



PSB Assessments of Local Wellbeing overview (August 2017)

Following my engagement visits with all Local/Public Services Boards (PSBs) in 2014-16 and the publication of my [Guidance](#) to PSBs in October 2016, the following overview provides my views on the Assessments of Local Wellbeing published by the PSBs in May 2017. My response is based on my “Top Tips’ in preparing Local Wellbeing Plans” and my key issues to consider in the Local Wellbeing Plans as outlined in my Guidance. It complements the Future Generations Commissioner’s [report](#) ‘Well-being in Wales: Planning today for a better tomorrow’, published in July 2017.

Whilst I fully understand that the Local Wellbeing Plans should demonstrate local ownership by PSBs and reflect local priorities, there are certain key issues for older people that resonate in all parts of Wales. These key issues to consider are included in Annex A and I would expect that the PSBs consider the linkages between these issues and locally determined priorities and how the five ways of working can help address these and take them forward¹.

General observations

It has been interesting analysing the assessments and the broad variety in terms of style, length (from 22 to 600+ pages), focus and structure, with some framed in the context of the local wellbeing ‘pillars’ (Social, Economic, Environment, Cultural), some driven by the seven national wellbeing goals, and others guided by the five ‘ways of working’ (Long-term, Prevention, Integration, Collaboration, Involvement).

How older people’s needs and circumstances are addressed within these assessments is particularly interesting, with over half including a dedicated section on older people’s issues and/or ageing well. This is strongly welcomed however it is not the only way to address the needs of older people: if older people are addressed ‘across the board’ e.g. across the four local wellbeing ‘pillars’ or seven national wellbeing goals and included in several headings/sections then this represents a good, impactful and inclusive publication.

¹ <https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

Every assessment addresses the implications of an ageing population, and particularly for health and social care services. Dementia is also addressed in every assessment, which I welcome. Whilst I do not underestimate the challenges brought about by demographic change in terms of financing robust and sustainable health and social care services, I am also clear that an ageing population presents a wealth of opportunities as well. Wales is nation of older people, something that we should celebrate. This is something that I would expect to see addressed in the Local Wellbeing Plans.

I expect stronger linkages between the assessments and the [Ageing Well in Wales](#) programme (referenced in Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Flintshire and Wrexham) and the local Ageing Well plans (referenced in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Torfaen). Ageing Well and the local plans provide a strong platform on which to address the needs and circumstances of older people, and the Local Wellbeing Plans could benefit from stronger synergies.

‘Top tips’ in preparing Local Wellbeing Plans

Respond to older people’s critiques of public services

As regular users of public services, the ‘experts by experience’, older people are a good benchmark to gauge the effectiveness of these services. The need for better and more reliable public transport for older people and others features strongly in some assessments, and this complements one of my longstanding priorities: ensuring that older people are able to get out and about is essential in maintaining their health, independence and wellbeing.

A key message is to consider older people’s needs and circumstances beyond health and social care. Whilst the assessments include several positive examples, in general older people’s needs gravitate towards health and social care. Preventative approaches are key, and whilst over half of the assessments place significant focus on such approaches, further work is needed to consider how transport (including public and community transport), leisure, the built and natural environment, learning, sport, culture, housing etc. take the prevention agenda forward and contribute towards the health and wellbeing of older people.

Consider the importance of language: there’s no ‘us’ and ‘them’, only ‘us’

Language is important and older people should never be thought about as a group apart. What is good for older people is usually good for other people, and thinking about public services and interventions that promote health and wellbeing across the life-course is crucial. The Local Wellbeing Plans provide an opportunity to bring about behavioural change and influence people’s lives in a number of ways, and thinking about how ‘we’ age and the services, facilities and infrastructure ‘we’ require to age well is important.

Consistency regarding how older people are addressed is also important, and I would encourage the PSBs to use the term “older people” rather than the “elderly” (features in most assessments), “pensioners” and, in one example, “old people”.

I am also concerned about the use of the term “dementia sufferers” (features in two assessments). People living with dementia have been very clear about the impact that negative language has upon their experiences of living with dementia. The terms ‘person living with dementia’ or ‘person with dementia’ acknowledge that the dementia is not the defining and final description of an individual’s life, and encourages us all to see the person first, and not the disease. It is therefore important that services supporting people living with dementia do not reinforce these beliefs through using language that is unacceptable to people living with dementia.

