



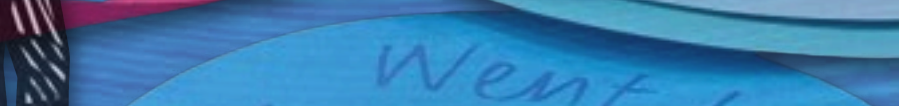
Comisiwn Seilwaith
Cenedlaethol Cymru
National Infrastructure
Commission Wales



CHARTING OUR COURSE

Findings







CHARTING OUR COURSE

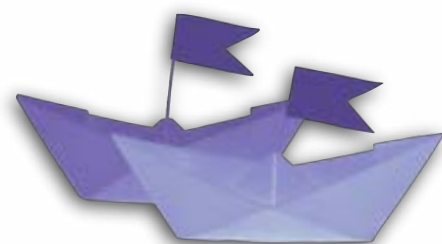
On the 21st November 2025, on one of those sunny autumn days where the sun is as bright and golden as the air is freshly silver crisp, Commissioners from the second National Infrastructure Commission for Wales came together to reflect on the impact of their work since their formation in 2022.

They met in Bryngarw Country Park. A one-time private estate, Bryngarw serves as a potent reminder of the power of infrastructure to shape landscape and fortune. The Traherne family, who built the house and its ornamental gardens, were by virtue of their landholding capitalists of early Welsh infrastructure. Their wealth was forged in the heat of the industrial revolution—derived from mineral rights, railway wayleaves, and stock market investments in the very heavy industries that transformed the valleys.

The River Garw, flowing past the meeting room, served as the 'OG infrastructure' for the day's discussions. To the Trahernes, this water represented a duality: upstream, it was the 'Black River,' a functional industrial sewer serving the collieries; yet here, powered by the profits of that extraction, it was tamed into a place of beauty and leisure for their benefit alone.

It was in this setting—where the proceeds of grey infrastructure were once used to build green sanctuary—that the Commissioners gathered. Taking influence from the river's flow, they mapped out their work, looking upstream to the sources of Wales's challenges and downstream to the legacy their decisions would leave behind.

This is the remarkable tale of their undertaking.





SUMMARY FINDINGS

Operating Landscape

- The Anchor Works (Cairns): Major reports like Renewable Energy and Flooding stand as physical landmarks—bedrock for future policy and waymarkers for community safety.
- Weaponised Bureaucracy (The Wiggly String): The group identified a pervasive force of "administrative inertia" designed to trip momentum. This friction manifested as silences, delays, and structural blocks.
- Agency (The Beaver in a Suit): To overcome this friction, Commissioners adopted the role of "beavers," building dams to raise the level of public debate and float ideas over bureaucratic barriers.
- The Sparkly Circle: The Commission's internal culture and shared values emerged as the "magic in the machine," providing the resilience required to persist against repeated government rejection.

NICW as Norm Entrepreneurs

The inquiry reframes NICW's role through the lens of social constructivist theory. Rather than acting as simple advisors, the Commissioners operated as "Norm Entrepreneurs". They actively constructed a platform for Norm Emergence, using "visioning" to redefine infrastructure as a social and wellbeing imperative rather than a technical challenge. By asserting an independent voice and brand, they **challenged the status quo**.

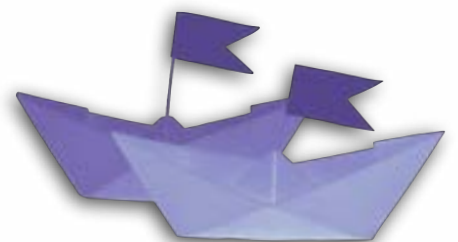


The Architecture of Leadership

Commissioners explicitly rejected the "Professional Board Sitter" archetype for the future Chair. The next leader must embody the "Rebel" spirit—someone who "drives the bus" rather than acting as a passenger. The team identified the psychological safety provided by outgoing Chair David Clubb as the essential shield that **above all** enabled their radical work.

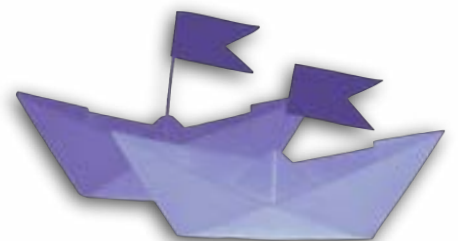
Future Outlook: The Norm Cascade

The Commissions stakeholder power is growing, and maintaining influence within this sphere has the potential to trigger a "Norm Cascade" (social pressure for change). While the *Evolving NICW* report calls for statutory powers and resources to secure legitimacy, this reflection proves that legislative permission is not the only route to impact. Even without statutory powers, the "soft power" cultivated by the current term provides a sufficient engine to drive change. The "idea seeds"—concepts that have now taken root independent of the state—demonstrate that the cascade has already begun.



Contents

Introduction	7
Process as Method	8
How it started	11
How its going	12
Mapping the flow	13
River Map	14
Field notes from the Future	22
How to build a chair	27
Conclusion	30





INTRODUCTION

The Commission's Journey

Since its formation in 2022, the second National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (NICW) has navigated a complex landscape. Tasked with advising the Welsh Government on the critical long-term infrastructure needs of the nation, the Commissioners have diligently worked through the requirements of their remit letter.

Over the last three years, they have delivered a substantial body of evidence-based work, moving from the strategic depths of the Renewable Energy Report to the urgent realities of the Flooding Report and the forward-looking Wales 2100. They have fulfilled their brief, offering independent, expert advice to steer Wales towards a sustainable future.

As the sun sets on this term, the Commission has already looked forward structurally. Their public-facing report, *Evolving the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales*, provides a robust analysis of the "hardware" required for the future. It sets out a clear roadmap for the body's potential evolution into a statutory organisation, defining the governance and powers needed to secure its longevity.

The Missing Narrative

However, official reports rarely tell the whole story. While the Evolving document captures the structural necessities, it remains silent on the "software"—the human dynamics that actually got the job done. It misses the internal culture, the "Rebel Leadership," and the values-driven way of working that allowed the current team to deliver such outsized value despite their operational constraints.

To capture this missing narrative, the Commission partnered with Landed Futures CIC. Landed Futures are creative practitioners who facilitate such conversations by blending social anthropology, systems thinking, and nature connectedness. The objective of the day was to look beyond the statutory outputs and understand the "meshwork" of relationships and resilience that underpinned them. This pairing moved the conversation out of the traditional meeting room and into creative reflection grounded in the landscape. The day was conceived to blend rigour with joy, using the natural environment to help unlock wider reflections. The outputs from this session were hoped to provide further detail to supplement NICW's final annual report.

PROCESS AS METHOD

Developing a reflective mindset

"You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born.
Fear not the strangeness you feel.
The future must enter you long before it happens.
Just wait for the birth,
for the hour of new clarity."
- Rainer Maria Rilke

The day was purposefully formulated to disrupt traditional expectations of a workshop. To surface the unsaid, **it was necessary** to step outside the usual patterns of corporate review. Therefore, the agenda was designed as a process of discovery, a deepening current, moving from personal reflection to systemic mapping, and finally to legacy.

1. The Emotional Baseline - "How it started vs. How it's going"

We began by grounding the day in the personal. Using the visual language of internet culture—the "How it started vs. How it's going" meme—Commissioners charted their individual journeys. From initial trepidation to hard-won confidence, these images broke the ice, allowing the group to bypass standard corporate pleasantries and immediately access an honest emotional baseline.

