



Public policy statement – Executive Summary
Climate Change
May 2025

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Background

Age Cymru's 2024 annual survey showed that climate change is a growing concern among older people in Wales.¹ At present, the average temperature in Wales is predicted to grow by at least 1.2°C by the 2050s, and up to 2.3°C by the 2080s.² This will result in hotter summers, rainier winters, and increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather events all year round.

Climate change poses many potential problems for older people, including impacts on individual health and wellbeing, access to services, transport networks, food production and building stability. These factors all contribute to making it harder to live in security and comfort. At the same time, the responses to climate change can impact upon the lives of older people, as moves to decarbonise and build climate resilience risk increasing financial and physical burdens on individuals.

The Welsh Government and other public bodies have adopted a two-pronged approach to tackling climate change, based on decarbonisation and building resilience.³ As Natural Resources Wales have commented:

*The twin needs for adaptation to climate change and building resilience to the impacts of climate change, plus enhancing nature as we do it, are not for the future, but are with us now.*⁴

Decarbonisation and resilience-building measures are now set to grow in prominence over the next few decades, as the Welsh Government pursues its legal obligation to reduce carbon emissions to Net Zero by 2050, in line with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, plus its goals of ensuring the 'social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being' of future generations, as per the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.⁵

¹ Age Cymru, *What matters to you? Current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales* (2024), <https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/policy/annual-survey/> ; Public Health Wales, 'Health and wellbeing impacts of climate change' (2021), <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/new-resource-highlights-health-impacts-of-climate-change/climate-change-infographics-english/>.

² Welsh Government: Shaping Wales' Future, 'Guest blog: How will climate change impact Wales in the future?' (10 September 2021), <https://shapingwalesfuture.blog.gov.wales/2021/09/10/guest-blog-how-will-climate-change-impact-wales-in-the-future/#:~:text=Annual%20temperatures%20in%20Wales%20are%20expected%20to%20rise,likely%20to%20become%20increasingly%20prevalent%20as%20a%20result.>

³ The reversal of nature loss and the increase of biodiversity is also a concern of the Welsh Government, but is not covered here as it does not directly relate to the experience of older people.

⁴ Natural Resources Wales, *Flood risk management annual report 2023 to 2024* (2024), [Natural Resources Wales / Flood risk management annual report 2023 to 2024](#).

⁵ Welsh Government, *Climate Action Wales: Public Engagement Strategy (2023-2026)* (2023), <https://www.gov.wales/climate-action-wales-public-engagement-strategy-2023-2026>; Welsh Government, 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials' (7 January 2025), <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html>.

Since then, the Welsh Government has published a range of plans designed to meet its twin objectives. These began in 2019 with ‘Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales’, which focused on policy proposals aimed at decarbonisation, and ‘Prosperity for All: A Climate Conscious Wales’, which concerned climate change adaptation.⁶ They were followed by the Net Zero Strategic Plan (2022) to decarbonise public services, followed by the ‘Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales’ (2024), which focuses on building climate resilience.⁷ At the time of writing, the Welsh Government is now in the process of producing a Just Transition Framework.⁸ While these policy developments are welcome, the UK Climate Change Committee notes that Wales’s progress towards adapting to climate change remains a mixed picture.⁹

The effects of climate change are already being felt by people of all ages and abilities. However, older people have a particularly high degree of vulnerability to climate-related effects, due to the increased likelihood of factors such as poor health, limited mobility and complex care and support needs. At present, an estimated 28.3% of people in Wales are currently aged over 60 – a figure predicted to rise to 31% by 2031.¹⁰ Older people are also more likely to live in relatively isolated rural locations, making them more at risk of climate-related disruption to services and supply lines.¹¹

This executive summary lists ways that policy in Wales can continue to pursue the goals of decarbonisation and building resilience while also working to maintain and even improve the quality of life of older people.

⁶ Welsh Government, *Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales* (2019) <https://www.gov.wales/prosperity-all-low-carbon-wales>; Welsh Government, *Prosperity for All: A Climate Conscious Wales* (2019), <https://www.gov.wales/prosperity-all-climate-conscious-wales>.

⁷ Welsh Government, *Welsh Government Net Zero strategic plan* (2022), <https://www.gov.wales/welsh-government-net-zero-strategic-plan>; Welsh Government, *Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024* (2024), <https://www.gov.wales/climate-adaptation-strategy-wales-2024>.

⁸ Welsh Government, ‘Just Transition Framework’ consultation (2023-2024), <https://www.gov.wales/just-transition-framework>.

