

Chair
Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee
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Dear Chair,

Priorities for the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee during the Seventh Senedd

The National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (NICW) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's consultation on its priorities for the Seventh Senedd.

NICW's remit is to provide independent advice on Wales' long-term strategic economic and environmental infrastructure needs over a 5 to 80-year period. Planning, local government capacity, housing growth, spatial planning and infrastructure consent are therefore central to the conditions needed for effective infrastructure delivery.

NICW recommends three potential inquiries for the committee to consider.

1. An inquiry into the implementation of the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 and the Infrastructure Consent Order regime

[NICW's infrastructure delivery research](#) found that Wales has well-developed policy and consenting frameworks, but that many projects continue to face delays or fail to progress. It identified slow, inconsistent and under-resourced consenting processes as a key barrier which creates uncertainty for project teams.

NICW's findings identified planning reform and consenting as a priority area and specifically referred to the need to proactively resource and equip the Infrastructure Consent Order regime. It also identified the need to build flexibility into consenting processes so that project promoters can be more agile.

The Committee should consider an early inquiry into whether the new regime has the capacity, clarity and institutional support needed to succeed. That inquiry could examine:

- whether the Infrastructure Consent Order regime is sufficiently resourced;
- whether public bodies and statutory consultees have the technical capacity to contribute effectively;
- whether guidance is clear for promoters, communities and decision makers;
- whether the regime gives enough certainty without weakening environmental protection;
- whether community engagement takes place early enough;

- whether digital tools and shared data are being used effectively; and
- whether implementation is being monitored against clear performance indicators.

This should be a delivery-focused inquiry. Its purpose should be to identify whether the system is ready to handle significant infrastructure proposals, not simply to review the legislation in abstract.

2. An inquiry into housing delivery, infrastructure capacity and strategic spatial planning

Housing delivery depends upon infrastructure. Transport, water, energy, drainage, digital connectivity, schools, health facilities, green infrastructure and flood resilience need to be planned together if places are to function well over the long term.

The Committee should consider an inquiry into whether housing policy and infrastructure planning are sufficiently integrated. This could examine:

- whether Local Development Plans and Strategic Development Plans are realistic about infrastructure requirements, and the role of the National Development Framework in establishing the need for schemes
- whether infrastructure providers are engaged early enough in housing growth decisions;
- whether water, energy and transport constraints are being identified transparently;
- whether regional planning arrangements are capable of aligning housing and infrastructure;
- whether climate adaptation and flood risk are sufficiently embedded in development planning;
- whether communities can see how infrastructure needs arising from growth will be funded; and
- whether Welsh Government should provide stronger guidance on infrastructure-first planning.

NICW's response to post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations Act argued that the Act's principles are not fully embedded in infrastructure planning and that reliance on short-term models risks perpetuating climate, housing and economic inequalities. That concern is highly relevant to the Committee's responsibilities for housing, planning and local government.

3. An inquiry into local authority capacity, skills and community engagement in infrastructure planning

NICW's infrastructure delivery research identified skills shortages, public sector capacity constraints, fragmented governance and inconsistent engagement as recurring barriers to infrastructure delivery. The report records that survey participants identified funding and investment, business cases and stakeholder and community engagement as the most influential factors affecting infrastructure delivery in Wales.

The findings presentation provides practical Welsh examples. The Pen-y-Cymoedd Wind Farm case study identified that large variation across local authorities in capability and experience affected delivery, and that lack of a consistent project pipeline limited longer-term legacy benefits. The South East Wales Electrification case study recorded those local authorities frequently lacked resources and experience for processing complex applications, requiring the project to fund staff to accelerate decisions.

The Committee should consider an inquiry into the capacity of local planning authorities and local government more broadly to support complex infrastructure and housing delivery. This could examine:

- whether local authorities have sufficient specialist planning, engineering, environmental and commercial expertise;
- whether capacity varies significantly across Wales;

- whether Welsh Government should support shared specialist capacity at regional or national level;
- whether statutory consultees have adequate capacity and consistent processes;
- whether local authorities can engage communities meaningfully at an early stage;
- whether planning fees, funding models or shared service arrangements need reform; and
- whether Wales needs a national infrastructure delivery workforce strategy.

NICW's findings presentation identifies the development of a National Infrastructure Delivery Workforce Strategy as a priority action. It also recommends monitoring and evaluating stakeholder engagement practices and appointing dedicated liaison roles within agencies and regulatory bodies.

Cross-cutting issue: public trust in planning and infrastructure decisions

Across NICW's recent work, public trust emerges as a central delivery issue. [Our Climate Change Engagement report](#) stressed that early, inclusive public engagement should become standard practice for climate-related plans and projects. NICW's infrastructure delivery research similarly identified early and meaningful engagement as one of eight priority actions for improving infrastructure delivery in Wales.

The Committee could usefully examine whether the planning system gives communities a meaningful opportunity to shape proposals before key decisions are effectively settled. This would be particularly important where housing growth, flood risk, renewable energy, transport changes or major infrastructure proposals have direct local impacts.

Conclusion

The Committee's work programme should place infrastructure at the centre of its consideration of housing, local government and planning. Wales will not meet its housing, climate, economic or community wellbeing objectives unless infrastructure planning is integrated, properly resourced and trusted by the public.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jenifer Baxter
Cadeirydd Dros Dro / Interim Chair