

Agenda – Petitions Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Hybrid

Meeting date: 15 January 2024

Meeting time: 14.00

For further information contact:

Gareth Price – Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

Petitions@senedd.wales

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

2 New Petitions

2.1 P-06-1367 Fund the removal of quarry rocks and the restoration of sand and groynes to Llandudno North Shore

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3 Updates to previous petitions

3.1 P-06-1217 Open Long Covid one stop medical hubs / clinics

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3.2 P-06-1253 Ban greyhound racing in Wales

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3.3 P-06-1354 The Welsh Government should support greyhound racing in Wales

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3.4 P-06-1368 The Welsh Govt should take steps to save the Environmental Information Regulations in relation to Wales

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3.5 P-06-1333 Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival

(Pages 19 – 25)



3.6 P-06-1363 Save our Fire and Rescue Service

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3.7 P-06-1375 Initiate an early senedd election

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4 Papers to Note

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5 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting

6 Forward work programme

Document is Restricted

P-06-1367 Fund the removal of quarry rocks and the restoration of sand and groynes to Llandudno North Shore

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 15 Ionawr 2024
Petitions Committee | 15 January 2024

Reference: SR23/7337-6

Petition Number: P-06-1367

Petition title: Fund the removal of quarry rocks and the restoration of sand and groynes to Llandudno North Shore

Text of petition: In 2014 Conwy County Borough Council dumped a further 50,000 tonnes of oversized and untested quarry rocks onto North Shore. This action destroyed the beach. Access for many is almost impossible, and dangerous if people try. It's a blight on the landscape, and detrimental to our main economy, tourism.



1. Background

1.1. Flood risk in Llandudno North Shore

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) estimates that around 245,000 properties are at risk of flooding in Wales and classifies the Llandudno shore as an area with high flood risk from the sea. Climate projections predict that sea-level will rise between 890 mm and 1210 mm alongside the Conwy coastline by 2120.

Coastal rock structures protect against erosion and sea level rise by absorbing wave energy. Current coastal defences on the Llandudno North Shore include a gravel/cobble beach and flood/dwarf walls.

Winter storms in 2013-14 caused a reduction in beach levels and flooding in the promenade. Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) imported around 30,000m³ of gravel cobble to replenish the beach. In response to this petition, the Minister give further detail on the historic installation of groynes and cobble on Llandudno North Shore, and highlights that the 2014 replenishment of cobble is:

... the same material, from the same quarry put in to the same design profile. The material was tested independently and was not oversized as it met the grading envelope in the design specified. The 2014 works did not do anything new but only replaced what had been lost from the 2000 scheme due to tidal and storm influences.

1.2. Tourism

The Llandudno Coastal Forum (LCF) and members of the public have shown support for a sand beach with timber groynes, to strengthen tourism in the area. The CCBC reports that tourism provides almost a quarter of all employment in the area and around £996 million to the local economy each year, according to pre-Covid estimates. CCBC estimates that the tourism sector in Llandudno is worth £384 million and supports more than 5,300 jobs (pre-Covid estimates). In response to this petition, the Minister says:

Llandudno is thriving from a tourism point of view and there is a sand beach at Llandudno west shore just 0.75m away.

1.3. Policy context

The Welsh Government is responsible for setting out the national flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) strategy. Its most recent National Strategy was published in 2020. The local authority is responsible for local flood risk management strategy. For CCBC this is set out in the Conwy Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee gives advice and support to Welsh Minister and RMAs on flood and coastal risk management in Wales.

Through the Welsh Government's FCERM Programme, local authorities can bid for funding to reduce the risk of flood and coastal erosion. The Welsh Government also allocates funding through the Coastal Risk Management Programme (CRMP), which supplements the core programme.

More information can be found in this Senedd Research briefing.

1.4. Conwy County Borough Council action

In 2021-2022, CCBC secured funding through the CRMP for an Outline Business Case (OBC), to consider options to reduce flooding in the area. It proposed CCBC apply for 100% Welsh Government funding for the scheme's design and development costs, and 85% of the scheme construction costs. CCBC proposed to fund 15% of the construction costs from internal Council resources and external partners.

In August 2022, the Welsh Government told the CCBC that the sand conversion cannot be funded through the CRMP since it does not provide additional flood protection despite a high cost (almost £24 million, £17 million more compared with raising the promenade wall, which would provide the same level of flood defence). In September 2022, CCBC accepted funding from the CRMP to continue with the non-sand option for the improvement of coastal defences.

In response to this petition, the Minister clarifies that “a sand beach could be put on part of North Shore”, however it would be outside the scope of the CRMP, and therefore would require “significant ongoing revenue burden” for the CCBC.

2. Welsh Parliament action

In 2018, Janet Finch-Saunders MS asked the Cabinet Secretary three times about the Welsh Government's commitment towards converting Llandudno North Shore to a sandy beach. In response, the [then] Minister of Environment highlighted that it's the responsibility of the local authority to decide on the most appropriate solution to reduce flood risk.

In Plenary in February 2023, Janet Finch-Saunders MS asked the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, about the steps she intends to take to make sure both coastal defences and a sandy beach are guaranteed in Llandudno. In response, the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, said:

... the Welsh Government have recently awarded grant funding to Conwy County Borough Council to develop a full business case for Llandudno, based on maintaining and improving the existing cobble defence on the north shore. The alternative sand option provides no additional flood benefit, at a much greater cost to the coastal risk management programme, and that's the problem. So, whilst I completely understand what you're saying about the sandy beach, the coastal risk management programme is for coastal risk management; it's not for tourist attractions and other aesthetic value. I'm not denying the value of that; I'm just saying that's not what the programme is for.

So, if Conwy County Borough Council want to get an alternative sand option at Llandudno north shore, they really need to look for alternative sources of funding.

In Plenary in May 2023, Janet Finch-Saunders MS described the rocks at Llandudno North Shore as "anti-tourism".

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/02656/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
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11 December 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 22 September regarding Petition P-06-1367 Fund the removal of quarry rocks and the restoration of sand and groynes to Llandudno North Shore.

My Officials have been in contact with officers at Conwy Council in order to establish a factual position about the situation in Llandudno North Shore which I have outlined below.

The groynes that were installed previously have been ineffective in maintaining beach levels on this frontage and were in place between 1938 and 1996.

After public consultation in 1994, a rock groyne was built in 1996 with the ineffective wooden groynes removed to stabilise beach losses.

Two phases of work – in 1996 and 2000 – placed the present day cobble bank on North Shore to protect the stepped revetment. This bank consisting of almost 300,000m³ of cobble provides protection to the promenade and the town.

The material is naturally occurring moraine type rock imported from local quarries and ranging in size from 200mm to 50mm typically. The larger type of material is less mobile than the smaller – it is not acceptable to have smaller stones constantly being thrown up onto the promenade during storm events. The cobble bank is the effective coastal defence for Llandudno and it must be maintained to protect the town from the risk of coastal flooding

After a series of coastal storms in December 2013 and January 2014, a significant amount of this cobble material – estimated at the time to be 30,000m³, was lost off shore resulting in the existing defence capabilities of the cobble bank being depleted. This was in addition to gradual losses which would have taken place in the preceding years.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Conwy imported 30,000m³ (over 60,000t) of cobble in 2014 to reinstate the existing 2000 coastal defence bank. It was the same material, from the same quarry put in to the same design profile. The material was tested independently and was not oversized as it met the grading envelope in the design specified. The 2014 works did not do anything new but only replaced what had been lost from the 2000 scheme due to tidal and storm influences.

There is no evidence that it is detrimental to the tourism economy – see latest STEAM data [STEAM Report CON 2022.pdf \(visitconwy.org.uk\)](#) . Llandudno is thriving from a tourism point of view and there is a sand beach at Llandudno west shore just 0.75m away.

