I have had the honour of holding independent roles related to the Welsh Government’s duty to promote sustainable development since 2006; first as the Commissioner for Wales on the UK Sustainable Development Commissioner to 2011, then as Commissioner for Sustainable Futures and Chair of Climate Change Commission

Before I look back on that 10 year period it is important to recognise the story really begins with devolution pioneers such as Sue Essex and others who built a duty to promote sustainable development within the Govt of Wales Act. A legal duty which set Wales apart and provided for the range of SD schemes, annual reviews that have been embedded in the operations of Welsh Government. It also led to WG establishing a stakeholder forum Cynnal Cymru in 2003 as the civil society network dedicated to promoting sustainable development.

**Sustainable development has been a distinctive feature of the devolution process from day 1 - today represents a landmark in that journey.**

My role in that journey started in 2006 with the 2 day a month independent public appointment to be the Commissioner for Wales on the UK SDC chaired by Jonathan Porritt, It has reported to 7 different Ministers, survived the demise of the UKSDC in 2011, being reappointed by Welsh Government as the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, incorporating the Chair of the Climate Change Commission for Wales and for the last 4 years being supported by Cynnal Cymru with a time commitment increased to 3 days a week.

It has been a real honour and great fun working with some brilliant people & organisations across business, public and voluntary sectors – right across Wales - & to have the chance to roam across Ministerial portfolios - role that has no powers, no direct levers, no direct budget, could be terminated in a month by Ministers but has a grand title! Much of my time has been spent working across boundaries, building networks, convening unusual suspects and being an honest broker providing a safe space for dealing with difficult issues – perhaps on time it felt like a “rent a chair” !

So what has been the learning

Welsh Government’s duty to promote sustainable development was subject to successive independent reviews and in the Commissioner’s independent commentary on the Annual Sustainable Development Report including:

* A lack of clarity and confusion as to what we meant by sustainable development
* Evidence of innovative silos but lack joined up approaches
* Sustainable development was treated as a cross cutting theme alongside others not as a central organising principle
* A cut and paste approach where the SD duty was included in introductions to policy documents but that was far as far as it went
* The Sustainable Development Scheme and reporting process ran parallel to the programme of Government and were not seen to be central policy
* The duty only applied to Welsh Government and had little traction across the public sector
* Our national Sustainable Development Indicators produced each August had little connection to policy

Indeed you may want to read my final commentary on the final Government Annual SD Report under the current system which again highlights these weaknesses.

The good news is that I believe much of the learning has been taken and applied in the development of the WFG Act. I do believe that the WFG Act has addressed the weaknesses in the system and the next administration will start in a very different place with a legal framework - setting out common goals, measures of progress and operating principles for the whole of the public sector.

Many of you have played key roles in ensuring that the learning has been applied – the SD Alliance, the WLGA early adopters, all who participated in the Advisory group and the various consulations but for me it was the national conversation on the Wales we Want that captured the key messages which is reflected in the intent of the legislation.

We must not forget the key messages from this conversation -

* Climate change was considered the single most critical issue facing future generations . I was pleased that political parties recognised this by signing the climate Change Commission pledge for the next election – all except UKIP.
* Children need to be given the best start in life from pregnancy through the early years as all the evidence shows this has a critical effect on life chances for this and future generations
* Future generations need thriving communities built on a strong sense of place Investing in growing our local economy is essential for the well-being of future generations - community led actions with key roles for town & community councils
* Well-being of all depends on reducing inequality and a greater value on diversity - health inequalities in some areas of Wales can lead to differences of life expectancy by up to 10 years.
* Greater engagement in the democratic process, a stronger citizen voice and active participation in decision making is fundamental for the well-being of future generations Central to my concern has been the top-down nature of public policy implementation and the failure to connect with community-led action new legislation introduces a range of mechanisms designed to address this issue such as requiring greater involvement from communities in decision making
* Need to support those leaders at all levels in all places committed to making change happen - too often these are the people who suffer the burn out as they battle against the odds

These messages reinforce the critical point that it must be about delivering on the intent of the legislation as opposed to a bureaucratic tick box process of compliance.

The intent is reflected in the commitment of countries around the world to the UN SDGs and the Paris Climate Change Agreement . Indeed my proudest moments in the role have been the opportunity to present our work to the UN High Level Forum in each of the last 2 years and then to host Nikel Seth to mark the Bill receiving royal assent – and his well known quote.. “What Wales does today the world will do tomorrow”

The scale of the global challenges means we cannot continue to do what we have always done and expect different results. I hope the Act and all that goes with it can represent our “Fosbury Flop moment where we raise the bar by doing things differently. It is not about running a faster or making adjustments but about doing things differently to get over a much higher bar

The evidence from global leaders clearly shows that progress is dependent on clear, consistent decision making, backed by a strong regulatory framework, built on a partnership between public, private and voluntary sectors and communicated via transparent progress reports. This needs a clarity of focus and a clear sense of what will make the most material impact.

