

## Overview

The NFWI Public Affairs Department has compiled these notes to support members' discussions on the 2012 shortlisted resolutions. The notes outline the key issues addressed in the resolutions, the current policy environment on the issues raised, and some of the main groups already working on the subjects. They are intended as a guide rather than a fully comprehensive summary of each issue. Please use the notes to inform your further research.

## Resolution Shortlist

### 1. Field study centres and outdoor education

At a time when understanding of the complexity of environmental issues is paramount, the WI opposes the closure of outdoor and field study centres, depriving future generations of schoolchildren of their recognised academic and social benefits.

### 2. Airborne litter

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to legislate against the sale and release of sky (Chinese) lanterns and the mass release of balloons because of the damage that can be done to animals, crops and property.

### 3. Reducing fuel poverty

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to address fuel poverty.

### 4. Employment of more midwives

There are chronic shortages of midwives. The NFWI calls on the Government to increase investment in the training, employment and retention of midwives in England and Wales to ensure services are adequately resourced and are able to deliver a high standard of care.

### 5. Achieving legal status for British Sign Language as an indigenous minority language in the UK

The WI urges Her Majesty's Government to give British Sign Language (BSL) the same legal status and protection as other regional and minority languages (e.g. Welsh and Gaelic).

### 6. Helmets for cyclists

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to make the wearing of helmets when cycling a legal requirement.

These briefing notes are available online at [www.theWI.org.uk/resolutions](http://www.theWI.org.uk/resolutions) and on the Moodle  
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## 1. Field study centres and outdoor education

### ***Wording of resolution***

At a time when understanding of the complexity of environmental issues is paramount, the WI opposes the closure of outdoor and field study centres, depriving future generations of school children of their recognised academic and social benefits.

### ***Proposer's position***

The proposer is concerned that centres established in the 1970s and 1980s to give pupils hands on experience in field studies and outdoor education are being lost as centres close. They hope that if the resolution is passed, local authority commitment to hands on experience in outdoor education will be reinvigorated.

### ***Outline of issue***

Field studies and outdoor centres offer young people opportunities for study outside the classroom, giving them experiences in the outdoors that are not available in school. This might include outdoor activities such as climbing or kayaking, or undertaking fieldwork to investigate the environment. Many of these centres receive funding from local authorities and enable pupils to visit at a subsidised rate.

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom states that real-world learning:

- tackles social mobility problems, giving children new and exciting experiences that inspire them to reach their true potential
- raises aspirations, equipping young people with the skills they need to become active and responsible citizens
- addresses educational inequality
- supports improved standards back inside the classroom, raising attainment and improving discipline.

In June the Field Studies Council (FSC) published a survey by five of the UK's leading outdoor providers showing that centres used by over 320,000 children each year are under threat. A dozen centres had already closed, and the future of another 60 is being discussed. Over half the threatened centres are run by inner-city councils, and most subsidise visits to allow those from less well-off families to attend.

The BBC also contacted all local authority funded outdoor educational centres in England and Wales over the summer, and found that 95% were losing their local authority funding entirely, and a third were worried that the centre wouldn't survive.

The FSC states that many of the centres could survive if they are given time to adapt to become financially secure. However, with councils often making decisions quickly, centres are unable to seek out alternative funding to become financially stable and so are forced to close.

### ***Arguments for the resolution***

- This resolution ties in with the WI's educational roots and commitment to environmental issues.
- This is an issue that is not receiving widespread attention, so the WI's involvement could raise its profile.
- The resolution could help the WI to make a sound contribution to supporting new generations to develop knowledge and understanding of their natural heritage.

### ***Arguments against the resolution***

- Decisions on funding for outdoor centres are being made by local authorities, so this issue may not be relevant for all areas.
- Many centres are already under threat of closure, so in some areas, this resolution may be passed too late to have a significant impact.

**Existing resolutions on the issue** None

**Existing/ related campaigns on the issue**

The **Field Studies Council** is campaigning against funding cuts and centre closures. They worked with the **Institute for Outdoor Learning**, the **National Association of Field Studies Officers**, the **Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres** and the **English Outdoor Council** to undertake a survey on centres under threat.

