

An IWA Report
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Cenhadaeth Cymru: Mission Wales

Governing with purpose - achieving progress



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Executive summary

The principle of mission-driven government is taking shape across the UK and across the globe. Most recently, the theory has represented the driving agenda for the new UK Government,¹ as it begins to set out its priorities. With a challenging political inheritance, the mission-led approach starts with the acknowledgement that, ‘to rebuild Britain, we need to change how Britain is governed’.²

Building on the work of the pioneer of the approach, Mariana Mazzucato,³ this paper attempts to consider the theory in a Welsh devolved context, proposing its potential as a key organising principle for Welsh Government over the years ahead.

In doing so, the report highlights the strategic fit between the concept of mission-driven government as a tool for delivering change against a set of persistent economic, social and environmental challenges Wales faces as well as the potential for setting the terms for an ambitious project of national renewal that is sorely needed.

As the home of the pioneering Well-being of Future Generations Act,⁴ the paper argues that Wales is well positioned to practically apply the theory of mission-driven government, entrenching long-term thinking to tackle a profound set of challenges and truly deliver for people in Wales.

25 years on from devolution⁵, the paper calls for a re-organisation of how government, at all levels in Wales, aims to deliver better outcomes for its communities. It starts from the basis that nothing short of transformational change in how devolved government operates will lead to effectively tackle an acute set of systemic problems. Whilst much policy intention in Wales has been positive and progressive, a focus on translating policy into practice and outcomes is urgently needed as a set of acute long-term crises come to a head, not least the continuation of the effective delivery of public services. It is intended that this paper thus meaningfully contributes to this ongoing and critically important discussion.

With a Senedd election under a new, more proportional voting system⁶ on the horizon in 2026, the paper is aimed at informing the platforms of all political parties seeking election as well as the current government. The paper is an effort to help create better outcomes from the government in Wales, for the long term. Whilst a mission-driven approach is currently being put into practice by a UK Labour Government, the preceding UK Government also used mission based-principles. In this sense, the paper looks at governance from an evidence-based perspective, rather primarily through a political lens.

Key recommendations:

The report makes the following recommendations (for a more detailed articulation of the recommendations, please see page 52):

1. Welsh Government (or parties seeking to form the government following the 2026 Senedd elections) should seek to take a mission-led approach to policy and delivery.
2. Welsh Government should establish senior leadership figures sitting in Cabinet who have responsibility for coordinating missions, including Cabinet Secretary mission leads, Civil service leadership, and Missions Boards with external expertise.
3. The identification of appropriate missions should follow a thorough publicly-funded citizens assembly process. Such an approach would root solutions in lived experience and support the strengthening of our democratic health.
4. Finance and budget decisions should be made on the basis of progress against missions, including feeding into wider public sector and procurement processes.
5. Private-public partnership on missions should reflect the government's public value, purpose and missions.
6. Establish mechanisms for setting up a National Wealth Fund to support mission delivery.
7. Matters of constitutional reform should overlay any proposals that inhibit radical thinking - making a clear case based on delivery, e.g. devolution of the Crown Estate to Wales.
8. Establish a mission-driven innovation body for Wales.
9. Produce a data matrix to adequately measure progress against missions, building on the National Wellbeing Indicators approach.

Introduction and Context

Wales faces a persistent and ongoing set of cross-cutting challenges, across areas of devolved, reserved and shared governance – with corresponding powers and responsibilities sitting at multiple levels.

Wales has one of the oldest and least energy efficient housing stocks in Europe⁷, educational outcomes, by international standards, are falling⁸, economic inactivity rates have persistently stayed around 20 percent⁹, employment is far below the UK rate¹⁰, 28 percent of children live in relative income poverty¹¹, the nation has a broadly persistently poorer performing economy compared to the rest of the UK (behind UK average and most UK regions and nations: as per productivity (GVA¹²), GDP¹³, gross disposable income per head¹⁴), a regionally unequal economy within Wales¹⁵ and poorer performance than regions of the UK in income, health and education^{16,17}. Furthermore, 21 percent of people in Wales live in relative income poverty, with over a third of people living with obesity¹⁸ and people in more deprived areas of Wales continue to have lower life expectancy¹⁹.

The warning lights, then, are blinking. Governments whether at Westminster or Cardiff, are failing to deliver for all too many in Wales. Living standards for low-and-middle income households continue to fall, in a wider UK economy which has become more stagnant and unequal²⁰. These persistent challenges are clear for all in Wales to see, yet strategies for alleviating them remain conspicuously absent, as does coordinated thinking on how to raise Wales' ambition to solve them. Across most areas of government action, there are huge gaps between well-intentioned policy and actual delivery.

Wales and the UK are also both failing to transition to a net zero economy quickly enough²¹ or adequately adapt for the already present impacts of climate change²². Indeed, research suggests that 'if the entire world population lived like the citizens of Wales, humanity would require 2.08 earths'²³. The progress that Wales has made on tackling carbon emissions has been largely aided by the nation's deindustrialisation²⁴ (most recently hitting the nation's First Carbon Budget assisted by the closing of Aberthaw coal power station²⁵).

Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economic model²⁶, which presents a space between planetary boundaries and a social floor where it is environmentally and socially safe for humanity to persist, highlights Wales' challenges. Looking at Wales through this lens presents a stark picture of an everyday economy which falls below the social floor for far too many, yet which is also overshooting its environmental ceiling²⁷. Government at all levels is failing to provide safety and security for people for the longer term.

Public services in Wales are also in a parlous state. At time of writing, NHS waiting lists in Wales are at their highest on record²⁸, with some waiting years to receive treatment. Meanwhile, local authorities in Wales, who deliver many frontline services across the nation, not least social care, have finances which are on an 'unsustainable path'.²⁹ A period of public sector austerity has stripped the ability for the public sector to deliver, with a medium term UK Government fiscal approach which may lead to further cuts.³⁰

Added to all of these present and incoming challenges is a sense of democratic malaise. Whilst we have seen 'significant and sustained' increase in public support for devolution in Wales³¹, turnout for Senedd elections remains continually below that for UK parliamentary elections in Wales³². The IWA's *Building Bridges* report

highlights the need to strengthen democracy in Wales beyond the electoral cycle, and tackle the effects of political pessimism³³. Indeed, when we analyse factors beyond the ballot box, the majority of people in Wales don't feel able to influence decisions about their locality³⁴. People in Wales are uncertain of the role of Welsh Government, or if they are, they are unsure of what powers it has to change their lives.

Trust in the capability of government to tackle the major challenges facing the nation has eroded. A decade of austerity measures, which have had a devastating impact on Wales' public sector and services, have limited the ambition for government and electors alike. As argued by Nesta, 'the way government works needs to change to meet the biggest challenges it faces'³⁵. As such, the modernisation of government is sorely needed in order to rebuild trust in government, and, ultimately, rebuild trust in democratic politics to achieve improvements in living standards. Failure to deliver risks undermining long-term support for electoral democracy³⁶. This takes on a distinct perspective given Wales' devolved governance model.

It's not all bad, however. Wales has significant advantages. Government in Wales has a recent track record of ambitious and progressive policymaking and has shown the ability to diverge from a wider UK policy landscape in positive ways (as indeed is the case with the Welsh polity more broadly³⁷). Achievements include: introducing a levy on single-use plastic bags, introducing presumed consent for organ donation, continuing to offer free prescriptions, introducing votes at 16, taking private profit out of the care system, creating an office for future generations, transforming the priorities of the transport system, a large scale Universal Basic Income pilot for care leavers, and turbocharging recycling rates. This non-exclusive list shows what a devolved government is capable of delivering and what a small, ambitious nation can aim to achieve.

Yet, delivery all too often fails to live up to the policy. For the WCPP, the answer to the question of whether a more progressive and often evidence-based approach to policy-making in Wales has led to 'any tangible difference to waiting times, the economy, the educational gap' is 'not yet'³⁸. For this to happen, Wales must squeeze the most out of its advantages. Wales is a small nation, with a strong history of partnership working and a willingness to be politically bold. This comes with the strength that it should be able to act with agility - with government setting direction for other actors, be they local authorities, businesses, or communities.

25 years on from devolution and with an ever increasing amount of powers devolved to Wales, now is the time to consider how Welsh Government and the Senedd can best be structured to deliver on the major challenges the nation faces. As Wales considers its next steps from a constitutional standpoint, it's important to consider *how* Wales uses its existing powers as well as identifying the (very valid) reasons why it doesn't work. It is time for government in Wales to meet the ambition of those campaigning for its existence almost thirty years ago: to improve public services and improve economic outcomes.

With 2024 seeing a new Welsh Government setting out their agenda, and with a Senedd election to take place in 2026, it is now an opportune moment to refresh the conversation about government delivery. New First Minister Eluned Morgan, during her first speech as First Minister to the Senedd³⁹, cast herself as 'a leader focused on delivery'. To develop her priorities for government, Morgan undertook a Wales-wide 'listening exercise,' supplemented by an online survey to establish people's priorities⁴⁰. This listening exercise resulted in the establishment of four priorities, on health and social care, green economic growth, increasing opportunity, and transport⁴¹. Morgan further highlighted the shift to a focus on delivery with the appointment of Julie James as Minister for Delivery⁴². That is not to say that mission-led thinking is party political, it is the intention of this report to catalyse thinking on setting up government in Wales to best tackle

major, systemic challenges. We encourage all political parties to pick up these ideas and articulate them in their context in the lead up to the Senedd 2026 election.

This paper is an attempt to do just that - setting out some ideas about how Welsh Government can deliver actions which will tackle some of Wales' most profound and systemic challenges.

Mission-driven government may act as a key framing device to help provide a series of solutions which fit well with the skills and capabilities of Wales, and also the profound nature of its challenges, which can only be addressed with system-wide change. In doing so, the paper sets out a background of mission theory before considering how it may be practically rolled out in Wales, including by setting some missions that should theoretically be put in place to drive progress against Wales' systemic challenges.

The report aims to kickstart a conversation on how government in Wales can radically reimagine itself and rise to the challenge of bringing about a stronger, fairer and environmentally sustainable nation for future generations.

What is a mission-driven government?

Mission-led governance is a principle revitalised by Mariana Mazzucato which, broadly speaking, means government ‘setting missions and organising themselves around the delivery of them’.⁴³ A mission-driven approach to government can help to articulate a grand vision and purpose for government, defining the key difference they aim to make in people’s lives.

Organising government around the setting of missions is inherently aimed at transforming the traditional approach of government to identify problems, set targets and hit them. Instead, a particular mission is meant to deal with long-term, complex and multifaceted challenges. In setting missions, a government is articulating how they aim to tackle big issues. Such issues are sometimes referred to as ‘grand challenges’, such as ‘climate change, preventative healthcare, and generating sustainable growth for the benefit of all’⁴⁴. Missions are tangible goals which ‘will help to tackle ‘grand challenges’ - important, systemic and society-wide problems that do not have obvious solutions’⁴⁵.

Missions aim to articulate the end point, where the government wants to get to rather than stating how it will do so. Importantly missions should be outcome focussed. This, in theory, ‘allows for a more innovative and flexible approach to the mission’⁴⁶. Missions, then, ‘should set the direction, but not determine how goals are reached’⁴⁷. Taking this approach means not thinking in particular policy silos or in the terms of specific sectors, but rather on solving the problems that matter to people, cultivating collaboration and innovation across a broad group of stakeholders and citizens.

Mission-driven government is therefore a cross-governmental commitment to hitting a number of specific, ambitious, and bold missions. This means a significant cultural change to how government operates, spends its money and seeks to catalyse collaboration and innovation to achieve shared goals. Finally, a mission-led approach can help to rebuild trust in government delivery by articulating their key policy challenges, synthesising the purpose of the state in improving everyday life.

Moonshot

In her book, *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*,⁴⁸ Mazzucato uses the case study of the 1960’s NASA Apollo mission of putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade to present the concept of a mission-driven approach.

The moonshot, an extraordinarily complex challenge, felt out of reach at the outset, but inspired innovation across sectors from food to textiles and technology, to reach the overarching goal. The setting of the initial mission fed into more concrete everyday technical challenges that require cross-sector collaboration to overcome. Innovations derived from the moonshot have had overspills, such as the creation of whole technology sectors, including smartphones, laptops and microchips⁴⁹.

The solution to successful missions is not known at the outset. Instead, missions create the conditions for exploring the answer to meet ‘wicked’ challenges. Policy innovation is therefore required to make progress.

Mission-driven government, then, aims to apply this principle across a government’s stated priorities. It aims to provide a series of long-term, measurable and achievable goals that the government will focus on.

Importantly, this means a complete reform of the way the government is set up to deliver. To be successful, the principle cannot be used as a mere rhetorical or framing device to focus a government’s communications of its priorities. Indeed, as Mazzucato states:

‘Simply agreeing on ambitious, societally relevant goals is not enough. Missions require a fundamental rethinking of policymaking tools and processes’⁵⁰

Practically applying mission-driven government represents a complete transformation in the way government does its work, navigates challenges, allocates spending, and measures its successes (and failures). The example of the moonshot articulates the impact that focussing on a single-unifying mission can have. This is pertinent for the political environment in Wales, where ambitious policy or legislation is often provided without the tools to effectively deliver it.

Recent applications of mission-driven strategies and government

Over recent years governments across the world have been considering how they can best organise themselves to solve the unique set of challenges they face. Below is a brief examination of governments which have used a mission-led policy approach. It is important to note at the outset that mission-led approaches have also been practically applied by organisations such as Nesta⁵¹, Cwmpas⁵² and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales⁵³. As this paper is focussed on mainstreaming mission-led approaches in a government context, this is what the analysis prioritises. The analysis will start by looking at a UK context, moving on to international applications and then finally highlighting implementation by supranational bodies.

Recent UK applications

1. UK Labour Government - Mission-led government approach

Ahead of the 2024 General Election, the UK Labour Party set out five overarching missions that defined their campaign and highlighted their areas of focus should they come to power. Their ‘5 missions for a better Britain’ attempted to establish principles for a ‘mission-driven government’ to end ‘sticking plaster’ politics⁵⁴. They stated that their mission driven approach means ‘deciding the big challenges that government should focus on and using all the tools at our disposal to solve them’ which will require ‘nothing less than a rethink of how we govern’⁵⁵. UK Labour use this approach to put together the 5 missions that shaped their manifesto:

- ‘Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7
- Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- Build an NHS fit for the future
- Make Britain’s streets safe
- Break down the barriers to opportunity at every stage⁵⁶

These missions were refined in the Labour party’s 2024 general election manifesto⁵⁷, expanding on these initial principles:

- ‘Kickstart economic growth: to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7 - with good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off.
- Make Britain a clean energy superpower: to cut bills, create jobs and deliver security with cheaper, zero-carbon electricity by 2030, accelerating to net zero.

