



Consultation response

Senedd Cymru: Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee Priorities for the sixth Senedd

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee's consultation into their priorities for the sixth Senedd.

With reference to the Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months, we have highlighted below some proposed focus areas for the Committee.

Transport

We believe that one of the Committee's priorities should be to focus on public transport as we've come out of lockdown. During March and April 2021, Age Cymru, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales worked together to gather the experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown and to understand the perspectives of older people on recovery.¹ The findings of this survey provides an insight into what older people need to emerge from the pandemic.

The ability to travel is a major concern for many older people in Wales as we come out of lockdown. Many people mentioned concerns regarding travel in general, with some having specific concerns regarding the availability of public transport, which had been an issue before the pandemic (see below), and some people had concerns regarding the safety of using public transport systems:

'Public transport is my biggest problem. Reduced services during lockdown have been a big problem' (Female, 70-74, Pembrokeshire)

'Staying safe while out on public transport as we now have a reduced train service so the trains will be crowded' (Female with additional caring responsibilities, 65-69, Caerphilly)

¹ Age Cymru (2021) Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery [Lockdown survey provides an insight into what older people need to emerge from pandemic](https://ageuk.org.uk/lockdown-survey-provides-an-insight-into-what-older-people-need-to-emerge-from-pandemic/) | Age Cymru (ageuk.org.uk)

'Trying to visit my 85 year old father who lives in Kent. I do not drive so would have to travel by coach to go and see him. I panic just at the thought of the idea' (Female, 55-59, Carmarthen)

'Transport and seeing friends and family safely [...] One of our buses has been taken off completely which means if I want to go into town I have to rely on the more expensive Bwcabus service. We had no buses running through lockdown but forced to use Bwcabus which costs more - difficult if you are on a low income due to benefits' (Female, 55-59, Ceredigion).

We recognise that public transport services are now increasing in frequency as we've come out of lockdown and it is important that older people have the confidence to use these services.

In terms of longer term Committee priorities relating to public and community transport, we would draw attention to the findings of Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey² (pre pandemic). Key issues raised were problems with physical accessibility to public transport, cuts to bus services, and a lack of public transport in rural areas. The need for more direct bus routes to health services was also raised. Concerns were also raised over the frequency and reliability of bus services and the lack of bus and community transport in the evenings.

For older people with limited mobility, getting to the bus stop and on and off the bus are issues that are compounded by a lack of facilities at bus stops. More bus stops and shelters with seating would make public transport more accessible. We welcomed the publication of Welsh Government's Accessible and Inclusive Public Transport Objectives³ in 2017, and it is important that these are implemented.

Community transport schemes provide an essential lifeline for many older people, especially in rural areas. We wish to see increased provision across the whole of Wales, with successful models being replicated more widely. We believe that levels of public funding allocated to community transport must be closely monitored by Welsh Government to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of vital services.

We believe that a focus of the Committee should be to ensure that Welsh Government transport decisions undergo equality impact assessments. Should charges for road users be introduced (see Welsh Government's consultation on the Llwybr Newydd transport strategy), we would have concerns about the financial impact on older people that depend on a car as the only practical form of independent transport, including older people that may experience mobility problems as they age, or for carers, and for those living in rural areas where public transport is sparse. Continuing to drive may be crucial for older people to get out and about, access essential services such as health care, and reduce the risk of social isolation, particularly in rural areas. We believe that older people that are dependent on car use should not be financially disadvantaged under such a system. Furthermore, we believe that any transport decisions made by Welsh Government further to their

² Age Cymru (2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk)

³ Welsh Government (2017) Accessible and Inclusive Public Transport Objectives [Accessible and Inclusive Transport Objectives \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

recent survey which sought views on tolls for older cars using the M4 and A470⁴ should also undergo an equality impact assessment.

Digital and Data

The Covid-19 pandemic has drawn into sharp contrast the gap between those of us that are able to get our information online and those of us that are unable to do so. Findings of Age Cymru's survey, which gathered the experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown (as referenced above⁵), revealed that accessing GPs was a cause for concern among older people and some respondents said the pandemic made things worse with many GP surgeries changing ways of working with limited booking times and an increase in the use of digital technologies. Reflecting the concerns of several respondents, one older person told us there is "No understanding of the fact that many elderly people do not have access to or understand social media." (Self-isolating male, 80-84, Denbighshire).

For those older people who are not online, we believe that service providers must ensure that the provision of online information is not to the detriment of the provision of information in other formats. We believe that a focus for the Committee should be on data poverty; it is important to recognise the significant cost of getting and staying online for some older people and to ensure that nobody is digitally excluded on cost grounds.

Housing

In terms of Housing, we believe that a focus of the Committee should be on fuel poverty. Older people are the group most likely to suffer from fuel poverty, where having to spend a disproportionate amount on fuel takes money away from other essentials. A contributing factor is that older people tend to live in older, energy inefficient properties. It is vitally important to ensure that our older population stays warm and well throughout the harsh winter months.

Town Centre Regeneration

Age Cymru's survey which gathered the experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown (as referenced above⁶) revealed older people's concerns regarding a lack of facilities in public places. Many respondents mentioned concerns about places they can rest and whether public toilets would be open:

When able to go out [I need] toilets around and seats to [be] able to rest.
(Female, 85-89, Torfaen)

⁴ [Climate change: M4 drivers asked for views on tolls for older cars - BBC News](#)

⁵ Age Cymru (2021) Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery [Lockdown survey provides an insight into what older people need to emerge from pandemic | Age Cymru \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ Age Cymru (2021) Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery [Lockdown survey provides an insight into what older people need to emerge from pandemic | Age Cymru \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)

[I need] More benches in the park. (Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

These were issues for many older people prior to the pandemic. Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey⁷ (pre-pandemic) revealed:

- public toilets were found to be the worst scoring element in local communities, with over half of the respondents scoring their community three or less out of 10. The lack of public toilet facilities was the key factor. Issues were also raised over the cleanliness and accessibility of facilities and limited opening hours.
- more than a third of respondents rated the pavements in their community a score of three or less out of 10. Uneven pavements and brick pavements that are slippery when wet were seen as hazardous. Pavements obstructed with parked cars, bins and street furniture restricted access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Problems with dog fouling and litter were also highlighted.
- 22.9% of respondents rated public seating and places to rest a score of three or less out of 10, with a general lack of public seating in communities being a key issue.

We believe that a focus of the Committee, in terms of Town Centre Regeneration, should be to ensure that communities are accessible to all, to give confidence to older people to go out again and re-engage with their communities.

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⁷ Age Cymru (2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator [Age Cymru's Community Calculator](https://ageuk.org.uk) (ageuk.org.uk)