2. Creative Cartography - Mapping the Meshwork

Just as the River Garw flows through a complex catchment, the Commission's work exists within a living ecosystem of politics, people, and pressure. We moved from the personal to the structural, co-creating a physical map of this territory.

Drawing on the design canon of the Stanford d.school, specifically the work of Carissa Carter, we approached this session with the understanding that every map is a subjective blend of the real and the imaginary. We used mapping not just to locate objects, but as a strategic heuristic—a shortcut to reveal the invisible structural friction and internal culture required to navigate the political terrain.

This approach allowed us to apply the social anthropology of Tim Ingold to the Commission's reality. We moved beyond the idea of a static "network"—a rigid structure of connected nodes—to visualise a living "meshwork." In Ingold's terms, the meshwork is composed of fluid lines of movement, growth, and relationship. It represents the system as it truly behaves, rather than how it is formally described in an organogram.

In this context, the Commissioners were revealed, as "Wayfarers." Unlike passengers who are passively transported from point A to point B, wayfarers must inhabit the landscape, negotiating the terrain and adapting to the currents. This distinction was crucial in forming the missing narrative—shifting the system from what was done to what it takes to achieve.

3. Uncovering Tacit Knowledge- The Field Notes from the Future

Having identified the external terrain and the commissioners movement through it, we turned inward. If the map showed where they went, the writing exercises sought to capture how it felt to travel the path. Using creative writing techniques such as automatic free writing, the commissioners were guided to articulate themselves within the meshwork.

The outputs generated provide an archive of the organisational culture underpinning NICW's function. By writing intuitively and rapidly, Commissioners moved beyond the "what" of their job descriptions to the "how" of their practice, capturing the resilience required to keep moving .

4. Defining Legacy- The Flat-Pack Leader

Finally, we looked downstream to the future. To profile the next Chair of NICW, to do this we adopted the metaphor of flat-pack furniture instructions. We acknowledged that while the official job description provides the "box picture" (the polished result), the reality involves missing screws, confusing diagrams, unmentioned helping hands, and the need for improvisation (and patience as well as lots of cups of tea).

The session also provided opportunity to reflect on the significance of Dave's leadership in creating the organisational culture that drove the Commission's success. By framing the definition in this way, we aimed to move beyond the polished statutory requirements to identify the "missing parts"—the tacit skills and resilience that are never listed in the instructions but are absolutely essential to making the Commission stand.



And then to Pooh Sticks ...

Weaving these sessions together was a playful literary metaphor: the "wisdom of Pooh." Landed futures wanted to introduce Commissioners to A.A. Milne's character as an archetype of the Intuitive Wayfarer. An idea seed of Landed's own, aimed to reflect some ideas into the conversation, the use of metaphor from unlikely places allows a different way of seeing to emerge.

In a forest of "intellectuals" (Owls and Rabbits) who often overcomplicate the path, Pooh possesses a grounded, relational wisdom. He cuts through complexity with simple truth, poetry and self doubt to achieve great things, like invent a game now loved by children and grown ups for 100 years and more.

Poohsticks. - The game which concluded the day, in what we hope will become the inaugural annual NICW Poohsticks championship.

Watching the sticks drift in the current served as a tactile reminder that despite the systemic friction, the meshwork holds, and the impact endures



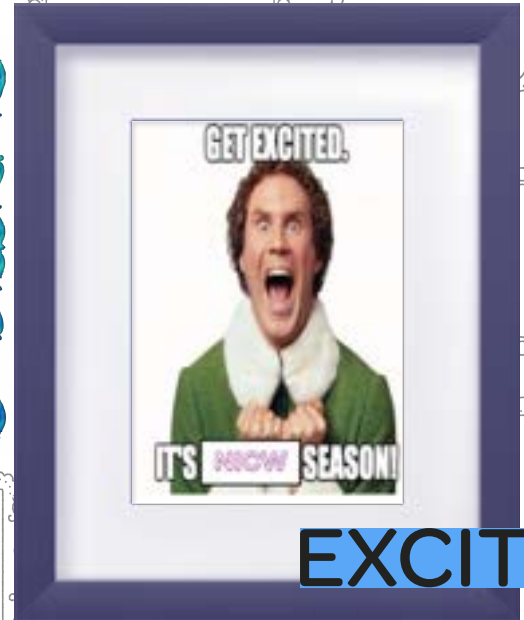
The sections which follow move us from theory to practice setting out the outputs from each phase of the workshop.

IN THE BEGINNING

ANXIOUS

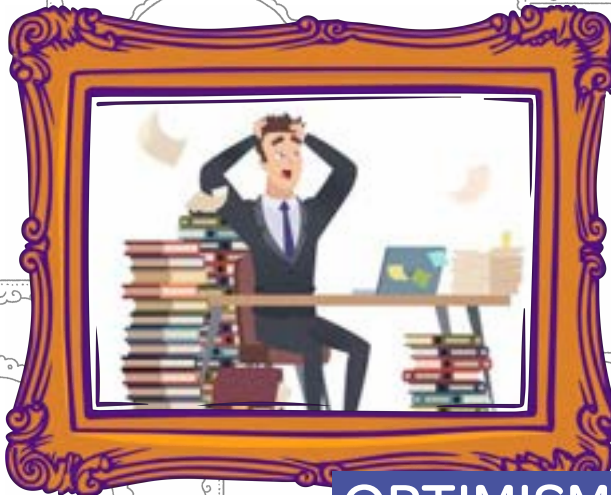


COMFY



EXCITED

TIMID



OPTIMISM



GREY

SUITS

**SEEDS
OF HOPE**



**CLIFF
EDGE**

**WEIGHT OF
RESPONSIBILITY**

FRUSTRATED

AND NOW

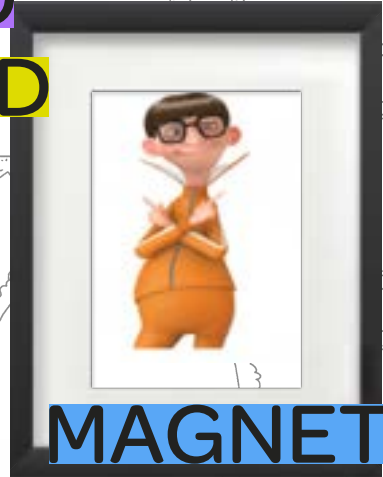
STILL PROUD

ORGANISED

When you've got a deep rage burning inside you but you've got to act nice because you're listening to Welsh Gov colleagues explain (yet again) how they're (not) taking forward our fantastic recommendations....



POKER FACE



MAGNETISED

**LONG TERM
NEW FUTURE**



**WISDOM
ACCEPTANCE**



**CONFIDENT
TO ALLOW
MY VOICE
TO BE HEARD**



COSY LOVELY

COMFY



SHOUTING

**INTO THE
VOID**



ABOUNDING

**CONFIDENT
WITH A HINT OF**

**SIDE
EYE**

YRAFON NICW

MAPPING THE MESHWORK

By testing comparisons and associations between two concepts, you can create a new understanding of your pursuits and goals ... Metaphors and similes highlight particular (and sometimes peculiar) meanings through comparison. ...it lets you see something that you think of as normal in a totally new way.

Charlotte Burgess-Auborn
You Need a Manifesto (p.28)

As the Wayfarers plotted out the meshwork map, specific features of the landscape began to emerge. A messy, living terrain which defied the neat lines of a government organogram, revealing instead a dynamic ecosystem dominated by distinct formations:

1. The Cairns (The Anchor Works)

The Commissioners did not view their reports as flat documents. On the map, they manifested as heavy, physical structures.

