

02/10/2017

Advice from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: Blaenau Gwent PSB

Dear Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board and supporting officers,

Thank you for seeking my advice on how you might take steps to meet your draft well-being objectives. My team have found regular conversations with your supporting officers and the opportunity of attending your Public Services Board (PSB) meeting very helpful in giving them an understanding of how you work together as a PSB; the method you have taken to well-being planning and your intentions to deliver the objectives and take steps in a different way. As they will have discussed with you, I was keen that my advice would be useful to you and the context within which you work, so I hope you have also found these regular touch-points helpful and that they have given you some guidance along the way.

At your PSB on the 18th September, the following high-level themes, were discussed, which I am using as the basis for this advice:

- best start in life;
- healthy behaviours and lifestyles;
- strengthening cultural identity and community resilience;
- forging new pathway to prosperity; and
- improving the natural environment.

I understand that you are working on translating these high-level themes into indicative PSB objectives. The steps in turn are the actions that your PSB is going to take to achieve these objectives. These different elements need to work together as a coherent package. I would suggest that the examples below that you have shared with my team are representative of the types of steps you will need to take and would advise that you work on developing your themes into high-level objectives that set out your ambitions of the outcomes you want to achieve for Blaenau Gwent.

- Develop and establish well-being hubs across Blaenau Gwent...
- Promote behavioural change...
- Tackle loneliness and isolation by...
- Develop a sustainable economy by....
- Improve the quality to protect the natural environment...

As you know, in setting draft objectives and taking steps to meet them, PSBs must use the five ways of working to challenge business as usual and to maximise their contribution to each of the seven national well-being goals. My

advice is in two parts – firstly, to help you consider how you might do this effectively. Secondly, based on your themes and draft objectives it provides prompts, resources and contacts to help you demonstrate through your well-being plan that you have used the five ways of working and seven well-being goals to shape your steps. The purpose of this advice is not to give you my opinion on your well-being objectives. These are determined and owned by you, as a collective PSB.

I would encourage you to read this in conjunction with my response to your well-being assessment. I was keen that it was a 'feed-forward', rather than 'feedback', helping you to consider how to approach continuous assessment and well-being planning. As you know, I have recently published ['Well-being in Wales: Planning today for a better tomorrow'](#), which highlights key findings and recommendations for all PSBs and public bodies on the key areas of change needed to make better decisions for future generations. Both of these resources are also intended as advice to you.

Adopting different ways of working to take steps to meet your draft objectives:

Setting objectives and steps is not business as usual. In the past, we have drawn out themes and priorities and written plans that show what we are doing anyway. Achieving the ambitions of this Act is about the 'what' and the 'how' i.e. what are you doing to contribute to our shared vision of the seven national well-being goals? The goals acknowledge that sustainable development connects the environment in which we live, the economy in which we work, the society in which we enjoy and the cultures in which we share, to people and their quality of life, so what are you going to do differently together? And, how you are applying the sustainable development principle to shape your actions for Blaenau Gwent?

To adapt your ways of working in this way requires a fundamentally different approach. You need to give yourselves the time and space as a PSB to question whether current approaches to public service delivery are fit for the future and explore key pressures and tensions in delivery for each of your objectives. Academi Wales' [Sustainable Futures Architecture](#) articulates succinctly how leadership behaviours need to change. You could use this framework to help explore your board's own behaviours and how you can change.

I am encouraged to hear that you are already having these conversations at PSB about how you can work differently. This is good to hear and I am advising all PSBs that, taking this time and space means having an honest discussion about the tensions between policy issues and current practice within your organisations in relation to each objective. But this should then be focused on action - what new approaches you will take together in the steps you will take to meet your objectives and maximise contribution to the seven national well-being goals. I would like to understand what each draft objective and step you are setting means for Blaenau Gwent and how this is different to what you have done before.

I would advise that you will need to demonstrate how your PSB has considered the following in relation to each of your objectives:

- **Long-term:** What do you understand about the long-term trends, opportunities, risks and likely scenarios for this issue? What are they and have you explored their impact on your steps? Are there current gaps in your data or understanding? What fore-sighting or future trends information do you need to understand this issue better? What capacity, confidence and expertise do you need to fill gaps in knowledge? The work you have commissioned with the Gwent area PSBs will hopefully provide you with future scenarios for your area. These can be extremely powerful in starting a discussion about the opportunities, risks and mitigating actions we can take for the long term.

To inform the action you take, you will need to adequately map and consider the future trends for each of your objectives. My office is working with others to build capacity in this area and, as your support team are aware, Welsh Government have been adding to the 'Future Trends' report resources, which you should make most use of by accessing through Objective Connect or by contacting David Thomas. [The Oxford Martin 'Now for the long-term'](#) report shows global and national future trends that we all need to react to in carrying out sustainable development.

- **Prevention:** In considering this issue, do you have an understanding of what you are trying to prevent? What are the root causes of the issue and when and where would be the best point to intervene? Are you clear on whether it is primary prevention i.e. seeking to prevent something before it has even occurred; secondary prevention i.e. preventing something from getting worse; or tertiary prevention i.e. softening the impact of something that has ongoing effects; that is needed? This is the difference between encouraging someone to wear a bicycle helmet (primary prevention of head-injury); putting someone in the recovery position if they have fallen from their bike (secondary prevention of the injury worsening) and counselling after the accident (tertiary prevention to help ongoing injuries from worsening).

