

Putting the 'Five Ways of Working' to work

From principles to practice

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The Five Ways of Working, as defined by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2016, commit public bodies to think about the generational impact of their decisions, to focus on addressing the root causes behind their shared challenges, to strategically align their goals across services, to work together, and to actively and meaningfully involve communities in their decision making.

In combination, they are the foundations upon which transformational and lasting change can be achieved, and upon which Wales can deliver its seven national Well-being Goals.

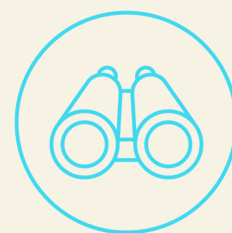
This can be easy to say, but not always easy to do!

In November 2025, the Co-production Network for Wales brought people from across North Wales together to ask ‘How are we doing?’, when it comes to putting the Five Ways of Working to work.

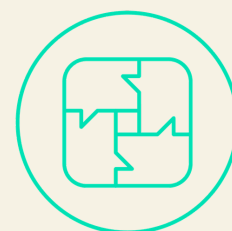
The event took place in Conwy, and brought together 20 people with a wide range of experiences, from managers within councils, health boards and wider public services, to third sector leaders, policy makers, and members of the public. Through the day’s discussions, the group explored the places where they feel things are working best, the places where there is most work still to do, and the changes which could make the biggest impact: now and in the future.

The discussions were facilitated by Jenny McConnel (Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales) and Mike Corcoran (Co-production Network for Wales). In this paper, we present all the things people told us, and what we think needs to happen next.

The event formed part of the Co-production Network for Wales 5-year National Lottery Funded project supporting Public Services Boards across the country - the bodies which bring together public service providers in every region of Wales to set out how they will meet their responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.



long-term



integration



involvement



collaboration



prevention

What do the Five Ways of Working mean to you?

We began the day by asking everyone what each of the Five Ways of Working meant to them, before comparing and contrasting their responses. Whilst for the most part we saw strong agreement throughout, it was apparent that some of the ways of working are a lot easier for people to understand than others. Not only that, but there was a high degree of crossover in the way people spoke about all five, suggesting that the important points of difference between each are not always as clear as they could, or should be.

What does COLLABORATION mean to you?



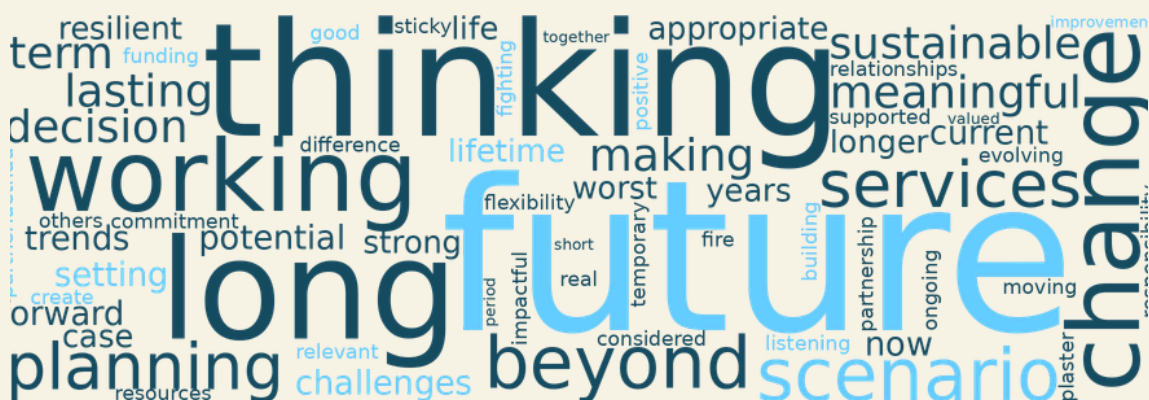
What does INTEGRATION mean to you?



What does PREVENTION mean to you?



What does LONG-TERM mean to you?



What does INVOLVEMENT mean to you?



How can the Five Ways of Working succeed in practice?

For our second discussion, we all sat together in a circle. Reflecting on the Five Ways of Working (and what each of them meant to us), we invited people to suggest the questions they felt it was most important for us to discuss, and then we explored each of them together.

Our questions were as follows:

- Are the 5 ways of working a useful framework, or a tick box activity?
- How do we know we're being inclusive if we don't know who we don't know?
- How can we enable young people to influence change in their communities? What are the first steps of working co-productively?
- What are we going to do differently as a result of today?

As the discussion unfolded, five key themes emerged as integral to the success of the Five Ways of Working in practice. Below, we present each in turn.