- The Renewable Energy Report appeared as a large, foundational slab—the bedrock upon which future policy must sit. 'It feels rectangular and solid'
- The Flooding Report was built as a Cairn—a stack of balanced stones. In hiking terms, a cairn is a waymarker used to guide others through dangerous terrain. The group recognised this work not just as a policy document, but as a crucial display of the knowledge and significance their reports could coalesce in the wider world. 'It's still the report I get asked to speak about the most'

2. The Wiggly String (Weaponised Bureaucracy)

Perhaps the most visceral element on the map was the "Wiggly String." Initially placed as a small barrier to delivery 'the computer says no', the group quickly realised its true extent. It wound its way through the entire river system—an erratic, frustrating line of friction. This was termed Weaponised Bureaucracy by the group. It represented the silences, the delays, and the administrative inertia that attempts to trip up momentum. 'I don't like the way it interrupts my nice ordered mind'

3. The Beaver in a Suit (Agency)

To survive a river full of "Wiggly String," the Commission identified another significant visual metaphor. The Beavers in Suits. The map revealed that when the "flow" of recommendations was blocked by government inertia, the Commission had to act like beavers: building dams to raise the water level. By raising the level of debate within wider stakeholders, they allowed their ideas to float over the bureaucratic barriers.

4. Texture and Tone (The Hidden Data)

The mapping allowed the Commissioners to explore hidden layers of meaning, such as the shape, colour, texture of their activity

- The Orange Pen: When mapping the Renewable Energy work, the group rejected the standard blue pen. They reached for orange—a warmer, more energetic colour. It signalled that this work wasn't just "business as usual"; it carried heat, urgency, and friction.
- The Sparkles: Crucially, the early meeting where the Commission defined its Values attracted a glittered ripple. It appeared as a "sparkly circle" on the map. This aesthetic choice was data: it signified that their internal culture feels fundamentally different to their external output. It is the magic in the machine—bright, distinct, and precious.

The following pages attempt to recreate the mapping outputs which emerged during this session.

Whereas in the session we utilised 'paper circles to represent the extent of impacts here it is possible better visually represent the different spheres of impact which emerged. As such to aid interpretation and make these patterns overt this iteration of the map of yr Afon NICW utilises the following cartographic markers to tell its story

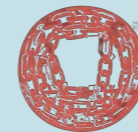
The 'map' is followed by structured analysis of the qualitative data gathered during the session, looking at the scale of impact within government, organisational and community spheres.



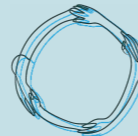
Markers in the river Stones represent NICW's interventions—the reports, the advice, key meetings, and mostly the projects that took up the time and headspace. The taller the tower, the more significant the piece of work. The shape chosen also holds meaning which is subject to individual commentary.



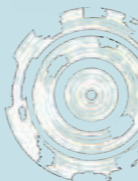
Idea seeds Small pebbles represent discrete moments in time where the Commission utilised blog posts to publicly discuss issues that fell within their remit, but outside of core workstreams.



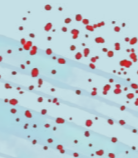
Impact on government Representing the formal reaction from the Welsh Government. The chain represent the rigidity and inherent constraint of this sphere.



Internal strength Representing impacts upon the Commission's internal culture, strength, and resilience.



Diffuse impacts Representing the wider, often invisible influence of the Commission's work extending into other organisations and industry. Building soft power and influence.



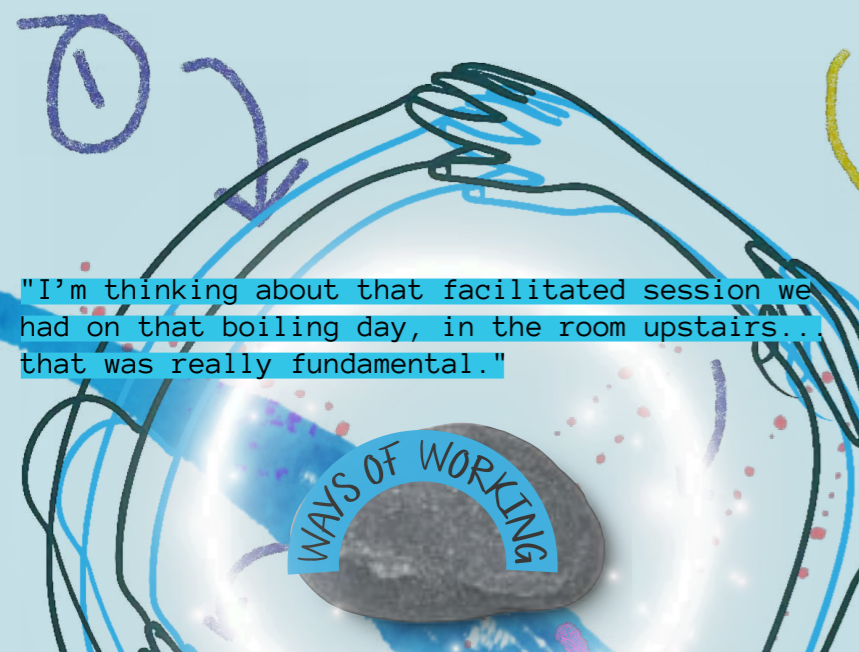
Barriers drawn as structural friction within the landscape also known as 'the wiggly string'



Relational channels/currents Visualised by long ribbons threading between the stones, they represent connecting currents, continuous flow of energy, logic, and intent that propels the Commission's work through the landscape.



Settingsail these represent elements of the commissioners work that have gained their own momentum and now navigate the wider world independently, carrying the legacy into the future.



"I'm thinking about that facilitated session we had on that boiling day, in the room upstairs... that was really fundamental."

That was the first time that we'd had the opportunity to ask questions about how do you like to work... and that set the scenery for the next

three years It was a small thing that had... a lot of consequence to it, because that was an important part of us getting together as a commission.

Wasn't that where we discussed the IDGs - that became the North Star something to aim towards

I may claim back the sparkly circle,, For your values

WEAPONISED BUREAUCRACY

IT FEELS LIKE A STRUCTURAL FORM OF HARM

THEY USE THE BUREAUCRACY TO PRODUCE THE NARRATIVE WHEN THEY DON'T ACTUALLY WANT TO HAVE OWNERSHIP OF SAYING NO

Being able to say things is fairly fundamental to having an organisation that can operate within the public sphere

We would have had to go to people in Welsh Government every time you wanted to publish stuff... It would have destroyed my enthusiasm.

WEBSITE & SOCIALS



I can't imagine, even if it had all been the same people working in the same work, we would have had nothing like the traction that we've got without the control of our own website.

The website gets at really big stone on top of that right, that is clearly you circumventing problems



February 2023 Roads review - impact - timely because Lee Waters wanted us to write about it - and because that was such a lively topic at the time it got a lot of hits

VALUES

the discussion we had about values ... that was another powerful step because any time somebody says, 'oh is you this is too much', or well our values are to be radical

And if you're going too far in a different directions we also have to be practical so how do we implement it. I think that came out of those discussions as well.

Using your river analogy, we went to the source rather than the event-and building that positive vision around how we can develop greater resilience

PORT TALBOT

LEAVING TWITTER

FLOODING

WALES 2100

RENEWABLE ENERGY

"I think it feels like a warm colour, not blue. I was thinking Orange." I was thinking orange too."

It is a really strong piece of work. It does what was asked. And yet there hasn't been the pick up of it that we might have hoped.

It was frustrating but also useful... that set us up for the flood one where we were ready... to get a measure of rejection.

