



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Welsh Government Board meeting: 2 September 2022

Agenda and papers from the Board meeting held on 2
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Agenda

1. Welcome / Current issues

Oral

See minutes.

2. Revised Terms of Reference

Paper item 2

Published.

3. Programme for Government

Paper item 3

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

4. Finance update

Paper item 4

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

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5. Welsh Government 2025 update

Paper item 5

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

6. Any other business

Oral

See minutes.

Present

- The Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Meena Upadhyaya
- Gareth Lynn
- Ellen Donovan
- Aled Edwards
- Dean Medcraft
- Judith Paget
- Andrew Slade
- Peter Kennedy
- Gawain Evans
- Helen Lentle
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Andrew Jeffreys
- Owain Lloyd

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- Tim Moss
- Bekah Cioffi (Shadow Board)
- Zakhyia Begum (Shadow Board)

In attendance

Catrin Sully

Secretariat

Alison Rees

Apologies

Jo-Anne Daniels
Tracey Burke
David Richards

1. Welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the Board meeting and noted the apologies received. The Chair welcomed Aled Edwards to his first meeting as a Non-Executive Director.

1.2 The Chair noted that Zakhyia Begum will take over as Lead Co-Chair of the Shadow Board when Bekah starts her maternity leave.

1.3 The minutes of the Board meeting of 29 July were agreed.

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Cost of Living

1.4 The Chair noted the challenge of responding to the cost-of-living crisis. Ministers are awaiting further information on UK Government's plans to inform the actions they can take here in Wales. Peter Kennedy added that that officials are reviewing Welsh Government's current offer to support staff through the cost-of-living crisis and what potential additional steps it could take. The outputs of this exercise will be presented to ExCo later in September. A Let's Talk Live session on wellbeing is also planned for later in the month.

1.5 Ellen Donovan queried the impact inflation, and the cost-of-living crisis will have on Programme for Government commitments and whether Welsh Government will be able to mount a rapid response. The Chair replied that there may need to be a prioritisation exercise carried out regarding the Programme for Government. The intention is to avoid establishing new groups to manage the response if possible.

1.6 Aled Edwards recognised the huge pressures involved in responding to the humanitarian crisis and congratulated Welsh Government on its world-leading response. Aled added that it may be some time before the refugees arriving in Wales will be able to return to their homes in Ukraine.

Education and Social Justice

1.7 The Chair invited Owain Lloyd to provide an update on the education and social justice portfolio areas. This summer has seen the first external exams series since 2019 and that the series had been successfully delivered. Meena Upadhyaya asked for clarification on the action planned to address the attainment gap amongst learners. Owain responded that officials are compiling a document that brings together all the actions Welsh Government is taking to support young people reach their full potential.

1.8 The High Court ruled in favour of Welsh Government in relation to RSE in the new curriculum with legal costs awarded against the claimants. Aled commended the way in which officials have worked with community and faith groups over the development of RSE.

1.9 Regarding refugees from the war in Ukraine, providing suitable accommodation remains a challenge and officials are working with local authorities to ensure that school-age children can move quickly into education. Aled noted the excellent engagement and social partnership working to respond to the needs of those arriving from Ukraine.

Covid-19, the NHS and social care

1.10 The Chair invited Judith Paget to provide an update on the position in the NHS in relation to Covid-19. Overall, the position is improving but there is a very long tail. At the time of the meeting only a small number of patients were in hospital being treated for Covid-19, with some 11 patients in ICU beds. Staff sickness remains an issue across both health and social care with many absences due to Covid-19.

1.11 Judith highlighted the pressure on social care services with staff shortages impacting on the provision on re-enablement and domiciliary care services. Around 13% of hospital beds are currently taken up by patients awaiting discharge.

1.12 Ellen asked if there is a danger that the position in relation to domestic care could worsen over the winter months given the anticipated severity of the flu season and, what creative solutions are being considered by officials. Judith noted the difficulty in predicting the course of the pandemic and flu season over the winter months. Judith highlighted the link between ambulance response times and delays in discharging patients from hospitals and confirmed that the NHS and social services are looking at innovative and collaborative responses

to the situation including creating additional community care capacity.

1.13 Meena queried whether there is adequate support available in Wales for those suffering from long Covid. Judith replied that additional funding has been provided and that officials are not aware of any issues relating to difficulties or delays in accessing services.

1.14 Reg Kilpatrick noted the concurrent challenges facing Wales this winter and assured that Board that the Preparedness and Risk group, which brings together policy leads from across Welsh Government with an interest in one or more of the risks, is leading on contingency planning.

2. Revised Terms of Reference

2.1 The Chair invited comments on the draft revised Terms of Reference.

2.2 Ellen noted that the role of the Board had evolved over the last 12 months, particularly in relation to the focus on the Programme for Government and added that this is reflected in the revised Terms of Reference. Ellen queried how Non-Executive Directors can be kept up to date on developments between meetings. Ellen remarked that including structure charts for both the overall approach to governance and the governance of Welsh Government 2025 might be a little confusing.

