

# Proposed function of a National Office for Care and Support

## Introduction

### Overview

In October 2021, the Deputy Minister for Social Services released a [Written Statement](#) detailing next steps arising from the Rebalancing Care and Support White Paper. In this Written Statement, the Deputy Minister announced a National Office for Care and Support would be established within Welsh Government. Since this announcement, a Technical Group has met and made recommendations to Ministers on the contents of a strategic National Framework for Care and Support. Additional information can be found in this [Written Statement](#) of December 2022.

In December 2021, the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru signed the [Co-operation Agreement](#) which outlines how the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru will work together over a three year period on policies where there is a common interest. Specifically relating to the establishment of the National Office, is the commitment to “set up an expert group to support our shared ambition to create a National Care Service, free at the point of need”. An Expert Group was formed in early 2022 to produce a series of recommendations about practical steps that could be taken, and the Expert Group’s [recommendations report](#) was published in September 2022. The recommendations heavily feature, and place emphasis on, the role of a National Office in guiding the social care sector. It is therefore essential that considerations for the National Office extend beyond the Rebalancing Care and Support Programme to best support development of the National Care Service, and its implementation.

As the work of a small technical group on the commissioning framework is now complete and the development of an implementation plan for the National Care Service is under way, the formal establishment of the National Office for Care and Support can proceed. To aid the establishment of the National Office, a Steering Group has been formed. This Steering Group acts as an advisory forum, and consists of representatives from the following stakeholders:

- NHS Executive
- Care Inspectorate Wales
- ADSS Cymru
- WLGA
- Welsh NHS Confederation
- Social Care Wales
- National Commissioning Board, Executive Board
- NHS Local Health Boards
- Care Forum Wales

We are utilising this consultation period on the National Commissioning Framework to widen engagement on the development of the National Office.

## The journey to a National Office

The [Rebalancing Care and Support White Paper](#), published in January 2021, set out a range of ongoing challenges facing social care in Wales. It proposed measures at a national level to rebalance the provision of services:

- away from complexity, towards simplification;
- away from price, towards quality and social value;
- away from reactive commissioning, towards shaping the market;
- away from task-based practice, towards an outcome-based practice;
- away from an organisational focus, towards more effective partnerships; and,
- to co-produce better outcomes.

In order to make progress it was also proposed that a National Office for Care and Support should be established, with a focus on the following:

- Responsible for ensuring that action is taken upon national, once for Wales initiatives
- Resolve matters escalated to a national level that cannot be resolved at a local or regional level relating to social care
- A national centralised entity maintaining a ‘birds eye view’ of all elements of the social care system in Wales
- Responsible for shared national vision and providing strong leadership within the spirit of the SSWBA

In autumn 2022 the Expert Group produced its Report – Towards a National Care and Support Service. This report makes several recommendations in relation to establishing a National Care and Support Office:

- Through a single National entity, benefits of consistency, profile and leadership can be fully realised, and provide the necessary coordination to achieve the shared vision of a National Care Service
- Ensure action is taken on those things that can only be undertaken at a national level, resolving any barriers identified by Local Authorities and/or Health Boards which they cannot resolve themselves
- National Office to be the lead social care body for organisations to turn to for help when needed on social care matters
- National Office to have a central co-ordination function at a national level rather than cutting across the work of other national social care agencies

## The vision for the National Office for Care and Support

The National Office will be expected to align with and, wherever applicable, input to relevant cross-system work including:

- Programme for Government commitments
- Co-operation Agreement commitments

- The five ways of working set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Meeting legal duties under the Welsh Ministers' Welsh Language Standards, the National Office will play a key role in supporting and promoting Welsh language and culture, recognising Welsh belongs us to all and the importance of language choice and need in delivering quality care and support aligned to the More than just words framework
- A Healthier Wales.

The National Office will work to and promote the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales. It will promote improved working with people and communities and with partners and look to prevent problems and to take a more joined-up approach. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language
- A globally responsible Wales

The Act includes a 'sustainable development principle' and the sustainability of social care and support services is therefore paramount. We intend that the National Office should act in a manner which seeks to ensure that better meeting the care and support needs of the present also enhances the prospects of generations to follow.