However, a Shared Prosperity application has been made by CCBC to commission a report into the economic value of replacing a portion of the cobble bank with sand

Conwy County Borough Council have previously received funding from the Welsh Government's Coastal Risk Management Programme to prepare an Outline Business Case for Llandudno. The business case considered various options to reduce the risk of flooding and erosion to the town. One of the options considered was the installation of 600m of sandy beach on the north shore. However, unlike the recent scheme at Colwyn Bay, the business case found that importing sand would be significantly more expensive than other engineering options and would provide no additional flood protection benefits to the community.

The business case for Llandudno identified a preferred option based on maintaining and improving the existing defences on the North Shore and West Shore. The Welsh Government have awarded grant funding to the local authority to develop detailed design proposals for a scheme in Llandudno, based on their preferred option.

A sand beach could be put on part of North Shore as long as it was correctly modelled, designed and funded for construction. However, there would be a significant ongoing revenue burden for the council which does not exist currently. Conwy County Borough Council are welcome to pursue alternative sources of funding to install a sandy beach on the North Shore, however this would be outside the scope of the Coastal Risk Management Programme.

Yours sincerely,



Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Janet.Finch-Saunders@senedd.wales

Mr Jack Sargeant MS, Chairman,
Petitions Committee,
Welsh Parliament
Via email

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6 November 2023

Dear Chairman, Jack,

It is my pleasure to be writing with regards to the petition calling on the Welsh Government to “Fund the removal of quarry rocks and the restoration of sand and groynes to Llandudno North Shore.”

In the first instance, I would like to express my thanks to you for kindly taking the time to meet with Cllr Ian Turner, countless residents, elected members and me on Llandudno promenade so to be formally presented with the 12,500 strong petition.

With tourism in Conwy County now worth £1.1 billion, it is essential that we unleash that economic potential further by restoring sand to North Shore. Indeed, quarry rocks should never have been dumped on our shore, a decision which has made the beach inaccessible to many, forced the donkeys into retirement, and harmed the tourist offer in our region.

It is essential for the Welsh Government and your Committee to understand that North Shore is a truly unique beach. It is one of the focal points in a town which has been named among the top 10 best holiday destinations in the UK for autumn 2023 by Tripadvisor! Llandudno is the holiday hub for all of North Wales. In fact, it has been identified that should the town continue to adapt to the changing conditions within the tourism market and invest accordingly, the high growth scenario suggests that:

- The number of day visitors is set to increase from 2.88 million in 2018 to 4.08 million in 2045;
- The number of overnight trips taken to Llandudno is set to rise from 440,289 in 2018 to 561,339 by 2045;
- The economic impact of tourism in Llandudno is expected to rise from £388.8 million in 2018 to £513.6 million in 2045.

So to achieve such high growth, I believe it essential that sand is returned to North Shore, and as such, that this beach and destination of national importance be considered by the Senedd. Consequently, I truly hope that your Committee will refer the petition for a debate in the Siambr.

Kind regards,

Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Senedd Cymru
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Eich Cyf / Your Ref:

Dyddiad / Date: 18.12.2023

janet.finch-saunders@assembly.wales

Dear Janet

Re: Llandudno North Shore

Many thanks for your letter and for all the work you have done in supporting this petition. As you are aware Conwy County Borough Council's preferred option, as part of the coast flood defence works, was for the sand to be returned to the North Shore and it was very disappointing that this was not supported by Welsh Government. Tourism is a vital industry for our county and Llandudno plays a key role in supporting this on both a local and regional level.

Cofion cynnes



Cllr. Charlie McCoubrey
Council Leader

Agenda Item 3.1

P-06-1217 Open Long Covid one stop medical hubs / clinics

This petition was submitted by Lawson Webb, having collected a total of 1,214 signatures.

Text of Petition:

There are 1,000s of people suffering from long covid who are not getting any medical help. We feel ignored and helpless. Our lives have been decimated.

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Pontypridd
- South Wales Central

Agenda Item 3.2

P-06-1253 Ban greyhound racing in Wales

This petition was submitted by Hope Rescue, having collected a total of 35,101 signatures.

Text of Petition:

In Wales we have one independent greyhound track racing once a week. Since April 2018, Hope Rescue & their rescue partners have taken in almost 200 surplus greyhounds from this track, 40 of which sustained injuries. There are plans for the track to become a Greyhound Board of Great Britain track, racing four times a week, greatly increasing the number of surplus dogs & injuries. Greyhound racing is inherently cruel & greyhounds have little legal protection. It is already banned in 41 US states.

Additional Information:

Campaign groups have collated data and evidence of poor welfare within greyhound racing in the U.K.

Alliance Against Greyhound Racing: <https://www.aagr.org.uk/category/why-is-greyhound-racing-cruel/>

League Against Cruel Sports: <https://www.league.org.uk/greyhound-racing>

There have also been press articles and undercover investigations in to greyhound racing:

RTE Investigates: Greyhounds Running For Their Lives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYTb2qBjIMM>

Panorama investigates: Doping and rigging bets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0p0bHSkIAk>

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jun/26/activists-renew-calls-to-end-greyhound-racing-as-400-die-despite-lockdowns>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/greyhounds-being-shipped-pakistan-illegal-23765480>

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/13086085/british-greyhounds-racing-dogs-mass-graves-bolt/>

A recent petition is due to be debated in Parliament after securing 104,882 signatures.

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/554073>

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Ogmore
- South Wales West

Agenda Item 3.3

P-06-1354 The Welsh Government should support greyhound racing in Wales

This petition was submitted by David Tams, having collected a total of 10,601 signatures.

Text of Petition:

The Welsh Government are currently considering banning greyhound racing in Wales.

This potential ban has been brought on through a petition submitted by a charity. I believe the information used to create that petition was not factually correct and that they used massively inflated figures on the number of injured greyhounds with no supporting evidence. The charity has been asked for evidence on multiple occasions but refused. The petition gained 35k signatures but less than 19k of these signatures came from within Wales.

Additional Information:

Banning greyhound racing would have an economic impact on individuals involved in the industry. There would also be a direct impact on the Valleys Stadium, and the medium and long term development of the Ystrad Mynach area.

There would also be a negative impact on the greyhound breed.

Valley Greyhound Stadium is currently in the process of becoming a GBGB registered track.

All tracks licensed by GBGB must adhere to the regulator's Rules of Racing which seek to uphold the very highest standards of greyhound welfare and integrity. There are over 200 rules covering all aspects of how the sport is run and regulated including how greyhounds are cared for when they are at the track, at home in their trainer's residential kennels, when being transported and into their retirement.

The Senedd currently has a cross party group to support horse racing in Wales, we ask that the same support is shown for greyhound racing.

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Islwyn
- South Wales East

Agenda Item 3.4

P-06-1368 The Welsh Govt should take steps to save the Environmental Information Regulations in relation to Wales

This petition was submitted by Guy Linley-Adams, having collected a total of 272 signatures.

Text of Petition:

The pro bono student Environment Project of the School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University, has examined the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and how they could be improved in Wales, producing a short report

However, If the REUL Bill passes, it will 'sunset' all EU-derived subordinate legislation in 2023, including the 2004 Regulations.

The UK would be in breach of the Aarhus Convention.

The Welsh Government must use its powers to save the 2004 Regulations for Wales.

Additional Information:

The importance of the rights granted to the public by the Aarhus Convention (and hence by the 2004 Regulations) are summarised brilliantly in *Fish Legal v Information Commissioner United Utilities plc Yorkshire Water Services Ltd and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs* [2015] UKUT 52 (AAC), at para 57:

"The Aarhus Convention...links environmental rights and human rights. It acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations. It establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders. It links government accountability and environmental protection. It focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context and it is forging a new process for public participation in the negotiation and implementation of international agreements...

...it is also a Convention about government accountability, transparency, and responsiveness...".

