

Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

January 2022

Chair's foreword

In June 2021, I had the privilege of being elected by my fellow Senedd Members as Chair of the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee.

It is a new look Committee, with a broad remit covering much of the portfolios of the Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change. Ensuring that the Committee considers all the aspects of its remit will undoubtedly be a challenge, but it's one that I, and other members of the Committee are determined to meet. I believe that putting climate change, environment, energy, transport, infrastructure, and planning together in the remit of one Committee is sensible. A holistic, cross-cutting approach is necessary to deliver the changes we need to see in order to tackle the climate change and the nature emergencies.

Over the summer, we consulted widely on what stakeholders and members of the public thought should be our priorities at the start of this new Senedd term. We were pleased to receive over 100 responses to the consultation, which have been published in a separate summary report. We then held several oral evidence sessions, to allow us to drill down into the issues that had been raised. Finally, we heard from the Minister and Deputy Minister, to understand their immediate and longer-term priorities.

We have now identified three key priority areas for our work – Climate Change and Net Zero, Protecting and enhancing the natural environment, and Sustainable Communities. This third priority encompasses transport, infrastructure and planning and will consider how policies in these areas can deliver sustainable communities. We have sought to capture as many of the issues raised with us as possible.



This is a live document – priorities will change, external events will bring to the fore new challenges that need to be addressed. We have agreed to be agile and responsive. We will also undertake another public consultation halfway through this Senedd term to understand whether we need to refocus some of these priorities.

We also set out how we will work as a Committee. We are committed to engaging with people, especially young people, and I hope we will soon be able to meet people face to face again. I know this is an aspect of the Committee's work that all the members appreciate and enjoy.

I hope you will agree that this is an exciting programme of work. We look forward to you sharing your expertise and experience with us.

Llyr Gruffydd MS

Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

1. Ways of working

1. The Committee has a particularly broad remit, and we recognise this will present challenges for scrutiny of the full range of policy areas. Several of the issues identified by stakeholders as potential priorities for the Committee are cross-cutting. We recognise that joint working with other Senedd committees, and more innovative working practices, may be necessary to consider these issues. A key theme emerging from our consultation was that we should focus on policy delivery and outcomes.

How we will work

- We will work strategically and be agile. We will take a flexible approach to our work – some issues will require in-depth exploration via a full inquiry, others may be addressed through correspondence with the Minister or relevant public body.
- We will set clear objectives for our work and consider the best way to achieve the desired impact.
- We will publish an annual report on Climate Change scrutiny and request a debate in Plenary to ensure that all Senedd members are able to discuss the Welsh Government's progress.
- We will monitor and report annually on the progress of biodiversity policies.
- We will follow up on our work to ensure it is having the impact we expect.

Working with others

- We will look for opportunities to work with other Senedd committees and with equivalent committees in other legislatures.
- We will encourage other Senedd committees to mainstream consideration of climate change and biodiversity matters in their scrutiny.

Engagement

- We will ensure that our work is informed by engagement with organisations representing the wide diversity of people in Wales, with children and young people, and individuals with lived experience of inequality.

- We will utilise the expertise and knowledge of academic experts to strengthen the Committee's work. We will commission research in our priority areas if it does not already exist.
- We will conduct another public consultation on our priorities half-way through this Senedd term to ensure they continue to be appropriate, relevant, and necessary.

2. Our priorities

2. At the start of the Sixth Senedd, we held a public consultation to help inform our priorities. We received 118 submissions from stakeholders and individuals whose interests span the breadth of our remit.

3. During October and November 2021, we held a series of thematic evidence sessions with stakeholders to further explore their views. We also took evidence from the Minister for Climate Change and the Deputy Minister for Climate Change.

4. Our meeting on 25 November was devoted to determining our priorities.

The Priorities

5. Our priorities are grouped under 3 themes – Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment. They are set out against an indicative timescale - the next 6 months; Year 2 of the Senedd term; or Years 3-5 of the Senedd term.

6. Our priorities for later years are less specific, as we wish to retain flexibility to respond to any changes in Welsh Government priorities or to any external factors or events. We will also need to consider these priorities in the light of the co-operation agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, agreed in 2021, and which is due to last for three years.

Other issues

7. During the Sixth Senedd, this Committee has met fortnightly, in accordance with the timetable agreed by the Senedd's Business Committee. The Business Committee has agreed to review this arrangement in early 2022. Decisions to alter the timetable may affect the timescales set out in this report.

8. The Committee is expecting to consider several non-legislative common frameworks, which are necessary because of the UK's departure from the EU, in early 2022.

