

LGF (S20) 01

Bil Cyllid Llywodraeth Leol (Cymru)

Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Response from: Older People's Commissioner for Wales



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru Older People's Commissioner for Wales

John Griffiths MS
Chair
Local Government and Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament
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Rydym yn croesawu
galwadau yn Gymraeg

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8 January 2024

Dear John,

Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee: Consultation on Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill

I am pleased to see that the current consultation enables people to submit their comments by post as well as electronically. Digital exclusion is an increasing issue for older people across Wales.

In relation to this, I note that one of the proposals in the above Bill relating to the council tax system is to replace the current requirement to publish information in newspapers with a requirement to publish a notice of the council tax charges on the local authority's website and "put suitable alternative arrangements in place to ensure that such information is accessible to citizens who have difficulty accessing online facilities".

This is concerning as the latest National Survey for Wales shows that 31% of over 75s do not have access to the internet at home and 33% of over 75s do not use the internet (including Smart TV and handheld devices), compared to 13% of 65-74s and 0% of 25-44s. This means around 101,200 people over 75 do not use the internet.

This change is therefore likely to disproportionately impact older people. 'Suitable alternative arrangements' is also an ambiguous replacement to the more specific requirement to publish in newspapers, and risks being an inadequate alternative.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In November 2021, I used my legal powers to issue Section 12 guidance to local authorities and health boards regarding [access to information and services in a digital age](#) to help address the issue of the rights of older people not online.

I am currently undertaking further work on digital exclusion. Over 150 older people have shared their recent experiences of digital exclusion with me and I will shortly be publishing a report on this issue. Older people describe being made to feel left behind, 'past it', and isolated as a result of so much everyday business moving to online-only or digital first. The proposals in the current Bill risk adding to this even further and are unnecessary.

Citizens are potentially more likely to see useful information of which they were unaware (and so not intending to specifically seek out) when browsing published newspapers. It seems less likely that people will browse local authority websites.

For the above reasons, the requirement for notices of the council tax charges to be published in newspapers should be retained and the provision in the Bill for this to be via local authority websites, with unspecified alternative offline provision, should be removed. There is no reason why the Bill cannot specify that council tax charges be published both online and in newspapers.

I would be happy to discuss the issue of digital exclusion further. Please contact Ruth Thomas (ruth.thomas@olderpeople.wales) if you would like to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Heléna Herklots CBE
Older People's Commissioner for Wales