- Take back our streets: by halving serious violent crime and raising confidence in the police and criminal justice system to its highest levels.
- Break down barriers to opportunity: by reforming our childcare and education systems, to make sure there is no class ceiling on the ambitions of young people in Britain.
- Build an NHS fit for the future: that is there when people need it; with fewer lives lost to the biggest killers; in a fairer Britain, where everyone lives well for longer.⁵⁸

Their ‘first steps for government’⁵⁹ aimed to use these missions as guiding principles. They outlined six initial steps for the government:

- ‘Deliver economic stability
- Cut NHS waiting times
- Launch a new Border Security Command
- Set up Great British Energy
- Crack down on anti-social behaviour
- Recruit 6,500 new teachers’⁶⁰

Each of which defines initial priority actions to be taken against the missions. However, it should be said that the above first steps are inherently linked to campaigning, rather than governing. Which is understandable, given they were created and published as part of an election campaign.

UK Labour’s mandate on winning the 2024 UK General Election implicitly supports a mission-led approach. As I write, we are still in the early months of a UK Labour Government, but missions have formed the basis for much of their policy activity thus far. Their intention to continue with mission-led government was a key policy and political principle which was clear from the 2024 King's Speech, which stated:

‘My Government’s legislative programme will be mission led and based upon the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all’⁶¹

The contents of the King’s Speech and the bills included in the speech were also grouped together under the government’s 5 mission headings.⁶²

Whilst we are waiting to see the impact of the mission-led approach of the new UK Government, it has already started to be implemented in the first 100 days in office. The Clean Power 2030 Mission was launched in early July, with the appointment of Chris Stark, former Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee, as Head of Mission Control⁶³. Later that month, the first ‘Clean Energy Superpower Mission Board’ meeting took place⁶⁴. The early indications are that Mission Boards will be established which speak to the UK Government’s 5 missions, led by Government but with ownership of subject matter experts and the collaboration with industry as a facilitation partner central (in the context of the clean power mission). We await to see how the missions approach is mainstreamed by UK Government over the coming months.

It is important to state that the approach taken by the UK Labour Government towards its mission-driven governance has gained some criticism. For some, the only one of its five missions to truly meet the barometer

of a mission is the ‘clean energy superpower’ one⁶⁵. One of the reasons for this is that a number of the other missions are conditional, such as achieving the fastest sustained growth in the G7. The critique, therefore, displays that setting appropriate missions is key to securing the benefits of the approach.

2. UK Conservative Government - Industrial Strategy and Levelling Up

Likewise before them, albeit to a more limited extent, the Conservative UK Government also used mission-driven models in their 2017 industrial strategy⁶⁶ (which was withdrawn while in government). The strategy highlights four ‘grand challenges’ which provide a focus:

- AI & Data Economy
- Future of Mobility
- Clean Growth
- Ageing Society⁶⁷

The strategy set out these goals for the ‘long term,’ attempting to provide ‘a policy framework against which major private and public sector investment decisions can be made.’⁶⁸ Elements of the strategy were supported by Mazzucato herself, whose work focussed on ‘how to use a challenge-based approach to drive innovation and industrial change alongside horizontal policies aimed at advancing education, skills, research, technological and sectoral capabilities’⁶⁹. Whilst the strategy is now withdrawn, the example shows practically how mission-led principles can be put into practice in the industrial policy space. The fact that the strategy was largely never put into practice also highlights that engendering a broad base of political support for a mission-led agenda is vital to achieve a long-term commitment to delivery.

Furthermore, the Conservative UK Government’s Levelling Up Strategy⁷⁰ starts by ‘setting clear and ambitious medium-term missions to provide consistency and clarity over ‘Levelling Up’ policy objectives’⁷¹. The Strategy set missions, including:

- ‘By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing’
- ‘By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years’
- ‘By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.’⁷²

The Levelling Up Whitepaper explicitly referenced the work of Mazzucato, with her responding that, whilst a mission-oriented approach ‘is welcomed... the challenge now, is to make this approach more than just words’⁷³. A recent report by the Future Governance Forum noted that:

‘The lack of progress in achieving the UK government’s mission-driven approach, as set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, demonstrates that without a whole-of-government approach, and especially without Treasury buy-in, missions can fail to deliver’⁷⁴ (p.16).

As such, to a certain extent, the Levelling Up missions approach represents something of a cautionary tale rather than a guide to follow on the effective implementation of a mission-led approach to policy. The evidence on the effectiveness of the policy⁷⁵ suggests that the policy was not delivered with the urgency or speed required.

That the UK Conservative Government also attempted to embed mission-led principles in practice highlights that the approach is not a party political endeavour. Indeed, with much focus on mission-led government as an overarching theme under the current UK Labour Government, it is easy to overlook the interest in them by the preceding government.

3. Net Zero Legislation - A mission?

The legislation to underpin a net zero target at UK Government level could also be considered an example of mission-led policy⁷⁶. The Climate Change Act 2008⁷⁷ established the legal goal of reaching net zero by 2050, a long-term cross-governmental goal based on the Commission's advice⁷⁸. The Act established mandatory reporting mechanisms and included the creation of the Climate Change Committee⁷⁹ to inform and critique the UK nations' net zero policies and implementation. The creation of an independent committee of experts to guide, advise and scrutinise the development of successive Carbon budgets⁸⁰ to meet the 2050 goal provided a clear direction for wider stakeholders and supported the private sector to invest against this goal. Research suggests that the above mechanisms have helped to shape UK policy, raise collective ambition and tie approaches to evidence-based interventions⁸¹. Yet, policy achievements against this goal have seen consistent failure at UK and devolved level, failing to live up to the target, suggesting that setting a target alone is not enough (the Committee's UK⁸² and Welsh Government⁸³ progress reports attest to this).

There is some key learning when considering net zero legislation in the context of missions. Firstly, establishing legal structures and independent bodies can have a strong impact on increasing the evidence base for change. Such bodies also help to inform a number of stakeholders, catalysing collaboration on so-called wicked problems. The approach has also led to *mostly* a state of political consensus on the UK's net zero target and a working across existing policy silos. To some extent then, a mission-led principle can be considered to aid a non-party political approach to major policy goals. This is important when we consider which parties may seek to implement a mission-driven approach in Wales, where coalitions (both formal and informal) may be required after the 2026 Senedd election.

4. Camden Council

A mission-led approach has also been used at a local government level in the UK, most notably by Camden Council. After engagement with local residents the council set four missions:

- 'Diversity: By 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community - and the next generation is ready to follow
- Young people: By 2050, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure
- Food: By 2030, everyone eats well every day with nutritious, affordable, sustainable food
- Estates and neighbourhoods: By 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity⁸⁴

These areas of focus and ambitious set of missions followed an extensive community consultation process featuring a citizens assembly, which fed into Camden 2025⁸⁵, a precursor to the above strategy. The Camden example displays the importance of elevating community voices as a key part of establishing a mission-led approach. Research has also been undertaken to establish the use of a mission-aligned community wealth fund as a means to align investment and procurement spend to community established goals and public purpose⁸⁶.

Some of the outputs from the mission-led process to date include:

- ‘An 80% decrease in young people being remanded into custody and a decrease in youth victims of knife crime’
- ‘The Council’ supported ‘local businesses and high streets through the pandemic, making over 22,300 grant payments at a value of almost £150m, as well as providing advice on how to work safely’
- ‘The Council has invested £3.2m each year in Camden’s voluntary and community sector, and a further £1m per year in advice partners’
- ‘Camden’s ‘community conversations’ programme has ensured the lived experience of residents continues to influence the development of our neighbourhood-based approach to community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour’
- ‘The Council has built 38 new affordable extra care flats with a range of shared facilities’
- ‘The Council has prevented 633 families and 1,184 single people from becoming homeless since April 2018, and supported 492 families into settled private rented homes (as of October 2021).’
- ‘The Council has switched corporate and school buildings to 100% renewable energy, and 90% of streetlamps have been switched to energy efficient LEDs.’⁸⁷

These are but a few of the examples of programmes, projects and outputs from a mission-aligned strategy, informed by a citizens assembly process. We Make Camden also publish details of their varied funded projects⁸⁸. Whilst the Camden Council example is still being delivered, it is notable that their mission-led approach has led to tangible policy outcomes and achievements.

International and Supranational examples

Prof. Mazzucato has undertaken research on innovation-driven, inclusive and sustainable growth in a Brazilian context⁸⁹. The subsequent report examines the potential for a mission-aligned approach in order to transform the nation’s economy and tackle social, environmental and economic challenges. The report recommends the setting of ‘clear, centrally governed missions’ that require cross-sector investment and collaboration, which are oriented around tackling said national challenges (p.4). The report has important lessons for how national governments can seek to transform their economy in a sustainable and just way, importantly, this means acknowledging the key role of the state in directing investment and innovation. The report also established that aiming for economic growth as a mission in and of itself is inadequate, stating that ‘growth should not be treated as an ex-ante target of economic policy, but rather as an outcome of well-structured missions’ (p.12).

A further example of a mission-led policy approach, comes from the Swedish Government’s Transforming School Meals programme⁹⁰. The mission was to ensure that ‘every child in Sweden eats sustainable and

good school food'.⁹¹ The approach aligned to the aim to become the first fossil-free welfare nation whilst enhancing wellbeing. The Swedish National Food Agency, with local government support, acted to transform the landscape of public procurement of food supporting suppliers to provide nutritious, seasonal and locally grown food. In coordinating action around this mission, the school meal was used as a broader opportunity to create change to the food system, and helping to set eating behaviours of children throughout their life. This is a good example of a clear mission-driven approach which has led to broad long-term cross-cutting benefits. A similar approach has also taken place in Swedish regions, notably in Malmö⁹². Initial indications on whether the mission-led approach has been successful suggest that the mission-led approach has enabled collaboration between disparate actors on concrete pathways for maximising impact against overarching goals - a position of strength on which to build nation-wide systemic change from⁹³. Whether this will lead to the mission being successful in the long-term is yet to be determined.

A mission-led approach has also been adopted by supranational bodies. The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, for example, sets grand 'global goals' to the world, including:

- 'No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Good health and well-being
- Decent work and economic growth
- Climate action'⁹⁴

Vitality, the goals are broken down into tangible steps to achieve them, with targets, publications and actions underpinning delivery⁹⁵.

The mission-led approach was also applied to the development of the European Commission's Horizon programme for research and innovation. The report, authored by Mazzucato⁹⁶, applies mission-led principles to tackle major challenges that necessitate innovative research and development approaches to solve. This strategy attempts to 'answer the critical question of how to direct innovation to solve the pressing global challenges of our time,' with the aim of tackling global challenges 'by transforming them into concrete, measurable, and most importantly, achievable missions'.⁹⁷

The report highlighted some example missions for the future, such as:

- 100 carbon neutral cities by 2030
- A plastic free ocean
- Decreasing the burden of dementia⁹⁸

The mission-oriented approach highlighted the potential for pan-Europe collaboration on tackling major challenges, whilst ensuring the continent remains competitive with major global economies, such as the United States and China.

An initial review of the mission-led Horizon programme suggested that the programme is 'on track to achieve their ambitious goals by 2030'⁹⁹.

The above examples evidence that mission-driven principles have been established across the globe and are continuing to inform the delivery of a set of progressive and ambitious policy agendas related to the key challenges

facing nations. Importantly, the approach has been put in place in a number of different contexts, to inform innovation and industrial strategies, as well as being used as a framework for defining a government's priorities. That mission-led government approaches have been practically applied by different levels of government, from local to supranational, indicates the ability for the devolved government in Wales to apply the theory.

That mission-led government principles are being taken forward by political parties seeking to tackle major policy challenges at a UK level would also enable Welsh Government to learn from best practice from neighbouring nations and central government alike. With a UK Labour Government now starting to deliver their priorities based on a mission-led approach, this could lead to complimentary joint learning as well as opportunities for alignment in key areas, such as renewable energy generation or economic development principles.

It is also clear from this analysis that there is no one set way of undertaking a mission-led approach. For each nation, delivery looks different.

Recent application in Wales

Some recent Welsh Government policy strategies have already adopted mission-oriented rhetoric in order to articulate policy priorities and organise delivery principles, highlighting an ongoing interest in Wales in the mission-driven concept. I will unpick these applications below, exploring the benefits of the approach and explaining that, whilst these fall short of the cross-governmental embedding of a mission-led approach, they provide important lessons to inform any future strategy.

Firstly, it is important to recognise that a number of policy outcomes in Wales are reserved to Westminster. As such, the Welsh Labour Manifesto for the UK General Election¹⁰⁰ mirrored the missions of the party at a UK level. Whilst it is welcome that the manifesto features UK Government policy intention in a Welsh context, the document speaks to the importance of devolved government in Wales needing to set its own set of priorities and missions.

The key applications of a mission-led approach in Wales relates to two policy strategies, namely the Economic Mission¹⁰¹ and the Innovation Strategy for Wales¹⁰² (although other strategies also mention mission rhetoric, including the Education Strategy¹⁰³).

1. Welsh Government's Economic Mission

The Economic Mission for Wales was published in late 2023, under then-Economy Minister, Vaughan Gething (who would, of course go on to become First Minister of Wales, with some principles carried over into his leadership manifesto¹⁰⁴). This mission-led approach to economic policy grew, in part out of Covid-19 reconstruction efforts from Welsh Government¹⁰⁵, which preceded the *Economic Mission*.

