



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government Board Meeting: 01 September 2023

Minutes from the Board meeting held on 1 September 2023.

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Agenda

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Present

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Gareth Lynn

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- Meena Upadhyaya
- Aled Edwards
- Carys Williams
- Nick Woods
- Andrew Slade
- Liz Lalley
- Tim Moss
- Jo-Anne Daniels
- Dean Medcraft
- Helen Lentle
- Peter Kennedy
- Des Clifford
- David Richards
- Zakhyia Begum

In attendance

- Andrew Jeffreys
- Polina Cowley
- Simon Brindle
- Diana Reynolds

Presenters

- Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner
- Marie Brousseau-Navarro Deputy Future Generations Commissioner
- Natalie Pearson

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Secretariat

- Alison Rees

Apologies

- Tracey Burke
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Judith Paget
- Gawain Evans

1. Welcome/ Current Issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The Chair welcomed Liz Lalley, Dean Medcraft and Nick Woods to the meeting, Liz deputised for Reg Kilpatrick, Nick Woods for Judith Paget and Dean for Tracey Burke.

1.2 The Chair noted that the duration of the meeting had been shortened to accommodate a Programme for Cabinet Subcommittee meeting.

1.3 The note of the meeting of 14 July were agreed.

1.4 In year budget position and budget planning – Noting the substantive item later in the agenda, the Chair provided a brief update on the in-year position and budget planning for 2024-25. The Chair recognised the scale of the challenge and the efforts across the organisation to reach the required savings. The Board, ARAC and Group-level risk committees will provide oversight to the process.

1.5 Zakhyia Begum provided feedback on behalf of the Shadow Board, highlighting the growing unease amongst staff over the implications of budget pressures on their areas of work and suggested communicating with staff about the outcome of the budget savings exercise.

1.6 **Covid Public Inquiry** – The Chair noted the demanding timescales and workloads for those across Welsh Government involved in preparing for and participating in the Covid Inquiry.

1.7 **DG recruitment** – the Chair thanked Aled Edwards for supporting the recruitment exercise for the role of Director General Public Services and Welsh Language. The Chair also thanked Joanne-Anne Daniels and Reg Kilpatrick for their continued efforts as interim Directors General.

1.8 **Non-Executive Director recruitment** – the Chair thanked Carys Williams, Gareth Lyn and Zakhyia Begum for supporting the recruitment exercise for two new Non-Executive Directors.

1.9 **Shadow Board refresh** – the Chair noted that a recruitment campaign to refresh the membership of the Shadow Board would be launched shortly. The Chair noted the excellent addition the Shadow Board's reflections have made to discussion at Board over the last two years.

1.10 **Welsh Government Staff Awards** – The Chair noted that this year's awards have seen the highest number of applicants in some categories. The awards ceremony will take place in the early autumn.

1.11 **Respect Campaign** – the Chair drew the Board's attention to the Respect Campaign which will launch in early September.

2. Promoting sustainable development and sustainable governance in Wales – The Welsh

Government and Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

2.1 The Chair welcomed Derek Walker, Future Generations Commissioner to the meeting and invited him to offer his reflections since taking up the role earlier in 2023.

2.2 The Commissioner welcomed the progress made by his predecessor and outlined how he would build on it. An outcome focussed programme of work will be published in November setting out several priority areas and key performance indicators.

2.3 The Commissioner noted that he sees his role as adding value to the work of the public sector in Wales by provide advice and helping public bodies to overcome those issues hampering their efforts.

2.4 The Chair Invited Simon Brindle to comment. Simon noted the productive working relationship with the Commissioner's office and highlighted the need to be mindful of Welsh Government's two distinct roles: first as a policy maker, and secondly as a body with legal duties under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Simon emphasised the importance of Welsh Government being an exemplar organisation. Simon added that there are occasions where the act is being used as a way to challenge Welsh Government decisions.

2.5 The Chair invited the Board to offer comments and put questions to the Commissioner.

2.6 Des Clifford asked for the Commissioner's views on balancing and managing the tensions implicit in the role in both promoting sustainability and reviewing the actions of public bodies in Wales. The Commissioner responded that he hoped to be able to use the convening power of the role to facilitate conversations and action around sustainability.

2.7 David Richards noted the progress made within Welsh Government on the sustainability agenda and asked for the Commissioner's views on how well understood the need to take account of the wellbeing of future generations is understood by people in Wales. The Commissioner responded that there is evidence of the public's awareness of the act and emphasised the need to continue with efforts to disseminate information on the act and the need to take account of the wellbeing of future generations. The Commissioner added that the act is well respected internationally.

