

ROCP 16, Care & Repair 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 Care & Repair Cymru | Evidence from Care & Repair 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?

Care & Repair Cymru welcomes the Committee's focus on the decarbonisation of housing. Our clients are often living in older and poorly insulated properties. Repairing these homes can support the decarbonisation of Welsh homes by reducing energy usage. Care & Repair's 70+ Cymru project aimed to reduce fuel poverty amongst older people, installed energy saving measures which totalled to £1,127,556 total financial gain for our 2,988 clients. This drop in the ocean highlights the magnitude of older people in Wales living in energy inefficient properties who are struggling to keep warm. We welcome the Welsh Government's investment in a retrofit assessment for homes via the Warm Homes Programme and believe the committee should play a role in ensuring this work is evaluated and scaled up once underway. Key to the programme's success will be the implementation of fabric first measures - green and modern heating solutions can often be ineffectual, as such technology requires well-insulated walls, otherwise technologies such as heat pumps can lead to higher electricity usage and have the potential to exacerbate fuel poverty in the medium term as gas is usually cheaper than electricity.

Retrofitting needs to target the worst first: the most energy inefficient homes and homes that are off the main gas grid. For example, in Wales, the areas with the highest fuel poverty (above 18% in Ceredigion and Gwynedd) are also the areas with the highest proportion of homes that are off the main gas grid. 74% of homes in Ceredigion were energy inefficient (EPC D or below), and 82% of homes in Dwyfor Meirionnydd are EPC D or below. Research from Citizen's Advice found

that the average required investment per home in Ceredigion to achieve an EPC C was £17,216, and in Dwyfor Meirionnydd higher at £18,168. Many of our older clients who have lived in their homes for decades, and who we often see in some of the most hazardous unfit housing conditions, do not have an EPC rating – therefore the true scale of these costs is not captured by the research, but nonetheless shows the high levels of investment required. We believe the Committee should continue its work on understanding the challenge of decarbonising the private Welsh housing stock by calling on stakeholders to share examples of innovation, best practice and possible solutions to the challenge of supporting the funding of decarbonisation within the private housing sector. We believe the Committee could take on the role of reviewing the learning from the Optimised Retrofit Programme, being mindful of the types of properties and households this programme has served, and playing an important role in advocating that homes and households that may find their retrofit journey challenging are not left behind.

Care & Repair’s mission is to support older people to live safely and independently at home and in their communities. Many of our clients in Wales rely on public transport to access vital services such as hospitals and GP surgeries, public transport ensures they remain part of their community and promotes independence. Having a reliable transport system in Wales forms part of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, as outlined in a Wales of Cohesive Communities. Welsh Government’s report Age Friendly Wales – our strategy for an ageing society highlights the importance of improving accessibility to public transport, which is especially prevalent for our clients who use transport as a means of accessing healthcare. Therefore, we would urge the committee to Welsh Government to consider longer-term funding for bus services, this is particularly relevant as the £150 million pandemic-era funding has come to an end, meaning 10% of bus routes could be cut.

Such services are key for our clients to connect with their community, ensuring they get the provisions they need and prevent inequity in health care. Cuts to local bus routes are detrimental to older people in Wales, leading to social isolation.

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?

Care & Repair Cymru believe the Committee should reconsider its strategic priorities within the context of the cost-of-living crisis and challenges of fuel poverty; the Committee should use these priorities to promote income maximisation and keeping people warm in their homes. The Care & Repair

movement has put £41 million back into our clients' pockets since 2014 whilst delivering home improvements that keep people safe and warm.

Therefore, we urge the Committee to place emphasis on supporting such organisations to actively develop on its strategic priorities in a relevant way.

Alongside the cost-of-living crisis, households have faced a significant rise in energy costs, with many households falling into fuel poverty. Welsh Government estimate that up to 45% of households in Wales could be living in fuel poverty, an increase from 12% in 2018. A 54% increase in the energy price cap in April 2022, alongside a rise in inflation, left people worse off and spending more on their energy bills. Thus, Care & Repair Cymru argues that whilst tackling climate change and promoting sustainable communities are still relevant, it is vital to tackle these in a way that considers the impact of cost of living and fuel poverty. We urge the Committee to reconsider how to approach the strategic priority of climate change in a way that also helps eliminate fuel poverty. Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme provides the opportunity for the Committee's strategic priorities to remain relevant under the context of the cost-of-living crisis and the increase of fuel poverty. Care & Repair Cymru welcomes the next iteration of the Warm Homes Programme which will take a 'Worst First' and 'Fabric First' approach to retrofitting. Over the course of this Senedd, we believe that the Committee should focus on the next iteration of the upcoming Warm Homes Programme and evaluate how it is being used to address today's social, economic, and environmental challenges effectively across Wales. The Committee has a responsibility to ensure Welsh Government is combatting fuel poverty and decarbonisation together, working on long-term prevention of both these challenges. The Committee should ultimately scrutinise how Welsh Government are effectively tackling climate change, through decarbonisation, whilst providing the means to prevent fuel poverty.