Take forward the asset-based approach: invest in older people

This approach is crucial if our public services are to develop preventative outcomes for older people and help maintain their health, independence and wellbeing as they grow older. It means investing in older people and recognising older people for what they are: invaluable community assets that can support our public services through working, volunteering, and caring, if provided with appropriate facilities and infrastructure. The asset-based approach is addressed in a few assessments (Cardiff, Cwm Taf, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent), and I would expect that the Local Wellbeing Plans take this forward. I was also interested in how Flintshire view young people as assets, and challenge the PSBs to address older people in the same way. Older people already make a £1bn contribution to the Welsh economy annually (acknowledged in Pembrokeshire and Monmouthshire): how can the PSBs support them to contribute £2bn and more?

I do not underestimate the huge financial pressures placed on public services in Wales, and the expectation to do more with fewer resources. That is why the asset-based approach, promoting social capital (recognised in Conwy-Denbighshire, Cwm Taf, Monmouthshire, Swansea, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham), using creative and innovative solutions and enabling and empowering older people to contribute to our communities and economies becomes ever more important. I strongly welcome those assessments that recognise the contribution of older people and dispel the myths and misconceptions around older people. For example:

- “Many felt that older people could give a lot to society” (Caerphilly)
- “give older people opportunities to pass on knowledge, wisdom and traditions” (Carmarthenshire)
- “Older people tend to play a key role in supporting and maintain informal social networks, which in turn bind communities and families together” (Flintshire)
- “Older people make an increasing contribution to the wellbeing of our community as workers, volunteers, taxpayers and carers” (Ceredigion)
- “Older people are also a significant asset to the County” (Monmouthshire)
- “There are obvious benefits from an ageing population” (Torfaen)

Focus on outcomes: older people's lives with value, meaning, and purpose

The outcomes for older people and others should drive forward the work of the PSBs. Several of the assessments place a strong emphasis on outcomes, which I welcome. For example, 'Older people age well and are supported to remain independent' is a clear outcome that brings together all PSB partners (Swansea). There was also a strong focus on resilience in several assessments, not only in terms of environmental and ecological resilience but also in terms of community, personal, social and emotional resilience, which all resonate with older people.

Moving forward, I recommend that the Local Wellbeing Plans consider how services and interventions contribute towards positive outcomes for older people. The [National Outcomes Framework](#) that supports the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act is a good starting point and includes a number of useful examples e.g. I am healthy/happy/safe and protected from abuse, I can learn and develop, I feel valued in society.

Measure the right things: qualitative and quantitative indicators for older people

Quantitative indicators are important, and provide the PSBs with useful benchmarks to report on progress and identify any specific barriers or shortfalls. However, qualitative indicators are equally as important, and as the 'experts by experience', I am clear that the voices of older people must be heard clearly within these documents (acknowledged in Monmouthshire).

Over half of the assessments place a strong focus on engaging and consulting with older people, which I strongly welcome. I also welcome those assessments that include direct quotations by older people, which demonstrates the range of engagement and how the views and experiences of older people are helping to drive forward the assessments and subsequent work. Examples of positive and impactful quotations by or for older people include the following:

- "The biggest strength of our community is and always has been 'the people'. It is the trials and tribulations that have cemented that sense of community and hopefully that sense of 'us' will always endure" (Blaenau Gwent)
- "People are so friendly and helpful, I only came here for two years and have stayed 46...It is vital for retired people/older people to be able to socialise and learn so as not to be a burden on the health services" (Monmouthshire)
- "More support for older generation including suitable housing for people with physical or psychological disability" (Newport)
- "Having access to gym/exercise classes for the older population is important for wellbeing" (Vale of Glamorgan)
- "Provide a better cultural environment for all ages for the purposes of social engagement" (Wrexham)

The Local Wellbeing Plans should consider both qualitative and quantitative indicators for older people, and a clear commitment to engaging with older people takes forward the five 'ways of working'. 'Working with, not to' should be a clear PSB principle.

Be bold: be ambitious for older people

The extent to which older people are addressed in the assessments is varied, and so too are the key issues for older people. Those assessments that address the Ageing Well in Wales themes have a clear framework in terms of taking forward specific actions, with some providing details on how key issues e.g. dementia and loneliness and isolation will be addressed.

