



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 13 December 2021.

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Lesley Griffiths MS
- Jane Hutt MS
- Julie James MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Eluned Morgan MS
- Mick Antoniw MS

- Dawn Bowden MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Julie Morgan MS
- Lynne Neagle MS

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- Lee Waters MS

Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director General Office of the First Minister
- Will Whiteley, Deputy Director Cabinet Division
- Toby Mason, Strategic Communications
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Daniel Butler, Special Adviser
- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Sara Faye, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Owen John, Special Adviser
- Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
- Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser
- Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Tracey Burke, Director General, Education and Public Services
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 Crisis Coordination
- Judith Paget, Director General Health
- Andrew Slade, Director General, Economy, Skills and Natural Resources
- Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services
- Emma Watkins, Deputy Director Budget and Government Business
- Matt Wellington, Head of Budget Policy and Delivery
- Andy Fraser, Deputy Director Water and Flood
- Lori Frater, Head Coal Tip Safety Task Force
- Andrew Sallows, Delivery Programme Director NHS

Item 1: Minutes of previous meetings

1.1 Cymeradwyodd y Cabinet gofnodion y 2, 6, 8 a 9 Rhagfyr / Cabinet approved the minutes of 2, 6, 8 and 9 December.

Item 2: Senedd business

2.1 Cabinet considered the contents of the Plenary grid and noted sessions that week would be held in virtual format, as a result there would be no breaks in proceedings. Voting time was scheduled for 8:10pm on Tuesday and around 6pm on Wednesday.

Item 3: Programme for Government

3.1 The First Minister introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to note progress on delivering the Programme for Government.

3.2 The Programme for Government (PfG) had been updated to reflect the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. It had been published the previous week.

3.3 Work on delivery had commenced in all areas, with evidence of some early successes.

Item 4: Draft Budget Package 2022-23

4.1 The Minister for Finance and Local Government introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to approve the MEG level allocations for the 2022-23 Draft Budget, along with the 3 year indicative spending plans.

4.2 The paper was the conclusion of an intensive, complex and challenging

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programme of activity in preparation for laying the Draft Budget the following week. It had been particularly challenging given the tight financial settlement and the situation was compounded by the ongoing uncertainty of the pandemic.

4.3 Nevertheless, the Draft Budget was grounded in the government's values of environmental, social and economic justice and sought to deliver sustainable public services. The government would be able to deliver the stronger, fairer, greener country as set out in the Programme for Government.

4.4 The first 3 year settlement since 2015 had enabled the Government to plan for the future, particularly in relation to capital spend and the Wales Infrastructure Investment Strategy, which would be published alongside the Budget.

4.5 The Budget would provide flexibility for the government to respond to the uncertainty and severity of Omicron, which would be reflected in the messaging.

4.6 Work was underway to confirm details of the introduction of the real living wage for Social Care workers the following week, thereby fulfilling an important Programme for Government commitment.

4.7 There would also be an announcement on non-domestic rate reliefs for 2022-23, which would provide certainty for many businesses and sectors in Wales, particularly those most directly affected by the pandemic. All retail, leisure and hospitality ratepayers in Wales would receive up to 50% non-domestic rates relief for the duration of 2022-23 – capped at £110,000 per ratepayer. The freeze on the non-domestic rates multiplier would also continue.

4.8 The paper also included full details of the funding allocated to thirteen areas as part of the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru. This included significant funding for Free School Meals provision, childcare and a large investment of capital funding - over half a billion up to 2024-25 to meet a number of commitments.

4.9 In addition, following budget discussions with Jane Dodds MS, the Minister for Finance had agreed to create a £20 million fund to support looked after children.

4.10 Cabinet welcomed the paper and put on record its thanks to all those involved in preparing the Budget while responding to the challenges of the pandemic, in the context of the outcome of the Spending Review and preparing a new Programme for Government. Ministers also appreciated the introduction of the real living wage for social care workers, which would provide stability for the sector.

4.11 Cabinet approved the paper.

Item 5: Any other business – update on COVID-19: Omicron

5.1 The First Minister outlined the weekly review process for the Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations, which would culminate with a Cabinet meeting on Thursday. There would be a paper on Wednesday outlining the latest evidence on the spread of Omicron, along with modelling of potential trajectories and clinical advice.

5.2 Without additional financial support from the UK Treasury, the government's response would be limited to restrictions that had the highest impact with the lowest costs.

5.3 Ministers discussed the availability of lateral flow testing devices and noted there were 21 million available for the people of Wales. The issue was ensuring that pharmacies had adequate stock levels. The UK government had placed an order for a further 200 million kits and Wales would receive its usual share. Individuals should be encouraged to use the tests they currently had and to avoid stockpiling.

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