Taking the 'economic mission' first, it is unclear what the overarching mission is. Overall improvement in Wales' economic outcomes is thus portrayed as a mission in and of itself. To achieve this broad goal, the strategy sets out four national economic priorities:

- A just transition and green prosperity
- A platform for young people, fair work, skills and success
- Stronger partnerships for stronger regions and our everyday economy
- Investing for growth

Whilst these priorities are worthy areas for action, they do not constitute missions in their ambition. The strategy itself does, however, represent a ‘whole government commitment,’ with details laid out for how diverse policy areas such as transport, net zero, skills, research and development, construction and social partnership all have a role to play in Wales’ economic mission. The lack of tangible policy targets, or indeed ways to accurately measure their delivery, inhibits the document as anything beyond a statement of intention (which is not to dismiss it, but merely contextualise it). Additionally, it is proposed later in the document that economic missions should sit under a cross-governmental set of missions. In doing so, the economy portfolio and part of government should be a part of a broader mission-led approach and strategy in Wales, contributing within its remit against a pan-government, jointly-owned set of priorities.

The economic mission strategy does, however, place an emphasis on the importance of setting strategic priorities which provide a framework for tackling economic challenges. As such and although not a guide for implementation, the document shows the interest in mission-led delivery models to policy-making in a Welsh context.

2. Wales Innovates

The innovation strategy, *Wales Innovates*,¹⁰⁶ is another strategy created under Vaughan Gething, in his time as Economy Minister for Wales. It states that:

‘... the goal of this Strategy is to point the way to a different approach to innovation in the future. If we can’t compete in everything, we can adopt a mission-based attitude.’ (p.2).

Again, this document takes a mission-led approach, with a delivery plan¹⁰⁷ accompanying the strategy which notes the ‘goals, actions, milestones and measurements’ it wishes to achieve with the strategy¹⁰⁸. Mission areas sit across education, economy, health and wellbeing, and climate and nature. It is worth stating that, at time of writing, no update has been made on actions delivered against the delivery plan.

Yet, the strategy brought some criticism for, whilst providing a clear vision, failing to suggest ‘anything genuinely substantive - let alone potentially transformative,’ especially regarding the practical importance of adequately supporting the key role of universities in the nation’s innovation ecosystem¹⁰⁹. Another academic perspective also noted that whilst the strategy ‘displays some interesting approaches.... there is a significant distance to go in making Wales innovation system more “functional”¹¹⁰. As such, the strategy says a lot of the right things, but fails to deliver the means to achieve transformative change to turbocharge Wales’ innovation sector.

Despite the lack of clearly defined missions and the underpinning delivery mechanisms, the two aforementioned examples clearly demonstrate Welsh Government’s interest in a mission-led strategic approach to tackling challenges.

Nonetheless, this work does, however, use the rhetoric of mission-driven government towards less tangible and cross-cutting goals. These do not represent an approach which transcends one specific sector, representing a cross-governmental transformation in delivery. That it has, to date, been difficult to ascertain the tangible difference that a missions approach, as set out in *Wales Innovates*, has had on Wales' innovation sector speaks, once again to a potential delivery gap.

3. Cymru Can

The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales' 2023 *Cymru Can* strategy also utilises 'missions' to prioritise five goals for the Commissioner's seven year term¹¹¹. *Cymru Can* established the following as cross-organisational missions:

Mission 1: Implementation and impact:

'We will make it our mission to ensure the Well-being of Future Generations Act is applied effectively and with ambition in a way that improves the lives of the people of Wales now and in the future' (p.14).

Mission 2: Climate and Nature:

'We will make it our mission to ensure all Welsh public bodies achieve their net zero and nature positive goals by 2030. As a result, public bodies are leading action on climate change including adaptation, in a way that reduces inequalities and maximises the benefits to people and communities across Wales.' (p. 23)

Mission 3: Health and Wellbeing:

'We will make it our mission to facilitate a transformation in the way we keep people healthy, with a greater focus on prevention and the long term. As a result, public bodies are working together to tackle the root causes of ill health and address health inequalities.' (p.28)

Mission 4: Culture and Welsh language:

'We will make it our mission to reinforce the positive impact of cultural well-being. As a result, public bodies are making the urgent changes needed to promote culture and creativity, enhance the fabric of communities and promote multiculturalism and the Welsh language.' (32).

Mission 5: A well-being economy:

'We will make it our mission to help transition Wales to an economy that puts people and planet first. As a result, governments at all levels, businesses, and communities, are making this happen' (p.38)¹¹².

The *Cymru Can* strategy clearly aligns missions to the remit of the Commissioner and what they are able to contribute towards, with a number speaking directly to public sector transformation (in the context of the Office's statutory role in delivering public sector reform and guidance). They do not necessarily speak to broader goals, but this is unsurprising given the elements that the Commissioner has control over and is able to influence (indeed, at time of writing, 48 public bodies fall under the remit of the Act¹¹³) as well as the lack of specificity provided in the underpinning legislation itself. The strategy provides a strong basis for conceiving of a mission-led approach, in the context of a globally-unique Welsh government body. I will come back to this example later in the report, to explore the role of the Well-being of Future Generations Act as a unifying vision and structure to build mission-driven government principles in Wales.

Each of the above examples display that mission-led thinking has been considered and applied in Wales and put to practise against individual strategies by Welsh Government and against a specific remit by the Future Generations Commissioner. Such examples are useful in creating the conditions to further explore why mission-led government, as a far broader approach, can be implemented in Wales, a subject revisited later in the report.

Conclusion

The examples explored above suggest that mission-led approaches can lead to ambitious and citizen-led policymaking, which attempt to meaningfully engage with the wicked challenges facing governments at all levels.

They also display that, whilst mission-led strategies to date have helped governments and public bodies to prioritise certain policy areas, there are risks that taking such an approach can lead to ‘mission washing,’ that is, merely using the rhetoric of mission-led policies, rather than unleashing their transformative potential. This is a risk in a Welsh context, where delivery gaps against policy are widespread.

Finally, it is worth stating that much mission-led policy initiatives are in their infancy, with tangible policy impacts waiting to be determined. The setting of missions is, of course, an attempt to create longer term targets, but it is still the case that this is a fledgling policy field (albeit one which builds on the back of decades of thinking on effective public policy approaches).

Why would a mission-led approach work for Wales?

Missions can give a government a focus and purpose. They enable government to set priorities and provide direction for other stakeholders, including businesses, individuals, the public and third sectors. Missions help to give a government an overarching purpose, in doing so raising a collective sense of aspiration to achieving a set of ambitious, but realistic long-term goals. Importantly, this means defining what government will, and equally importantly, *won't* be prioritising. Providing long-term institutional clarity of purpose will help tackle the churn of short-term policy fixes that has been present in Wales since devolution.

Framing the work of government against these sets of challenges can act to root the government's activities in the lived experiences of people in Wales. Whilst it is clear that most people in Wales support devolution¹¹⁴, political disengagement in Wales remains high. It is, therefore, even more important that our devolved government actively prioritise the issues which have a significant impact on the living standards and wellbeing of people in Wales. Creating missions can thus help improve accountability whilst re-engaging people with the democratic process. This is especially pertinent to the work of a devolved government, in a nation where many rely on UK-based media platforms for their news consumption.¹¹⁵

A mission-led approach thus would enable Welsh Government to set the direction and take an active role in areas of national interest. This should lead to decisions around purpose, transcending fixing market failures and inefficiencies, prompting government not to ask 'what is the lowest cost?' but 'what takes us in the right direction?'¹¹⁶. This is especially relevant given the challenges to Welsh Government's budget¹¹⁷.

Wicked problems and systemic challenges

A number of Wales' challenges can be identified as 'wicked problems', including adapting and mitigating climate change, widespread poverty and deprivation and a health service struggling to meet ever-rising needs. Arguably Wales' challenges are so profound that a reset in how government in Wales is conducted is urgently required.

At the heart of a mission-led approach to government is the need to focus on tackling the so-called 'grand challenges' that governments in the 21st century must overcome¹¹⁸. Challenges such as climate change, ageing populations, increasingly finite resources and tackling economic and social inequalities are present in many nations, yet present themselves in different forms.

From this lens, Wales' challenges can certainly be understood as *grand* and *wicked*. Put simply, the scale of challenges Wales faces necessitates an ambitious strategy which is focussed on delivering better outcomes.

As a result, there is an urgent need for government structures to enable ambition and meet the requirements to tackle these systemic and long-term challenges. Missions, as a guiding principle, can help to engender much-needed cultural change to Welsh Government departments as well as wider stakeholders, such as local government, CJsCs and other public bodies. Indeed, mission-led policies and government expressly aim to

‘embed public purpose and direction,’ in a manner which increases confidence to the public sector ‘that their work is of importance to society’¹¹⁹(p.5).

Taking a mission-led approach can help Welsh Government to re-engage with the challenges that impact everyday life in Wales, and to re-orientate their energy towards fixing them.

Closing the delivery gap

There is a well-established recognition that in Wales, there is a significant gap between generally strong, progressive policy and legislation and poor performance and delivery. This is related to the above question of Wales’ grand challenges: the challenges highlighted above are not new, they are well known to people in Wales, yet progress on fixing them has proven ineffectual.

The former Future Generations Commissioner Sophie Howe described this in her 2020 Future Generations Report¹²⁰:

‘There is an implementation gap between the aspiration set out by Welsh Government in policy and legislation and their commitment to delivery on the ground’ ... ‘While new policies and legislation are showing promise, Welsh Government have an overly optimistic view of what it takes to implement these. As well as resourcing the introduction of legislation, policy and guidance, Welsh Government need to fund their implementation, including delivery capability, awareness raising, training and robust monitoring’ (p.13)

It is hard to argue that further progress on delivery has been made in the period since.

Furthermore, in their recent comprehensive analysis¹²¹ of regional economic development policy in Wales post-devolution, Bradbury and Davies note that their research:

‘...reveals a systemic problem of Welsh Government focusing on policy and legislation rather than implementation, leading to a lack of delivery on original ambitions’ (p.10).

Their analysis also finds that:

‘... there appears to be a substantial policy making-implementation gap in Wales, replicating a similar problem at a UK level’ (p.25)

They state that there is a ‘policy presumption’:

‘This is the belief that issuing policy statement and passing legislation is sufficient to bring about change and does not require extensive engagement with citizens in its formulation and implementation’ ... ‘The consequence is that what are often leading-edge and laudable policy aspirations are followed by disappointing outcomes’ (p.25)

Bradbury and Davies’ analysis and that of the former Future Generations Commissioner are illustrative of the problem of the delivery-or-implementation gap in Wales. Examples of where this can be seen include transport policy, renewable energy policy, and policies to improve health outcomes, as well as regional economic

development policy. Each of these have significant competencies devolved to Wales, and Welsh Government has progressively had even more competence and responsibility for delivering over the last 25 years.

As a result of this need to deliver, it is clearly an area that the Welsh Labour Party, leaders of every post-devolution Welsh Government, are keen to focus on. In particular, such an approach is aligned to the ‘securomics’ model espoused by UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves, with Welsh Labour appearing keen to transition to supply-side interventions to tackling economic challenges, which underpin many further challenges (such as inequality, poorer public services and healthcare) by embracing a productivist approach¹²². A focus on the tangible delivery of policy, and the role that active government can play in delivering better outcomes is at the forefront of Welsh Government’s agenda in the build up to the Senedd election in 2026.

A mission-led approach, then, fits into this ongoing debate in Wales around improving the ability of Welsh Government to implement and deliver a generally positive set of policies. Indeed a mission-led government approach is aimed at doing precisely this, creating the conditions for government to create ambitious, long-term policy interventions which result in impact.

Well-being of Future Generations Act – entrenching long-term decision making

One of the key principles of mission-driven government is to ‘focus on the long term.’¹²³ Long-term thinking is more established in the policy landscape in Wales than in most other nations, with the Well-being of Future Generations Act providing a guiding set of principles for long-termist and integrated policy and planning.

Wales is proud to be the first nation in the world to legislate in the interests of future generations. This commitment to enshrining long-term decision making processes could form a profound part of the nations’ identity going forward, with Wales generally embracing this role as globally leading in this space¹²⁴.

It is also pertinent that the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act came out as an effort to incorporate Sustainable Development Goals in a Welsh context. This further shows the strategic fit with a mission-led approach, given that the UN Sustainable Development Goals can be read as missions. Indeed, the UN’s 17 Sustainable Goals use a mission-led approach¹²⁵. Likewise, the Act sets out what is meant by the term ‘sustainable development’ in a Welsh context:

‘the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principles, aimed at achieving the well-being goals’¹²⁶.

The Act and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner has also enabled Wales to act as an important example in a growing international conversation around mainstreaming international sustainable development goals in a national context. This is evident recently in the Commissioner’s submission to the UN Protocol for Future Generations¹²⁷. Long-term decision making in the interests of future generations is therefore a key aspect of Wales’ internal and external political identity.

Furthermore, the Future Generations Act is an articulation of a long-term vision for the nation, its focus and

remit the result of a national conversation, *The Wales We Want*¹²⁸. The outreach and engagement project reached 6,574 individuals, who took part in over 100 conversations with over 1000 responses, all aimed at providing a vision from which the Act could be developed. The subsequent report¹²⁹, which analysed the findings from the engagement process, led directly into the Act. This vision for Wales is therefore *of and for* the people of Wales, building on a deliberative democratic mode of co-creation.

The establishment of the National Wellbeing Indicators¹³⁰ as an attempt to measure progress against well-being goals also displays the Welsh approach to considering what really matters to people's lives. These indicators put into practice measurement on progress against the descriptions of the goals set out in the Act¹³¹. This broadness in approach further displays the way that, in Wales, there is a decent conception of what better wellbeing means to people.

This in-depth thinking about the long-term direction of the nation means much of the conceptions about major challenges has, to an extent, already commenced. This is a benefit for a Welsh Government looking to establish a mission-led approach.

Whilst some seek immediate impact from the Future Generations Act and Office, and there is evidence that Wales, as a nation, is failing to make progress on a number of wellbeing goals¹³², progress has certainly been made on transforming the behaviour of the public sector. Such impact is inherently a long-term endeavour, which isn't to say that continued critique isn't necessary, but to acknowledge that long-term behavioural change needed to shift delivery of public services is a major challenge. Too often, though, in recent years, impact has been driven by committed individuals rather than through following a deliberate strategic direction.

The Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales may have a role to play in supporting the transition to a mission-driven strategy (within its remit of shaping public bodies delivery), with a wealth of learning and practical experience of applying such approaches.

The Future Generations Commissioner's latest seven-year strategy *Cymru Can*¹³³ represents a clear articulation of areas for priority action as we head to 2030. The report, the result of an engagement and collaboration stage, identifies areas to focus on according to people across Wales.

