

FIGHT TODAY

FOR A BETTER

TOMORROW

Learning from Wales' First Future Generations Commissioner

A short briefing for leaders and
changemakers in Scotland

"During my time in Scotland with Carnegie UK, I saw first hand the excitement that the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill has created. It was a privilege to share my experiences as the world's first Future Generation Commissioner, and to have conversations about the real impact that legislation like this can have on people's lives. Putting wellbeing and sustainable development at the heart of decision making is essential if we are to address the significant challenges that face our societies. I hope that the Bill can continue to gain traction in Scotland, and that similar wellbeing and sustainable development legislation continues to develop across the world."

Sophie Howe, Wales' First Future Generations Commissioner



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About the visit

Over the last decade, Scotland has emerged as one of the leaders in the international wellbeing movement. Since 2018, it has had a set of statutory National Outcomes (presented via the National Performance Framework) that articulate a wellbeing vision for its people. The Scottish Government was a founding member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments group (WEGo), also established in 2018.

Despite the significant shifts in rhetoric, this has not translated into consistent or transparent decision-making that demonstrably improves lives. In July, over 200 charities, businesses, unions, community groups, economists and academics issued an open letter to Scotland's First Minister, calling for a "robust plan" to turn wellbeing economy rhetoric into action¹. **The commitment to introduce a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill - along with a Future Generations Commissioner - in this parliament session is an opportunity to take such action.**

During Ms Howe's recent visit to Scotland, we heard that there is a lot that Scotland can learn from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which was passed in the same year as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Both provide a legislative framework for outcomes-based approaches to decision-making in public policy. However, one key difference between the two approaches was the creation of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

Sophie Howe became the first Future Generations Commissioner for Wales in 2016 and completed her term in January 2023. During her time as Commissioner, she led high-profile interventions around transport planning, education reform, and climate change. She worked with the Welsh Government to successfully initiate a Universal Basic Income and a 4 day working week pilot.

Ms Howe's visit to Edinburgh in May 2023 offered an opportunity for MSPs, civil servants, and others working on wellbeing policy in Scotland to learn from her experience as Future Generations Commissioner. This paper provides an overview of the key learning from the visit, along with answers to some of the questions about what a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill in Scotland would look like in practice.

¹ WEAll Scotland, 2023. [200 charities, economists, businesses and unions call on FM to turn Wellbeing Economy into reality.](#)

Sarah Boyack MSP's Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill for Scotland



With temperatures rising, and extreme weather becoming the norm, the effects of climate change are upon us. Yet policy makers and Governments are not acting fast enough. Therefore, it is clear, that **we must act quickly and decisively if we are to leave behind a planet capable of supporting our children's children.**

Earlier this year I published my Members Bill, the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill, which would put the wellbeing of future generations at the centre of how Government's make decisions. It would create certainty about the future, with new legally binding duties placed on public bodies that would ensure their actions benefited current and future generations. It would remove confusion and uncertainty, implementing long overdue statutory definitions of wellbeing and sustainable development in law. And most importantly it would create a brand-new Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Commissioner who's roll would be to hold Government to account and work proactively with decision makers to develop policies that ensure we have a healthy world around us where everyone can live and thrive.

With the public consultation coming to an end earlier this year, I have spent the past months working with key people and organisations across Scotland to demonstrate how this Bill would benefit people in Scotland and further afield.



With the help of organisations like Carnegie UK it was a pleasure to welcome Sophie Howe, the first Welsh Future Generations Commissioner, to the Scottish Parliament where we had a number of insightful and productive conversations about what the key lessons we can take away from her experience and discuss how my bill can help make Scotland a happier, healthier and more sustainable place.

Through those conversations it was great to see how passionate and excited many of my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament are about this Members Bill. Many were enthused by Sophie Howe's stories of a healthier, happier Wales. Particularly the role that she as commissioner played in the first hospital owned solar farm in Wales, that reduced energy costs for the NHS and decarbonised their energy use. Furthermore, many were excited by the role she as Commissioner played in looking forward to the challenges and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence.

These are just some of the ways in which my members bill would be able to benefit the Scottish people. However, it would also provide an opportunity to respond to our particular opportunities and challenges here in Scotland.

Now that my consultation has come to an end, I will continue to work with the Non-Government Bills Unit and colleagues from across the entire political spectrum as I work towards introducing my bill to the Scottish Parliament. However, it is clear now more than ever that if we are to leave behind a planet that is capable of providing a happy and healthy life to all people that we must move forward with this Bill.

Sarah Boyack MSP

Sarah Boyack is the Scottish Labour MSP for Lothians Region, Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Just Transition

What are the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act?

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires all public bodies and the Welsh Government to demonstrate how they are meeting today's needs, without compromising the wellbeing of future generations. It includes seven wellbeing goals, and five ways of working. These are:

The Five Ways of Working



Long-term

The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs



Integration

Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies



Involvement

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves



Collaboration

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives



Prevention

How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

The Act - which included provision for a Future Generations Commissioner – started its journey within the Welsh Labour Party manifesto commitments towards the Sustainable Development Goals². Wales, as with Scotland, had seen the abolition of the Sustainable Development Commission in 2011; a decision taken by the UK Coalition Government and widely criticised in the devolved jurisdictions at the time.

