



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group meeting: 30 April 2024

Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group meeting held on
30 April 2024.

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Attendees

Fran Targett, Chair
Amanda Main, Caerphilly CBC
Anna Friend, Flintshire County Council
Claire Germain, Welsh Government
Joanna Goodwin, Centre for Digital Public Services
Karen McFarlane, Children in Wales
Katie Till, The Trussell Trust
Lindsey Phillips, Welsh Local Government Association
Lisa Hayward, Welsh Local Government Association
Matthew Evans, Welsh Revenues and Benefits Managers Group
Miranda Evans, Disability Wales
Nigel Griffiths, Bridgend CBC
Simon Hatch, Citizens Advice Cymru
Steffan Evans, The Bevan Foundation
Victoria Lloyd, Age Cymru

Facilitators

Adrian Devereux, Workstream Facilitator
Ben Gibbs, Workstream Facilitator
David Willis, Welsh Government
Emma Morales, Centre for Digital Public Services
Josh Parry, Workstream Facilitator
Mel James, Welsh Government
Paul Neave, Welsh Government
Sam Pidduck, Welsh Government

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Apologies

Helal Uddin (Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team), Glyn Jones (Workstream Facilitator), Leah Whitty (Workstream Facilitator), Kevin Griffiths (Workstream Facilitator)

Chair's update

Membership and resourcing updates

The Chair started the session with a welcome the new members of the steering group and supporting team. Joining the steering group is KT who will be replacing Beatrice Orchard as The Trussell Trust's representative. Meanwhile, ME will be acting as the full time representative for Disability Wales.

Joining the "Charter – Hybrid Policy Team" is EM from the Centre for Digital Public Services who will be supporting the development of the implementation plan and DW from Welsh Government who will be focusing on project governance.

Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice

Since the last meeting, ministerial changes mean that this piece of work is now the responsibility of Lesley Griffiths, who was recently appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice. As Chair, FT has written to the new Cabinet Secretary to request an introductory meeting to discuss their priorities for the steering group.

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Meeting between Chair and CDPS Joint-CEO

In April, the Chair met with the joint-CEO of CDPS, Harriet Green. There was a wide-ranging discussion, and an agreement was made to keep in touch as our project progresses.

Securing local authority buy-in

At the last meeting of the steering group, it was agreed that WLGA would work on securing and formalising wider local authority engagement.

In April 2024, Councillor Hunt wrote to the Chief Executives of all local authorities to provide an overview of the project and request they nominate a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) who will direct their council's engagement with the steering group and participate the newly formed Local Government SRO Advisory Group

It is the aim for the Local Government SRO Advisory Group to meet at least once by the time of the next Partnership Council for Wales meeting in July 2024

Meetings with Councillor Hunt

In April 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice held an introductory meeting with Councillor Hunt and his officials. It is understood that it was agreed they would jointly address the Partnership Council in July 2024

The Chair of the steering group will also be meeting with Councillor Hunt at the beginning of May.

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Operational progress update

PN began this item with an update on the development of the 6 workstreams. Since the last meeting, Workstream facilitators have now revised the priority actions and membership, and these were shared at the meeting.

It was agreed that the workstreams membership, aims and priority actions document would be presented to the Local Government SRO Advisory Group by WLGA for feedback and suggestions. Prior to this LH agreed to check over the language used and make sure it is appropriate for the audience and context.

CG raised the importance of ensuring that the workstream's actions are revisited regularly to check that they are in line with what the steering group needs to continue its work on the implementation plan. Similarly, JG noted that as the workstream's progress they should consider assigning timeframes to their activities.

On the membership of the workstreams, SH confirmed that Citizen Advice will be looking to support the workstreams and will send over nominations to the Welsh Government facilitators. Meanwhile, VL suggested Age Cymru could nominate a representative for the communications workstream. Finally, ME agreed Disability Wales would consider how they can support the workstreams.

It was agreed that more could be done to increase the local authority representation across the workstreams. LH agreed to take this forward and noted that a representative who has experience delivering a shared service would be beneficial.

On the topic of local authority participation, it was noted that the Welsh Revenues and Benefits Managers Group would be a good forum to keep engaged. The group has an in-person meeting on 3rd July, prior to the Partnership Council, and it was agreed the steering group should ask for a slot

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on the agenda.

SE informed the group that The Bevan Foundation has a slot at the WLGA fringe conference and will ensure that the messaging is consistent with the steering groups.

PN noted that there will need to be consideration for how the workstreams are brought together to either work jointly on matters of shared interest or to be kept informed of other's work/progress. JG suggested that there could be a standing item on the agenda of each steering group meeting where workstream facilitators can provide a quick update.

LP suggested that the steering group could consider establishing some Key Performance Indicators and produce something which makes clear the vision of the steering group. FT noted that the Welsh Benefits Charter sets out the vision and guiding principles of the work the steering group has set out to achieve, however, it could be shortened into more of a vision statement, and this be included as foreword to the implementation plan.