I am impressed with the wide and diverse range of issues addressed in the context of older people. Examples include: public transport and getting out and about (Anglesey-Gwynedd); person-centred support and simpler coordination of services (Caerphilly); scams prevention (Carmarthenshire); housing stock and suitable accommodation (Bridgend & Powys); mental wellbeing (Blaenau Gwent); digital technologies and exclusion (Conwy-Denbighshire & Monmouthshire); fire incident casualties (Flintshire); employment opportunities (Newport); temperature extremes (Torfaen); alcohol use (Vale of Glamorgan); fuel poverty (Wrexham), social activities (Swansea); accessing the countryside and greater physical activity (Neath Port Talbot); and the impact of the economic downturn on older people's spending power (Pembrokeshire).

I also welcome the strong focus on volunteering, addressed in nearly all assessments. Older people make a significant contribution to volunteering, and can contribute more via the asset-based approach. Older people are also beneficiaries of volunteering, and encouraging older people to take up volunteering and benefit from voluntary organisations should be taken forward. Most assessments also address intergenerational opportunities and I welcome this focus, including good practice examples e.g. an intergenerational community project involving Age Cymru and RAY Ceredigion. Encouraging older people to engage with younger people in different settings is a crucial component in establishing age-friendly communities across Wales.

Ageism and age-related inequalities is something that affects older people in a number of ways e.g. employment, and this is addressed in a few assessments (Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Newport).

The importance of providing support to older carers is only addressed in a few assessments, and I expect that the Local Wellbeing Plans provide further details on the services and interventions needed to support carers of all ages. Older carers make a significant contribution and often do not realise they are carers for partners, relatives and friends. The care provided by unpaid carers in Wales is estimated to be nearly £6bn and public, health and social care services would simply grind to a halt without them. In line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and its emphasis on promoting wellbeing, further work is needed to provide better help, care and support for carers, particularly as they grow older.

The diverse range of issues addressed reflects the diversity of older people's needs, wishes, aspirations and circumstances, and the Local Wellbeing Plans should provide further details on how some of these key issues will be achieved.

Conclusion

In terms of older people, every assessment addresses their needs and circumstances in different ways and to various degrees, and I am pleased to see some of the Ageing Well in Wales themes feature strongly. The impact of an ageing population is a common theme, and I expect that the Local Wellbeing Plans consider the range of opportunities that come with an ageing population, and move towards preventative and resilient outcomes that takes forward the asset-based approach i.e. invest in older people. The need to enable and empower older people is relevant across the four local wellbeing 'pillars' and the seven national wellbeing goals.

Addressing this challenge, and acknowledging that every PSB partner has a role to play in improving older people's quality of life, will help maintain the health, independence and wellbeing of older people, provide their lives with value, meaning and purpose, and contribute towards the development of age-friendly communities across Wales.

Finally, five assessments refer to my Guidance and seven in total refer to my role and work. I am pleased to see these linkages made and am keen to continue working with the Future Generations Commissioner and all PSBs when drafting the Local Wellbeing Plans over the coming months.

Annex A: Six key issues to consider in the Local Wellbeing Plans

- **Falls Prevention:** Over half of the assessments address falls and/or hip fractures and this is welcomed. Falls prevention is a huge issue and reducing the number of older people who fall benefits everyone: the individual, their families/carers, health and social care services, and other public services. It is an Ageing Well in Wales priority and I recommend that the Local Wellbeing Plans address falls and provide solutions on how to reduce local falls numbers via a collaborative approach i.e. it involves the Local Authority and Health Board, the third sector, emergency services, housing, transport and leisure partners etc.
- **Domestic Abuse:** Whilst several assessments address abuse in one form or another, only a few address the abuse of older people (Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Bridgend, Wrexham). Domestic abuse involving older people remains a 'taboo' subject and further work is needed to raise awareness, to signpost those affected to relevant help and support services, and to improve the recording of older people affected by domestic abuse. I expect the Local Wellbeing Plans to place greater emphasis on domestic abuse and how it affects people of all ages, and how a multi-agency collaborative approach is required to reduce the number of older people affected by domestic abuse and also in other settings e.g. hospitals and care homes.
- **Loneliness and Isolation:** Every assessment except one addressed the crucial issue of loneliness and isolation, which I strongly welcome. Loneliness and isolation needs to be recognised as a public health priority and something that affects an increasing number of older people. An estimated 75% of people aged 75+ who live alone feel lonely, and an estimated 9,000 older people in Wales spend Christmas Day alone. I am clear that Wales is facing a public health crisis if key partners do not recognise the devastating and far-reaching effects of loneliness and isolation. Loneliness and isolation can affect people of any age, however it affects more older people particularly with the loss of 'lifeline' community services such as public buses, toilets, libraries and day centres.

