

ROCP 29, Platfform

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 Platfform | Evidence from Platfform

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?

Power Up is a young people's wellbeing and social action project, by the charity Platfform, for young people aged 10 to 25 who live in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. It has been co-designed by young people and aims to provide frontline wellbeing support as well as support young people to enact social change in their communities and Wales. One key aspect of the project is that we have a young people's advisory board, made up of young people aged 14 to 25, who are essentially the 'managers' of the project and use their collective skills, knowledge and lived experience to oversee the direction of Power Up.

At Power Up, we are aware that climate change is a 'wicked problem'; one that can appear impossible to solve because of how complex and interconnected it is. While it may appear impossible however, there are many solutions already identified by science and available to policymakers. Many of the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) line up with the aims of tackling climate change. This issue affects everyone, which became increasingly apparent to us from engaging with 490 children and young people on their experiences and views of mental health and wellbeing, where the topic of climate change was mentioned frequently as a key concern.

We wanted to explore this further as Power Up, and so we held a focus group with 10 young people, 3 employed by Platfform and 7 who are part of our young people's advisory board, and asked what they thought about the committee's plans. They all agreed that the committee should focus on the three priorities of

climate change, sustainable communities and protecting Wales' natural environment. They expressed that these were a "great start in making a change". One young person commented in particular on the fact that climate change threatens all of our lives and will eventually have long term negative effects, especially regarding crops and food provisions. Another young person brought up the pressing goal of Wales becoming 'net-zero' and that this was something that "needed to be achieved". Climate change is all-encompassing problem, it does not impinge on just one type of 'person' or 'group' (although there is evidence that it will impact more on people in poverty or who might be more at risk of harm).

They thought it was important to keep people informed on the progress that organisations are making and what initiatives are working already to combat climate change. By informing people, we might be able to influence attitudes towards climate change, by improving the general public's knowledge on the consequences of climate change and the direct impact it is currently having, and potentially lead to positive action (Hornsey & Fielding, 2020). We can empower people with education on global warming in order for them to be able to make a difference.

The focus group also had a few reservations regarding the priorities. Whilst they applauded the Government's concern for tackling climate change; they noted it was imperative to ensure that the environment and climate change was considered a 'non-partisan issue' and that the Welsh Government should take steps to work closely with party opponents to make sure that these priorities can be met and are not challenged.

Additionally, not much was mentioned in the priorities about helping people get involved with climate action. A young person pointed out that there are charities that are already taking part in valuable work. They suggested that the government could learn from and collaborate with or perhaps provide some funding to charities and people who want to get more involved in climate action.

Finally, one young person remarked that although the priorities were good, they seemed to challenge each other, for example, "how could you create new and accessible housing without threatening the natural environment?". They thought that the committee should clarify how they would maintain a balance between these two priorities.

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?

The Power Up project believe that the committee's priorities are still relevant to a large extent, as the issue of climate change has been repeatedly brought up by children and young people we have talked to about mental health and wellbeing, to the same extent as other problems the UK is currently facing (such as the cost of living crisis and conflict over wages and salaries). The relevance and risk of climate change has arguably increased since the sixth Senedd, as there is growing understanding that we are running out of time, and there is a continued lack of proactive decision-making from people in positions of power to combat it, meaning that it continues to be a problem.

It is paramount to young people that the government does work hard towards meeting these priorities, particularly given Wales may not reach fossil fuel contribution levels and carbon emission targets by 2050, according to the Climate Change Committee (2023). This is especially worrisome for children and young people, who have become increasingly wary of whether the world has a future. As one young person we spoke to said: "I'd like to bring children into a world that actually has a future".

There will be views that argue climate change is less relevant to issues such as the cost of living. This is an important dilemma to address, and we think as a project, that the committee should make very clear that climate change is going to impact people in poverty to a greater extent (rising food costs, housing located in flood-risk areas, etc). There may be a temptation to soften our approach to climate change, but our cost-of-living crisis is a pale shadow of the crises that face us with collapse of food supply chains, for example. In order to bring the public onside with climate change action, despite other priorities such as the cost of living crisis, a hearts-and-minds battle needs to be won about the longer-term impacts of doing nothing. In addition, seeing climate change as something that only starts impacting people in decades, is also unhelpful. Demonstrating that issues like rising food prices will begin impacting us much sooner, may be one way of bringing sceptical members of the public along with us on the journey.).

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?)

The Power Up project liked the proposed plans by the committee. They agreed that decarbonising houses was a good idea and one young person commented

on how the government might incentivise owners of older houses to upgrade their houses so that they were more environmentally friendly. Moreover, young people thought that the committee's goals may more likely be attained through "building lasting relationships" with green charities as well as grassroots climate-focused organisations; the idea of working with those who have on-the-ground knowledge and experience.