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Cardiff Central
- South Wales Central

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1368
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/03213/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
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19 December 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 28 November following the Petitions Committee's consideration of P-06-1368, in which you share the petitioner's correspondence and request answers to the questions outlined in their response.

As noted in my letter of 13 October, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 are not due to be sunset as a result of the passing of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023. This has been recognised in the lead petitioner's letter to the Petitions Committee of 31 July.

I have read the "Report of the Freedom of Information sub-group of the pro bono Climate and Environment Project of Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics 2022/2023" with interest. There are no plans to consider amending the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 as they apply to Wales or introducing a Welsh equivalent at this time. Even so, I have passed the report onto my officials to keep on file as part of our evidence base should we reconsider this position in the future.

Please extend my thanks to the members of Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics' Freedom of Information sub-group of the pro bono Climate and Environment Project for their engagement on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

P-06-1368 The Welsh Govt should take steps to save the Environmental Information Regulations in relation to Wales - Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee, 03 January, 2024

The students of the pro bono Environment Project at Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics are very grateful for the time and effort the Chair, Members and Clerks of your Committee, the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, and the Minister for Climate Change, have all put into responding to the petition.

On the specifics of the petition, as earlier indicated, the threat to the 2004 Regulations from the REUL Bill, as originally introduced in Westminster, disappeared during the stages of that Bill's amendment, but only after the petition was opened.

However, despite the purpose of the petition being 'overtaken by events', the students have been able to see first-hand what an extremely useful mechanism for public interaction with the Senedd the Petition Committee system represents.

The students continue to work on the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and hope to be able to submit further work to the Welsh Government in 2024.

As freedom of access to environmental information is a key pillar of good environmental governance, as underpinned by the Aarhus Convention, the students are currently working towards submitting their further work as part of the forthcoming consultation on the White Paper on Environmental Governance in Wales, which is understood to be due this month (January).

Yours sincerely

Guy Linley-Adams

Agenda Item 3.5

P-06-1333 Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival

This petition was submitted by Craig Shuttleworth, having collected a total of 3,625 signatures.

Text of Petition:

In 2021, Petition P-06-1208 was debated by the Senedd to get new laws to protect red squirrel habitat. The petition also highlighted how NRW NW Area had failed to monitor squirrel populations in Newborough and Pentraeth forests on Anglesey. Subsequent research revealed precipitous declines in Newborough forest associated with too much timber cutting.

<https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=37917>.

Now in Gwynedd, NRW are once again tree felling without squirrel data; once again suggesting that vague 'internal guidance' can make up for this

Additional Information:

It is baffling that in NE Wales, NRW can successfully integrate red squirrel conservation into commercial forest management yet next door in the West it is a relentless shambles.

Red squirrels in Gwynedd have been devastated by Squirrelpox virus. 10,000 people signed Petition to 'Fund vaccine research to protect red squirrels from deadly Squirrelpox virus'.

<https://bylines.cymru/environment/squirrelpox-endangers-red-squirrels-and-livelihoods/>

Now the few surviving red squirrels face the lottery of NRW blindly cutting down their homes. Given the tourism value of red squirrels (£1 Million to the Welsh economy per year), the well-being value of the species and the numerous Government commitments to conserve populations, why is it a constant battle with the NRW NW Area?

Is it any wonder that 1 in 6 species are at risk of extinction?

<https://naturalresources.wales/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-interim-report-2019/challenges/?lang=en>.

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Arfon
- North Wales

Briefing note

Petition P-06-1333 Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival

Overview

Red Squirrels are part of our native wildlife. Populations have suffered significant declines because of competition with Grey Squirrels and the spread of squirrelpox virus. They have been assessed as Endangered in Wales, and GB.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is a member of the Wales Squirrel Forum which coordinates, supports and provides advice on the implementation of actions of the [Red Squirrel Conservation Plan for Wales \(RSCPW\)](#) and the [Grey Squirrel Management Action Plan \(GSMAP\)](#).

Red Squirrels are present in forests that NRW manages and in private woodlands. There are three key Red Squirrel populations in Wales in Anglesey, Clocaenog Forest and Mid-Wales. We are working with partners in these strongholds to help deliver the RSCPW objectives and provide financial and staff support to Red Squirrel conservation projects.

To thrive, Red Squirrels need the absence of Grey Squirrels, more woodland habitat, and sustainable forest management. We have contributed funds to the UK Squirrel Accord (UKSA) whose work includes the development of the Grey Squirrel fertility control research. We provide ongoing contracts for Grey Squirrel control in the NE Wales Red Squirrel focal area and provide funds for this work in mid-Wales.

Red Squirrel Conservation

Red Squirrel populations are threatened by competition with the non-native Grey Squirrel which leads to a reduction in breeding success, followed by population decline and ultimately extinction. This population decline is accelerated by the spread of the highly infectious squirrelpox virus (SQPV). Grey Squirrels are carriers of the virus, and it causes high mortality in Red Squirrel populations.

Under the RSCPW the three main populations in Wales are recognised as 'focal sites' for conservation. Each focal site has a buffer area and for Anglesey this covers parts of North-West Gwynedd where Red Squirrels have become re-established following the successful eradication of Grey Squirrels on Anglesey and subsequent spread of Red Squirrels.

The RSCPW sets out targets and actions for Red Squirrel recovery in Wales and its implementation is led by the Wales Squirrel Forum (WSF). The WSF is chaired by [BASC](#) and NRW is the secretariat. Other members include Welsh Government, Clocaenog Red

Squirrels Trust, Mid Wales Red Squirrel Project, Red Squirrels Trust Wales, Countryside Alliance, UK Squirrel Accord, Coed Cymru, Confor, Tilhill, WTW and Mid Wales and the Marches Assessment Centre (land-based training provider).

During a review and refresh of the conservation plan in 2018 it was identified that Red Squirrel range had expanded since 2005 and the primary objective of maintaining breeding populations at all focal sites had been achieved. A secondary objective, to maintain the current distribution of Red Squirrels within Wales, was probably not achieved as there were few records of Red Squirrels at sites outside the focal areas where they had previously been recorded.

The primary action for Red Squirrel conservation is the management of Grey Squirrel populations to prevent competition and the spread of disease. Grey Squirrel management is usually undertaken by trapping and humane despatch. Research by [APHA](#), commissioned by UK Squirrel Accord, is underway into fertility control (immunocontraception) for Grey Squirrels. The five-year Research and Development phase is due to be completed in January 2024.

Woodland management is also important for Red Squirrels to ensure sufficient trees providing food are present and good arboreal connectivity.

Evidence from Ireland and Scotland indicates that the presence of Pine Martens is associated with a reduction in Grey Squirrel populations and increases in Red Squirrels. The mechanism for this is not fully understood.

Legal position

Red Squirrels are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Offences include: Intentional taking, killing or injuring; Intentionally / recklessly damaging or destroying its place of shelter / protection; or Intentionally / recklessly disturbing it whilst occupying its place of shelter / protection.

Licences can be issued for various purposes including scientific or educational, conservation, preventing the spread of disease and preserving public health or public safety. There is also a defence within the Act whereby an offence will not have been committed if it is the 'incidental result of a lawful operation and could not reasonably have been avoided'.

NRW's role

As the Land Manager of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE), which includes 40% of the total Welsh forest resource, NRW manages forests where Red Squirrels are present including on Anglesey, Clocaenog and Tywi Forest.

We also support Red Squirrel populations in how we regulate felling and woodland creation, and how we provide advice, evidence and support for partners.

NRW is supporting the Magical Mammals project which is working to safeguard Red Squirrel populations in Anglesey, Gwynedd and Clocaenog. The project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and run by the Red Squirrels Trust Wales (RSTW) and Clocaenog Red Squirrels Trust (CRST). NRW is providing annual match funding and staff support over the course of the 5-year project.