The vision for the National Office will be tested to ensure the continued alignment with the requirements of the Future Generations and Wellbeing Act, which is consistent with our long-term plan for health and social care, [A Healthier Wales](#). The National Office will also embody the four fundamental principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: voice and control, prevention and early intervention, well-being, and co-production. This will be achieved through the core functions of the National Office and additional roles and responsibilities, such as data and intelligence gathering, which will come under the office.

Critically, the National Office will work closely with the 22 Local Authorities and their Social Services teams. Local Government has the statutory responsibilities for the provision of sufficient care and support to meet people's wellbeing needs. Social Care has its roots in local government, so enabling a complex system, including the role of the NHS in commissioning significant levels of care and support, to work synergistically, is central to our vision. The National Office will involve equally people who use social care services and their carers, the social care workforce and stakeholders through seeking feedback and input into the work of the National Office.

To do this the National Office will support the Chief Social Care Officer to provide strategic direction and strengthen national leadership for the social care sector and support quality improvement to improve outcomes for people. Alongside supporting the Chief Social Care Officer, the National Office will engage and collaborate with people who receive services and with the social care workforce to identify and drive improvements.

The partnership with Social Care Wales will also be critical. Social Care Wales is the workforce regulator, and it has key improvement functions. The National Office will work with Social Care Wales to amplify both positive messages about working in social care, and improvement activity consistent with its own role in overseeing the implementation of the national framework and through gathering data and wider sector intelligence.

The National Office will enable, advise, support, and take action to ensure delivery of national policies, priorities and standards and improve quality and safety of care and support services. Promoting preventative services, reducing inequalities, and working to ensure a consistent high-quality experience for care and support recipients, will be important objectives.

Working in tandem with the NHS Wales Executive, the National Office will promote integration of services to create seamless health and social care services, providing national direction to enable improved national, regional, and local outcomes.

To contribute to the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the National Office will be alert to the net zero target for public sector in 2030 and will promote decarbonisation action plans and social value by way of achieving this.

The National Office will embed change through the promotion of the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, the Anti racist Wales Action Plan, and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan to embed meaningful changes and values as part of Welsh life. The Anti Racist Wales Action Plan will act as the lever to deliver demonstrable leadership at all levels to meet existing commitments and to challenge against racism and in the provision of equitable, culturally appropriate services, recognising intersectionality and differences among groups. LGBTQ+ rights are embedded in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitments and are a key component of the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. The LGBTQ+ Action Plan, developed with the aim of making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe, sets out social care and welfare actions and the National Office will have a key role in ensuring successful delivery of this plan.

The National Office will embed and support the strategic framework for Welsh language. More than Just Words 2022-27. In doing so, the National Office will strengthen Welsh language provision in social care services, supporting Welsh speakers to receive care in their first language.

The National Office will provide a central guiding hand to support social care system leadership, facilitating and supporting the sector and if necessary, provide a stronger guiding hand to the sector on improvement and transformation in line with national proprieties and standards.

The National Office would seek to bring about expertise and capacity to support implementation of national policies and bring transparency and clarity on national priorities. To do this, the National Office will facilitate the system / shared learning working together in synergy with local / regional partners to share best practice whilst still supporting local / regional innovation.

To support and drive improvements and transformation, the National Office will be a key enabler to support change, ensuring that people are central to developments and that the use of technology is enhanced within social care services. The National Office will also further develop the use of data, harnessing current datasets and cleaning these and will move towards putting in place advanced analytics and modelling tools. Such tools will support improved use of data to measure impact, anticipate risks and have a better understanding of demand management. In doing so, the National Office will support the promotion of innovation and digital solutions to support the social care sector, moving away from a data rich but information poor landscape.

## Progress to date

The journey to a National Office for Care and Support began with [the Rebalancing Care and Support White Paper Consultation](#). Following the Consultation, the Deputy Minister's [Written Statement](#) of October 2021 outlined the next steps: a Rebalancing Programme. This Programme has three elements: the National Framework, the National Office, and regional partnership arrangements.

Following the start of the Rebalancing Programme, the Deputy Minister announced in a [Written Statement](#) of June 2021 that Albert Heaney has been appointed Chief Social Care Officer. The Chief Social Care Officer will provide leadership for the sector within and outside Welsh Government, providing impartial and informed advice to Welsh Ministers on priorities for change.

