

Online Conference 2020

Wales after Coronavirus: Fairer, Greener & Healthier

Proposed by: Policy Development Committee

Conference records its deep sorrow at the suffering and loss of life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, both at home and abroad, which has resulted in 1,630 in Wales confirmed deaths in Wales - 42,875 in the UK - by 13 October 2020 and a much higher number of total excess deaths; the toll has been disproportionately high on the most deprived communities, and members of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Conference regrets the enormous economic damage caused by the virus and the hardship many people are facing, with the most vulnerable the worst affected.

Conference pays tribute to the extraordinary efforts and sacrifices made by NHS and care workers and many others during this crisis.

Conference notes:

1. That for too many people, things aren't working as they should. Too many live with poverty and inequality, trapped by low wages, gaps in the social security system and high costs, or are held back because of who they are. The Coronavirus outbreak has deepened these inequalities as well as creating new ones, such as the ability to work from home, access the internet and support children's learning.
2. That Covid-19 follows the fault lines of inequality, with people in the poorest neighbourhoods more than twice as likely to be killed by the virus as those in the richest areas. The virus, and the lockdown measures, have adversely affected those already facing significant inequality and disadvantage, including Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups, women, those with underlying health inequalities, disabled people, manual workers, and those on low incomes.
3. That in the immediate response to the Coronavirus, local authorities, public services, and communities came together to take a leading role in keeping people safe, maintaining essential services, and safeguarding vulnerable people.

4. That lockdown has affected us all in different ways, with more than two-thirds of adults in the UK (69%) report feeling somewhat or very worried about the effect COVID-19 is having on their life.
5. That despite the extensive economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, global emissions of greenhouse gases are projected to fall by only four to seven per cent during 2020.
6. That the UK Prime Minister has failed to communicate competently and created more confusion with his own behaviour and that of his advisors. UK Ministers also failed to work hard enough to get four-nation agreement on many action points, which hampered communications, despite similar and shared problems on protective equipment, testing, care homes in all four nations.
7. The role that Welsh Liberal Democrat Education Minister Kirsty Williams MS has played in supporting teachers, parents, pupils, and the education workforce throughout the pandemic, including:
 1. Being the first nation in the UK to announce free school meals for pupils, including through to Easter 2021;
 2. Providing IT equipment for vulnerable learners to help them keep learning at home during lockdown;
 3. £2.3m to provide face coverings for secondary school and further education learners;
 4. £5m for mental health in schools to support pupils and staff;
 5. £50m package for skills and learning targeted towards higher and further education;
 6. £29m to recruit, recover and raise standards, including recruiting 900 new teachers;
 7. A pay rise of 3.75% for teachers.

Conference believes:

- A. That this should be a moment to reset the dial on growing levels of inequality, poverty, isolation, climate and ecological breakdown and rethink our approach to creating a fairer, greener economy that ensures that nobody goes without the basic essentials needed to get ahead in life, and supports and enables a thriving, habitable planet.
- B. That the state, as well as civil society, needs to do more to help those locked out from support, education and other networks by poverty, poor internet, a lack of education etc. Government must intervene to ensure that people, communities, and our economy recover from the impacts of the lockdown.
- C. That excluding the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency is the biggest issue facing humanity. Our economic recovery must focus on

'green growth', creating new green jobs and cutting emissions, ensuring that we leave a thriving planet for future generations.

- D. That a new type of politics is needed to meet the challenges of the future - more compassionate, more deliberative, more accessible, and inclusive, and one based on ideas and solutions, not personalities.