I have this suspicion that where they say, 'no we can't,' it's more, 'no we don't want to.' This lack of power... is really convenient to not do what we don't want to do

The vision for flooding work was a really practical way of applying those future techniques... using them with people to have a conversation and coming up with a product that means something to people

What they [Welsh Government] really said was, 'we're already doing loads of stuff, we can't change what we're doing.' And that just screams a complete lack of agile government. That they aren't able to do anything different

Our project this year was about operationalising or piloting... something to see if it would. The project itself was an work intervention... it's already had an impact on the people involved, so it's pretty unique

Seeing those futures approaches... actually using them with people to have a conversation and coming up with a product that means something to people

Lo and behold... community is a really big aspect [of the later projects], and the nature on the board came from that [flooding work] too

That is really nice to see... We never started this three years ago thinking we were going to do nature on the board.

A large, expansive but unconnected ripple... potential impact that is still unfolding

We've got a legacy programme going on at the moment... to embed what they learned and pass on what they learned

They made their own river channel

watershed trip November 2024 So nice to be able to visualise what we've been talking about

"It's an example of people doing the disruptive stuff by themselves."

LEARNING FROM Y BANNAU

CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS

NANT GYMUNEDOL GRANCETOWN

NATURE ON THE BOARD

LEGITIMATE AS INDEPENDENT EXPERT

We're not grey suits, we want to be proactive. There is that sense of passion and that sense of purpose

COMMUNITY BENEFIT FROM RENEWABLES

CHANGES TO PD RIGHTS RENEWABLE ENERGY

Civil servants... take a while to pivot

It is about planting the seeds if change can't happen immediately.

MESH WORK OF KEY ALLIES

We are seeing examples of other people picking up on some of the recommendations... regardless of whether they're aware of our report or not.

We've got ideas out into a kind of ecosystem... It might not happen as fast as we want, but it will mean change

It is all in the campaigning space now... manifesto land, future policy

NICW RECOMMENDATIONS IN MANIFESTO PLEDGES

You may see some of the things that we have recommended picked out by political parties... which is massive in itself



MAPS ARE WELCOMING, THEY INVITE EXPLORATION. MAPS DON'T ASSUME TRUTH OR AT LEAST THEY SHOULDN'T. ACTUALLY EVERY SINGLE MAP IN THE WORLD IS A COMBINATION OF THE REAL AND THE IMAGINARY. WHETHER YOU INTEND TO OR NOT, WHEN YOU CREATE ANY MAP, YOU CREATE SOMETHING THAT TEETERS ON THE MAKE BELIEVE

CARISSA CARTER

Planting Idea Seeds

our ways of working
VALUE SETTING
IDG #priority
How far boundary
How we talk about ourselves
Productive Conflict

APPLICATION OF
+ NATURE
COMMUNITY

Went to the Source of the Problem!

Visualising the Solutions

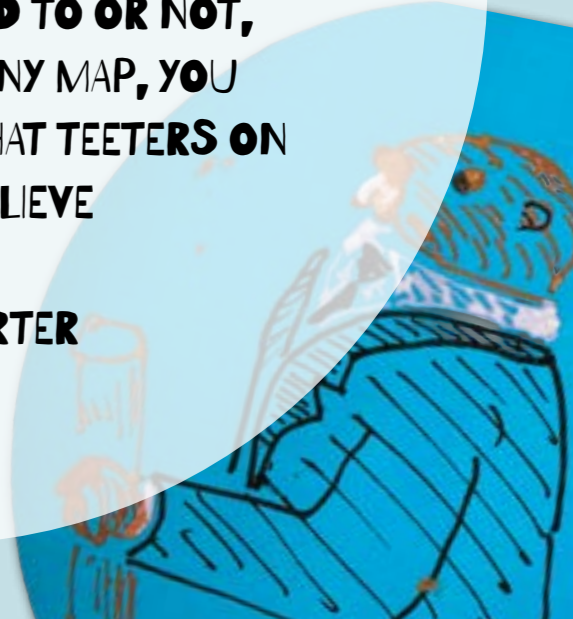
Wide benefits to spread
Intervention - what have been tried - results
Spread - Intervention - what have been tried - results

Building a System

Community benefit from renewables

Permitted Development Change

Manifestos
spreading our ideas



Mapped element	GOV	INT	DIF	Discussion of assigned score	Statements captured on map elements
Ways of working discussion - Inner Development Goals	5	5	1	This work - internally focused so went under the radar of government so direct impact in this sphere was limited, however described by the group as 'foundational' to how NICW works - critical to developing a psychologically safe space to be radical	Sparkes - led to value setting Defined how we talk about ourselves Our ways of working Found boundaries Productive conflict - storming phase
Renewable Energy Report	5	5	1	Low traction within Welsh Government . Recommendations were largely rejected or ignored. (Although traction with MPs and influenced Crown Estate Debate) note of caution that some things were considered outside devolution settlement or have taken time to implement (PD changes) recognised by all as having high internal value. It "set the template" for all future projects and taught the Commission the "hard lesson" regarding government capacity to adapt and respond to new things outside of P4G. Minimal public pickup compared to later works but ideas are now percolating esp crown estate issuee.	Limited response from WG We learned what to expect Taught us about the system 'We learnt to game the system"
Flooding Report	5	5	1	WG say that they have accepted most of the recommendations, in reality they have rejected most. They are all accepted in principle, but are unable to stop work programmes to refocus efforts 'they can't change what they are doing'. The visioning work especially was seen as valuable but alien to the civil servants who received the work. From a NICW perspective the team all agreed that it was a central piece of work, and term defining 'from which everything came out'. Brought together key streams of their work, community, nature and climate resilience to redefine what infrastructure in Wales looks and feels like. This led to high resonance and take up by wider stakeholders.	Went to the source of the problem Practical application of futures work Brought together nature and community Surfaced river guardianship and rights The rain keeps raining, people keep getting flooded, it remains important to the community . Took forward the 'futures work' Told a compelling story that resonated
The Website and Social media presence	5	5	1	Active resistance from government (wanted it shut down) exposed some key systems which could have been barriers to NICWs independence such as having to ask 'permission' to publish anything on their website (Stuart found an elegant solution). Internally to NICW this was seen as an essential step in delivering on its remit, especially fundamental to establishing an independent identity. In terms of diffuse impacts within wider stakeholder community this was also seen as fundamental. Allowed the commission to speak with its own voice how and when it wanted. The blog posts (also mapped) have been really successful in driving that awareness and voice.	Without it it would have killed any enthusiasm I had for the job. The website stone was deliberately placed on top of 'wiggly string' representation of bureaucratic barriers as a demonstration of the agility of the team to overcome challenge.

GOV: Impact on Welsh Government (Policy change, acceptance, relationship). • INT: Internal Impact (Culture, resilience, agency, template-setting). • DIF: Diffuse Impact (Soft power, community engagement, public discourse). Score Scale: 1 (Blocked/Minimal) to 5 (Transformative/Foundational).