Many PSBs haven't used their assessments to fully understand both the current situation and the scale and nature of the response required. At present you have identified a need to change structures, services and resourcing, but are not clear what this change looks like. I appreciate you might not know the full picture yet, but I want to see all PSBs exploring how they break cycles and dig deeper into data to see the implicit messages in the data to better understand the causes and effects of key issues and trends to inform your steps.

- **Collaboration:** I commend the time your support officers dedicate to working across the Gwent area and I am pleased to hear the positive collaborations and pilot approaches being undertaken as a result. I am also pleased to hear that you are considering the different relationships between national, regional and local structures and considering where the most effective interventions may need to happen in order to address the issues you have identified in your assessment of well-being. I acknowledge that this process is complicated but it is important that the people who sit around the PSB table can bring the best range of insights, constructive challenge, data and solutions to the PSB. Have you got the right people around the table, at the right level to make decisions around an issue? Who else might you need to be collaborating with to better understand this? As recommended in my report on the Well-being Assessments, now is a

timely opportunity to review the invited membership of the PSB and consider who are the 'unusual' suspects that you may need to work with to take steps to meet your objectives?

In delivering the steps, how might your organisations collaborate? You will need to demonstrate how your PSB is considering the steps that need to be taken together and across organisational boundaries in order to effectively meet your objectives. This could include co-locating staff, breaking down traditional structures, arranging job-swaps and secondments and, importantly, pooling resources. I will want to see how you have considered these benefits and how the steps you will take move you towards achieving this collaboration.

- **Integration:** For each objective, how are you going to move away from just doing something that meets the objective, and instead, demonstrate that you are taking steps which maximise your contribution to each of the goals? I am pleased to hear that in your discussions you have started to consider the interconnections between your emerging objectives to help inform your decisions about the most effective steps and would urge you to continue to do this deliberately and explicitly. Instead of looking at this issue in a traditional and general sense, have you looked at the definition for each of the goals to widen your understanding of well-being for this issue and the opportunities which might exist for meeting these goals through each of your objectives? How well do you understand the contribution your organisation makes at the moment to this objective? And do you understand how different is the contribution you will need to make going forward for this objective?

How can you plot what's going on elsewhere in your organisations, the strategies and plans at a regional or a national level, to connect and lead with others on achieving this objective? My team have spoken positively about the work being undertaken at a Gwent wide level and I will be really interested to understand the benefits of this as we move towards delivering well-being plans. As a PSB, have you yet acknowledged the barriers or tensions that have arisen and what steps can you (or others) take to remove them? Who else is needed around the PSB table to help you interconnect decision-making and improve well-being for this issue?

- **Involvement:** I know you have tried to continuously involve people in the development of your well-being objectives over the last few months and that you have actively sought to go beyond the usual consultation and ad-hoc engagement. I am pleased that you have taken this evidence from local people and have actively considered how these colloquial issues can be expressed strategically in your well-being objectives. I am keen for you to continue and build on this level of engagement. How are you taking steps to understand the lived experiences of people in your area and how is this shaping your actions? How are you actively seeking better ways of involving people in decision-making? How can you collaborate with members of the community in meeting these steps? As with the Social Care Wales Board, what options are there for involving people with lived experience on Boards and partnership groups?

Your support officers have worked hard to help you achieve this level of progress in assessing well-being for the area, synthesizing this evidence into high-level themes and drafting your emerging objectives and steps, but I must emphasise that it is your leadership that is required to adopt a new way of working. I know you have used the goals to help form your objectives, but they are also there to help you to explore the tensions and opportunities of working together to achieve a better public service for Wales.

This leadership and partnership working permeates at every level of your member organisations. Consistency in representation and how you take messages back from PSB to your own organisations is critical to building relationships and creating action. As leaders, I am sure that you are part of many partnership structures, meetings and initiatives, but the PSB is meant to be the opportunity for integration and collaboration at a senior and influential level. How can other partnerships be tasked with collaborating to take steps to help you meet your objectives? Communicating why the work of the PSB matters to your own senior management teams and using the well-being plan to challenge current practices within your own departments is crucial to creating the culture change you have highlighted in your discussions with my team. I have a role to recognise and mitigate barriers, but so do you – as senior leaders, in challenging your managers to work differently and be 'safe to fail'.

Alongside this, you will also need to demonstrate how each of your organisations are taking all reasonable steps in the exercising of their functions to meet the PSB's objectives. I appreciate that during the first phases of implementation of the Act this may be challenging as the objectives of individual public bodies have been set. So, whilst I am sympathetic to the needs of PSBs and public bodies to have time to work towards alignment I will want to see that the work of the PSB is not seen as something separate to the priorities of its member bodies. I am encouraged that you have acknowledged this and recognise that current arrangements and members' organisational structures are not fit for purpose and that you are exploring an objective to address this.

Other PSBs seeking to create organisational change through their objectives include Torfaen, who are looking at organisational development in the context of the Act, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire and you may wish to engage directly with them to share ideas and learning. Again, my office is happy to connect you if this is helpful.

It follows that co-ordinating this work needs to be recognized by all of you as members of the PSB. I am interested in how different PSBs are supported and it appears that when support is multi-agency, resourced and committed to by different partners, collaboration and integration across departments and structures becomes easier. Some PSBs are already adopting closer working arrangements, a multi-agency virtual team with a senior leader or more formal secondments and co-location. There are several resources that may be of use, such as Designing Multi-Agency Partnerships; Leading Culture Change and Stepping up: a framework for public sector leadership on sustainability. This will require you, people in positions of leadership, to play your part and be brave in driving the changes needed. I hope you continue to lead an intelligence-based approach to finding different solutions to how things have been previously done.