NRW is the licencing Authority for licences issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

NRW is responsible for issuing felling licences under the Forestry Act 1967 (as amended). Under the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 NRW will have the power to add environmental conditions to felling licences. We are currently working with external stakeholders and Welsh Government colleagues to develop these environmental conditions, which includes conditions for safeguarding Red Squirrels.

NRW led on the development and revision of the [RSCPW](#), working with members of the Wales Squirrel Forum. The plan identifies actions for Red Squirrel conservation including habitat management, Grey Squirrel control and disease risk.

NRW worked with Welsh Government in the development of the [GSMAP](#), which seeks to address both the impacts on Red Squirrels and trees.

NRW is a signatory to the UK Squirrel Accord which aims to secure and expand UK Red Squirrel populations beyond current thresholds and ensure UK woodlands flourish and deliver multiple benefits for future generations of wildlife and people. The accord has funded research into immunocontraception to tackle the Grey Squirrel population.

NRW lets and manages contracts for Grey Squirrel control on the WGWE at Clocaenog Forest and Tywi in mid-Wales.

How we manage our woodlands

All our forests are managed to the UK Forestry Standard which sets out best practice. This includes complying with legislation to protect wildlife. In addition, our forests are independently audited and certified as sustainably managed against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

The way in which we manage the land in our care where Red Squirrels are present is set out in *Red Squirrel Guidance for Forest Management on the NRW Managed Estate* which is part of our Land Management Manual. This sets out how our Forest Resource Plans should consider Red Squirrels in the management planning and harvesting of our forests.

We aim to maintain and/or increase Low Impact Silvicultural Systems/Continuous Cover Forestry (LISS/CCF) where forest stability can be maintained to allow arboreal connectivity (corridors) and continuity of future forestry structure to enhance multi-age and diversity.

We carry out species survey before we undertake any work in the forest. Our ecologists check for the presence of protected species, including Red Squirrel and Pine Marten. If evidence of protected species is found we put in mitigation, this could mean an exclusion zone or delaying the work until the species has moved.

Red Squirrels are difficult to survey and monitor due to their secretive nature and low densities in some forests. NRW commissioned research in 2022 to identify a methodology for assessing Red Squirrel population trends on Anglesey. Following a tendering exercise, this work was completed by a consortium between Bangor University and Craig Shuttleworth¹. The monitoring technique uses observations of Red Squirrels on cameras as an index of population size. Additional work is underway to identify a suitable methodology in low-density populations of upland conifer sites such as Clocaenog and Tywi Forest.

We minimise impacts on Red Squirrels during harvesting operations by not undertaking works where Red Squirrels are present during the period between 1 February and 30 September when there may be dependant young in dreys (nests). When planning harvesting operations, we also aim to maintain an arboreal corridor through or around the edge of the coupe.

We hope the information provides the information you need on the topics raised in the petitioner's letter.

¹ Shannon G, Valle S & Shuttleworth CM. 2022. Using remote activated cameras to estimate relative abundance and habitat preference of red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*). NRW Evidence Report Series. Report No: 672. 40pp.

P-06-1333 Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival - Petitioner to Committee, 09 January 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the NRW 'Briefing note' on Petition P-06-1333 '*Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival.*'

Regional species management is reliant upon adaptive management. This requires mechanisms to be in place so that plans have flexibility and can evolve quickly to emerging ecological data.

We have recently recommenced meetings with NRW staff to try and ensure this is achieved. However it is early days and there have been false dawns before.

I would like the Petitions Committee to consider keeping this petition open for perhaps 12 months to allow the outcomes of collaborative working to then be reviewed by them. We have already had two petitions criticizing NRW and have shown that the issue is something which commands significant public interest with between 3K & 10K signing in only a few months.

Kind regards

Dr Craig Shuttleworth

Agenda Item 3.6

P-06-1363 Save our Fire and Rescue Service

This petition was submitted by Gavin Roberts, having collected a total of 1,937 signatures.

Text of Petition:

North Wales Fire and Rescue along with the Fire Authority plan to downgrade Rhyl and Deeside Stations from 24hr Stations to Day staffed Stations leaving the Stations empty at night. (Option 2).

Additional Information:

Currently there are 3 Wholetime Stations in North Wales, Wrexham, Deeside and Rhyl. They are staffed 24/7. Under the current proposals Rhyl and Deeside would be downgraded to day staffed Stations, relying on on call personnel responding from home at night. The predicted delay could be as much as 8-10 minutes. In a fire every second counts and this will undoubtedly cause injuries and even deaths.

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Aberconwy
- North Wales

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Gogledd Cymru**

**North Wales
Fire and Rescue Authority**

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Pencadlys y Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
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Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
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St. Asaph, Denbighshire. LL17 0JJ
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www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk

To: petitions@senedd.wales

NWFRA
21 December 2023
Ask for: Lisa Allington
01745 352 688

members.services@northwalesfire.gov.wales

Dear Mr Sargeant,

Re: Petition P-06-1363 Save our Fire and Rescue Service

I am writing in response to your letter on behalf of the Petitions Committee dated 25th October 2023, in connection with the petition highlighted above and the Fire Authority's Emergency Cover Review.

Firstly, to provide Members with clarity regarding consultation timelines, the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Consultation ran from the 21st of July to the 30th of September 2023. It generated good engagement from the people of North Wales with a total of 1,726 responses. More than 400 people attended community engagement events and more than 480 attended Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sessions. The deadline for consultation responses was midnight on the 30th of September and the North Wales Fire Authority ECR Working Group have met on several occasions since then to discuss the consultation outcomes and options. A full Fire Authority meeting took place on Monday the 18th of December 2023, during which FA Members decided not to progress with any of the options proposed and to continue with the current level of emergency cover. The options considered included the options as consulted on, a variation of option 1 and an option developed and proposed by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

Secondly, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to some of the concerns raised in the petitions supporting correspondence ref: P-06-1363 Save our Fire and Rescue Service, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 03.10.23.

Clwyd West MS Darren Millar contacted us regarding his concerns in September 2023 and was provided with further data and analysis in response to these. The impacts of each option on the Clwyd West constituency, Denbighshire and North Wales as a whole, were summarised, including the following:

The consultation options aim to provide a more equitable emergency response across our communities, considering the wide range of incidents that NWFRS respond to, including flooding, wildfires, road traffic collisions, house fires, industrial incidents, water rescues and so on.

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North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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Seasonal population changes were considered during the consultation option development and whilst NWFRS's incident volume shows some degree of seasonality with March, April and May tending to be busier than the winter months, there is no evidence of incident peaks related to holiday period population movements or variations.

Mr Millar also referenced alternative options proposed by firefighters that maintained the current response model in Rhyl. I would like to reassure Mr Millar and the Petitions Committee Members that staff and the main firefighters' representative body the FBU, were engaged throughout option development, consultation and post consultation option refinement.

In addition to Mr Millar's response, I have some concerns regarding the accuracy of the information which is referred to as additional reading, and I will attempt to address these in the order that they appear in the P-06-1364 correspondence. The Authority is required to set a balanced revenue budget which must be approved by the full Authority before the commencement of the financial year.

The budget setting process for 2023/24 highlighted the significant budget challenges and financial constraints being experienced across the public sector and recognised the need to identify measures to further reduce the budget requirement.

The Authority approved the net revenue budget for 2023/24 of £43.314 million at its meeting of 16th January 2023 following a series of Member planning meetings. This represents the amount to be levied against constituent local authorities and although it represented a year on year increase of 9.9%, it included the requirement to deliver £1.4million of in year savings and address the impact of the Welsh Government's decision to remove financial support of £0.4 million towards the emergency services national network.

A further amendment was made following the reallocation of £1.08 million of Welsh Government funding which was moved from hypothecated grant received directly, into the revenue support grant issued to local authorities. This change is cost neutral to the local authorities although the net budget to be levied increased to £44.394 million.