Drawing this item to a close, LP shared that she had been working on a one-page document which sets out the aims of the project to Streamline Welsh Benefits. The steering group agreed that this was a good idea and requested the Communications workstream adapt the document into something suitable for a broader audience. This document could then be used by all members of the steering group to raise awareness of the aims and approach of the project.

Action point 1: LH to review the workstream aims and priority actions document to ensure it is appropriate for sharing with local authorities.

Action point 2: workstream document to be shared at the Local Government SRO Advisory Group and feedback provided to the steering group.

Action point 3: SH, VL and ME to consider their organisation's participation in

the workstreams and make SP and MJ aware of any nominations.

Action Point 4: LH to work on increasing local authority membership on workstreams.

Action Point 5: LH and Welsh Government facilitators to explore addressing the Welsh Revenue and Benefits Managers Group at their meeting on 3 July.

Action point 6: communications workstream to adapt the one-pager document made by LP for a broader audience.

Resourcing the development of the Implementation Plan

Introducing this item, CG described the need for the resourcing of the development of the implementation plan to strike the right balance between being structured but also having the required flexibility.

CG continued to explain that whilst the steering group has the “Core Team” of Welsh Government officials, there is a need for additional support, an “Charter, Hybrid Policy Team” of sorts, to provide the day-to-day support that is required.

Initially joining this “Charter, Hybrid Policy Team” is EM a Senior Delivery Manager from CDPS who will be supporting the development of the implementation plan and DW, Head of Tackling Poverty (Welsh Government) who will be considering what proportionate governance looks like for a project like this.

CG shared that Welsh Government will continue to work with WLGA to consider how they may support this “Hybrid Policy Team”, but also broadened the invitation to other organisations on the steering group if they feel they have

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resources they would like to offer. Noting this, JG shared that if there are any specific skills or gaps identified CDPS could look to fill them.

More broadly, KT queried whether there is an agreed date for the implementation plan to be developed by. FT shared that whilst we are aiming for the end of summer, this is likely to be a draft version only as engagement with wider stakeholders will take time.

Agreeing, JG noted that whilst the implementation plan can be flexible in its content, there will need to be agreed intended outcomes within it. The group supported this view, referencing the ever-changing context of social security and the broader environment in which the steering group operates as reasons behind this need for flexibility.

Open discussion: Implementation Plan template

Introducing this item, FT stated that from this discussion she would like the group to come to a clearer understanding of how they want the implementation plan to look, who the target audience is, and what it should include.

When discussing the structure of the plan, it was suggested that it could be broken down into phases (noting who will do what and by when) and include how each one will be measured. To aid this, the time period the plan will cover will need to be considered as well as whether it should just focus on a time period or perhaps a phase.

Regarding the plan's target audience, it was agreed that it will need to be available publicly due to the high level of interest by stakeholders and the general public once actions start to be implemented. It was suggested that an Easy Read version may be better for a wider audience.

Following discussions, it was agreed that the implementation plan should be available in 2 formats:

1. A high-level overview which starts with and links back to the Welsh Benefits Charter and includes the general actions which are required and by when.
2. A more detailed plan which follows on from the high-level overview, which can include more specifics but also is agile enough to allow changes as appropriate, for example, to reflect lessons learned.

For both versions of the implementation plan it was agreed that there must be identified outcomes and ways to measure them. JP informed the group that Welsh Government internally are already considering how this may be done. as will the Monitoring, Research and Evaluation workstream, once set up.

On the style of the plan, it was agreed it should be simple to understand and the Child Poverty Strategy could be good inspiration for this. CDPS shared that they have content designers who could help with this.

A discussion was held on how the plan will reflect progress to date. It was suggested that the foreword could reflect and recognise the good progress that has already been made.

On a similar note, FT shared that if an agile approach to the implementation plan is agreed, the group will need to consider how it reports on progress, is it within the plan itself or should the group report against the plan regularly.

Noting the agreement for the minutes and publications of the steering group to be published, LP raised the question of where they should sit / who should host them and suggested that they could be housed on the WLGA website.

On the publication of the implementation plan, AD shared that public interest would increase over time and that when appropriate the Communications workstream can support with media engagement, including the development of

supporting assets. Expanding on this, SH noted the importance of capturing and sharing “stories” of this work.

LP and FT highlighted the need to engage with the Local Government SRO Advisory Group on the plan as early as possible and to involve them in its development.

It was agreed that the “Charter, Hybrid Policy Team” would be responsible for the initial drafting of the implementation plan but that it will be brought to the steering group for review. CG shared that it would be beneficial to have something to take to the Partnership Council for Wales meeting in July.

Action point 7: LP and Welsh Government to discuss the publication and hosting of the steering group’s outputs.

Minutes of last meeting

The group approved the draft minutes from the last meeting (21.03.24).

Any other business and next meeting

No any other business was raised, and the next virtual meeting was confirmed for the 25 June 10.00 to 12.00.

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