

Consultation Response

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill

September 2014

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to provide evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee for its consideration of the general principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill. All of our comments relate to the first question asked by the Committee and the overall approach of the Bill.

General

Age Cymru welcomes and supports the proposals for the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill as we believe it has the potential to help us achieve an Age Friendly Wales.

There are more people aged over 60 than ever before, and they are the fastest growing group in society. As people grow older they may face new challenges, and maybe even illness, loneliness or poverty. They still want to laugh, love and be needed. To stay independent and keep doing the things they love. We all want a fulfilling later life. Age Cymru seeks to stand up and speak for all those who have reached later life, and also protect the long-term interests of future generations. We believe that living longer should be celebrated and everything we do is designed to change the way we age for the better and enable everyone to be part of the solution.

We believe that this Bill has the potential to support longer term decision making and clearly signals intent to integrate the three elements of sustainability in approaches to decision making. We believe it should accurately reflect the importance of demographic change as a key driver for change.

We support the intention to strengthen the governance framework for sustainability and specifically to ensure that decisions taken make a difference to the economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales. It is vital that progress is effectively evaluated and measured to provide clear evidence of what works and what doesn't work and provide underpinning evidence for policy decisions.

We believe that there are policy areas that will require investment to support a switch to longer term decision making.

We believe the Future Generations Commissioner needs robust and well-defined powers that will support the effective implementation of the legislation.

Question 2:

The general principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation in the following areas

- I. The approach to improving well-being, including setting of well-being goals, establishment of objectives by public bodies and the duties on public bodies**

Demographic change and the link to sustainability

It is well established that Wales, along with much of the developed world, has an ageing population. Based upon current trends, the number of those aged 65 and over in Wales is projected to increase from approximately 600,000 in 2013 to almost 900,000 in 2037. This is a cause for celebration and a major achievement for our society. It provides us with opportunities for the future, but also challenges and it will require changes to the way in which we plan and deliver public policy and services.

Even with people generally living healthier lives for longer, the impact of demographic change on this scale is generally expected to result in an increased demand upon some public services. At the frontline of this will be health and social care services, as a result of projected rises in the incidence of long-term critical illnesses and dementia.¹

The Welsh Government has stated that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill is concerned with sustainability in a broad sense. We welcome this. In 2013, the House of Lords Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change report *Ready for Ageing?* warned that the UK is “woefully underprepared” for the social and economic challenges presented by an ageing society.² We believe that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill presents a major opportunity to ensure that Wales properly plans for and addresses the sustainability of our society in the light of the major demographic changes we are already experiencing, and will continue to experience into the future.

This is a challenge that Wales should be taking seriously. We have a higher proportion of people of state pensionable age than the other nations of the UK and the UK as a whole. 18.5% of the population was of state pension age in 2010, compared to a UK average of 16.5% and the proportion of people over the age of 80 was also higher. Within rural areas the ratio is generally higher, for instance in Conwy 24.5% of the population are aged 65 or over.³ This means that Welsh public

¹ Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change: *Ready for Ageing?* HL Paper 140, published 14 March 2013: p11

² Select Committee, 2013: p7

³ ONS, Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2010.

services will potentially feel the effects of demographic change more acutely than other parts of the UK.

However, with careful planning and preparation by the Welsh Government and those in charge of the delivery of public services, this is not an insurmountable challenge. A lot can be done to influence spending through service design. Focusing health and care systems towards detection and prevention; promoting independence and active ageing; and identifying problems early (as opposed to crisis management), present cost-effective ways to manage improved life expectancy.

Simply treating the ageing population as a 'burden' is to also miss the major contribution that older people make to society, both financially and in other respects. Increasing numbers of people are working past traditional retirement ages and older people are the primary providers of care in Wales, through the unpaid support they provide to spouses, other relatives and friends. Reporting of increasing life expectancy frequently appears to miss the point that having more fit, active, engaged older people who can carry on working, caring and contributing to communities is a good thing.

Truly investing in the ageing population and taking a life course approach could bring major benefits to individuals, services and the public finances by:

- ensuring that health and care services take a preventative approach to people's health, thus avoiding the need for more expensive crisis response in future;
- supporting individuals to plan for increasing longevity and their later life;
- encouraging employers across all sectors to make the most of the skills of an ageing workforce;
- ensuring the all older people are able to remain active participants in their community, and to access essential services, thus minimising the effects of loneliness and isolation.

To achieve this we require advanced planning and long-sighted decision-making by public organisations and service providers. This is where we believe the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill provides a vital opportunity to ensure that demographic sustainability is a vital part of the type of future-proofed decision making that the Welsh Government is seeking to develop for Wales. However, in its current guise the Bill does not do enough to recognise and respond to this opportunity.

We believe the Bill and its associated documents should specifically reference planning for, and responding to, demographic change as a key element of the goals and objectives that it intends to stimulate. In responding to the goals, and taking the needs of future generations into account when taking decisions, it is vital that public bodies ensure that they are taking into account the full life-course of those generations. In this way, perhaps we will be able to eliminate some of the barriers and challenges which face current generations as they age.