LOSING OUR FEAR OF FAILURE

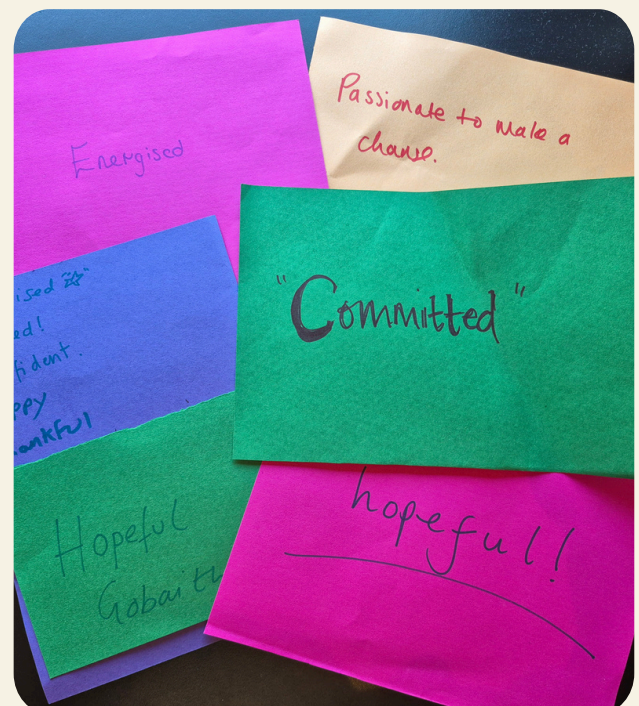
We talked about the pressure public bodies can feel to get everything right, have all the answers, and not make mistakes.

Sometimes this can inhibit the risk taking and culture change which is essential for real and transformative progress to be made. It also risks damaging relationships and eroding trust with communities.

People value honesty and authenticity - it's okay to say 'I don't know', 'We got it wrong' and 'We need to do better' - it makes it easier for people to understand the challenges we face, and to help us overcome them.

Here are some of the things people said:

- "We have to be comfortable with ambiguity. It's okay not to have the answers, but it's difficult for professionals to always admit that."
- "Sometimes we can be scared of opening our mouths for fear of the implications."
- "We need organisations to commit to 'changing the culture'."
- "Communities will say 'it's okay to get it wrong so long as you're being sincere'."



LOOKING BEYOND THE 'USUAL SUSPECTS'

We talked about the challenge of undertaking real, meaningful community involvement.

Some communities (and even some individuals) feel as if public bodies come to them again and again, always asking the same questions. It leaves them feeling tired and tokenised, whilst the vast majority of the population is still not involved at all. The answer, we felt, was to get out of our comfort zone and go and meet people where they are. Our public service providers need to be truly embedded in their communities, and give people all sorts of different ways to speak to them (in person, online, and always in places which are safe and accessible to them). We must always keep asking 'who's not here?', and take extra effort to speak with those who may face the greatest barriers to working with us, or who may most often have been ignored or overlooked in the past.



Here are some of the things people said:

- "If you go to the same groups all the time they get fatigued. We need to 'unpick' restrictive practices."
- "We've got to get out there and get to know our communities."
- "My son struggles to leave his room, but the confidence he's gaining through his online support is really positive."
- "[We need to find] the gaps and the people we're not hearing - not just the low hanging fruit and the loudest voices."

LISTENING MEANINGFULLY

We talked about how important 'being listened to' is, but how hard it can be to achieve in practice.

Pressures placed upon services can limit the time they get to spend with people, limiting the time people have to speak and to be heard. We can feel a pressure (perhaps connected to our fear of failure) to come straight in with the answers, forgetting to ask people 'what do you want to happen?' and 'how is this working for you?'. When we do listen, without exception, it helps us to build stronger relationships, make better decisions and deliver better outcomes. We also talked about the importance of listening to develop trust, in all directions. And if we don't trust each other, then how can we truly work together?

Here are some of the things people said:

- “We’re very good at going out and saying what we can provide and what we can do to help, without asking what people need.”
- “It’s about how much time people have - they might have allocated time to spend with people, which impedes their ability to listen - we need to empower people to work differently.”
- “What we need to be doing is listening more - asking, ‘how is this for you?’.”
- “As a parent of a young person, how important is it that we hear the voices of our young people! Young people have so much to offer and we need to do more to get them involved.”

UNLOCKING THE ‘STICKY MIDDLE’

We talked about how action is needed at the top, at the bottom and in the middle!

People felt that there was a gap in how the theory of the Five Ways of Working was translating into practice. Our leaders say the right things, those at the front line of our services are trying their best to do the right things, but something is being lost somewhere in between. Our public bodies are complex and operate under intense and continuous pressure. This presents real challenges in terms of ensuring messages are clearly and consistently communicated.



Not only that, but existing cultural practices are deeply embedded, and the primary focus of services is not typically delivering radical and transformational change, but ensuring that essential day-to-day operations can continue.

