



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Welsh Government Board meeting: 7 June 2024

Agenda and papers from the Board meeting held on 7 June 2024.

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# Present

- Catrin Sully, Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Carys Williams, Head of Corporate Governance Centre of Excellence
- Mutale Merrill, Head of Corporate Research and Analysis
- Aled Edwards, Principle Research Officer for Corporate Research and Analysis
- Mike Usher
- Tim Moss
- Sioned Evans
- Tracey Burke
- Andrew Slade
- Dom Houlihan
- Nia James
- Dean Medcraft
- Amelia John, Secretariat
- Judith Paget, Permanent Secretary's Office
- David Richards, Director – Governance and Ethics
- Chair of the Shadow Board

## Apologies

- Wellbeing of Future Generations Board Champion

## 1. Welcome/current issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The draft notes of 10 May were agreed subject to minor corrections.

1.2 The Chair noted the confidence vote in the Senedd on 05 June.

1.3 The Chair noted the announcement of the UK Parliamentary Election on 04 July, officials have been provided with guidance on the pre-election period.

1.4 The Chair noted that a Civil Service Live event is taking place at the International Convention Centre in Newport on 25 June but as it falls within the pre-election period there have been some changes to the agenda and there will be no political involvement. The Chair noted Shadow Board's concerns surrounding the exclusion of Staff Network events from Civil Service Live this year as the UK Civil Service had made the decision to reject all sessions run by Staff Networks and we would no longer be included in the event. Amelia John noted the contribution Staff Networks make to Welsh Government, offering time and expertise to feed into policy making where needed. The Chair agreed to raise the issue with UK Civil Service colleagues.

1.5 The Chair noted the New Year Honours 2025 meeting held on 06 June and thanked Non-Executive Directors for their attendance. The Chair suggested holding awareness raising sessions across Wales to encourage nominations for honours in recognition of the excellent contribution to the national life by people in Wales.

1.6 The Chair noted that ExCo at its meeting on 06 June considered the findings of the full-year evaluation of the Hybrid Working Pilot with ExCo and consider its implications for the ReSpace Workstream of WG2025 and the organisation's future workplace strategy, including short and medium-term opportunities. A discussion on the future workplace strategy will come to a future Board meeting.

1.7 The Chair welcomed Catrin Sully to the Board and invited her to update the Board on the Cabinet exercise to identify a small set of whole government priorities for the period to March 2026. Cabinet have considered the continuation of the moratorium on documents making commitments, developing a small set of 'whole government' top priorities, and identifying areas that Cabinet could

consider stopping. The Welsh Government Annual Report will be published in July.

1.8 The Chair invited Board members to comment. Tim Moss queried whether there is clarity on what the blockers to delivery are and the collective ask of the civil service.

1.9 Commenting on the moratorium on documents making commitments, Tracey Burke observed that these are often a way of galvanising action and play an important role in highly regulated areas, especially where there are areas of shared regulation.

## 2. Risk management

2.1 The Chair welcomed Andy Fraser and the Head of the Corporate Governance Centre of Excellence to the meeting. The item on risk management included the Wales Resilience Outlook, a discussion on refreshing Welsh Government's risk appetite statement and a review of the Corporate Risk Register.

2.2 Wales Resilience Outlook - the Chair invited Andy to provide an overview of the most significant civil contingencies risks facing Wales that are most likely to materialise in the near-term.

2.3 Carys Williams asked how ministers use the information to inform their decision-making process and how the public can engage with the information. Andy responded that the Wales Resilience Outlook drives discussions at the Risk and Preparedness Committee and that the First Minister and ministers receive regular updates from the committee. Andy noted that the Wales Resilience Outlook is a classified document produced for government and emergency responders responsible for preparing for and mitigating the impact of

risks and not for the public. Andy added that the intention is to produce a summary for the public.

2.4 Mutale Merrill highlighted the importance of engaging with the public. Andy agreed and noted that UK government has launched a new website aimed at supporting the public prepare. Welsh Government is looking to engage all communities across Wales so it can develop a tailored approach to engagement.

2.5 Tim Moss asked about engagement with partner organisations. Andy responded that the Wales Resilience Outlook is shared with all Category 1 and 2 responders.

2.6 Aled Edwards highlighted the key role that the third sector plays in supporting the response to a crisis and the impact that deprivation can have on a community's resilience. Aled queried whether Welsh Government has mapped the third sector's capacity to support a strategic response in a crisis situation. Andy agreed that this is an important point and noted that currently there is not a full picture of the third sector's capacity.

2.7 The Chair of the Shadow Board reflected on the size of the National Security and Resilience Division and the frequency with which the team is required to respond to issues, the Shadow Board expressed their concern for the team's resilience.

2.8 Reflecting on the themes covered in the briefing, Mike Usher noted the impact on supply chains and the importance of contingency measures to reduce the immediate impact.

