



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Welsh Government Board meeting: 26 January 2024

Agenda and minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 January 2024.

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# Agenda

## 1. Welcome / Current issues

Oral

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## 2. Artificial Intelligence in the Welsh Government

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## 3. People Survey 2023

## 4. Budget planning and WG2025 update

## 5. Finance update

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## Present

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Carys Williams
- Gareth Lynn

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- Aled Edwards
- Meena Upadhyaya
- Tim Moss
- Sioned Rees
- Tracey Burke
- Andrew Slade
- Judith Paget
- David Richards
- Amelia John
- Gawain Evans
- Nia James
- Dom Houlihan
- Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams

## **In attendance**

- Mike Usher
- Lou Bushell-Bauers
- Angharad Reakes
- Natalie Pearson

## **Secretariat**

- Alison Rees

## **Apologies**

- Des Clifford
- Jessica Ward

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# 1. Welcome/Current Issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The Chair welcomed Sioned Evans Director General Public Services and Welsh Language and Nia James Interim Director of Legal Services to their first Board meeting since taking up their new posts.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams and Lou Bushel-Bauers, as the new Co-Chairs of the Shadow Board, to their first Board meeting.

1.3 The Chair noted that today's Board meeting is Professor Meena Upadhyaya's last before she steps down from her role as Non-Executive Director. The Chair thanked Meena for all her support and assistance to the Board.

1.4 The Chair noted that following the recent recruitment campaign Mike Usher and Mutale Merrill have been appointed as Non-Executive Directors and will join the Board shortly. Mike Usher was observing today's meeting ahead of taking up his post.

1.5 The Chair noted the publication of the final report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales.

1.6 The Chair invited Andrew Slade to provide an update on the plans by Tata Steel to close the two blast furnaces at its Port Talbot site. Andrew noted the ripple effect Tata's decision will have throughout local communities.

1.7 The Chair invited Judith Paget to provide an update on the NHS in Wales. Judith noted the pressures the NHS had faced over winter 2023. The industrial action by junior doctors has been hugely disruptive with significant planned care activity cancelled. Junior doctors are likely to take further action in February with further strikes.

1.8 The Chair noted the work of teams across the Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group in preparing for and responding to the winter storms.

## 2. Artificial Intelligence in the Welsh Government

2.1 The Chair welcomed Glyn Jones, Chief Digital Officer to the meeting and invited him to discuss the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and technologies and the potential benefits and risks associated with AI, and how the Welsh Government is approaching AI operationally, financially, and culturally.

2.2 Glyn noted that several teams across Welsh Government have piloted the use of Microsoft copilot and report seeing productivity benefits. Glyn noted the potential of AI to improve services but highlighted the cost associated with buying licences to access the technology.

2.3 The Chair invited Board members to comment on the issues raised.

2.4 Meena Upadhyaya queried whether expanding the use of AI would require Welsh Government to collect additional data, and how best to ensure that the regulatory mechanisms are sufficiently robust to ensure that equality is not compromised. Meena also asked how Wales compared with the other devolved administrations in terms of use of AI. Glyn responded that additional data collection is not required but that Welsh Government needs to make better use of the assets it currently holds, this is being taken forward as part of a wider programme to improve corporate services. Regarding equality, Welsh Government has agreed to the Algorithmic Transparency Framework. In terms of comparison with other devolved administrations, Scotland is ahead having been a member of the AI Alliance for several years and has ten doctoral training centres.

2.5 Gareth Lynn noted the benefits and challenges AI poses and queried if checks are in place to ensure the technology is being used appropriately across the organisation. Glyn advised that staff using Microsoft copilot as part of the pilot have been provided with a great deal of advice and guidance and that expectations on staff training will be included in the Corporate Data Ethics Framework.

2.6 Tim Moss noted the links between the expansion in the use of AI and Welsh Government's digital transformation agenda and highlighted the importance of ensuring that the data and data structures underpinning the technology is appropriate.

2.7 David Richards noted the benefits emerging technology could bring to the way Welsh Government works and suggested that there needs to be a strategic, long-term plan for its use.

2.8 Carys Williams queried the Board's risk appetite regarding emerging technology and other issues and suggested a workshop at a future meeting to discuss in detail. Sioned Evans supported the proposal.

2.9 On behalf of the Shadow Board Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams highlighted the benefits tools such as Microsoft copilot offer in assisting staff with drafting documents and other tasks. Rhiannon added that many of those involved in the pilot are concerned about losing access to the programme at the end of the pilot.

2.10 Dom Houlihan highlighted the emerging thinking amongst HR professionals on how to respond to the challenges AI poses to the recruitment process.