2.8 Gareth Lynn noted that ARAC had commissioned work earlier in 2023 on future demographics to consider the impact of changes in the Welsh population composition and the fiscal burden of supporting an aging population.

2.9 Meena welcomed the progress made and the introduction of KPIs and queried whether identifying bodies not complying with the act would facilitate progress. The Commissioner recognised the need to maintain momentum to achieve progress and emphasised the need to understand the barriers preventing organisations from complying with the act. The Commissioner also highlighted the support his office can provide to organisations making bold decisions in this area.

2.10 On behalf of the Shadow Board Zakhiya Begum asked the Commissioner for his views on how Welsh Government can learn from other organisations as it addresses resourcing and budget challenges. In response the Commissioner highlighted the value of collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

2.11 Tim Moss recognised the tensions between short term pressures and long-term goals and asked the Commissioner for his views on areas which Welsh Government should prioritise. The Commissioner responded that the Wellbeing of Future Generations legislation cuts across all areas of Welsh Government's work and needs to be at the heart of all its interactions with the wider public sector in Wales.

2.12 Amelia John asked for the Commissioner's views on how Welsh Government should approach tackling inequalities. Using the LGBTQ Action Plan as an example, the Commissioner suggested being very open on progress with delivery as a way of holding organisations and groups to account.

2.13 Andrew Slade highlighted the importance of the Commissioner's office in facilitating the debate in Wales around climate change. The Commissioner agreed and noted that his office welcomed the opportunity of working with Welsh Government and regional and local partners on good growth.

2.14 The Chair thanked all for their comments and endorsed the points raised. The Chair looked forward to building on the constructive working relationship with the Commissioner's office.

3. Finance update: in-year position and forward look.

3.1 The Chair invited Andrew Jeffreys to provide an overview of the in-year position and budget saving exercise, and a look ahead to the 2024/25 budget.

3.2 Andrew noted the improvement in the in-year position and the positive contributions the peer review process has made to the budget savings exercise. Since the last Board meeting there has been a change to the approach to spending controls, with these now being managed at a MEG level rather than centrally. Discussions are under way with UK Government over a potential Capital to Revenue swap, Andrew highlighted the risks if approval is not given by the UK Treasury. Andrew noted the uncertainty over the level of consequential flows to Wales following decisions by UK Government. Andrew noted the impact of budget decisions on public services and service users. Looking ahead to 2024-25, Andrew commented that many of the savings identified in 2023-24 are one-off savings and noted the financial challenges

ahead.

3.3 Carys Williams queried whether it would be possible to move to a three-year budget rather than a one-year budget to support longer term planning and the potential benefits of adopting a zero-based budgeting approach. Carys also queried whether becoming stricter in capturing spending on consultancy services was necessary.

3.4 Andrew Jeffrey's recognised the benefits of planning based on a three-year budget but noted that Welsh Government is tied into the UK Government's Spending Review Cycle. Regarding adopting a zero-based approach to budget setting, Andrew noted the benefits of such an approach but suggested that it would be better timed for when a new government takes office.

3.5 Gareth Lynn supported Carys' comments and suggested undertaking scenario planning to explore future structural and strategic challenges. Gareth noted the outcome of the in-year budget savings exercise and the challenges for 2024/45.

3.6 Meena Upadhyaya queried the criteria used to inform decisions on savings. Andrew responded that ministers have agreed a set of principles to underpin their decisions. Andrew noted the challenge for teams across Welsh Government of working on in-year savings at the same time as planning for 2024/25.

3.7 The Chair thanked Board members for their comments and highlighted efforts to limit the impact of budget savings. The Chair offered to provide further updates to the Non-Executive Directors.

4. Welsh Government 2025 Action Plan update

4.1 The Chair invited Tim Moss and Natalie Pearson to provide an update on progress made by the Welsh Government 2025 workstreams during the second quarter (1 May to 31 July) and outline priorities for the next quarter.

4.2 On behalf of the Shadow Board Zakhyia Begum suggested that perhaps WG2025's priorities need to be revised given the budgetary pressures facing Welsh Government.

4.3 Carys Williams emphasised the need to have a clear vision of what the organisation will look and feel like in 2025.

4.4 Tim noted the comments and highlighted the need for a much stronger focus on efficiency and the investment need in staff to being about the necessary changes.

5. AOB

5.1 The Chair noted that today's Board is Peter Kennedy's last before his retirement, the Chair thanked Peter for his support and contribution to the Board.

5.2 Zakhyia Begum noted that Bekah Cioffi would be returning to Shadow Board soon after a period of maternity leave.

5.3 The Chair noted that Board will meet next on 20 October, the meeting will be held in person in Cathay Park with video conferencing facilities.

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