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Welsh Government

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# Cabinet Sub-Committee on Cost of Living meeting: 16 October 2023

Minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Cost of Living  
meeting on 16 October 2023.

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## Present

- Mark Drakeford MS (part meeting)
- Jane Hutt MS (Chair)
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Julie James MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Mick Antoniw MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Julie Morgan MS

## Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director Office of the First Minister
- Rebecca Dunn, Head of Cabinet Division
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser,
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Philippa Marsden, Special Adviser
- David Hooson, Special Adviser
- Jo-Anne Daniels, Director General Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, COVID-19 recovery and Local Government
- Nick Wood, Deputy Chief Executive NHS Wales
- Amelia John, Interim Director Communities and Tackling Poverty
- Claire Germain, Deputy Director Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families
- Jo Salway, Director Social Partnership and Fair Work
- Andrew Jeffreys, Director Welsh Treasury

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- Emma Watkins, Deputy Director Budget and Government Business
- Jonathan Price, Chief Economist
- Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Sarah Hall, Legal Services
- Liz Lalley, Director, Recovery
- Lori Frater, Head of Coal Tip Safety Taskforce
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat
- David Willis, Head of Tackling Poverty
- Theresa Jaynes, Secretariat
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat (Minutes)

## External attendees

- Clover Rodrigues, WLGA
- John Rose, National Lottery Community Fund
- Lisa Hayward, WLGA
- Chris Llewellyn, WLGA
- Azim Ahmed, Muslim Council of Wales
- Tom Lee, CPAG

## Apologies

- Paul Butterworth, Chambers Wales
- Lesley Griffiths MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Eluned Morgan MS
- Lynne Neagle MS
- Dawn Bowden MS
- Lee Waters MS

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## **Item 1: Introduction, welcome and minutes of previous meeting**

1.1 Croesawodd y Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol Gweinidogion a phartneriaid i'r cyfarfod. The Minister for Social Justice welcomed Ministers and partners to the meeting.

1.2 The Chair noted that on 26 September, the Welsh Government published the summary report and recommendations of the Expert Group on the Cost of Living, a report which had been commissioned to advise this Committee on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on people in Wales and actions that should be taken to mitigate the impact of the crisis in Wales.

1.3 The Expert Group were thanked for their work and in particular the Chair, Professor Rachel Ashworth.

1.4 It was noted Welsh Government and partners were already taking action on or would be able to take forward at pace many of the recommendations from the report. However, given the fiscal difficulties faced by all public services, there would be some recommendations that would be more challenging to deliver.

1.5 The Sub-Committee agreed the minutes of 10 July and 14 September / Cytunodd y Pwyllgor cofnodion o 10 Gorffennaf a 14 Medi.

## **Item 2: Warm Hubs and Warm Welcome Spaces**

2.1 The Chair introduced the item, before handing over to Clover Rodrigues of the WLGA and John Rose of the National Lottery Community Fund.

2.2 The Welsh Government had provided £1m to support Warm Hubs as safe

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and warm places within the local community that people could go to keep warm during the winter. The funding had been distributed via Local Authorities, who worked with local partners in the development and delivery of Warm Hubs.

2.3 In addition, a further £1m had been made available for FEIs to offer warm spaces to the local community as part of the Keep Learning, Community Colleges initiative.

2.4 It was noted that over 850 Warm Hubs had been established across Wales last winter, providing support to over 117,000 people. This was in addition to those funded by Local Authorities, those run purely on a voluntary basis, for example by faith groups, and those who would have sourced their own funding from sources such as the National Lottery Community Fund.

2.5 In terms of this coming winter, it remained to be seen how the crisis would continue to unfold, but fuel and energy costs continued to be much higher than two years ago, and inflation continued to impact households across Wales, leading to continuing pressure on household finances. However, it was clear that tough decisions were having to be made everywhere on the prioritisation of finances.

2.6 Despite these financial constraints, many partners were building on the Warm Hubs concept of delivering services in shared spaces and offering 'warm space' based activities for their communities.

2.7 In addition, Local Authorities had built upon existing provision across their communities and were upgrading and modifying existing facilities where possible.

2.8 The intention of LAs was to provide targeted support to the most vulnerable, combining advice services with warm places, where food and warm drinks were available alongside access to Wi-Fi, charging points and company for those who were experiencing isolation.

2.9 There were a number of excellent examples, such as mental health workshops in NPT and the 'croeso cynnes' scheme in Gwynedd, and all these were established on the basis of providing universal provision without any associated stigma of access, whilst being focused on those who really needed the support.

2.10 The National Lottery Community Fund work had dovetailed with that of the Welsh Government and Local Authorities, with grants ranging between £300 and £300k being provided over two years to assist with the cost-of-living crisis.

2.11 The Fund had provided approximately £8.7m to 222 projects designated specifically as cost-of-living related, with more for others.

2.12 The majority of support had gone to advice services, community spaces and for food and warm spaces provision, with adaptations and redesign of existing community spaces a key focus.

2.13 Community spaces had also adapted their times of provision, with later opening hours at evenings and through half terms.

2.14 Funding had also been concentrated on providing support to people in their own homes, for example through a care package with items such as thermal socks, slow cookers to produce nutritious, warm food at lower cost.

2.15 The learning from the past year's delivery included ensuring affordable access to warm spaces, including transport costs, focusing on the disproportionate impacts on those in communities, such as the elderly and some minority groups. In addition, it was important that people felt cared for, and the role of welcoming, helpful and knowledgeable volunteers could not be underestimated in delivering that.

