

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /  
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee  
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd  
PR12  
Ymateb gan y Coleg Brenhinol Pediatreg ac Iechyd Plant Cymru / Evidence from Royal  
College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) Wales



## **Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee Response from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)**

### **About the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)**

The RCPCH works to transform child health through knowledge, innovation and expertise. We have over 500 members in Wales and over 17,500 worldwide. The RCPCH is responsible for training and examining paediatricians. We also advocate on behalf of members, represent their views and draw upon their expertise to inform policy development and the maintenance of professional standards.

### **Summary**

We welcome the fact that within the Welsh Government, we have a Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change, which demonstrates commitment to addressing this issue. We hope that finalising and delivering new legislation and then working on its implementation will be a top priority: we have in mind here the Clean Air Act and legislation on 20mph zones.

As a College, we have highlighted climate change as a priority in our new three-year strategy and look forward to sharing more of our work with the committee over the coming months and years.

## Reflections from RCPCH on the Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities

### Energy

We very much welcome the focus on investment in renewables. However, we would welcome scrutiny by the Committee of any and all Welsh Government fossil fuels subsidies. In May 2021, the UK and other G7 nations reaffirmed their commitment to end inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by 2025<sup>1</sup>.

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC) of which RCPCH is a member, has made the following policy calls<sup>2</sup>:

- All fossil fuel subsidies to end (while protecting the vulnerable who may be unfairly disadvantaged) coupled with a massive investment in renewable energy and storage, green infrastructure, and green jobs
- All fossil fuel companies to become net zero by 2040

### Net zero

Wales has recently committed to net-zero by 2050. The Welsh Government's ambition is a net-zero public sector by 2030, which we hope and assume includes health services<sup>3</sup>. However, the UKHACC is calling on governments to go further, as per the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change advice<sup>4</sup>.

UKHACC policy calls endorsed by RCPCH include:

- All countries to achieve net zero emissions by 2040, with countries with high emissions of carbon making much bigger cuts than those with low emissions
- All health services to become net zero as soon as possible and before 2040

The NHS in England has a 'Greener NHS' unit tasked with making NHSE net zero. We ask the Committee to consider scrutiny of Welsh Government planning and actions to deliver net zero health services and wider public sector by 2030. A stated ambition that is not backed up by serious planning, resource and a timetable of actions to achieve the agreed outcomes is unlikely to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> UK Government (May 2021) *G7 Climate and Environment: Ministers' Communiqué*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-climate-and-environment-ministers-meeting-may-2021-communicue/g7-climate-and-environment-ministers-communicue-london-21-may-2021> and UK Government (December 2020) *PM announces the UK will end support for fossil fuel sector overseas*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-the-uk-will-end-support-for-fossil-fuel-sector-overseas>

<sup>2</sup> UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (2021) *Health professionals call for action to avert a climate catastrophe*. Available at: <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UKHACC-COP26-Calls-for-Action.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government (2021) *Wales commits to net zero by 2050, but sets out ambitions to get there sooner*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/wales-commits-net-zero-2050-sets-out-ambitions-get-there-sooner>

<sup>4</sup> UKHACC (2021)

## Environment

We welcome proposals for the new Clean Air Act and would like to see this prioritised by Welsh Government. Links between air quality and children's health are well documented. In our Position Statement on Outdoor Air Quality we state that "the effects of air pollution can start before birth and are shown to have a greater impact on babies, children and young people. These effects are particularly damaging because they can have a lifelong impact and those with existing health conditions are even more vulnerable"<sup>5</sup>.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that fine particulate (PM 2.5) pollution should not exceed 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup><sup>6</sup>, yet current UK legal limits are more than double this – at 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup>.

In a letter signed by RCPCH President Dr Camilla Kingdon, The UKHACC recently urged the UK Government to introduce new legally binding air quality targets without delay, stating that the current UK Government plans are insufficient to protect the public from immediate harm<sup>7</sup>. This was prompted by the UK Government response to the coroner's report produced to prevent future deaths from air pollution after it was recorded as a cause of the death nine-year-old Ella Kissi-Debrah. The response failed to heed the Assistant Coroner's primary recommendation that air quality targets, in line with the guidance of the World Health Organization that fine particulate (PM 2.5) pollution should not exceed 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, should be seen as a "minimum requirement".

