

Consultation Response
Draft strategy for engaging the general public
in action on climate change
Welsh Government
December 2022

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading 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 Welsh Government's consultation on their Draft strategy for engaging the general public in action on climate change. Engagement with the general public about climate policies that will affect them and their communities is important so that people can share their views and lived experiences.

We believe there should be a fair transition towards net zero, and that Welsh Government should undertake equality impact assessments on climate change policies and interventions to ensure that those worst off in society are not disproportionately affected financially in the move towards net zero. A recent Audit Wales report reveals that a significant number of people are living in poverty in Wales and deprivation reaches all part of the country, and that the levels of poverty remain high and are impacting all parts of the population, including pensioners.¹

Housing

We believe it's important that Welsh Government's proposed actions to decarbonise homes must consider how fuel poor households can be supported to mitigate any risks that decarbonisation may present to low income and vulnerable households, for example, whether available grants will be sufficient to cover the costs associated with the proposed switch from gas boilers to low-carbon heat pumps for homeowners in

¹ ['Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales \(audit.wales\)](https://www.audit.wales/publications/2022/01/time-for-change-poverty-in-wales)

Wales.² We believe that Welsh Government should undertake equality impact assessments to ensure that low income and vulnerable households are not disproportionately affected financially by the decarbonisation of the existing housing stock.

It's important that people are aware of the differences between fully owned or leased solar roof panels in the buying and selling of houses.

Transport

To create a modal shift and encourage people to use more sustainable modes of transport, reliable, accessible and sustainable public transport services need to be available, with good connections and ease of connection between the different forms of transport. Key issues relating to public transport raised in Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey³ (pre-pandemic) 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.

In a recent survey⁴ with 1200 older people carried out by Age Cymru working in partnership with national older people's organisations, which was carried out during March and April 2022 focusing on older people's experiences in the past three months during the pandemic, older people told us about a general lack of public transport. They highlighted that public transport services were infrequent and hadn't returned to pre-pandemic levels. This was particularly problematic for those living in rural communities and those that don't drive.

Some older people 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. It's important that there is supporting infrastructure in terms of sufficient car parking spaces (including Blue Badge parking spaces) to enable people that are reliant on cars to access communities and services.

² BBC news (online) 19 October 2021. [Heat pump grants worth £5,000 to replace gas boilers not enough, say critics - BBC News](#)

³ Age Cymru (2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ Age Cymru (2022) Current experiences of people aged 50 or over across Wales of the Covid-19 pandemic and views on the year ahead [Age Cymru | Covid Survey \(ageuk.org.uk\)](#)

Active travel

Age Cymru supports the aims of active travel for older people, in light of the documented health and social, as well as environmental, benefits that this can bring to individuals.

To enable active travel, it is essential that the built environment in public spaces and streets in communities is safe and inclusive. Over a third of respondents to Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey (referenced above) rated the pavements in their community as poor. Pavements in a poor state of repair were seen as hazardous. Inadequate street lighting and a lack of safe pedestrian crossings that allow sufficient time to cross roads are also barriers that can prevent older people taking part in their communities.

Appropriate infrastructure is needed to facilitate older people to access community spaces safely. Over a third of respondents to Age Cymru's Community Calculator rated public seating and places to rest as poor, with a general lack of public seating in communities being a key issue.

Older people have expressed concerns over shared space for cycling and walking. There is the need to ensure meaningful consultation with disabled and older people about proposals for shared spaces, to avoid exclusion as a result of poor design.

Employment

Welsh Government need to give due consideration of the needs of people aged 50 or over, and fully consult them in any plans to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in the transition to net zero.