2.3 Gareth Lynn welcomed the linkages to Welsh Government 2025 in the revised Terms of Reference. Gareth noted that the Board has not yet considered the wider strategic issues facing Wales and suggested that it would be useful to consider some of the bigger risks at future meetings. Aled commended the Terms of Reference and reflected on the emphasis on the Social Partnership model of working in Wales.

2.4 Bekah welcomed how the Shadow Board had integrated into the work of the Board and suggested aligning the Shadow Board Terms of Reference with those of the Board.

2.5 In relation to the role of the Board and the organisational strategy set out in bullet point 3, Tim queried whether the ordering of the words 'challenge' and 'advice' in the first line is correct.

2.6 Natalie Pearson noted that officials are keen to learn how decisions are made within Welsh Government and suggested considering ways to promote information on governance, assurance, and the work of the Shadow Board.

2.7 Meena queried Non-Executive Directors membership of Finance and Corporate Service Sub-Committee. Ellen responded that she is a member of the sub-committee, although there has been some discussion whether it is appropriate for a Non-Executive Director to be a member of a sub-committee that reports directly to ExCo. Bekah commented that as lead co-chair of the Shadow Board she had been invited to attend ARAC and the Finance and Corporate Services Sub-committee but had been unable to owing to diary clashes.

2.8 The Chair thanked the Board for their comments, noting the general endorsement for the revised Terms of Reference and the comments on areas that require further refinement.

Action

Secretariat to revise the Terms of Reference based on the comments received.

Action

Secretariat to share the revised ExCo Terms of Reference with the Board once agreed by ExCo.

3. Programme for Government update

3.1 The Chair invited Catrin Sully to provide an update on progress with the Programme for Government commitments. Discussions are underway on the potential impact of several factors including the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of the war in Ukraine, the ongoing impact of the pandemic and Brexit on the ability to deliver Programme for Government commitments.

3.2 Catrin noted concerns raised over the number of new strategies and actions plans emerging; many make additional commitments to those in the Programme for Government. It is important that Cabinet agree to the development of these plans before any time or resource is committed to their development. Meena queried what factors are driving these new commitments and reiterated the First Minister's request that the Non-Executive Directors focus their attention on three specific areas of the Programme for the Government; of these two are rated as 'red'. Regarding the new commitments, Ellen suggested exploring a number to see how they had emerged. Ellen proposed a deep dive on social care at a future Board meeting as this is one of the areas the First Minister has asked the Non-Executive Directors to pay particular attention to. Gareth suggested considering how processes can be improved to ensure that strategies, action plans and consultations are referred to Cabinet before time and resources are invested in them.

3.3 Des Clifford reflected on the rapidly changing external context within which the Programme for Government is to be delivered; the Programme for

Government will help maintain focus on priorities for delivery.

3.4 Reg commented that where commitments are to explore topics, and having done so, there is often then pressure to move quickly on to implementation.

3.5 The Chair thanked all for their comments and noted the points raised.

4. Finance Update – Period 4 update

4.1 The Chair invited Gawain Evans to update the Board on Welsh Government's 2021-22 provisional outturn and reserves position.

4.2 The update is based on forecasts submitted by Welsh Government Heads of Finance for the period ending 31 July 2022 (period 4) set against the budgets published in the Welsh Government First Supplementary Budget 2022-23.

4.3 The adjusted forecast overspends reported against Welsh Government MEGs in period 4 totals £356.5m which is an improvement on period 3. There is unlikely to be any surplus money available in 2022-23. There is a very small reserve of some £74 million available. The Wales Reserve currently stands at £91million, this has however been earmarked for 2023-24.

4.4 The Chair invited Board members to comment.

4.5 Gareth queried the extent to which the identified deficit is already locked in to budgets and noted the challenge ahead and suggested that there might be a need to make some early decisions on corrective actions to break even. Meena asked if there are sufficient reserves to cover the projected overspend and if there are alternative means to adjust the anticipated deficit. Bekah queried whether it might be possible to use underspends on EU funding to help meet the deficit. Andrew Jeffreys noted that the impact of inflationary pressures is likely to be felt for some time with Welsh Government's financial position likely to worsen

in future years.

5. Welsh Government 2025 – governance and coordination

5.1 The Chair invited Natalie to update the Board on the arrangements for the governance and coordination of the WG 2025 organisational development programme.

5.2 Gareth commended the paper and queried the role of the Board in monitoring progress and providing assurance. Ellen noted the importance of having tangible timelines and good communication plans in place.

5.3 David Richards highlighted the importance of embedding the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act within the programme.

5.4 Reflecting on the One Welsh Public Service workstream, Reg noted as udae comes out of the Covid-19 pandemic there is a real appetite to explore different ways of working to draw in new skills to Welsh Government and help make delivery more effective.

5.5 Meena welcomed the comments from fellow Board members and asked for what benchmarks will be used to measure if the organisation is fit for purpose and if there are opportunities to engage more than 50 per cent of staff at events.

5.6 Bekah noted that additional resources have not been allocated to the WG2025 programme and queried whether without dedicated resources it will be seen as a priority for delivery.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 No items of AOB were raised. The Board will next meet on 21 October.

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