

Waste

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Gwastraff | Waste

Ymateb gan Caffi Trwsio Cymru | Evidence from Repair Cafe Wales

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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(Evidence from Repair Cafe Wales)

Repair Cafe Wales (RCW) is a Community Interest Company that facilitates pop-up events, offering training and advice to encourage communities that want to work towards a more circular economy, creating a culture of repair and re-use, directly addressing the ever-growing emergency of unsustainable growth in landfill and waste.

Described by the First Minister as a 'phenomenon of Wales' repair cafes enable members of the public to have their household items fixed for free by skilled volunteers to extend the products lifespan and reduce the number of items going to landfill.

Since January 2019, our communities have repair over 17,269 items which equates to:

- 568,150.1 kg CO₂e emission saving
- 60,441.5 kg landfill & recyclables saving

Born in Wales, but not just for Wales, communities around the UK continue to join the RCW umbrella, united by our vision of a society empowered to work together to reduce waste, share skills, and strengthen our communities.

Our network of over 130 repair cafés provide a diverse range of benefits to the communities in which they are embedded:

- Offer creative opportunities to engage with re-energising town centres and developing zero waste towns.
- Potential routes to employment by supporting formalised training and digital inclusion projects.
- Provide data that feeds into product design improvement. As the Welsh Government's 'Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales' plan argues 'Better design assists in creating products that are durable and easy to repair, upgrade or remanufacture'.
- Provide a wide variety of volunteering opportunities which supports intergenerational activity.
- Creates safe and inclusive spaces that support community development and improve health and wellbeing.

Frequently consulted by groups both in the UK and internationally, Wales remains one of the most prominent experts on repair café operations and the leading voice on repair café insurance, one of the largest challenges facing the industry. RCW is an excellent example of an innovative, scalable project which reflects Welsh Government's plans to promote community infrastructure that helps citizens reduce waste. For example, the 'Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales' plan asserts the need to keep 'products and resources in use for as long as

possible through recycling, reuse, repair, remanufacturing reduces emissions and helping to develop a circular economy’.

Our work contributes to and aligns with numerous areas of Welsh Government policy including:

- Beyond Recycling Strategy
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act
- Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales • High street regeneration
- Tackling poverty and inequality
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing

RCW’s work contributes to all seven goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015).

Wales has the largest repair cafe network in the UK and Repair Cafe Wales are proud to be leaders in the industry, often supporting other countries to replicate the success we have achieved here in Wales. Our vision is to open a repair cafe in every community in Wales. Our strategic priorities over the next five years are:

- To continue to grow our network of repair cafes
- To better understand levers for behaviour change to continue to normalise repair for Welsh citizens
- To contribute to the progress of the Right to Repair movement
- To explore ways of better integrating repair into schools and education settings to begin to close the intergenerational repair skills gap we see in our communities

RCW also contributes to work happening at a UK level and across Europe through the Right to Repair movement. In October 2023, the UK repair network (of which RCW are a lead member) published the **UK Repair and Reuse declaration** which calls for:

- Making repair more affordable, through tax reductions and repair vouchers.
 - Expanding the UK’s right to repair regulations to cover all consumer products, strengthen design standards and remove barriers to repair for everyone.
 - Introducing a repair index to help the public choose more repairable and durable products.
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- Introducing requirements and targets for reuse and repair to be prioritised over recycling and providing investment to make this a reality. This should be a key part of amended extended producer responsibility rules.
- Supporting a new generation of repairers through repair training, accreditation and apprenticeships.

Whilst Wales has the largest repair cafe network in the UK, there is only so far our work can go if the products we are buying are not designed to be fixed and there is no legislation to monitor the cost of spare parts. The rate of growth of the repair cafe movement demonstrate the public demand for repair services and skills, but so much more is required to meet this need.

Supporting the Welsh Government's aim of 80 repair and reuse hubs across Wales and building upon the ambitions set out in our 2020 paper 'Welsh Government supported high street pilot: Multipurpose circular economy resource', Repair Cafe Wales and Benthyc Cymru launched RE:MAKE Newport in 2021. This was Wales' first high-street repair and reuse hub and this significant partnership project was made possible through the Nationally Significant Landfill Tax Fund from the WCVA. It set out with the aim of creating a new high street model that could be replicated and adapted across Wales, accelerating uptake of repair and reuse behaviours.

Benthyc Cymru and Repair Cafe Wales have applied the proven benefits of sharing learning and creating best practice processes and templates to accelerate and scale-up circular economy activities in national networks. Through combined insight and collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, this has created a new hybrid repair and reuse model that has the potential to grow and adapt to incorporate an unlimited range of circular economy and sustainable practices for communities.

The main lessons learned from this project include the effectiveness of high-street repair and reuse hubs in promoting sustainable practices, the importance of community engagement and skill-sharing, and the challenges in achieving financial sustainability. These insights are crucial for replicating this model in other areas to further the goals of the Beyond Recycling Strategy.

The project has highlighted 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. This includes evaluating the social and economic contributions, such as community well-being, skill development, and job creation, highlighting the multifaceted value of repair and reuse hubs.

Alongside paid staff, volunteers have been crucial to the success of the RE:MAKE Newport project and the additional repair and reuse hubs. These spaces would not be able to run without a dedicated team of volunteers and therefore robust volunteer engagement, training, and retention strategies are essential.

Establishing strong partnerships is also key to the success and sustainability of projects like RE:MAKE Newport. This includes collaborations with local businesses, public and third sector, and community organizations who help contribute to resource sharing, enhanced service offerings, and broader community engagement.

The RE:MAKE project, has evidenced the extent of the social, economic, and environmental objectives that can be achieved and amplified within a Repair and Reuse hub. It demonstrates the potential for a national network to enhance behaviour change by leveraging local differences and accelerating learning. As a pioneering model, RE:MAKE Newport aims to be a national hub for training in Repair and Reuse, aligning with Newport's sustainable city goals. However, securing continued funding is critical to sustain and expand its impact and ensure its longevity.

Overall, to best support the Beyond Recycling Strategy's aim of enabling community action, we need to see:

- Continued support and funding for community driven repair initiatives, acknowledging the crucial role community repair plays in tackling the repair of items for which there is not a suitable alternative business model
- Progress of repair and reuse legislation in Wales to ensure our products are better designed and citizens are empowered to repair
- Development of repair education in Wales to contribute to the wider green skills agenda
- Continued funding and support of repair and reuse hubs to give them time to build income generation streams and embed into town centres

The progress we have made in raising awareness and creating opportunities for repair and reuse led by and for communities around Wales has the potential to accelerate crucial behaviour change to support Wales' Circular Economy ambitions. However, the biggest challenge we face going forwards is that of funding. We are working hard to develop sustainable business models while maintaining our ethos of accessible services, but the lead time for this work is years, not months, and must be completed in parallel with the operational and behaviour change work at its core.
