

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR21
Ymateb gan Diverse Cymru / Evidence from Diverse Cymru

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We are writing to provide evidence on the forthcoming strategic priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee and in particular how the focus of the committee relates to, and can build on commitments to a fair and equal Wales for all.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We work across all protected characteristics and with other people who experience discrimination and disadvantage, such as carers and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

We believe that equality and human rights should be at the heart of every decision the Senedd makes affecting Wales. Equality, diversity and inclusion must be a cross-cutting theme, central to all inquiries and work of every Senedd committee and policy area. This should include coproduction with the wide-diversity of people in Wales.

We would welcome any opportunity to work with you to build commitments to a fair and equal Wales for all into your policies and work as the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee.

A copy of our Manifesto for 2021 is available, in both English and Welsh, here:

<https://www.diverseecymru.org.uk/a-manifesto-for-a-fair-and-equal-wales-2/>

What you think about the Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months.

COP26 and climate change

Opportunities to reform the Welsh economy and infrastructure towards a green economy must recognise and take into account inequalities and disadvantage experienced by the wide diversity of people in Wales, across the protected characteristics and beyond. Within important committee scrutiny of plans and commitments the voices and experiences of people who experience inequalities must be front and centre. This should involve direct engagement and coproduction with people representing the wide diversity of people in Wales.

Specific issues to take into account include maximising opportunities for flexible and agile working within the green economy; specific support and development for communities to ensure that all groups have the opportunity to benefit from green jobs; and maximising the opportunities to tackle discrimination, inequality and disadvantage, including gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps and career segregation for all communities as the green economy grows.

The committee should ensure that these issues are fully explored and taken into account within Minister's plans for COP26 and beyond.

As we deliver the variety of building, housing, energy, transport, infrastructure and other initiatives to tackle climate change in Wales, it is vital that improvements to advance equality and tackle barriers, discrimination, and disadvantage experienced by many groups in Wales are fully considered and integrated into these initiatives simultaneously.

Energy

The commitment to tackling fuel poverty whilst focusing on decarbonising heat and moving to renewable sources is very welcome. The role that tackling fuel poverty plays in these initiatives, including experiences of fuel poverty for people who experience inequality and disadvantage in Wales, should be a focus for the committee in this Senedd term. Intersections between socio-economic inequality, including fuel poverty, and inequalities related to protected characteristics and others experiencing inequality and disadvantage, are well-evidenced and vital to ensuring that everyone in Wales benefits from progress in this area, especially those with higher fuel consumption requirements, including disabled people, carers, older people, and larger families.

Transport

All forms of public transport must improve accessibility for all disabled people in Wales. This must include audio and visual information, unassisted access, and comprehensive

training in access for disabled people, including learning disabled people and people with dementia.

Safety and fair treatment on public transport is a concern for many people across the protected characteristics. There must be comprehensive training for all public transport staff on each protected characteristic group and other groups experiencing discrimination and disadvantage in Wales. This must include appropriate and inclusive treatment. Staff must be empowered and supported to challenge when customers experience discrimination or hate incidents on public transport.

Public transport must be frequent, reliable, and affordable. The related infrastructure, including stations, tickets, and vehicles must also be accessible, inclusive and safe, which includes toilet and changing places provision and improving vehicle design.

Active travel must also be designed to be safe, and accessible for all users, including disabled pedestrians and cyclists, and prioritise walking and cycling above driving when designing road infrastructure. Consideration of access for disabled people who need to drive to access town and city centres must also be part of these considerations.

As we improve the public transport and active travel infrastructure in Wales it is vital that inequalities and discrimination are tackled and the experiences of people who experience discrimination and disadvantage are at the heart of initiatives.

Digital Infrastructure and Digital and Data

All online information and websites should meet the highest web accessibility standards. However, it should also be recognised that no website is fully accessible to everyone. Offline information and support is still required.

