

ROCP 20, Older People's Commissioner for Wales

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 Older People's Commissioner for Wales | Evidence from Older People's Commissioner for Wales



Senedd Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee: Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

15 September 2023

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

The Committee's priorities are broad enough to enable a variety of areas to be explored for the remainder of the Senedd term.

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?

The Committee's three strategic priorities remain relevant. Sustainable communities have become even more important as a priority because of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on individuals and households across Wales, including older people.¹ The Committee's focus on transport, connectivity and affordable food is welcome but consideration also must be given to the liveability of places that extends beyond people in paid employment. Other factors that contribute to sustainable communities such as caring responsibilities and access to local services need to be taken into account.

The Age Friendly Communities approach will be of interest to the Committee in future thinking about the sustainable communities priority.² The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes Age Friendly Communities as being places in which older people, communities, policies, services, settings and structures work together in partnership to support and enable us all to age well. The WHO identify eight essential features of Age-Friendly communities, known as the 'eight domains.' These are: Outdoor spaces and buildings; Transport; Housing; Social participation; Respect and social inclusion; Civic participation and employment; Communication and information; Community support and health services. The eight domains can help form a model to think about sustainable communities.

¹ Polling conducted on behalf of the Commissioner in March 2023 showed that 64% of people over 60s had cut back on spending during the previous 12 months. Of those reporting that they had cut back on spending, 84% cut back on energy, whilst 83% said they had cut back on food shopping. Results from Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2023) March Polling 2023. Available on request.

² Older People's Commissioner for Wales (undated) What are Age-Friendly communities? Available at: [What are Age-friendly communities? - Older People's Commissioner for Wales](#)

In 2010, WHO launched its 'Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities'. To become a member of the network, local leaders must commit to and implement the four steps:

- engage with and understand stakeholders including older people.
- plan strategically to enable all stakeholders to develop a shared vision.
- implement an action plan.
- measure the progress of the age-friendly approach as well as its impact on people's lives.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is working with the Welsh Government, local authorities and their partners including older people, to drive the development of age-friendly communities and an age-friendly Wales. The Welsh Government's commitment is shown in 'Age-friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society' and through its funding to local authorities of £1.1M for dedicated staff to develop age-friendly communities through local engagement and partnerships. To date three local authorities - Cardiff, Anglesey and Flintshire - have successfully applied to join the Global Network and many other local authorities are at an advanced stage of application, thanks to positive engagement with partners and stakeholders. There is a growing body of good practice to share from these developments which the Commissioner would be pleased to provide to the Committee.

The Commissioner recommends that age-friendly communities are a key part of the Committee's approach to its sustainable communities priority. This is relevant to considerations of infrastructure and will also be important when agreeing future work on placemaking.

Wales is already seeing the signs of a rapidly changing climate with the increased prevalence of adverse weather events, such as extreme heat and increased risk of flooding. Research shows that climate change is a concern across the generations in Wales.³ Polling undertaken for the Commissioner in March 2023 found that 67% of older people felt anxious about climate change.⁴ This continues to contradict any idea that older people are not concerned about climate change.

Climate change as a Committee priority also has specific implications for older people in Wales. For example, Public Health Wales's 2023 Health Impact Assessment⁵ on climate change, highlighted that older people are more at risk during extreme weather and flooding because of the disruption to access to health, social care, and support services.⁶ Older people are also included in high-risk groups during extreme heat events, with the risk of dehydration, heat-related illness and mortality.⁷ Adverse weather caused by climate change

³ Public Health Wales (2022) Welsh public survey reveals perceived harmful impacts of climate change on mental health and cost of living. Available at: [Welsh public survey reveals perceived harmful impacts of climate change on mental health and cost of living - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](https://www.nhs.uk/news/2022/07/welsh-public-survey-reveals-perceived-harmful-impacts-of-climate-change-on-mental-health-and-cost-of-living)

⁴ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2023) March Polling 2023. Available on request.

⁵ Public Health Wales (2023) Climate Change in Wales: Health Impact Assessment. Available at: [Climate Change in Wales: Health Impact Assessment - World Health Organization Collaborating Centre On Investment for Health and Well-being \(phwwhocc.co.uk\)](https://www.phwwhocc.co.uk/)

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ Ibid.,

will also lead to increased social isolation, during events such as heatwaves.⁸ The specific impact of climate change on older people needs to be reflected in Committee discussions.

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)?

The Committee’s priorities/outline programme of work encompasses a range of appropriate areas. The Committee’s intention to assess progress against the Welsh Government’s digital strategy is of particular interest and scrutiny of the extent to which it delivers for older people will be welcome. The Digital Strategy for Wales – Delivery Plan includes an action under ‘Digital inclusion’ of ‘Work with all sectors to ensure alternative options for engaging are available for everyone and designed to the same standard as those expected of digital’.⁹ This action has been given the timescale ‘later’: it will be useful to know planned progress on this area as this specific issue becomes increasingly urgent.

Digital exclusion is frequently raised with the Commissioner by older people. Polling undertaken in March 2023 found that a third of people aged 60+ do not use a smart phone and that amongst those that do, skills and confidence vary a great deal.¹⁰ Similarly, the National Survey for Wales found that 32% of over 75s do not use the internet (including Smart TV and handheld devices) and 29% of over 75s do not have access to the internet at home.¹¹

The Committee may be already aware that the Commissioner has issued Section 12 Guidance to local authority and health boards which set out the kinds of action they should be taking so that people who can’t (or don’t wish to) get online have ways to access the information and services they need via non-digital means, and to support older people to get online.¹²

The Guidance highlights that any move to digital services must be accompanied by measures to ensure that the human rights of older people are protected and that it is possible to access information and services via offline channels. Support to gain the skills and confidence to be able to connect online should also be provided.¹³ Therefore, it is important that the Welsh Government’s digital strategy works for older people to ensure that everyone has the same access to information and services whether they use technology or not.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Welsh Government (2021) Digital strategy for Wales: delivery plan, updated November 2022. Available at: [Digital strategy for Wales: delivery plan \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

¹⁰ Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2022) Digital exclusion creating new barriers for older people. Available at: [Digital exclusion creating new barriers for older people - Older People’s Commissioner for Wales](#)

¹¹ Welsh Government (2023) National Survey for Wales April 2022 to March 2023. Available at: <https://gov.wales/national-surveywales-results-viewer>

¹² Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2022) Access to information and services in a digital age: Summary of responses from local authorities and health boards. Available at: [Access to information and services in a digital age: Summary of responses from local authorities and health boards - Older People’s Commissioner for Wales](#)

¹³ Ibid.

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?

The Committee's focus on the Welsh Government digital strategy is increasingly relevant as services and information move online at a faster rate. Older people report to the Commissioner that offline options are becoming poorer or harder to access.

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

The current consultation webpage states that 'all responses should be submitted via the online form' and the Commissioner has written separately to the Committee Clerk highlighting how this excludes people who are not online, including a number of older people. Despite research showing that climate change is an issue that concerns older people, a significant number of older people would not be able to respond to the consultation because alternative ways of responding are ruled out.

All Senedd Committees should ensure that the work they undertake, including inquiries, is as accessible as possible to people who wish to respond. This means actively encouraging responses in a range of formats, including non-digital.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

The Commissioner is taking action to protect older people's rights, end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner is working for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld, and no-one is left behind.

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