



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Welsh Government Board Meeting: 29 April 2022

Agenda and minutes from the Board meeting held on 29 April 2022.

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Agenda

1. Welcome

Oral

See minutes.

2. Programme for 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. Covid-19 Transition Plan

Paper item 4

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

5. Finance update

Paper item 5

Paper 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)
- Andrew Goodall
- Meena Upadhyaya
- Gareth Lynn
- Ellen Donovan
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Andrew Slade
- Tracey Burke
- Des Clifford
- Judith Paget
- David Richards
- Andrew Jeffreys
- Peter Kennedy
- Gawain Evans

- Helen Lentle
- Bekah Cioffi (Shadow Board)
- Zakhyia Begum (Shadow Board)

In attendance

- Catrin Sully
- Debra Carter
- Liz Lalley

Secretariat

- Amy Jones

Apologies

- Natalie Pearson

1. Welcome

1.1 The Permanent Secretary welcomed all to the Board meeting and the Shadow Board co-chairs Bekah Cioffi and Zakhyia Begum.

1.2 The Permanent Secretary asked Board members if they are content with the minutes from the last meeting. The Shadow Board chair advised of some amendments they would like considered.

1.3 The Permanent Secretary informed the Board of the new Group Structure for

the organisation that was put in place from the 1 April 2022. Des Clifford shall begin a new role 'Director of the Office for the First Minister'. The Permanent Secretary gave special thanks to Des for his contribution as a Director General.

1.4 The Permanent Secretary asked Reg Kilpatrick and Jo-Anne Daniels to provide the Board with an update on the current work that is continuing around the crisis in Ukraine. Reg advised the Board that the working is ongoing in a more business as usual approach and staff are continuing to monitor any domestic threats.

1.5 Jo-Anne Daniels advised the Board of the difficult start in processing applications with significant delays; however, timings have improved and many more applications had been approved. There has been some difficulty with people arriving via other routes through families etc and will need to consider how our contact and welcome centres would operate if there was an influx in numbers.

1.6 Judith Paget provided an update on latest developments of Covid-19, which focused on Covid-19 numbers in Wales, position in hospitals, intensive care and staff availability. Judith also brought to the attention of the board, the publication of a Planned Care Recovery Plan.

1.7 The Permanent Secretary fed back to the board developments of the WG 2025 change programme. He confirmed that deep dive sessions had taken place and there remains a genuine concern of a change programme being put in place with the pressures that have been placed on staff over the last 2 years during the pandemic.

1.8 The Permanent Secretary informed the Board that the Future Generations Commissioner has launched a Section 20 review into how Welsh Government is carrying out sustainable development and a further discussion will be brought back to board.

Action

Discussion of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to be provided at the next Board meeting.

2. Programme for Government – Progress Overview

2.1 Catrin Sully provided the Board with a progress update on the Programme for Government commitments collectively owned by Cabinet. It was noted that Cabinet had discussed progress towards delivery of the Programme for Government in March. There is further work needed to develop the monitoring and reporting regime, including a focus on strategic milestones.

2.2 Catrin informed the Board of an initial discussion at ExCo about improving the information used to monitor progress and the Permanent Secretary will be holding sessions with lead officials in the coming weeks to understand the potential delivery challenges in a number of areas.

2.3 The Board discussed a number of the key commitments raised at the Programme for Government Cabinet Sub-Committee including Pay disparity and Race disparity. The Board noted the positive impact of the Sub Committee.

2.4 The Non-Executive Director's noted the progress made on delivery of the Programme for Government and were encouraged by the approach to monitoring and reporting. They asked Directors General to comment further on a number of commitments including the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill and the planned care recovery plan.

2.5 The Shadow Board noted the progress being made on reporting and were

pleased to see developments in standardising progress updates, it was noted that further work was needed to ensure consistency across the programme.

3. Council Tax reform

3.1 Debra Carter provided an update to the Board on the Programme for Government commitment to reform a fairer and more progressive system in Wales. The reforms will deliver meaningful change this term within the framework of the existing system, which is now almost 20 years out-of-date, while setting a longer-term trajectory for further reform if desired, including considering alternative approaches.