2.9 Amelia John suggested inviting trusted third sector partners to challenge Welsh Government's resilience plans and offered to help broker arrangements. Andy welcomed the suggestion.

2.10 The Chair invited Andy to make any final comments. Andy noted that while the UK Government and the devolved administrations do share information and have a common approach to identifying risk and building capability, there is always that could be done.

2.11 Risk Appetite – Tim Moss noted that the Welsh Government Risk Appetite statement is being refreshed and the Board to offer their views on whether the organisation's current risk appetite still appropriate and proportionate and for initial thoughts on where the appetite should be for certain categories of risk.

2.12 Carys Williams suggested being more open in terms of risk appetite and embedding the approach throughout the organisation.

2.13 Sioned Evan welcomed the thematic rather than single organisation-wide approach and suggested that a higher risk appetite underpinned by effective governance structures could encourage and enable innovation. Tracey Burke agreed adding that the organisation needs to be able to take well managed and defensible risks. David Richards echoed these comments and noted that while there may not be an internal blame culture, the political and media context in which the Welsh Government operates which can lead to an external one.

2.14 Mike Usher suggested taking a different approach and proposed beginning with an open appetite for risk, reviewing it regularly and only adjusting where and when necessary.

2.15 Mutale Merrill observed that all Welsh Government staff are risk holders and advocated better enabling staff to identify and manage risk.

2.16 Dom Houlihan suggested including a theme around workforce and culture and highlighted the importance of supporting staff to feel empowered to make decisions.

2.17 Aled Edwards queried whether the auditing community is fully aware of the

challenging circumstances in which the public sector and partner organisations are required to operate and deliver at speed.

2.18 Dean Medcraft supported the proposed thematic approach and suggested more needs to be done to make staff aware of the organisation's appetite for risk. The Chair of the Shadow Board agreed and advocated moving towards a learning and development culture where staff feel supported to innovate.

2.19 Nia James agreed that having effective governance arrangements in place is key to managing risk. Nia noted that from a legal perspective the appetite for risk may start from a risk adverse perspective but can alter as more is known about the nature and context of the risk.

2.20 The Chair thanked all for their comments, work on revising the Risk Appetite Statement will continue over the summer with further discussion at Board in September.

2.21 The Corporate Risk Register – The Board reviewed the latest iteration of the Corporate Risk Register. Mike Usher noted the target score for the climate change risk (Risk 6.1) and queried whether this is achievable. A risk owner Tracey Burke suggested holding a deep dive at ExCo on the risk.

2.22 The Chair of the Shadow Board welcomed plans to separate out risks and issues.

### **3. Reporting on the 2023-2024 cycle of the Welsh Government Performance Framework**

3.1 The Chair invited Tim Moss and colleagues from Knowledge and Analytical Services to provide the Board with an overview of the fourth cycle of reporting of the Welsh Government Performance Framework covering organisation's



performance for 2023-2024. Tim also noted work underway to develop a new Balanced Score Card.

3.2 The Chair of the Shadow Board noted that the Shadow Board had expressed concern over the decrease in partnership working reported and suggested making tools and guidance available to support collaboration co-production. Shadow Board queried how recognition of learning and development and formal qualifications could be incorporated into the recruitment process and considered the benefits of establishing a centrally held voluntary skills matrix with a view to matching skills to roles where appropriate.

3.3 Dom Houlihan noted that Welsh Government performance score for learning and development align with the average for the Civil Service as a whole. Regarding performance management, Dom noted that work is needed to understand how to best support line managers have high quality conversations with their teams.

3.4 Mike Usher commented that the report suggests that improvements are needed in governance and project management skills. Tim Moss noted that these issues had been highlighted in recent reports by internal audit. Sioned Evans added that programme management and delivery skills are core skills that all staff should have and should be key to progression. Dean Medcraft agreed with these comments.

3.5 Mutale Merrill queried whether the measures in the performance framework are at an appropriate level to give assurance to the Board and suggested including a narrative to explain over and under performance.

3.6 Carys Williams stressed the importance of using the balanced score card to drive progress across the organisation and suggested identifying several key areas to focus efforts on to make tangible improvements.

3.7 Aled Edwards noted that issues around disability had featured in several

recent papers and queried whether this is an area that needs exploring further. Dom Houlihan suggested that the People and Remuneration subcommittee of the Board undertake a deep dive on the topic.

3.8 The Chair thanked all for their comments and noted that the Executive Committee has indicated that the new Balanced Score Card is the approach it wishes to follow. The Chair suggested that the Non-Executive Directors meet with Tim Moss and colleagues to discuss further.

## 4. WG 2025 update: ReSize

4.1 The Chair invited Dom Houlihan to update Board on the first phase of resizing the organisation. Dom provided an overview of the outcomes of the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) but noted that the outlook for 2025/26 remains challenging.

4.2 The Chair of the Shadow Board noted the importance of understanding why colleagues had chosen to apply for VES.

## 5. Any other business

5.1 No items of any other business were raised.

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