Mapped element	GOV	INT	DIF	Discussion of assigned score	Statements captured on map elements
Climate conversations	5	4	1	The report has only recently been published so the government response to recommendations has been assumed from reflections that the report is struggling for departmental ownership, the officials 'don't know what to do with it', or where the recommendations land. For NICW this was another significant moment in their development, many identified this as a 'unique' approach, taking forward their learning from the previous reports and 'piloting' an approach. Proved that NICW can work directly with the community and that they value the perspective. In terms of wider impact the work was seen as transformative - the impact especially on the individuals involved was much 'weightier' than policy reports. (To reflect that the river was manipulated to form a Nant Grangetown to identify the current and flow that was born from the project)	Legacy - embed - interventions - people have benefited Wide benefits which will spread organically 'drawn to these three rocks because of the movement on them' three interlinking rings were mapped onto nant grangetown, circling three small pebbles. Surrounded by the naming of a range of organisational allies.
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
Nature on the board	5	4	1	Recommendation rejected by gov in flooding report. NICW piloting and gaining lots of stakeholder and community interest. Demonstrates the ethos and culture of the commission, keen to test and trial to build evidence to reiterate key recommendations with government (future governments). Report is yet to be published but given the level of interest from published series of essays, there appears to be a significant 'potential' impact emerging.	Small heart shaped pebble surrounded by large paper ripple with 'potential impact' written in teal.
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
BLOG POSTS	5	4	1	Some Ministers were keen for NICW to address live issues through 'softer' methods of communication, but the value such communications brought were not widely recognised by welsh government. Internally these were important pieces which provided a voice to address key issues outside of statutory reporting. Allowed NICW to find and assert its position. These were considered one of the most impactful intervention in building diffuse impacts - noting high traction when reports were on live issues - allowing NICW to shape public narrative in real time.	Roads Review - Written at ministers request - huge public interest Leaving Twitter Port Talbot Values Learning from Bannau - 'visulising the solutions' 'a wellspring moment' Wales 2100 - 'the government structures a barrier - not set up to deal with this sort of thinking'
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		
	4	4	1		

GOV: Impact on Welsh Government (Policy change, acceptance, relationship).• INT: Internal Impact (Culture, resilience, agency, template-setting). • DIF: Diffuse Impact (Soft power, community engagement, public discourse).Score Scale: 1 (Blocked/Minimal) to 5 (Transformative/Foundational).

Mapped element (ribbon)

GOV INT DIF Discussion of assigned score

Statements captured on map elements

<p>CURRENT The independent voice</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Linking the development of the website to every intervention downstream. Taken out to sea by 'meshwork of key allies - passionate and committed', helping keep internal courage strong and external support live. Utilised by certain elements of WG when beneficial to their issues. Mostly ignored.</p>	<p>Pink ribbon threading actively around barriers to avoid the 'grey' of the system. 'Current formed around an assertion of independence</p>
<p>CURRENT The culture current</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Linking ways of working conversation to values. Nature on the board, and, taken out to sea by 'legitimate independent experts'. A vital element that ensured that each intervention provided internal feedback loops for learning. Critical to bolstering against perceptions of 'failure' when recommendations are not taken up by WG, leading to the statement 'we learned ways to game the system'. As played out in NICW piloting activities which have otherwise been sidelined by WG.</p>	<p>Purple ribbon - identifying this culture as something valuable and different and to be proud of.</p>
<p>CURRENT Legacy</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Linking from the renewable energy report through the lower reaches and taken out to sea by 'NICW recommendations in manifesto pledges' rather than current policy. This was key learning, that emerged from the renewable energy report that the influence must always be on the next government if real change is to occur - the need to get recommendations into programmes for government etc. This was seen as psychological closure, the idea seeds starting to take root. Charts the course of the emerging soft power 'getting valence in the wider ecosystem'</p>	<p>Turquoise ribbon - showing the connection from the 'failure' of the renewable energy report to the soft power approach taken now, of influencing future decision makers.</p>

GOV: Impact on Welsh Government (Policy change, acceptance, relationship). • INT: Internal Impact (Culture, resilience, agency, template-setting). • DIF: Diffuse Impact (Soft power, community engagement, public discourse). Score Scale: 1 (Blocked/Minimal) to 5 (Transformative/Foundational).

Mapped element (barriers)

GOV

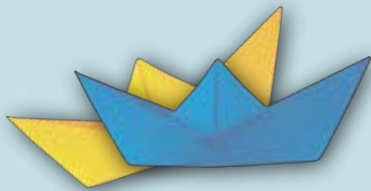
INT

DIF

Discussion of assigned score

Statements captured on map elements

Mapped element (barriers)	GOV	INT	DIF	Discussion of assigned score	Statements captured on map elements
<p>BARRIERS Weaponised bureaucracy</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>This registered the highest impact in terms of the governmental sphere. Demonstrative of how effective the system is in protecting itself from change. Initially a range of individual barriers were drawn (see right) but the consensus was that these combined to form a constraining force limiting the power of bodies such as NICW to take meaningful action (visualised as a wiggly string) . The impact on NICW as an organisation is significant, mostly resting on the secretariat to resolve, but even here the success is limited by the feeling that NICW is a square peg in a round hole (no ministerial sponsor or relevant department). This was seen as a huge waste of energy and the source of much of the frustration within the group. It also was a source of some of the creativity and resilience demonstrated within the culture - the recognition that Commissioners are a 'beaver in a suit' using what they have available to them to engineer the ecosystem to meet their needs.</p>	<p>Individual barriers identified Money - and the way it is chosen to be spent - no mechanism to respond to cross-departmental recommendations because budget lines dictate action.</p> <p>Devolution terms- often used to absent WG from addressing issues that they do not want to address.</p> <p>Resources - NICW operates with the equivalent of 1.3FTE but has a significant work load to meet via remit letter.</p> <p>Capacity - stretched officials unable to 'turn the tanker mid way'</p> <p>Rigidity of Programme for Government - nothing will happen if it isn't listed there at the beginning of a Senedd term.</p> <p>Processes - as with the website issue, processes are often cumbersome and limit creativity and agility needed for NICW to meet their work plan.</p> <p>Visualised as messy string running across the river flow.</p>



SETTING SAIL

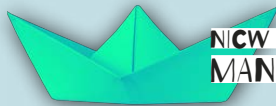
All rivers flow to the sea, where currents mix, and waters merge. Ready for a new life, to fall as rain somewhere else, take flow in a different river altogether. It is not an ending, but the movement to another phase. The moment when your ideas leave the page, your children grow to adults, the start of another day.

In this map, those currents that kept moving the *meshwork* onwards ended as outcomes that exist beyond just the pages of NICW's reports. In our reporting, we show these as paper boats; in reality, they are ideas that NICW no longer champion alone.



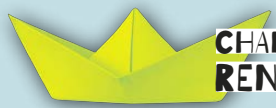
LEGITIMATE AS INDEPENDENT EXPERT

The Voice. By fighting for their own website and brand, the Commission established an unapologetic, independent voice. They proved that to be trusted, you must be visually distinct from the Governments communication channels.



NICW RECOMMENDATIONS IN MANIFESTO PLEDGES

The Long Game. Realising that mid-term policy pivots are rare, the Commission shifted focus to the horizon. The goal is no longer just influencing today's Minister, but embedding ideas into the manifestos for the next Senedd.



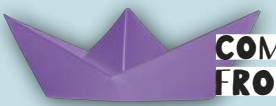
CHANGES TO PD RIGHTS RENEWABLE ENERGY

The Delayed Win. Proof that "planting seeds" works. Recommendations on Permitted Development Rights made in the Renewable Energy Report (2022) have only just surfaced in policy (2025). The meshwork resists change but it is possible. .



MESH WORK OF KEY ALLIES

The Relational Infrastructure. A network of "friends and advocates" built outside the formal system. These allies act as a flotilla, carrying the Commission's message through channels the "Wiggly String" cannot block.



COMMUNITY BENEFIT FROM RENEWABLES

The Fertile Ground. The insistence that renewable energy must yield direct dividends for local people. This concept has taken root, becoming a central part of the conversation on how infrastructure lands in Wales.