Digital exclusion is a significant barrier to accessing information and services. If information is not available offline many people become isolated and cannot access services or support. Public information must be available in hard copy and offline formats and widely distributed. On and offline information must also be available in a wide-range of accessible formats; in BSL, alongside English and Welsh, including embedding the BDA Charter; and always written in Plain English and Cymrag Clir in at least 14 pt Sans Serif font and following accessibility guidelines as the standard format. All information should also be thoroughly checked to ensure it is inclusive of all people and communities in Wales.

Programmes to address digital exclusion must be provided locally and tailored to the barriers experienced by different groups. Individual support should be easy to access.

Face-to-face engagement, once it is safe, is essential for many people. Not everyone can engage online. Additionally, many people who can and do engage online feel

isolated if their only engagement with people is online. In person meetings, community groups, and events are vital to tackling isolation.

Housing

We need to be thinking of not just homes for life when planning new development or regeneration, but designing communities for life.

As we retrofit homes to decarbonise them, opportunities should be taken to retrofit homes where possible to meet homes for life standards and support people to continue to live in their homes throughout their lives and as they get older or become disabled people. This should include active consideration of accessibility and inclusion standards within the WHQS programme, as well as considering support and initiatives for private landlords.

Town Centre Regeneration

Isolation has been a significant impact of the current pandemic on many people. People are shopping, accessing services, and connecting more within their local communities. These local economies and communities are vital. This also assists in promoting active travel and reducing longer journeys to tackle climate change and promote health. Economic policies must support local, neighbourhood shops and services and ensure that all neighbourhoods are accessible for disabled people and inclusive.

Town and city centres should be carefully designed to ensure that street furniture and features do not present a barrier to disabled people. Public realm design must involve people representing the whole range of protected characteristics and people in Wales from the initial design stage.

In particular, which of these priorities the Committee should be focusing on over the next year or so?

Some of our key issues for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure are:

- Reforming the economy and thinking about localised economies, cutting down on the need to travel to access work and services.
- Ensuring local economies are accessible and inclusive for everyone in Wales.
- Ensuring town centres and local neighbourhoods are designed in accessible and inclusive ways.
- Flexible working and agile working, which is beneficial for climate change, as well as women, careers and disabled in particular.

- Moves towards greener economies, and green jobs being an opportunity to address inequalities across all characteristics, such as gender, disability and race inequalities and pay gaps in workplaces, as well as career segregation. There is a significant role for Senedd to ensure that a new economy is truly open to everyone and inclusive, whilst also skilling up those most disadvantaged by inequalities.
- Public transport which is inclusive, accessible and safe, and staff being trained and aware of equalities issues, including hate incidents, and feeling able to address these issues.
- Ensuring that housing and neighbourhood design address inequalities and meet lifetime homes and neighbourhoods standards.
- Ensuring the voices and experiences of people who experience inequality are central to all policy making, and co-producing all work.

Any other subject you think should be prioritised over the next 12-18 months. Please set out why you think your suggested subject should be a priority for the Committee?

Inclusive Policy Development

As we recover from Covid-19 it is vital that all political parties in Wales place equality and human rights front and centre of all legislation, strategies, policies, programmes, and actions. The impact on all different communities and groups in Wales must be monitored and action taken to ensure that we emerge from this crisis stronger and more equal, rather than equality and human rights being detrimentally affected. Older, younger, disabled, and Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic people and women are already disproportionately impacted by higher unemployment and lower wages. The current crisis has deepened and highlighted these inequalities.

A 'one size fits all' approach will not meet the equalities requirements of people with one or more protected characteristics. We need to recognise and act on the voices and experiences of people in Wales, including intersectional issues. Failure to make this fundamental shift in the way we address equality and diversity will leave many people in Wales at risk of discrimination, poverty and injustice.

Legislation, policy and practice must be coproduced with individuals representing the diversity of the Wales across all characteristics to ensure that it respects every individual and advances equality for all. There is significant evidence that legislative compliance is not reflected in people's experiences of barriers to accessing services and in discrimination in Wales. This implementation gap must be closed.

Comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion training programmes are a vital part of this solution.