



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Welsh Government Board meeting: 2 December 2022

Agenda and minutes of the Board meeting held on 2
December 2022.

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Agenda

1. Welcome / Current issues

Oral

See minutes.

2. Future Generations Commissioner Section 20 - Review of Welsh Government

Paper item 2

Paper not published as it contains information relating to the formulation or development of government policy.

3. Council Tax reform

Paper item 3

Paper not published as it contains information relating to the formulation or development of government policy.

4. Programme for Government update

Oral

See minutes.

5. Finance update

Paper item 4

Paper not published as it contains information relating to the financial interests of the Welsh Government.

6. Update on the Infected Blood Inquiry

Paper item 6

Published.

7. Welsh Government 2025 Action Plan

Paper item 7

Paper not published as it contains information relating to the formulation or development of government policy.

8. Any other business

Oral

See minutes.

Present

- The Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Meena Upadhyaya
- Gareth Lynn
- Ellen Donovan
- Tracey Burke
- Judith Paget
- Andrew Slade
- Jo-Anne Daniels
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Tim Moss
- Peter Kennedy
- Gawain Evans
- Helen Lentle
- Andrew Jeffreys
- David Richards
- Dafydd Eveleigh (Shadow Board)

In attendance

- Catrin Sully
- Simon Brindle
- Andrew Charles
- Debra Carter
- Sally-Ann Efstathiou

Secretariat

- Alison Rees

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- Daniel Taylor

Apologies

- Aled Edwards

1. Welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the Board meeting. The minutes of the Board meeting of 21 October were agreed. The Chair provided updates on several areas.

1.2 Operation Blue Harvest – Reg Kilpatrick provided an update on the recent Welsh Government emergency planning exercise. Ellen Donovan asked if the exercise had highlighted any resourcing issues. Reg responded that exercise suggested that resources were sufficient, but highlighted lessons around decision making and planning.

1.3 NHS Update – Judith Paget informed Board that whilst the number of patients hospitalised with Covid remain stable, there were increases in the number of flu-related admissions to hospitals. Meena Upadhyaya asked whether Covid cases are expected to rise and if so, what plans are in place to respond. Judith noted that modelling suggests that Wales may not see another peak in cases until March 2023 and highlighted the importance of the vaccination programme.

1.4 Judith noted the prospect of multiple strike action and the need to model this with the joint emergency services group to inform decisions by the central risk preparedness group.

2. Future Generations Commissioner Section 20 Review of Welsh Government

2.1 The Chair invited Andrew Charles and Simon Brindle to update Board on the Future Generations Commissioner's Section 20 Review.

2.2 David Richards welcomed the excellent work by Andrew and Simon in building a constructive working relationship with the Commissioner's office and suggested that it might be timely to re-frame the role of Board Future Generation's Champion.

2.3 On behalf of the Shadow Board, Dafydd Eveleigh queried how best to monitor the success of embedding the act.

2.4 Gareth and Meena welcomed the focus on CLIP. Ellen suggested that Board papers could in future include a section considering the topic from the perspectives of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

2.5 The Chair thanked all for their comments and suggested the review would be the catalyst for further action and supported suggestions to review the role of the Future Generations Board Champion.

3. Council Tax reform update

3.1 The Chair invited Reg Kilpatrick and Debra Carter to update the Board on plans for Council Tax Reform.

3.2 Gareth reminded the Board that council tax reform is one of the Programme for Government areas that the First Minister has asked the Non-Executive Directors to pay particular attention to. Ellen noted the scale of the challenge

and the compressed timetable and queried the implementation risks. Meena noted the complex nature of tax reform and queried the evidence based that suggests that these reforms will be in the public interest.

3.3 Tim Moss suggested that communications need to be clear on the benefits of council tax reform and asked if there was clarity on the critical path and the scale of change and risks for local authorities.

3.4 On behalf of the Shadow Board Dafydd highlighted the language used in communications around council tax reform, noting that 'tax burden' is not a helpful phrase when communicating the essential nature of tax to fund critical services. Dafydd also noted the absence of representation for disabled people and questioned how reform was being communicated to minority groups. Dafydd further noted the concern with regards to the amount of support available for those in the middle-income bracket, those who may be worse affected without being eligible for support.