Indeed, the strategy itself takes a mission-led approach with specific overall missions for the below areas: Implementation and impact (of the Act):

- Climate and nature
- Health and well-being
- Culture and Welsh language
- A Well-being Economy

Importantly, this mission-led strategy has led to managing resources, personnel and structuring their team based on these five mission-areas. For example, each mission has high level of ownership from team members¹³⁴, and provides the structure of delivery. Each mission is broken down into: the need for the mission, activity logged against the mission, outcomes from activity and overall impact.

The transition to a mission-led approach to government in Wales will therefore be building on the back

of a decades long national policy conversation about integrating long-term decision making processes and governance. A Welsh Government looking to embed a mission-led approach can build off of this conversation as well as the practical application of such an approach by the Future Generations Commissioner's office (albeit in different circumstances and with radically different powers).

A distinctly-Welsh approach - an opportunity?

Wales has a proud history of progressive policy-making. The home of the cooperative movement, birthplace of the NHS, and home to a radical reformist political tradition. A Welsh Government looking to write the next chapter in this tradition will be building on a unique history of cooperation, ambition, universalism and progressive values.

In the devolved era, Welsh Government has shown substantial ambition in its policymaking, given its (reducing) constraints regarding powers and responsibilities. Indeed, over recent years, government in Wales has shown the ability to diverge from a broader UK policy context in progressive ways. Some examples of ambitious and progressive policies include the introduction of a levy on single-use plastic bags, introducing presumed consent for organ donation, continuing to offer free prescriptions, introducing votes at 16, taking private profit out of the care system, creating an office for future generations, transforming the priorities of the transport system, a large scale Universal Basic Income pilot for care leavers and turbocharging recycling rates. This non-exclusive list shows what devolved government is capable of delivering and shows what a small, ambitious nation can achieve. (Although that is not to say that external factors to Welsh Government do not (and have not) heavily influence policy and delivery¹³⁵).

Over recent years, Welsh Government have looked to entrench a 'Team Wales' approach to policy-making and delivery¹³⁶ and has put forward legislation attesting to their commitment to working effectively with partners of all kinds, whether they be the third sector, the private sector, local authorities or trade unions. The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act seeks to encourage partnership working in order to deliver better public services and improve wellbeing¹³⁷. That the value of collaboration and partnership working is already established, not least in legislation, but also in ways of working, is a clear benefit when attempting to establish a mission-led approach to government. Welsh Government can look to build on existing fora and relationships in order to deliver a transformative, and long-term policy agenda.

When undertaking ambitious policy since devolution, the Welsh Government approach has often mirrored that of a mission-led principle. A good example of this is the complete transformation of recycling rates in Wales over the last two decades.

At the dawn of devolution in 1997 Wales recycling rates were 'around 9%', yet, today they stand at 59%, representing the second best performance in the world¹³⁸. Former Welsh Government Minister Lee Waters explained how this transformation took place¹³⁹:

'This was achieved by setting a vision for Wales to be a 'Zero Waste nation' where all waste is reused or recycled. That was underpinned by a long-term strategy [Towards Zero Waste¹⁴⁰] with legal targets for municipalities (with financial penalties if the targets were missed; behaviour change initiatives, as well as investment in infrastructure as part of a staged plan for change.'

Waters concludes that:

‘Progress in recycling shows that with a strategy, a plan, investment in the things needed to make change possible, along with incentives and disincentives does work.’

In its recycling policy, the then Welsh Government set out on an ambitious journey, and then set about creating a long-term, consistent strategy to achieve it. Cross-sector collaboration was required in order to create change, with policies such as setting statutory recycling rates, encouraging behaviour change in households and businesses, providing sustained investment and banning single-use plastics all helping to stimulate wide scale change¹⁴¹.

Welsh Government’s recycling journey is a good example of the promise of a mission-driven approach to address key challenges, and suggests a compatibility between this approach and Wales as a distinct policy and polity.

There is therefore much learning to be made from Wales in terms of conceiving of ambitious and progressive policy post-devolution. A Welsh Government looking to implement a mission-driven government approach has this record to build upon. It’s important to acknowledge that, as Nesta attest: ‘there’s no blueprint for mission-driven government’ and ‘no single way of doing missions¹⁴².’ As such, there is a positive base of ambitious goals, policy and case studies to draw from in developing a mission-led approach to governing in a devolved context. This recent history is a significant advantage, and further displays the synergy between mission-driven government and Wales.

Political Conditions

Generally speaking, politics in Wales has been more stable than in our neighbours at a UK level. Ministers, in general, see out their mandates of typically over five years and government priorities largely stay the same at the beginning of a Senedd term as at the end. Such relatively stable conditions, alongside consistent political leadership present in Wales could enhance the effectiveness of a mission-driven approach. Whilst 2024 has been a time of unprecedented political fracture in the Welsh Labour party, with three First Ministers in a year, stability has been the general state of play.

Whilst there may appear to be something inherently party political in setting missions for government, there is no reason why taking such an approach should be dominated by any one particular party. Indeed, a sense of a long-term, missions-based focus could set the conditions for more collaborative political discourse.

To date, Wales’ devolution story has been one of necessary partnership, cooperation and collaboration. Whilst the Labour Party in Wales is the most successful electoral force in the democratic world (according to the then First Minister¹⁴³) they have never won a majority in the Senedd. As a result, coalitions, cooperation and cross-party working have been vital elements in securing majorities and governing.

Senedd reform will soon increase the number of Senedd Members by over 50% and a move to a more proportional voting system¹⁴⁴, and the need for parties to work in constructive partnership to achieve joint goals is rising. Additionally, at time of writing polls suggest a close election in 2026 as well as substantial voter churn¹⁴⁵.

As partnership working between parties is likely to be key in the makeup of the next Welsh Government, there is a political opportunity for parties to unite behind a set of comprehensive missions to guide national renewal and the tackling of systemic challenges. A mission-driven approach fits with current, and medium term, political conditions in Wales.

Wales' Devolution Journey – delivering on powers and raising ambition?

Over the past 25 years, Wales has charted a unique course in its devolution journey. This has presented challenges, and the current settlement between the UK and Welsh Governments is clearly not closed, remaining unfit for purpose in many areas. The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales has established the ineffectiveness of Wales' devolution settlement more broadly, pointing out areas which require substantial reform, such as transport, justice and energy, amongst others¹⁴⁶.

Relevant and warranted concerns around the suitability of Wales' devolution settlement, have, however, taken *some* focus away from the importance of delivering the maximum out of the powers that government in Wales *does* have. As such, with limited apparent political support in the current UK Government for any revolutionary reform to the settlement between Wales and the UK, there is a need to refocus on delivering with what powers Wales currently has.

That does not mean ignoring the challenges with the current settlement, but acknowledging what Wales has control over and what it doesn't. For example, Welsh Government's well-placed aspiration to be a 'nation of sanctuary'¹⁴⁷ for those seeking refuge and asylum, means little without the levers to make much tangible impact on immigration, foreign affairs policy or underlying funding arrangements.

Taking a mission-led approach, setting direction through an ambitious and long-term set of policy challenges, could help to shift this narrative on its head. Effectively implementing a mission-led model at Welsh Government level means clearly understanding and articulating what is truly within devolved competency to deliver. This could act to refocus Welsh Government towards maximising impact with existing powers, whilst strongly calling for further powers if they inhibit progress against missions.

Bradbury and Davies' research supports the notion that cultural constraints in Wales' polity have contributed to lowering the effective implementation and delivery of policy and thus devolved governance, which has neglected to 'develop robust approaches to implementation and delivery, as well as governance and accountability'.¹⁴⁸ They note that this represents a 'political culture that is likely to dominate whatever the constitutional position of Wales'. They highlight how Wales' existing devolved powers are significant, and that policy levers and effective spending by devolved government, over education, transport and health can set the conditions for long term improvement to wellbeing and economic outcomes. That Welsh Government's existing suite of powers and responsibilities enable the taking of a longer-term approach to policy, such as through re-allocating budgets towards preventative health interventions, again helps to reinforce the strategic fit with the long-term, outcomes-focussed mission-led strategy.

Such a conversation about achieving the largest benefit from existing powers also means embracing the limits of what devolved government is able to deliver. Former UK Deputy Cabinet Secretary Helen

MacNamara notes that 'mission driven government... is fundamentally about being honest about the limits of government'.¹⁴⁹ A mission-led approach, aligned to the powers and limitations of Welsh Government can therefore help to be honest about barriers to change (although this is not always a given), whilst pushing these powers to deliver maximum impact for people in Wales. Collaborating with UK Government on areas of shared responsibility will of course continue to be a vitally important endeavour, it should not, however, hinder government in Wales from setting its own ambitious set of priorities.

All of this is not an attempt to gloss over the considerable medium-term challenges that the Welsh Government budget, and by extension, that of local government and public services in Wales face. Welsh Government, and all public services, are currently attempting to pull off a magic trick - achieving more with less. This cannot be allowed to continue, Welsh Government cannot and should not try to do *a bit of everything*. Instead, Wales, a small nation, should attempt to be more targeted about what it wants to achieve, with whom and how. A mission-oriented approach could help to establish key priorities and mobilise action and investment around those missions which can lead to wellbeing benefits. Only by focussing on key challenges, directing energy, resource and commitment over a longer period of time can Government in Wales truly begin to tackle some of its persistent challenges.

Conclusion

The above non-exhaustive list highlights the strategic fit between a mission-led approach to government and the Welsh political and policy landscape post-devolution. This analysis provides an objective perspective of why mainstreaming mission-led government theory can help to accelerate delivery of impactful policy and investment. The above elements articulate why government in Wales stands at a significant moment of opportunity to transform how government is conducted and reinvigorate the way our political structures address the long-term challenges the nation faces.

What missions for Wales?

With the theory of mission-driven government explained, its strategic fit with government in Wales established, this report now turns to how such an approach can be embedded and implemented. This means first examining what missions Welsh Government could seek to focus on. Whilst this is a matter of political calculation, I make some suggestions below and explain why I think they would be suitable theoretical challenges in Wales that would shine a light on the role a mission-driven approach could play and why.

First and foremost, I do not consider myself the fountain of all knowledge on what Wales' most-pressing challenges are. Indeed the setting of appropriate missions for Wales should be co-created with both citizens and a number of societal partners, a point I will come back to when considering *how* Wales can move towards mission-driven government. The below is therefore an attempt to consider some areas that would be aided by taking a mission-led approach as well as an analysis of key policy challenges through a *missions* lens. It should be noted that the examples provided should not be considered as comprehensive overview, but merely a brief description of potential missions and a display of how these examples can act to catalyse action and progress.

Key principles in setting missions

Missions need to provide clear objectives that can only be achieved through an aligned set of policy interventions.

Mazzucato and Dibb lay out five criteria for developing effective missions:¹⁵⁰

- 'Be bold - inspirational with wide societal relevance'
- 'Set a clear direction - targeted, measurable and time-bound'
- 'Be ambitious but realistic'
- 'Encourage cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, and cross-actor innovation'
- 'Involve multiple, bottom-up solutions' (p.4).

Building on this, Mazzucato et al (2024) produce six principles for delivering mission-driven government in the UK:¹⁵¹

- 'Missions should set bold, audacious goals to provide a clear purpose and direction'
- 'Missions should focus on the long term'
- 'Missions should galvanise action across sectors and across society'
- 'Missions need active political management to build, grow and nurture a coalition of the willing'
- 'Missions should be based on a new approach to policy design'
- 'Missions should direct public and private investment in line with mission goals' (pp.7-10).

Beyond the above principles and steps, there are some other considerations around setting effective missions. One of which is that missions are not meant to be competitive in nature. As such, some of the UK Labour Government's missions do not fulfil this principle. In particular, the mission to have the fastest growing economy in the G7 is fundamentally flawed. This is because it relies on the decisions of others which cannot be controlled by the government setting the mission. Being comparative also means that hitting this target isn't inherently a cause of celebration and success in and of itself: say, if all G7 economies went into deep recession, then being the best of a bad situation doesn't help deliver economic benefit to people in the UK. There's also clearly an argument that growth as an indicator fails to acknowledge that growth has a direction.¹⁵² Subsequently, Mazzucato has criticised this specific mission in the media¹⁵³.