I think we can see how these principles have been successfully applied in some areas such as recycling but there is no doubt there have been major frustrations where progress has been slow.

My first piece of work as Commissioner was the SDC’s Turning the Tide report published in 2007 on the potential of renewable energy from our tidal range. I step down with UK Government announcing another review. The tidal range and marine energy is probably our greatest natural asset. *With €100.4 million of EU structural funding prioritised for marine energy in Wales over the next 5 years, two wave and tidal stream Demonstration Zones, seabed agreements in place for 4 separate wave and tidal projects and a number of proposals for tidal range projects, Wales is well placed to play a worldwide leading role in the marine energy sector*.”

We now have more investment potential than any other country. I hope future Ministers will lead on the delivery of this potential

In 2007 the then Environment Minister, Carwyn Jones, set out the aspiration that from 2011 onwards all buildings would be zero carbon.

The same 2007 plenary announced the plans for the then Minister for Enterprise, Andrew Davies, to publish a route-map, which would set out how we should transform Wales into an exemplar, competitive, low-carbon energy economy, which led to a Low Carbon regions programme which ran into the sand with the demise of the Wales Spatial Plan

Of course the Ministerial Statements of 2007 came before the global financial crisis, the most urgent and immediate economic crisis of our generation which focused political minds on the very immediate challenges facing communities. Climate change is a colossal but slow moving problem and easy to put to one side in face of the more immediate day to day challenges such as those presented to the Welsh Government by the house building sector in response to the aspiration for accelerating the move to zero carbon buildings.

This is not to say we have not made progress, and there has been great leadership from within the sectors represented on the Climate Change Commission, with examples from business, public bodies, community groups and charities, but none of it has yet added up to the transformation set out in the aspirations of 2007.

The Commission has received representation on issues connected with the lack alignment between national policy and local implementation through planning policy. This has particularly applied to the lack of progress on community renewable energy development, where the Commission was instrumental in facilitating the establishment of Community Energy Wales. that there is now just over 2.5mW including Bro Dyfi and National Trust installations installed and a further 5.3mW due to be installed next year - Scotland's community and local energy generation capacity that is over 500 MW

I believe however that the Paris Agreement demonstrates that we are in a different place now. Scientific evidence is even stronger - *Global temperatures in February smashed previous monthly records by an unprecedented amount, according to Nasa*[*data*](http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/tabledata_v3/GLB.Ts+dSST.txt)*, sparking warnings of a climate emergency*. There is increasing direct experience of short term impacts. There is also a clear global consensus for action across countries and companies and we now have the Environment (Wales) Act that sets the stronger legal framework for delivery

Last week I chaired the Green Growth Forum - appropriate ending - as economic transformation is at heart of the challenge. The Green Growth Forum was hosted by the Welsh Government in partnership with the Climate Group. It was the first post “[Paris (Climate Change) Agreement](http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf)” event that brought together States and Regions along with representatives of the business community to focus on the delivery of the commitments agreed in December.

The overriding message from the Forum was that of optimism and opportunity. The principle of green growth provided an alternative economic model as opposed to a contradiction in terms. It redefined the nature of growth to incorporate social justice and environmental action. It also challenges the principles of what we mean by and how we measure the nature of growth in our society.

The need for consistency of message across all levels of Government cannot be overestimated. How Government spends its money in procurement assessing impacts across the value chain

The expectations we have for companies or organisations in receipt of grants and public funds.

I believe the SD Charter which we will talk about later today has a key role as a voluntary demonstration of that commitment to how we do business in Wales – an expression of the Shared Values and Goals are represented in the WFG Act.

My Commissioner journey began as a two day a month appointment with one member of staff. It ends by handing over to a Future Generations Commissioner with legal powers and duties, backed by a well resourced office. It is therefore a very different role and I would like to wish Sophie Howe well in her exciting new role

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Cynnal Cymru staff for the great support they have provided over the last four years . It has been a great team effort but I know the team would join me in highlighting the outstanding role played by Rita Singh who has been a relentless, positive, driving force.

For me looking forward I want to focus on how I can support communities, citizens and consumers in taking action - particularly through my role as Chair of WCVA.

The next administration will start in a very different place, with a strong legislative framework, setting out goals, values, indicators and measures which will apply to the whole of the public sector, working with a much greater global consensus for action in delivering the UN SDGs.. and the opportunity to make sure we apply the lessons from the last 10 years