This advice should be taken by all PSBs, but I appreciate every PSB has taken a different approach to drafting their well-being objectives and will be going about delivering their well-being plan in the context that is right for them. The second section my advice seeks to help you demonstrate through your well-being plan that you have used the five ways of working and seven well-being goals to shape your steps.

Advice on how you might take steps to meet your draft objectives:

From the regular conversations you have had with my team, I know your supporting officers have worked hard over the summer to draw on your assessment findings, prioritise issues through engaging with you and engaging with others to gather professional knowledge to draft your objectives and steps. This section of my advice is intended to give you ideas, information and contacts that might help to demonstrate how you have considered the steps you will take in the context of Blaenau Gwent.

I was pleased to see that following my advice, you have spent time honing the initial 30 themes in your Well-Being Assessment into five high-level themes, which are shaping emerging objectives using an asset based approach. I am also pleased that you have identified the need for an additional internally focused objective that seeks to develop your purpose as an effective PSB. I would encourage you to continue with this focus and build on developing inter-connections between the themes and objectives in agreeing and delivering your steps to meet these objectives. It is important that you consider how your objectives both individually and as a collective set, maximize their contribution to all the well-being goals and not just make links to a smaller number of well-being goals where there is a clear and direct connection. By exploring connections to all the well-being goals you will not only gain a more holistic picture of the issue you are trying to resolve but you also can maximise the range of resources and opportunities you can draw on to help you find solutions.

Best start in life.

For each of your draft objectives and the steps you seek to take, I would advise you to be clear about what this means for Blaenau Gwent in your well-being planning. What local evidence have you used (or will you use) to understand the specific areas of successful preventative interventions in Blaenau Gwent? What local services will be impacted if you redirect investment to the first 1000 days of a child's life? How might taking an adverse childhood experience (ACE) informed approach play out in reality for your organisations?

Have you considered the long-term trends of this objective? The complex socio-economic situations in many communities in Wales would suggest that families are not receiving the right support at the right time, and cycles are continuing to the next generation. The costs of the worst start in life are enormous, both to the individual's life and to public services. [Late intervention services for young people are estimated to cost England and Wales £17bn per year](#) (£6bn on child protection and safeguarding, £5.2bn on crime and anti-social behaviour, £3.7bn on youth economic inactivity, £680m on school absence and exclusion, £610m on child injuries and mental health problems, and £450m on youth substance misuse). Prevention is at the core of this objective and I would advise that your organisations recognise it is part of all of their responsibilities to prevent poor outcomes.

As public services, we often treat the symptoms of ACEs, such as mental illness, substance misuse and domestic abuse, rather than the root causes. Taking a preventative approach means shifting resources to deal with root issues. In this way, dealing with ACEs is as much about having an ACE aware public service and identifying where ACEs have happened, as making sure that services families access are integrated. In the steps you take, it is important to not just focus on early years but to review initiatives that focus on mental health, substance misuse, criminal justice, housing, services and others to ensure they are preventative, joined up and actively seeking to better situations for families and for future parents to stop the cycle continuing to the next generation. Alyson Francis, Director of the ACE Support Hub, has also recently worked with my office to write to you, outlining that ACEs are not another thing to do, but an opportunity to reconsider how we deliver services together that make sense for the families receiving them. The ACE Support Hub could also act as a central place for PSBs to share practice, as almost all of the PSBs in Wales have discussed early years, children and ACEs in their draft objectives and steps.

Understanding the lived experiences of people who have been through trauma in their lives also gives a fresh perspective on shaping preventative services. Currently, our services are often not set up in a way that would deliver this objective. We deal with people in neat 'service-user' categories, such as 'domestic abuse victim', 'anti-social behaviour perpetrator', 'substance misuser', 'problem tenant', which often create barriers for people to have equality of opportunity or outcome. This approach means we fail to join up the dots, to integrate and to spot signs of a worsening situation. The five ways of working are intended to challenge how we currently do things and provide a different lens as a whole public service for dealing with problems. Involving people is central to challenging the system because only by understanding the lived experiences of people can we design services that are fit for current and future generations. This example ['Why poor people don't plan long-term'](#) provides an insight into the barriers people face in overcoming inequality and the case studies [contained in this report by Locality](#) demonstrate the financial and social costs of not taking this holistic and preventative approach to people's lives.

Understanding people's lived experiences and setting the context of what it means to live in a particular community will not only help align services, but encourage you to consider how you contribute to a more equal Blaenau Gwent. The third sector also have useful knowledge on— linking people with local activities and services in their area and helping them to stay active and well. [WCVVA produced wider information](#) on how the third sector play a role in contributing to the seven well-being goals.

Your Well-being Assessment highlighted maternal health - before, during and after pregnancy, as a key focus. We know that maternal and familial health have a big impact on a child's life, linking to your other theme on 'Promoting healthier behaviours and lifestyles'. Between 10% and 20% of women develop mental health problems during pregnancy or within a year of giving birth. These illnesses are one of the leading causes of death for mothers during pregnancy and the year after birth. Despite this, women in around half of the UK have no access to specialist perinatal mental health services and in other geographical areas, services are inadequate.

Considering the impact of services like this on young families is important if you are to take a cross-sector approach. The ['Mums and Babies in Mind' project in England](#) has given a focus to local leaders to create a pathway across sectors that provide expectant and new mothers with the right support at the right time.

