

The Future Generations Bill in Wales

1. Sustainable development has been an important part of the devolution story with the duty in the Government of Wales Act. This has set Wales apart in our approach with the requirement on Welsh Government to promote sustainable development in its policies, produce a scheme (strategy) to demonstrate how this will be achieved and submit annual progress reports against the scheme. Incoming Governments are required to review the Sustainable Development Scheme and decide whether they wish to produce a new scheme. There have been 3 such SD schemes in the last 12 years the latest being “One Wales One Planet” <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/publications/onewalesoneplanet/?lang=en> . Wales was the only UK administration to maintain an independent Commissioner role post the UK Government’s decision to end the UK Sustainable Development Commission. The Sustainable Futures Commissioner role established in April 2011 is supported by Cynnal Cymru - the Sustainable Development Forum for Wales
2. This process has been an important contribution to our governance for sustainable development, but the experience has demonstrated weaknesses in the procedures, highlighted in the successive independent reviews undertaken by each new administration and in the Commissioner’s independent commentary on the Annual Sustainable Development Report <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/publications/sd-annual-report-2012-13/?lang=en> including:
 - Sustainable development is treated as a cross cutting theme alongside others not as a central organising principle
 - The Scheme and reporting process run parallel to the programme of Government and are not seen to be central policy
 - The duty only applies to Welsh Government and has no traction across the public sector
 - The Sustainable Development Indicators produced each August have little connection to policy
 - The remaking of the scheme by an incoming Government can mean it is up to 2 years before a new scheme comes into being
3. The current administrations Programme of Government included a commitment to strengthen our governance for sustainable development by **introducing a Sustainable Development Bill, with the purpose of making sustainable development the central organising principle of the devolved public sector and establishing a new statutory SD body with legal powers**. An initial discussion paper was issued in early 2012, with the White Paper being launched in December 2012 for a consultation period to March 2013, with responses being published in the May <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/sustainabledevelopment/sdwhitepaper/?lang=en> . Responsibility for the Bill shifted from the Environment and Sustainable Development Minister to the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty in the March, with Huw Lewis taking the lead before the summer reshuffle led to the current Minister, Jeff Cuthbert taking on responsibility.

4. The First Minister's statement in July announced that the Bill would be renamed **the Future Generations Bill** and would form part of the legislative programme during 2014. The change of name was designed to "help better communicate its purpose and foster greater cross sectoral involvement in how we use legislation to ensure that the decisions of today are better for the long term."
5. Future Generations Bill is therefore proposed as the next step in strengthening our commitment to sustainable development by making it the central organising principle of the public sector in Wales. The Bill will learn from the experience to date and apply across the whole of the devolved public sector. It will enable a common approach to our long term development as a nation.
6. The Bill is in step with global developments being aligned to the UN process of establishing Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and introducing structures to focus on the needs of future generations. The UN SDGs will be set in 2015 and apply to all nations with each being expected to set out their contribution to their achievement.
7. The Bill will not be a silver bullet that will address all our problems or make difficult decisions easy. **It will though introduce mechanisms that improve our governance and decision making for the long term** - so providing a better chance of meeting the intergenerational challenges that are beyond one term of Government and need the engagement of wider society.
8. The Bill is currently being finalised for introduction into the National Assembly in July 2014 and while there may be some variation the outline **mechanisms for improving our governance for the long term** will include:
 - Setting our national long term development goals, aligned to the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals, but reflecting the specific needs and priorities of Wales. The public sector will be required to demonstrate how their policies and programmes maximise their contribution to the achievement of these goals. These goals will be included on the face of the Bill with draft goals being launched by the Minister on February 18th as part of a national conversation on The Wales we Want
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/publications/the-wales-we-want/?lang=en>
 - Establishing a common set of sustainable development governance principles that will underpin decision making across the public sector – collaboration; prevention; integration; long term; citizen centred - providing a common framework for decision making across the public sector

