

Just Transition to Net Zero Wales

Consultation Response: 15.03.2023

Response on behalf of Learning Disability Wales

About Learning Disability Wales

Learning Disability Wales is a national charity representing the learning disability sector in Wales. We work with people with a learning disability and their families, Welsh Government, local authorities, disabled people's organisations and the voluntary sector to create a better Wales for all people with a learning disability.

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General comments

We welcome this opportunity to submit evidence to the plans to facilitate a just transition to a more environmentally friendly Wales. We recognise the need to make sure Wales transitions to a system that protects the environment and makes this country liveable for everyone long term. We are further very happy to see the strong focus on this being a just transition in which wellbeing and fairness are centred.

This consultation document does a good job at charting some of the main issues around justice that arise in terms of just transition. However, it would have been nice to see a more grounded approach here that looks specifically at how the outcomes can be achieved.

In our response we can specifically address the issues relating to people with a learning disability as well as the learning disability sector in Wales.

1. Confronting eco-ableism

We are concerned that Welsh Government is pursuing some policies that might disable people with a learning disability, and other disabled people. Eco-ableism occurs when changes to protect the environment or fight climate change are put into place without taking accessibility issues into account and disabled people are thus disproportionately disadvantaged. For example, while it is good to encourage walking and cycling, we would have liked to see an acknowledgement that changes made to accommodate the eco-friendlier forms of travel should never disadvantage disabled people in their transport needs.

We have mentioned this several times in different consultation responses to Welsh Government, especially when it comes to transport planning in Wales. We have stressed the importance of making sure that accessibility is a central part of planning, not an afterthought. It is thus somewhat disappointing to see these concerns not adequately addressed here.

In point 50 you write that “Therefore, for shorter journeys, walking and cycling should become the natural modes of choice. To achieve this we need to create the conditions that make this safe and attractive. The extent to which these modes of transport are used varies”. Walking and cycling are not a viable option for many disabled people. While Welsh Government should absolutely make forms of active travel safer and easier to use, it is important to note that for many people walking and cycling will never be a “natural” choice and that it is potentially harmful to imply that not choosing these methods or transports are “unnatural”. It makes more sense to focus on a transport system that gives people choices and makes other forms of public transport easily accessible.

2. Centring accessibility

Within your plans to facilitate a “just” transition in Wales you write about the need to centre vulnerable groups. We suggest that one way of doing this is through making the social model of disability a

central theme in your policies. Welsh Government has committed to implementing the social model of disability throughout all its policies. The social model of disability suggests that disability does not arise out of something being “wrong” with the disabled individual, but as a result of people’s impairments and differences not being sufficiently accommodated.

Given that a transition to a zero carbon economy will mean extremely significant changes to the way society functions, in implementing these changes accessibility and justice should be central within planning and should be discussed explicitly in proposals relating to environmental policy.

3. Including the voices of people with a learning disability

It is important that people with a learning disability are included at every stage of this policy and that their needs are taken seriously. This also means that all information needs to be made available in accessible formats. It is disappointing, for example, that these consultation events were not made available in easy read.