**Groups to contact for further information**

**Field Studies Council** <http://www.field-studies-council.org>

Members could also consider contacting their own local authority to find out whether they fund outdoor centres.

## 2. Airborne litter

**Wording of resolution**

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to legislate against the sale and release of sky (Chinese) lanterns and the mass release of balloons because of the damage that can be done to animals, crops and property.

**Proposer's position**

The proposer is concerned that the release of sky lanterns and balloons can harm wild animals, livestock and sea life, cause fires and unsightly litter.

**Outline of issue**

The practice of floating Chinese lanterns has become increasingly popular at outdoor events and parties, particularly in the countryside. Balloon releases are sometimes held as part of charity or fundraising events.

According to the Government, fire and rescue services attended 125 incidents caused by Chinese Lanterns in 2010/11, none of which caused significant damage. Fire and rescue services attend over 100,000 outdoor fire incidents a year.

There are concerns that the metal parts of lanterns can also harm livestock if they are eaten and that pieces of the lanterns can damage farm machinery. Some manufacturers have started to develop biodegradable lanterns that degrade naturally and do not contain wire.

Balloons that fall back to earth can be mistaken for food by wildlife and livestock, and can block the animal's digestion system causing them to starve. The Marine Conservation Society states that the number of balloons and balloon pieces found on British beaches has tripled in the last ten years. In response to these concerns some local authorities have banned balloon releases on their land.

In June, Agriculture Minister James Paice asked the British Hospitality Association to discourage customers from using the lanterns and called on people to find other ways to celebrate. He said that the Government has received anecdotal evidence about the impact of lanterns, and is building an evidence base on the issue.

In 2010 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills wrote to all local trading standards offices asking them to contact importers and retailers of lanterns to ensure that only lanterns that are biodegradable are put on the market.

**Arguments for the resolutions**

- People may not be aware of the dangers these lanterns and balloons present, so an awareness-raising campaign could highlight the importance of following safety guidelines.
- This is an issue of concern in rural communities.

### ***Arguments against the resolutions***

- It may be more effective for communities that are experiencing problems with lanterns to work together to tackle the problem.
- The issue does not affect a significant number of people so it may be difficult to achieve widespread support, and the Government has pledged a 'one in one out' policy on red-tape, preferring voluntary approaches for such matters.
- The Marine Conservation Society already has a long-running campaign to ban balloon releases that has had some success.

***Existing resolutions on the issue*** None

### ***Existing/ related campaigns on the issue***

- The **National Farmers Union** has called for Chinese lanterns to be banned.
- The **Women's Food and Farming Union** is campaigning for Chinese lanterns to be banned.
- The **Civil Aviation Authority** has called for organisers of Chinese lantern releases to register their event in advance with them or local aerodromes.
- The **Marine Conservation Society** has campaigned to get local authorities to ban balloon releases on their land.
- **Cheshire Federation of Women's Institutes** has passed a resolution on this issue.

### ***Groups to contact for further information***

**Department for Environment and Rural Affairs** [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk) T: 08459 33 55 77

**Marine Conservation Society** [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org) T: 01989 566 017

**NFU** [www.nfuonline.com](http://www.nfuonline.com) T: 024 7685 8500

## **3. Reducing fuel poverty**

### ***Wording of resolution***

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to address fuel poverty.

### ***Outline of issue***

A fifth of UK households are defined as being in fuel poverty, meaning they spend at least a tenth of their income or more on utility bills. The average household energy bills have increased by 33 per cent in the last year, exceeding £1,200 per annum, which is twice the average bill from five years ago.

The charity National Energy Action estimated recently that there are about 5.5m households in the UK – more than one in five – in fuel poverty, a figure which has more than doubled since 2004. 4.5 million of those in fuel poverty were classed as 'vulnerable' households – those containing an elderly or disabled person, children or someone with a long-term illness.

Concerns about rising energy prices have also increased with the release of figures showing that energy company profits per household had increased from £15 in June 2011 to £125 in October.

