

ROCP 52, Welsh Local Government Association

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 Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru | Evidence from Welsh Local Government Association

Review of the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee's priorities

Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Introduction

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities (LAs) in Wales. The three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all local authorities determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
3. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to help inform the Committee's main priorities for the Sixth Senedd.

Feedback on Ministry's priorities

4. "The Welsh Government has set out its ambitions and priorities in its new Programme for Government. Local government shares and welcomes many of these priorities, including the focus on tackling climate change.
5. As one of the core public service deliverers in Wales, local councils are central to delivering many of the Welsh Government's national ambitions. It is important therefore that local government continues to be involved as early as possible in designing and shaping the emerging policy and legislative priorities. Now more than ever, it is also paramount for this Government's ambitions to be proportionate to the ability of local government to deliver these considering



ongoing cuts, increasing costs, and continued loss of expertise and capacity within Local Government.

6. Public services are under enormous pressure, and this is further exacerbated by a national shortage of skilled workforce in most of the Climate Change Ministry's priority focus areas. It is therefore imperative for the Minister and the Welsh Government to work with academia and industry to tackle this shortage and support the development of the requisite range of skills and expertise needed to deliver the priority focus areas and build the resilience and expertise of public bodies.
7. We support in principle the new Wales Transport Strategy but would like to emphasise that a balanced approach to transport must be taken. In order to implement the sustainable transport hierarchy, it is vital that adequate provision is made to enable the priority form of transport to be used. Active travel, public transport and electric vehicle charging all require more investment if they are to encourage the behaviour change sought and required. Investment in the highway network remains crucial not only for the safety of car drivers but also for buses, cyclists, EVs, emergency vehicles and commercial vehicles.
8. The WLGA supports the First Minister's aspiration of '*putting the environment at the heart of decision-making*' which needs to complement the recovery of local economies, support efforts to sustain rural and coastal communities and assist in the delivery of local priorities generally.
9. We welcome the inclusion of both the Optimised Retrofit Programme and Welsh Housing Quality Standard among those priorities, both of which will contribute to decarbonisation and tackling poverty, and build on the work already done to drive up housing standards.
10. Welsh Government grants and programmes have historically tended to be developed in silos offering few opportunities to maximise benefits and cross-fertilisation. We hope the new Ministry will be the catalyst to better align emerging policies, priorities, and grants across the different WG portfolios, to enable the



delivery of holistic and multi-benefit projects and activities as required by the Well-Being of Future Generations Act

Suggested priority areas

Climate Change

11. There is a strong focus on mitigation and decarbonisation to meet the stretching targets for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. However, this strong emphasis has so far shifted the attention away from the need to adapt to existing changes, especially with increased flooding and sea level rise. Very little progress has been made in this area due to a range of factors including lack of enabling policies, and large scale studies to facilitate the relocation of communities or other management options. **We would encourage the Committee to explore why adaptation to climate change and sea level rise is not receiving the same level of prioritisation as decarbonisation and how it can be embedded as part of central and local government decision making.** Adaptation is also required to deal with other climate change implications such as the arrival of new pests, diseases and instances of extreme heat and large-scale international migrations. Forward planning to build preparedness and resilience in the face of these emerging issues is needed.

Tree Planting

12. The Welsh Government needs to design efficient and modern regulation and strategic planning for tree planting to ensure multiple benefits (for biodiversity and carbon and recreation and economy) are achieved rather than one at the expense of the other. We are currently seeing a large number of farms being bought by carbon off-setting companies to turn into vast tree plantations. Whilst this helps (in the long term) meet carbon storage and sequestration objectives it also stops young farmers from starting up at a time when Wales needs to be self-reliant and increase food production post Brexit. **The Committee should explore how the WG should work more closely with National Parks and others to ensure tree planting is done in the right areas and complement peatland**



restoration and carbon sequestration strategies developed by National Parks.

Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management or climate risks

13. We welcome the continued investment in Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management and updated National Strategy for Flood & Coastal Erosion. However, the government's clear focus is on protecting homes rather than businesses. This policy is likely to impact on prosperity and local economies and does not reflect the ambition set-out in the National Development Framework. Effectively, many Business Parks (Treforest, Connah's Quay for example) would not be eligible for WG funding to increase their level of protection against flood risk and sea level rise. **We would encourage the Committee to take an active interest in this area and identify how these areas which are pivotal to local economy and employment will be protected and funded in the face of increasing risks.**

Many inland and coastal areas in Wales are likely to see a change in management approaches due to increasing risks and unaffordability of defences. However, there will be huge costs associated with the decommissioning of assets and infrastructure. The need to have enabling national policies and funding streams to support this transition is key but not developed as yet. Our decisions and activities are also about ensuring that we do not expose more people to climate risks. National policies outside this Ministry are also key in supporting this, with TAN15 being a major enabler while others are in direct conflict with this responsibility. **We would therefore encourage the Committee to explore how cross policies and plans can better complement each other but also identify how the Welsh Government is planning for decommissioning and transition to more sustainable management options against climate risks.**



Transport

14. WLGA is supportive of the ambitious proposals in the new Wales Transport Strategy. Implementation of it will require a focus on behaviour change to achieve the desired modal shift. **We would encourage the Committee to investigate what steps will be taken to reinforce this behaviour change and to ensure that policies are 'rural-proofed' so they do not disadvantage or disproportionately affect rural areas.**

Skills & Expertise

15. Wales is facing a significant shortage of skilled workers impacting on the ability of Councils, Natural Resources Wales, and the private sector to recruit and fill specialist posts. Shortages are seen across a range of areas including Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management, Climate Change, Energy, Housing, Forestry, and Sustainable Drainage. This can be partly explained by a lack of suitable courses delivered by academia, funding shortages, and difficulty of councils to match private sector wages, **We would encourage the Committee to investigate how the Welsh Government should engage with academia and the relevant industry to support and fund the development of specialist education programmes linked with the delivery of priority areas.**

Welsh Government Grants

16. Grant eligibility criteria, inability to match fund using other grants (including UK Government grants in some cases), and lack of WG cross-departmental working have often limited the ability of councils to deliver multi-benefit activities. Furthermore, programmes tend not to align, making the assembly of funding very difficult. The Ministry's priority focus areas and Well-Being of Future Generations Act will require a more holistic approach to delivery, taking into account the environmental, social, economic and cultural well-being collectively and not each in isolation. **The Committee should investigate how the various grants and programmes can be more flexible through better synergy and wider remit.**