



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government Board Meeting: 08 March 2024

Agenda and minutes of the Board meeting held on 08 March 2024.

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Contents

Agenda

Present

Welcome

Programme for Government update

WG2025 Phase 2 update

Finance update

Any Other Business

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Agenda

1. Welcome / Current issues

Oral

See minutes.

2. Programme for Government update

[Papers item 2]

3. WG2025 Phase 2 update

[Papers item 3]

4. Finance update – Period 10

[Papers item 4]

5. AOB

Present

- Permanent Secretary (Chair)
- Carys Williams

- Gareth Lynn
- Aled Edwards
- Mike Usher
- Tim Moss
- Sioned Evans
- Tracey Burke
- Andrew Slade
- Dom Houlihan
- David Richards
- Amelia John
- Gawain Evans
- Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams
- Jessica Ward

In attendance

- Mutale Merrill
- Lou Bushell-Bauers
- Hawar Ameen

Secretariat

- Alison Rees

Apologies

- Judith Paget
- Nia James

1. Welcome/Current Issues

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies received. The minutes of 26 January were approved.

1.2 The Chair welcomed Mutale Merrill to the meeting, Mutale is observing the meeting ahead of taking up her role as Non-Executive Director on 01 April.

1.3 The Chair noted that today's Board meeting is Gareth Lynn's last before he steps down from his role as Non-Executive Director. The Chair thanked Gareth on behalf of the Board for all his support and assistance to the Board.

1.4 **Covid-19 Inquiry** - The Chair reflected on the Covid-19 Inquiry's Wales hearings conducted over the last three weeks and thanked Alyson Francis and Inquiry team for all the support they have offered to staff preparing to give evidence.

1.5 The Chair invited Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams to provide an overview of discussions at Shadow Board on the impact of the pandemic and the Covid-19 Inquiry on staff. Rhiannon noted the traumatising impact of the pandemic and the negative impacts on staff of reliving the experience through the inquiry and press coverage. Shadow Board suggested increasing communications about the range of support packages available to staff. Dom Houlihan noted the points made and stated that he would discuss with the Staff Engagement Team ways to allow the organisation to reflect on and discuss experiences of the pandemic.

1.6 **2024-2025 Budget** – The Chair noted that the budget 2024/25 has been approved by the Senedd and referenced the challenging decisions that have had to be taken in arriving at the budget.

1.7 **Preparations for the transition to the new First Minister** – the Chair advised Board that he has had productive and constructive conversations with

both leadership candidates and updated Board on the appointment of Rachel Garside Jones as Director First Minister Transition.

2. Programme for Government update

2.1 The Chair welcomed Catrin Sully to the meeting and invited her to provide an update on monitoring the Programme for Government. Catrin noted the significant impact of the budget pressures on the Programme for Government (PfG); the new First Minister will need to reset the PfG considering the challenging budget position.

2.2 Carys Williams noted several inconsistencies between the RAG rating and the text describing the status of commitments in the reporting grid and asked how the Board could support Carys and her team communicate the need for improved consistency to help support the First Minister monitor the delivery of the Programme for Government. Gareth Lynn echoed these comments.

2.3 Aled Edwards welcomed the updated and noted the progress made across the PfG. Aled observed that one of the candidates has set out plans to establish a Delivery Unit in their manifesto. The Chair responded that there would need to be further discussion on the form and function of such a unit.

2.4 Tracey Burke reassured the Board that her Senior Leadership Team continued to monitor the delivery of PfG commitments closely, even when engaged in difficult budget setting discussions. Tracey queried whether ministers require the level of detail provided by BIRT and suggested developing a more proportionate way of reporting to ministers. Sioned Evans echoed these points and added that although BIRT is a good reporting system it does not provide an overview of major projects to assist ministers review progress at a strategic level.

2.5 Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams welcomed the update and commented that the annex setting out progress had been very useful and suggested including a similar approach for those commitments where delivery targets are changing. Shadow Board also suggested that BIRT should be embedded in WG2025 to support planning.

2.6 The Chair invited Catrin to respond to the points raised. Catrin agreed that developing a more concise report for ministers would be beneficial and suggested that moving perhaps to quarterly reporting would help improve consistency. Catrin noted the challenge in setting out the critical path to delivery, particularly for those commitments where there are no numerical targets.

3. WG2025 Phase 2 update

3.1 The Chair invited Tim Moss and Dom Houlihan to update Board on Phase 2 of WG2025 which is focused on tackling the organisation's financial challenges. The Board were invited to comment on progress and on the risk appetite for the programme.

