

Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure and Committee

Submission from the Bevan Foundation

The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most influential and innovative think tank. We develop practical solutions to poverty, inequality and injustice. We welcome the opportunity to contribute views on priority issues for the committee to consider.

- 1.1 The committee will have a vital role to play in scrutinising Welsh Government measures tackle the climate and nature crisis to the pace and scale needed and as part of a broader approach to a fair recovery from the pandemic
- 1.2 The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on pre-existing inequalities underline the need for a fair transition to be a central focus of the committee's future enquiries.

A fair transition focus will require recognition of the inequalities that exist in Wales, how they are changing and their relationship to the climate crisis. The most disadvantaged people and places in Wales are often some of the lowest contributors to Wales' carbon footprint. Equally, the effects of climate change - such as poor air quality – affect people in Wales differently, and the availability of options and capacity to respond to climate change is influenced by wider factors such as living standards, income, experiences of poverty and location. For example, the cost of switching to electric vehicles will be prohibitive for some, yet the penalties for not doing so are likely to be felt most by those who cannot make the switch. Similarly, the drive to retrofit homes - while important- raises some questions about who bears the cost and the impact on low-income families and individuals ability to manage their energy costs. The combination of having amongst the largest economic inequalities and the highest levels of emissions in Britain makes achieving a fair transition in Wales especially challenging, but by no means impossible.

- 1.3 Infrastructure is critical to responding to climate change and helping to create a fair transition for all. Infrastructure as a public good will be central in helping facilitate the modal shift that is essential for responding to climate change.

This includes the provision of accessible, affordable and available public transport in every part of Wales and good provision of the “hard” infrastructure of the roads, tracks and so on that it relies on to provide connectivity.

However, in recent years there has been an erosion of some public transport services, particularly buses. Scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s capacity, powers and reach in this area will be vital in understanding how the existing gaps in provision and quality of public transport infrastructure will be meaningfully addressed over the course of this Senedd term.

We also wish to emphasise that the modal shift needed in how people live and travel is very likely to require the greatest shift amongst those with the most means and resources. Some estimates, for example, suggest that the lower running costs of low-emissions vehicles could even increase car use amongst some groups, further eroding public transport usage, leaving people cut off and undermining the shift away from car travel.

- 1.4 We welcome the emphasis on decarbonisation outlined in the Welsh Government’s letter to the committee. One of the key messages from the most recent advice report to Wales from the Climate Change Committee¹ is that all sectors must have multiple options to reduce emissions. It will be important to understand how business and industries are being mandated and supported to de-carbonise by the Welsh Government as well as the skills that are forecast to be needed for it to take place and to create a fair transition for businesses and workers.
- 1.5 Localities that are thriving and sustainable form a key pillar to creating a fairer Wales; one in which all places can play a part in responding to the climate and nature crisis. We advocate the development of some existing Welsh towns into Anchor Towns². These would help rebalance the spread of economic activity in Wales and in so doing, help create beacons of fair, sustainable and inclusive economies that tap into the productive potential of Welsh towns.

¹ Climate Change Committee (2020) Advice Report: The path to a Net Zero Wales
<https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Advice-Report-The-path-to-a-Net-Zero-Wales.pdf>

² Bevan Foundation (2019) Anchor Towns
<https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/anchor-towns/>

While we welcome the Welsh Government's ongoing commitment to town centre regeneration, it must be acknowledged that town centres will always struggle to thrive in towns that don't thrive. As such, a balance must be struck between a focus on town centres and their relation to other equally important and wider factors affecting town such as quality and availability of housing, availability of basic consumer and business services such as access to banking and connectivity to the surrounding areas and the wider region.