

Waste

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Gwastraff | Waste

Tystiolaeth gan Benthg Cymru | Evidence from Benthg Cymru

The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (the Committee) is undertaking a one-day inquiry on waste.

Background

The focus of this work will be on progress towards delivery of the Welsh Government's circular economy strategy, Beyond recycling (March 2021) (PDF 2MB), specifically:

- the 2025 targets - 70% recycling for waste from households, commercial and industrial businesses, 26% overall reduction in waste, zero waste to landfill, 50% reduction in avoidable food waste, and
- actions undertaken to date aimed at: driving innovation in materials use; upscaling prevention and re-use; building on our recycling record; investing in infrastructure; enabling community and business action; and aligning Government levers.

The Committee is particularly interested in how the following are impacting/will impact on progress:

- Delays to the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility Reforms.
 - Roll out of the ban on single-use plastic products and business waste separation requirements.
 - Preparedness of the waste sector and infrastructure investment requirements.
 - UK Internal Market Act.
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Our response relates to the delivery of the Welsh Government's circular economy strategy as set out in '*Beyond Recycling*.' Wales' first Library of Things and Benthg Cymru's pilot 'Benthg - Borrow Don't Buy', is cited on page 20 of this strategy document, on the basis that Libraries of Things are a key part of a vibrant circular economy, with multiple environmental, economic and social benefits.

Background

Established in 2017, Benthg Cymru has developed and continues to support a membership network of 20 Libraries of Things (LoTs) from Barry to Bethesda, with more communities joining up every week.

The Benthg Cymru network supports behaviour change from buying to borrowing, and encourages a more circular economy by maintaining and keeping the items borrowed in use longer, reducing materials going into waste streams as well as reducing carbon emissions.

Most items on an LoT inventory in Wales are second-hand items donated from the local community, via individuals' sheds, attics and cupboards. By keeping these items in use, Benthg Cymru estimates that the network has diverted nearly 4000 items representing c. 13.7 tonnes from landfill.

By saving people money (borrower fees are kept deliberately low) and space in their homes, LoTs are a sustainable, low-cost way to support those who suffer social and economic deprivation – an increasing concern in the ongoing cost of living crisis. Via online borrowing platforms, LoTs provide easy access to a variety of items from tents, school uniforms, toys and the ever-popular carpet cleaner.

To date, the Benthg Cymru network has supported approximately 13,000 borrows across Wales and communities in Wales have saved over a total of £300k and 160,000kg of carbon emissions through borrowing instead of buying.

Benthg Cymru's network of LoTs also provide employment and volunteering opportunities as well as alleviating social isolation and loneliness. The network changes people's lives on a daily basis.

This change would not have been possible without the far-reaching vision and support of the Welsh Government, Benthg Cymru is the only organisation of its kind in the world - further cementing Wales' commitment to the Circular Economy and its place as one of the highest recycling nations in the world (page 4 of *Beyond Recycling*):

'[Welsh Government] has provided the tools to enable community action. This means supporting the local actions which collectively make a big difference. (page 6 of Beyond Recycling).'

A recent testimony from the Australian Library of Things network illustrates Wales' global reputation in this sector:

'[Benthyg Cymru's] results are impressive when compared to other countries and have been discussed in International Library of Things forums as a model to emulate. The Australian Library of Things Network aims to replicate this successful model, once we establish a suitable funding source.'

David Paynter

Australian Library of Things Network

Evidence

1. In the *Dechrau Benthyca 2022* report Benthyg Cymru reflected on the learnings of the nascent network from April 2021 – March 2022 and made recommendations for harnessing the incredible momentum achieved within a short timeframe. The report concluded that:

1.1 Benthyg Cymru's ethos of providing tailored support to different projects and stakeholders allows necessary flexibility to adapt to different circumstances and communities, but significant variations from one project to the next means that outcomes and timings are difficult to predict at this stage.

1.2 Sustained, flexible funding at local and network level will be required to carry out the long-term evaluation and analysis which will be crucial in understanding the key drivers behind a successful LoT.