Field notes from the future

Now Commissioners, we want you to do something a bit different, using pen and paper if you can, good to connect the body to the words, write for the next 7 minutes don't worry about what you write, don't think too much about what you write, just finish this sentence, When I reflect on my time in NICW I feel

I've got a few phrases. Every person that's been touched in some way by the Commission, people we'll never meet, those who might not flood, people born 100 years in the future who are themselves looking back at us.

I just want to highlight a few individual words, if you don't mind. So I have proud, stakeholders and that's part of a longer sentence about us valuing that, but then also valuing us. And then the other one is longer term impact and legacy.

I think maybe I've taken a more personal view on it, so what I've enjoyed myself, so I've also talked about being proud.

Intellectual challenge, companionship and a sense of purpose. Being my authentic self. And constructive challenge and reflection.

I guess I'll say motivated and inspired. The motivated aspect is the work that we do. And then the inspired, I would say, the biggest impact has been the Commissioners themselves. It's an inspiration.



if money and resource was unlimited what 15 things would you do

I want clean streets

skills and jobs... So one thing that comes out of all of our research and all the projects and reports that we've done is that Wales doesn't have the jobs, and it doesn't have the skills to do the jobs, and if we're going to have that sustainable future, then we need that.

there is an element of more of the same, but there's also kind of pushing the boundaries of what we're allowed to do, and we could action, or at least pilot some of our policy recommendations and ideas.

doing things like writing white papers to consult on so that we could actually be presenting potential solutions for government to take forward.

I started off a bit boring and practical.

then I guess I started listing all the things that I felt that we might need to enable that to happen, to support it and the Welsh Government. That listens and enables, supports public bodies to deliver the recommendations and the ideas that we come up with, and a long list of other things as well.



And if things stayed the same

How to live well on nothing a year, ... So you have to, ... find a way to achieve the same outcome. So you need creative and imaginative people, otherwise you won't get anywhere.

an online diary that links to their work diaries so you can actually organize meetings properly.

Feels like a small ask, doesn't it? It's funny what becomes impossible,

I've got partnerships and connections.

so friends and advocates will share your message. You need to find your your evangelists. Every religion is an evangelist.

I've said something that relates to that, which is the ability to understand and manipulate the system. Whatever the system

I've got vision and inspiration, commitment, communication, clear goals and plans. That's something that you're going to communicate, not just means fun and someone with attention to detail and friends in high places.

communication. And what I mean by that is, I don't feel as though what we're doing is communicated enough, and it's as easily digestible by the public, because the public then pushes politicians to sway a different way. So is that something we can do in terms of changing the public's behavior so that it pushes politicians to kind of take our recommendations more seriously or to act on them

long term delivery, long term funding to support of kind of future focused implementing all the great legislation we've already got,

Dear future chair

You have strong foundations in place.
NICW's ways of working from 2022- including
our values - have stood us in good stead to
deliver ambitious and radical
recommendations for all our projects.

Creating an open, honest and positive
culture has supported us all as
commissioners to deliver strong reports
that we're all proud of. We've also had
lots of fun along the way!

As chair of the next commission I'd
recommend that you build on our successes,
learn lessons from our experiences to
establish a strong team.

Find your allies and work with partners to
deliver positive change that we all want to
see in Wales

Dear future chair

Have fun:-)

Be creative,

Communicate well

Inspire

Travel

Listen

Foster and develop the group

Agree values

Make connections

Forge partnerships

Know your friends and supporters

Don't give up.

Dear future chair,

I've had the privilege of sitting on 2 commissions - one that worked and one that did not. As you take the Commission forward, I wanted to share some reflections.

The ability to work constructively together is built on shared values but not uniformity of experience background or opinion. You can disagree and discuss issues openly only when colleagues have a shared sense of what is important.

Beginning by setting out our goals, and foundational beliefs has enabled the second commission to work constructively together and support each other's projects. We see how each of us is contributing to the strategic whole.

We have learned that you cannot change the system by rattling its cage. You have to work within the constraints that bind a democratic system. The ideas you have today may not be implemented tomorrow, but don't lose hope for the future. You might not be able to change the government's course of action midway through a five year term, but you can feed ideas into the next government's programme. The tanker is hard to turn mid-ocean so set it off in a different direction when it next stops in port.

For me the contacts we have built across communities and stakeholders have been the most rewarding part of the journey, I've learned so much, but more importantly, it's improved the quality and reception of our work.

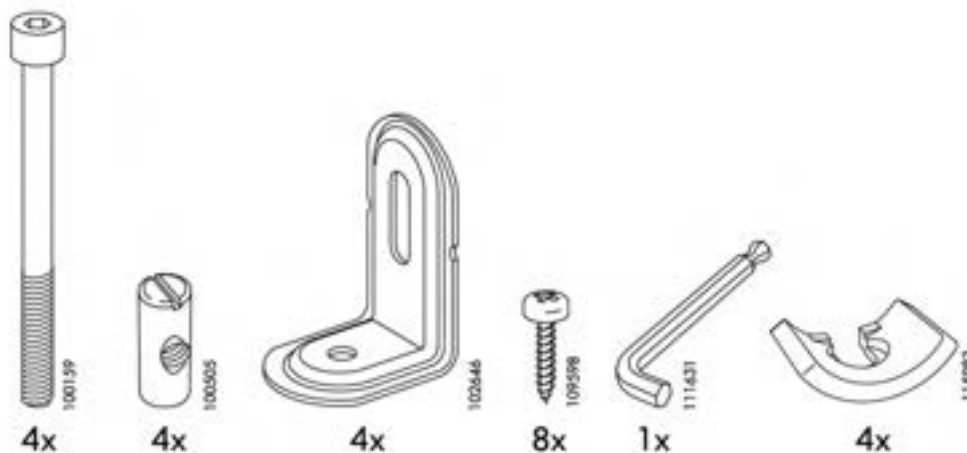
Good luck

HOW TO BUILD A CHAIR



THE ARCHITECTURE OF LEADERSHIP

The final phase of the inquiry turned from the work of the Commission to the architecture of its leadership. In their letters to the future, the Commissioners expressed a specific anxiety regarding the appointment of a "Professional Board Sitter"—an archetype defined by "inflexibility of thought," "conformity," and a tendency to simply "rubber stamp reports". They argued that the unique pressures of this role, operating within a "weaponised bureaucracy," require a different structural composition. The findings below deconstruct the necessary "Assembly Instructions" for a Chair who is not just a figurehead, but a "doer" capable of "driving the bus," using the tenure of David Clubb as the successful prototype.

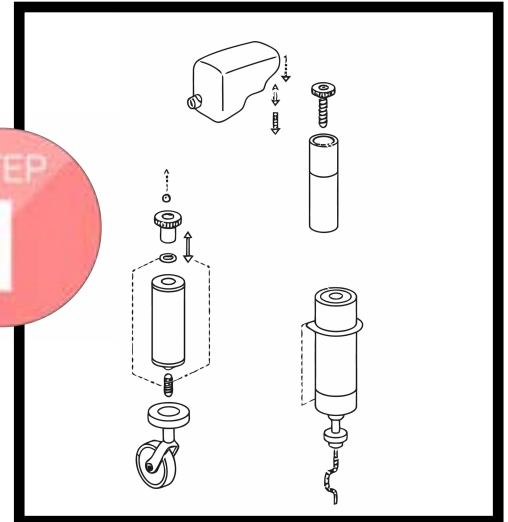


1. THE LEGS: (Stability & Support)

The foundational elements that hold the rest of the Commission up.