However, one young person emphasised the fact that most emissions are not made by individual people but by "big corporations like Shell". They wondered what the government was going to do to hold them accountable for their contributions and ensure that the focus of behavioural change would not solely be down to individuals.

Regarding creating sustainable communities, young people liked the idea and discussed what this may look like practically. They thought "more green spaces" could be incorporated in different areas such as on the top of urban spaces and buildings within cities. This is something we have seen as a project that can contribute positively to young people's mental health and wellbeing (having access to nearby green spaces). Additionally, one young person highlighted that people could be encouraged to utilise their gardens more; possibly to plant more trees or produce plants, vegetables or flowers. And with encouraging people to use renewable energy sources, the Welsh Government could make it easier by signposting people to schemes like ECO4 and lowering eligibility criteria so that more people can benefit from renewable energy.

Nonetheless, the young people's advisory board brought up important points to consider. Whilst they liked the idea of people driving electric vehicles, they conveyed that this was not entirely realistic for people who live in rural Wales. Moreover, using electric vehicles could result in anxiety over finding a spot to charge it; whether there were enough charging spots and if they were the right type of charger. There are significant concerns that electric vehicles cannot be truly sustainable until these concerns are addressed. One young person also highlighted that transport alternatives are only accessible to people who do not have disabilities and/or live close to their place of work. They want the government to ensure those people do not miss out.

With protecting the natural environment of Wales, the young people liked the idea of having more places be considered as legally 'protected', so that areas of beauty could be preserved and flourish. They also applauded the Welsh Government's plan to limit the building of new roads as a bid to not increase

carbon emissions or negatively impact the environment further. Young people thought that by educating the general public on and celebrating the biodiversity of Wales, people would more likely be inspired to take action in promoting biodiversity.

However, the young people indicated that overall, the Welsh Government could take protecting the natural environment a bit more seriously. Some ideas of possible steps involved working with activists such as 'Surfers Against Sewage'; more significant progress on plastic reduction and implementing specific requirements in laws as seen in other countries, such as England, who have said that all new building projects from November 2023 must improve biodiversity by at least 10%.

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?

The focus group agreed that the detailed priorities were still largely relevant. Pertaining to climate change, they thought the Welsh Government needed to be clearer about how they are managing the consequences of climate change and demonstrate how their commitment to take it seriously and challenge it is backed up in practice, building on positive decisions such as the M4 relief road. Climate change is something that is already happening, not something that will happen in the future. One young person conveyed the importance of keeping to its plans, especially after the news recently revealed the UK Government's plans to scrap its £11.6bn climate pledge.

Young people were concerned by the complication that even though climate change affects everyone, people from minoritised ethnic communities are particularly vulnerable and that this needed to be considered alongside other issues.

Considering the housing crisis, young people were worried about the creation of homes in sustainable communities becoming a matter of class and wealth. They were concerned that tensions would arise between those who can afford to live in sustainable communities and those we cannot (at least in the beginning of the formation of these communities). Following what has been revealed in the news about reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, it is imperative that future infrastructure is built sustainably – quality lasting places that people want to live and work in.

More needs to be invested in transport as young people felt that the current state of public transport was not feasible long term. For example, one young person mentioned the agitation of not being able to travel to North Wales without having to leave the country first via train. This does not encourage people to use public transport when driving is more convenient and quicker.

Our young people pleaded for the government to take protecting the natural environment more sincerely. Suggestions involved stricter enforcement of fines for fly-tipping; more community fridges/pantries to reduce food wastage and installing more bins in rural areas as “litter is rife”.

With respect to bigger problems, recommendations included challenging England on our polluted shared waterways and investigating how developments in infrastructure to improve the lives of people could be made alongside the government’s pledge to protect the natural environment as much as possible.

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

As a project, we believed it was important to comment on the effect of climate change on young people and their mental health.

The focus group talked about ‘climate anxiety’ and how we should “not sugar coat” how serious climate change is. They thought it was disheartening to see activists like Greta Thunberg be “villainised and infantilised by certain media outlets” and the huge responsibility they felt that they had to “fix something that was not started by us”.

Young people possessed feelings of ‘doom’ and ‘helplessness’ towards the future and were worried that there might not be a world for them to bring up children or if they did, they would “miss the beauty of the world around us because it is dying so quickly”.

Additionally, they felt that, generally, people did not care enough to make changes which led to them feeling disillusionment with the government and adults and feeling like there was not much that young people could do to make a significant difference without the help of companies or the government. One young person reiterated that climate change is “human issue, we are the ones that have to suffer. It’s not a selfless act.”

These comments are not surprising considering that Save The Children found in a

survey of 3000 children in the UK that 70% were worried about the kind of world they would inherit and 56% believed climate change was negatively affecting children's mental health globally.

But young people did share some hope of a positive future; they said it was "empowering to see others making a difference" and that coming together to campaign about climate change let them connect and feel better about themselves.

6. Other information

No response.
