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8 February 2022

Llyr Gruffydd MS
Chair
Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN



Dear Llyr Gruffydd MS

Digital connectivity in rural areas

I am contacting you on behalf of the National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales, the Wales YFC, NFU Cymru, FUW and the CLA to highlight our joint work over the last year in relation to digital connectivity and our interest in being kept informed about the work of the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee in this area.

In January 2021 we came together to focus on digital connectivity in response to poor connectivity issues raised by our respective members. Since then, we have undertaken 2 surveys to gather the experiences of people in Wales, held a webinar with industry experts and developed an Action Pack for our members outlining the current situation and sources of information and support available to improve connectivity.

We are pleased to note that the report 'Priorities for the 6th Senedd' states that the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee will assess progress on digital connectivity across Wales in the next 6 months, particularly in light of the findings of our recent survey where 57% of respondents rated their broadband as 'poor' or 'moderate' and 53% felt that they had been negatively impacted by poor broadband connectivity.

Our research published in May 2021 highlighted the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Over 50% of respondents from a rural area did not feel that the internet they had access to was fast and reliable and only 36% of those had superfast broadband. In comparison, 18% of their urban counterparts had access to standard broadband and 67% had superfast broadband.

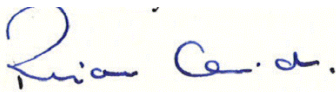
Whilst 80% of participants used their mobile phone to access the internet, just 68% of those with a smartphone had access to a 4G or 5G mobile network. 57% of respondents from a rural area described the mobile signal in their house as 'unreliable' and 49% of those from a rural area stated that their signal was 'unreliable' outdoors.

Both our surveys have highlighted a high lack of awareness of the funding and support available to businesses and households to improve their connectivity. 75% of respondents to our research published in May did not know where to access support to improve their broadband connectivity. In addition, 54% of respondents to our recent survey did not know where to access information. The next steps of our campaign will explore what we can do to help cascade information to our members and wider communities.

In relation to the Welsh Government's recent consultation to move to an online livestock recording system, 50% of farmers and landowners responded that they did not feel that their broadband was good enough, in terms of speed and reliability, to enable them to complete livestock records online. 54% told us that they would prefer to administer/manage their business both online and paper and just 29% would prefer to do so entirely online.

We hope that our research findings are of interest to you and will follow your work on assessing progress on digital connectivity with interest. Please do get in touch if we can support the work of your Committee in any way or if you would like additional information from us.

Yours sincerely



Rhian Connick
Head of NFWI-Wales

(on behalf of NFWI-Wales, Wales YFC, NFU Cymru, FUW and the CLA)