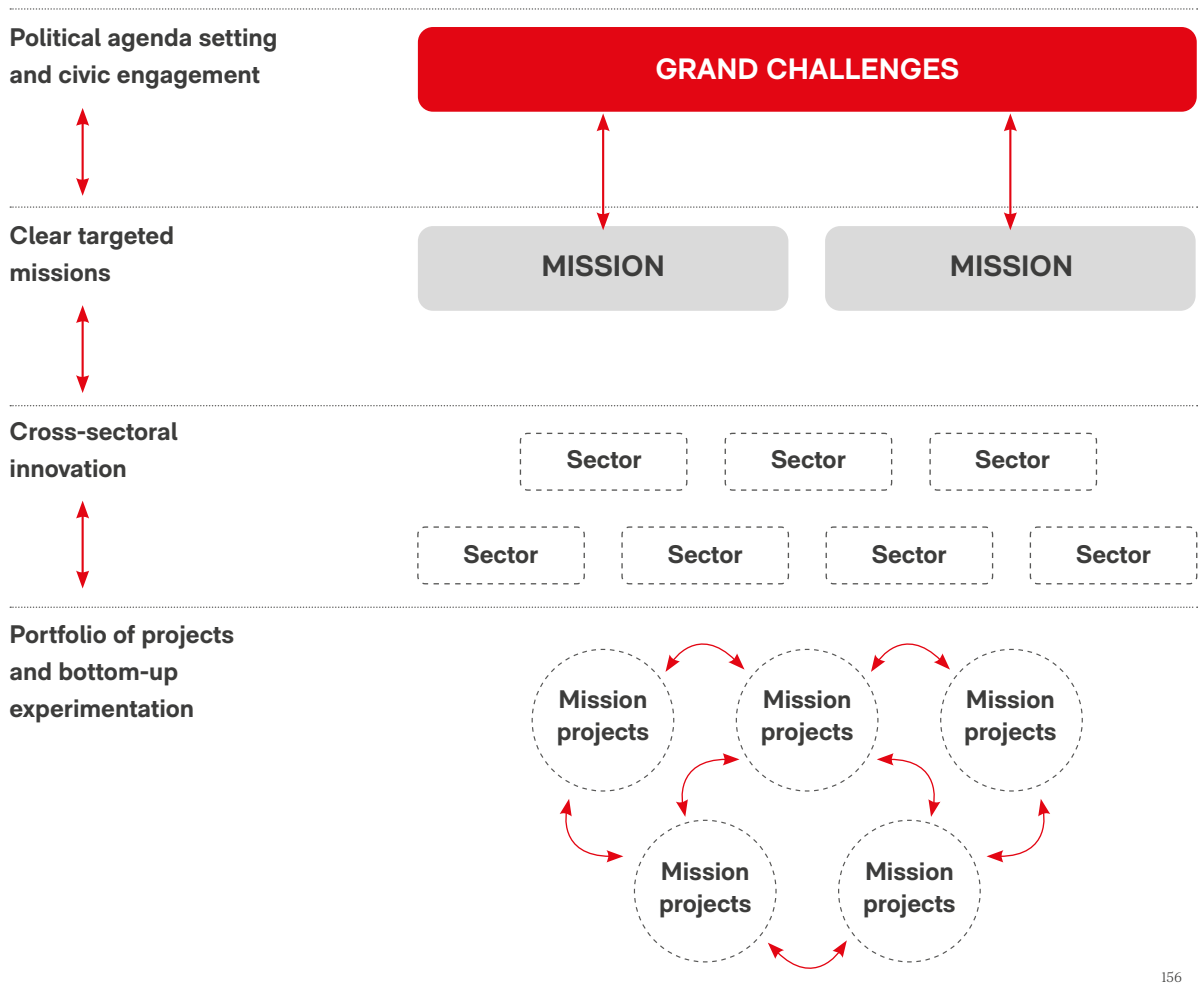
Related to this is the need to ensure that missions are deliverable by Welsh Government and other stakeholders. Within Wales' current constitutional settlement, this means setting missions which Welsh Government have the powers, responsibilities and policy levers to substantially influence. For example, there would be little worth in setting a mission based on immigration or foreign policy if these matters are reserved to Westminster. Of course, the devolution settlement is rarely as black and white as *fully devolved* or *fully reserved*. Indeed, much of Welsh Government's policy areas are reflections of the so-called jagged edge of devolution (as expressed by Wyn-Jones and Jones¹⁵⁴). Such a spread of powers will require an honest assessment of what is and isn't within the capability of Welsh Government to undertake, direct and coordinate. This should not act as a restraint on ambition, however, but instead create synergies between powers, responsibility and impact, opening the door to expanding what is possible for a devolved government to achieve when working strategically on key challenges.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act can provide some sense of clarity to the setting of some of these goals, the 7 wellbeing goals and the 5 ways of working articulating how policy should be developed, implemented and what vision for Wales they should be assessed against. Using the Act as a framing device for missions could be effective.

This section will attempt to build on these principles in order to come up with appropriate indicative missions on which to build a mission-led government approach at the devolved Welsh level.

Structuring missions

To illustrate their theory, Mazzucato and Dibb use the following *missions map*¹⁵⁵.

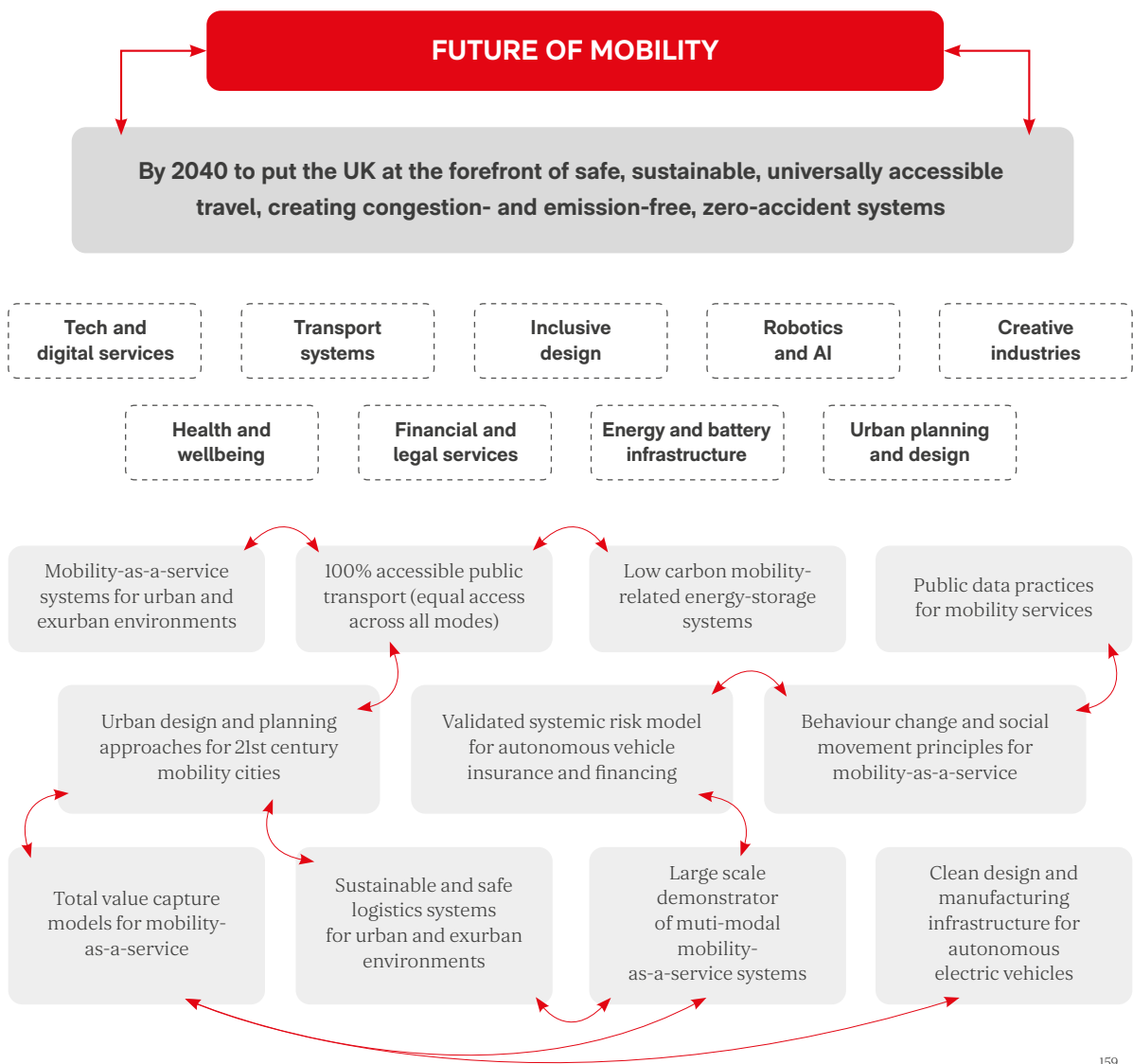


The above displays how the tackling of grand challenges sets the conditions for the coordination of action below, with missions providing the underlying focus of policy direction from government. Everything is built on solving a ‘wicked’ problem. This is then broken down into the relevant sectors that have to be meaningfully engaged in creating projects to meet a mission (remember, a mission-led approach reimagines the state as providing a path, or direction, for delivery).

Fig 1 displays how to practically break down a mission-led approach into distinct projects which government and partners can deliver.

Example missions

This model, or map, can be expressed more clearly when put in the context of an example mission. Mazzucato and Dib¹⁵⁷ use the example of the ‘Future of mobility’ grand challenge, set up as part of the prior UK Government’s 2017 Industrial Strategy White Paper¹⁵⁸ (but which was never put into action). This can be seen in the below chart:



The example mission further displays the broad and cross-sectoral nature of taking such an approach, whilst clearly articulating what a mission-led policy could look like.

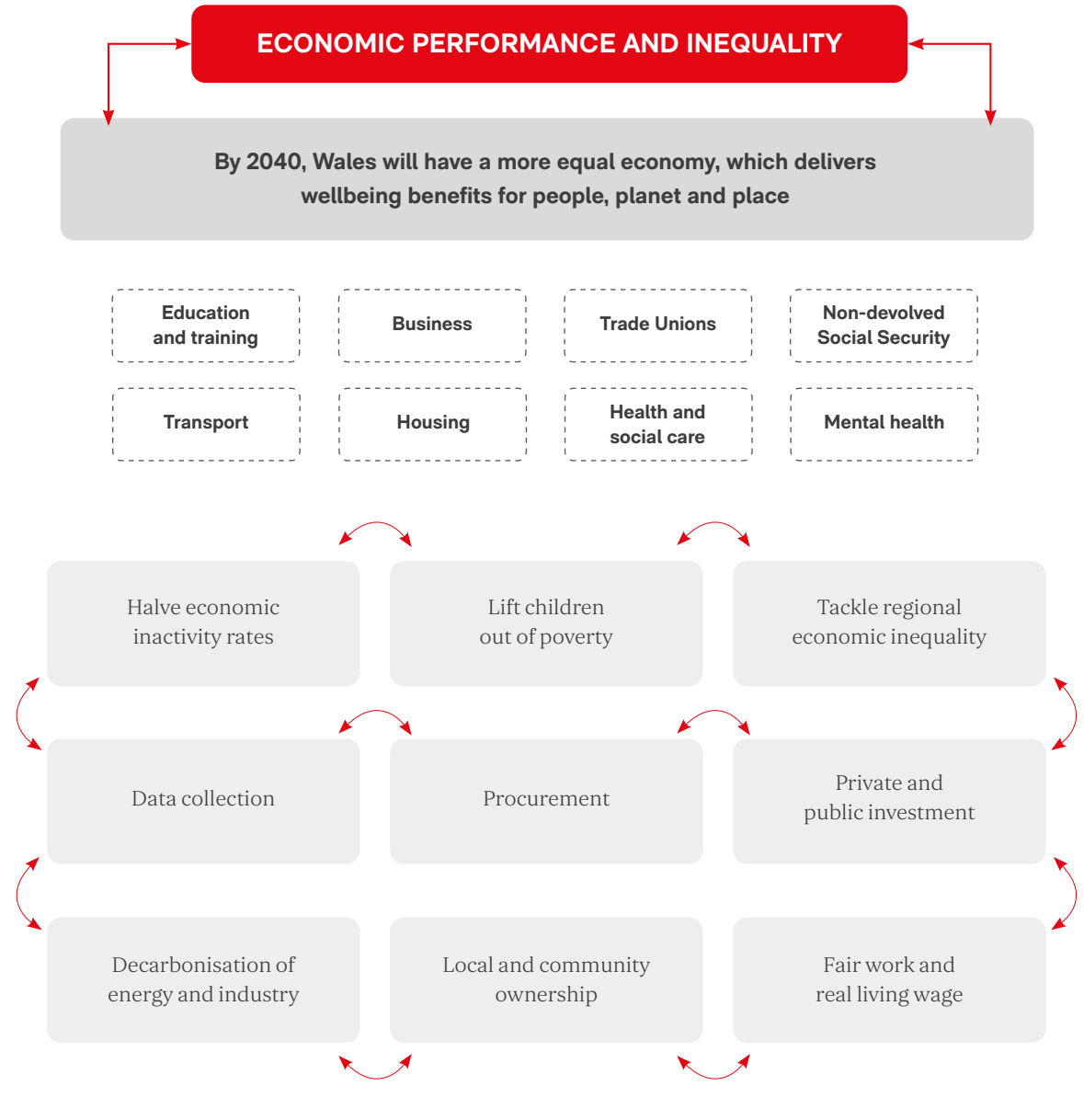
Indicative missions for Wales

Using the above examples, I will attempt to set a few indicative missions for Wales, as a means to display how the theory would work in a distinct Welsh context.

1. Economic performance and inequality

The challenge:

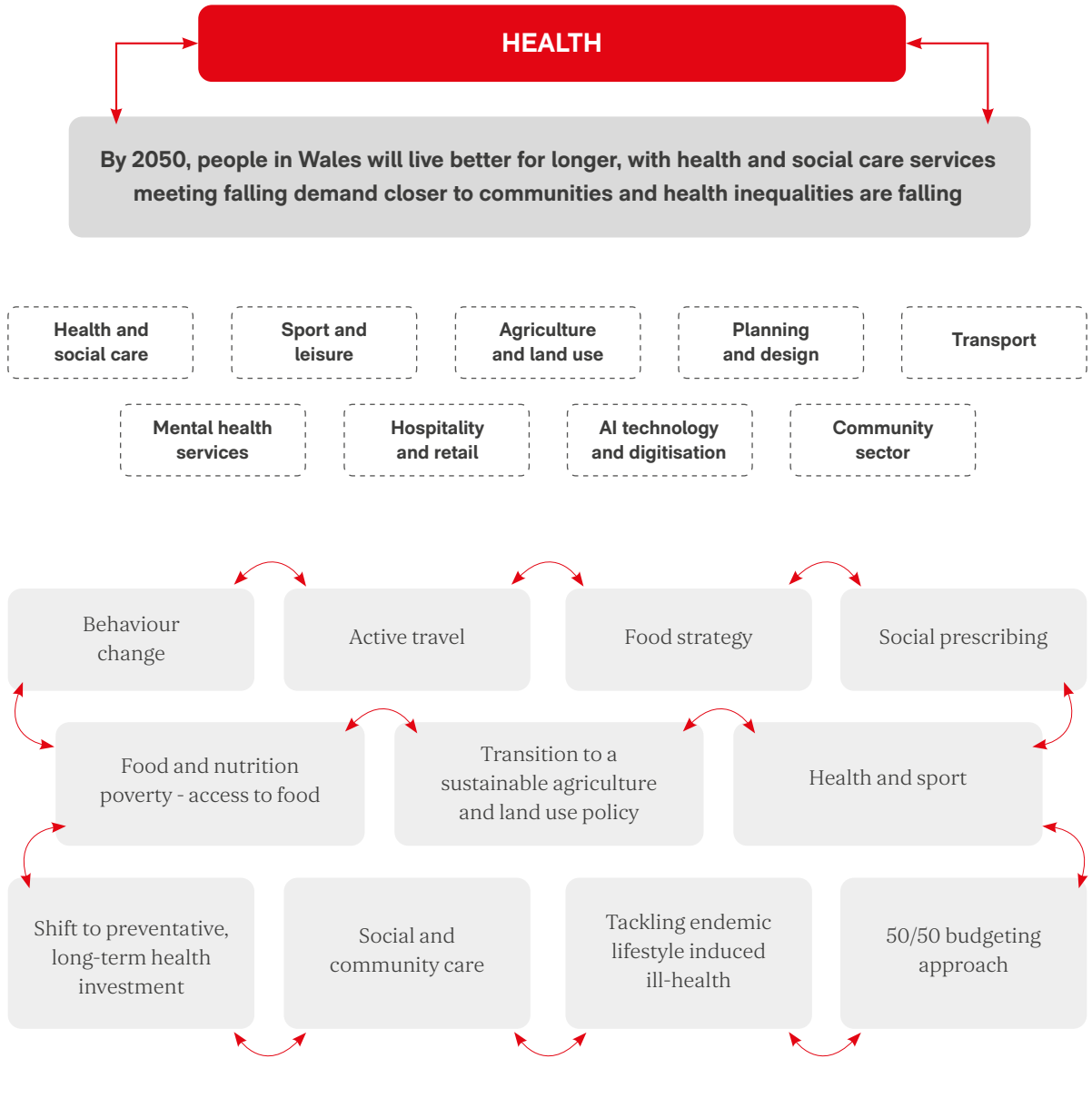
Wales sits as part of a stubbornly stagnant UK economy¹⁶⁰. Economic inactivity rates have persistently stayed around 20 percent¹⁶¹, employment is far below the UK rate¹⁶², 28 percent of children live in relative income poverty¹⁶³, the nation has a broadly persistently poorer performing economy compared to the rest of the UK (behind UK average and most UK regions and nations: as per productivity (GVA¹⁶⁴), GDP¹⁶⁵, gross disposable income per head¹⁶⁶), a regionally unequal economy within Wales¹⁶⁷ and poorer performance than regions of the UK in income, health and education¹⁶⁸¹⁶⁹. Furthermore, 21% of people in Wales live in relative income poverty, and both Wales and the UK are failing to transition to a net zero economy quickly enough¹⁷⁰ or adequately adapt for the already present impacts of climate change¹⁷¹. The economy as it stands is failing to deliver for far too many, with living standards failing to rise and a cost of living crisis seemingly now perpetual.