Conference calls on the Welsh Liberal Democrats to bring forward for its 2021 manifesto:

- i. Proposals on future of social care funding and governance, and access to services based on need and not ability to pay, ensuring that individuals and staff can live and work in dignity, and access and deliver high-quality, bilingual services.
- ii. Proposals for universal free childcare and school care for all children aged 9 to 14 years, regardless of the work status of their family.
- iii. Proposals for a debt bonfire, committing to a one-off debt bonfire for just under 200,000 of the poorest people in Wales, using creative options to do this in a cost-effective way.
- iv. Proposals for public service reform including:
 1. A revolution in commissioning arrangements for public services across Wales;
 2. A First Port of Call Duty or No Wrong Door Duty for all public services;
 3. A National Scheme for Individual Service Funds to support individuals accessing public services;
 4. A re-focus of national political and public service leadership and oversight on prevention, on ending silo-working, and ensuring multi-disciplinary approaches are in place.
- v. Proposals to fund a programme of Recovery Rewards, providing significant cash prizes to individuals, businesses or others that invent outstanding solutions to highly specific social or environmental problems that we refuse to tolerate in our 'new normal'.
- vi. Proposals for a 'social floor' to guide policymaking, agreeing a social foundation of well-being that no one should fall below, tackling poverty, inequality, deprivation, political disenfranchisement etc.
- vii. Proposals for universal essential services, which meet people's fundamental needs for shelter, food, warmth, healthcare, education, and connection with others.
- viii. Proposals for a Welsh Benefits System, which reforms and brings together the plethora of devolved, means-tested schemes into a coherent whole to help to lift people out of poverty.

Conference calls on the Welsh Government:

1. To put the environment and mitigating climate change at the heart of our economic and social recovery programme, by:
2. Ensuring that a large proportion of new jobs created are 'green jobs' and ensure those who are unemployed due to COVID-19 are helped to reskill to fill them;
3. Refocusing public spending to green projects and infrastructure such as investment in public transport instead of new roads;
4. Ensuring that support packages for businesses recovering from the impacts of lockdown include, where appropriate, commitments to reduce emissions.
5. To re-focus on the provision of good-quality, affordable housing, building more social homes for rent, improving the condition and energy efficiency of homes, preventing homelessness and reforming council tax.
6. To take renewed steps to reduce poverty and inequality by maximising the powers and spending available to Welsh Government including working with the UK Government to pilot a Universal Basic Income in Wales.
7. To work to deliver the ambition for a healthier nation, during and beyond COVID-19, by supporting people to lead more active and healthy lives through investment in public health and putting health and wellbeing for all at the heart of government, including:
8. Improving access to community health services and primary care services - including mental health services - and providing greater capacity within services to ensure the effectiveness of consultations and addressing concerns about telephone triaging and booking systems;
9. Addressing the stark health inequalities faced by Black and Asian ethnic groups and poorer communities. that have been brought to the fore during the pandemic
10. Address the impact of loneliness, and digital and physical connectivity of communities and households across Wales by:
11. Investing in public and community transport, ensuring that communities have access to reliable, affordable, and suitable public transport options;
12. Investing in high-quality digital connectivity across Wales, including working with schools and colleges to narrow the digital divide;
13. Embracing the concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood, giving people access to essential goods and services, accessible by foot, bike or public transport;

14. Embracing the positive impacts of the lockdown, including encouraging more flexible working and increasing walking and cycling.
15. Support those working on the frontline, in the NHS and social care, and emergency services by:
16. Investing in making the existing COVID-19 support phone hotline available 24/7 for all health and care staff.
17. Guaranteeing a high universal mental health support service that can be accessed by all health and social care workers, replicating models such as the Medical Assessment Programme.
18. Removing the use of the Bradford Factor - a formula used to discourage short, frequent, unplanned absences - and other HR practices that reinforce a culture of presenteeism.
19. Introducing an 'occupational health passport' so workers do not have to relive mental health traumas when they change jobs.
20. Continue the work to create a Right to Lifelong Learning and ensuring parity between vocational and academic education, ensuring people of all ages and backgrounds can access the training they need to make individual choices and have equal access to jobs in the new economy.
21. To continue its work on a Race Equality Plan for Wales in response to the impact of Covid-19 - with regards to health, social, and economic disadvantages - faced by Black and Asian ethnic groups across Wales.