⁹ Climate Change Committee, *Adapting to climate change: Progress in Wales* (2023), <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/adapting-to-climate-change-progress-in-wales/>.

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics, ‘Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland’ (8 October 2024),

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>;

Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, *Understanding Wales’ Ageing Population: Key Statistics* (2022), <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/understanding-wales-ageing-population-key-statistics/>.

¹¹ In Powys, for example, over-65s make up around 28% of the population. See: Office for National Statistics, ‘Population and household estimates, Wales: Census 2021’ (28 June 2022), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimateswales/census2021>.

Executive Summary

Age Cymru's Climate Change policy statement offers a range of policy recommendations aimed at ensuring that older people are able to live in security and comfort despite increasing climate disruption. These recommendations, which are spread across four broad policy areas (transition to net zero, changing weather, housing, and transport), follow two key themes: decarbonisation and building resilience.

The following is a summary of the Climate Change policy statement. It is followed on page 7 by a list of policy proposals drawn from the statement.

Transition to net zero

Age Cymru supports the Welsh Government's plans for the transition to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, the transitional process must be socially equitable and should not place a disproportionate financial burden on older people, nor should it result in a large-scale loss of jobs across Wales, which would not only result in redundancies among older workers but would also have a knock-on effect on the communities in which older people live.

The Welsh Government should also take steps to address the rise of climate-related ageism, with older people commonly (and incorrectly) being regarded as uninterested in climate change, and/or primarily responsible for causing it. At the same time, efforts should be made across Wales to harness the experience, enthusiasm and energy of older people and to channel it into community projects aimed at building resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Changing weather

Changing weather patterns pose multiple risks to older people in Wales, both in terms of long-term impacts on society (such as increased average temperatures, new vector-borne diseases and food shortages) and the immediate danger of extreme weather events, like flooding, wildfires and landslips.

Age Cymru urges the Welsh Government to promote public awareness of the risks of hotter temperatures, and to work with local authorities on preparing urban spaces to be more heat-resistant. This includes creating shaded spaces, seating areas, water fountains and improving public building insulation.

Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government should prepare plans for new diseases outbreaks, including national monitoring and vaccination programmes.

Wales must reduce its reliance on global trade routes for food supplies and instead reinvest in local farming and food production.

The Welsh Government and relevant public bodies should monitor extreme weather events, while ensuring adequate training and equipment for the emergency services are in place alongside an effective public communication system. Flood defences should continue to be developed in line with the National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (2020) and the Welsh Government should press ahead with plans to establish a Disused Tips Authority for Wales.

Housing

Housing is closely tied to climate change, as both a major carbon emitter (housing in Wales is among the worst in Western Europe for energy efficiency) and an important determinant of personal health and wellbeing. Age Cymru supports efforts to retrofit homes with energy efficiency measures, both for reducing carbon emissions and maintaining the health of residents.

The Welsh Government should continue to provide retrofit schemes for both private and social housing. Retrofit measures must be financially viable for residents and not prioritise carbon reduction over affordability. Renters in particular must not face more expensive energy bills as a result of retrofit measures taken by landlords without their consent.

All retrofit schemes at both a Wales and UK level must be well regulated against fraud and dishonest business practice. In particular, we urge the UK Government to rethink the ECO scheme with a view to increasing regulation and removing incentives for unscrupulous installers to exploit vulnerable clients.

Transport

Like housing, easy access to transport networks is vital for people to live healthy, socially active and fulfilling lives. However, transport remains a major carbon emitter and, as fossil fuel prices increase, a considerable drain on personal finances.

Age Cymru supports efforts to encourage older people to use public transport and active travel routes as alternative to private car use, rather than penalising people for using cars. To achieve this, we urge the Welsh Government to expand public transport networks across Wales (particularly outside the populous South-East) and to improve accessibility for older people, including measures such as toilets and disabled access. A comprehensive mapping of public and community transport networks across Wales should be undertaken.

Age Cymru supports expanding active travel networks, but also calls for improvements in safety to encourage more older people to use them as a healthier and carbon-free alternative to driving.

List of public policy proposals

1. Transition to Net Zero

1.1 Ensuring a just transition

- Older people must be consulted on the process of transitioning to net zero in a meaningful way.
- Information about the net zero transition should be communicated in a clear, accessible and hybrid (i.e., digital and non-digital) format.
- The transition must be undertaken in a socially equitable way, that does not cause sudden price rises or restrict access to essential services.
- Older people should not be punished for relying on more carbon-intensive goods and services (e.g., car travel) while they remain, for many, the cheapest option available. The Welsh Government and other stakeholders involved in the net zero transition should instead seek to encourage less carbon-intensive alternatives, such as public transport or housing retrofit.
- The Welsh Government should seek to create new jobs across Wales as part of the transition to net zero, as well as offering re-training opportunities for older workers.

