



## How I got here

### FUTURE GENERATIONS COMMISSIONER Sophie Howe ON HER CAREER JOURNEY

**W**hen Wales passed its Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in 2015, Sophie Howe became the country's first Future Generations Commissioner. In her role, she holds government and other public bodies to account in considering how their actions affect children of the future and has led high-profile interventions around housing, transport planning, education reform and climate change. **I GREW UP IN ELY, A DEPRIVED AREA OF CARDIFF.** Even at school, I had an interest in politics and led a campaign for girls to be allowed to wear trousers. I went on to Cardiff University, where I studied Law and Politics, and in my first year, volunteered to work on Julie Morgan's MP campaign. In my final year, she encouraged me to stand as a councillor. I put myself forward and became Wales' youngest councillor. **I WAS SIX MONTHS PREGNANT WITH MY ELDEST SON WHEN I RAN MY ELECTION CAMPAIGN DURING MY UNIVERSITY FINALS.** At the time, being a single mum before my career had started was seen as a bit of a disaster – I was 21. If anything, this made me more determined; having a baby is a defining moment, but mine

interconnected wellbeing goals, including how we improve physical and mental health, meet climate targets and tackle inequality. I'm there to ask: 'What are we doing today that will affect our future grandchildren?' **MY FIRST BIG TEST WAS TO ASK WHY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT WAS SPENDING ITS ENTIRE BORROWING CAPACITY ON A 30-MILE STRETCH OF THE M4.** The business community was not happy about my interventions, but fast forward two years and there's been a fundamental change in the way Wales thinks about community, health and transport. I've also overseen huge education reforms, including a new school curriculum in Wales emphasising the importance of key life skills. **I WORK HARD TO ENGAGE WALES' YOUNGER GENERATION IN POLITICS.** As well as lowering the voting age to 16, we have a Youth Parliament, and work with young co-creators who help explain policies to their peers. I also run the Future Leaders Academy for 18- to 30-year-olds who have leadership potential. We put them through an intensive programme, then pair them with existing leaders in Wales in a reverse mentorship. It really works: our current leaders can learn from tech-savvy

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became even more than that because I wanted to prove everyone wrong. I now have five children and can honestly say I wouldn't be where I am without the support of other brilliant women who have helped spur me on. **I HAVE ALWAYS TRIED TO HELP PEOPLE THROUGH ADVERSITY IN MY WORK.** As well as being Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I've supported women through pregnancy dismissal cases with the Equal Opportunities Commission and worked on youth justice as South Wales' Deputy Police Commissioner. It was partly my long-term approach to reform that led to me being appointed Future Generations Commissioner. **I ENSURE WALES' MAIN INSTITUTIONS CAN DEMONSTRATE HOW THE DECISIONS THEY MAKE TODAY WON'T COMPROMISE THE ABILITY OF FUTURE CHILDREN.** To do this, we've set up seven

young people growing up with a different set of concerns. **CLIMATE CHANGE IS ONE OF THE GREATEST THREATS LOOMING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.** Despite all the talk at COP from world leaders, our emissions are still going up, and as a mum, I can't help but think about how it impacts my children. What we're seeing connects back to our complete failure to take long-term views; the electoral cycle is five years at best, so there's rarely an incentive for governments to invest in the future. **OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS WORK IS ALREADY PICKING UP INFLUENCE AROUND THE WORLD.** In 2020, I was asked to give a TED Talk on Wales' long-term approach to policy-making, and the UN is planning to appoint a global equivalent to my role. Expanding my work to helping other governments and corporates implement the same kind of model is definitely a huge goal.