



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Cabinet meeting: 12 April 2022

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 12 April 2022.

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#### Shared Prosperity Fund

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## Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Vaughan Gething MS (item 1)
- Lesley Griffiths MS
- Jane Hutt MS
- Mick Antoniw MS
  
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Julie Morgan MS
- Lynne Neagle MS

## Apologies

- Julie James MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Eluned Morgan MS

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- Dawn Bowden MS
- Lee Waters MS

## Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director Office of the First Minister
- Will Whiteley, Deputy Director Cabinet Division
- Toby Mason, Strategic Communications
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Daniel Butler, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Owen John, Special Adviser
- Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
- Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Helen Carey, Cabinet Secretariat
- Tracey Burke, Director General, Climate Change and Rural Affairs
- Jo-Anne Daniels, Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 Recovery and Local Government
- Frank Atherton, CMO
- Nick Wood, Deputy Chief Executive NHS
- Fliss Bennee, Co-Chair TAC
- Liz Lalley, Director Recovery and Restart
- Christopher Warner, Deputy Director COVID -19 Restart 21 Day Review
- Helen Lentle, Director Legal Services
- Dylan Hughes, First Legislative Counsel
- Neil Buffin, Deputy Director Legal Services

# Item 1: The Shared Prosperity Fund

1.1 The Minister for Economy informed Cabinet that the UK government would be publishing the prospectus for the Shared Prosperity Fund, to replace EU structural funds, the following day. The fund would provide £585 million to local authorities in Wales over the next 3 years, nevertheless, Wales would be around £1 billion worse off by 2025, when compared to EU funding.

1.2 The Welsh Government had worked intensively for a number of years to create the strongest possible model for post-EU regional investment in Wales. This had included co-production with stakeholders, a public consultation, and a project to ingrate international best practice with the OECD.

1.3 Despite frequent attempts at engagement with UK ministers on these plans, it was not until this month that the UK government offered a meaningful negotiation in order for the prospectus to be published ahead of the local government pre-election period.

1.4 In spite of this unfeasible timetable, Welsh Ministers had tried to create a partnership approach to the Fund that respected the devolution settlement and aligned with the wishes of people and organisations in Wales on how post-EU funding should be invested and delivered.

1.5 As a result of the intensive discussions, concessions had been achieved, which would allow regional allocations to local authorities with plans that required alignment with the Welsh Government's Framework for Regional Investment. Ministers would work with local government and stakeholders to maximise the programmes that would support the mission to create a stronger, fairer and greener Wales.

1.6 However, the funding plans did not reflect the distinct needs of Welsh communities. There was a concern that the economic development funds would be directed away from those areas where poverty was most concentrated. The Welsh Government had proposed an alternative formula which would distribute funding more fairly across Wales according to economic need, but this had been rejected by UK ministers.

1.7 Furthermore, the Welsh Government would not have a co-decision-making function, which would be essential to maximising investment and respecting devolution. It was noted that a recent opinion poll undertaken by the Western Mail indicated that people in Wales would prefer the post-EU regional aid programme to be run by the Welsh Government rather than UK ministers.

1.8 Given this, it would not be possible to endorse the approach the UK government was taking and would have implications for the role of Welsh Ministers in terms of delivery, as well as the commitment of Welsh Government resources for the implementation of the fund. This regressive decision was compounded by the dramatic reduction in the funds Wales would have received had the UK government delivered its pledge to replace, in full, EU funds for Wales.

1.9 Cabinet expressed disappointment that the UK government's formula will see people worse off in Wales.

## **Item 2: Review of Coronavirus Restrictions (No. 5) Regulations – 14th April 2022**

2.1 The First Minister introduced the paper, which asked Cabinet to formally review the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) Regulations.

2.2 Cabinet was reminded the restrictions relating to COVID-19 within the Coronavirus Control Plan were for the purpose of preventing, protecting against, controlling or providing a public health response to the incidence, spread of infection or contamination. There must be a threat to public health and the restrictions had to be proportionate in what they were intending to achieve.

2.3 The paper outlined the public health situation. Coronavirus was still prevalent across Wales and the wider UK. The latest results from the ONS Coronavirus Infection Survey estimated between 27 March 2022 and 2 April 2022, an average of 230,800 people in Wales had COVID-19. This equated to one in 13 people. These high levels of infection were being driven by the BA.2 sub-type of the Omicron variant.

2.4 The pandemic continued to cause pressure on the NHS. COVID-19 admissions to hospitals in Wales had increased since the beginning of March but had now plateaued to around 40 per day. Those in intensive care with the virus had remained lower than in previous waves.

2.5 As of 7 April, there were 1,372 COVID-19 related patients in hospital in Wales, although 535 of these were recovering. The percentage of confirmed cases, being actively treated for the virus, was currently around 14%. There were 17 ICU beds occupied by patients with confirmed cases of the virus, which had increased over the previous month, however this was significantly lower than in previous waves.

2.6 The latest modelling from Swansea University indicated that medium term projections from 1 April suggested a less challenging scenario, with up to 1700 beds occupied by COVID-19 patients, compared with around 2500 projected the previous week.

2.7 The advice from the CMO, included in the paper, outlined there was a need to maintain efforts to reduce transmission within hospital settings. Face coverings for visitors may have a small additional effect on reducing viral transmission but also signal the need for continued protective behaviours. Such coverings should continue to be used by staff and visitors until viral transmission in communities was significantly reduced.

2.8 Cabinet agreed, from 18 April 2022, businesses and organisations would no longer be legally required to undertake a specific coronavirus risk assessments and take reasonable measures to minimise the risk of contracting coronavirus.

2.9 However, there would be a need to retain the legal requirement for face coverings to be worn in health and social care settings, for the time being, to protect the most vulnerable and staff.

2.10 Cabinet agreed officials should proceed with the decisions taken by ministers and instruct lawyers accordingly.

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