

Sixth Senedd Legacy report:

By the Equality and Social Justice Committee

March 2026

1. Introduction

We looked at equality, human rights, social justice and the well-being of future generations during a period when progress with each has come under threat from many directions. Our final report looks back at a tumultuous period spanning June 2021 to April 2026 during which multiple crises such as Ukraine, the cost-of-living, climate emergency and war in the Middle East have destabilised politics, and had negative consequences for many aspects of our daily lives.

1. This report looks back at our work during this period and looks ahead at the issues that may merit further consideration in future.



2. To everyone who engaged with us over the last five years we say thank you for your contribution – our work depends on your knowledge, passion and commitment and it has been an honour to work together for a fairer Wales.

2. Our remit

3. In a procedural innovation, we were empowered to look at any topic from the perspective of equality, human rights, social justice and the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. Our remit was designed to be different and to reflect the cross-cutting nature of many of those issues.

4. Early on we agreed strategic objectives which were to:

1. use equality and social justice considerations and the well-being of future generations goals as a guide and apply the lens of “a fairer Wales” to the issue under consideration; and
2. champion equality, social justice and the well-being of future generations across the Senedd and its Committees.

5. This strategic approach provided an overarching framework which helped us to decide what to prioritise and when.

6. Our remit enabled us to work differently and gave our scrutiny greater depth and focus. However, we were often frustrated by the lack of coordination and the persistence of siloes in evidence in the work of the Welsh Government particularly in respect of equalities, and at times in spite of the efforts of some Ministers.

Recommendation 1. We note that the Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliaments Review recommended an amendment to Standing Orders to “mandate a dedicated Equality Committee with specific remit or functions in relation to the oversight of equalities”.¹ We support this recommendation and further recommend that its remit should include the ability to consider any topic from the perspective of equality, human rights, social justice and the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

¹ A Senedd for all: Report of the Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliament Review, 2026, page 90

3. Summary of our work and achievements

7. We covered both policy and legislation relating to our remit. The majority of our work consisted of policy inquiries and we completed 18 in total.

8. Our role in the scrutiny of legislation was more limited, as only 2 Bills were referred to us.²



9. We scrutinised 5 Welsh Government Draft Budgets, and held 5 pre-appointment hearings with preferred candidates for senior public appointments.



10. Following the commitments made to EU citizens living in Wales after Brexit, we committed to monitoring the implementation of agreements on citizens' rights and kept a close eye on the operation of the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). We published a total of 8 monitoring reports, two annual reports culminating in our

final 'Settled but not Safe' report which was debated in Plenary in November 2024. We discussed our monitoring work with visiting officials from other European countries and the European Union institutions on several occasions during official visits to Wales.

² They were the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill and the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill.

Inquiry scrutiny

11. Our 18 thematic inquiries covered some of the major structural challenges that impact equality and social justice including the cost-of-living crisis, child poverty, violence against women, racial and gender inequality, the rights of disabled people, fuel poverty, social cohesion and pressures on third sector budgets. Despite the breadth we were able to cover, the list of potential inquiry ideas was persistently greater than the number we could hope to complete with the time and resources available. We carefully considered the need to prioritise and hope that each inquiry was influential in some way.



Importance of follow-up

12. The importance of following-up on recommendations cannot be overstated and we were able to undertake formal follow-up on several of our early inquiries.

13. Debt and the pandemic: the first inquiry we completed was inspired by research from the Bevan Foundation and was followed-up by our short inquiry into debt and the rising cost of living in 2023. With current geopolitical crises once again threatening another wave of inflation, it may be timely for a successor Committee to look again at some of these issues. This inquiry underlined the advantage of using existing academic research, where appropriate, to explore government policy and performance.

14. The Warm Homes Programme (WHP): responding to Audit Wales report on the effectiveness of the WHP we adopted a 'public accounts committee' approach to scrutinise the strengths and weaknesses of the government's strategy to tackle fuel poverty. Our follow-up work in 2024 looked at the persistence of fuel poverty as well as assessing the WHP successor programme against our original report.

15. Childcare and parental employment: aspects of this inquiry fell in the remits of both the Children, Young People and Education Committee, and the Economy, and Rural Affairs Committee, and members of those committees accepted our invitation to take part. The cross-cutting nature of this work meant that many aspects of both the original and follow-up inquiries fed naturally into

other areas of our work, most notably, the [Welsh Government's draft child poverty strategy](#).

