 2016–21: A Plan for Public Services in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Local Government Association.

- Welsh Local Government Association Labour Group. (2016). *Local Government: Modernisation, Collaboration, Regional Working*. Cardiff: WLGA.
- Whitby, A., Seaford, C. & Berry, C. (2014). *BRAINPOoL Project Final Report: Beyond GDP—From Measurement to Politics and Policy* [Online]. Available at: www.brainpoolproject.eu. Accessed Jan 2018.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