1.3 Centralised support in the form of a network model gives Wales a huge advantage in establishing LoTs on a national scale by providing templates, toolkit, shared learnings and consistent collated data. Benthyg Cymru has developed a comprehensive and detailed toolkit covering all areas of managing a Library of Things including risk mitigation processes. These resources are available to all Benthyg Cymru network members.

1.4 One of the benefits of a national network approach is to be able to compare and analyse differences within different geographical and demographic locations, this provides insight into the significant opportunities to identify and operate levers to accelerate behaviour change towards a circular economy.

1.5 Funding streams would ideally support a 3–5-year project in order to allow time for projects to become established and to see behaviour change take effect.

Revenue funding is often likely to be more important than capital to support venue and staff costs.

1.6 Libraries of Things are an integral part of making the circular economy a reality in Wales and delivering behaviour change towards more sustainable ways of living.

2. Benthyg Cymru is currently funded by Welsh Government. The organisation is researching and developing alternative income streams and working to reduce reliance on one source of funding but at the same time keep borrower fees as low as possible.

2.1 Sustainability is an integral part of making the circular economy a reality in Wales and delivering behaviour change towards more sustainable ways of living.

2.2 Increasing awareness of sustainable living is a key step and challenge for the organisation and critical to enabling behaviour change as well as generating income. Benthyg Cymru is conducting behaviour change 'test and learn' trials as well as delivering targeted communications campaigns to proactively encourage people in Wales to borrow not buy.

2.3 In order to support communities live sustainably and affordably by making borrowing as easy as popping out for a loaf of bread, Libraries of Things need to be convenient, easy to use and accessible to everyone.

3. Benthyg Cymru has a Memorandum of Understanding with Repair Cafe Wales and together both organisations are stronger than their sum of parts, by fostering collaboration, resource sharing, and collective problem-solving.

3.1 Repair Cafe Wales supports over 100 communities across Wales. Over the course of a year, their repair cafe network helps divert over 7000 items from landfill which is over 24,500 kg of waste and over 230,300 kg CO₂e in carbon emissions saved. But their repair cafes also do much more than reduce landfill, they help build community cohesion, reduce loneliness and isolation, teach skills, save people money, and bring generations together.

3.2 The progress that Repair Cafe Wales and Benthyg Cymru have made in raising awareness and creating opportunities for repairing, borrowing, and reusing across

Wales has the potential to accelerate crucial behaviour change to support Wales' Circular Economy ambitions.

3.3 However, the biggest challenge both organisations face is that of funding. Developing sustainable operational models while maintaining the ethos of accessible services and supporting those suffering deprivation will take years, not months, and must be completed in parallel societal behaviour change.

4. Evidence from the 'Sustaining Change: The RE:MAKE Newport Model for Community-Led Repair and Reuse 2024' report produced by Benthyc Cymru and Repair Cafe Wales shows that:

4.1 High-street repair and reuse hubs are effective in promoting sustainable practices at an everyday level by bringing borrowing, repair and reuse under one roof in a retail-like setting.

4.2 The report highlights the need for a social value tool to measure and understand the broader impact of repair and reuse hubs beyond the already understood environmental and financial benefits, which includes evaluating the social and economic contributions, such as community well-being, skill development, and job creation.

4.3 The RE:MAKE project has demonstrated significant benefits at local sites in Newport, Pontypridd and Maerdy and developed a role that could be replicated with minimal modification.

4.4 RE:MAKE Newport's success in challenging circumstances, post-pandemic in a struggling City centre, demonstrates that with sufficient support, this model has the potential to thrive anywhere in Wales.

Conclusion

The success of Benthyc Cymru and its network has shown how local, everyday actions (borrowing not buying) can contribute to a circular economy.

However, securing funding is critical to sustain and expand the network's impact across Wales in order to ensure long-term behaviour change that already does and will further contribute to social, economic, and environmental improvement across Wales.