2. Health

The challenge:

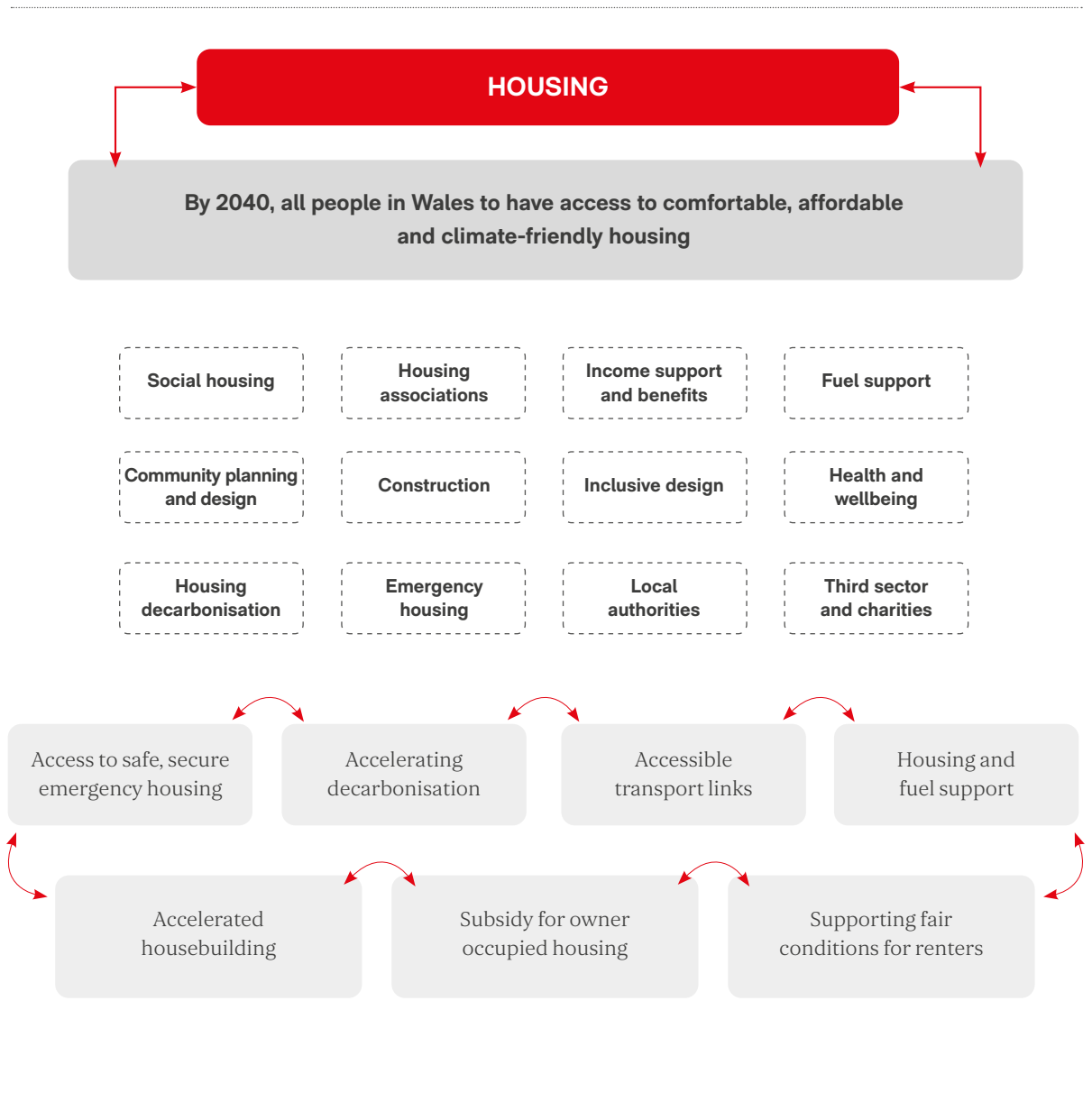
NHS waiting lists in Wales continue to grow to record levels¹⁷², growing inequalities in life expectancy alongside continually large inequalities in healthy life expectancy¹⁷³, inequalities in the number of avoidable deaths¹⁷⁴, just 37 percent of people in Wales are healthy weight, while 61 percent are overweight or obese¹⁷⁵ (Nesta Cymru estimates that a third of adults in Wales are obese¹⁷⁶) and the number of adults living with diabetes has grown by 40 percent from 2010 to 2022¹⁷⁷. With an ageing population¹⁷⁸ and an expected growth in the need for health services, there is a distinct need to reconsider how our health system delivers outcomes for people in Wales, transforming health services to a preventative system which extends healthy living standards and high wellbeing. With health and social services representing half of Welsh Government's budget¹⁷⁹, rising costs and need present significant pressures across government. This issue ties intrinsically into mission 1 on the economy, as economic inactivity due to sickness in Wales is significantly higher than the UK average, with better health offering to benefit the UK labour market and wages, but particularly so in Wales¹⁸⁰.



3. Housing

The challenge:

Wales has one of the oldest and least energy efficient housing stock in Europe¹⁸¹. Wales doesn't have enough homes for social rents for low-income households¹⁸² and Welsh Government are currently failing far too short of their commitment to building 20,000 social homes by 2026^{183 184}. Housing in Wales is also responsible for 21 percent of carbon emissions, with significant challenges around decarbonising a diverse range of dwelling types, ages and construction¹⁸⁵.



The above examples should help to flesh out theory into practical considerations of some specific missions. As highlighted previously, missions are not about the state providing a plan of action from the outset, but rather providing a sense of directing a host of other stakeholders to act in alignment with the overall challenge. Accordingly, Welsh Government, in the indicative missions noted above, cannot decide ahead of time what the appropriate suite of solutions may look like - this will take collaboration, shared learning and responsibility, and a long-term commitment to focusing on specific goals. As such, specific policy projects noted in the above should be taken as mere projections.

As is clear from the above examples, there are numerous policy programmes and initiatives which cut across different missions. For example, the need to tackle Wales' multiple health crises will have a significant impact on creating better economic conditions, not least in tackling economic inactivity. This is one of many examples which demonstrate the halo benefits of taking a mission-led approach.

Additionally, the examples highlight how tackling 'wicked' challenges and setting ambitious missions does not align with existing government ministerial boundaries. Any attempts to engender a mission-led approach in Wales will therefore require a complete transformation in how government and the Welsh civil service operates. A point that will be built upon in the next section of the report.

That the above missions have been chosen should come as no surprise. As outlined earlier in this report, the challenges that Wales faces are well established and are systemic in nature. Indeed, Nesta Cymru have suggested in prior work, that, on using missions to guide innovation policy in Wales, 'we might want to focus our ambitions on finding ways to rapidly and radically tackle the income inequality that leaves 30 percent of children in Wales in poverty, or the significant gaps in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest'¹⁸⁶ (p.13). A supplementary point is that there is clearly a role for citizen engagement exercises in establishing effective missions, and that as such, the above merely illustrate how such an approach could work when set against some of Wales' wicked and cross-cutting challenges.

The next section will seek to move these principles on to how to deliver a cross-government commitment to a mission-led approach, what that would look like, what changes need to be made and some of the key considerations for embedding this approach effectively.

How to deliver mission-driven government in Wales

With the importance and value of missions-led thinking and governance to Wales now established, the question is how Welsh Government could go about implementing such an approach. In this section, I will build upon the existing literature on mission-driven government to establish key steps and considerations to drive forward successful implementation. In doing so, I will at all times provide a Welsh specific lens, recognising the nation's unique polity, constitutional position and its political and legislative context.

Political commitment and providing a purpose to government

A first step in establishing a mission-driven government is to provide an overarching argument for what purpose the government is seeking to achieve. What is its vision for Wales, what are the key ambitions for the nation and what are the major challenges that the government is seeking to address? Setting this foundation should articulate what the government stands for and how it will seek to improve people's lives. In a devolved system, where powers and responsibilities are shared, often in complex ways, a demonstration of a clear vision for what Welsh Government will achieve will be beneficial to both the public and wider stakeholders, such as businesses.

Beyond this, missions should not just be concerned with *what* government aims to do, but *how* it aims to achieve it. This means an overhaul of how government in Wales operates, re-orientating the means with the goal, creating space for partnership, innovation and a focus on delivery.

As such, a shift to mission-driven government must be accompanied by widespread culture change across the government machine in Wales. This shift requires clear sighted political leadership, which has a clarity of understanding what is required by government ministers, and the Welsh civil service.

Only through established political commitment can Welsh Government convey confidence to other stakeholders that it is committed to tackling missions over the long-term and that its allocation of resources will accordingly be in alignment. Internal communication of a shift in approach of Welsh Government is as important as the external messaging. Civil servants will need to be brought on board with this approach, as they will bear the responsibility for practically delivering what government is focussing on and how it intends to deliver. This cultural shift needs to set the conditions for a different way of governing.

In a Welsh context, this will also mean engaging with UK Government, as key partners in delivering in an environment of blurred lines and shared powers and responsibilities. Importantly, however, Welsh Government should seek to act with autonomy in areas it has control over, regardless of the parties occupying government at either end of the M4. True ownership of an agenda for the use of devolved powers to transform people's lives will be critical in expanding an ambitious platform of policy delivery.

As a first step, the First Minister should make it their priority to provide a long-term commitment to renewing government in Wales, focussing on tackling its key missions.

Building from democratic engagement

Governments in Wales and across the UK face an increasing set of wicked challenges in the decades ahead, from tackling climate change, eradicating health inequalities and reviving a stagnant economy. Amongst these profound challenges are those with the democratic process itself, with trust in politics eroding over recent decades. A mission-led approach to government can help to build stronger foundations of transparency and accountability by being explicit about the long-term goals. Indeed, in a 2024 Demos report on mainstreaming deliberative democratic methods, they make the case for putting citizens at the centre of efforts to tackle UK government's missions¹⁸⁷. Missions are an opportunity to build from the bottom, utilising deliberative democratic methods to not only identify missions which resonate and are important to people in Wales, but also to ensure that policy development and delivery are part of a constant conversation with a diverse (in every sense) range of people.

It is vitally important to ensure that missions are co-created through democratic engagement and consultation with the people of Wales, through deliberative mechanisms such as citizens assemblies. The IWA have written elsewhere on the potential role of deliberative democratic methods to aid ambitious policy development¹⁸⁸. Importantly, any deliberative process needs to include not only people with a diverse range of lived experiences in Wales, but also of business, public service delivery staff as well as politicians and civil servants. This is in order to generate a sense of collective buy-in across Welsh Government, increasing confidence in the policy platform.

A deliberative exercise to underpin missions will crucially aim to gain democratic accountability against the missions and ensure that missions align to the priorities of people in Wales. Building overarching policy direction and the purpose of government from meaningful deliberative democratic engagement can help to build legitimacy and stress-test priorities.

Once missions have been set, political leadership needs to be established, setting out a clear vision for why each mission has been chosen and how they will be prioritised and action taken.

Radical transformation - setting government up to deliver

A transition to a mission-led approach represents a fundamental shift in the way Welsh Government functions. If it is to be successful, a government needs to engender 'a big culture change'¹⁸⁹ in order to break down protective government ministry silos and to work effectively together to achieve overarching goals. A mission-led approach to government must be implemented as a priority action across the whole government, with missions sitting above government departments in order to 'foster alignment around a shared set of goals'¹⁹⁰.

The setting out of a mission-led government, then, should seek to *fundamentally reform* structures of government, not *replicate* work already being done. Mission driven government is therefore not just about what government *wants to achieve* but also *how* it will seek to do so¹⁹¹. In more practical terms, this reform means a structural change to the way we manage government. Institutional structures need to reflect what government priorities are, not replicate business as it has always been done, with one Minister or Cabinet Secretary solely responsible for delivery.