9. We expect several Bills to be referred to this Committee during the Sixth Senedd. Information on when the Bills will be introduced is limited, and it is likely that our work programme will have to change to accommodate their consideration.

10. The Committee is required to consider and report on several matters on an annual basis, including the Welsh Government's draft budget. We have agreed to consider several other items of business on an annual basis, including scrutiny of Natural Resources Wales; the National Infrastructure Commission; Transport for Wales; the Environmental Governance Assessor; and Ofcom. These are set out under the relevant theme, where appropriate.

11. We will continue to hold regular general scrutiny sessions with the Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change and will take those opportunities to discuss these priority areas with them.

Priority 1 - Climate change

12. The Climate Change Committee¹ ('CCC') has described the 2020s as the "decisive decade for tackling climate change", with Wales needing to make more progress in reducing carbon emissions in this decade than in the last three. The action taken, or not taken, by the Welsh Government during this Senedd term, and the next, will be critical in determining whether Wales can become a Net Zero nation by 2050.

13. The Welsh Government's [Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 \(2021 to 2025\)](#), published shortly before COP26, sets out its policies and proposals for reducing carbon emissions. This document will guide our work throughout the Sixth Senedd.

14. The transition to Net Zero is only one part of the climate change challenge. The other is understanding and adapting to climate risks. The importance of this has been brought into sharp focus in recent years, with Wales experiencing three major flooding events since the start of 2020. These have had a devastating and long-lasting impact on communities. Even with dramatic reductions in carbon emissions at a national and global level, further change is inevitable, which means more extreme weather events are likely.

What we will do in the next 6 months...

Climate adaptation - We will assess progress towards delivery of the Welsh Government's climate adaptation plan, [Prosperity for All: A Climate Conscious Wales](#), taking account of the UK's third Climate Change Risk Assessment (due to be published in early 2022).

Decarbonising housing - We will begin a multi-phase inquiry into decarbonising Wales' housing sector, building on the [recommendations](#) of the Decarbonisation of Homes in Wales Advisory Group, and the Future Generation Commissioner for Wales and New Economics Foundation's report, [Homes Fit for the Future: The Retrofit Challenge](#).

Renewable energy - We will consider the outcomes of the Deputy Minister for Climate Change's "deep-dive" investigation into barriers to significantly scaling up renewable energy in Wales.

¹ The Climate Change Committee is an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008. Its purpose is to advise the UK and devolved governments on emissions targets and to report to Parliament on progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Behavioural change - We want to better understand how the Welsh Government can promote public engagement and bring about the behaviour and societal shift that is needed to tackle climate change. We will commission some initial academic research to support us in this.

What we will do in Year 2 of this Senedd term...

Carbon budgets - We will scrutinise the delivery of the first carbon budget (2016 to 2020), informed by the Welsh Government's statement for the budgetary period and the CCC's subsequent progress report (both due in 2022). This will also provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider Wales' consumption emissions.

Decarbonising the public sector - We will scrutinise progress towards actions and milestones set out in the Welsh Government's Net Zero Carbon status by 2030: A route map for decarbonisation across the Welsh public sector (July 2021) and NHS Wales Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan (March 2021). This will provide an opportunity to build on the work of the Audit Wales review, which is due to be completed in summer 2022.

Decarbonising housing - We will continue our work on decarbonising housing.

Coal tips – We will undertake some initial, exploratory work on this subject in preparation for expected legislation.

In years 3-5, our work will include:

Annual scrutiny sessions will be held with the Welsh Government to assess progress towards delivery of policies and development of proposals in **Net Zero Wales**, and the impact of these on carbon emissions across sectors. We will hold annual scrutiny sessions with the Welsh Government to assess progress towards delivery of commitments in **Prosperity for All: A Climate Conscious Wales**. We will continue our work on **decarbonising housing**. We will review the Welsh Government's 10 year National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales.

Priority 2 – Sustainable communities

15. Sustainable communities have good connectivity and sustainable transport opportunities. Their homes are low carbon, affordable, and accessible to the local community. The people who live in these communities have access to affordable, sustainable food that is produced locally. They have green skills they use in well paid jobs in innovative, local companies. Sustainable communities should exist across Wales, not just in urban areas, and the people who live there can do so through the medium of Welsh and English.

16. Infrastructure, planning, and transport are key parts of the Committee's remit and our work will consider how these policy areas can help build sustainable communities.

17. Two themes will underpin our scrutiny in this priority area – ensuring a just transition to a green economy, and delivery of the Well-being Goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

What we will do in the next 6 months...