No one attributed blame to the folks in the middle for this - but everyone acknowledged that if we’re serious about truly embedding the Five Ways of Working, then this was a very real challenge that couldn’t be ignored.

Here are some of the things people said:

- “I think the people at the top do want to hear it. It’s the people in the middle that you can’t get past.”
- “We operate under ‘basic restrictive practices’ which are so embedded that we don’t even notice them.”
- “[Because the ‘people in the middle’ are so busy] messages can become diluted and their meaning lost.”
- “We have visionary but bureaucratic systems - they don’t always work together.”

PUTTING OUR MONEY WHERE OUR MOUTH IS

We talked about how our services are funded, and whether this is a help or a hindrance.

Many felt that the short-term funding cycle that their services depend upon, were in stark contrast to the long-term, transformative changes those services were being asked to make. For charities and voluntary organisations in particular, it was felt that the progress of great work could often be hindered by funding coming to an abrupt end, with the fall out from such cliff edges often causing real harm to the communities these organisations exist to support. And whilst a 'lack of funding' was something all had experienced in the delivery of their own services, there was a

shared belief that adopting the Five Ways of Working would ultimately lead to better services, and much better value for money in the long-term.

Here are some of the things people said:

- "Funding terms (often as short as only 6-months long) aren't enough."
- "We lost volunteer-led critical response care because no one would cover our low and basic costs."
- "When going for funding you're encouraged to 're-invent the wheel', but often that's not what's needed. Amazing projects can come to a blunt end and the impact can be horrible."
- "By working together we should have better and more sustainable outcomes, and better value for money".



Case studies

For our third discussion, we broke into three small groups (each led by representatives of one of North Wales' three Public Services Boards) and looked at three case studies of how the Five Ways of Working are being put into practice in different ways and in different places across North Wales today.

In each instance, we reflected on what the example could teach us about bringing the Five Ways of Working to fruition in our own work.



Lessons from Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board

From Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB we were joined by Sandra Lynne Thomas (Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB Programme Manager) and Justin Hanson (Natural Resources Team, People and Places Officer, North West Wales). Sandra and Justin discussed the work the PSB and its partners have led around Newborough National Nature Reserve.

The nature reserve sits next to the village of Newborough, which sees huge pressure placed on its transport infrastructure and public services every year as tourists from all over the country flock to the area - something which has on occasion attracted [national press attention](#).

A complex long-term challenge with no single quick fix, through years of careful work led by the PSB, from hosting '[community hackathons](#)' and drop-in sessions to establishing a local, multi-agency steering group (with the participation of village residents), steady and [meaningful progress](#) is now being made.

Here are the key lessons we took away when it comes to the Five Ways of Working:

- **It all starts with relationships:** these are long-standing challenges and it has taken time to earn the trust of local people and rebuild damaged relationships. Progress has depended upon acknowledging past grievances, engaging with people who had not been involved previously (including those who have protested against their public bodies in the past) and having honest conversations about what's not working.
- **Local communities must be at the heart of everything:** practical solutions could not have been reached if local people were not absolutely at the heart of decision making. Developing solutions with, not for, people has helped to give those proposals legitimacy, and created a shared sense of ownership for their implementation.
- **Complex challenges need multi-faceted solutions:** it was acknowledged from the beginning that challenges could only be overcome by bringing people and organisations with different skills, perspectives and influence together. 'Futures Thinking', looking not just at today's challenges but how these challenges would evolve in the years and decades ahead, has been central to identifying solutions with the potential to deliver a long-term impact.
- **Good involvement takes time and effort:** people can't just be invited to take part in one-off engagement exercises. Involvement has worked because time has been taken to plan carefully, communicate clearly, and support people throughout. It has been a process which has evolved over years.



*Aerial view of Newborough looking out towards Newborough Forest and Newborough Beach
(Image: Natural Resources Wales)*

Lessons from Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board

From Conwy and Denbighshire PSB we were joined by two managers from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board - Christy Hoskings (Regional Patient Experience Lead, Neurodevelopment Services - Children and Young People) and Brian Laing (Strategic Partnership Manager for Public Health). Christy and Brian talked about two Bevan Exemplar projects which had taken place with communities across the two counties: '[Well North Wales](#)' and the '[100 Stories Project](#)'.

Well North Wales set out to bring together multi-agency partners to enable a shift from 'treating illness to providing the building blocks of wellness'. Supported by the Conwy and Denbighshire PSB, this work involved, amongst many other things, bringing a wide range of partners together to create a shared 'co-production plan' for the communities in and around Towyn and Kinmel Bay.

The 100 Stories Project adopted a range of story-based research methodologies to work with young people in Conwy and Denbighshire (and across North Wales) to develop a detailed understanding of the complex systems young people have to navigate when transitioning from children's to adult services, enabled improved decision making, improved service design, and enhanced outcomes for all - whilst empowering all those who shared their stories in the process.