In February 2022, the Deputy Minister announced in a [Written Statement](#) an Expert Group had been formed to make recommendations on the development and implementation of a National Care Service. In September 2022 the Expert Group published their [report](#).

Following ongoing engagement between Welsh Government officials and key stakeholders, a Steering Group for the National Office for Care and Support was formed and began meeting in February 2023. The Steering Group are an advisory forum and have worked with officials in producing this consultation document.

## Achieving the vision

### Design

As the Deputy Minister's [Written Statement](#) of October 2021 indicated, the National Office will be established within Welsh Government.

Resourcing arrangements will continue to be explored through internal discussions, and any necessary recruitment will be in accordance with Welsh Government policy and the Civil Service Commission Recruitment Principles.

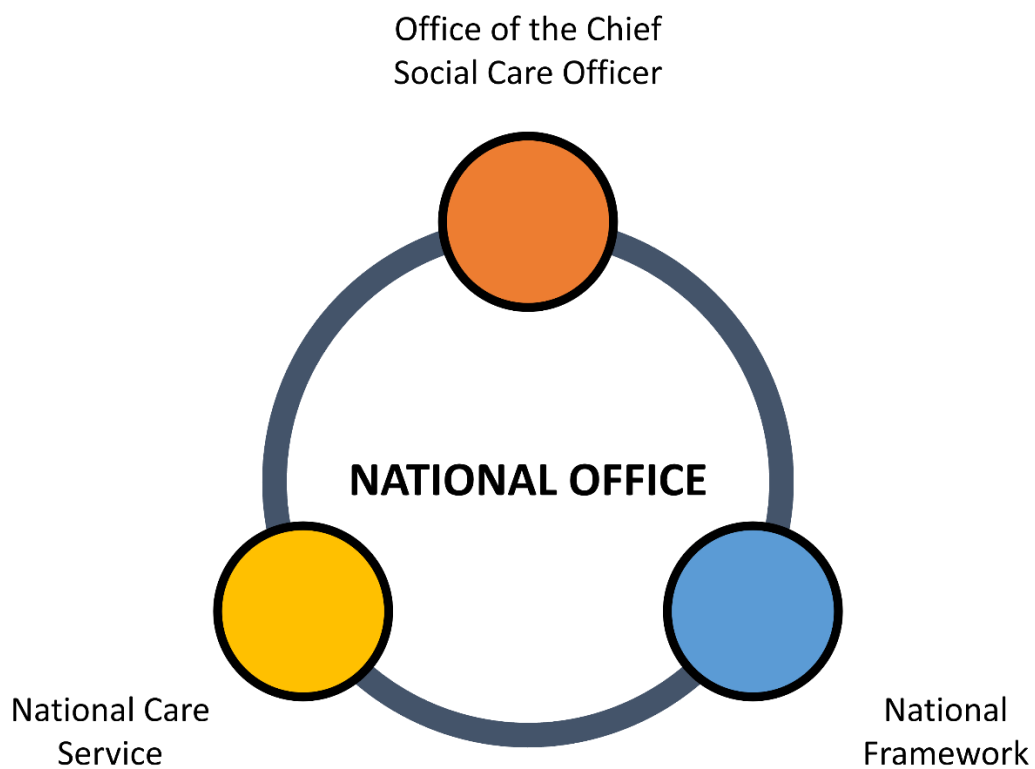
The focus of the National Office will be outward-facing, supporting the sector to grapple with the many challenging issues it faces, and to develop effective responses. There may also be times when the National Office takes on discreet elements of policy work consistent with its remit. Early steps towards the development of a National Care Service would be such an example.

We are examining the merits of embedding existing national functions into the National Office, and conversations are ongoing in relation to the future role of the National Commissioning Board and its relationship with the National Office.

It is not envisaged the proposed governance model will require any change to primary legislation as a separate body is not being created the National Office will not take on activity which is outside the scope of Welsh Ministers' existing functions. Should proposed functions introduced as the National Office matures require any legislation, this will be explored.