We believe that the goals do have the potential to bring greater clarity to the practical application of the sustainability principle and encourage public bodies to how to consider the longer term in their decision making. However, for the Bill to work, the

goals themselves will need to be meaningful, clearly articulated and all public bodies will need a shared understanding of them as well as the common aim of the sustainable development principle. We support the development criteria for the goals listed in the Explanatory Memorandum at Para 70.

From an Age Cymru perspective we have mapped the goals on the face of the Bill against our own objectives for an Age Friendly Wales to consider how these would work for older people:

A prosperous Wales

All older people should enjoy an adequate standard of living and a level of income which enables them to live comfortably and afford essentials. No one should have to endure a calamitous reduction in their standard of living when they retire. This includes the right level of employment support for over 50s and access to the right level of information and advice, including learning opportunities.

Our concern is that the focus of the goal on poverty and socio-economic disadvantage should be broader than employment. People who are poor in later life are by and large those who have been poor throughout their lives; while we aspire to well-being for all, we cannot afford to assume that in future generations everyone in society will have had equal opportunities or the capacity to save for later life and there must always be measures to support those individuals.

A resilient Wales

Resilience is an important concept for Wales. We hope that this goal relates to social and economic resilience rather than in a purely environmental sense.

A healthier Wales

Older people are the main adult users of most health and care services, however, from education and training to the organisation of care, the NHS and social services are often not designed with older people's needs in mind. There should be a total satisfaction with community and residentially based care services, including primary health care across Wales and the support available to live a healthy life.

We support the focus on prevention that is evident throughout the Bill. We believe that this is vital in the area of health. We are however, concerned that the shift to a preventative agenda in health requires additional investment. There is a strong link to social care policy and investment in our communities. Decision making in all of these areas has been heavily influenced by significant budget cuts. This has led to actions that quite clearly will not be beneficial to Wales and its population in the longer term and this legislation in isolation cannot change that.

A more equal Wales

Age discrimination remains the most widely experienced form of discrimination in the UK and has a direct impact on the inclusion and social isolation of older people. Negative attitudes towards older people and ageing are pervasive in our society. In common with most other forms of discrimination, ageism is based on inaccurate stereotypes, and often in the case of older people, assumptions about a person's ability and competence, due to their age. An effect of ageism is that older people frequently experience discriminatory treatment. In addition to the negative impact this

discrimination has on individuals, there is also a wider cost to society in terms of lost productivity of older workers and the associated long term health costs. All older people in Wales should be respected, socially included and safe within their lives and environments.

A Wales of cohesive communities

Communities in Wales must meet the needs of all generations and ensure that people of all ages and characteristics can access the services and facilities they need. We support the concept of 'lifetime neighbourhoods': communities which are designed and developed to support people to enjoy a good quality of life during the ageing process, promote the needs of older people, and help them to retain their independence. All outdoor environments and public spaces across Wales should be accessible and usable for all older people and all older people will be appropriately and satisfactorily housed.

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

Lifelong learning and the opportunity to take part in activities are important for many older people. Access to appropriate classes, courses and groups can bring considerable benefits to physical and mental health, and help to prevent social exclusion and isolation. For many older people the wider benefits of learning in later life are not motivated by the acquisition of academic or vocational qualifications, but are often based on keeping active, developing new social networks and gaining new skills and knowledge.

II. -the approach to measuring progress towards achieving well-being goals, establishment of objectives by public bodies and the duties imposed on public bodies;

Objective Setting

We have some concerns in relation to the setting of objectives by public bodies. This model has been adopted in relation to the Equalities Act; our perception is that this has led to an inconsistency of approach across the sector. We believe this has the potential to dilute the clarity of purpose in terms of what constitutes a sustainable Wales and alignment to a single vision. Moreover, we are concerned that there is a lack of oversight in terms of the setting of objectives. We believe that the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales should have a more robust role in the setting of objectives,

Progress

We welcome the requirement for annual reporting, but we believe that there must be clarity and consistency in the way public bodies are required to report. There needs to be a shared understanding of what is being reported and methods must be consistent both across public bodies and year on year so that effective comparisons can be made.

We would wish to avoid the situation that has occurred with the Equality Act 2010, where reporting means it is actually very difficult to gain an overall assessment of how the PSED in Wales is delivering across all of the protected characteristics.

III. The establishment of a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, the Commissioner's role, powers, responsibility, governance and accountability

We are concerned that the powers of the Commissioner will not be suitably robust to ensure that the aims of the legislation are fully implemented and that this would undermine the whole credibility and purpose of the office. The powers of the Commissioner need to be sufficient to ensure an effective relationship can be established with public bodies in Wales. We believe that the Commissioner should have the power to review the objectives set by a public body in terms of whether they support the well-being goals. This would ensure that objectives are consistent with the sustainable development principle and promote a consistency of approach across Wales.

Conclusion

We hope this information is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of this important issue and would be happy to provide further information as required.