Blaenau Gwent also has more people experiencing mental health problems. Your well-being assessment identified that 17% of adults in Blaenau Gwent are being treated for a mental illness and an increase in the number of children aged 5-15 predicted to have any mental health issues by 2020. Approximately 50% of people with enduring mental health problems display symptoms by the time they are 14 years old, and many at a much younger age. If the symptoms are there at such an early age – what can be done to prevent the problems at later life? If we know that on average, the NHS spend over £21 million on the prescription of anti-depressants, how can we act earlier? The [Children's Society Good Childhood Report 2017](#) found that children's happiness is at its lowest since 2010 and this is being impacted by fear of crime. [Cardiff have trialed mental health lessons for children](#) and a new report from Respublica and Barnado's, ['Making young minds matter'](#), highlights early interventions (such as in-school counselling in Wales) that can have a positive impact on mental health. I would advise you to involve children and young people in understanding any issues with accessing the right care and support, designing different services and evaluating the effects of this approach. Only by understanding the lived experiences of people can we design services that are fit for current and future generations.

I have also noted that your well-being assessment identified the significant impact poverty has for children in Blaenau Gwent, having the highest rate of child poverty for any local authority in Wales. A [2013 review carried out by the London School of Economics for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) found that children in lower-income families have worse cognitive, social-behavioural and health outcomes. Crucially, this study demonstrated that it was in part because they are poorer, not just because low income is correlated with other household and parental characteristics. How can the PSB collaborate with others to improve the economic well-being of families across the region? How can these communities, in particular, be focused on? If we know that by the time children in some areas reach reception class in school, the circumstances of where they live already affects well-being, then we need to be intervening at a much earlier stage in responding to these trends.

So, in considering what steps you might take, the [New Economics Foundation work](#) on investing in children might be helpful, which highlights the need to address both material wellbeing and external circumstances – such as housing, poverty, and schooling – as well as psychosocial well-being and inner resources. I would also advise you to use the knowledge you gathered in your Well-Being Assessment from Public Health Wales on the [First 1000 days](#) of a child's life and the benefits that can be realised from investing in the early years to determine what steps you can take now to improve the well-being of our future generations. Public Health Wales have established a national ['Health and Sustainability Hub'](#) to co-ordinate their own work around the Act and, through your PSB representative, you might find it useful to link with the national team for further evidence and knowledge.

Most PSBs have identified draft objectives connected to early years, giving children a good start in life and preventing ACEs including Cwm Taf, Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Conwy / Denbighshire. Alyson

Francis and I are also on the panel of the [Good Practice Exchange Wales webinar on understanding ACEs](#) on the 7th November, which may be helpful to you in considering your steps for this objective.

I would advise you to take immediate steps towards better integration of services, co-locating teams, pooling resources and working in a way that makes sense for your communities. Some families access many services and better integrating these provisions would help them to help themselves. I see from the diagram showing your thinking on how your draft 'indicative' priorities can be transferred into local well-being objectives that you are considering establishing well-being hubs. The idea of 'community hub's' is becoming more widespread and examples such as the [Bromley by Bow Centre in East London](#); [Leeds Neighbourhood Networks](#) and [Solva Care](#) demonstrate innovative initiatives that focus on the needs of the community first and integrate services to improve well-being. You will not be surprised to note that other Public Services Boards are also considering setting objectives around engagement, developing / sustaining strong social networks, fostering belonging and shaping services. In particular, you may wish to share ideas with Vale of Glamorgan; Carmarthenshire; Newport; Ceredigion and Powys PSBs, who have supplied me with similar draft objectives.

Healthy behaviours and lifestyles.

As a PSB, you have identified this theme as critical because it is about prevention and enabling people to improve their well-being. Your well-being assessment identified the importance healthy behaviours are in promoting good health and reduction to disease. It also identified how health harming behaviours are linked to deprivation and life circumstances. Your steps, therefore, should not just relate to how health can be improved but link to people's built and natural surroundings, their income and their community life – all of which are wider determinants of health. I advise you actively use the definitions of the seven well-being goals, as they are intended to show you how we can have multiple benefits on well-being through actions we take.

Evidence suggests that enabling people to make healthy choices is linked to their economic status, their environment and how they connect with others. You have identified from your engagement activity that people view social activities as being important to well-being. Change often 'sticks' when people are involved in wider social and cultural activities together; for example, the Nudjed 'Behaviour Change is a Team Sport' report found getting people together increased exercise patterns. Their work has included successfully working with young mums in the South Wales Valleys to get them involved in more physical activity. How does this relate to your other objectives and high-level themes? Can activities to address community resilience and isolation and loneliness help people to live healthier lives? How can improving the natural environment also help manage their health? As I'm sure you've recognised there are opportunities for you to work with organisations such as the National Trust and Wildlife Trusts to develop a county-wide approach. The Natural Resources Wales' 'Actif Woods' project is an example of getting people outside, protecting their environment and enjoying the positive effects on health and well-being. How can you involve other 'unusual suspects' in exploring the steps to meet this objective? How can the third sector feel empowered to help? In some areas, community organisations have been funded by the Intermediate Care Fund to act as community coordinators for older people – linking them with

local activities and services in their area and helping them to stay active and well. If this is proving successful, how can we better collaborate on resourcing initiatives like this?