The post Covid-19 job market is particularly bleak for older workers who are already facing the highest rate of redundancy caused by the pandemic of all age groups. Recent ONS labour market figures highlight that over 50s are falling out of the workforce following the end of the furlough scheme, with 180,000 fewer in work than before the pandemic.⁵

Older workers who lose their jobs are far more likely to slip into long term worklessness. Over 50s who are unemployed are twice as likely to be out of work for 12 months or more as younger workers and almost 50% more likely as workers aged 25 to 49⁶. For many older people this will mean that they're without income or on reduced hours during a time when they are at most financial need; and being unemployed during this phase of

⁵ Office for National Statistics (2021) Labour market overview, UK: November 2021 [Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/labour-market)

⁶ Centre for Ageing Better (2020) A mid-life employment crisis: How COVID-19 will affect the job prospects of older workers report (<https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/Tackling-worklessness-among-over50s-after-covid-report.pdf>)

life can have a severe impact upon income in retirement. This was an issue prior to March 2020 that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

One of the reasons older workers find it difficult to stay or get back into the workplace is due to lack of flexible working options. Older workers are more likely to be living with long term health conditions, and/or are more likely to have caring responsibilities, particularly older women. 31% of older people who responded to Age Cymru's recent survey⁷ of 1200 people aged 50 or over across Wales told us that they currently look after or give any unpaid help or support to someone. Of these unpaid carers, 55% have increased the amount of care they provide in the prior three months. A number of these carers have also told us that they've had to reduce their working hours, or leave their job due to their caring responsibilities.

Older people are also discouraged from getting back into the workplace as they are often unaware, or don't think, that job opportunities could be available to them, due to lack of targeted or inclusive advertising for jobs, training, upskilling and/or career advice.

Another key issue for older workers is ageism and age discrimination. Age discrimination in employment is now illegal and the Default Retirement Age was abolished in 2011. However, perceptions and stereotypes of older workers – usually negative – are still held and challenging these is of great importance.

Age Cymru believe that everyone should be able to remain working as long as they desire and are capable of doing so, and that no-one should be disadvantaged because of their age.

We believe that to ensure that people aged 50 or over in Wales are not disadvantaged by the transition to net zero:

- They need to be fully consulted in any ongoing plans
- Any skills/training/ career advice/upskilling programmes should be inclusive for those aged 50 or over
- Any skills/training/career advice should have specific targeting towards people aged 50 or over
- There needs to be specific career advice and career reviews available to people aged 50 or over, looking to move into green industries, or have their job impacted by transitioning to net zero
- There must be more must be done to tackle ageism and age discrimination in the workplace. This includes through educating employers and managers to avoid discriminating and to challenge stereotypes; and by improving access to redress where people are treated illegally. The UK and Welsh Governments and the Equality and Human Rights Commission should make the case for employing older workers more effectively, including improving awareness of age discrimination

⁷ [age-cymru---report-on-the-current-experiences-of-people-aged-50-or-over-across-wales-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-views-on-the-year-ahead--june-2022.pdf](https://ageuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/age-cymru---report-on-the-current-experiences-of-people-aged-50-or-over-across-wales-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-views-on-the-year-ahead--june-2022.pdf) (ageuk.org.uk)

- Any apprenticeship or employability schemes for ‘green’ jobs should be open to those aged 50 or over, and have specific targeted advertising
- To support older people to stay or re-enter the workplace the UK Government should abolish the 26-week qualifying period for flexible working, so that job applicants have a statutory right to request flexibility, and the UK Government should introduce a system of “flexible by default”, where employees could assume they can work flexibly unless the employer can demonstrate otherwise.
- For those people aged 50 or over who are within three years of their State Pension age and realistically have a very low chance of working again – especially people claiming Employment and Support Allowance, Carers Allowance, or have been unemployed for 12 months or more – should have early access to their State Pension, at the full rate.
- In terms of support through Job Centre Plus, support provided to jobseekers aged 50 or over must start from day one of a benefit claim, be better tailored to individual needs and recognise the barriers to returning to work often faced by those aged 50 plus. This should include JCP ensuring all its advisers are trained to address the particular barriers facing older jobseekers.

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