



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

Welsh Government Board meeting: 08 December 2023

Minutes from the Board meeting held on 08 December 2023.

First published: 30 January 2024

Last updated: 30 January 2024

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Contents

Agenda

Present

Welcome

Diversity and Inclusion update

Period 7 Finance update

The 2024-25 Budget

AOB

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Agenda

1. Welcome / Current issues

Oral

See minutes.

2. Diversity and Inclusion update

[Paper Item 2]

3. Period 7 Finance update

[Papers Item 3]

4. The 2024-25 budget

[No papers, verbal update]

5. AOB

Present

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Carys Williams

- Gareth Lynn
- Aled Edwards
- Tim Moss
- Judith Paget
- Tracey Burke
- Andrew Slade
- Jo-Anne Daniels
- Helen Lentle
- Gawain Evans
- David Richards
- Zakhia Begum
- Amelia John

In attendance

- Polina Cowley
- Nina Durant

Secretariat

- Alison Rees

Apologies

- Des Clifford
- Reg Kilpatrick
- Meena Upadhyaya

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1. Welcome/ Current Issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The Chair noted that this was Jo-Anne Daniels and Reg Kilpatrick's last Board meeting as their roles as interim Directors General were coming to an end shortly. Sioned Evans will start in the post of Director General Public Services and Welsh Language in January 2024. The Chair thanked Jo-Anne and Reg for their contributions to the Board.

1.2 The Chair noted this was Helen Lentle's last Board meeting as she will leave Welsh Government in December. The recruitment exercise to appoint a new Director of Legal Services is underway.

1.3 The Chair noted that this was also Zakhyia Begum and Polina Cowley's last Board meeting as Co-Chairs of the Shadow Board as their two years on the Shadow Board, along with that of many other Shadow Board members, was coming to an end. A new Shadow Board will be in place from January 2024 and the new Co-Chairs will attend Board. The Chair thanked Zakhyia and Polina, and the Shadow Board for their contributions to the Board over the last two years.

1.4 The Chair welcomed Dominic Houlihan to his first Board meeting since taking up the role of Director of People and Places.

1.5 The Chair welcomed Jessica Ward to the Board, Jessica joins the Board as the Board Future Generations Champion. Jessica will serve on the Board for 6 months before passing on the role to one of the other two successful applicants for the role; each will serve on the Board for 6 months. giving advice on the principles of the working with the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

1.6 The minutes of 20 October were approved.

1.7 The Chair updated Board on the plans to recruit two new Non-Executive Directors and thanked Carys Williams, Gareth Lynn and Zakhyia Begum for their efforts in the interview process.

2. Diversity and Inclusion update

2.1 The Chair welcomed Sally-Ann Efstathiou and Nina Durant to the meeting and invited Amelia John, Board Equality Champion to provide an update on the organisation's equality, diversity, and inclusion commitments over the March to December 2023 period.

2.2 Amelia noted that while recruitment data for 2022 indicates that some progress has been made, the organisation is still a long way from achieving the ambitious targets it has set itself. Acknowledging the challenging financial context the organisation is in, Amelia provided an overview of the actions currently being undertaken to drive a significant shift in recruitment trends, as well as proposals for more radical action to catalyse the systemic and cultural changes needed.

2.3 Aled Edwards noted the importance of celebrating diversity and inclusivity, and protecting staff from the corrosive nature of some of the media dialogue around migration. Aled also noted that the Welsh language is at the heart of and not peripheral to equality issues.

2.4 Carys queried whether there are options to be more creative in the recruitment process, for example using alternatives to competency-based interviews. Amelia agreed and Sally-Ann noted that the organisation has now moved to using success profiles and is looking at other ways to enhance the recruitment process.

2.5 Gareth Lynn noted the very ambitious targets that the organisation has set

itself and the challenge in meeting them and cautioned that a drive to meet targets could have an adverse impact on behaviours. Gareth queried the sufficiency of demographic data for Wales to inform target setting.

2.6 Dom Houlihan welcomed the steps taken to improve equality in the workplace and highlighted the importance of ensuring that the basics were right in terms of recruitment. Reflecting on the Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Dom queried whether the volume of actions might lead to a lack of focus and competition between initiatives.

2.7 Tim Moss highlighted work to review Welsh Government's approach to recruitment for Public Appointments. Tim suggested that the way in which Welsh Government and other public bodies present themselves can have impact on how potential candidates perceive them as places to work and influence decisions on whether to apply for posts.