Collaborating with others to make this happen could make a real difference to our well-being. Collaborating with 'unusual suspects' and involving people in how you take steps to meet this objective will enable you to maximize your contribution to the seven well-being goals. For example, what is the role of culture in enabling children and adults to live healthier lives? How might people take part in cultural activities to help manage their health? The Arts Council for Wales' strategy, which outlines some of the benefits involvement in creative activity can have on the health, cohesion and skills of the population. The Cultural Commissioning Programme, funded by Arts Council England seeks to help commissioners of public services understand how they can improve outcomes by integrating arts and cultural activities into a range of services, including mental health and wellbeing, older people and place-based commissioning. Collaborating with the national public bodies subject to the Act, such as Sport Wales, Arts Council for Wales, National Museums of Wales and National Library of Wales, may be able to help you see how your steps to meet this objective could maximise contribution to each of the goals.

Methods of social prescribing cover a huge range of things, but it is growing and I am encouraged to see it being recognised as a preventative approach. This study, on social prescribing in Bristol, provides information on different models and gives some insight into the improvements in mental and general physical health. The recent BBC documentary, 'The doctor who gave up drugs', showed several examples of how alternative approaches to prescribing pills can have a more holistic, long-lasting positive impact on someone's life – with people getting physically fitter and healthier mentally without the reliance on prescriptions.

A number of PSBs are drafting objectives to improve health, improve prevention, enable people to take more responsibility for their health, introduce behaviour change and social prescribing; including Powys; Caerphilly; Cwm Taf; Pembrokeshire; Conwy / Denbighshire and Monmouthshire.

Strengthening our thriving cultural identity and community resilience.

This theme highlights a number of complex issues from your well-being assessment, that demand you look at the differences across Blaenau Gwent, the current integration of services and external factors. I would advise that you dig deeper into the data to inform your understanding of the issues relating to this theme and seek to better understand your communities. Listen to what people have told you about their communities and collaborate to find solutions using the seven well-being goals.

As leaders of local agencies, you have a key role to play in promoting and supporting community cohesiveness, given your role in community leadership and support, and role in community capacity building through, for example, facilitating networking and coordination, and providing training for community groups and employees. The research documented in '[What Works in Community Cohesion](#)' provides a useful reference for PSBs on the different dimensions of community cohesion.

Ask yourselves if current provision is appropriate to manage these issues? Are these issues currently managed adequately and in what areas might they need more collective or preventative action? What is the impact of inaccessibility? How fit for the future is IT provision? What impact does perceptions of safety have on people's ability to access services or play an active role in their communities? How do levels of volunteering differ across the county? How involved are the many volunteers in the work of the PSB?

Understanding the lived experiences of people could give you an important insight into how different communities are functioning and where your services would be most helpful. For instance, are there ways the PSB could encourage and reward this community activism in ways that would help you meet your objectives in particular areas? The Royal Town Planning Institute's report on ['Poverty, Place and Inequality'](#), includes several recommendations around why place-based approaches are key to tackling inequality between and within communities.

I would advise each of your organisations to commit to the National Participation Standards and Participation Cymru can support your officers in gaining the skills vital for effective and meaningful involvement. Co-production Network Wales could help you to identify and engage community leaders. Most people will only get involved in something that directly impacts them, their family or the place where they spend time and, often, this can lead to much bigger outcomes - shown by the work that ['Nurture Development' do around Asset Based Community Development](#). Your own [Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales' 'Deep Place' study in Tredegar](#) gives evidence on how an understanding of place can have multiple benefits on well-being.

Have you also considered how people might want to get involved in the future? What sort of changes might you need to make to your organisational systems and policies to enable people to get more involved in communities and shape local services? Currently, research shows that children aged between five and 16 years spend an average of six and a half hours a day in front of a screen; [28% of young people use social media](#) as their primary news source; [43% of 'millennials' are driven to make financial donations through social channels](#); and [according to the 2017 ONS survey](#), 87% of all adults in Wales were recent internet users (meaning they had used the internet in the last three months). Although some people are currently offline, and there is clearly a need for a tailored approach, there is a real opportunity to engage with people that is most convenient to them and is part of their daily life, not an additional chore.

You have identified that the inaccessibility within Blaenau Gwent and limited public transport suggests that isolation and loneliness can be an issue for not just older but younger people as well. Research [by Ageing Well Wales](#) has shown this and suggests that loneliness in people is both about how connected people are to their communities physically and about feeling purposeful in society. Although technology is not going to provide all of the answers to isolation in your communities, think about the long-term impact it could have on our population. In our sharing economy, could there be other online technical solutions to preventing social isolation, around car-pooling or community transport connected to social media? The ['Hypervillage'](#) concept developed by FutureScape imagines villages connected by their assets, [encouraging people in rural communities to capitalise on technology](#). How have you thought about the long-term possibilities of employing technological solutions for this issue?

Monmouthshire has a good track record of employing technical solutions to problems. "[Monmouthshire Made Open](#)" is an example of an online platform that has anticipated how people might contribute to improving their area in the future, with opportunities to share ideas, ask the community, start a project and seek volunteers or resources. Matthew Gatehouse, working with Monmouthshire PSB, would be able to share their learning with you on establishing this website.

[Solva Community Council](#) in Pembrokeshire are an interesting example of how volunteers and older residents have benefited from a scheme to reduce isolation and improve well-being. There are many good examples of projects that seek to bring people together to learn new skills, socialise and build their resilience in later life, like [Men's Sheds Cymru](#), happening across Wales that the PSB could encourage and support. This is where the five ways of working should be challenging your thinking and I will be interested in seeing how you influence and task the Social Services and Well-being Regional Partnership Board in delivering your response to your objectives. [This report by the Young Foundation](#) provides inspiration on 'Innovating better ways of living late in life', challenging the traditional siloes we are working in. Creating flexible and age friendly communities and environments can prevent people from needing social care, from becoming isolated, from suffering ill-health or having an accident at home.