- **Support:** The primary function is stability for the team. The Chair must be someone who "backs us up, that we feel that we all have his support".
- **Integrity:** They must provide a solid ethical base. This means someone who "walks the walk on EDI and just doesn't just say it".
- **Foundation:** They set the "ground rules" early—even small things like the "vegetarian food situation" set a structural precedent for inclusion that "can be taken through" to the future.

STEP
1

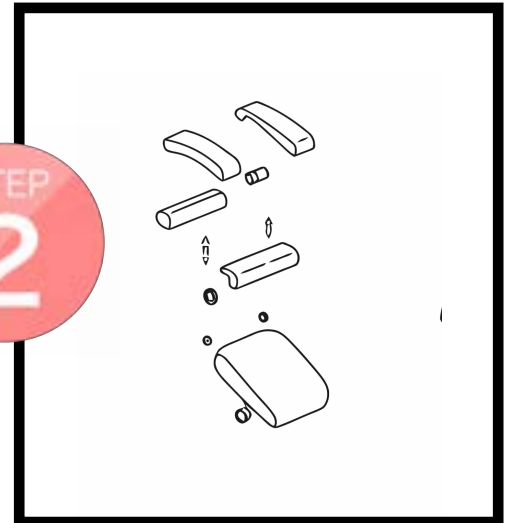


2. THE SEAT: (The Doing)

The active surface. Crucially, these instructions defines this by what it must NOT be.

- **Material:** Must be made of active material, not passive. The group explicitly rejected a "professional board sitter" —defined as someone who just "looks at the reports... and then goes home again".
- **Function:** This is not a static seat; it is a driver's seat. "We need somebody who wants to drive this bus".
- **Usage:** It is designed for work, not rest. "It is a doing thing... you will be delivering stuff, not just talking about stuff".

STEP
2

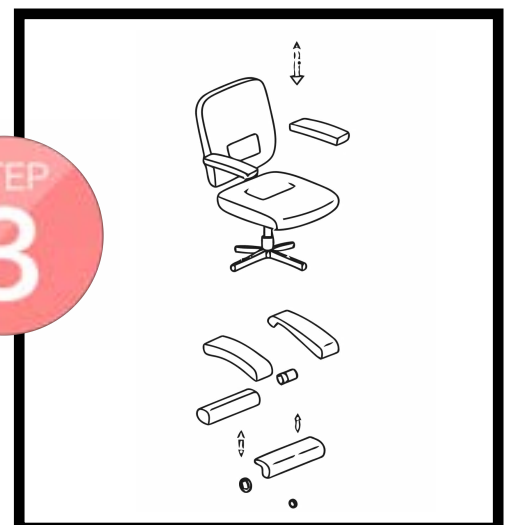


3. THE BACK: (Resilience & Spine)

The vertical strength required to lean against the pressure.

- **Resilience:** Must be strong enough to withstand weight. They need to be "resilient enough to stand up for what they believe in... against the bureaucracy".
- **Independence:** Cannot be flexible or flimsy. They must be "brave and independent minded" and not simply someone who "rubber stamps reports".
- **Posture:** They must reject "conformity" and be capable of "seeing the faults in the way it is" rather than fitting comfortably into the system.

STEP
3



4. THE FINISH: (Style & Vision)

The unique character that defines the piece.

- **The Look:** Not "Civil Service Grey." The group identified themselves as "rebels" and "norm entrepreneurs," requiring a Chair who matches that aesthetic.
 - **The Varnish:** "Humble." Despite the strength, the finish should be understated
 - **Style:** Must have a "sense of vision and purpose"—someone who isn't satisfied with "how it's always been done".
-



Assembly note



The parts to your future chair are uniquely manufactured, attempting to use standard parts regardless of their closeness in appearance to the original, may lead to structural weaknesses and risk the overall functionality of the chair.

Authentic parts will ensure a good match to complimentary units and guarantee the quality, sturdy reliability our brand is recognised for.

A NOTE ON THE PROTOTYPE -

We cannot close this section without reflecting on the role of the outgoing chair in shaping NICW's term- Dave's leadership was viewed by the participants as pivotal to their success. Beyond the professional achievements, the team truly valued the psychological safety he provided—the absolute certainty that he "backs us up" and the personal resilience he showed in shielding them from pressure. They valued his authenticity, noting that he "walks the walk" rather than just adhering to policy—creating a tangible reminder that every member of the team was "well catered for" and respected from day one. Above all, they valued his humility; he was a "proactive" leader who did not sit above the work, but modeled the "passion and purpose" he expected from everyone else.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION: NICW AS NORM ENTREPRENEURS

We entered the reflection session aiming to map out the ripple effects of NICW's work programme. What we found suggested that the public-facing outputs were relatively limited in reach by traditional measures of success, such as recommendations followed or legislative change. The real strengths of this term were more internally focused: building the kind of organisational culture capable of legitimately challenging the status quo. The Commissioners repeatedly identified their agreement on shared ways of working (linked to the IDGs), their commitment to operating by shared values, the significance of independent communication and connection to stakeholders outside of Welsh Government as critical to their operation.

The key impact of this activity was summarised succinctly by one Commissioner as a result of the afternoon's writing session:

"I don't feel as though what we're doing is communicated enough... the public then pushes politicians to sway a different way. So is that something we can do in terms of changing the public's behavior so that it pushes politicians to kind of take our recommendations more seriously or to act on them?"

This observation holds a clear linkage to social constructivist views of social change, particularly the "Norm Life Cycle" which occurs in three key stages.

- **Stage 1:** Norm Emergence (Persuasion) "Norm Entrepreneurs" actively build new standards by "framing" issues to challenge the status quo. They rely on persuasion to convince a critical mass of leaders to adopt the new norm. Once approximately one-third of actors adopt the norm, a threshold is crossed, triggering a rapid shift known as the tipping point.
- **Stage 2:** Norm Cascade (Socialisation). The dynamic shifts from persuasion to imitation. Actors rush to adopt the norm to gain legitimacy, maintain their reputation, and avoid social censure or "peer pressure".
- **Stage 3:** Internalisation (Habit). The norm becomes "taken-for-granted". It is no longer debated but becomes the automatic, standard way of operating.



Consequently, we filter our findings through this theoretical lens, specifically focusing on Stage 1 and considering NICW as Norm Entrepreneurs. Theorists Finnemore and Sikkink describe norm entrepreneurs as agents who call attention to issues or create issues by using language that names, interprets, and imaginatively communicates them. These entrepreneurs do not simply follow rules; driven by strong notions of appropriate behaviour, they actively build new standards rather than waiting for them to appear. This aligns perfectly with the way the Commissioners refer to themselves: as "outliers" or a "bunch of rebels."

By analysing the Commissioners as Norm Entrepreneurs, we reframe the narrative of the 'River Map' from administrative struggle to strategic disruption. The friction recorded in the session serves as the predictable evidence of 'normative contestation'. New norms never enter a vacuum; they must fight for space against existing habits and 'alternative perceptions of interest'. Therefore, the Commissioners' self-identification as 'rebels' represents a functional requirement for the role. They existed to redesign the operating manual, rather than simply service the machine.

If we view NICW as Norm Entrepreneurs, their term can be read as the successful construction of a platform for Norm Emergence.

- **The Independent Voice** Norm entrepreneurs require "organizational platforms" from which to promote their new standards. NICW constructed an independent website and brand identity separate from the Welsh Government. This "Stone" on the string provided the necessary distance to speak freely, allowing the Commission to bypass the "grey" filter of the civil service and frame issues directly to the public.

- **The Reframing of Infrastructure with vision** Entrepreneurs call attention to issues by using language that "names, interprets, and dramatically communicates them". Through employing creative visioning within their work NICW actively "framed" infrastructure not as a technical engineering challenge, but as a social activity to be co-designed. This cognitive framing is an essential component of political strategy in the persuasion phase.

