



Scrutinising public administration

A RESPONSE FROM WCVA

1. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.
2. We thank the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee for the chance to offer our thoughts on this important consultation. We also thank the voluntary sector organisations who engaged with us and provided vital intelligence for our response.

PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICE FOR SCRUTINY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

3. There is a need for greater co-ordination and joint understanding across government portfolios of the role of the voluntary sector and its interactions with the public sector. More clarity is required within those portfolios and divisions as to how those relationships are established, grown and maintained. This is necessary for effective scrutiny of public services provided by the voluntary sector, whether independently or in coproduction with the public sector.
4. Regarding the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act: while the Code of Practice sets out what is expected of organisations and bodies, and the duties placed on them, these organisations and bodies are often not held to real account. There are inspection reports, of course, with a list of recommendations, but how can we be sure that these recommendations are effectively considered and carried out? Accountability and transparency is key here.
5. How the Act's principles of coproduction and service user voice and control are implemented across health and social care must be scrutinised closely.

6. Procedural rules must be made available in a wide variety of formats and languages, not just English and Welsh.
7. When citizens and organisations contribute to consultations, engagement events and so on, participants should be kept up to date on how their contributions have been used and the differences they have made.
8. It is important that minutes from strategic partnership meetings are made available in a timely and accessible manner for transparency and clarity.
9. It would be useful if the Committee could publish some case studies showcasing what it considers to be best practice in public administration.

INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE THE COMMITTEE NEED TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

10. When public bodies work together, they must understand and document the likely long-term impacts of the decisions they make on Wales' progress towards the seven wellbeing goals of the Future Generations Act, with this information available to all, including the Committee. Openness and transparency in evaluating the differences that scrutiny has made in improving public services and practice is vital.
11. Equality Impact Assessments must be co-produced with service users, with clear mechanisms to challenge decisions. There are reports this is not happening consistently. The [Locked Out](#) report has more on the impact of this on disabled people.
12. The success, or otherwise, of steps taken to involve a diversity of voices, along with the difference citizen's contributions have made, must also be documented.
13. The [Voluntary Sector Data Hub](#) contains a wealth of statistical information about voluntary sector activity, funding and income, going back a number of years. This would be an invaluable tool for the Committee if considering the impact of voluntary sector services.
14. WCVA's [National Principles for Public Engagement](#), endorsed by Welsh Government, are a useful tool for bodies to ensure they are effectively engaging with communities and individuals.

PRIORITY ISSUES THEY MAY WISH TO CONSIDER

15. As a priority, the committee should look to examine the ongoing delivery of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, in terms of both monitoring progress against the national milestones and indicators, and in terms of how it is applied by public bodies at various levels. The committee's report [Delivering for Future Generations: The story so far](#) from March 2021 is a valuable starting point here, but that this work is still being embedded across public bodies. Its implementation also varies across Wales.

16. Openness and transparency in evaluating the differences that scrutiny has made in improving public services and practice is vital. The success, or otherwise, of steps taken to involve a diversity of voices, along with the difference citizen's contributions have made, must be documented.

17. Regional Partnership Boards are invaluable for scrutiny of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, but it is important the Committee is aware of issues facing voluntary sector and citizen representatives on these Boards. Across many RPBs, sector representatives are hugely outnumbered by statutory representatives. Often, one person is expected to be a voice for the whole of the voluntary sector – which is impossible for as diverse a sector as ours – and reports suggest that person is often made to feel very much the junior partner on the Board. Similar issues arise for citizen and carer representatives. Citizen representatives and voluntary representatives require greater support to achieve the stated requirement that RPBs 'demonstrate citizen engagement and co-production'. Other partners on RPBs must also be helped to understand the importance of these particular representatives.

18. Corporate Joint Committees will be important in shaping how local government collaborates regionally. It is vital that high quality scrutiny mechanisms are put in place so that we can be sure that CJsCs are encouraging coproduction of public services.

19. Once the Race Equality Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan are launched, bodies must be scrutinised as to how they are meeting the aims of these documents.

DISCUSSION

20. WCVA will be pleased to discuss these or any other points relating to this consultation response with officials, committees, Members of the Senedd or Ministers if requested.

David Cook,
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