




Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

 Unpublished

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

Cabinet meeting: 8 January 2024

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 8 January 2024.

First published: 23 February 2024

Last updated: 23 February 2024

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS (Chair)
 - Rebecca Evans MS
 - Vaughan Gething MS
 - Lesley Griffiths MS
 - Jane Hutt MS
 - Julie James MS
 - Jeremy Miles MS
 - Eluned Morgan MS
 - Mick Antoniw MS
-
- Hannah Blythyn MS
 - Dawn Bowden MS
 - Julie Morgan MS
 - Lee Waters MS

Apologies

- Lynne Neagle MS

Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director Office of the First Minister

- Matthew Hall, Head of Cabinet Division
- Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Daniel Butler, Special Adviser
- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Sara Faye, Special Adviser
- Sam Hadley, Special Adviser
- David Hooson, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Owen John, Special Adviser
- Phillipa Marsden, Special Adviser
- Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat
- Catrin Sully, Cabinet Office
- Kathryn Hallett, First Minister's Office
- Helena Bird, Permanent Secretary's Office
- Nia James, Director Legal Services
- Tracey Burke, Director General Climate Change & Rural Affairs
- Sioned Evans, Director General Public Services and Welsh Language
- Tim Moss, Chief Operating Officer
- Judtih Paget, Director General Health and Social Services
- Andrew Slade, Director General, Economy, Treasury and Constitution

Item 1: Minutes of the previous meeting

1. Cymeradwydd y Cabinet gofnodion y 11 Rhagfyr / Cabinet approved the minutes of 11 December.

Item 2: First Minister's items

The Spring Term

2.1 The First Minister informed Cabinet that it would be a busy spring term.

2.2 The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales would be publishing its final report on 18th January and the Government would then need to carefully consider its findings. In addition, Gordon Brown would be delivering the latest in the series of Welsh Government constitutional lectures in London on 7th March.

2.3 Furthermore, Natural Resources Wales would be publishing its Long-Term Investment Requirements report on 11th January and the new Child Poverty Strategy would be launched on 23rd January.

2.4 A number of significant consultations would also be closing this term, such as Fairer Council Tax, phase 2 on 6th February and the Structure of the School Year on 12th February.

2.5 In addition, the COVID-19 Inquiry would be holding evidence sessions in Cardiff from 27 February to 14 March.

Item 3: Senedd business

3.1 Cabinet noted that there were no debates scheduled for Tuesday and voting time would be around 6.25pm on Wednesday.

Item 4: Oral Updates following events over the Christmas recess

4.1 The First Minister invited Ministers to provide feedback on certain issues that occurred over the Christmas recess.

NHS Performance over the Christmas period

4.2 The Minister for Health and Social Services provided Cabinet with an update on NHS performance over the Christmas period. The minister had made some unannounced visits to hospitals during this time, which had been well received by staff.

Recent storms and flooding

4.3 The Minister for Climate Change informed Cabinet that the Christmas and new year period saw the latest named storms to affect Wales and the wider UK. Storm Gerrit over 27th and 28th December, followed by Storm Henk in early January.

4.4 In response to Storm Gerrit, the Met Office had issued Yellow warnings for both heavy rain and strong winds over much of Wales, this was followed by further Yellow warnings for strong winds and heavy rain on 30th December. Meanwhile Storm Henk similarly affected large parts of Wales, particularly south and mid Wales, with heavy rainfall over already saturated ground.

4.5 Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) forecasting and warning services for main rivers and the sea were also active throughout the festive period. During Storm Henk NRW issued 1 severe flood warning for the River Ritec at Kiln Park Tenby, which had led to the evacuation of the caravan park, and a total of 30 flood warnings and 40 flood alerts across Wales.

4.6 There had been specific cases of flooding, such as the Tafarn y Deri pub in Llanedi, Lizzie's Barn Sanctuary in Kidwelly and a number of properties at Llansteffan, where the usual flood defences had held but a small river behind the village overflowed.

4.7 Current indications from local authorities suggested that 37 properties in total had been flooded internally, 23 predominantly in Ferryside and Llansteffan along with 1 business property, 4 in Caerphilly, 3 in Pembrokeshire, two each in

Monmouthshire and Torfaen, and 1 each in Powys and Rhondda Cynon Taf. However, the full detail of impacts on communities in Wales was still emerging and officials were in contact with local authorities across Wales about the impact of both storms.

4.8 Even though several rivers reached flood warning levels and many watercourses were out of bank, NRW indicated that its network of flood defences prevented flooding in many areas, with 73,000 properties benefiting from these defences. NRW also reported that the upstream storage reservoirs at Pontarddulais and Cowbridge had stored significant quantities of water preventing flooding downstream. In addition, the flood gates at Abergwili were deployed and flood defences at Newtown and Meifod prevented flooding.

4.9 This financial year the government had allocated over £75 million in Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales, the highest ever annual spend on flood risk management in Wales to date.

4.10 It was recognised that, given the greater frequency of storms, more would need to be done to encourage residents to monitor local weather conditions and use rainwater gauges provided by NRW.

4.11 The minister indicated that she would be issuing a Written Statement the following day on the impact of these storms and to demonstrate how the Government's investment had protected properties in Wales.

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

4.12 The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership provided Cabinet with an update on the recently published culture and values review into the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS).

4.13 The SWFRS had commissioned Fenella Morris KC to undertake an independent review of its culture and values following cases of staff misconduct exposed by ITV in December 2022. There had been a case of gross and prolonged sexual harassment by a firefighter towards a colleague at a fire station in Cardiff, and a case of a firefighter convicted of domestic violence. In both cases, the response of management had been wholly inadequate, neither firefighter was dismissed or even suspended at the time. This compounded the suffering that their victims had experienced. It also suggested serious problems with the Service's corporate culture and values.

4.14 Ms Morris's report, published the previous week, found evidence of unacceptable discriminatory attitudes and behaviours at all levels of management, up to and including senior level. Specific instances identified in the report included misogynistic remarks excused as "banter", sexualised online images of staff in uniform, homophobic Christmas decorations and racist abuse.

4.15 In addition, the report found serious underlying problems. A "boys' club" existed within the Service, especially within senior management, there was widespread staff discontent and demotivation, and a belief that nothing would ever change, while promotion arrangements were widely believed to be subject to bias and favouritism. In addition, disciplinary procedures too often led to

inadequate sanctions or no sanctions at all. Key HR policies were out of date, inadequate or concerned more with protecting the reputation of the Service than the rights of individuals. Furthermore, the firefighting workforce remained overwhelmingly male and white, with little effective progress in addressing that.

4.16 There had been a breakdown of the normal processes of management control, which might explain why misconduct had become so commonplace, with serious and widespread demotivation.

4.17 Even though Ms Morris had not been asked to consider service performance, demotivation and mismanagement of staff combined with tolerance of bad practice could have obvious implications for delivery. There were already concerns about a sometimes complacent and defensive attitude by SWFRS, particularly when confronted with external challenge. This had included all but total disregard of recommendations from the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor about important operational matters, such as minimising the risk of fatigue and providing firefighters with sufficient training.

4.18 The deputy minister had not ruled out using powers of direction and intervention, and the question would be how and to what extent the Government would become involved. The deputy minister would be making a statement to the Senedd the following day.

4.19 Cabinet agreed that it was important for the government to carefully consider the recommendations from the report and help create a healthy working culture at the SWFRA.

Cabinet Secretariat

January 2024

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