



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government Board Meeting: 14 July 2023

Minutes from the Board meeting held on 14 July 2023.

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Present

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Gareth Lynn
- Meena Upadhyaya
- Aled Edwards
- Carys Williams
- Judith Paget

- Andrew Slade
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Tim Moss
- Jo-Anne Daniels
- Dean Medcraft
- Helen Lentle
- Peter Kennedy
- Des Clifford
- David Richards
- Zakhyia Begum

In attendance

- Andrew Jeffreys
- Sharon Bounds
- Sharon Cross
- Polina Cowley

Apologies

- Tracey Burke
- Amelia John

Secretariat

- Alison Rees

1. Welcome/Current Issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The Chair welcomed Dean Medcraft to the meeting, Dean is deputising for Tracey Burke, but Tracey hoped to be able to join the meeting from 12pm.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Sharon Bounds and Andrew Jeffreys to the meeting, they are attending Board for Item 1 to support the discussion on the in-year budget position and budget planning for 2024/25.

1.3 The notes of the meeting of 09 June were agreed. The Chair thanked Zakhyia Begum for sharing the notes of Shadow Board's meeting of 12 July. The Chair welcomed Sharon Bounds and Andrew Jeffreys to the meeting, they

1.4 The Chair updated the Board on a number of current issues including the COVID Public Inquiry, the First Minister's reflections on the Annual Report and the recent Civil Service Live event held in Cardiff. The Chair confirmed that Welsh Government staff below SCS will receive a one-off non-consolidated payment of £1,500 to support staff with the continued high cost of living. The payment will be made to all eligible staff irrespective of their working hours.

1.5 The Chair invited Andrew Jeffreys and Sharon Bounds to provide an update on the current financial position and planning for 2024/25.

1.6 Andrew highlighted the challenging financial position focusing Welsh Government and provided an overview of Cabinet's proposed collective approach to managing the position. Andrew noted the spending controls in place to limit avoidable spend.

1.7 The Chair invited the Board to comment on the issues raised.

1.8 Judith Paget highlighted issues around communicating with external

stakeholders and delivery partners the financial challenges and the steps needed to recover the position.

1.9 David Richards reminded the Board of the responsibilities the Permanent Secretary and Directors General have as Principal Accounting Officer and Additional Accounting Officers respectively for the management of the Welsh Government's budget.

1.10 Tim Moss highlighted the knock-on impact the current financial pressures will have on how the organisation operates in the future.

1.11 Gareth Lynn noted that at their recent meeting the First Minister requested that the Non-Executive Directors play a role in supporting officials in the work to address the financial pressures facing the organisation.

1.12 Aled Edwards queried whether Welsh Government would receive any additional funding from UK Government by way of Barnett consequential. Andrew Jeffreys replied that it could not be assumed that additional funding would be made available.

1.13 The Chair thanked all for their comments.

2. Policy Innovation

2.1 The Chair welcomed Simon Bridle and Andrew Charles to the meeting and invited them to provide an overview of innovation in the policy making process in Welsh Government, developing innovative policies and strengthening innovation in the policy making function across the organisation. The Chair noted that this item is in response to a request from the Non-Executive Directors who suggested that this is an area they were interested in discussing at Board.

2.2 The Chair invited comments from the Board.

2.3 Carys Williams queried how the organisation can foster a creative culture, encourage innovation, and support staff when projects do not deliver as expected.

2.4 Aled Edwards highlighted the importance of working in partnership with the third sector and community groups to develop and deliver innovative solutions and noted the challenge in quantifying the value and benefits of initiatives such as the Wales Asylum and Refugee Doctors scheme.

2.5 David Richard echoed Aled's comments on the importance of co-creation with partners and commented that Welsh Government is often criticised for being risk adverse, but also criticised at the same time for taking risks.

2.6 Gareth Lynn suggested that innovation will be of even greater importance given the financial constraints facing Welsh Government. Reflecting on the presentation and the description of the policy cycle, Gareth queried whether there could be a greater role for the business community in supporting innovative policy development.

2.7 Meena Upadhyaya asked what incentives are in place to encourage staff to take a more innovative approach and what barriers exist to inhibit innovation.

2.8 Judith Paget reflected on opportunities within the Health and Social Services portfolio to bring together academics and industry leads to look for innovative solutions. Judith noted the importance that engendering a 'safe to fail' environment has on innovation.

2.9 The Chair invited Zakhyia Begum to comment on behalf of the Shadow Board. Zakhyia noted that discussions at Shadow Board had mirrored the points raised by Board members.