- **Gaming the system** New norms never enter a normative vacuum; they must challenge existing standards. The "Wiggly String" mapped in the session serves as visual proof that NICW successfully challenged the "logic of appropriateness" of the existing bureaucracy. The friction experienced proves that the Commission did not succumb to the status quo but actively contested it. They talk of learning to 'game the system' as being part of their role.



THE CULTURE: THE FOUNDATION OF RESILIENCE

The creative writing session of the afternoon identified the Commission's cultural operating system as the foundation of their resilience. It was this internal culture which provided the strength to navigate the limited immediate acceptance of their technical recommendations.

- **Resilience Against Rejection** As one of the memes illustrated, the Commission faced repeated rejection from the Welsh Government machinery. The "Sparkly Circle" of shared values provided the collective strength to persist. This internal cohesion allowed the group to continue producing challenging work despite the pushback, preventing the "weaponised bureaucracy" from diluting their output.

- **The Vital Asset to Retain** Crucially, the Commissioners identified this culture as the single most important asset to retain for the future. The "Letters to the Future Chair" explicitly warned against reverting to a "professional board sitter" archetype. They valued the "rebel" spirit—recognising that conformity kills the ability to frame new norms.

- **The Safety to be Radical** This culture created the necessary safety to be radical. The Commissioners celebrated the outgoing Chair, David Clubb, for establishing a "shield." This psychological safety enabled them to take the reputational risks necessary for norm entrepreneurship, secure in the knowledge that the team would not abandon them when friction occurred.

To accelerate the "Norm Cascade" of Stage 2, the Commission can build on its growing network of allies. The Commissioners' mapping of key stakeholders during the morning session suggests the beginning of this cascade, identifying the "critical mass" of actors required to shift the primary mechanism of change from persuasion to socialisation. By cultivating these relationships outside the immediate government sphere—the "Meshwork"—the Commission can utilise its soft power to build the peer pressure necessary to drive change. By stakeholders advocating for the same change NICW recommends, the new norms become socially "inappropriate" to ignore, building momentum regardless of the government's initial resistance.

NICW's White Paper Evolving NICW similarly seeks to accelerate this process but requires structural reinforcement. It outlines a roadmap to establish a "Statutory Commission" enshrined in primary legislation, granting the body "legal permanence" and "enhanced credibility". The proposal demands a significant uplift in resources, including a budget of up to £3 million and a dedicated staff of 10 FTE, to provide the capacity to "track and report on delivery" and "scrutinise" government performance. This formal evolution aims to secure the "legitimacy" required to institutionally challenge the status quo.

However, the reflection day findings prove that the Commission suggest that legislative permission is not the only route to impact. Should the Welsh Government reject the formal request for statutory powers, the "soft power" cultivated by the current term serves as a sufficient engine to drive the cascade. The elements reported here as "Paper Boats" confirm this process is already underway; they demonstrate that the Commission's ideas are successfully traversing the "meshwork" of allies, independent of formal state sanction. The "rebel" culture has already built the platform; the next Commission's success will be built on its continuity of culture.



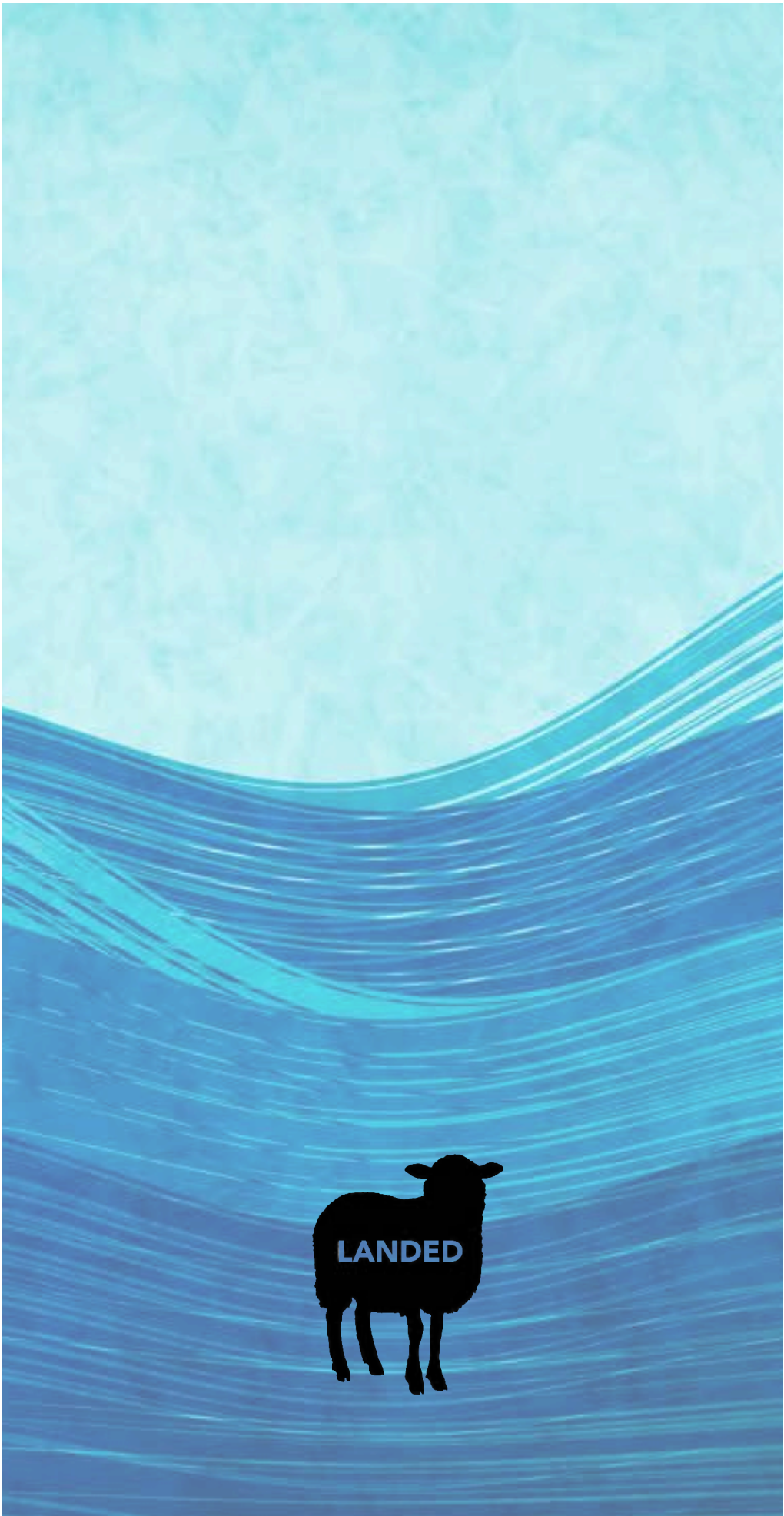
Christopher Robin and Pooh and Piglet were left on the bridge by themselves.

For a long time they looked at the river beneath them, saying nothing, and the river said nothing too, for it felt very quiet and peaceful on this summer afternoon.

‘Tigger is all right, really,’ said Piglet lazily.
‘Of course he is,’ said Christopher Robin. ‘Everybody is really,’ said Pooh. ‘That’s what I think,’ said Pooh. ‘But I don’t suppose I’m right,’ he said. ‘Of course you are,’ said Christopher Robin.



- House at Pooh Corner by A A Milne
Original illustration E. H. Shepherd



LANDED