

The [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) and the [Active Travel \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) intended to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It aimed to provide a vision based around seven well-being goals, and attempted to create a genuine joined-up government around physical activity, wellbeing and sport:

The Act will make the public bodies... think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

The imperative for cross-departmental thinking and a joined-up policy approach is not new. Many have called for such an approach over the years and more recently this has been supported in many reports from many different departments and sectors.

The Sports Think Tank's [Sport Sector Survey: New Players, New Tactics \(STT, 2015\)](#) reported:

Too often, too many organisations fail to join up their policies and their programmes. Too often, evidence on how to be most effective is lacking. Too often, initiatives lack sustainability... The research clearly indicated that respondents thought the sports sector should be more unified and government more joined up to be effective.

The sports sector in England were hopeful after the publishing of [Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#) (DCMS, 2015). This new Government sports and physical activity strategy not only put social outcomes at the heart of the public funding of sport but recognised that:

If this new strategy is to work effectively, all parts of government must work more closely together towards clear, shared outcomes. There is universal agreement across all Whitehall departments about this, and a shared commitment to delivering it.

The report went on to state:

To support this strategy a new and more joined-up approach to delivery and funding needs to be taken across government. We will put in place the structures needed to

make this happen, including a formal annual progress report to Parliament and a cross government ministerial group which will meet regularly to drive implementation.

To help support these aims across the Home Nations the strategy also looked:

To help improve coordination and the sharing of best practice among each of the devolved administrations and the UK Government, the 'Sport Cabinet' will be re-established. It will bring together the four sports ministers who represent Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and both England and the UK as a whole.

Furthermore, the Government published its [Childhood Obesity Plan](#) in August 2016. This was framed as the “start of the conversation, rather than the final word”. The plan set out the immeasurable aim to “significantly reduce childhood obesity rates over the next 10 years”. While many believe the plan lacked robust action, it did set out a central problem: that ‘while much good work was being done across England by local authorities, charities, NGOs and universities among others, that the system was fragmented and without a joined-up approach, these efforts were at risk of being eclipsed by the growing scale of the epidemic’. In response, the plan recognised that, Government leadership and a cross-party, cross-departmental, cross-sector commitment to end childhood obesity was critical to delivering a whole-systems strategy to end childhood obesity.

The Government’s [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#) (DFT, 2017) key ambition was to ensure ‘that cycling and walking are the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey’. The Government’s approach to delivering this was one of partnership – they understood that this would take long-term transport planning and a change in attitudes – amongst central Government, local bodies, businesses, communities and individuals, for this ambition to be realised.

More recently, a key priority of DEFRA’s new 25-year environment plan [A Green Future](#) (DEFRA, 2018) is getting more people experiencing the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of the natural environment. The Plan identifies a number of key areas of action, including ‘connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing’. The plan also recognises the

need for joined up, cross Government thinking including that enhancing the public's ability to experience the benefits of being active outdoors, shapes other government policy around the impact on the environment.

Furthermore, the authors of the recently published, [Off the Scales Obesity Report](#) (Centre for Social Justice, 2017) were deeply impressed by the results of a new approach to tackle obesity in Amsterdam where the Deputy Mayor lead an innovative cross-political and joined up approach to the problem:

The Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme, which is a politically led, joined-up, whole-systems approach aimed at ending childhood obesity in Amsterdam by 2033... an example of how political leadership and cross-party, cross-departmental and cross-sector commitment can bring fragmented systems together, by putting in place a common goal and inspiring collective action.

The authors, including the Working Group Chair, Baroness Jenkin of Kennington, were acutely aware of the lack of progress in England. In her foreword she highlights:

The message in this report is clear: there is no silver bullet to end childhood obesity. It requires robust and persuasive political leadership; cross-party and cross-sector commitment; a long-term vision; a whole-systems and targeted approach; and consistent monitoring and evaluation.

The report goes on to highlight, as one of its core recommendations, that:

Government leadership and commitment: *The first step the Government, and specifically the Prime Minister, must take to end childhood obesity is to commit to doing so, secure the cross-party, cross-departmental and cross-sector commitment to support this and set out a bold, long-term, target-led, non-partisan strategy. The Government should focus on area-based targeting: start in areas with the highest proportion of childhood obesity and then roll out interventions proportionate to an area's childhood obesity rates.*

And the report goes further in suggesting a new mechanism to encourage this approach:

Physical activity strategy in both the Department for Education and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport must be joined up and have the ambition of tackling childhood obesity as core to its values. However, a strategy for physical activity must also relate to transport, infrastructure projects, and the role the third sector plays in community sports.

The Government should introduce a Department of Public Health and Prevention (DPHP) led by a Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention. The Secretary of State's prime responsibility would be to lead Public Health England, deliver effective cross-departmental public health policies and ultimately reduce the NHS England budget and burden by investing in effective prevention.

In his 2016 confidential version of the [Getting Wales Moving](#) Report (PHW & SW, 2017), Jonathan Davies, National Director for Physical Activity, comes to a similar conclusion, stating:

What is absolutely clear is that the cross-cutting nature of the physical activity agenda means that successful delivery of any large scale change in physical activity level is heavily dependent on government, public private and voluntary sector organisations working with each other and with the public in co-productive and more outcomes focused ways, at local, regional and national levels.

While the consequences of an inactive population fall mainly on the NHS and subsequently Social Care, these two agencies have little role in increasing population physical activity. International policy, evidence and experience suggests that land use and planning policy; transport and education play a far greater part.

Yet even in Wales, where the legislation is in place to help achieve this goal, joined up, cross government working, to date, does not seem not to have emerged or been embedded.

In the same report, Jonathan Davies concludes: *“In spite of some world leading legislation that should place us in a unique position to be able to make progress....there is little evidence to date of progress in this important area”*.

While the political landscape remains in some turmoil as a result of Brexit, and the subsequent political events, England is two years into the implementation of the new sports and one year into its obesity plan. While both plans have long term objectives, there is however, little evidence of any joined up, cross government approach, despite there being some evidence of this approach amongst the sector.

We know that joined up government is extremely challenging: no Government goes into power thinking we must work in silos; likewise, no Civil Servant says I’m refuse to work in partnership with other departments or the private or voluntary sector. So what is the answer to affect truly joined up government on crucial, if not critical, public policy issues?

We will be asking:

- What can we learn from the Welsh experience? Why hasn't their innovative policy approach worked as well as anticipated? Should we be advocating a similar approach in England?
- Does the CSJ call for the Prime Minister to lead in key areas such as tackling physical activity and obesity, and creating a new *Department of Public Health and Prevention* led by a Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention provide a fresh new approach?
- Is a cross government ministerial group which meets regularly to drive implementation effective?
- Should all departments be simply required to undertake impact assessments on every policy on sport and physical activity?
- What other solutions could we advocate to government to ensure better joined-up approach?
- How can the sector work with departments now to ensure they put physical activity at the heart of their work?