2.8 Zakhyia Begum referred the Board to the detailed comments included in the Shadow Board minutes. Zakyia added that the move to hybrid working may present additional challenges for new starters and make it difficult to make people feel a valued part of the organisation.

2.9 Tracey Burked noted that some concerns have been raised regarding the current Reverse Mentoring scheme and queried how the scheme could be improved.

2.10 Jessica Ward queried whether outreach work included going into to schools and targeting young people to raise awareness of opportunities within Welsh Government.

2.11 The Chair invited Amelia, Sally-Ann, and Nina to respond to the comments made. Amelia noted that the targets are deliberately ambitious and are aiming to address historic underrepresentation. On developing new approaches to recruitment, Amelia noted that a risk-based approach is being adopted and that

legal advice has been sought. On the commitments within the EDI strategy, Amelia agreed that there needs to be more focus on the on the key levers that will bring about change. On Public Appointments, Amelia noted work underway to ensure that EDI is at the heart of all campaigns. On the current Reverse Mentoring programme, Sally-Anne noted that the HR team would reflect on the feedback and amend the guidance as necessary. On outreach, Nina commented that there is engagement with schools and that this is an area that the HR team would like to expand upon. Nina noted the impact of outreach work on the diversity of candidates applying for the welsh Government apprenticeship programme.

2.12 The Chair thanked all for their comments noting that Welsh Government has a responsibility to be an exemplar in Wales. On the Welsh Language, the Chair highlighted the complimentary nature of this alongside the organisation's EDI aspirations.

3. Period 7 Finance update

3.1 The Chair invited Gawain Evans to update Board on the in-year position as at 31 October. Gawain noted the slight improvement in the in-year position but highlighted the ongoing risks.

3.2 Aled Edwards queried why the full amount of the capital to revenue swap requested by Welsh Government has not been approved by HM Treasury. Gawain responded that the approach taken is in line with other requests from government departments.

3.3 Gareth Lynn noted the efforts to achieve the current in-year position and asked what the likely outcome would be if Welsh Government breached its budget. Gawain replied that while it is unlikely that Welsh Government will breach its overall budget, from a HM Treasury perspective the Welsh

Government budget is managed by individual DELs and if there was a DEL breach there would be an equivalent reduction to the following year's budget.

3.4 Judith Paget noted the huge amount of cross-government work, particularly amongst finance teams, undertaken to achieve the current in-year position. Officials from the Health and Social Service Group continue to work with the NHS in Wales to look for ways to reduce the deficit further.

3.5 Carys Williams highlighted the importance of recognising the work officials have put in and the positive impact of working collaboratively. Aled agreed and noted impact on officials liaising with partners and stakeholders during challenging times.

3.6 The Chair thanked all for their comments, noting the efforts across the organisation and the difficult decisions that ministers have had to make on the in-year budget.

4. The 2024-25 Budget

4.1 The Chair invited Andrew Jeffreys to provide an update on the 2024-25 draft budget. Looking ahead to 2025/26 and the timing of the next UK Government general election, Andrew commented that the in-coming government may set a budget for 2025-26 and then undertake a spending review.

4.2 Gareth Lynn asked what options are available to Welsh Government to raise revenue and the lead in time needed. Andrew replied that if, for example, a decision was made to increase the rate of income tax in Wales that could be implemented reasonably swiftly.

4.3 On behalf of the Shadow Board, Zakhiya Begum noted the differential impact cuts to public spending and services have and highlighted the impact on the

most vulnerable in Wales. Amelia John agreed, noting the cumulative impact that cuts will have on the most disadvantaged and suggesting taking a longer term and preventative approach to decisions on public spending. Jessica Ward agreed, noting how the Well Being of Future Generations Act could encourage creativity and help strike a balance between the savings needed and protecting the most vulnerable.

4.4 Carys asked the Chair how the Non-Executive Directors can support Welsh Government as work on the budget continues. The Chair noted the reduced budget available for running Welsh Government and suggested that this is an area where advice and support from the Non-Executive Directors would be invaluable.

4.5 Gareth, as Chair of the Welsh Government Audit and Risk Committee (ARAC), advised that he is considering how the committee can best provide scrutiny and assurance on budget planning.

4.6 The Chair thanked all for their input and brought the agenda item to a close.

5. AOB

5.1 No items of any other business were raised, the Board will next meet on 26 January.

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