The previous Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy, launched in 2001, aimed to help reduce the number of households in fuel poverty and included measures to target the three main factors that influence fuel poverty: household energy efficiency, fuel prices and household income.

In March 2011, the Government appointed a 'fuel poverty tsar', Professor John Hills, Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics. Hills was asked to undertake an independent review of fuel poverty, starting at first principles including the problem of fuel poverty, current measurements and the extent to which

fuel poverty is distinct from poverty and the detriment it causes. His interim report (in October 2011) noted the 'human cost was high', with 2,700 lives claimed every winter. A final report will be published in early 2012.

The Government is introducing the Green Deal to transform the country's homes to make them warmer and cheaper to run. From 2012 people will be able to access up to £10,000 upfront to pay for energy efficiency work, repaying the costs through savings on energy bills. A new obligation on energy companies will come into effect at the end of 2012. This new obligation will underpin the Green Deal and focus particularly on those householders (e.g. the poorest and most vulnerable) and those types of property (e.g. the hard to treat) which cannot achieve financial savings without a measure of support.

In October the Government hosted a Consumer Energy Summit which brought together consumer groups, energy suppliers and industry regulator Ofgem, agreeing a range of measures to help consumers save money on their gas and electricity bills, and discussing policy developments aimed at keeping household energy bills down. A 'Check, Switch and Insulate to Save' website has been launched to give consumers advice, and suppliers will write to eight million quarterly credit customers to tell them how they can save money by changing payment method. Energy suppliers also agreed to make sure that energy bills show customers how to save money.

### ***Arguments for the resolution***

- Soaring energy bills have pushed one in five households into fuel poverty.
- The WI could raise the profile of this important issue.

### ***Arguments against the resolution***

- The Energy Minister has pledged that the needs of fuel poor households will be prioritised in the proposed Green Deal.

***Existing resolutions on the issue*** None, although the NFWI has supported the End Fuel Poverty coalition on the basis of related resolutions.

### ***Existing/ related campaigns on the issue***

The NEA is currently involved in delivering the Future of Rural Energy in Europe initiative to communities across England, Wales and Scotland. The initiative holds energy roadshows where householders can obtain information and advice about energy efficiency, new technologies, grant availability, and reducing heat loss in homes.

### ***Groups to contact for further information***

**Department of Energy and Climate Change** <http://www.decc.gov.uk/> T: 0300 060 4000

**National Energy Action** <http://www.nea.org.uk> T: 0191 261 5677

**Welsh Government** [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk) T: 0300 060 3300

## 4. Employment of more midwives

### ***Resolution wording***

There are chronic shortages of midwives. The NFWI calls on the Government to increase investment in the training, employment and retention of midwives in England and Wales to ensure services are adequately resourced and are able to deliver a high standard of care.

### ***Proposer's position***

The proposer is concerned that there is a shortage of midwives employed by NHS Trusts, resulting in fragmented, rushed care, lack of choice and lives put at risk. The proposer hopes that the resolution will increase public interest, result in more NHS Audits plus allocation of funding to employ more NHS midwives.

### ***Outline of issue***

Maternal health services in England and Wales are facing increasing pressure as a combination of staff shortages, a rising birth rate (up 20% over the past decade) and increasing numbers of complications in pregnancies test maternity services' ability to deliver a high standard of care to women and children.

The vacancy rate for midwives in England is nearly 5%, and in some London NHS trusts the vacancy rate is as high as 20%. In Wales the Royal College of Midwives (RCN) says that 10% more midwives are needed to keep pace with the birth-rate. The RCN has said that 4,700 additional midwives are needed in England and Wales in order to provide a safe service to women and their children.

There are other issues putting maternal health services to the test;

- The birth rate is rising; it is currently at its highest rate in almost 20 years.
- There has been a rise in the number of older women giving birth which has resulted in more complicated pregnancies.
- Women are more overweight than ever before; another factor that can cause difficulties in pregnancy.
- The increasing use of IVF to conceive has led to more and more multiple births.