Sustainable communities – We will commission research on the latest trends and good practice and consider how these might apply in Wales. We will use this work as a basis to develop plans for future workstreams on placemaking and sustainable communities later in this Senedd.

Transport - We will consider public transport use post-Covid. We will hold our first annual scrutiny session with Transport for Wales. We will commission research on behavioural change in relation to modal shift and active travel.

Digital connectivity – We will assess progress on digital connectivity across Wales.

Clean air – We will continue to press the Welsh Government to bring forward a Bill as soon as possible.

What we will do in Year 2 of this Senedd term...

Transport governance – We will consider whether current delivery structures, governance arrangements and resources are adequate. We will look at the new five-year National Transport Delivery Plan and Regional Transport Plans, which are intended to be developed by Corporate Joint Committees.

Infrastructure - We will hold our first annual scrutiny session with the Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales.

Planning – Work on planning will include examining whether there are sufficient capacity, resources and specialist skills within local authority planning departments.

Electric vehicles – We will assess progress against the Welsh Government's [electric vehicle charging strategy](#) and action plan.

Placemaking – We will continue work on placemaking as identified in our scoping work.

In years 3-5, our work will include:

A review of the Welsh Government's **circular economy** strategy, Beyond Recycling. We will assess progress against the Welsh Government's [Digital strategy for Wales](#). We will continue our work on **Renewable Energy**. We will review the **planning framework**, including consideration of Future Wales and post-legislative scrutiny of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015. We will continue our work on **modal shift** and **placemaking**.

Priority 3 – Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

18. Wales' natural environment is one of its most precious assets, but it is under threat from a range of sources, including pollution, climate change and over exploitation. Most habitat types in Wales have seen a reduction in biodiversity over the last 100 years. Continued biodiversity loss brings risks to human safety and well-being through lost 'ecosystem services'. Wales is still far from reaching national and international biodiversity goals, such as achieving the 'sustainable management of natural resources' as defined in the *Environment (Wales) Act 2016* or the Aichi targets defined by the Convention on Biodiversity. Protecting and enhancing the natural environment, will be a key challenge for the Welsh Government during the Sixth Senedd.

19. Although Wales has a distinct legislative framework designed to support the sustainable management of natural resources and tackle biodiversity loss, there are questions about whether and how it is making a difference in practice.

20. During the Fifth Senedd, attention was firmly focused on the UK's departure from the EU: what it would mean for environmental standards; how the environmental governance gaps would be addressed in Wales; and what post-EU Exit agriculture and fisheries policies would mean for sustainable management of Wales' land and seas. Many of these key questions are yet to be answered.

21. In June 2021, the Sixth Senedd declared a nature emergency and set out its expectations for stronger action to address biodiversity loss, including statutory biodiversity targets, and the establishment of a statutory environmental governance body for Wales.

What we will do in the next 6 months...

River pollution - We will hold a one-off session with stakeholders to explore unlicensed sewage discharges.

Green recovery - We will examine the progress of the implementation of the report of the Green Recovery Task and Finish Group.

Marine - We will explore a range of policy areas as they relate to the marine environment, including spatial planning and renewable energy development, Marine Protected Areas and blue carbon.

Environmental governance - We will continue to press the Welsh Government to bring forward a Bill as soon as possible.

Natural Resources Wales – We will hold our first annual scrutiny session with Natural Resources Wales.

What we will do in Year 2 of this Senedd term...

Environmental governance - We will scrutinise the Welsh Government's interim environmental governance measures by holding a one-off session with the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor following the publication of her annual report (due in spring 2022).

Biodiversity - We will explore whether and how the outcome of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which will take place in May 2022, has shaped the Welsh Government's response to the nature emergency. We will keep under review the progress towards the introduction of statutory biodiversity targets.

Agriculture (Wales) Bill – We will explore opportunities to scrutinise the provisions in the forthcoming Bill that are relevant to our remit.

Forestry – We will assess progress on forestry policies, including the National Forest, and consider progress towards delivery of the Trees and Timber Task Force's recommendations (July 2021) and the new Woodlands for Wales Action Plan (due to be published before the end of 2021).

Marine – We will keep under review progress on marine policies, including the review of Welsh National Marine Plan policies and progress towards achieving Plan objectives, expected before November 2022. We will explore divergences in marine environment management from the outcome of a piece of academic work on 'Brexit, devolution and the sea' (*already commissioned*).

In years 3-5, our work will include:

We will consider the Welsh Government's new arrangements for financial support for the **agriculture** sector from an environmental and sustainability perspective. We will continue to keep **marine** issues, **environmental governance**, and **statutory biodiversity targets** under review.