The pay negotiations for firefighters concluded in February 2023 for both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years with an increase of 7% and 5% respectively. This is payable from July each year and is above the planning assumptions used when setting the 2022/23 and 2023/24 budgets. All pay awards are subject to national negotiations, the timescales of which are outside of the control of the Authority.

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Consequently, the underlying financial challenge faced by the Authority for 2023/24 is a recurring shortfall of £2.4 million. In the short-term, it is proposed that the cost pressure will be managed through temporary changes to service delivery in respect of response times and prevention work, deferring expenditure and the use of reserves.

The actions taken avoided the need to raise a supplemental levy during 2023/24 and allowed Fire and Rescue Authority Members the opportunity to consider the options arising from the Emergency Cover Review to provide future financial awareness and stability.

The new training facility that is referenced, is not intrinsically linked to the Emergency Cover Review. Our main training facility at Dolgellau fire station continues to be used for operational training; however, it requires significant investment to extend its medium-term life span for risk critical breathing apparatus and firefighting tactics training and cannot be considered as a long-term option. We want to continue to improve our training provision and be able to provide the very best training facilities for our firefighters, which will in turn ensure we can provide the best possible response and protection services to our communities across North Wales and be able to respond professionally and safely to a wide variety of different types of incidents.

We have identified a site for a new training centre in Denbighshire on the A55 corridor and the final details of the business case continue to be developed.

The suggestion that there is a culture of spending and wastage is simply not true. NWFRS have extended the use of their fire appliances some two years above that of neighbouring FRs. We work collaboratively across the three Welsh FRs during larger procurement projects to ensure we source the best value when purchasing equipment and PPE. NWFRS enter onto national frameworks when possible to get the most cost effective, proven solution for the equipment we utilise and we regularly review and extend the useable lifespan of the equipment we supply our firefighters within safe and legal parameters.

The Fire Authority's Budget Scrutiny Group review in great detail department and staffing costs across the Service and have indeed identified potential savings against the 2024/25 budget forecast made prior to the Emergency Cover Review consultation. The decision made by the Fire Authority on the 18th of December, not to progress with any of the ECR options proposed and to continue with the current level of emergency cover, will mean the budget for 2024/25 can now be agreed.

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Gogledd Cymru**

**North Wales
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It is heartening that we will be able to achieve this without the loss of any firefighter jobs and without the loss of any of our fire stations. We now will turn our attention to working with our stakeholders to explore how we can work together, within our budget, to provide alternative improvements to emergency cover that meet the needs of our communities across North Wales.

The Emergency Cover Review has been moving at some pace since the close of consultation, with additional meetings beyond the standard schedule taking place, so I apologise for the delay in response.

I hope that this information is useful to Members and if you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dylan Rees'.

Cllr Dylan Rees
Chair of the Fire Authority

**P-06-1363 Save our Fire and Rescue Service - Petitioner to Committee,
09.01.24**

Having read the chairs response which was attached. I do disagree with some things he stated.

He disputed that the service had a culture of spending and that all finances were strictly controlled. However if it wasn't for the fire brigades union (FBU) stepping in they would have gone ahead with the direct entry scheme costing countless more money than the standard promotional process, The FBU also stepped in to halt the service employing another deputy chief fire officer.

The Service have also just spent hundreds of thousand of pounds on a Fire Cover review, which the Fire Authority threw out at the meeting on the 18th December.

I would now hope that we the FBU can work together with the Fire Authority and management and come up with a solution to this issue without the need for any job losses or station downgrades.

Kind regards

Agenda Item 3.7

P-06-1375 Initiate an early senedd election

This petition was submitted by Graham Bishop, having collected a total of 15,439 signatures.

Text of Petition:

After continued failings from Mark Drakeford and his Labour party we request an early election for the chance to vote on a new governing party in Wales. Examples of Welsh Labour failings are their handling of the covid pandemic, their running of Welsh vocational education systems and also their most recent farce... the new 20mph speed limits being introduced in Wales. The Welsh economy is floundering and change needs to happen. Time for a new leader in the Senedd.

Additional Information:

<https://www.business-live.co.uk/opinion-analysis/labour-been-disaster-welsh-economy-25470185>

This pretty much covers everything although opinion not fact.

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Wrexham
- North Wales



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1375
Ein cyf/Our ref FM -/00621/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair
Petitions Committee

29 November 2023

Dear Jack,

I am responding to your letter about Petition P-06-1375.

There are two scenarios in which the Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Presiding Officer to arrange an extraordinary general election:

- (i) firstly, where, under section 5(2), at least two-thirds of the Senedd resolves that it should be dissolved;
- (ii) secondly, where, in accordance with section 5(3), one of the events described in section 47(2) occur, and the Senedd fails to nominate a member of the Senedd for appointment as First Minister within 28 days of that event.

One of the events described in section 47(2) is where the Senedd (by a simple majority) resolves that the Welsh Ministers no longer enjoy the confidence of the Senedd. If the Senedd resolves that the Welsh Ministers no longer enjoy the confidence of the Senedd, and fail to nominate a new First Minister within 28 days, the Presiding Officer would be required to arrange an extraordinary general election.

For completeness, section 4 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 also enables the Presiding Officer to bring forward the date of an ordinary general election. However, this power could only be used to bring the date forward by one month (so, the next Senedd election could take place in April 2026 instead of May 2026).

I would refer the committee to the Welsh Government's [Annual Report](#) which sets out the record of this government.

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Correspondence.Mark.Drakeford@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The committee will also be aware the Senedd is currently scrutinising the Senedd Cymru (Members and Election) Bill, which includes a provision to reduce the length of time between Senedd elections from the current five to four years.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD

P-06-1375 Initiate an early senedd election – Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee, 09.01.24

My thoughts on the matter, it's difficult to say really. I don't believe that the senedd would vote in favour of an early election.

It is clear to see that the current government does not have success for Wales or welsh people in their minds. Education & NHS are at the worst standards that I can ever remember and with the introduction of a blanket 20mph limit it has devastated the tourism industry. Public transport is diabolical at the moment, I can see that from the inside as I work as a bus driver... People come to the buses because the trains are either severely delayed or cancelled totally, only to be met with buses having the same issues, delayed or not running.

Being in a border county (wrexham) and driving cross border bus services (oswestry) a high volume of people I speak to simply refuse to drive into Wales because of the 20mph.

Labour used to be the people's party. Now it seems they refuse to listen to the voters. I for one will never vote for Welsh Labour again and if I'm completely honest, I'm very tempted to move my family out of Wales across the border into oswestry.

I look forward to being able to watch the debate on this matter, however I feel I already know what will happen.

Many thanks



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

21 December 2023

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter dated 21 November to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change regarding learner transport. I am responding as the Deputy Minister is unwell.

I appreciate the important work the Committee is undertaking in this area and the comments made by families, young people and the organisations who represent them. I sympathise with the concerns raised in relation to learner travel and recognise the importance of this issue for parents, children and young people.

Learner travel is a cross-cutting complex area. As Committee members are aware, the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure (LTM) is the legislative framework that underpins learner transport in Wales. A review of the LTM was published in 2022 and a further internal analysis and evaluation exercise was undertaken earlier this year. These pieces of work reflect the findings from various pieces of work from the Children, Young People & Education Committee, that the transport needs of learners are complex, as are the networks, tools and resources required to deliver effective home to school transport services.

We do, however, believe that despite these challenges, there are opportunities for innovative approaches to be implemented to improve consistency and delivery of learner travel support across Wales. These opportunities are set out in the Learner Travel Recommendations Report that will be published in January 2024. The report sets out a modest pathway to develop a safe and sustainable learner travel offer that aligns with Welsh Government policies

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

and aspirations, reflecting legislative changes that have taken place since the introduction of the LTM in 2008.

