

# APSE Annual Seminar

## Working with Councils in Wales

Wellbeing and preventive approach in communities

Creating sustainable neighbourhoods for Welsh citizens

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# Today's Presentation



- Wellbeing and the 'preventive' approach in Welsh communities

We will look at the recent history of the wellbeing agenda for Welsh public services, how it has been developed and the role of both the WLGA, and our members in Welsh local government, in putting wellbeing approaches into practice.

- Creating sustainable neighbourhoods for Welsh citizens

We will assess the policy landscape in Wales around sustainable neighbourhoods, place-making and community development. What are Welsh councils doing in this area and what is the future of this agenda?

- Future Funding 2024-25 to 2027-28

Based on our presentation to the APSE Wales seminar, we will look at the current plans of the new UK Government based on the UK Labour election manifesto – the current state of play ahead of a Comprehensive Spending Review. Wellbeing and sustainability approaches require sustainable investment in local government services.



# Wellbeing agenda - Background

- Across much of the western world, ‘Wellbeing’ public policy approaches have become popular with democratic governments across the centre-left to centre-right political spectrum and with NGOs in the humanitarian and community development space. Mostly as a response to the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing period of fiscal austerity in most western states.
- We won’t cover the history of the idea today but the OECD, the government of New Zealand and at the sub-state level the Welsh Government have been key drivers of adopting ‘Wellbeing’ approaches.
- Crucially for us – Wales legislated Wellbeing into its statute book with the 2015 **Well-Being of Future Generations Act** (‘the WFG Act’).



# The WFG Act: Our Context in Wales

- The WFG Act of 2015 is our context in Wales. We will not critique the Act today but we can note the tension inherent in the Act: does the WFG Act simply describe normal goals that would be pursued by public service delivery? Or does it represent a transformational paradigm where actors like local government truly change the way they operate?
- Either way, Wales was the first government in the world to put well-being approaches into law, legislating in 2015, with the broad support of the whole Senedd.
- The WFG Act essentially aims to protect the interests of future generations by ensuring that all public service bodies work towards a set of wellbeing goals enshrined in the Act... Let us briefly remind ourselves of them...



# Seven Wellbeing Goals

- A Prosperous Wales**
- A Resilient Wales**
- A More Equal Wales**
- A Healthier Wales**
- A Wales of Cohesive Communities**
- A Wales of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language**
- A Globally Responsible Wales**

These goals must be pursued by all 48 Listed Public Bodies in the Act: including the whole WLGA membership (councils, FRAs and NPAs). A Commissioner has been created to promote the goals and the Act, and the Act also created Public Service Boards where the public bodies co-operate and collaborate on a local and regional basis.



# The WFG Act and Local Government

- The WLGA supported the Act as an **opportunity** to pursue our strategic goals which are to give Welsh councils the maximum freedom to deliver, with the greatest possible share of resources:

*“The Act itself offers a framework which provides councils with the freedom to shape their objectives and services around the local community needs in these challenging times.*

*We aim to support and ensure that our local councils continue to deliver local public services that meet the needs of their communities, without compromising the needs of future generations.”*

(WLGA, 2015)



# The 'Preventive' Approach

- The Act also refers to 'five ways of working' that should be considered when pursuing the Wellbeing goals. These are collaboration, integration, long-term, involvement and also **prevention**: where the WFG Commissioner states that:  
  
“acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives”
- For Welsh councils and the WLGA, prevention is the key in some of our service areas that are most linked to individual and community wellbeing, namely: Homelessness (prevention of which is a duty for LAs under the 2014 Housing Act), Children's Services (where early, preventative intervention for e.g Looked After Children is crucial for future life chances), and Social Care (where local government services can directly prevent escalation of individual problems from becoming a healthcare emergency).



# Prevention in Practice

- Welsh councils have been putting prevention into practice, despite having limited resources for long-term investment.
- Some examples: Facing a crisis of a 34% increase in the number of Looked After Children over the past 15 years (115 per 10,000 children in Wales, compared to 67 per 10,000 children in England), nearly all Welsh councils have invested in specialist 'Edge of Care' teams – not unique to Wales but uniquely prioritised there. WLGA has worked with ADSS and Welsh Government on this and other preventive approaches – crucially securing extra funding outside of our usual revenue support grant. While facing multiple crises in those specialist services due to recruitment and funding issues, numbers of children requiring care have broadly stabilised since 2021 – though leaving no room for complacency.





# Challenges to Preventive Services

- The main challenge to preventive and specialist services is the return of effective ‘austerity’ outside the NHS and education.
- Not only is this the case for the social and care related services already mentioned, but it even more so for the **discretionary** services Welsh councils provide which prevent ill-health, community decline, neglect and wellbeing.
- Green spaces, libraries, community venues, are all at risk.
- Piecemeal funding packages like SPF and the recently cancelled Towns Fund (£80m in Wales) aren’t predictable enough to fill the gap.
- Our narrative as Welsh and UK councils must centre on the preventive value that these services provide to community cohesion, particularly following disorder/unrest in England.



# Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods

- In tandem with recognising the need to pursue the goals of the WFG Act, there is an understanding across both local and Welsh Government that sustainable neighbourhoods are central to people's wellbeing. Briefly, here is the current state of play and forthcoming challenges:
- Welsh councils have increasingly emphasised Place-Making and community development in their LDPs and strategic plans. Generally, development and planning guidance **has** become greener and more sustainable across housing, transport, biodiversity and land use. Councils have been particularly innovative on implementing the Active Travel Act – when funding has been made available!
- The Local Government Act 2015 also gave our members the General Power of Competence to improve local communities – something the WLGA had lobbied for consistently.