## Functions

The initial, high-level functions the National Office will need to exercise are split into three: managing oversight of and compliance with the National Framework for Care and Support; the development, implementation, and ongoing delivery of the National Care Service; and supporting the Chief Social Care Officer in their role. Within each of these core functions, additional responsibilities and / or components will be drawn in to align with the vision for the National Office. The diagram below depicts the core functions of the National Office.



The below table sets out the proposed roles and responsibilities aligned with each of the core functions of the National Office.

<b>National Office for Care and Support</b>	<b>Office of the CSCO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide strategic national leadership for the social care sector in Wales and act as a central resource for the sector.</li> <li>• Have oversight of and a lead coordination function of the work of the different bodies operating at a national level, including those sponsored by Welsh Government.</li> <li>• Central co-ordination point for identifying and dissemination of best practice and lessons learnt to drive service improvement.</li> <li>• Provide a perspective on delivery and improvement, including compliance with legislation.</li> <li>• Bring the sector together, partnering to deliver results.</li> <li>• Focus on professional practice and positive sector change, fostering a sustainable learning and support environment.</li> <li>• Oversight of the social care sector and service delivery, using data to support the sector in working towards solutions.</li> <li>• Act as a strong voice for everyone in the social care sector.</li> </ul>
	<b>National Framework for Care and Support - Commissioning Oversight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the implementation of the National Framework for commissioned care and support within health and social care.</li> <li>• Lead on a continuous programme of awareness and training to support implementation of the National Framework.</li> <li>• Establish an online resource in the form of a 'toolkit' to support commissioners in the delivery of the strategic National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support.</li> <li>• Support ongoing management of the national toolkit.</li> <li>• Ensure compliance with the requirements of the National Framework by commissioners.</li> <li>• Support WG policy leads in undertaking 2 yearly review of the National Framework, helping to ensure it is kept up to date, providing advice on necessary changes.</li> <li>• Maintain a strategic oversight of market stability through a risk stratification approach and alert local, regional, and national commissioners of potential failure.</li> <li>• Work with children's social care policy leads to support commissioning in this area.</li> </ul>



	<p><b>Development of a National Care Service</b></p> <p>(Note, all proposed functions align with the vision of working towards to National Care service for Wales and will not be for immediate implementation once the National Office is operationalised).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the continuous aim of improving National Care and Support Services in Wales.</li> <li>• Facilitate the ongoing development of an enabling culture across the social care system, to ensure a consistently high-quality approach that empowers co-production at the frontline.</li> <li>• Oversee delivery of the Implementation plan for a National Care Service.</li> <li>• Drive the implementation and delivery of policies put in place to create a National Care Service.</li> <li>• Support and lead culture change relating to Mwy na geiriau (More than just words).</li> <li>• Consolidate and co-ordinate functions across the sector, acting as a central guiding hand to the social care sector.</li> <li>• Co-ordinate transformation of social services / social care across adult and children's services.</li> <li>• Co-ordinate improvement function across the sector, working with key partners.</li> <li>• Maintain an overview of Welsh Government sponsored activity relating to social care services.</li> <li>• Create and embed national principles and standards for a National Care Service.</li> <li>• Host a data unit which is responsible for collating, analysis and cleansing data and using this to model and forecast for the sector, supporting policy leads for prevention and early intervention for both adults and children's' services.</li> <li>• Lead the drive for innovation and improvement in the social care sector.</li> <li>• Applicable to adults and children.</li> </ul>
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The National Office, established within Welsh Government, will have executive accountability through the Chief Social Care Officer through to the Director General of the Health and Social Services Group within Welsh Government, and to Welsh Government Ministers for Political accountability. The National Office will sit within existing structures within Welsh Government and be a part of the Social Services and Integration Directorate.

The National Office must operate at optimal effectiveness and efficiency, providing value for money. The National Office will use its allocated resources in an affordable and sustainable manner, and within its agreed allocated limits and in accordance with Welsh Government policies relating to financial management, forecasting, and reporting.

## Implementation

A phased approach will be taken to implementing additional functions as the National Office matures, with a 'core' National Office operational from April 2024.

Whilst not all aspects of the vision for the National Office will be realised in April 2024, the core functions will be operational and will begin working towards the wider vision. Additional roles and responsibilities may be drawn into the National Office as it matures.