

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR37

Ymateb gan Ffederasiwn Cenedlaethol Sefydliadau'r Merched Cymru / Evidence from
National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales



National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales

Climate Change

Tackling the climate emergency needs to be a priority. We agree with the statement in the letter from the Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change on 'the need for the 2020s to be 'the decade of action' if we are to meet net zero by 2050'. Due to the urgency of the situation, we must see faster and bolder action to reduce Wales' emissions and hope to see the launch of an ambitious low carbon delivery plan in the autumn.

To address the climate crisis, the NFWI supports a green and just recovery that puts nature as well as people at its centre. In a member survey by the NFWI about the impact of Covid-19, over 50% of respondents from Wales stated that the 'Government should make sure that action taken to help the economy to recover doesn't harm our environment or make climate change worse'. We would like to see policies that focus on:

- green jobs and training which provide a fair and just transition away from heavy industry;
- cleaner, greener energy and transport;
- protection, restoration and enhancement of green spaces;
- nature-based solutions to climate change; and
- protection and support of the most vulnerable, at home and abroad, from the impacts of climate change.

Environment

We welcome the government's commitment to bring forward legislation to ban more single use plastics. However we believe that further action is needed in this area and would like to see a focus on microplastics, and in particular microplastic fibres. We would like to see the Committee revisit the recommendations included in the 'Report on policies and proposals relating to plastic pollution and packaging waste' published by the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee in June 2019.

The NFWI has been calling on government and industry to research and develop solutions to limit the release of microplastic fibres, which are shed from synthetic clothing when laundered and end up polluting the environment. A report published by the NFWI in 2018 found that UK households were doing as many as 68 million loads of laundry a week with almost half of respondents' most

washed items containing more than 30% synthetic fibres. The report also found that two-thirds of respondents purchased and disposed of between 120 items a year, which could mean as many as 17,680 new garments bought and 19,340 items disposed of per year.

Bus Strategy for Wales

Bus services play a vital role in ensuring communities remain sustainable, reduce social isolation and ensure access to employment, education, local facilities and health services.

Encouraging people to move away from polluting cars and use public transport is central to cutting our carbon emissions and tackling climate change.

In light of the Welsh Government's plan to launch a Bus Strategy by the end of this year, it is vital that the Strategy meets the needs of the population and is backed with the necessary investment. Promoting a modal shift away from the use of personal motor cars is going to be a huge challenge and will also be dependent on improving the current provision. In April 2021, the NFWI published a report which looked at people's experiences of using local bus services and the impacts of cuts on women and people living in rural areas. The report found that:

- There is a need for a higher frequency of bus services in rural areas;
- Bus services need to be improved so that they are responsive to the needs of women;
- Bus services need to be integrated with other transport networks;
- Investment in more regular bus services is needed for environmental reasons; and
- 46% of respondents to the survey said that their access to basic services had been negatively affected by cuts to bus services, whilst 37% said the same about their access to health services.

Our research also found that the needs and travelling patterns of women are not always supported by the current system with 63% of respondents in Wales stating that they had not had the opportunity to contribute their views on transport decisions/policies and strategies impacting their local bus service.

As the Welsh Government develops its Bus Strategy, now is a good opportunity to ensure that a Strategy is developed that will help achieve viable and sustainable bus services that meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

Digital connectivity

Good, reliable digital connectivity is essential for work, business, education, leisure and day to day activities. According to Ofcom's Connected Nations report 2020, around 18,000 homes in Wales are unable to access 'decent' broadband, which is defined as providing download speeds of 10 Mbps and upload speeds of 1 Mbps.

The findings of a survey into digital connectivity launched in May by NFWI-Wales, the Wales YFC, NFU Cymru, FUW and the CLA has highlighted the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Some of the key findings are outlined below:

- Over 50% of respondents from a rural area did not feel that the internet they had access to was fast and reliable. Indeed, less than 50% of those who lived in rural areas stated they had standard broadband and only 36% had superfast broadband;
- 57% of those from a rural area described the mobile signal in their house as 'unreliable' and 49% of those from a rural area stated that their signal was 'unreliable' outdoors;
- 75% of respondents did not know where to access support to improve their broadband connectivity and only 19% were aware of the UK-wide Gigabit Voucher Scheme; and

- The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified the difficulties and frustrations of poor connectivity with 66% of survey respondents from a rural area stating that they, or their household, had been impacted by poor broadband.

Broadband and mobile phone signal are an essential public service in Wales and we strongly believe that they must be recognised as such.

Whilst we welcome the Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales and the establishment of a Barrier Busting Taskforce, we feel that it is vital that the Welsh Government and industry are scrutinised on their delivery and commitments.