Thank you for raising the Committee's findings with me. I have addressed each of your themes in turn for ease of reference.

Evidence gathered: What are your views on the evidence we have gathered? Does this reflect your understanding of the issues across Wales, and the impact it can have on access to education and childcare?

We will be interested to read the final report of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's current review on whether disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare and we thank the Committee for looking into this important issue.

In the meantime, I appreciate you sharing directly with me the relevant findings on the experiences of children and young people with ALN of travelling to and from their places of learning and the impact it can have on wider family members.

Learners with ALN often face greater social barriers, not only to their learning. We therefore expect additional care to be taken for vulnerable learners accessing transport provided by local authorities, to ensure greater consistency in their safety and wellbeing.

The individual development plan (IDP) includes provision for transport needs for children and young people with ALN to be documented and is an opportunity for individuals, their families and the relevant authority to ensure that the appropriate provision is sought. Completing the travel arrangement section in IDPs, when relevant, can help with the coordination and delivery of school transport for the most vulnerable learners.

We hear of learners with ALN facing transport difficulties when accessing further education and that the provision of transport is inconsistent across Wales. As the letter suggests this can be a particular problem for those over 19 years old. Often a learner with more complex ALN will stay in school until they are around 19 years old before continuing their education at a further education college.

We are aware of the excellent independent travel training that Cardiff Council deliver to young people to provide them with lifelong skills to be able to access places of learning, employment and social opportunities by giving them the skills and confidence to use public transport. Although this type of intervention will not be suitable for everyone, we would like to encourage more local authorities, and learning institutions to consider alternative options.

Transport to extra-curricular activities, including provision such as breakfast clubs, is a challenging issue faced by all children and young people. The current legislation does not require local authorities to provide transport for these activities. The 2022 LTM review highlighted the fact that even if we did have the financial resources to support such provision, the weakness in current networks and infrastructure make implementing and expansion of provision difficult. Put simply, we do not have the bus drivers, the bus operators, the capacity in our school buildings or the resources locally to be able to provide school transport for extra curricular activities on top of the statutory provision. Our aspirations to introduce a locally informed franchised bus network, complemented by community transport networks does, we hope, provide opportunities to address some of these accessibility issues for children and young people across Wales by maximising the resources available.

The LTM Recommendations report that we hope to publish shortly recommends an immediate update the statutory guidance document to improve consistency of provision across the local authorities and ensure alignment with legislative changes that have taken place including the enactment of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The evidence that you have presented will help inform the update to these guidance documents. This will include ensuring that local authorities and other delivery partners consider best practice regarding procurement of contracts to include minimum standards of awareness and training around transporting children with ALN.

Pupil Absence Report:

Could you outline the Welsh Government's current position on our recommendation?

The reasons for absence in schools is multifaceted. The Welsh Government will continue to explore the causes of low levels of learner attendance at schools and how this might be addressed at local and national level. We will use the findings to inform policy developments and interventions.

Our ambition will be to deliver a learner first approach to learner travel, however we have to be realistic to the challenges that were highlighted in the first review around transport networks, tools and resources required to deliver effective services for home to school transport. The internal evaluation and analysis exercise undertaken earlier this year collated a wide range of local, national and international evidence to identify innovative approaches to learner travel provision. Local authorities across Wales are already deploying some excellent and innovative practice to maximise resources to enhance transport provision to learners and the broader community. We want to embed the right structures so local authorities and other delivery partners can share and disseminate best practice to improve consistency of provision and to ensure that the transport infrastructure is in place to reduce any barriers to accessing education.

Petitions:

As we approach the end of the year, can you advise what has happened since this advice was submitted to you over the summer? What will be the next steps, and when will they result in change on the ground for learners across Wales? While we acknowledge the complexities around learner travel and the ongoing financial challenges faced across the public sector, we believe there is a real need for pace and urgency when dealing with this important issue.

An internal analysis and evaluation exercise was conducted earlier this year. The Committee will be sent a copy of this report which outlines a set of recommendation to improve the consistency and quality of learner transport provision across Wales.

Children's Commissioner:

We would welcome your views on the Commissioner's recommendation for a free public transport pilot for children and young people under 18 within this Senedd term.

One of the key aims of the Welsh Government's Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, is to reduce the cost of sustainable travel for **everyone** in Wales, including young people.

Within the current operating model children up to the age of 5 will be allowed to travel free on local buses when accompanied by an adult. Those between 5 years old and up to 16 years

will also be able to receive either half fare or 1/3 off the normal bus fare, dependent on the bus operator, or if the service is operating under contract to the local authority.

We have looked at a range of options to make travel on public transport easier, more accessible and affordable for all in the community by simplifying the fares and ticketing system. We have undertaken a comprehensive piece of planning work around options to deliver a 'Fairer Fares' offer for bus passengers in Wales, which has included the potential introduction of capped single fares, zonal fares, integrated bus and rail ticketing and enhanced young person's ticketing. Some of these initiatives are currently being trialled on the Transport for Wales operated TrawsCymru network and we will be using this learning to inform a long term, sustainable and affordable solution that will encourage modal shift for all.

Under the current operating model, the only way we can offer discounted or free travel is to negotiate reimbursement arrangements with operators which has proven to be costly, as has been seen with the free travel offer for under 22s in Scotland. The proposed Bus Bill, which we will be bringing to the Senedd in 2024, will provide us with the opportunity to look a fresh at bus service delivery across Wales, including taking forward our work on fairer fares (and therefore the possibility around an enhanced provision for children and young people). As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right to support all citizens of Wales.

In the meantime, we fund and provide the MyTravelPass scheme for 16 to 21 year olds which provides approximately 1/3 off the cost of bus travel. There are also a number of discounted bus network tickets available across Wales and a number of opportunities for discounted travel on the TfW rail network. The report recently published by the Welsh Youth Parliament, *Sustainable Ways*, has highlighted the need to undertake further work to ensure children and young people are aware of these schemes. We have therefore asked Transport for Wales to undertake a campaign to raise the profile of the discounts available for children and young people travelling on public transport.

Children in Wales:

What work is the Welsh Government doing to alleviate the cost of living pressures on transport costs for children, young people and their families?

The Welsh Government provides funding to local authorities for pre-16 provision in schools through the Local Government Revenue Settlement in the form of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The RSG is not ring-fenced; the funding allocated to each authority is available to the authority to spend as it sees fit on the range of services for which it is responsible, including school transport. In determining the level of funding required to deliver their statutory duties local authorities may draw on other sources of funding outside the RSG.

In 2022/23 local authorities reported a total spend of £160 million on home to school transport. The latest published data outlining local authority spend on education, including learner travel, is available at the following link: [Education revenue outturn expenditure, by authority and service \(£ thousand\) \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/government-figures/education-revenue-outturn-expenditure-by-authority-and-service)

As outlined above we have committed, along with Transport for Wales, to take forward a piece of work to run a targeted campaign and develop relevant and accessible resources, to ensure that children and young people are aware of all the public transport assistance they can access including:

- Children up to the age of 5 years old travel free on bus services across Wales and then either at half fare or two thirds the normal adult fare from the age of 5 and up to 16 years old.

- The Welsh Government's "MyTravelPass" is a discounted travel scheme, which is available for all young people aged 16 to 21 years. This £2 million scheme provides approximately 30% off the standard adult bus fare on local bus services across Wales. For further details of the scheme please see the following link: [Home !\[\]\(7e19807c61da14f515588e95cd49886c_img.jpg\) mytravelpass | Welsh Government](#).
- There are also various discounted bus tickets offered by the different bus operators across Wales.
- Under 11's can travel for free on Transport for Wales operated rail services and under 16's can travel for free on off-peak Transport for Wales services when accompanied by a fare paying adult.
- Additionally, the 16-17 Saver railcard is also available for use on all rail services across Wales and England offering 50% off most rail fares every day of the year with no time restrictions and no minimum fare for an annual cost of £30.
- the Education Maintenance Allowance funding for further education can be used to support travel costs: [Education Maintenance Allowance, funding for Further Education | Student Finance Wales](#)

The Welsh Government has also compiled a list of support and advice to help individuals and families with the cost of living. This information is regularly updated and can be accessed on the following link: [Get help with the cost of living | GOV.WALES](#)

Welsh Youth Parliament:

What are your views on the recommendations made by the Welsh Youth Parliament?

