

Dr Andrew Goodall
Ysgrifennydd Parhaol
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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Dear Adrian,

Response to the Auditor General for Wales' examination of the setting of Welsh Government's well-being objectives

Thank you for your letter on the conclusion of your examination of the extent to which the Welsh Government has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives.

The inclusion of the Auditor General for Wales within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 recognises the important role that examinations can play in supporting public bodies to continually improve and deepen how they act in accordance with the sustainable development principle. You have recognised that this is a stretching duty that takes audit into a new territory and therefore I note the change in your approach to the examination in this reporting round, following your consultation in 2020 and the changes you have made to your methodology to explore and understanding context, recognising that ways of working will need to be applied differently.

I am pleased that the examination recognises the positive action we are taking to embed the sustainable development principle in how we conduct our business. However, our assessment differs from that in the examination. It remains my opinion that the way the Welsh Government's well-being objectives were set meets our statutory responsibilities, and more importantly, sends a strong message to public bodies that setting objectives early, and at the heart of the organisation provides the best chance for them to shape decisions towards more sustainable outcomes.



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Your report has highlighted the opportunity for Government to provide better information to the wider public sector on how it is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle, including how it is applied in decisions of a strategic nature, such as the well-being objectives. On Recommendation 2, we continue to look at ways in which we can communicate how we are acting in accordance with the sustainable development more widely, beyond our communication to you, the Commissioner and the Senedd. Next month we are bringing together existing and new bodies subject to the Act to share learning and practice in discharging the well-being duty.

One of the key outcomes of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is to ensure that sustainable development is the central organising principle of Government and public bodies. It remains our expectation that public bodies should not treat the requirement to set well-being objectives under the Act as separate from the objectives that guide and steer the actions and decisions of the organisation. In practice, this means bodies, particularly those that are politically led, finding a way to bring together the policy objectives on which members have been elected, and that they are mandated to deliver, with the design of well-being objectives which maximise their contribution to the achievement of the well-being goals.

The Programme for Government 2021-2026 purposefully places the ten well-being objectives at its heart. This ensures that people in Wales can see their democratic voices reflected in Welsh Ministers' priorities for this government term. The early setting of well-being objectives by Welsh Government sends a strong signal to the wider public sector that this practice, which bodies exhibited in the last cycle of the Act, should continue. This demonstrates the leadership and commitment of Ministers and has added new impetus to the sustainable development agenda across Welsh Government. Treating the well-being objective setting process in this way and not as a standalone process, detached from our wider mechanisms for delivering sustainable development is, in my opinion the more effective approach and better reflects the spirit and intent of the Act.

As the 2021 Senedd elections delivered a continuation of the previous government, when setting the well-being objectives, we were able to draw from our recent collaboration, engagement, and involvement with people and organisations from across Wales. This includes learning from our work with the Shadow Social Partnership Council, the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group, and the Welsh Youth Parliament. It is the sum of these parts that supports Ministers in making decisions, rather than a single, add-on route of citizen insight and involvement just for the well-being duty. Involvement should be a continuing endeavour and therefore while we understand your position in respect of Recommendation 1, I do not see the benefit in an exercise to draw together all the results of involvement into a single product.

The Welsh Government's action and leadership on the well-being of future generations agenda is accelerating in this Government term, and we are maximising every opportunity to deliver on our well-being objectives, identifying areas where we can integrate approaches and contribute to shaping Wales' future. I look forward to continuing to work with you and your team to strengthen our architecture for delivering sustainable development in Wales.

Yours,


Dr Andrew Goodall
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Cc: First Minister, Minister for Social Justice, Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.