- Ensuring an alignment between national and local delivery through applying the same principles of decision making and focus on achieving long term goals to National, Local Government and other public bodies. The Bill will put Local Service Boards and associated Single Integrated Plans or “Wellbeing Plans” on to a statutory basis as a means of ensuring local delivery. (Local Service Boards represent a collaboration of public service organisations across a local authority area)
 - Establishing an independent Future Generations Commissioner on a statutory basis as a advocate for future generation and guardian of the long term. The Commissioner will have clear legal duties and powers, including the ability to hold inquiries related to the achievement of the goals and application of the governance principles. The Commissioner will be supported by an Advisory Council, with a core membership of the Older Persons, Children, Welsh Language and Equalities & Diversity Commissioners .The Commissioner will be responsible for the production of a Future Generations Report at a set point in the electoral cycle in the year prior to an election to report on progress against the long term goals.
 - Requiring an incoming Government to take into account the Future Generations Report in setting key indicators/ measures of progress and demonstrating how a programme of Government would contribute to achieving key measures of progress over the term of Government
 - Requiring Public Sector bodies who would be subject to the Bill to integrate sustainability into their public reporting and identifying their contribution to the sustainable development goals
 - Ensuring compliance through the Wales Audit Office - who would have responsibility for identifying evidence of the application of the core principles in decision making and contribution to long term goals
9. Alongside the legislation there would also need to be other measures to support the objectives of the Bill, such as The Sustainable Development Charter www.sd-charter.net provides a voluntary mechanism for private and third sector bodies to sign up to the same principles and contribute to achieving the common goals – a form of “social contract”. The Bill will demonstrate a country committed to a sustainable future, well placed to deliver green growth in partnership with private sector companies with the same ambition.
10. The process of developing the Bill has been supported by the Future Generations Bill Reference Group involving key stakeholders and chaired by the Commissioner. It has also drawn from shared learning with countries / regions who are following a similar path (e.g. Finland, Germany, Hungary and Catalonia) and key reports such as the Oxford Martin Commission on the Future “Now for the Long Term”.
http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/commission/Oxford_Martin_Now_for_the_Long_Term.pdf

11. The Ministerial statement on the Future Generations Bill also set out plans for a “national conversation” on the Wales we want for the future generations.
<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/futuregenerationsbill/?lang=en>
The Minister asked the Sustainable Futures Commissioner to take this forward as an opportunity to both trial the role of a Future Generations report and inform the establishment of our long term goals .
12. This pilot national conversation was launched with Michael Sheen in the Wales Millennium Centre on February 18th <http://www.thewaleswewant.org.uk/content/launch-event> , with an initial report in June to accompany the introduction of the Bill into the National Assembly before the publication of the first Future Generations Report in March 2015. The conversation is being carried forward through Cynnal Cymru <http://www.cynnalcymru.com> with a network of supporting organisations who have registered as Future Champions. These conversations will contribute to developing long term vision for Wales, by understanding ‘where we are now’, long-term trends affecting Wales, and the role we as individuals, communities, business and government can play to meet the vision. The Wales we Want web site- www.thewaleswewant.org.uk provides the focus for the conversation, with resources materials, surveys etc.
13. The Future Generations Bill itself will be introduced to the National Assembly in June 2014 with a timetable for receiving Royal Assent in early summer 2015 and the appointment of the new Commissioner to be completed by December 2015. There is an extensive programme of preparation underway, including Wales Local Government Association establishing a cohort of early adopters across local authorities to build on their work with the City and County of Swansea who have been the pathfinder authority for applying the principles included in the Bill <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/31032014-event-future-generations-bill/>
- 14. In summary the architecture of the Future Generations Bill seeks to:**
 - establish a framework of governance for the long term;
 - recognise the long term, inter-generational challenges facing Wales, such as health inequalities, climate change, poverty, obesity and the degradation of the natural environment;
 - provide a platform for taking a different approach to new opportunities, for instance re-defining growth, integrated responses and solutions, collaboration and innovation.
 - establish a clear focus on outcomes, through goals which set out a shared focus on ‘the Wales we want’;
 - recognise that this will require a collective endeavour and shared contribution by the public sector, business and third sector; and
 - ensure that the Bill is part of a broader package of support including the Sustainable Development Charter.