**Future Generations Commissioner urges Welsh Government to deliver on a green recovery budget**

● Carbon neutral housing and green jobs for people unemployed by pandemic are crucial to reset the economy and ‘build back better’

● Sophie Howe has outlined the five spending priorities Wales needs to be considering now - and calls for an urgent green stimulus package to help the country’s long-term recovery

● Government’s supplementary budget on Wednesday needs to signal investment that prioritises a better quality of life in the future

Green jobs for the unemployed and a multi-million pound package to decarbonise housing should be central to how Wales is reshaped in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, says the Future Generations Commissioner.

Sophie Howe says we have a “once-in-a-generation opportunity” to reset Wales’ economy and is calling for “visionary ideas and transformative investment” in the nation’s recovery plan.

The commissioner has published a series of recommendations for Welsh Government as it announces its first Supplementary Budget, detailing how funding will be allocated during and after the crisis.

The Welsh Government budget has increased by more than 10% for the current financial year - £2.4bn will be allocated to support Wales with its COVID-19 efforts.

Ms Howe said: “The pandemic has brought incredible challenges, but how we recover gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

“The budget must signal a change in direction to reset our economy and remedy past failures with bold, collaborative, inclusive thinking and political courage.

“It needs to address health, the economy and the ongoing climate and nature crises for the sake of Wales’ long-term future. We need a new definition of prosperity, based on well-being, and a fairer, greener way of living.”

The commissioner, whose role is to protect future generations from the political actions of today, says in a paper that ministers must now show political courage with a focus on quality of life over GDP, as the country begins the rebuilding process while restrictions remain in place to stem the spread of COVID-19.

More investment in the low-carbon economy is crucial, and in the short-term, Ms Howe suggests those who have lost jobs and income in the pandemic could be reskilled and employed in the green economy.

Among her recommendations is a multi-million pound stimulus package to support the decarbonisation of Wales’ housing stock – putting money into new low-carbon affordable housing and launching a national retrofitting programme to improve energy efficiency in existing homes.

The benefits to people’s health, the environment, the jobs created and – crucially – Wales’ housing stock, would, says Ms Howe, far outweigh the estimated cost of more than £500m a year.

As thousands remain working from home – taking pressure off transport networks and reducing carbon emissions – the commissioner wants investment to improve digital connectivity.

Ms Howe applauded Welsh Government’s £25m commitment to fund transport improvements for pedestrians and cyclists by local authorities across Wales, and said it must form part of a long-term plan.

It comes as moves to pedestrianise the centre of Bristol have been unveiled as part of its response to the COVID-19 crisis. The city is also engaging residents in planning new ways to use existing spaces - with emerging ideas including the pedestrianisation of entire dual carriageways.

Elsewhere, Milan – one of the most congested cities in Europe – is transforming 35km of streets into ‘future zones’, where people can walk and cycle safely.

Resources should also be shifted so Wales’ natural habitats can be restored, with green corridors linking the country and more investment in the new national forest being planted.

Such thinking, says the commissioner will not only help wildlife, but can assist flood defences and the nation’s capability to face the challenges of climate change and create jobs.

Ms Howe wants the Government to use the Well-being of Future Generations Act legislation along with her new [Future Generations Report](https://futuregenerations.wales/resources_posts/the-future-generations-report-2020/) and [10-point plan](https://futuregenerations.wales/resources_posts/10-point-plan-to-fund-wales-climate-emergency/) for funding the climate emergency, in its response to the crisis.

The Future Generations Report suggests Welsh Government works with public bodies to deliver 20% tree canopy cover in every town and city in Wales by 2030.

Ms Howe said: “Our pre-Covid 19 economy prioritised economic growth, forced many people into poverty, and in turn created an unhealthy population that is particularly susceptible to global crises such as pandemics.

“It’s vital that the budget addresses things we can’t afford to ignore - such as the current health crisis, the economic crisis the pandemic has triggered and the ongoing climate and nature crises.

“Wales has the opportunity to lead the way with visionary ideas and transformative investment, to a future based on well-being, using our unique Well-being of Future Generations Act as a framework.

“I’m keen to work with partners and organisations to support Welsh Government in developing a response to the crisis which allows Wales to build back better.”

**The Future Generations Commissioner’s five recommendations...**

1.Develop an economic stimulus package that leads to job creation and supports the

decarbonisation of homes, through building new low carbon affordable housing and

investing in a national programme to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.

2.Invest in better ways to connect and move people through improving digital connectivity,

active travel and public transport.

3. Invest in skills and training to support the transition to a better future, creating new

greener jobs.

4. Invest in nature and prioritise funding and support for large-scale habitat and wildlife

restoration, creation and connectivity throughout Wales –including for natural flood

defences, to implement the new national forest, and to ensure land use management and

agriculture supports secure local food chains and distribution.

5. Invest in the industries and technologies of the future, and support for businesses that will

help Wales to lead the low carbon revolution and lock wealth and jobs into local areas with

investment in the foundational economy.

**ENDS**

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