

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Datgarboneiddio'r sector cyhoeddus | Decarbonising the public sector

Ymateb gan Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru | Evidence from Welsh Local Government Association

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Building on Audit Wales' work, the Committee would welcome your views on any or all of the following:

### **1. What are your views on the role of the Welsh Government in supporting public bodies to deliver on the five 'calls for action' identified in the Audit Wales' report?**

As the national government of Wales, Welsh Government has important roles in (i) giving strategic direction on the approach to be taken by public bodies to achieving net zero by 2030, including timelines and targets (ii) encouraging a partnership approach to meeting these targets across the public sector and (iii) providing support – financial and technical – to help public bodies meet the challenges they face.

### **2. What are your views on the Welsh Government's Net zero carbon status by 2030: A route map for decarbonisation across the Welsh public sector as a means of providing strategic direction to public bodies?**

The route map has provided a useful, high-level steer in relation to point (i) above, identifying those areas where the focus of public sector bodies should be. These are the areas where action by the public sector can have maximum impact in terms of emissions reduction. WLGA has been funded by WG to support councils in fleshing out the detail around the route map (related to point (iii) above). It is important to identify strategic programmes of work where research, guidance and learning can be shared, to avoid ad hoc approaches, where everything is replicated 22 times and the scope for economies is lost.

### 3. What are your views on the progress made by public bodies in the priority areas for action set out in the route map - Sustainable procurement; Net zero buildings; Mobility and transport, and Land use?

Good progress is being made on all four fronts. A Climate Strategy Panel was established by the Partnership Council for Wales to focus on these areas from a local government perspective. This includes Chief Executive level representation from each of the four regions of Wales and one of the National Park Authorities, along with two council Environment directors. Expert advice is also being provided on the panel by relevant policy teams within WG, NRW, academia and unions. The Panel undertook a 'deep dive' into each of the four areas to research the key issues and challenges. This, along with a review of council's work on decarbonisation in 2021, has identified areas where support is most needed and where there are opportunities to share learning (via masterclasses) and undertake work collectively. WLGA has set up a framework of five consultants who are being commissioned to carry out work to fill the gaps on behalf of all councils. This work will be shared not only with all councils but will also be publicly available on the WLGA website to assist other public sector bodies where appropriate and relevant.

### 4. What are your views on the support provided by the Welsh Government to deliver progress in the priority areas, including any gaps?

As noted above, WG has provided funding to WLGA to develop customised support for councils. WLGA has been liaising very closely with officials within the Local Government division of WG in developing its programme of support, working effectively as a team. The Minister for Finance and Local Government has attended the Panel meeting to discuss the various activities underway, as well as discussing progress with the 22 Leaders and other public sector leaders at the Partnership Council for Wales.

### 5. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?

The WG support to date has been very welcome but is relatively small scale and linked to the 'exploration' phase. As we move into the 'delivery' phase there inevitably will be far greater financial issues to address. The upfront cost of steps that will need to be taken are likely to be substantial – e.g. in relation to buildings, vehicles, and procurement of low carbon products and services (which are likely to be more expensive).

This will require innovative approaches such as 'invest to save', 'whole life costing' and the factoring-in of the carbon implications of purchases, rather than simply the monetary costs. Many vital measures will generate payback in the longer term. Some of this payback will be financial and capable of being 'captured' (e.g. through lower running and maintenance costs for electric vehicles; energy efficiency measures that produce savings on energy bills; renewable energy generation that provides a low cost and resilient source of energy for council function (as well as the potential for creating local economic benefits).

However, some of the necessary investments will be in 'public goods' which will contribute to the well-being of communities in the future but do not create an immediate or realisable monetary return on investment. For example, peatland restoration will yield carbon reduction benefits over

time (by sequestration) but the return on the initial investment will be an environmental one, not financial.

This is relevant to climate change adaptation/resilience investments as well as those aimed at achieving net zero. For example, flood prevention measures will protect residents and businesses and may help to avoid expenditure on clearing up flood damage. However, that is a 'social return on investment' with no associated direct income stream to repay upfront capital costs.

WG's Sustainable Farming Scheme proposals, which involve paying land owners/farmers for ecosystem services can play an important role here, in terms of efforts to reduce carbon emissions and adaptation (as well as in arresting nature loss) in the wider local authority area territory (as opposed to 'in-house' focus of decarbonisation / net zero efforts of councils).