Therefore, one of the first steps in establishing a mission-led approach would, once missions have been set,

involve establishing governance structures and political ownership of each mission. In a Welsh context, this will mean establishing an elected ‘mission-leader’ and a practical ‘mission-deliverer’. The mission-leader will likely be a Cabinet Secretary, with a mission area sitting within their existing portfolio. The mission-deliverer will be a civil service leader at least of Director level. Together, these two individuals will set the conditions for establishing a broader mission-team or board, which should consist of subject matter experts, those involved in delivering on the mission and comprising figures from across public, private and third sectors. The IFG and Nesta note that mission driven government is ‘enabled by strong foundations’, consisting of:

- Structures and processes
- People and culture
- Data and technology¹⁹²

Taking such an approach can overcome a siloed approach to tackling Wales’ challenges, which are based on Ministerial responsibilities, rather than the sector or policy area.

Beyond mission leads, Welsh Government should also establish a ‘Mission Council’ for each mission. A Mission Council should be comprised of ‘representatives of all tiers of government, the private sector and civil society; with implementation to be driven by a cross-departmental Mission Team within the civil service’¹⁹³. The need for a Mission Council or Mission Boards (as established by the UK Labour Government¹⁹⁴) fits strongly with the Welsh Government’s ‘Team Wales’¹⁹⁵ approach as well as the Social Partnership¹⁹⁶ approach and the ways of working as set out in the Future Generations Act¹⁹⁷. As such, a mission-led approach to government, which attempts to bring together civil society, the private sector, trade unions and other key stakeholders together with government, can build upon a movement in this direction by Welsh Government over recent years.

In a Welsh context, the creation of Mission Councils should not be additive to existing layers of government, which are increasingly complex and often opaque. Instead, Mission Councils should seek to replace those structures which have failed to deliver the change intended. With a focus on delivery comes the need to reconsider which bodies and structures are delivering effectively. Councils should synthesise existing structures in order to be laser-focused on tackling specific and wicked challenges and achieving ambitious, yet achievable goals. How Mission Councils can effectively interact with existing structures is vital, with some of these layers including Corporate Joint Committees¹⁹⁸, Public Service Boards¹⁹⁹ and Regional Partnership Boards²⁰⁰.

Just as importantly, outside expertise should play a key role in Councils themselves, bringing in practical private and third sector expertise into the delivery of government. Such an approach should move away from commissioning large scale expert commissions on large scale challenges, such as the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group²⁰¹ or the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales²⁰², where commitment to take on board expert analysis is dependent on political considerations. Instead a Mission Council should ensure these perspectives directly impact the delivery of policy and its implementation. The appointment of a Mission Council which has a broad range of experience and expertise will act to extract maximum practical impact from policy and investment. In terms of delivering an agenda set out by a Mission Council, a cross-departmental Mission Team²⁰³, situated in the Welsh civil service is critical.

Under a mission-led approach, the impact on the civil service, in charge of delivery under a reconstituted

and sharpened, more efficient Welsh Government machinery will be profound. Yet, this is a positive change. Helen MacNamara, Former Deputy Cabinet Secretary, sets out what a mission-led approach offers to the civil service at a UK level:

‘Civil servants want a minister with a plan. If there was one quality that set apart the best Ministers I worked for, they were clearly there to do something, could communicate what they wanted and then got on and did it. Missions offer a framework for instilling a similar driven mindset system-wide across the public sector, sending a clear signal within government and beyond about where the government wants to get to, and getting everyone pulling in the same direction.’²⁰⁴

Within this reorganisation of government structures, Welsh Government need to ensure that their mission-led approach lasts beyond the short-term political cycle. New structures, such as those mentioned above, must be long term in nature with the organisational structure and mandate to act radically and innovatively to tackle grand challenges. Importantly, bodies such as Mission Boards, must have a degree of independent accountability mechanisms built into them. Lessons can be learnt here from the UK Climate Change Committee²⁰⁵, an independent body which consistently holds governments across the UK to account for their progress against the legally mandated goal of reaching net zero by 2050. There is clearly scope for this to be undertaken by already existing organisations, such as the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, although they of course would have to be adequately resourced to carry out such a task.

There are lessons here from recent Institute for Government report *Power with Purpose*, the final report of the Commission on the Centre of Government²⁰⁶, looking at the centre of UK Government and its effectiveness to deliver against policy challenges such as ‘stagnant economic growth,’ ‘the generational task of building energy security and tackling climate change,’ an ‘ageing population and decaying infrastructure’ (p.11). Vital to overcoming these challenges is the Centre of Government providing clear strategic direction with defined priorities. Applying these principles to Wales, it is clear that those standing to become the First Minister at the 2026 Senedd elections should provide a clear set of priorities which span cross-government. The First Minister and their team should make difficult decisions around where their priorities should sit. In doing so, the First Minister holds overall responsibility for both setting and hitting missions. The above report states that the lack of strategy is a long-standing problem with UK Government and indeed it can be said to be a similar problem here in Wales, as established earlier in this report.

A Welsh Government seeking to be more interventionist, governed around a set of ambitious missions, will require a redrawing of the civil service in Wales, with new capabilities and capacity required. The activity of establishing a mission-driven approach could act to strengthen the civil service in Wales by providing clear lines of accountability on hitting major policy goals. All too often the blurred lines between devolved and reserved government can act as a shield to avoid accountability for a lack of progress on priorities. A mission-led government, with a clear policy direction will help to remove this shield, providing clarity against tangible overall long-term targets.

Partnership working

Tackling social missions, that is, missions which aren't solely technical in nature but require a social response, requires the involvement of a wide and diverse range of stakeholders at the outset and throughout²⁰⁷. Sharing ownership of tackling grand challenges requires 'leading with purpose and governing in partnership'²⁰⁸.

This fits in well with the policy context in Wales, where a social partnership approach has been established in legislation²⁰⁹. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act also places collaboration and involvement as a key 'way of working' for the public sector²¹⁰. It also speaks to Wales' strengths in being a small nation, with established mechanisms for partnership working with private, public and third sectors.

Nesta and the IFG, in their report on mission-driven government, highlight how, 'when defining a mission and developing a game plan, we begin by understanding the system and developing a theory of change'²¹¹. Hitting ambitious missions, then, is an exercise in 'significant system coordination across multiple actors, whether that is public bodies, local government, businesses, charities, families or individuals.' Working alongside partners of all kinds is vital to the theory of change of mission-led approaches to government. Ensuring effective alignment between government and partners is critical for success.

An organisational culture alongside internal structures in Welsh Government, which understand and gain value from partnership working of all types, will aid the government in delivering better policy outcomes. A mission-led approach can support this cultural and governance transformation to take place, helping government in Wales to radically adapt itself to progressing against systemic wicked challenges.

Avoiding mission risks

Whilst this paper proposes that a mission-driven approach to devolved government in Wales can be a harbinger for transformation on a set of systemic challenges, it is not inherently so. Indeed, speaking in the rhetoric of missions is clearly not enough and is in fact a key risk to implementation. This is especially the case in the context of devolved Welsh governance, where generally positive policy rhetoric has obscured the lack of progress on tackling major challenges since devolution 25 years ago.

This means acknowledging that 'not all missions succeed'²¹². Missions could risk being 'an aerosol sprayed onto existing programmes'²¹³ if it is not delivered with a clear sighted direction-setting, investment, meaningful partnership and with an accompanying appropriate set of metrics to ascertain whether the approach is working or not. Considering all that is set out in this section of the report is an attempt to make sure that the adoption of a mission-led approach is not superficial, but instead represents wholesale change. The practicalities of delivering the approach are far more important than the rhetoric.

An effective mission led approach has to transcend rhetoric, instead being a conduit to transformation in how government in Wales functions and delivers.

Mission-aligned funding and budget-setting

As highlighted earlier in the report, the constrained ability for Welsh Government to invest in large scale projects is inhibited by an inflexible and short-term budget making process²¹⁴. Whilst there is clearly a need for more fit-for-purpose devolution arrangements to enable Welsh Government to set more ambitious, long-termist and ‘mission-aligned’ spending decisions, there is more that could be done in the medium term to support key government missions. Indeed, reorienting government in Wales to become more mission-driven should inherently have a direct impact on the spending priorities of government in and of itself.

Yet, structural changes to Welsh Government spending frameworks could help to deliver more impact from public spending, and help to deliver impact in missions.

Firstly, establishing longer-term analytics of spending would benefit the ability of Welsh Government to spend ambitiously on the nation's challenges. Using the Well-being of Future Generations Act as a means of establishing the long-term impact of spending would be beneficial. This goes beyond merely asking the Future Generations Commissioner to submit analysis of the Welsh Government’s annual budget, but to proactively reorientate spending around long-term perspectives and policy interventions.

Taking a mission-led approach to government activity should also include ensuring that business case assessment of major spending commitments elevates spending on missions²¹⁵. The IPPR propose for the UK Treasury, but it is still relevant in a Welsh context, the creation of new ‘political tests’ for spending under a mission-led government, which comprise of:

- ‘affordability: does this spending ensure the government can meet its fiscal rules and departmental spending limits?’
- mission critical: does this spending help deliver the government’s missions
- ‘10 year test’: what is the impact of this policy over the longer term?’²¹⁶ (p.14).

Taking the above approach in Wales can help to make budgetary decisions which don’t represent sticking plaster solutions to systemic problems, but rather tackle the underlying issue and provide long-term benefit.

Additionally, a mission-led government should act to reorientate spending decisions away from departmental boundaries but towards progress against missions. As such, the potential for allocating spending through a ‘mission fund,’ could help to achieve cross-departmental spending pots for specific mission impacts.

Reimagining the use of the Welsh Government budget should act to incentivise a more preventative approach to policymaking across the board. For example, if the mission of Welsh Government is to decrease the level of lifestyle-induced health conditions in Wales, then the budget for tackling this mission could sit, when taking a preventative approach, across the following Welsh Government briefs and its spending decisions could look like the following:

- Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip - in incentivising a wider take up of sport and physical activity and investing in local facilities
- Cabinet Secretary for Education - in ensuring that physical activity levels are high for children and young people and ensuring that participation doesn’t drop when transitioning to adulthood

- Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Transport and North Wales - in widespread funding and rollout of active travel and behaviour change programmes to incentivise active modes of travel
- Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care - to support community-based health support to keep people out of hospital
- Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs - to support the development of a more healthy food environment across Wales
- Minister for Social Care - to support healthier, more active opportunities for those in care as well as those with caring responsibilities
- Minister for Mental Health and Early Years - to support investment into adequate mental health support services, to keep people out of acute care and support to help with maintaining a healthy lifestyle to support both physical and mental health over the long-term²¹⁷.

Taking this, albeit simplified case study, it is clear that much more can be done with the Welsh Government budget to support cross-departmental spending decisions which align with a mission-led delivery model. A more preventative approach also needs consideration for Welsh Government budgeting, in analysing the longer term fiscal benefit of investment now. The above case study also clearly makes the case for mission boards or councils with specific mission leads, as mission-led government means acting across existing departmental boundaries. Perceiving government spending in a mission-led way, turns on its head the current budgetary process.

Setting the terms of private investment – Crowding in and instilling public purpose

One of the clearest articulations of how a mission-driven approach can aid Wales is in helping government in Wales set the terms of private investment. It's important to establish that over recent decades, both the private and public sector across the UK have under-invested²¹⁸. The Resolution Foundation state that 'in the 40 years to 2019, total investment in the UK averaged 19 per cent of GDP, the lowest in the G7²¹⁹'. Such levels of investment lessen productivity, wage growth and contribute to a wider stagnating economy, where businesses are not in the position to compete in the global marketplace.

Taking a mission-led approach, by helping to provide clear, long-term strategic direction for the private sector to support can have a catalysing impact on delivering truly public value from private investment. Taking a mission-driven approach to government is a way of establishing a cross-departmental set of principles, purposes and direction to the wider economy, rather than as reacting to market conditions. This role for the government to be 'market-shaping' rather than correcting market failures, represents a key opportunity in Wales' poorly performing economy (in numerous senses).

Firstly, and as already established in this paper, Wales is severely inhibited from investing at the scale that is needed for projects that will truly transform its economy,²²⁰ in its broadest sense. The IWA's *Fiscal Firepower* report²²¹ clearly articulated how Wales' devolution settlement and annual budget setting mechanisms inhibit government in Wales from tackling major challenges, particularly those highlighted in this paper. Additionally, Welsh Government's budget is under severe pressure, with £900 million of cuts required to their 2023-24 budget²²². Government in Wales has to, and to an extent already does, deal with the reality that its fiscal levers and budget severely constrain ambitious policy making. It is also important to state that under

the new UK Government, this is seemingly likely to remain the case. With that being said, there is a need to extract maximum public value from private investment.

Whilst this, for some, may not be the overall preference, it represents a political necessity and reflects the reality of delivering effectively within the current devolution settlement. Government in Wales, over the last decade has been asked to pull off repeated magic tricks, doing more with less. This situation is unlikely to change. I've outlined elsewhere²²³ why budgetary pressures in Wales are here to stay. Likewise, Local Authorities in Wales are dangling on the edge of precipice, with research from the Wales Governance Centre stating that Local Government in Wales face a funding gap of £744m by 2027²²⁴. Government in Wales needs to extract value not least in public spend but also private investment. This is a necessity and a mission-led approach can help to direct investment towards public purpose, provide long-term certainty and support a positive relationship between government and businesses of all types.

For missions to be effective then, amongst a backdrop of bleak public finances in Wales, there is a need to mobilise the investment that is in the system in alignment with missions as well as set the conditions for further investment.

There is a clear role to be played by the Development Bank of Wales, which has £1.9bn funds under management²²⁵. Their corporate plan²²⁶ for the five-year period to 2027 states the 'mission' of: 'Unlocking potential in the Welsh economy by increasing the supply and accessibility of sustainable, effective finance' (p.11). The Bank states that their 'primary role' is to ensure access to finance for businesses when 'market failure' exists. From a mission-based perspective this falls short of the ambition for public investment initiatives. The role of public finance should not merely be to fix market failures, but to *create and shape* markets, based on public outcomes and value. Whilst many of the aims and principles of the Bank are mission-aligned, the starting point is wide of the mark, indeed, it acknowledges the framing of public investment being reactive to markets. In a mission-led approach, markets are proactively created and shaped towards public goals. Mazzucato and Penna have highlighted the damaging impact of taking a *fixing market failure* approach, specifically when taken by state investment banks²²⁷. If Welsh Government were to set clear missions, the Bank could be empowered to make investments which create long-term economic and social benefits which are evenly distributed and mission-aligned. In doing so, public funds in Wales could be given a direction which brings socio-economic benefit to people in Wales.