3.2 The Chair opened discussions by inviting Amelia John and Jessica Ward to offer their thoughts as Board Equality and Board Wellbeing of Future Generations champions. Amelia welcomed the way in which the WG2025 programme has engaged with staff networks and Trade Union representatives and highlighted the importance of assessing the equality impacts of the decisions being made by the programme. Jessica noted the importance of ongoing and early engagement with staff at every grade across the organisation as the programme moves forward and the need to ensure accessible language is used to encourage colleagues to feed into discussions.

3.3 Gareth Lynn welcomed the assurance provided in the paper and queried what steps would be taken if the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) did not deliver

the required savings.

3.4 Carys Williams noted the opportunity for change that WG2025 offers and emphasised the need to prioritise progress over perfection. Reflecting on the planned VES, Carys noted the potential impact on unsuccessful applicants.

3.5 Sioned Evans agreed that progress over perfection was preferable and highlighted the importance of communicating progress to staff to demonstrate the changes that WG2025 is making. On resourcing, Sioned noted the need to be able to move staff within the organisation quickly to priority areas.

3.6 Mike Usher suggested that the ReShape element of the WG2025 programme offers the greatest opportunities as well as the greatest challenges and noted that it would have been preferable to complete this element of WG2025 before the ReSize element. Mike added that Welsh Government should consider how it can work more effectively with its partner organisations to deliver for Wales.

3.7 The Chair invited Mutale Merrill to offer her thoughts on WG2025. Mutale noted the risks associated with losing experienced and skilled staff through VES and the need to retain the corporate memory.

3.8 On behalf of the Shadow Board Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams commented that there is an appetite for change in the organisation and emphasised the importance of engaging with staff and bringing them along with the programme. Shadow Board recommended developing a centrally held voluntary skills matrix to identify staff with particular skills sets in order to match skills to business needs and help create an agile workforce.

3.9 The Chair invited Tim and Dom to respond to the points raised. On staff engagement, Tim noted the monthly catch-up meetings with the Staff Networks and agreed with points raised about widening input and ensuring that accessible language in staff communications. On the ReSize programme and VES, Tim

recognised that it would have been preferable to undertake the ReShape exercise first but the financial challenges the organisation requires it to reduce its headcount as a priority. Tim noted and agreed with the points raised regarding the risk of losing skills from the organisation through VES and the need to work differently, both internally and with partner organisations. Dom added that it was unlikely that VES will be undersubscribed and so the risk of not delivering the necessary savings is minimal.

3.10 The Chair invited Board members to comment on the risk appetite for WG2025.

3.11 Andrew Slade opened the discussion by noting that not acting and making no changes to the shape and size of the organisation is not an option. Andrew cautioned against an overly bureaucratic approach to governance. Sioned Evans agreed and advocated being bold and stressed that the mitigating actions put in place are key to managing risk. Tracey Burke echoed these comments.

3.12 Aled Edwards agreed with the points made and stressed the importance of looking to build partnerships and engender a culture that looks to find solutions to the issues facing Wales.

3.13 Gareth Lynn queried ownership of the risk appetite - is it the risk appetite of the Welsh ministers or Welsh Civil service – and noted the approach to risk during the Covid-19 pandemic. Aled Edwards agreed and asked how the lessons learned and good practice from times when Welsh Government has taken high profile risks and delivered well are informing the WG2025 risk appetite.

3.14 The Chair invited Tim Moss to respond to the points raised. Tim observed that external scrutiny can create a risk adverse culture in the organisation and noted the comments made on the greater appetite for risk during the pandemic and suggested that this may have changed the organisation's risk appetite.

3.15 The Chair thanked Tim and Dom for their presentation and closed the item.

4. Finance update - Period 10

4.1 The Chair invited Gawain Evans to provide the Board with an update on the report on the Welsh Government's 2023-24 forecast outturn and reserves position as at 31 January 2024 (period 10). The Chair noted the difficult decisions that have been made on spending plans to achieve the current position.

4.2 On behalf of the Shadow Board Rhiannon Lloyd-Williams noted the reliance on underspends to meet deficits and reflected on what this says about budget planning within the organisation.

4.3 Tracey Burke highlighted the ongoing efforts of teams across the organisation to ensure that payments are processed by the end of the financial year.

4.4 Gareth Lynn recognised the challenges of working on one-year budget cycles and noted that the upcoming spending review will offer an opportunity focus on medium-term spending priorities.

4.5 Mutale Merrill asked how staff across Welsh Government and stakeholders are being made aware of the impact of the 2024/25 budget. Gawain responded that policy officials as well as finance staff have been involved in work on developing the budget and that Sponsorship Leads have discussed the position with their respective Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). Tim Moss added that he too had been in discussions with ALBs and other partner organisations on how best to work together in the face of a challenging budget situation to deliver together for Wales.

5. Any Other Business

5.1 No items of any other business were raised, the Board will next meet on 10 May.

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