Please see attached Annex A, our written response to the Welsh Youth Parliament.

Financial pressures on local authorities:

To what extent is the Welsh Government monitoring changes in local authority provision as a result of financial constraints; and the impact that is then having on learner engagement and attendance?

We monitor local authorities school transport provision closely through our work with the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO), which provides a forum for local authorities to raise any concern on this issue. As part of the recent analysis and evaluation exercise, we reviewed all 22 local authority home to school transport and received survey responses from 14 local authorities who provided information on their costs, delivery models, issues and barriers associated with home to school transport in relation to the Measure and associated guidance.

Some really excellent practices have been identified with local authorities thinking creatively and innovatively about their learner travel provision. For example, the invest-to-save independent travel training provision in Cardiff and Monmouthshire Council reviewing their community transport provision and collaborating with bus operators to maximise the opportunities for children and young people to use public transport networks to access their places of learning. We support and encourage more of this integrated approach and joined up service delivery across Wales.

I hope this letter provides you with the reassurances required at this time by your committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Delyth Lewis
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CF99 1SN

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21 December 2023

Dear Welsh Youth Parliament Members,

Thank you for the Sustainable Ways Report published by your Climate Change and Environment Committee. I am a passionate advocate for encouraging modal shift, getting people out of their cars and travelling sustainably – either through active travel or on public transport and the findings of your work are an important contribution to driving this agenda forward.

The report highlights some incredibly important issues, views and challenges that we as a government welcome. I would like to assure you that the content and its recommendations have been reviewed in detail by Ministers and officials and your findings will help inform the policies we develop and deliver whilst we progress on our transformational journey to develop an integrated transport network across Wales.

Many of your recommendations complement our aspirations set out in Llwybr Newydd, our Transport Strategy, where we have set out clear our ambitions to deliver an integrated active travel and public transport network that is both accessible, sustainable and efficient for the people of Wales.

We are in the early stages of this process. The Bus Bill which we are planning to bring to the Senedd next year will be a major step towards realising our ambitions. The Bill provides us with an opportunity to look afresh at bus service delivery across Wales by moving away from a commercial network (where private bus operators determine which routes they run and how much they charge) to a franchised model of delivery. Bus franchising allows the franchising authority (planned to be Welsh Government) to specify key aspects of bus services, including routes, timetables, fares, hours of operation and service quality standards – many of the themes that your recommendations touch on. Bus operators are therefore then responsible

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

for running these services under contracts awarded by the franchising authority. As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right to support all citizens of Wales.

Transport for Wales are responsible for delivering the Welsh Government's vision of a high quality safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network. In 2022 they, with the support of the Children's Commissioner, introduced a Children and Young People's Charter. Building on this work, we have asked them to accelerate the Children & Young People's Advisory Group who we will be ask to explore options for taking forward the recommendations of your report.

I will take each recommendation in turn so that you have a clear understanding of our position and, where relevant, the actions we will take.

THEME – AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING

Recommendation 1:

Places of learning to put a greater emphasis on improving young people's understanding of the practicalities of how they can travel sustainably in their local area

Welsh Government response:

Welsh Government agree with the sentiments of this recommendation and we will continue to support places of learning in developing the resources they require to encourage and promote sustainable travel in their local area.

We continue to invest in promoting Active Travel and have recently worked with Sustrans to provide support to schools to develop Active Travel School Plans, which aim to identify and address barriers to active travel to school, to help increase the number of pupils and staff walking, scooting or cycling regularly.

A set of resources and approaches were launched on 4 October this year and are available, online, for use by places of learning This investment complements our long standing Active Journeys programme, and cycling and child pedestrian training.

A new Walk to School programme, delivered by Living Streets has started working with local authorities and schools and will operate for two years providing schools and their learners with the skills and resource required to support sustainable travel.

Recommendation 2:

An increase in efforts to promote sustainable travel, and schemes like MyTravelPass.

Welsh Government response:

Welsh Government agree that children, young people, their families and others of influence in their lives should be fully aware of all the benefits and opportunities available to them to travel sustainably.

We were concerned to read about the low proportion of those responding to the survey who knew about the MyTravelPass scheme. Although schools and colleges are notified of the initiative on an annual basis, and we have asked delivery partners, such as the Children's Commissioner to also promote these initiatives, the report demonstrates the requirement to do further work in promoting this benefit.

We will explore options with Transport for Wales to develop tailored communication resources for use by schools, colleges, local authorities and other key stakeholders, such as the Welsh Youth Parliament, to promote this benefit to eligible applicants.

We believe that a campaign targeting young people should be cocreated with young people, through Transport for Wales' Children & Young People's Advisory Group to be established in early 2024 and will ask them to prioritise this recommendation.

THEME - AFFORDABILITY

Recommendation 3:

The introduction of free public transport for people under the age of 25.

Welsh Government response:

One of the key aims of the Welsh Government's Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, is to reduce the cost of sustainable travel for everyone in Wales, including young people, and we are currently looking at a range of options to make travel by public transport more affordable for all in the community, including under 25s by simplifying the fares and ticketing system.

We have undertaken a comprehensive piece of planning work around options to deliver a 'Fairer Fares' offer for bus passengers in Wales, which has included the potential introduction of an enhanced young person's ticket option.

However, we have been faced with a challenging funding settlement from the UK Government. Following the Covid pandemic, we have had to prioritise our bus funding to ensure essential bus services are maintained whilst keeping fares as low as possible through the conditions set out in the Bus Emergency Scheme and current Bus Transition Fund, that has successfully sustained the bus industry over the past 2 years.

By the end of this financial year Welsh Government will have provided over £200m of emergency funding to protect our bus network across Wales since the onset of the Covid pandemic. This means that we haven't been able to progress as quickly as we would have liked on our Fairer Fares commitments. As and when the funding position does improve, we are keen to progress this piece of work and will continue to work with children and young people to develop any future intervention.

Recommendation 4:

The introduction and effective promotion of schemes to support young people to access equipment like bikes.

Welsh Government Response:

We recognise that access to cycles, as well as lack of secure cycle storage is an important barrier to greater uptake of cycling. Through our grants to local authorities, Welsh Government has funded school bike fleets to enable access to roadworthy cycles for cycle training and for trips during the school day.

We have supported public bike share schemes, such as in Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan and Swansea, which offer affordable cycle hire. There are already a large number of charities and social enterprises across Wales, which repair and re-sell second hand bikes, making cycle ownership much more affordable.

Welsh Government is currently exploring options to provide more support for this sector and encourage schemes in areas where these do not exist currently.

Recommendation 5:

Greater Investment in our public transport service, with a focus on:

- Expanding public transport routes
- Increasing the frequency of services
- Ensuring that services are reliable
- Reducing journey times

Welsh Government Response:

The current privatised operating model for buses means that buses are run by commercial companies for profit. This model does not provide Welsh Government with the tools, resources nor flexibility to make the changes that the recommendations request.

The Bus Bill which will be introduced to the Senedd next year will, however, provide the legislative framework to introduce a franchised model of delivery where Welsh Government, along with our delivery partners will be able to develop a truly integrated public transport network to reflect the requirements of local communities.

Under the franchise model we would be able to run bus routes that work for local communities, that integrate with rail services and link up with Active Travel routes. We will be able to introduce one ticket for people to be able to travel on all modes of transport, with a single timetable that can align with other bus and rail services.