Indeed the way in which we design our framework of finance 'is not neutral', it shapes both investments and activities²²⁸. A missions approach, which is intended to tackle grand challenges, aims to direct investment towards innovation for a societal purpose. As innovation is inherently a risky endeavour, finance models need to be 'long term' and 'patient'²²⁹. The role of national development banks, as per the Development Bank of Wales, to support a mission-led government should be to provide patient, long-term financing to support innovation to tackle wider social and environmental objectives as set out by government's missions. An example of good practice noted by Mazzucato and Penna (2019) is Germany's development bank KfW, which bases all investments on their contribution to three missions:

- 'Climate change and the environment'
- 'Globalisation and technological progress'
- 'Demographic change'²³⁰.

Taking such an approach is an opportunity for Welsh Government and the Development Bank of Wales to establish finance which supports a cross-government mission-oriented agenda.

By recalibrating the public purpose of the Development Bank along government-established missions could produce results quickly. Looking at public purpose beyond maximising employment opportunities is important to ensure for investments which don't run counter to government policy, especially against mission areas. An example of where the positive role the Bank can play is in their work on funding research into opportunities for household decarbonisation²³¹. The research aimed at informing the Bank's investment strategy in the area of green housing²³². The Bank can clearly play a role in providing finance for large scale investments which help hit key Welsh Government targets, which are evidence informed, rather than led by primarily political considerations. Indeed, if enabled to do so, the Bank could roll out large scale investment on housing decarbonisation, if given clear long-term commitment from Welsh Government.

Further to this, the IWA have previously highlighted the need for a sovereign wealth fund in Wales²³³, in order to provide a pool of funding to invest in tackling long-term challenges and securing public benefit from Wales' natural resources. 'Community wealth funds' are a topic explored at a more local level by Mazzucato et al in the context of Camden²³⁴. In their report, they detail how a community wealth fund set up by Camden Council should be utilised to support the implementation of four missions which were developed through a thorough citizen engagement process. The wealth fund, they propose, should be used to direct economic activity, creating and shaping markets towards mission-oriented public benefits. The paper also highlights how devolving wealth funds to a lower level of government can lead to outcomes which are rooted in community needs, challenges and shared ambitions. In a Welsh context, this could take the form of an overall national fund, as well as taking a mission-led approach to the investments made by Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), enabling them to meaningfully diverge where they allocate both public and private investment, in closer alignment with communities across Wales. The CJCs' new set of powers and responsibilities make such an approach possible. A mission based approach in a Welsh context is therefore a project of devolving *to* Wales and devolving *within* Wales. The governance of funds could exist as separate legal entities, which sit at arms length of both government and CJCs. Additionally, a major opportunity for green economic growth comes from utilising its abundant natural resources to produce green energy. As the private sector seeks to develop large-scale projects across Wales (and off its coastline), there is an argument for capturing some of this wealth to invest in a wider, pan-Wales mission-led investment strategy. Indeed, this subject was explored at length by the IWA in our *Sharing Power, Spreading Wealth* report²³⁵.

All of the above require the state to be a more active participant in the economy, this is especially the case in Wales, where much economic policy has read across UK-wide priorities. By taking a more active role in shaping the direction of the economy, government in Wales can help to 'crowd in' private investment by 'stimulating new areas of economic activity with catalytic public investments²³⁶'. Welsh Government have a number of levers that they can pull in order to crowd in investment for public purposes, such as establishing regulation and standards, institutions, shaping market incentives and disincentives, natural resources, existing investment portfolios to name but a few. There is, therefore, more that can be done at devolved government level to incentivise a supportive environment for investment, and being more mission-led across the use of funding and finance could be a starting point. With a Welsh Government short of fiscal headroom, it is essential.

Enabling an innovation-friendly environment

Building on from the need for increased and purposeful investment is the vital importance of enabling innovation to a mission-driven government seeking to tackle grand challenges. Innovation lies at the heart of a mission-led approach, with missions providing the intended outcome of government, leaving the *how* open to innovation and collaboration.

The innovation, research and investment required to achieve missions, and the cross-sectoral solutions and partnership approach they require, can lead to the development of solutions which can have much more widespread use. These are termed ‘spill-overs’²³⁷. Such an approach, as Mazzucato argues in *The Entrepreneurial State*²³⁸, has led to the innovation underpinning many staple modern technologies, such as the internet and smartphones. Each innovation came out of public sector innovation which was required to solve public interest problems. Importantly, this involved the public sector supporting innovation at the riskier initial stages of the innovation process.

Long term decision making which is mission-aligned should act to increase the ability of the Government to crowd in investment, which is aligned to the fulfilment of ambitious social and environmental goals. Yet, implementation of a mission-driven approach to government and innovation policy should seek to build the capacity of the state in order to direct innovation²³⁹ alongside supporting private and third sectors to become active participants in tackling grand challenges.

Mission-driven government can provide the framework to intentionally direct the power of innovation towards social, environmental, economic and wellbeing goals. Indeed, missions can ‘provide the means to focus our research, innovation and investments on solving critical problems, while also spurring growth, jobs and resulting in positive spillovers across many sectors.’²⁴⁰

When it comes to the innovation ecosystem, Wales is not starting from a high place. Prof. Calvin Jones (2023) notes that through the last two decades ‘Wales has continued to significantly underperform the UK average on R&D as a percentage of gross value added,’ with policy making little difference²⁴¹. R&D spend in Wales is far below the UK average²⁴². On discussing what must be done to transform Wales’ innovation sector, Jones states the following:

*‘What, then is to be done? Or rather, what can be done in the absence of wider system change? Perhaps a mission-based approach has the value of revealing the areas where Wales has most autonomy and scope for movement, in terms of both its devolution settlement, and national and global economic systems. This is unlikely to be in the traditional industrial areas but rather the fully devolved health, education, planning and environment areas.’*²⁴³

Building on this argument, it is clear that a whole transformation of Welsh Government to an effective mission-based set-up to governing is also required to revive Wales’ innovation sector. In this way, a mission-led approach can support Welsh Government to focus its energies, both pan-government and for enabling innovation, on what it has the ability to influence and change. Read in this way, the need to transform government and the innovation ecosystem in Wales are complementary projects and must be done in tandem to deliver radically better outcomes.

Furthermore, in a 2024 piece for the IWA's the welsh agenda online,²⁴⁴ Prof. Calvin Jones highlighted the lack of practical innovation taking place in Wales:

'Wales, however, is bereft of practical, actionable ideas – at least ones that change us, let alone the world' and 'Wales has no statutory innovation agency or approach. Public sector Innovation activity is thus necessarily spread across myriad public bodies (as the 2023 Wales Innovates strategy²⁴⁵ demonstrates).'

Part of the solution of Wales' languishing innovation problem, Jones posits, is the creation of 'Y Pair Dyfdodol' or a 'Future Generations Lab for Wales', which would be resourced and targeted at tackling Wales' persistent challenges²⁴⁶. It would appear that such a body would fit well with a mission-driven approach to government, matching innovation with public purpose. Aligning with shared social challenges, Wales can aim to deliver maximum impact for the limited investment available.

Social innovation agency Nesta Cymru, reflecting on the draft *Wales Innovates* strategy, 'welcome the use of missions to set a direction of travel for innovation in Wales,' yet 'more work needs to be done to realise their full potential as a policy tool. In particular, they need to be more specific²⁴⁷.' Importantly, they state that the gap around diffusion of innovations in Wales needs to be addressed, meaning the way in which innovation is spread. With missions which are socially-oriented, or challenge-oriented, the diffusion is indeed a vital part of the picture. If there is a lack of focus on this, it leads to the delivery gaps which have been inherent in policy practice in Wales over the last decade.

They suggest the creation of a:

'dedicated innovation team with knowledge of and access to a wide range of skills, tools and methods to provide appropriate support, some of which will have to come from outside the organisation (Welsh Government)²⁴⁸.

The above perspectives highlight some of the challenges with innovation strategy in Wales, and highlight that, whilst an improvement to what has come before, recent policy developments (represented by *Wales Innovates*) is not enough to enable the transformation needed. Indeed, Wales' innovation policy can be said to be reflective of the wider delivery gap, which sees good policy and poor delivery.

Through Welsh Government playing an active role in directing innovation investment to allay with public purpose, a mission-driven approach can help to support the long-term sustainability of an ailing innovation and research sector in Wales, which faces continual funding pressures. This also requires directing private sector innovation investment towards missions.

To conclude, for Wales to effectively embed a mission-driven approach to government, it will need to radically transform its approach to innovation. Through providing long-term certainty on priority areas for innovation, Welsh Government can help to catalyse energy, investment and collaborations which help to deliver transformation.

Embedding accountability – establishing mission-aligned data and metrics

With Wales' complex set of powers and responsibilities, which are often shared with UK Government, it is vital that a mission-led approach at Welsh Government level is used as an opportunity to assess what is possible to achieve with existing capabilities. It is critical that missions match Welsh Government's current capabilities and capacities, whilst also extending ambition for what is achievable with said powers.

The setting of government missions can also help to show the value of devolved governance and its ability to deliver positive change to people's lives. Being explicit about what their priorities are will also help to support greater trust, transparency and accountability from the devolved government.

A set of ambitious missions must also be supported by the availability of robust and accurate metrics to direct delivery against missions²⁴⁹. A recent IPPR report suggests that each mission should be 'set alongside a set of key metrics by which they will be measured by²⁵⁰'. These metrics should be embedded across all departments of Welsh Government to guide policy implementation and support robust external and internal scrutiny. The lack of data and metrics to guide policy development is a constant inhibiting factor to ambitious policy-making in Wales. Without clear metrics, a mission-driven approach will fail to deliver its aims. There could be a role for tying some missions in Wales against the National Wellbeing Indicators,²⁵¹ which 'measure the progress of Wales as a whole towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act'²⁵². Importantly, metrics should speak directly to missions explicitly. A dashboard of metrics for each mission should also help to support governance across all departments of government.

IPPR proposes two sets of metrics to guide mission-driven government. Core metrics, which are based on outcomes and comprehensive outputs and input, which contribute to hitting wider outcomes²⁵³. The IPPR state these should be embedded across all departments of UK Government. Such an approach should also be taken in Wales, whereby a dashboard of core and comprehensive metrics guide policymaking and lead to greater transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

By looking through the theoretical principles underpinning mission-led government, it is clear that such a view would fit well in the Welsh context, in the short-to-long term. Key principles of the mission-led approach fit well with the existing direction of travel of Welsh policymaking and can help government in Wales organise itself around extracting the maximum public benefit from its powers.

A mission-led approach can also help to catalyse energy and action around the key problem which has blighted devolved governments: the delivery gap between policy and implementation. Taking a mission-led approach enables this challenge to be tackled head on.

This paper made the case for taking a mission-led approach across government in Wales, focussing efforts on a number of distinct missions. The paper provides some ideas as to what missions could look like in a Welsh context, but more fundamentally, looks at the principle of why taking a mission-led approach should form the backbone of manifestos for the next Senedd election in 2026.

Through this paper, the IWA hope to start a conversation, raising Wales' ambition when it comes to what a devolved government can achieve over the next 10-15 years. In the year that the Senedd turned 25, this feels like a particularly prescient moment for a reassessment of the achievements of Welsh Government and putting in place the conditions for a turbocharged delivery in the next 25 years. This is especially the case given the expanded resources, capacity and legislative powers government in Wales is now afforded. With the election for a newly expanded Senedd coming in 2026, under a new electoral system, we urge all parties to begin to consider what a better government in Wales could look like, and propose a mission-led approach as a potential key organising principle fit for the nation's ambitions.

Expanded Recommendations:

1. **Welsh Government (or parties seeking to form the government following the 2026 Senedd elections) should seek to take a mission-led approach to policy. These missions should be:**
 - Articulated in a programme for government
 - Measurable, targeted and ambitious
 - Within the devolved Government's control and ability to shape
 - A statement on how it will aim to hit missions
 - Timebound for over a decade to establish long-term political buy-in
 - Based on meaningful engagement with the public at the outset.

2. **Welsh Government should establish senior leadership figures sitting in Cabinet who have responsibility for coordinating missions, including:**
 - Cabinet Secretary mission leads
 - Permanent civil servant to oversee and coordinate cross-departmental mission-delivery
 - Mission Boards made up of a broad range of experience to establish approach to tackling missions
 - Relevant external specialists to oversee a taskforce at the outset of missions.

3. **The identification of appropriate missions should follow a thorough publicly-funded citizens assembly process. Such an approach would root solutions in lived experience and support the strengthening of our democratic health**
 - This should include the consideration of the role of a 'Citizen Delivery Unit' to test ambitious policy against the public - embedding deliberative and discursive democratic solutions to tackling grand challenges.

4. **Finance and budget decisions should be made on the basis of progress against missions, including feeding into wider public sector and procurement processes**

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5. **Private-public partnership on missions should:**
 - Reflect the government’s public value, purpose and missions
 - Ensure contracts are time bound, unleashing intellectual property
 - Establish long-term funding streams for innovation against missions, through Welsh Government, Development Bank of Wales and Corporate Joint Committees.

 6. **Matters of constitutional reform should overlay any proposals that inhibit radical thinking - making a clear case based on delivery, e.g. devolution of the Crown Estate to Wales**

 7. **Establish a mission driven innovation body for Wales which:**
 - Is independent of government
 - Is aligned to the Well-being of Future Generations Act
 - Provides long-term funding commitment to support the sustainability and resilience of research institutions.

 8. **Explore the role of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner in establishing long-term thinking in delivery of missions**

 9. **Embed a mission-oriented approach to social partnership, with:**
 - Shared governance and responsibility across civil society
 - Utilising a ‘Team Wales’ approach.

 10. **Establish mechanisms for a National Wealth Fund:**
 - Exploring the role of CJsCs in establishing more local opportunities
 - Establish clear, mission-aligned purpose for the Development Bank of Wales as well as degree of partnership in delivering Wealth Fund
 - Consider the role for the Development Bank of Wales in this mix.

 11. **Produce a data-matrix to adequately measure progress against missions**
 - Building on the National Wellbeing Indicators approach.

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