Opening up land and buildings to the community could be a way of encouraging multiple benefits to be realised. Across the UK, austerity has meant that buildings, land and services have been transferred to community ownership and, in many cases, it has increased well-being for the people involved. How can you better use the collective public estate you have in Blaenau Gwent? If isolation and transportation is an issue, how can some provision be provided in a different way? The [Welsh Government National Assets Working Group](#) captured some Welsh examples that you might wish to explore, but there are many national organisations promoting better use of publicly owned land and assets, such as [Shared Assets](#), [Nurture Development](#) and [Locality](#), with the aim of encouraging communities to thrive.

Other Public Services Boards are also considering setting objectives around engagement, culture, developing / sustaining strong social networks, fostering belonging and shaping services. In particular, you may wish to share ideas with Vale of Glamorgan; Ceredigion; and Newport PSBs.

Forging new pathway to prosperity.

Your assessment of economic well-being identifies how the public sector in Blaenau Gwent has delivered successful interventions that demonstrate positive trends in many areas, which are regrettably overshadowed by the scale of the challenges that you face in your area. Your role and action has been in making this change, as Chief Executives, Leaders, Chairs and senior managers. This objective demands strong leadership, as I have advised above, that permeates throughout each of your organisations. To take steps to meet this objective, you will need to be brave in pooling resources, changing policies and taking risks by trying different approaches. You

will need to communicate these changes within each of your organisations. The seven areas of change in the Act: corporate planning, financial planning, workforce planning, procurement, assets, performance management and risk are the core organisational activities where applying the five ways of working would ensure the sustainable development principle frames how you work. I would also advise you to appreciate the influence you can have over other organisations too.

In general, I would advise that as public service leaders, you consider what actions you can take or influence to meet this objective and maximise your contribution to each of the seven well-being goals. You will need to be clear about how you have reflected on the full definitions of each of the Well-Being Goals including the goal for a Prosperous Wales. You will need to take more analysis about what this means for Blaenau Gwent- where there is scope for innovation; low-carbon economy; and the potential for decent jobs- particularly in light of your findings in your well-being assessment.

How can you involve people from the more unequal communities in Blaenau Gwent to seek their advice on creating opportunities? How can your organisations offer apprenticeships for all ages? How can your procurement procedures maximise your contribution to the goal of a globally responsible Blaenau Gwent? As an area with a high number of active enterprises, businesses and start-ups, can your organisational policies seek to help sustainable local businesses, cutting down on transporting goods, rather than focussing on cost alone? [Forum for the Future](#) have published reports on this and my office are working with [Value Wales](#) to pilot sustainable procurement in the context of the Act. How can your procurement also champion equality? How can policies seek to grow the Welsh language in the area? Alun Davies AM [announced funding for growing bilingual small businesses](#) recently to increase visibility of Welsh in our communities. In seeking to enable entrepreneurship and growth, how about introducing initiatives that stipulate people set up sustainable enterprises that maximise their contribution to the seven goals?

The future of work is uncertain. Jobs that exist now were unheard of when I left school and it will be the same for our children. The [Future of Work report](#) predicts that 65 percent of the children who are now starting school will find themselves working jobs as adults that don't even exist yet. How have you considered these long-term trends in setting your steps and enabling people to adapt their skills for future earning? How can you act for the long term now and seek to instill skills in young people that are fit for the future? What life skills might your children need to make it in Blaenau Gwent in the future? The [Future of Work report](#) also suggests project-based work is likely to become more widespread, with skills like creativity, connectivity, communication and problem-solving being far more important than specific knowledge. Teamwork, communication and confidence are as valuable to young people as good grades when entering the workplace (in the [Prince's Trust recent Results for Life report](#)).

Your well-being assessment identified that the majority of the population in Blaenau Gwent are employed in the public sector but this is projected to decrease. [And, according to McKinsey](#), technology could automate 45 percent of the tasks people are currently paid to do– how have you considered the impact of many of these roles being replaced by automation? What action can you take now, as public service providers, to encourage learning

and jobs in the foundational and social economy, around local care, retail and food industries, which are jobs less likely to be automated in future and good for the local economy? A [recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) highlights the value of the social economy in creating jobs, strengthening skills and employability. How have you considered these long-term trends in setting your steps and enabling people to adapt their skills for future earning?

You should consider who else you might need to involve in developing this draft objective, such as schools, businesses, Coleg Gwent, universities and social enterprises. What social responsibilities have the private sector adopted in the area? How are businesses coming together to drive positive, long term change and does the PSB have any influence over this? What opportunities can be offered to budding community enterprises through the PSB collaborating with the private sector and education providers? What research has been undertaken about the local economy? Your well-being assessment identifies that young people are not being equipped with the low-level qualifications and skills to enter employment, so how might you encourage local businesses to use their social responsibilities and enable better learning for younger and older people?

As I have mentioned above, it will be critical that the steps you take to meet this theme have to be integrated across the other themes and objectives. For instance, you have identified the potential benefits having a high quality natural environment can contribute to a thriving tourism economy. How can you encourage sustainable tourism for the area in growing a well-connected county? How can the communities around Blaenau Gwent be involved in finding active travel routes; creating small and local business opportunities? Encouraging a focus around the culture and language of the area can also help you maximise your contribution to all of the goals.