1.2 Creating opportunities for climate action

- Opportunities for community volunteering should be promoted at both a national and local level. These should include volunteering based on building community resilience to climate change, such as community gardens, transport and resilience planning.
- Local authorities and third sector organisations should create spaces for sharing experience between different generations within a community, with the aim of teaching one another about ways to live in a more sustainable manner.

1.3 Combating climate-based ageism

- The Welsh Government must combat climate-related ageism in all media and public communications in Wales during the transition to net zero.

2. Changing weather

2.1 Overheating

- The Welsh Government and Public Health Wales should promote awareness of the risks of higher temperatures and humid weather to older and more vulnerable people.

- The Welsh Government should work with local authorities on a nation-wide project to make urban spaces more accessible in hot weather, developing more shaded areas, green spaces, public seating and drinking fountains, while also improving the thermal resistance of public buildings.
- Community spaces such as libraries should be reviewed for suitability for use as 'cool banks' in very hot weather.

2.2 Diseases

- Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government should prepare emergency plans for dealing with the outbreak of diseases associated with a warmer, wetter climate, including preparing a comprehensive vaccine programme and raising public awareness of symptoms (via both digital and non-digital means).
- Public Health Wales should explore developing a monitoring system for tracking diseases that are likely to increase in cases with climate change.

2.3 Food shortages

- The Welsh Government should explore methods of reducing reliance on global food supply lines, instead working with farmers, ecologists and economists to encourage local, sustainable and affordable food production methods.
- The Welsh Government and local authorities should continue to promote small-scale food producers based in Wales.

2.4 Extreme weather events

- The Welsh Government must have an effective disaster relief plan in place for extreme weather events, including flooding, wildfires and landslides. Emergency services should be adequately equipped and trained to respond to these events.
- The Welsh Government must continue to build resilience to flooding into the built environment, in line with the National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (2020).¹²
- Relevant public bodies should monitor extreme weather events and produce an effective method of communicating risks to the population. Any communication method must include both digital and non-digital means.
- The Welsh Government should proceed with establishing a Disused Tips Authority for Wales, with the aim of taking a more active approach to assessing, monitoring and managing disused tips across Wales. This Authority should possess adequate powers to compel private landowners to

¹² Welsh Government, *National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales* (12 March 2021), <https://www.gov.wales/national-strategy-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-wales>.

address potentially dangerous tips on their land, as well as for the Authority itself to take action on private land if needed.

3. Housing

3.1 Housing retrofit

- The Welsh Government should continue to provide retrofit schemes to help people make their homes more energy efficient. These schemes should prioritise physically and financially vulnerable people.
- Retrofit schemes must take into account the affordability and suitability of specific energy efficiency measures. For example, heat pumps should not be installed if they are likely to cost the occupant more money than their existing central heating system.
- Private renters should not be forced to take on higher operating costs of new energy efficiency measures installed at the behest of a landlord. If such measures are installed, landlords should be compelled to cover any excess costs.
- Government communications on the future of housing retrofit (at both a Wales and UK level) must be improved to avoid public confusion around changes to energy efficiency measures (e.g., phasing out of gas boilers).

3.2 Consumer protection

- Retrofit schemes must be strictly regulated to safeguard against exploitative business practice and fraud.
- The Welsh Government should make more effort to publicise the risks associated with organising retrofit work on a property, particularly in relation to exploitative business practice.
- The UK Government should rethink the ECO scheme before the termination of ECO4 in 2026, with the view to increasing regulation and removing incentives for exploiting the vulnerabilities of clients.

4. Transport

4.1 Car use and public transport

- The Welsh Government should continue to promote public transport as a viable alternative to car use, both through 'soft' measures such as public information campaigns and through 'hard' measures such as improving bus and rail network coverage and affordability.
- Bus and rail services must be designed to accommodate the needs of older people, including disability access and toilet facilities. Older people should be consulted on changes to public transport to ensure that these needs are met.

- A comprehensive mapping exercise of the available public and community transport systems should be undertaken across all 22 local authorities in Wales.

4.2 Active travel

- The Welsh Government and stakeholders (e.g., Sustrans) should continue to expand the active travel network across communities in Wales.
- Active travel networks must be safe to use. Safety measures such as raised barriers, bike traffic lights and bollards should be deployed more frequently to separate bike lanes, roads and pavements.

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