2.16 The point was made that rural communities needed to be included in this work, as they experienced particular challenges with rural isolation, transport

issues and access to services.

2.17 The Sub-Committee agreed that using every opportunity to highlight the work of 'every contact counts' was a priority, as almost £200m in pension credit money was still going unclaimed in Wales, which equated to a 1p rise in the rate of basic income tax.

2.18 The Sub-Committee welcomed the updates and thanked partners for all their work supporting communities across Wales.

## Item 3: Coal tip location data

3.1 The Minister for Climate Change introduced the item, noting that a tip landslide in Tylorstown during 2020 had resulted in the establishment of the Coal Tip Safety Task Force.

3.2 A key objective of the Task Force was to map the location of disused coal tips in Wales and to assess their safety, working with the Coal Authority, Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales.

3.3 A substantial piece of work had been undertaken to map the location of these disused tips as well as their ownership, which was the culmination of a lengthy and complicated exercise.

3.4 The Welsh Government would only consider releasing the location information once sufficient confidence in the data was available, and the complexities associated with personal data had been addressed.

3.5 Now that work had been completed, it was the intention to publish the data on the locations of category C and D disused coal tips on 14 November on the Welsh Government website.



3.6 The Sub-Committee noted that a particular complexity existed around the ownership landscape, as many tips had multiple owners, including a mix of public and private ownership.

3.7 It was reported there were 349 category C and D disused coal tips across Wales and the Government would be writing to around 1,600 landowners and around 580 occupiers of properties who were likely to have all, or part, of a C or D tip on their land.

3.8 A small number of the owners would have only a tiny percentage of a tip on their property, for example the foot of the tip extending into their garden.

3.9 The category of a tip was based on a number of things, including the closeness of a tip to local communities, houses or major infrastructure.

3.10 For this data release, the focus was on category C and D tips as they would be more likely to need frequent inspections, so identifying them early would allow maintenance to be carried out when necessary. It was important to flag that this did not mean these tips were unsafe, but they may be larger and are more likely to be closer to communities or major infrastructure.

3.11 It was noted that this release of data was likely to affect many people and communities living in and around the former coalfields, particularly in the South Wales valleys area and many of these were amongst the highest areas of deprivation, and likely impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

3.12 Therefore, making sure communities were safe had always been and continued to be the main priority.

3.13 The communications and engagement work around the release of data was focused on ensuring the messaging was clear, consistent and, most significantly, reassuring for these communities.

3.14 This was a very sensitive matter, particularly in the South Wales valleys

and a key priority was to provide reassurance to communities about what the Welsh Government was doing to manage coal tip safety.

3.15 A key message for homeowners and occupiers would be that the Welsh Government had established a programme to monitor and maintain these tips, and they were simply being asked to allow their Local Authority, Coal Authority or a contractor access to their land to undertake inspections or maintenance works, if required.

3.16 The tips were being regularly inspected by the Coal Authority, with category C tips once a year and category D tips twice a year. The current round of winter inspections had begun on 9 October.

3.17 In addition, funding of £44.4m had been made available by the Welsh Government to Local Authorities to carry out routine works on public and privately-owned tips.

3.18 Future work in this area included the Disused Tips Bill, scheduled for introduction next year, which would seek to enshrine in legislation a long-term, sustainable and fit for purpose regulatory regime for disused tip safety, led by a newly created public body solely focused on this work.

3.19 It was recognised the letters about the release of data may raise concerns around the potential impact on house prices and insurance. There were also likely to be concerns about the safety of the tips and the impacts on health. Work was ongoing with Public Health Wales to ensure the approach was reassuring and reached the coalfield communities appropriately.

3.20 To this end, online events and in-person drop-in sessions in local communities were being arranged, to enable landowners and members of the local community to come and ask any questions they may have on the data release. There would also be information available on the Government webpage, particularly about who to contact if further information was required.

3.21 In addition, as it was likely that constituents would seek advice from their local MS, MP or Councillor, technical briefings to provide necessary information to representatives would also be arranged.

3.22 Economic analysis in the 2022 White Paper on Disused Coal Tips indicated it was likely that the presence of disused coal tips was already priced into the housing market in former coalfield areas. However, there were clearly sensitivities and work was ongoing with the ABI, UK Finance and under-writers to ensure they were also briefed on the release of data.

3.23 The Sub-Committee welcomed the update and the potential impact on areas of deprivation and agreed to continue monitoring the situation alongside the many other cost-of-living factors.

## Item 4: Update from partners

4.1 The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip invited social partners to provide an update from their respective networks and asked them to suggest agenda items for future meetings.

4.2 There were reports from some families within the Muslim community about difficulties balancing childcare with work and making employment work for them alongside caring for a young family.

4.3 It was reported that Wales had the best childcare offer in the whole of the UK at present, with care for 3- and 4-year-olds for 48 weeks of the year, compared to only 38 weeks in England.

4.4 There was work ongoing to expand this provision to 2-year-olds, and despite England announcing expansion to children as young as 9 months old, that policy was yet to be implemented in practice and the sector in Wales was reporting that

capacity to deliver would be an issue, alongside the difficult financial situation at present.

4.5 The Sub-Committee agreed that the child poverty strategy would be a useful area to consider at the next meeting with social partners, alongside the wider childcare offer and employability and skills plan.

4.6 The Sub-Committee thanked all partners for their contributions and noted the Chair would be meeting with responsible lenders, energy providers and the UK Energy Minister and Ofgem shortly to discuss fuel poverty issues.

Cabinet Secretariat

October 2023

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