The Government states that it has a record number of midwives in place, and that last year there were a record 2,493 midwives in training. For 2011-12 there will be 2,490 planned places available.

In September the Welsh Health Minister set out plans for improve care for women and their babies during pregnancy and childbirth. The main priorities include organizing maternity care to meet the needs of women and their babies, protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of mothers and their babies and ensuring motherhood and pregnancy is a safe, fulfilling, life enhancing experience.

### ***Arguments for the resolution***

- This is an important current issue, affecting many women and their families, and offers good opportunities for local campaigning.

### ***Arguments against the resolution***

- The Government has already increased the number of midwives in training.

### ***Existing resolutions on the issue***

The NFWI has a number of resolutions on maternal and child health, covering issues such as information and access to analgesia.

One resolution specifically mentions midwives:

*That this meeting, while warmly supporting the action of the Minister of Health with regard to research, begs Women's Institute members to urge Local Authorities where necessary to carry out the Minister's recommendations for the provision of specialized obstetric advice and an improved midwifery service; also to persuade expectant mothers to make full use of existing pre-natal clinics and treatment. Furthermore, this meeting is of the opinion that the opportunity of anaesthesia should be within reach of all expectant mothers.*

*Berkshire Federation, May 1935*

#### **Existing/ related campaigns on the issue**

- The **Royal College of Midwives** is running a Protect Maternity Services campaign
- The **White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood** was launched in the UK by Sarah Brown

#### **Groups to contact for further information**

**Department for Health** <http://www.dh.gov.uk> T: 020 7210 4850

**Royal College of Midwives** <http://www.rcm.org.uk> T: 020 7312 3535

## **5. Achieving legal status for British Sign Language as an indigenous minority language in the UK**

### ***Wording of resolution***

The WI urges HM Government to give British Sign Language (BSL) the same legal status and protection as other regional and minority languages (e.g. Welsh and Gaelic).

### ***Proposer's position***

The proposer is concerned that deaf BSL users frequently face language barriers in accessing education, work and services. They are concerned that information in BSL is not widely available and can be difficult to obtain. They hope that giving BSL legal status will give children the right to learn BSL as well as English in their education.

### ***Outline of issue***

British Sign Language is the first and preferred language of many deaf people in the UK. While there is limited reliable data available, estimates suggest that it is used by around 50,000-70,000 people. In 2003 the Government recognised BSL, but gave it no legal status.

The British Deaf Association (BDA) is campaigning to achieve legal protection for BSL and hope that this would result in children being given the right to learn it as well as English at school. Currently children do not have a right to BSL in schools, and access to BSL depends on the local authority. They hope that legal protection would increase access to education, employment and public services by offering information in BSL.

The 2010 Equality Act recognises several 'protected characteristics' (such as sex, race and disability) which receive formal protection. Under the Equality Act organisations must provide a 'reasonable adjustment', which could include BSL. At present, the services that deaf people receive vary considerably across the UK as different areas interpret the concept of 'reasonable adjustments' differently. The BDA argue that a BSL Act would enable a clear and consistent level of access for deaf BSL signers.

They argue that the Government could accord BSL legal protection under the European Charter of Minority Languages, under which Manx and Cornish are already registered. However, the Council of Europe did not include indigenous sign languages in the Charter, and the Government refused to include BSL under this Charter in 2002.

A member of the Scottish Parliament has proposed a bill on BSL, and plans a consultation on the issue prior to putting the bill forward. The BDA state that this bill could be a signpost to show what a BSL Bill could look like for the UK.

The British Deaf Association will be releasing a BSL Charter later in 2011, and will be requesting that local councils sign up to ensure and improve the quality of their BSL provision.

#### ***Arguments for the resolution***

- The involvement of the WI could help awareness raise and increase the prominence of this campaign.
- Other EU countries such as Austria and Belgium have specifically addressed sign language status and rights.

#### ***Arguments against the resolution***

- As BSL provision varies across local authorities, it may be more effective to push for better provision at a local level.
- There is no clear evidence to indicate that protected status would actually improve the quality and consistency of services for deaf people.

