

Dear Madam,

Wales is a country renowned for its passionate culture and heritage. The landscape which adorns it self promotes its natural beauty, by attracting thousands of visitors each year. According to the Welsh Government (2017), the Snowdon Summit Visitor Centre saw a 40.7% increase in visitors during 2017; other attractions around Wales reported similar results. After visiting Wales, many visitors choose to stay, adapting to its unique way of life, where opportunities to live, work and study are pandemic (Living in Wales, 2019). However as with many other nations, Wales is facing numerous obstacles, which could potentially threaten its status, as a country that strives to positively endorse the lives of its residents (Welsh Government, 2012).

In 2015, the Welsh Government responded to public concerns regarding its long term viability in terms of climate change, jobs, health inequalities, poverty and growth, by introducing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The purpose of the Act is for public bodies to have regard for the future when seeking decisions. It also encourages public bodies to liaise with people and their communities, to tackle problems via early intervention (Wales Council for Voluntary Action, 2019). The Act is unique to Wales offering extensive opportunities, to both our present and forthcoming generations (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2019). The Act introduced seven well-being goals for Wales; to be prosperous, to be resilient, to be healthier, to be equal, to have close-knit communities, to have a flourishing and dynamic Welsh language and culture, and to be answerable without exception for our country (Welsh Government, 2019).

After implementing the Act, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales position, was created to ensure all public bodies were working in collaboration, when involved in decisions which affect Wales (Welsh Government, 2016). The current Commissioner is Sophie Howe, who also ensures responsibility for ensuring that Public Service Boards (PSB) are active for each local authority in Wales. Each Public Service Board, has a responsibility to ensure that within its local authority area, the social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being objectives are achieved via the seven well-being goals, as introduced by the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2016).

According to the Welsh Government (2019), there are currently twenty two local authorities in Wales, following the implementation of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 (legislation.gov.uk, 2019). However, according to the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2019), there are currently nineteen Public Service Boards established within Wales. Upon cross-checking, it has become evident that Conwy and Denbighshire alongside Gwynedd and Anglesey have amalgamated to create two boards in preference of four (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2019). This has caused some great confusion to myself, as the intention of the Act was to create a board for each local authority. Following a thorough research, there appears to be no evidence to offer an explanation, which leaves my person questioning whether Wales is in breach of the Act. This issue should be addressed with some urgency, to provide clarity to the residents of Wales.

As a resident of Bridgend County, the responsibilities held by the Bridgend Public Services Board (BPSB) is of particular interest to my person. Having reviewed the BPSB well-being plan (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018), there are a few areas of concern. Firstly, the document is slightly misleading, as the front cover depicts the target years as 2018-2023, whereas the content of the document, refers to its ten year plan (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018). This is confusing to the reader and requires immediate clarification to pursue with its vision.

Secondly, regarding the well-being assessment 2017, there is a concern regarding the low participation number of survey respondents – 506 (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2017).

According to the Welsh Assembly Government (2015), the population of Bridgend totalled 140,480 in 2011. Therefore, it is estimated that less than 0.5% of the population of Bridgend completed the assessment. Considering the results formulated the key four objectives of the BPSB, this measure is not a true representation of the population. The board, in my opinion should sanction a new survey, to create a viable representation of the population and their opinions via utilisation of our postal services.

Bridgend is surrounded by areas of natural beauty and has communities, towns and villages in areas near the coast or mountainous regions. There are three valleys situated within the borough; Garw, Llynfi and Ogmore – each of which depict a heritage, rich in Welsh culture and history (Bridgend's Heritage, 2013). As a resident of the Llynfi valley, the board's fourth objective (to make choices in terms of our persons and environment, which are healthy) is of particular interest to myself. Upon researching the aims as set out by the board (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018), it has become apparent that there are a few discrepancies that require clarity.

Firstly, the board commits to protecting and promoting the green spaces of Bridgend, thus allowing its residents to enjoy the health benefits of accessing nature (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018). According to Mind (2019), our everyday lives can benefit both physically and mentally from spending time in green spaces. However, in contradiction to this the council have set aside vast areas of green land for development (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018). Included in their plan is an area of outstanding beauty in Llangynwyd, which currently has protected green belt status (Bridgend County Borough Council 2019). Therefore, the objectives set out in BPSB well-being document (Bridgend County Borough Council 2018) differ to the aims of its local development plan 2018-2033 (Bridgend County Borough Council 2018). As the two severely contradict each other, it is with great confusion as to which objective you plan to prioritise. With reference to the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015) which carries legislative status, it is of my opinion that it could best be approached, by revising your development plan to include regeneration and utilisation of run-down areas of land, which have previously accommodated manufacturing within the borough. For example, within Llangynwyd there is an area of land which previously hosted a petrol station. In my opinion, this land should be regenerated in preference of a green belt area of land.

Secondly, the board have identified an ageing population within the borough and have committed to providing age friendly communities (Bridgend County Borough Council 2018). To tackle this, the board worked in partnership with the older person's forum and Age Cymru to produce a plan which meets the objectives as set out by the board – 'Ageing Well in Bridgend' (Bridgend County Borough Council 2019). Upon inspection of the document, it appears that one of its aims is not being adhered to.

To create and maintain age-friendly communities, the council alongside BPSB, committed to providing access to public toilets. However, the council are currently not adhering to their commitment, with the closure of many of its public toilets in recent months across the borough (newsfeed, 2019). Maesteg public toilets closed down after its town council refused take responsibility for them (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2018). Bridgend need to reaffirm its responsibility and adhere to the terms of its associated documents relating to the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Otherwise, it could be contested by the population of Bridgend, that the council are in breach of their legislative duties in accordance with the Act.

To evaluate the impact that BPSB has had within the borough, it was anticipated by myself to view the minutes from all BPSB meetings held. However, upon accessing the webpage, it was with great disappointment, to view a page that is not up-to-date (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2019). The page is inconsistent, containing several inaccuracies. Minutes of a meeting held in March 2017 are listed as March 2016. Also, the meeting timescales are inconsistent and vary. The first nine meetings were performed on a bi-monthly basis, the next two quarterly then the last meeting reverted to bi-monthly, with no meetings recorded since June 2018. In addition, there has been no update to the webpage since June 2018.

Also, whilst accessing the minutes, it has become apparent that over 50% of the partner groups within the BPSB, do not regularly attend meetings, accounting for less than 66% attendance when they do (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2019). This causes concern, as the board members are not providing consistency to the residents of the borough as there is continued absenteeism. The Department of Work and Pension for example, have only attended two of the twelve meetings held (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2019). Comparing BPSB meeting schedules and attendance of

members to Swansea Public Service Board, it is evident that Bridgend needs to follow the course of action taken by its neighbouring council of Swansea and follow their lead in terms of achieving key objectives (City and County of Swansea, 2019).

The creation of the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, has in theory created a clear vision for the future of Wales. However, it is clear from the concerns raised above, that the objectives and legislative requirements are not presently being met in full. Within local authorities, there are vast inconsistencies regarding their individual approach towards Public Service Boards. To achieve the Act's full potential, the boards should collaborate and work together in regions, to ensure solidarity for the whole population of Wales. With regards to Bridgend, the council immediately needs to reaffirm its commitments and legislative requirements in order to fulfil the intentions of the Act. This will benefit the residents and create communities which are healthy. It would be greatly appreciated if you could proffer an explanation via email, regarding the above concerns.

Yours faithfully,

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