# Creating Sustainable Neighbourhoods

- But as previous slides indicated, while these approaches are being embedded, the discretionary services that really knit communities together have been disappearing: in the past month alone Welsh councils have gone out to consult on the closure of e.g a community swimming pool, two local heritage centres, a tourist information centre, and an elderly persons' visiting service. This is the reality of a £395m funding gap.
- **The misalignment between what Welsh councils want to provide for citizens, and what we are funded to deliver,** risks becoming critical by the 2025 Senedd elections and certainly in the next term.
- This is particularly frustrating when a clear vision is finally in place around Wellbeing, Place-Making and community resilience.
- The WLGA and Welsh councils want to provide a leadership role in creating sustainable and resilient neighbourhoods – not merely be a provider of a specified range of services. Our challenge is to articulate this vision to Ministers and parties ahead of the next budget and 2025 Senedd elections...





# Future Funding 2025-26 to 2027-28

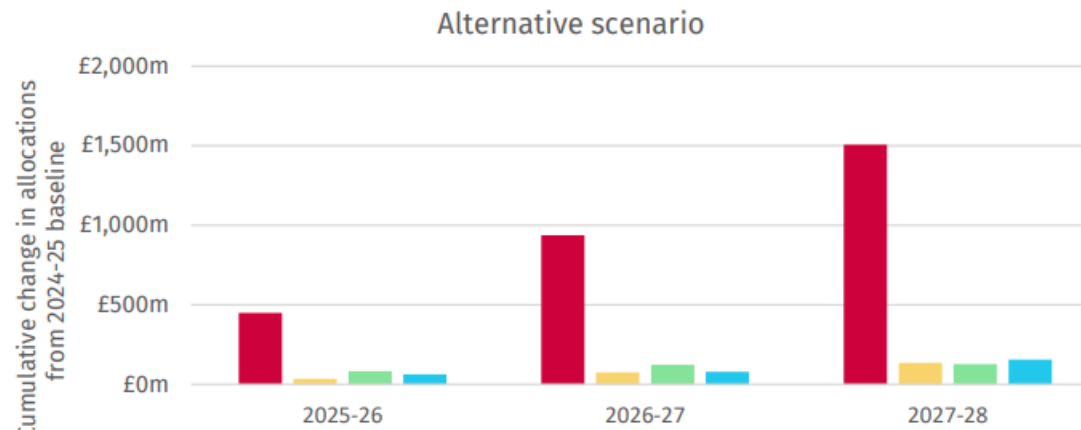
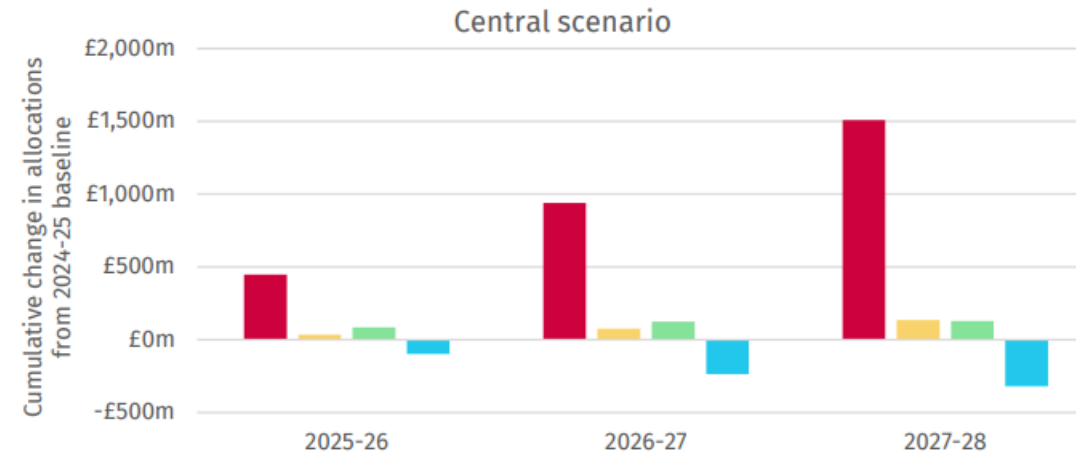
- To clarify, Wellbeing agendas require additional resources, given the emphasis on preventive and long-term expenditure.
- In our next slide, we will look at two funding scenarios from the independent Wales Fiscal Analysis project, which are based on existing pre-election spending plans.
- The first and top scenario in the graph reflects published spending plans from the outgoing UK Government. The lower, alternative scenario models a 2% increase in real-terms departmental spending....the bars in the graph show what would happen if Welsh Government matches health, schools and childcare spending commitments in England. The **blue** bar represents **all other spending areas including local government.**



# Future Funding 2025-26 to 2027-28



Indicative additional allocations from 2024-25 baseline (nominal terms)



■ NHS consequential ■ Schools consequential ■ Childcare consequential ■ All other spending

Source: Wales Fiscal Analysis calculations. ● Notes: See main body of text for assumptions made. Projections are for Welsh Government resource DEL allocations (including redistributed Non Domestic Rates revenues).



# Future Funding 2025-26 to 2027-28

- The point of the previous slide is us that even under an Alternative Scenario of modest spending growth, after passing health, schools and childcare consequential on to those areas, local government funding would **fall in real-terms** by 0.5% in 2026-27, and by 0.3% in 2027-28...
- **To avoid doom and gloom:** we must make a bold case not for public spending for its own sake, but for targeted and innovative investment in our communities, with local government being the public service that is most suitable for binding our communities together...
- Some of the policy framework has started to fall into place. Wellbeing approaches give us a focus and direction of travel. **With sustainable and targeted investment, Welsh councils can build resilient communities.**



Diolch i chi am wrando

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