***Existing resolutions on the issue*** None

#### ***Existing/ related campaigns on the issue***

The **British Deaf Association** is campaigning for BSL to receive legal status.

#### **Groups to contact for further information**

**Office for Disability Issues** <http://odi.dwp.gov.uk>

**The British Deaf Association** [www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk) T: 0207 405 0090

## **6. Helmets for cyclists**

#### ***Wording of resolution***

The NFWI urges Her Majesty's Government to make the wearing of helmets when cycling a legal requirement.

#### ***Proposer's position***

To prevent unnecessary deaths or serious and long lasting injuries by making it compulsory to wear a helmet when cycling

#### ***Outline of issue***

There is no legal requirement in the UK to wear a cycle helmet when cycling on roads. The aim of cycle helmets is to reduce the risk of serious injury caused by impacts to the head.

In 2008, 115 pedal cyclists were killed and 2,450 reported as seriously injured on Britain's roads, accounting for 9% of all killed or seriously injured road casualties (Department for Transport, 2009). Approximately 40% of pedal cyclists admitted to hospital in England suffered head injuries.

There is much controversy on whether cycle helmet wearing should be made compulsory. A great deal of the controversy related to whether cycle helmets reduce injuries and if so, what type of injuries they reduce and further whether compulsory cycle helmet legislation discourages cycling.

The brain injury association Headway promotes the use of cycle helmets, believing that they can save lives and prevent lifelong disability and in 2009 launched an online petition calling for a new law to be introduced to make it compulsory for children to wear helmets while cycling. A research report commissioned by the Department of Transport in 2009 to review the effectiveness of cycle

helmets in the event of an on-road accident concluded that cycle helmets would be expected to be effective at reducing the frequency and severity of injury in a range of accident conditions, particularly the most common accidents that do not involve a collision with another vehicle.

The British Medical Association advocates for an increase in voluntary use prior to the introduction of compulsory cycle helmet legislation and supports initiatives that increase such use. Other medical professionals advocate for compulsory helmet wearing, primarily because in the event of a fall, bicycle helmets substantially reduce the incidence and severity of head injury and this has been proven by scientifically valid research methods.

However the UK's National Cyclists' Association, the CTC, is against compulsory helmet wearing. CTC argues that there is not enough conclusive, medical evidence that helmet wearing actually reduces the seriousness of head injuries. The Association believes that helmet wearing discourages people from cycling, as it is perceived as being a dangerous activity and argues that compulsory helmet wearing can distract from an overall need to increase cycle training and improve the road environment, particularly making car drivers, who are mainly involved in cycling accidents, more aware of cyclists. It would also be difficult to enforce.

Jersey recently passed a law making it compulsory for all under-18s to wear helmets when cycling. In countries where helmets have been made compulsory for children and adults for some time, such as Australia, there has been little long-term improvement in the rate of serious injury to cyclists while many people have been put off cycling altogether. Some researchers claim that helmet wearing give cyclists a false sense of security and so they tend to take less care than otherwise. Seeing helmeted cyclists may lead to car drivers taking less care.

### ***Arguments for the resolution***

- The health and environmental benefits of cycling are very much in line with past and current WI mandates and compulsory helmet wearing may encourage more people to take up cycling, whilst improving the overall safety of cyclists.

### ***Arguments against the resolution***

- The resolution is too narrow. It could look at compulsory helmet wearing as part of a drive to improve road safety and training for cyclists to increase safety for cyclists and encourage more people to feel confident to take up cycling.

***Existing resolutions on the issue*** None

### ***Existing/ related campaigns on the issue***

The brain injury association **Headway** has long campaigned for cycle helmets to be made compulsory.

### ***Groups to contact for further information***

**Department for Transport** [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk) T: 0300 330 3000

**British Medical Association** [www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk) T: 020 7387 4499

**Headway** [www.headway.org.uk](http://www.headway.org.uk) T: 0115 924 0800

**UK's National Cyclists' Association** [www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk) T: 01483 238326