Here are the key lessons we took away when it comes to the Five Ways of Working:

- **It ain't (just) what you do, it's the way that you do it:** in both projects, the process was critical, and ensuring that accessible, safe, and meaningful opportunities to be involved were provided to communities and partners throughout took careful planning, expert support, training, and investment. It wasn't rushed, and it didn't happen by accident.
- **Stories are powerful:** allowing people to share their own stories in their own words, empowered them and gave their lived experiences real influence. When combined with clear calls to action, these stories become tools for mobilising change.

- **Value learning as an outcome in itself:** these projects were about creating the conditions where ideas could develop organically, with communities, over time. Change happened slowly, and things didn't always go to plan, but this wasn't seen as failure, rather it was seen as invaluable learning - an essential and unavoidable part of the process.
- **Co-production leads to better outcomes:** doing things together builds understanding, and support the development of more relevant, trusted and utilised services. Shared ownership (and embedded capacity) is key. Any project which depends on a sole individual is high risk - we cannot rely on champions alone.
- **Don't wait for the perfect conditions:** there will never be a perfect time to get to work - so start now! Learning and momentum develop as you go: the conditions start to create themselves.



Lessons from Wrexham and Flintshire Public Services Board

From Wrexham and Flintshire PSB we were joined by Emily Reddy, from the North East Wales Community Cohesion team. Emily and her team work with communities across Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire to ensure that everyone who calls North East Wales their home feels safe, welcome, and that relationships are strengthened across and between the region's diverse communities.

Emily spoke about the extensive positive work she, her and team and their partners have led to promote inclusion, equality and diversity across the region (through festivals, conferences and events of all shapes and sizes) alongside the ongoing community tensions and challenges which have to be managed all year round - including recent protests over proposed asylum seeker housing in Flintshire.



North East Wales Community Cohesion Event

Here are the key lessons we took away when it comes to the Five Ways of Working:

- **Understanding root causes is key:** when community tensions arise, this is often symptomatic of deeper anxieties, for example relating to social change, pressure on public services, and a general loss of trust in institutions. If lasting solutions are to be found, these root causes have to be addressed.
- **We need to find our common ground:** even groups who seem at odds with each other will share the same core needs, for example, a desire to feel safe, respected and listened to, and common points of interest, for example, related to sport, food or music. Finding ways for people to come together on a human level, connected by their shared interests, can help to build relationships and ease tensions.
- **Safe spaces are essential:** ensuring community cohesion often means navigating complex, sensitive and difficult conversations. Finding safe (physical and virtual) spaces where these can happen, and bringing in expert independent facilitation (allowing all to have their voices heard equally) is key.
- **We need information we can trust:** constructive dialogue between diverse partners and communities needs to be underpinned by balanced and accurate information which all can trust and respect. Personal stories can add deeper insight to bring this information to life and help to build empathy and understanding across communities.
- **Different places will need different solutions:** there can be no one-size-fits-all. Solutions must be locally grounded, and reflect the needs and context for any given community - this will take time to achieve, and that's okay!

Where do we go from here?

Taking a step back to reflect on all of our discussions, a prospectus for action soon appears. Simple things which, if done together, could accumulate to deliver a significant impact.



MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THE 5 WAYS OF WORKING

Work is needed to make sure everyone with a role to play in the implementation of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act knows exactly what the 5 Ways of Working are, the similarities and differences between them, where they came from and why they matter.



EMBRACE LEARNING CULTURES

Work is needed to combat the fear of failure in those places where it can stifle innovation and inhibit change. We should support the development of learning cultures and responsible risk-taking where it has the potential to unlock transformational changes.



EMPOWER CHANGE MAKERS

People with the potential to lead transformational change exist at all levels within our public bodies, but they won't become change makers by accident. We need to develop training, flexible processes and supportive cultures which enable them to thrive, and deliver the wellbeing outcomes we all want to see.



PROVIDE TARGETED INVESTMENT

If we want people to do new and different things, we have to accept that this requires support: our public bodies (and our public!) benefit when specialist expertise, targeted resources and seed funding are put in place to get the ball rolling. The potential long-term savings justify the investment.



INVOLVE ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

Everything is underpinned by strong relationships. Involvement goes way beyond formal engagement. We need to make sure that all those who deliver, and all those who access our services, have regular and meaningful opportunities to get to know each other, to share ideas and experiences, to be listened to and to be heard. It's a continuous, virtuous cycle. Change happens at the speed of trust.

This is an opportunity to act together

Future Generations Cymru and the Co-production Network for Wales are committed to doing all we can to turn this prospectus for action into a reality, and we hope that you will join us!

Co-production Network for Wales



copronet.wales

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For more information about our work



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