

ROCP 49, Audit Wales (Auditor General for Wales and Wales Audit Office)

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 Archwilio Cymru (Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru a Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru) | Evidence from Audit Wales (Auditor General for Wales and Wales Audit Office)

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?

As in our response in September 2021, given our remit it would not be appropriate for us to comment on relative priorities for the Committee.

However, as over-arching themes, and while not necessarily mutually exclusive, the three priorities the Committee has identified seem to provide for broad and varied coverage of matters relevant to the Committee's overall remit, subject also to considering areas of potential overlap on specific topics with other committees. Audit Wales has itself identified 'Responding to the climate and nature emergency' as one of four themes for its audit work programme. See: Forward work programme | Audit Wales.

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?

No response.

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?)

No response.

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?

No response.

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

We welcomed the opportunity to brief the Committee on findings from our work on public sector readiness for net zero by 2030. We will continue to maintain contact with the Committee clerking team around our work programme and outputs from it that may be of relevance to the Committee's work. And we will reflect on the Committee's plans as we decide on our own work programme priorities.

We will also continue to monitor any future Committee consultations to consider whether there is relevant material to share from our national work, but also from our local audit work. For example, should the Committee progress any further work on planning services, there is likely to be relevant material from recent local audit work to draw on.

Although not necessarily exhaustive, we have commented below on some specific matters arising from recent work, our work in progress, or indicative future work, that are potentially relevant to the Committee's Year 3 to 5 plans.

6. Other information

- Flood risk management: We published a Picture of Flood Risk Management in December 2022 which looked at how flood risk management works in Wales and the challenges facing the sector. We indicated in the report that we will consider looking again at flood risk management in Wales over the next few years to see how well the Welsh Government, NRW and local authorities are responding to the issues identified in the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee's review of resources and the broader challenges facing the flooding sector. However, we have no firm plans at present, and any further work would look to take account of other ongoing review work on this topic, including the work of the National Infrastructure Commission Wales.
 - Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK.. This report, which is due for publication imminently, will set out the UK and devolved governments' legislation, policy, strategy, governance, and monitoring arrangements relevant to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions. We have worked on it jointly with counterparts from the other UK audit bodies.
 - Brownfield regeneration. We are currently preparing a report, for publication later in the calendar year, which will explore issues around brownfield
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regeneration in Wales.

- National Park Authorities. We are currently completing a study that has looked at the overall governance arrangements in National Park Authorities. We are currently preparing a draft report for publication by around the end of the calendar year. We have also completed local audit work on income diversification and have decided to publish a summary of those findings, again by the end of the calendar year.

- Active travel. With a view to completion in spring 2024, we are progressing work that will assess whether the Welsh Government is well placed to deliver its active travel ambitions. This work will reflect, in part, on issues arising from the Welsh Parliament's Cross Party Group report in June 2022.

- Addressing biodiversity decline. We are progressing some initial planning for work that will consider, at a high level, how our audited bodies are responding to the biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Alongside this we are undertaking some wider research and development activity which may lead to other outputs. We have not yet confirmed the planned timetable for completion of this work.

We are also planning a more focused review to examine action that Natural Resources Wales is taking around terrestrial, freshwater and/or marine protected sites. The work at Natural Resources Wales will have a particular focus on the application of the sustainable development principle. We have not yet confirmed the planned timetable for completion of this work. It follows on from recent local audit work at Natural Resources Wales that examined its process for the setting of well-being objectives.

- Capital planning and programme management – Welsh Government. We are currently planning work that will consider the Welsh Government's overall strategic approach and the arrangements in place to support delivery (rather than seeking to test the effectiveness of every aspect of capital and infrastructure investment). It will include consideration of the application of the sustainable development principle. We have not yet confirmed the planned timetable for completion of this work.

- Circular economy and waste management. We drew attention in our 2021 response to the series of reports we published on waste management in 2018-19. We are currently taking forward some enquiries with the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to confirm the extent of action taken in response to recommendations in those reports and to reflect on other significant developments. We have not yet decided whether this will lead to a formal published output, but if the Committee proceeds with work in this area then we will look for opportunities to share findings.

Our work programme for 2023-2026 identifies several other indicative topics for work to start in 2024-25 or 2025-26 that may be relevant to the Committee's remit and intentions. We have not yet made any firm commitments to this work and will be revisiting these indicative plans during the remainder of 2023-24.

Nevertheless, we would highlight:

- Net Zero. We will be considering options for following up and/or expanding on our July 2022 reports on public sector readiness for net zero carbon by 2030.
 - Transport delivery. Building on our current work on Active Travel, we will be reflecting on opportunities to consider other key areas of delivery in relation to the Welsh Government's national transport delivery plan.
 - Decarbonising housing. We have identified this as a topic that we may look at ourselves, examining progress across different tenures and the delivery and impact of related Welsh Government funding.
 - Digital Strategy for Wales. Following on other work – including our March 2023 report on digital inclusion which touched on infrastructure investment, work on cyber resilience and other local audit work including a current review of digital strategy arrangements in local government – we may examine other issues relevant to the six 'missions' in the digital strategy.
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