3.2 Debra informed the Board the Welsh Government will consult on the following:

- Delivering a revaluation to update the property valuations for all 1.5m domestic properties in Wales (currently based on 2003 values), reconfigure and add council tax bands and amend the tax rates to achieve a more progressive system. The aim is for people in higher value homes to pay more, and those in lower value homes to pay less
- Establishing rolling revaluation cycles for council tax for the first time in its history, so that the system keeps pace with the market
- A review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)
- A review of the complex framework of discounts, disregarded persons, exemptions and premiums, and
- Continuing to explore alternative approaches for longer term consideration (eg a land value tax, unbanded systems).

3.3 Debra advised the Board Phase 1 of the formal consultations on broad principles will begin in July this year, followed by Phase 2 Consultation on detailed proposals in Summer 2023. There have been three Ministerial bilaterals

with Plaid Cymru representatives to agree the scope of reforms. The Minister for Finance and Local Government is content with a set of first principles as the basis for the Phase 1 Consultation, but discussions with Plaid Cymru about these principles have been ongoing and are not yet resolved. A Policy Committee is scheduled for early June.

3.4 The board discussed the issue of public response and communications, and Phase 1 of the consultation may draw criticism for not providing detailed information about impact. The board also agreed that the timescale of the consultations is tight and leaves little room for further development.

3.5 The Non-Executive Director's noted the proposal's and agreed it is going to be a very complex task and the most challenging risk is not to underestimate the level of public engagement required.

3.6 The Shadow Board noted the highly political nature of the government's proposals and provided some suggestions and assurance including their views on communication and handling, approach to risks and engagement with local authorities.

4. Covid Transition Plan

4.1 Liz Lalley and Reg Kilpatrick provided the Board with an update on the implementation of the Transition plan and the work underway to manage Coronavirus alongside other respiratory infections.

4.2 Liz informed the board of the development of a public facing plan 'Together for a safer future: Wales' long-term Covid-19 transition from pandemic to endemic'. The plan sets out a Covid stable scenario and how we will transition to managing Coronavirus beyond the emergency footing on which we have been operating.

4.3 Liz advised the board despite recent waves of infections we remain in a Covid Stable scenario and we are moving towards a more long-term approach to management of the virus, based on our effective, well established public health infrastructure including:

- Supporting people and businesses to maintain behaviours to help reduce the transmission of all respiratory infections through advice for the public and for employers and our ongoing communications work
- Vaccination boosters in spring for the elderly and most vulnerable adults and a regular vaccination programme from the autumn
- Adjusting our Test, Trace, Protect programme in a phased and gradual way to focus on the most vulnerable, including maintaining lateral flow testing for symptomatic people to the end of June, and
- Adapting public services, including, for example, using local risk assessments and outbreak control plans.

4.4 The Board discussed the possibility of a more serious variant and the plans we have in place. The board were advised we will retain an ability to scale back up our response under a Covid Urgent Scenario. Work is continuing with the UK government and PHW to ensure that our targeted testing and surveillance programmes, as well as our participation in UK and international networks, will give us the ability to identify new variants of concern. We would also be in a position to provide enhanced covid specific guidance and communications with legislation as a last resort.

4.5 The Non-Executive Director's noted the detail of transition preparations and raised their concerns at the challenges we would face in response to a Covid Urgent scenario given the extent to which UK-wide infrastructure had been removed.

4.6 The Shadow Board members noted the paper and provided comments on anticipated organisational impacts of transition.

5. Finance update

5.1 Gawain Evans provided the Board with a report on financial management for the forth coming year and provided an update on the 2021-22 outturn.

5.2 Gawain reported on the Revenue forecast, Capital forecast and the position of current reserves.

5.3 Gawain also informed the board due to the lack of available reserves and the need to allow time for ministers and officials to review pressures and prioritise unfunded programmes, a decision has been made not to carry out an exercise to identify emerging budget pressures and it is intended to bring forward the first formal in year reporting period to period two.

5.4 The Board discussed a number of risks to the in-year approach including, inflation and costs of running a significant number of projects.

6. Any other business

6.1 The Permanent Secretary thanked members who attended and to the Shadow Board Co-Chairs for their comments.

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