3.5 In response, Debra noted the communications challenges and added that officials have held discussions with several groups representing different groups in society to discuss proposals to reform council tax. Debra advised that implementation challenges are noted as risks on the project risk register. Regarding the timetable for delivering the reforms, Debra noted that the 2025 date is non-negotiable and noted that contingencies would focus on other activities around re-evaluation.

4. Programme for Government update

4.1 The Chair invited Catrin Sully to update Board on progress made with the Programme for Government re-prioritisation exercise.

4.2 Catrin Sully noted that the original intention of re-prioritisation exercise was to strengthen the response to the cost-of-living exercise but the worsening budget position then became the primary driver. A revised Programme for Government will be published in early 2023.

4.3 Ellen gave her support to the approach taken in reviewing Programme for Government commitments and queried whether there was scope for Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to do more to support delivery of Programme for Government commitments. Gareth added his support and asked if those areas where underspends had been identified and surrendered to reserves were being cancelled, curtailed or delivery delayed.

4.4 On behalf of the Shadow Board, Dafydd asked if a reduction in Programme for Government commitments would mean that staffing resources could be reallocated to areas under pressure. The Chair responded that while he agreed that some teams across Welsh Government are understaffed, the re-prioritisation of Programme for Government commitments will not result in more resources but may offer some choice in how to utilise those available.

5. Finance update – Period 7

5.1 The Chair invited Gawain Evans to provide the Finance Update for Period 7.

5.2 Gawain noted the improved position at Period 7 with the potential for a small underspend at the end of the financial year. The Finance Minister has asked that the current controls over underspends remain in place, with underspends being surrendered to reserves unless there is an urgent case to re-purpose the money.

5.3 Noting that underspends are likely to increase as the end of the financial year approaches, Ellen asked if it was possible to predict the best/worst case position. Gawain responded that this would be difficult given the potential for

additional funding from UK Government becoming available close to the end of the financial year; the Finance Minister is writing to the UK Government to stress that if additional funding is given then Welsh Government must be given the flexibility over how it is used.

5.4 The intention is to sign the 2021/22 accounts on 12 December. Audit Wales have indicated that the accounts will be qualified on the basis of ongoing issues raised in the previous year's accounts.

6. Update on the Infected Blood Inquiry

6.1 The Chair invited David Richards to update Board on the Infected Blood Inquiry.

6.2 David Richards noted that the Infected Blood Inquiry highlighted how decisions by officials impact on people's lives and following a question from Meena Upadhyaya, noted that the Ministerial Code had since been changed to stress that role of officials in providing impartial advice to Ministers, with the responsibility lying with Ministers to decide how to act on that advice.

6.3 Dafydd noted that while there are mechanisms in place to ensure that policies are open and transparent, they may not always be effective and asked how Welsh Government planned to respond to the inquiry's findings.

6.4 . Gareth welcomed the paper and noted the role of the Non-Executive Directors in challenging group-think. Ellen welcomed the input that Shadow Board makes by bringing a different set of perspectives to Board discussions.

7. WG2025 – update on the Action Plan

7.1 The Chair invited Tim Moss to update Board on the draft WG2025 Action Plan. Tim informed Board that workstreams have been identified, emphasising that the impact of workstream activity will be reviewed at regular intervals.

7.2. The Chair invited Board members to comment on the draft Action Plan. Meena noted the important role IT and digital technology will play in WG2025 and queried if measures are in place to ensure that Welsh Government has access to emerging technology. Gareth suggested that ARAC could provide governance support to WG2025. Reflecting on discussion at the Finance and Corporate Services subcommittee, Ellen suggested addressing issues around skills gaps in areas such as Project Management within WG2025.

7.3 Given the scale of the challenge ahead, Andrew Slade highlighted the necessity for the change programme and the enthusiasm and willingness to effect change. Des Clifford echoed these comments. Reg Kilpatrick commented that the Public Service Workstream provides good opportunities to bring best practice and innovation into government. Judith noted support for WG2025 across the Health & Social Care Group and added that the Group also has an internal programme called Shaping Up which aligns with WG2025.

7.3 The Chair noted the positive view of change and described the need to communicate where change has already happened, what is happening now, and what will be happening as a result of the WG2025 strategy.

8. Any other business

8.1 No items of any other business were raised. The Board will next meet on 13 January 2023.

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