We would therefore ask the Committee to consider in its scrutiny of the proposed legislation and Welsh Government action on the environment, whether target setting frameworks in the proposed legislation are strong enough and meet WHO recommendations. We would also ask the Committee to consider whether Welsh Government timelines both for delivering the legislation and implementing its commitments are adequate to meet the urgency of the challenge. Finally, we would hope that the Committee would consider what impact the Clean Air Act is likely to have on inequalities, given that across the UK, the most deprived communities experience the worst air quality, further driving health inequalities<sup>8</sup>.

## Transport and active travel

In reading the Minister and Deputy Minister's letter to the Committee Chair, we were struck that there is no mention of proposals to introduce a default speed limit of 20mph in restricted roads in Wales (typically residential or built-up areas)<sup>9</sup>. We support these proposals, which we hope will provide safer environments for children and young people to walk, play and travel. We encourage such active travel to school and generally in day to day life. These proposals speak to a range of policy areas across government<sup>10</sup> including air quality, obesity, active travel and road accident prevention (see our State of Child Health evidence on this<sup>11</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> RCPCH (October 2020) *Outdoor air quality in the UK - position statement*. Available at:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/outdoor-air-quality-uk-position-statement>

<sup>6</sup> WHO (May 2018) *Ambient (outdoor) air pollution*. Available at: [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

<sup>7</sup> UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (June 2021) *UK Health Leaders Say Government Air Pollution Plans Are Insufficient to Protect the Public*. Available at: <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/environment-bill-letter/>

<sup>8</sup> See RCPCH (October 2020) *Outdoor Air Quality in the UK – position statement*

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government (July 2021) *POLICY AND STRATEGY: 20mph*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/20mph>

<sup>10</sup> See Phelan, S (August 2021) 'How does active travel improve child health?', *RCPCH Insight*. Available at: <https://medium.com/rcpch-insight/how-does-active-travel-improve-child-health-9ace4c2426cc>

<sup>11</sup> RCPCH (2020) *State of Child Health*. Available at: <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/injury-prevention/road-traffic-accidents/>

Therefore, we would ask the Committee to consider whether these proposals fall within its remit for scrutiny and work with other relevant Committees to ensure that the Welsh Government is held to account on these commitments. We also note the health inequalities associated with each of these policy areas<sup>12</sup> and again encourage the Committee to consider inequalities in any scrutiny undertaken.

On active travel more broadly, the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee report in 2018 was, as we understand it, the most recent report on the Active Travel Act. We would therefore consider that there should now be further scrutiny to establish how much progress has been made by the Welsh Government in addressing the recommendations made in the earlier report, particularly those accepted or accepted in principle by the Welsh Government in 2018. This could also provide an opportunity for Members to consider whether the Act is delivering on its objectives overall and whether more people, particularly children and young people in Wales are now walking and cycling; and what impact the pandemic has had on walking, cycling and active travel given changes to so many people's working lives, education and day to day lives.

### **Other subjects we think should be prioritised**

#### **Planning for heatwaves and flooding:**

The Met Office recently published a report showing that we are already feeling the effects of climate change in the UK with increased heat and rainfall. It found that "2020 was the first year that the annual values for rainfall, temperature and sunshine were all in the top ten in the same year. 2020 was third warmest, fifth wettest and eighth sunniest on record for the UK"<sup>13</sup>. With this in mind, we would invite the Committee to consider scrutiny of government plans around heatwaves and flooding – and in particular the impact on children's health. The College has not published any reports on these issues but we are considering them and will update the Committee if we publish any evidence around the risk to child health from heatwaves and flooding, or other effects of climate change.

#### **Hearing evidence from children and young people**

Given that climate change and environmental policy will have such a profound impact on today's children and young people throughout their lives, we would recommend that the Committee engages directly with children and young people both in terms of establishing priorities and in terms of scrutiny to understanding how government programmes are delivering for them (for example, what are young people's experience of cycling to school, or of air pollution near their homes). As our own work within the College around climate change develops, we will also share with the Committee insights from children and young people working with us.

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<sup>12</sup> See RCPCH (2020) *State of Child Health*

<sup>13</sup> Met Office (July 2021) *Climate change continues to be evident across UK*. Available at: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2021/climate-change-continues-to-be-evident-across-uk>