

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Climate, Nature and Wellbeing

Date: 2 February 2026

Time: 16.30 – 17.30

Location: Teams

Chair: Delyth Jewell MS

Secretariat: Dafydd Huw, RCPsych Wales

In attendance: Annie Smith, RSPB Cymru; Bec Miller, Asthma + Lung UK Cymru; Carolyn Thomas MS, Senedd Cymru; Colleen Cluett, Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales; Dafydd Huw, RCPsych Wales; Delyth Jewell MS, Senedd Cymru; Dr Tania Bugelli, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board; Emily Darney, Youth Climate Ambassadors for Wales; Gwenda Owen, Cycling UK; Julie Tate, Natural Resources Wales; Libby Davies, Natural Resources Wales; Liz Smith, Wales Environment Link; Molly Hucker, Fridays for Future; Niamh Salkeld, Plaid Cymru Senedd Group; Oliver John, RCPsych Wales; Paul Swann, Amddiffyn Mynydd Epynt; Rhiannon Hawkins, University of Glasgow and UCL Warning Research Centre; Sue Evans, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust Cymru.

1. Welcome and Introductions

- The Chair welcomed attendees, apologised for the absence of a translator but encouraged contributions in Welsh.
- Attendees introduced themselves.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes

- The minutes of the previous meeting (3 November 2025) were approved without objection.

3. Annual General Meeting

- The following were re-elected unopposed:
 - Delyth Jewell MS – Chair
 - Carolyn Thomas MS – Vice-Chair
 - RCPsych Wales – Secretariat
- Delyth Jewell MS reflected briefly on the work of the Cross-Party Group over the current Senedd term, expressing appreciation to members and

stakeholders for their engagement and commitment. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that the issues of climate, nature and wellbeing remain high on the political agenda and expressed her hope that the group would continue in the Seventh Senedd following May's election.

4. Presentation by Rhiannon Hawkins, University of Glasgow and UCL Warning Research Centre, on “Mental Health Vulnerability Index (MHVI): preparing communities, societies and authorities for the impacts of climate change on mental health”

- **Introduction:** Rhiannon Hawkins introduced the [Mental Health Vulnerability Index \(MHVI\)](#), a tool designed to assess how climate-related hazards may affect community mental health. She explained that the index seeks to identify populations at greater risk of psychological harm from events such as flooding, drought and extreme weather, and to support more preventative approaches in planning and policy.
- **Rationale:** Attendees heard that there is growing evidence linking climate-related events to increased mental health difficulties, both immediately after incidents and in the longer term. Rhiannon Hawkins noted that while early warning systems and risk assessments for physical hazards are well established, mental health impacts are rarely incorporated into these frameworks. The index was therefore developed to help address this gap and improve understanding of how environmental change affects wellbeing at a population level.
- **Development of the Index:** The index was developed through a review of academic and policy literature, alongside analysis of available public datasets. Rhiannon Hawkins explained that existing systems often focus on physical infrastructure and emergency response, with limited inclusion of community experience or longer-term health impacts. The MHVI was designed to bring together a wider range of social, environmental and health indicators into a single framework.
- **Structure of the Index:** Rhiannon Hawkins outlined that the index combines 47 indicators grouped into five domains:
 1. socio-demographic factors,
 2. economic vulnerability,
 3. exposure to climate hazards,
 4. population health indicators, and

5. infrastructure and environmental resilience.

These indicators are combined to produce a composite score intended to show relative levels of vulnerability across areas. The tool has been developed using open-access data and is intended to be accessible for use by policymakers, public bodies and communities.

- **Relevance to Wales and policy:** Attendees heard that the index could help identify areas where additional support, preparedness measures or health interventions may be beneficial. It may also assist with targeting early-warning communications, informing local planning, and supporting integration of mental health considerations into climate adaptation strategies. Rhiannon Hawkins suggested that applying such an approach could position Wales as a leader in recognising mental health within disaster risk reduction policy.
- **Future plans:** Rhiannon Hawkins explained that she is developing an online platform to make the index easier to use and more widely accessible. She also plans to engage with policymakers and international organisations to explore how the model could be adapted for other contexts. Work is ongoing to improve accessibility and refine the indicators as more data becomes available.