In preparation for this radical reform, we are working collaboratively with Transport for Wales and local authorities to agree on the shape of public transport networks in the different regions of Wales. We are working to deliver a coherent, consistent, well planned and passenger friendly network with simple affordable tickets valid across all services.

Recommendation 6:

Improved connectivity between different modes of sustainable travel.

Welsh Government response

Integrated journey planning is one of the four key workstreams in Llwybr Newydd, recognising that modal shift requires a holistic, integrated approach to journey planning, working across different modes and sectors to make it easier for people to travel door-to-door using sustainable transport modes. Integrated journey planning involves a complex range of issues such as timetabling, information provision, infrastructure planning and policy development

All local authorities are required to develop Active Travel Network Plan in which they have planned the walking and cycling routes for each of their towns - railway and bus stations are key destinations for these routes. Transport for Wales is working with local authorities on making improvements at stations, for example by putting in secure cycle parking.

As outlined in response to recommendation 5, by introducing a franchised model of delivery for the Bus network we will be able to develop an integrated public transport and active travel network improving connectivity between different modes of sustainable travel.

Recommendation 7:

The removal of barriers facing different groups including neurodiverse young people and those with physical disabilities

Welsh Government Response:

Safety is a key theme of our forthcoming Equality Action Plan, another one of Llwybr Newydd's key workstreams.

We want everyone to feel confident, safe and secure in using the sustainable transport mode of their choice. The action plan will feature measures to address personal safety on public transport, in active travel and on the roads. We will also integrate safety considerations into all aspects of transport policy and planning, including the design of infrastructure.

The Equality Action Plan will be published in early 2024. We will ensure that the Children & Young People's Advisory Group has the option to engage with this piece of transport planning as it develops.

in the development and implementation of policies and programmes the Welsh Government applies the Social Model of Disability, recognising that those who are covered by the legal definition of disability are frequently disabled by barriers in society, rather than by their impairment or condition. We will take this approach in developing our franchised network.

Transport for Wales has an access and inclusion panel made up of people with protected characteristics. This panel helps scrutinise our accessibility policies and advise on how to engage and support passengers to use bus and rail services.

THEME - ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES**Recommendation 8:**

Greater investment on active travel routes, with a focus on improving safety and accessibility. Specifically we would like to see:

- a greater number of bike, walking and wheeling paths
- more segregated bike lanes
- improvements to the condition of paths and pavements

Welsh Government Response:

This Autumn we celebrated 10 years since the Active Travel Act was passed. Senedd Members from all parties marked the anniversary at an event organised by the Cross Party Group on the Active Travel Act on 4 October, reconfirming their, and our, commitment to make Wales a walking and cycling nation.

We have allocated just under £55m to local authorities for active travel infrastructure through the Active Travel Fund and the Safe Routes in Communities Grant for 2023/24. This funding is available for local authorities to make improvements to walking and cycling routes and facilities.

The Welsh Government are also encouraging local authorities across Wales to introduce School Streets, which involve road closures around schools at the start and end of the school day, in order to improve conditions for walking and cycling, improve road safety and reduce air pollution.

Recommendation 9:

An increase in the amount of secure bike parking facilities in communities, and particularly in places of learning.

Welsh Government Response:

We agree with the principle of this recommendation and provide grants to local authorities to be able to develop this infrastructure. Our grant funding to local authorities is for walking, wheeling and cycling routes and facilities. Each local authority can access a set amount of money each year, which is currently at least £500,000, to make small scale improvements or do preparatory work for bigger projects. This funding can be used to install secure cycle parking where it is needed.

In addition, the Safe Routes in Communities Grant is aimed specifically at improving the conditions for walking, wheeling and cycling to and from places of learning and is frequently used to fund cycle and scooter storage.

As part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, proposals for new or improved places of learning must include details of sufficient secure and convenient cycle storage.

THEME – SIGNAGE, TICKETING & TIMETABLING INFORMATION

Recommendation 10:

Improvements in how information regarding public and active travel is made available and communicated, making it more accessible, so that it is easier to see how various modes of travel can be used to get to the end destination.

Welsh Government response:

The Active Travel Act 2013 requires local authorities in Wales to produce maps of walking and cycling networks in their local area, known as Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMs). These maps are designed to show two main things:

1. Existing routes – those current walking and cycling routes that already meet Welsh Government active travel standards, meaning they can be readily used for everyday journeys, and
2. Future routes – new routes that the local authority proposes to create in the future, as well as current routes that are planned for improvement to bring them up to the standards.

In developing these maps local authorities must consult on these networks at the planning stage. They then should also engage with the local community during the development of each project through to construction. The approved maps can be viewed on [Datamap Wales](https://datamap.wales.gov.uk/). [Active Travel Network Maps | DataMapWales \(gov.wales\)](https://datamap.wales.gov.uk/)

Working with Transport for Wales and the Children & Young People's Advisory Group we will explore options to develop an accessible multi modal journey planner.

Recommendation 11:

Improved provision of real-time information to show the progress of and updated arrival times for public transport, on those times when there are delays

WG Response:

We agree that public transport operators should be making use of modern technologies to make sure that good information is easily available to people.

An integrated transport system, underpinned by a franchised bus network, as outlined in Llwybr Newydd will enable the Welsh Government in partnership with Transport for Wales to specify the service requirements, including features such as the provision of real-time information, in future contracts.

Transport for Wales are already providing this service on their TrawsCymru network and rails connections.

Recommendation 12:

Provide a ticketing option which enables young people to use one ticket across multiple modes of public transport.

Welsh Government Response:

We agree with the principle of this recommendation, the current system of operating buses has resulted in a complex, fragmented system of fares and ticketing on local bus services across Wales.

Our Bws Cymru strategy, and the Bus Bill, sets out a path for the provision of more simplified, affordable and accessible arrangements for fares and ticketing on bus services. Our ambition is to develop a system based on the principles of One Network, One ticket, One timetable where people can travel across Wales

We have recently introduced combined bus / rail ticketing on the Transport for Wales procured TrawsCymru bus service T1 linking Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, which is proving popular with passengers. Steps are being taken to extend this to other parts of the TrawsCymru network over the next few months.

We will be using the learning from these initiatives to help inform and realise the Welsh Government's aspirations set out in Llwybr Newydd to develop a transport system that is accessible, efficient and sustainable.

THEME – DISCRIMINATION & ABUSE**Recommendation 13:**

A co-ordinated campaign to reduce anti-social behaviour and discrimination against marginalised groups of young people, and for places of learning to support within the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales.

Welsh Government response:

Inclusion will be a key theme of our forthcoming Equality Action Plan. Wales' transport network must be inclusive of everyone who needs to travel. The action plan will also set out actions to help make the transport industry within Wales also an employer of choice, improving its representation of people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, women, LGBTQ+ and disabled people.

The Children & Young People's Advisory Group will provide an opportunity to work with delivery partners to address issues around equality and accessibility.

We have recently worked with Young Wales to undertake a consultation exercise with children and young people on their thoughts, insights and experience of travelling to school. The findings of this consultation exercise have informed the recommendations of an internal report which includes actioning a piece of work to update the Travel Behaviour Code, and associated resources for schools, to promote ownership and responsibility amongst children, young people and schools with respect to their attitudes, behaviours and values when travelling. Your research and recommendation will help inform this piece of work.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for your hard work, dedication and effort to use the platform that you have as members of the Welsh Youth Parliament to ensure that the voices of children and young people across Wales are heard and listened to by the Welsh Government.

Your work, and this report in particular, will leave a lasting legacy on the infrastructure and culture of transport provision in Wales as we deliver on our ambitions to deliver a truly integrated transport network to help deliver on our commitments to be a Net Zero Nation by 2050.

Yours sincerely



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