

ROCP 06, BHF Cymru

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan BHF Cymru | Evidence from BHF Cymru

Your views

1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

BHF Cymru is supportive of these priorities. However, given the significant health hazards of air pollution, we would also urge the Committee to consider a strategic approach which prioritises protecting and improving human health outcomes.

2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

Since the Committee's priorities were published, Welsh Government introduced the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill. Within the Bill there is a clear focus on the importance on clean air to human health. The Committee has also prioritised human health in its report on the legislation, particularly in its amendments to ensure alignment to WHO targets of health harming pollutants.

PM2.5 for example is one of the most damaging pollutants for our health and derives from a range of sources, but most notably from domestic burning of traditional coal and wet wood. PM2.5 can be inhaled and can cross into the bloodstream, not only causing damage to the respiratory system but our heart and circulatory system too. Researchers found that these fine particles can cause blood vessel walls to narrow and harden over time, which can increase blood pressure and the strain on your heart. PM2.5 can also cause blood clotting. Ultimately, this can worsen existing heart and circulatory diseases, lead to the development of new cardiovascular conditions and increase the risk of acute cardiac events like heart attack or stroke.

There is a clear link between air quality and the health and wellbeing of our nation. Welsh Government has recognised this in the Environment Bill. We would also like the Committee to recognise the severe threat to public health posed by air pollution in its strategic priorities.

Recommendation: The Committee should identify protecting human health as one of its strategic priorities.

3. What are your view on the Committee’s detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?)

BHF Cymru is supportive of the Committees detailed priorities, particularly its focus on pressing Welsh Government to introduce a Clean Air Bill. However, over the coming years, we believe the Committee should have more of a focus on clean air, ensuring proper implementation of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill.

4. To what extent are the Committee’s detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

In its strategic priorities the Committee committed to pressing Welsh Government to introduce a Clean Air Bill, for which BHF Cymru is extremely grateful. Since the start of the Sixth Senedd, Welsh Government has introduced the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill which is currently at committee stage. BHF Cymru welcomes CCEI Committee’s suggested amendments to the Bill in its report and BHF would support all of these recommendations.

However, the context of the Bill necessitates additional scrutiny from CCEI which is not reflected in the CCEI’s priorities report. As the Bill is intended to be a framework bill, there will likely be substantial secondary legislation following the Bill. Primarily, BHF Cymru is concerned with PM2.5 and its primary source, domestic burning. We would like the committee to ensure that Welsh Government is ambitious in setting targets to PM2.5 in line with WHO guidelines. We would also urge the committee to identify ways that Welsh Government should seek to reach these targets. Measures suggested in the domestic burning consultation document included smoke control zones, incentivising switches to less harmful forms of heating, scrappage schemes for log burners, and banning the sale of wet wood and traditional bituminous coal,

On the latter, Welsh Government have asserted they it has the powers to ban the sale of wet wood and traditional bituminous coal under the UK Environment Act. However, many of the other possible interventions have not been discussed as part of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) Bill.

The domestic burning consultation has not yet been formalised as a strategy or plan, and this policy document presently sits unused.

Recommendation: The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee should ask Welsh Government to outline planned interventions for reducing PM2.5 in Wales, taking into account how Wales can move away completely from domestic burning. This should take the form of a domestic burning strategy and should include interventions considered in Welsh Government's domestic burning consultation.

5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?

N/A.

6. Other information

N/A.