2.11 The Chair thanked all for their comments and noted that ExCo would consider further as part of a wider conversation on digital transformation across the organisation.

## 3. People Survey 2023

3.1 The Chair welcomed Angharad Reakes to the meeting and invited her to present on the findings of the Welsh Government People Survey 2023; after the presentation the Chair invited Board members to comment.

3.2 Sioned Evans welcomed the presentation highlighting the need to align resources with ministerial priorities as a key area for improvement. Sioned welcomed the Directorate-level analysis and queried whether it might be possible to buddy-up high performing teams with lower scoring teams.

3.3 Carys Williams highlighted the importance of thanking staff for their time in completing the survey and suggested triangulating the results on visibility of leaders and other leadership questions to help identify and learn from best practice. Carys suggested instituting a scheme of 'Speak-Up' guardians to provide a safe space for staff who have concerns. The Chair welcomed the proposal and suggested this might be something Shadow Board could advise on setting up.

3.4 Meena Upadhyaya noted that lived experiences could make individuals from some backgrounds uncomfortable in speaking out. Tracey Burke agreed, adding that as well as feeling confident in the ability to speak up, staff need to feel confident that action will be taken.

3.5 On behalf of the Shadow Board, Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams highlighted the need for staff to have someone to talk to who is not in their immediate line management chain. Rhiannon noted that Shadow Board are aware of some staff who did not complete the survey as they were concerned about the anonymity of their responses, and suggested increasing staff communications on how responses are handled to reassure staff.

3.6 Andrew Slade suggested addressing the issues identified in the survey



through WG2025.

3.7 Dom Houlihan echoed the points raised and noted that the HR team is committed to working with the staff networks and others to address the issues raised.

3.8 Tim Moss noted the high scores recorded by the Inspectorate functions within Welsh Government and suggested that there are lessons to learn from these teams.

3.9 The Chair thanked all for their comments and closed the item.

## 4. Budget Planning and WG2025 update

4.1 The Chair invited Tim Moss to provide the Board with an update on the WG2025 programme followed by comments and questions by Board members.

4.2 David Richards opened discussions by asking what is most likely to go wrong in delivering the programme. Tim responded that achieving the necessary pace of change is a key challenge and reflected in the programme risk register.

4.3 Gareth Lynn highlighted three areas. First, the need for clarity with ministers over what can be achieved within the available resources. Secondly, an understanding of the level of investment in skills and training needed and thirdly, using WG2025 as a bridge to make connections with other public sector organisations to work together to address issues.

4.4 Looking ahead to the next Board meeting in March, Carys identified seven areas where she would like to see progress made with WG2025. First, having programme-level principles in place, such as delegated authority for key decisions, risk appetite and coherent high-level design and scope. Second, a timeline of work and iterative financial impact. Third, communications and

engagement in place, with common messaging. Fourth, governance, including PMO in place and key risks captured (including mitigants, acceptance or transference solution). Fifth, clarity of wellbeing offering for all. Sixth, colleague experience checks (what & when) in place and finally, opportunities identified.

4.5 Amelia John noted the impact a reduction in external recruitment will have on Welsh Government reaching its diversity ambitions.

4.6 On behalf of the Shadow Board Rhiannon noted the value in sharing information even when it paints a challenging picture, as it provides something for staff to plan towards. Shadow Board members are keen to support WG2025 and join the Implementation Board if it would prove helpful.

4.7 The Chair thanked all for their comments and closed the item.

## 5. Finance Update

5.1 The Chair invited Gawain Evans to update the Board on the Welsh Government's 2023-24 forecast outturn and reserves position as at 30 November 2023 (period 8). The report includes forecasts submitted by Welsh Government Heads of Finance for the period ending 30 November 2023 (period 8) set against the budgets published in the Welsh Government First Supplementary Budget 2023-24 which was published on 13 June 2023 as amended for adjustments approved since then. It also provides a summary of the overall DEL position including the reserves set in the First Supplementary Budget and the Wales Reserve balance.

5.2 The Chair recognised the extraordinary efforts by officials and Cabinet to look for savings to enable the organisation to break even in 2023-24. The Chair noted the frustration caused by receiving additional monies, although welcome, from UK Government so late in the financial year and after planned spending

has been stripped back. The additional funding will allow for a degree of flexibility in 2024-25.

5.3 Gareth Lynn registered his surprise at the lateness of the decisions by Uk Government.

5.4 Amelia John echoed the points made and noted the impact of budget cuts on the third sector.

5.5 Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams recommended reiterating to staff the appreciation for all the work that went into finding the savings during 2023-24.

## 6. Any Other Business

6.1 No items of any other business were raised, the Board will next meet on 08 March.

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