5. Discussion and Q&A

- Delyth Jewell MS thanked Rhiannon Hawkins for her presentation, noting the strength of the research, its relevance to the group's work, and its potential to support stronger policy responses in this area.
- Delyth Jewell apologised that she needed to leave the meeting early and handed over chairing responsibilities to Dafydd Huw.
- **Rural and urban impacts:** Sue Evans asked whether Rhiannon Hawkins had observed differences between rural and urban communities in terms of mental health vulnerability to climate change, noting concerns about pressures facing rural areas. Rhiannon Hawkins responded that both rural and urban communities experience significant impacts; while vulnerability is present in both settings, the contributing factors and lived experiences can vary. She noted that rural areas may face prolonged stress linked to farming pressures, drought and changes to the natural environment, while urban areas may experience increased flooding risk (due to built environments) and heat-related impacts.

- **Links with Public Services Boards and policy work:** Colleen Cluett highlighted that Public Services Boards in Wales are currently undertaking climate risk assessments and suggested the index could be highly relevant to their work. She offered to share the report with relevant networks and explore potential engagement with both Public Services Boards and health-sector climate adaptation groups. Rhiannon Hawkins welcomed this and indicated she would be happy to engage with relevant partners. She noted that she had contributed evidence to similar work in Scotland and would welcome further collaboration in Wales.
- **Data collection and clinical coding challenges:** Dr Tania Bugelli raised the issue of how health services could better capture data on climate-related distress. She noted that current clinical coding systems do not always record environmental or climate factors affecting patients, making it difficult to track impacts systematically. Rhiannon Hawkins acknowledged this challenge and suggested that improving understanding may require combining quantitative data with qualitative research, including patient experience and community-based evidence. She emphasised the importance of linking environmental data with health data over time to identify patterns. Oliver John added that similar challenges had been identified through analysis of NHS 111 press 2 data. While patterns of distress can be observed, identifying root causes remains difficult within existing coding structures, and further work would be needed to explore this more fully.
- **Application to local community situations:** Paul Swann raised concerns about the mental health impact of proposed energy infrastructure developments in his local community in Powys and asked whether the index could be applied to situations of this nature. Rhiannon Hawkins confirmed that the index could in principle be applied at community level, particularly for indicators linked to deprivation, environmental exposure and infrastructure. However, she noted that mental health data is currently collected primarily at health board level, which limits the ability to produce highly localised analysis. She suggested that as data availability improves, more granular application may become possible.

6. Updates from Youth Climate Ambassadors for Wales

- Emily Darney shared an update on recent work and upcoming activity.

- **Recruitment:** The Youth Climate Ambassador programme is currently recruiting new members aged 13–25. Meeting attendees were encouraged to share the application with relevant networks, schools and youth groups to help widen participation and ensure diverse youth representation.
- **Petition on nature-based flood solutions:** Emily Darney reported that the ambassadors recently submitted a petition calling for increased investment in nature-based solutions for flooding in Wales. The petition received 285 signatures before closing. Feedback has now been received from the Climate Change Minister. Ambassadors are preparing a formal response, focusing on:
 - Encouraging a higher proportion of flood defence spending to be allocated to nature-based solutions (noting current investment is around 2%).
 - Promoting the case for making such investment standard practice rather than project-specific.
 - Seeking reassurance on how long-term climate targets (e.g. 2030 and 2050 goals) will be maintained consistently across future governments.
- **Public engagement project:** Emily Darney also reported that the ambassadors are working with the National Museum in Cardiff on a public engagement project focused on nature-based solutions. The project aims to raise public awareness of how these approaches can help communities, particularly those affected by flooding. Work is ongoing to develop exhibits and materials, with the intention that the display will be open to the public within the next few months.
- Dafydd Huw thanked Emily Darney for the update and noted the importance of ensuring youth voices continue to inform the group's work. Attendees were encouraged to share links or materials with the Secretariat for circulation alongside the minutes.

6. Any other Business

- Dafydd Huw confirmed that the presentation slides and draft minutes would be circulated in due course, and attendees were invited to notify the Secretariat of any corrections or amendments once received.
- It was noted that the Cross-Party Group hopes to reconvene following the Senedd election, subject to re-registration of the group in the new term.

- Attendees were advised that they would remain on the distribution list unless they indicated otherwise, and they were invited to contact the Secretariat if their details needed updating.
- The meeting was brought to a close with a word of thanks to all speakers and attendees.

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