2.10 The Chair invited Andrew Charles and Simon Bridle to respond to the points raised.

2.11 Andrew Charles commented that the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act presents policy makers with the opportunity to think differently and noted the role that evaluation plays in policy making.

2.12 Simon highlighted the importance of having an underpinning evidence base to inform policy making and building in evaluation from the outset. Simon agreed with comments made by board members on the benefits of engaging with the third sector. On the issue of innovation and risk appetite, Simon queried whether the focus should be on individual projects or on overall programmes of work and suggested ending those elements that are not delivering the requisite outcomes.

2.13 The Chair thanked all for their comments and noted that the Policy Capability Strategy would be launched shortly.

3. Welsh Government Performance Framework 2022-23

3.1 The Chair welcomed Sharon Cross and Helen McFarlane to the meeting and invited them to present on the latest Welsh Government Performance Framework report. The framework is one of the main approaches used for monitoring the performance of the Welsh Government Civil Service and the aim of the Framework is to drive improvements in the organisational effectiveness of the Welsh Government Civil Service by focusing on operational performance and the responsibilities of the Permanent Secretary in respect to the running of the organisation. The Framework does not report on Ministerial performance or the Programme for Government. The Framework consists of 23 themes that are divided into two groups: Functions ('what we do') and Attributes ('how we do it').

3.2 Turning first to the Attributes report, the Chair invited board members to comment on the presentation.

3.3 Reflecting on the points raised around Creativity and the positive feedback from staff, Carys noted that this is a key value and suggested that this as an area to focus and build upon.

3.4 Meena asked how Welsh Government intends to reach its targets for diversity in recruitment. Tim responded that planning is underway to promote opportunities to sections of the community groups that have not to date applied for Welsh Government jobs or for wider public appointments. Peter added that Cais, the new recruitment system, is now live and allows for name-blind recruitment. The HR team has also commissioned external experts to review the organisations policies and procedures from an anti-racist perspective.

3.5 Gareth queried why plans to communicate about the Performance Framework to staff were paused. Sharon replied that there were several factors, including the pandemic.

3.6 Turning to the Functions report, the Chair invited board members to comment on the points raised in the presentation.

3.7 On Digital and Data and Technology, Carys commented that the focus appears to be on IT performance and not on digital or data technology and queried whether the correct factors were being measured.

3.8 Reflecting on this being the third cycle of reporting, Gareth asked whether the exercise is giving the organisation the information it needs to assess its performance and suggested that now might be an appropriate time to review and refine the process. Sharon welcomed the suggestion and agreed that the framework is currently based on management information and staff perceptions and added that investment would be needed to include external feedback. The Chair queried whether it might be possible to include a pulse survey of targeted senior stakeholders.

3.9 On Legislation, Aled noted that the indicators focus on volume and not on quality. Helen Lentle agreed that the headline figures do not reflect quality, nor accurately reflect the workload that underpins Welsh Government's legislative programme and the work to respond to UK Government legislation. Helen suggested that the scrutiny by the Senedd is an indicator of the quality of the legislative programme.

3.10 On workforce resourcing, Meena Upadhyaya noted the impact that concerns about financial pressures could have on staff and staff morale. Zakhya Begum added that Shadow Board had raised similar concerns.

3.11 The Chair thanked all for their comments and asked the Corporate Research team to reflect on the points raised by Board.

4. Feedback on discussions with the First Minister

4.1 The Chair invited the Non-Executive Directors to provide feedback on their recent meeting with the First Minister.

4.2 Gareth summarised discussions and highlighted areas the First Minister would like the Non-Executive Directors to pay particular attention to. These are: improving diversity on the boards of Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies, achieving the Welsh Government's Welsh language targets, improving the legislative process in Wales and, supporting the Welsh Government in addressing in-year budget pressures and budget planning for future years.

4.3 Carys noted that the First Minister had also queried whether the Non-Executive Directors and the role they play should have more visibility amongst ministers. Carys challenged this suggestion and asserted that greater awareness by ministers is not necessary.

4.4 Des Clifford added that the First Minister had found the meeting positive and had noted the alignment between the issues considered at Board and those being discussed by the cabinet.

4.5 The Chair thanked all for their comments and suggested giving further thought to how best to improve understanding of the Board's role across the organisation.

5. AOB

5.1 No items of any other business were raised. The Chair thanked Board members and closed the meeting. Board will next meet on 01 September.

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