Conclusion 1. The main lessons for our successor committee from these three examples are:

- that follow-up work is important but that opportunities to do so effectively may be more limited in a four-year parliament;
- that using existing evidence e.g. novel, impartial research or Wales Audit Office investigations as a basis for inquiry work can considerably enhance the effectiveness of a Committee's scrutiny, if and when appropriate;
- that cross-committees coordination is important and that opportunities to participate in areas of shared scrutiny should be actively encouraged.

Recommendation 2. Given current geopolitical crises, our successor Committee should consider looking at the issue of debt and the cost of living early in the new parliament.

Timely scrutiny

16. Timeliness is another important factor which we took care to bear in mind as was demonstrated by the following inquiries.

17. [Fire and Rescue Services](#): we postponed less time critical work in order to respond quickly to the Morris Review of culture at South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. We had concluded that there was a compelling case for doing so, given the seriousness of the findings and the clear public interest. Our approach ensured that there was greater transparency and accountability throughout the process.

18. There are early indications that the intervention of the Welsh Government to appoint four Commissioners to provide strategic oversight of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service has transformed many aspects of its culture and performance.³ Long-term reform of fire and rescue services particularly in respect of structures, remains an open question.

³ Paper to note 2.7, [correspondence from Chief Fire Officer Fin Monahan of the South Wales Fire & Rescue Service regarding progress](#), 16 March 2026

19. Our inquiry into [implementation of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) (ArWAP) was effective because it responded to stakeholders concerns about consultation fatigue by focusing on delivery of existing policy rather than identifying problems which they felt would be repeating previous exercises and were well-understood.

20. Our work on the [disability employment gap](#) was another example of how timing can be influential and after several delays we were delighted to see the Disabled rights action plan published soon after our scrutiny. Monitoring implementation is vital if the plan is to meet expectations of disabled people.

21. After a summer of violent protests in some parts of the UK, [our social cohesion inquiry](#) looked at some of the key drivers and explored the urgent action needed to foster a sense of community and renew democratic values. We were grateful to the Welsh Government for responding with much welcomed speed to establish an Expert Group in line with our recommendation 1 given the seriousness of the threat.⁴

Importance of evidence and data

22. An almost perennial theme was the need to improve the use of data and evidence to assess the equalities impact of policies. We repeatedly pressed ministers on the transparency and quality of equality impact assessments ([particularly in relation to the Budget](#)) and took a keen interest in the work of the equality data units.

23. We warmly welcomed the creation of the various equalities Data Units and have noted the progress that has been made during the course of this parliament.⁵ However, we would like to see a more determined effort across government to improve evidence-based policy-making particularly in relation to equalities.

Recommendation 3. Improving evidence-based policy-making should be a key aim of the next Welsh Government and our successor committee should continue to monitor the work of the Data Units and the role of equalities data in shaping decisions by the Welsh Government.

⁴ [Correspondence to the Chair from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip regarding the Committee's report on social cohesion - 13 October 2025](#)

⁵ Equality, Race and Disability Data Units, [Progress Reports](#), September 2024, June 2025

Lived experience

24. Hearing directly from citizens and people with lived experience played a vital role in our work. As part of our [gender-based violence inquiry](#) we established an Advisory Group of survivors to provide constructive challenge at key stages of the inquiry including gathering their views to inform questioning of ministers and to shape recommendations. Their powerful testimony was instrumental in shaping the course of the inquiry and the approach adopted by Members.

Recommendation 4. Our successor committee should ensure that gathering the views of people with lived experience remains a feature of committee work where appropriate. Time should be spent on considering the engagement approach from the outset ideally during the scoping phase.

Areas that require further consideration

25. Every issue is important to the people that are affected by them. However, we think the next Senedd must look into the following areas as a priority.

26. In light of the outlook for world energy prices, the rising cost of living and its relationship with poverty, particularly child poverty should be a priority area for our successor committee. In particular our work on [the draft child poverty strategy](#) emphasised the role of targets and measures in both designing policy and for judging the effectiveness of interventions.

27. [Gender-based violence](#): we were disappointed by the lack of progress with the recommendations from this inquiry. Our latest update from the Welsh Government contained very little in terms of new information or concrete action and we are yet to see the “whole-of-government approach” that we called for in our report.

28. Several workstreams under the overarching “[experiences of the criminal justice](#)” inquiry exposed the clear inadequacies of existing arrangements. One such example was our [one-day inquiry looking at speech, language and communication needs within youth justice](#). We were disappointed by the Welsh Government’s initial response to our recommendations and therefore pursued the matter further through correspondence and ongoing scrutiny. Further progress is still needed, but this example does demonstrate the importance of placing pressure on ministers to act where there is clear evidence of need.