Other communities are considering how to retain young people over the long term, as [a trend being seen across Wales](#) is younger people leaving the county for opportunities elsewhere. Inaccessible communities in Japan and Canada have seen a recent upsurge of younger people staying in their place of birth, both with improved technologies but also by celebrating the way of life and introducing sustainable tourism. [This World Economic Forum article](#) suggests that some of the answers may lie in bottom-up community initiatives, where young people take a sense of pride and ownership in telling others about their heritage and environment, starting small scale businesses that benefit from visiting tourists. How the PSB can foster growth through its influence; could this involve young people undertaking apprenticeships or training?

Your assessment identifies there are a high number of people in the Blaenau Gwent with no qualifications. Whilst providing opportunities for people to learn and develop is no bad thing, enabling people to take full advantage of these opportunities is most important. Therefore, I would advise that you need to dig deeper into the data here and understand the full causes of achievement levels not improving at pace before setting steps to how you might meet this draft objective. Ask yourselves, what would really make a difference to the learning and development of people in Blaenau Gwent throughout their lives? What other things are having an impact of people's life chances that you, as public services, can prevent?

A study in Newcastle should be of interest to you in this respect. Social Finance are a not-for-profit organisation who specialise in in-depth analysis and looking at social return on investment, and were commissioned by Newcastle City Council to do some deeper digging for them to help them address the problem with NEETs (those Not in Education, Employment and Training). Whilst traditional focus looks at GCSE attainment, what this analysis shows in reality is that academic achievement is not the most significant factor at all, instead showing that 67% of 17-19 year olds who were NEET had come from the 25% of 17-19 year olds who had multiple contacts with social services during their childhood. The research showed that those who had had as little as six interactions with social services spent almost three times longer out of education or training. This study demonstrates that looking at the issue in a more holistic way clarifies the steps you can take as a PSB to achieve your objectives.

As the majority (16%) of active enterprises in Blaenau Gwent were in the construction sector, I also would like to advise you to consider steps on how you can work together to make the best use of your assets. Together, you have a large amount of public sector estate, responsibility for infrastructure and a say in how public buildings are designed and refurbished. You should explore what tangible actions that you can take, such as how you plan, design and locate development (as part of your Local Development Plan), how you refurbish buildings, improve infrastructure and locate public spaces, which can have a positive impact on well-being. [The Closing the Circle](#) report on the circular economy and the Welsh Environment is a useful report by Constructing Excellence in Wales. It demonstrates a potential economic opportunity of an additional £1 billion per annum by 2035 through the practical application of circular economy principles and give practical examples in where the public sector can look to minimise waste and resources in future projects. This is an increase of 12.5 per cent in the turnover of the Welsh built environment sector and generates 7,300 jobs (gross). You can also take inspiration from some of the projects mentioned in the recent [Constructing Excellence Awards](#), such as the Active Classroom. Having a consideration of how 'green' these buildings are, both in terms of energy efficiency and sustainable construction, is a quick win for you as a PSB.

I have previously spoken about the opportunity presented by the Cardiff City Region. There is clear interest at the PSB about taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the region and I would advise that, as people in positions of leadership, you need to influence the current negotiations with your draft objectives for Blaenau Gwent in mind. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that poverty costs the whole region £2.2 billion per year. Increasing GDP has little impact on reducing inequalities, and in eight out of the ten Local Authority areas in the region, child poverty is above the Welsh average. I would therefore advise you to encourage that value within the City Region is not just placed on economic growth but on developing patterns of employment and work that are fit for the future, investing in the most deprived communities to encourage skills in technology, creativity and problem-solving to break inter-generational patterns of poverty. Your well-being assessment highlights the high levels of digital exclusion faced by your communities. How are opportunities to increase connectivity being capitalized through the development of digital infrastructure? As more employment will become reliant on digital connectivity, how can the PSB influence private sector providers to improve the digital infrastructure of the county? How can you collaborate with businesses to provide a financial case for change? I am also keen to see how the Board are considering creating a well-connected region, akin to this draft objective. [I also recently](#)

[commented on the work of city regions](#) in response to Dr. Mark Lang and Professor Terry Marsden's recent report "[Re-thinking Growth: Toward the Well-being Economy.](#)"

Several other PSBs are drafting similar objectives and steps include Powys; Cardiff; Ceredigion; Newport; Pembrokeshire; Monmouthshire and Caerphilly.

Improving the natural environment.

The people of Blaenau Gwent have identified the natural environment as a fantastic asset through your well-being assessment. The green spaces of your area and the quality of the local street scene form an important factor in people's well-being. You have acknowledged the multiple benefits of having a good quality the natural environment, the important economic role it has through the development of tourism and sustainable energy infrastructure, but also the positive impact it has on physical and mental health, as well as mitigating the effects of extreme weather and climate change.

The [Wildlife Trust in Wales report into green infrastructure](#) outlines how green infrastructure delivers a wide range of proven, tangible, and cost-effective economic, social and environmental benefits. The [Design Commission for Wales](#) also has case studies and resources on design that focuses on users, maximises energy efficiency and has been shown to significantly improve patient recovery in health. In each of these areas my office can connect you to these people and organisations who may be able to assist you as you develop your work.