2 Welsh Labour Manifesto, 2011. <http://www.manifesto.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/07/welsh-labour-manifesto.pdf>

The story of embedding the Five Ways of Working

During the visit, we heard from Ms Howe about how the Act sets out the ways in which Welsh public bodies must work to achieve the wellbeing goals set out in the legislation. This includes powers for the Auditor General to audit how these ways of working are being applied in practice.

Attendees considered how from a Scottish perspective, the **5 ways of working** (long-term, integration, involvement, collaboration and prevention) are not dissimilar from the approach articulated within the Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services (prevention, performance, public participation and partnership). In 2021, discussions to mark the ten years since the Christie Commission report focused on the **missed opportunities** rather than progress made.

Initially, the Welsh legislation was regarded as primarily having an environmental focus, particularly given its roots in sustainable development. It took time to build up awareness of the implications for mainstream public services. Ms Howe reported that it took three years to see significant progress towards the ways of working. It required strong political support to alter not just the decisions made by Welsh Government but how government and its agencies carried out their core business.

The five ways of working were embedded in the following ways:

Using foresight training to build capacity and capability. This required public bodies to work collaboratively and recognise that no one public body could address the challenges or seize opportunities on their own;

Connecting local and national. Each of the 22 local authorities are required to have Wellbeing Objectives. Ms Howe's office oversaw the development of these objectives, taking a self-reflection approach, augmented by peer reviews, and working with the Wales Audit Office to monitor progress;

Identifying a growing movement of individuals within and outwith public services who are pushing for change. The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner has been able to support these individuals to see themselves as part of a movement for change rather than lone, often frustrated operator;

The office has invested in events, briefings, social media, toolkits and other methods to support people to shift their practice.

What's the distinctive role of a Wellbeing Commissioner?

Critical to the approach is a Commissioner with a long-term lens who helps to build capacity within public services. While there are many commissioners in Wales, as with Scotland, **no other role has the mandate for improving the functioning of government in a holistic and long-term way.**

This is one of the key distinctions between the role of a Future Generations' Commissioner; and the other commissioners in both Wales and Scotland.

The other key differences are:

- The Future Generations' Commissioner model does not relate to individual human rights. As such it does not undertake investigations pertaining to individuals, instead focusing on evidence of systematic failures.
- The Future Generations' Commissioner is responsible for upholding the interests of future generations who have not yet been born. There is a clear deficit in our system that there is currently no way of considering those who are not yet citizens in our democratic processes.

As Commissioner, Ms Howe predominantly worked with the Welsh Government to offer help, advice, and support. The role was about acting as both a coach, and a referee. It was important for her to be an independent Commissioner, working alongside the system.

How could these lessons be applied in Scotland?

Carnegie UK believes that the lessons shared by Ms Howe during the visit could be learned from, and acted upon, within the the proposed Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill. This would **allow the Scottish Government to realise its ambitions** to put wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.

But what could the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill achieve?

- The Bill would **improve existing accountability mechanisms**, by establishing clear definitions of wellbeing and sustainable development; by strengthening the duty on public bodies to promote this in policy development and implementation; and by establishing a Commissioner to **hold decision-makers to account**³
- Such legislation could also be used as an opportunity for Scottish Government to provide a **clear vision and guidance for public bodies** to put wellbeing at the centre of decision-making. A Future Generations Commissioner will also help to address the implementation gap of the National Performance Framework.
- The Bill would **embed long-termism into decision-making**, by ensuring that there is always a voice advocating for the wellbeing of future generations. Something we know is critical in, for example, the face of a looming climate crisis and the ongoing cost-of-living emergency.
- It would also provide an exciting opportunity to **enshrine the Christie Commission principles of people, partnership, prevention and performance**. These principles are regarded as the cornerstones of the 'Scottish approach' but have not been carried forward into legislation. These principles must not be optional or performative for decision-makers at any level of Scottish public services.

3 Carnegie UK. 2022. [Five steps to put wellbeing at the centre of policy making in Scotland](#).

8 Key learning from Sophie Howe's visit to Edinburgh

In taking this forward, Scotland would have an **invaluable opportunity to learn** from the experience of a Future Generations Act and Commissioner in Wales. It is also an opportunity to spend and invest now, to save later and in turn build a Scotland that prevents problems from occurring, rather than struggling with the consequences and paying a higher price further down the road.

This is an opportunity to develop world-leading legislation that gives Government and public bodies the tools to put the wellbeing of citizens, now and in the future, at the heart of their decisions.

Want to know more?

You might find it helpful to read:

- Our [written submission](#) to the consultation on Sarah Boyack MSP's Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill
- Our briefing on [five steps to put wellbeing at the centre of policymaking](#) in Scotland.
- WEAll Scotland's letter to the First Minister, Humza Yousaf signed by over [200 charities, economists, businesses and unions and calling on the FM to turn Wellbeing Economy into reality](#).
- The Scotsman's [article on why generations of unborn Scots need to have a voice in today's politics](#).

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