29. The criminal justice series also highlighted the need for more research and preparatory work especially given the findings of research for the Legislation, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Committee that only 3 of the Thomas Commission's 78 recommendations have been delivered since 2019.

30. We were supportive of the Welsh Government's Justice Blueprints but were extremely disappointed to find that their delivery has been hampered by successive UK Governments. We had hoped that this would change following a change in the party of government at UK level; however, the lack of progress with issues such as the creation of the women's residential centre, and our session with Lord Timpson demonstrated otherwise.⁶ This situation is unacceptable and points to a wider dysfunction and power imbalances in the relationship between the UK Government and the Welsh Government on these matters.

31. We regret the lack of vision which means that the future trajectory of this policy area remains unclear and note that it is the people of Wales who are likely to suffer most from the status quo.

32. The next Senedd must give urgent consideration to these matters and hold both Welsh and UK governments to account. We heard clear evidence that Wales is disadvantaged by current arrangements and call on the UK Government to accept the need for a clear, coherent vision which gives Wales parity with other parts of the UK, based on mutual respect.

33. The concept of Human Rights are being threatened in unprecedented ways. We were disappointed that implementation of the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights report was another area where delivery did not match up to expectations. We recognise the complexity of the barriers faced but remain disappointed by the lack of progress.

34. We have valued our constructive relationship with the Equality and Human Rights Commission during the course of this Senedd. However, we note that they have found the Welsh Government to be lacking in terms of its compliance with public sector equality duty. The next Senedd should consider looking into this matter, and compliance more generally at some stage during the next parliament.

⁶ Equality and Social Justice Committee, The criminal justice system in Wales: Ministerial scrutiny session – session 2, 14 July 2025; Record of Proceedings, paragraph 93 to 113 of the meeting on 2 March 2026

Recommendation 5. Our successor committee in the next Senedd should note the areas identified and consider how it may take forward these areas as part of its forward work programme.

Scrutiny of the Future Generations Commissioner and Act

35. We firmly believe that including future generations in the same portfolio as equalities has been beneficial. As part of our consideration we held regular scrutiny sessions with both the current and previous Commissioners and undertook vital post-legislative scrutiny work. We are grateful to them for the constructive nature of the relationship.

Recommendation 6. Our post-legislative scrutiny inquiry showed that the Act's aims and principles are more important than ever. In terms of raising future generations up the agenda, we recommend the next Senedd should again explicitly name a lead committee with responsibility for the Act and for future generations in its remit.

EUSS

36. Our work on the EU Settlement Scheme illustrated the long-term nature of the issues faced by EU citizens who remained in Wales after Brexit. As highlighted in our reports, we continue to be concerned, that EU citizens could be subject to the same miscarriages of justice that happened to the Windrush generation.⁷ Our final report highlighted the need for ongoing commitments from the Welsh and UK governments to provide support, improved joint working on data and scrutiny by a successor committee.

Recommendation 7. Our successor Committee should consider continuing our work and keep the EUSS on the agenda in the Seventh Senedd.

British Sign Language (BSL) (Wales) Bill

37. One of our final major pieces of work was also one of the most rewarding. As the responsible committee for scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill we broke new ground with regards to BSL provision. This included accepting

⁷ Equality and Social Justice Committee, Settled but not safe, November 2025

consultation responses in BSL, providing live BSL interpretation for all relevant proceedings on the Bill and creating explainer guides to the legislative process in BSL. These were supplemented by short video updates at regular intervals to ensure that BSL signers could follow the Bill's journey in their preferred language.

38. Working with the community of BSL signers in Wales helped shape our approach to this scrutiny process and we learned a great deal from our experiences. However, it also reminded us of the value of engaging communities themselves to help shape inclusive policies and procedures.

Recommendation 8. The next Senedd should give further consideration to the issue of BSL provision and the accessibility of its processes and procedures more generally. Our successor committee should monitor progress with implementation of the British Sign Language (Wales) Act including:

- progress with the commitments made to increase the number of BSL translators and interpreters as set out in section 3(2) of the Act;
- holding the Welsh Government to account with progress with the recommendations of the BSL Route Map particularly in relation to inequality of outcomes for deaf children of hearing parents.⁸

⁸ Welsh Government, [British Sign Language Route Map](#), 12 February 2026