



# **CCW response to Senedd Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Working Priorities consultation**

**Date: September 2021**

## **Who we are**

The [Consumer Council for Water \(CCW\) is the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales](#). Since 2005, we have helped thousands of consumers resolve complaints against their water company, while providing free advice and support. Our work is informed [by extensive research](#), which we use to champion the interests of consumers and influence water companies, governments and regulators.

We welcome the opportunity to share our views on what we think the priorities of Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee should be focussing on over the next six months and for the duration of the sixth Senedd.

## **An opportunity to elevate the importance of water in Welsh policy**

During the sixth Senedd, we have an opportunity to work with elected Members and the Welsh Government to elevate the importance of water consumers - and water more generally - in Welsh policy and legislation that can help meaningful action to tackle climate change.

Current key policy developments we should all be considering to achieve this include:

- The implementation of recommendations of the Independent review of water affordability delivered by CCW and commissioned by Ministers in England and Wales
- The review of the Welsh Government's Water Strategy for Wales – an action focussed policy tool on water
- A Joint Vision for Water in Wales signed by regulators & CCW
- A refreshed Welsh Government Strategic Direction Statement to Ofwat (the water industry regulator) to inform decisions on industry investment and price reviews
- Drainage and Wastewater Management plans from the two companies operating in Wales<sup>1</sup>.
- A Water Resources West draft regional plan by 2022 and ongoing cross-border (Wales & England) discussions about water resources strategic planning.

CCW always considers how our work programme fits with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and Wellbeing goals in Wales, and we have included a table that demonstrates this in Annex 1.

## **What we think you should focus on**

### ***End water poverty - a single social tariff for England and Wales***

On 26th May 2021, CCW published [the findings of the independent review](#), which was commissioned by UK and Welsh Government Ministers to make recommendations that will lead to tackling poverty in water. We engaged the public in discussing solutions to water poverty, but also reviewed water industry and cross-sector assistance practices to share learning and coordinate solutions to the growing problem of water poverty.

The **affordability of water bills is a key concern when considering investment in climate change adaptation, water/wastewater services and environmental resilience**. The provision of comprehensive support for those who struggle to pay their water bills can help reduce barriers to investment in the solutions for climate, infrastructure and service resilience.

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<sup>1</sup> Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy.

We should all be working collaboratively [to End Water Poverty](#) in Wales by implementing the recommendations of the [independent affordability review commissioned](#) by Ministers in Wales and England and undertaken by CCW.

Water poverty may mean different things to different audiences. In the context of the [Independent Affordability Review](#), we consider households to be in water poverty when they spend more than five per cent of their income (after housing costs) on water bills.<sup>2</sup>

CCW recommends that the Committee should support the following on behalf of water consumers:

- Ending the existing ‘postcode lottery’ of financial support through the creation of a single social tariff for all water companies in England and Wales (**top priority**)
- Improved data sharing between UK Government departments and water companies to ensure Welsh customers get support when they need it most.

### ***End sewer-flooding misery: Wastewater and flooding in Wales***

The flooding experienced across Wales in February 2020 had a devastating and long-lasting impact on Welsh communities, as noted in the [Climate Change Committee’s Inquiry report in December 2020](#). Whilst these events were classed as exceptional, it is obvious that extreme rainfall and its impact are becoming more frequent because of climate change.

In CCW’s view, a key priority for this Committee is to examine the resilience of drainage and wastewater services and its impact on customer services, communities, public health, and environmental resilience.

Specific actions for the Committee include:

- Support the [statutory status and delivery of company specific Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans \(DWMPs\)](#)
- Support [CCW’s End Sewer flooding campaign](#). In 2021/22 CCW is undertaking cross-industry work to seek improvements to wastewater companies’ sewer flooding response and policies. This includes the prioritisation of those who live in fear of sewer flooding because of repeat incidents as well as removing exceptional weather event exemptions for company compensation for those at higher risk
- Ask Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales that data available from **monitored Storm Overflows** is analysed to prioritise asset investment and identify other appropriate solutions, which could reduce likely environmental, community and public health impacts caused by excess rainfall and dated infrastructure. There are over 3,000 overflows in Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water’s area alone and most of those have been monitored to help inform investment discussions.

CCW’s flagship [industry wide public views on the environmental research](#) highlighted the public’s view that we need to look after the water environment for future generations. Participants reported widespread agreement that collective action is essential to address problems, and that the public, water industry, and government all have roles to play. Participants in Wales were slightly more likely than those from England to be aware of water companies’ roles in respect of the water environment.

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<sup>2</sup> This definition of water poverty is used as an assistance prioritising approach because it helps target those in severe poverty. Numbers of customers in 5% water poverty overlap with more customers in broader relative income poverty as well as the numbers of customers that tell CCW they struggle to pay bills.

## **Climate-resilient water: Water resource planning and transfers**

**Water resources and supply resilience is outlined in economic growth policies in Wales (see Future Wales- The National Plan 2040).**

We should all be having more comprehensive discussions on the potential of future water transfers and trading across regions of Wales and through Wales to England, as well as water resources planning for the long term.

More specifically, the Committee should be asking for:

- Welsh Government's position regarding the **Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID) commitment to ensuring resilience water supplies for the future across Wales and England.**
- The delayed **National Infrastructure Commission for Wales'** work on water to consider cross-border resilience of water supplies and any **Natural Resource Wales water resources mapping findings**, which will help inform future water company Water Resource Management Plans in Wales as well as Welsh Government guidance on water resource planning.

Finally, the Committee should be considering the **ongoing work of the Water Resources West group** (covering England and Wales) and current work on a **draft regional plan from Water Resources West by 2022**.

## **Further discussions**

CCW would welcome further discussions with the Committee on the contents of our response. Please don't hesitate to contact Lia Moutselou, Senior Policy Manager in Wales ([lia.moutselou@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:lia.moutselou@ccwater.org.uk)) or Ellen Jones, Campaigns and Engagement Manager ([ellen.jones@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:ellen.jones@ccwater.org.uk)) to arrange a meeting or ask any further questions.

# Annex 1 – Cross reference of CCW's works programme & campaign with Well-being goals Wales

CCW Strategy	Well-being Goals							Water Strategy For Wales  Current WG strategy Themes
	A prosperous Wales	A resilient Wales	A healthier Wales	A more equal Wales	A Wales of cohesive communities	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	A globally responsible Wales	
Affordable water for everyone (3)								<b>1. Water for nature, people and business</b>
Climate-resilient water and sewerage services for present and future consumers (1,2, 4, 5)								<b>2. Improving the way we plan and manage our water services</b> <i>Relevant CCW Campaign:</i> "Be in the know" about available help
Services shaped by the views of consumers (1-5)								<b>3. Delivering excellent services to customers</b> <i>Relevant CCW Campaigns:</i> End water poverty CCW: a voice for your complaint "Be in the know" about available help
Services that meet everyone's needs (1-5)								<b>4. Protecting and improving drinking water quality</b>
Effective and easy-to-follow complaint processes (3)								<b>5. 21st century s drainage and sewerage systems</b> <i>CCW Campaign – Ending Sewer flooding misery</i>