Loneliness and isolation can result in a number of detrimental physical and mental health impacts, and as my recent [evidence](#) to the National Assembly for Wales Inquiry demonstrates, Wales cannot afford to have current and future generations of older people at risk of loneliness and isolation. Loneliness and isolation remains an Ageing Well in Wales priority and I recommend that the Local Wellbeing Plans build on the assessments and provide collaborative solutions to tackle this public health priority across Wales.

- **Dementia Supportive Communities:** As previously mentioned, dementia is addressed in every assessment and this is something that I strongly welcome. The number of older people living with dementia in Wales will increase significantly in the coming years, and now is the time to address this crucial issue and propose actions and solutions that bring together all key partners. As with many issues that affect

older people, every PSB partner has a role to play in addressing dementia, and contribute to establishing Wales as a dementia friendly nation. My 2016 [report](#) on dementia emphasises that people living with dementia need to be recognised, not only by professionals and services, but also by wider society.

Some assessments specifically refer to the importance of establishing dementia friendly/supportive communities (Blaenau Gwent, Ceredigion, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham), and I strongly support this approach. It complements Ageing Well in Wales and such communities are required across Wales, not only to ensure that people living with dementia have the best possible quality of life, but also that individuals and their friends, family and carers live in communities that have a greater understanding of dementia and demonstrate support, empathy and cooperation. These developments offer a real opportunity for meaningful consultation to be conducted with people living with dementia and their carers, and my expectation is that this is something that all PSB partners would actively encourage and engage with to enable people living with dementia to directly influence service development.

- **Older people living in poverty:** Poverty amongst older people is not an issue that features prominently in the assessments and I recommend that the Local Wellbeing Plans consider ways of reducing the numbers of older people living in poverty in Wales. Over half of the assessments do address the issue of an ageing workforce and employment opportunities for people aged 50+, and this is something I strongly welcome. Wales is currently undervaluing and underappreciating its older workers, and the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience that older 'NEETs' (not in education, employment or training) possess is underutilised.

It benefits everyone to see an increasing number of older people remain in or return to the workplace: the individual, the employer and local and national economies. Improving learning and employment opportunities for older people is an Ageing Well in Wales priority and I welcome those assessments that address the current situation and provide solutions on how to maximise the potential of older workers and move towards age-friendly workplaces.

Learning opportunities is crucial for some older people in terms of gaining new skills and qualifications or refreshing existing skillsets. I am clear that learning across the life-course is important and leads to a range of positive wellbeing outcomes, and I support all efforts to develop lifelong/adult community-based learning opportunities that improves the employment prospects of older people. Lifelong learning is only addressed in a few assessments (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Carmarthenshire, Swansea) and I expect greater emphasis placed on such learning opportunities in the Local Wellbeing Plans, not only for older workers/jobseekers but also for those who access learning for mental stimulation, social networking, the opportunities for new challenges and self-fulfilment.

Every assessment except one addresses fuel poverty, and I expect the Local Wellbeing Plans to propose solutions on how to reduce the numbers of older people

living in fuel poverty. Only two assessments address the uptake of financial entitlements (Newport, Swansea), and I also expect that the Local Wellbeing Plans consider ways of encouraging older people and others to claim their financial entitlements, a crucial way of improving older people's financial resilience.

- **Older people living in safe and inclusive communities:** Community safety is addressed in every assessment, and the importance of older people being and feeling safe is a key component in establishing age-friendly communities across Wales. Community safety involves a broad range of partners, including Local Authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners, and the third sector, and moving forward I expect the Local Wellbeing Plans to address this key issue for older people in further detail.

Only a few assessments address the need to establish age-friendly communities (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Ceredigion, Cwm Taf, Swansea) and this is a missed opportunity. Working towards age-friendly communities, the overarching theme of Ageing Well in Wales, benefits people of all ages, and I recommend that the Local Wellbeing Plans place greater emphasis on such communities. The Plans should consider the services, facilities and infrastructure that people need as they grow older, work towards suitable homes and neighbourhoods, and encourage people of all ages to work together to develop community-based solutions that make a real difference in people's lives. Every Local Authority in Wales is a Dublin Declaration signatory i.e. a commitment to establish age-friendly communities locally, and yet only one assessment acknowledges this (Swansea).



Older People's Commissioner for Wales Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf.

The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services that they need.

The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that Wales is a good place to grow older – not just for some but for everyone.

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