Sustaining your natural environment also requires the involvement of residents. How can you better listen to their motivations for using their cars, rather than active travel? How can you encourage sustainable tourism in Wales? The environmental assets of your area are fantastic, so how can you connect the woodlands, peat heathlands, parks, sites of special interest and historical significance with active travel opportunities, public transport and, at the same time, benefit local business? This involves a place-based focus on planning and a wider focus on the environmental, social and cultural well-being of an area – rather than pure economic gain.

Involving people in the running of their community can also have a positive effect on helping to make the local environment more resilient. [NESTA has a guide](#) to working with communities to tackle climate change, including the 'Big Green Challenge', where participants changed their lifestyles to reduce their carbon footprint. Projects such as ['Rainscape' through Dwr Cymru](#) suggest ways that we can all mitigate the effects of floods, and an extreme example includes the [Isle of Eigg in Scotland](#), where the community are having a positive impact on their environment by introducing renewable community energy schemes, building sustainable businesses and improving biodiversity.

Collaborating with businesses in how you take steps to meet this objective will also be important to protect and enhance the land and halt declining biodiversity and habitat loss. For each of these steps, use the definitions of

the well-being goals to think about how you can do something different and achieve maximum impact, plus integrate across many of your draft steps. For example, how can you enable corporate volunteering opportunities that seek to enhance the resilience of the natural environment? What volunteering schemes could help to create a more globally responsible Blaenau Gwent? How can people encourage equality through their volunteering and cohesion within some of the communities in Blaenau Gwent? [Business in the Community](#) has a range of practical ways for businesses to work together and take action to help tackle some of the key environmental and social issues facing society.

I would advise you to think about your own roles in protecting this environment for future generations, which will need to be clear in the steps you will take to meet this objective. This will include how you plan, design and locate future developments (as part of your Local Development Plan), buildings, infrastructure and other public and community spaces. [Zero Carbon Britain's recent 'Making it Happen'](#) report sets out what responsibilities we all have to future generations to acting on climate change now. What can you do, as Chief Executive, Chair or Leader, now to mitigate the effects of our loss of environment and be more globally responsible? Although the public sector only accounts for a relatively small amount of Wales' emissions, you are uniquely placed to influence emissions far more widely in areas such as transport, energy, land use and procurement. The Welsh Government recently made a commitment for the public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030 and have released a Call for Evidence to explore the most effective mechanisms for achieving this ambition and the appropriate strategic actions required.

[The Welsh Government recently published](#) carbon emission levels subdivided by Local Authority and also released a [Call for Evidence](#) to explore the most effective mechanisms for achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. I will be hosting an event on the 9th November, in partnership with Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales to: explore how the public services in Wales can involve people in collaborating and integrating their work, to take greater account of the long-term carbon implications of their activities, and help prevent the effects of climate change becoming even worse.

I ask that you demonstrate consideration of the long-term impacts of extreme weather events that will pose particular risks for your area. I urge you to consider the impact of climate change on Blaenau Gwent, as an area with 6 community areas at risk of flooding, and identified negative impacts on water quality in extreme weather. Flooding affected homes and businesses last year in a number of counties and well-being assessments show how flooding affects people's well-being long after the event. Expected annual damage [to residential properties is estimated to be £22 million](#), so understanding how different weather events impact on communities is crucial to prevention.

Many of the people in Blaenau Gwent rely on their environment for income, food, water, and recreation. In the future, the effects of climate change are likely to cause droughts in the summer, meaning a shortage of water, declining bio-diversity and a knock-on effect for agriculture. How are you considering the potential economic effect of a changing climate? If you are seeking to use your natural resources for economic benefit, how have you

considered the long-term impact of extreme weather events on these resources? How can you use scenarios to imagine what preventative action you could take to protect agriculture, water supplies and transportation in the event of extreme weather?

In line with your draft objective of adopting a cross-sectoral change to your work as a PSB, you should also consider your own roles as organisations in developing resilience and becoming more globally responsible. The UK has pledged to have zero emissions by 2050 and every Welsh Government has pledged for more green jobs. But despite Wales being a place of great potential in providing natural energy, only 10% of Wales' electricity in 2013 was provided through renewable energy. Last year, the National Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee produced '[A Smarter Energy Future for Wales](#)', with 19 recommendations for how Wales could transform its approach to energy. More recently, Smart Energy GB have produced a report on '[A Smart Energy Future for Rural Areas](#)', giving examples and case studies of rural areas across the UK who are making that transition. You may find this [seminar](#) from the National Assembly for Wales' Research Service and the Learned Society for Wales, provides insights from the leading energy experts in Wales and their thoughts on the future of renewable energy in Wales. [The Policy Forum for Wales](#) keynote seminar takes place on the 7th December this year, with a focus on priorities for energy policy, growing the sector in Wales and increasing investment in renewables.

Other PSBs seeking to protect their environment and undertake further work to understand the risks for their communities include Blaenau Gwent; the Vale of Glamorgan; Powys; Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion.

I hope you have found this advice helpful in moving forward towards publishing a well-being plan for formal consultation. Please get in touch with my team if you want further contact details for any of the organisations and reports mentioned in this letter.

I am also learning the best ways to advise, support and monitor how public bodies are seeking to apply the five ways of working and maximise their contribution to the seven well-being goals, so I would welcome any feedback from you, supporting officers and the Blaenau Gwent PSB Scrutiny Committee on how I have chosen to approach this statutory duty and the advice I have given.

I look forward to receiving your draft well-being plan and please keep in touch with me and my team.

Kind regards,



Sophie Howe