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?)

For the Committee to effectively assess progress toward the successful delivery Net Zero Wales, we believe it is critical for the Committee to take an active role in ensuring Welsh Government delivers on its proposals. Within the housing sector, there is a huge green skills gap - we believe the Committee could play a role in investigating ways to incentivise and upskill the workforce to ensure Wales has the knowledge infrastructure it needs to meet its Net Zero targets.

Housing decarbonisation

Care & Repair Cymru maintains that to ensure effective housing decarbonisation, it is important for retrofitting schemes to be conducted on many different types of properties. For the Committee to continue their work on housing decarbonisation in Year 3 – 5, they should encourage Welsh Government to rollout decarbonisation schemes across different properties based on age, location, construction type and energy efficiency rating, as well as ensuring such retrofit schemes are available for owner-occupied households. We believe it will also be important for Welsh Government to report on the findings of retrofit effectiveness for the whole housing stock. This will mean retrofit programmes can begin a bespoke targeting of households who are in the greatest need of improving energy efficiency to both improve fuel poverty and create cleaner energy. Likewise, we feel that the Committee has a role in holding Welsh Government to account to ensure they share the learning on retrofitting schemes with third-sector partners. This will provide clarity for all stakeholders who are invested in providing cleaner and cheaper energy for households whilst upholding the value of using evidence-based practice to inform policy development. Overall, Care & Repair Cymru recommend that the Committee work to ensure Welsh Government shares learning with the third sector. This will maintain a partnership in which organisations can provide first-hand expertise and bring public voices to policy development.

Upskilling the workforce

To successfully deliver the Net Zero Wales policy proposals, it is vital to develop the infrastructure needed to create the skills capacity and jobs for installing effective green technology. Care & Repair Cymru urges the Committee to focus their Year 3 – 5 work programme on ensuring Welsh Government effectively recruits and retains a workforce capable of carrying out necessary energy efficiency improvements to achieve Net Zero. Many Care & Repair caseworkers across Wales have reported the lack of tradespeople who can install green technology. This is an insufficient skills pipeline to support the journey to net zero and improving household energy efficiency. We urge the Committee to focus on long term upskilling and reskilling of the construction industry to close the current skills gap. Longer-term work for the Committee should develop this skills capacity and ensure Welsh Government has created the infrastructure to improve access and attractiveness of these roles, and boost routes into the industry. Care & Repair Cymru recommends futureproofing such skills which will make the decarbonisation of housing cheaper and therefore more accessible for people living in Wales; contributing to the Net Zero target and improving fuel poverty.

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?

Care & Repair Cymru welcomes the Committee's programme for work for Year 3-5, in particular, the commitment to work toward achieving Net Zero, continuing work on housing decarbonisation and assessing the progress of Welsh Government's Digital strategy. However, we urge the Committee to focus on mitigating the challenges of fuel poverty, especially for older people, this will ensure the work of the Committee remains relevant under the context of the recent energy crisis. The Welsh Housing Conditions Survey in 2018 found that 30% of single pensioner homes were living in fuel poverty, way above the national average of 14%. Care & Repair caseworkers visit older people every day in Wales who are struggling with their energy bills, and who are uninformed about suitable energy efficiency improvements. Living in cold, energy inefficient properties disproportionately affect older people; they are more likely to experience health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, than other demographics. This is why we urge the Committee to take a person-centred approach when scrutinising Welsh Government's work to deliver Net Zero and housing decarbonisation. The Committee should work to ensure that measures to tackle fuel poverty are always included in policy proposals to reach net zero. Overall, such measures should consider the whole person, whole house to meet individual needs.

Likewise, Care & Repair feel that it is important for the Committee's programme of work on housing decarbonisation should include efforts for older people to become involved in the journey to achieving net zero. Today's societal context means that people are living longer, and the Welsh population is generally older than other UK nations. Therefore, it is important for the Committee to mobilise this demographic into combating climate change, including them in the challenge to decarbonisation housing and tackle fuel poverty. This is why the Committee should work to dispel the myth that older people aren't interested in tackling climate change. This can be done through provide clear, accessible retrofitting information, available for different groups of people, and providing further support for organisations such as Care & Repair, that make homes warm and safer for older people. We believe that such measures will empower older people to involve themselves in tackling climate change and even avoid energy scams. As people become more knowledgeable about their homes and how to make them more energy efficient, they will be less likely to feel pressured to install 'green measures' that aren't suitable for their properties.

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

No response.

6. Other information

References:

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