



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING, DOCUMENT

Cabinet meeting: 13 May 2024

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on 13 May 2024.

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Present

- Rt. Hon. Vaughan Gething MS (Chair)
 - Rebecca Evans MS
 - Lesley Griffiths MS
 - Huw Irranca-Davies MS
 - Jane Hutt MS
 - Julie James MS
 - Jeremy Miles MS
 - Eluned Morgan MS
 - Lynne Neagle MS
 - Ken Skates MS
 - Mick Antoniw MS
-
- Hannah Blythyn MS
 - Dawn Bowden MS
 - Jayne Bryant MS (from item 2)

Officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Rachel Garside-Jones, Interim Director Office of the First Minister
- Matthew Hall, Head of Cabinet Division
- Toby Mason, Head of Strategic Communications
- Catrin Sully, Head of Cabinet Office
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- David Hagendyk, Special Adviser
- Madeleine Brindley, Special Adviser
- Haf Davies, Special Adviser
- Sara Faye, Special Adviser

- Sam Hadley, Special Adviser
- David Hooson, Special Adviser
- Phillipa Marsden, Special Adviser
- Maddie Rees, Special Adviser
- Victoria Solomon, Special Adviser
- Tom Woodward, Special Adviser
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat
- 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 Group
- Tim Moss, Chief Operating Officer
- Judith Paget, Director General Health and Social Services
- Andrew Slade, Director General, Economy, Treasury and Constitution
- Owain Lloyd, Director Education and Welsh Language (item 4)
- Martyn Gunter, Head of Enrichment and Engagement (item 4)
- Rhian Griffiths, Co-operation Unit (item 4)
- Dafydd Trystan, Special Adviser (item 4)

Item 1: Minutes of the previous meeting

1.1 Cymeradwyodd y Cabinet gofnodion y 29 Ebrill / Cabinet approved the minutes of 29 April.

Item 2: First Minister's items

India visit

2.1 The First Minister informed Cabinet that he had travelled to India on Thursday evening to meet with the Managing Director and Senior Executive Team of Tata Steel. The First Minister had made the case to retain blast furnace steel making at Port Talbot alongside the company's investment in the Electric Arc Furnace. He also emphasised the need to avoid compulsory redundancies and not to make irreversible decisions, given the potential change in Government.

2.2 The First Minister also made the case to avoid compulsory redundancies across other Welsh sites and stressed the importance of maintaining Tata's downstream operations and production levels at Trostre, Shotton, Llanwern and Caerphilly. The company agreed to share information on those areas within the supply chain that would be affected by the closure of the blast furnaces as this would be essential to help the Welsh Government provide rapid support to businesses and workers affected.

2.3 There were also discussions around important areas of shared interest, including investment around Port Talbot and collaboration with Welsh Universities, particularly Swansea, relating to green steel production. The First Minister raised the opportunities presented by the Global Centre of Rail Excellence in Onllwyn, where the company would be discussing a memorandum of understanding the following day.

2.4 A formal Voluntary Redundancy Aspiration Scheme for employees at Port Talbot would be announced on Wednesday of that week. Meanwhile, Community, the largest Steelworkers' Trade Union, had indicated that 85% of those who took part in the ballot had voted for industrial action.

2.5 The government continued to engage with the Transition Board, but there was still no information from the UK government on the terms and requirements of its £500 million grant. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language would be seeking clarity on the support package later that week at his meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations.

2.6 There was a need to understand the implications of the significant number of redundancies, expected later in the year, the impact on the supply chain and the wider economy.

2.7 Cabinet agreed it was important to bring together all support the Welsh Government could offer to those affected, such as mental health and well-being services and housing related grants and benefits.

Council Tax

2.8 The First Minister informed Cabinet that, at the Co-operation Agreement Oversight Board on 8th May, the leader of Plaid Cymru questioned the Government's decision to defer the implementation of Council Tax reforms until 1st April 2028. Their preference was to press ahead with blended reforms in 2025.

2.9 Cabinet confirmed the decision should not be revisited, given the issues that had been raised during the discussion on 22 April, including the financial implications. It was noted that a Written Statement outlining this decision would be issued later that week.

Cyber Security Incident

2.10 The First Minister referred to the recent cyber security incident where a global vulnerability in protection had been identified. Immediate action was taken and there was no evidence of information being compromised. Nevertheless, it demonstrated the government would need to be aware of an increased risk from cyber criminals.

Item 3: Senedd business

3.1 Cabinet considered the Plenary grid and noted that voting time on Tuesday was scheduled for 5:45pm and around 6:25pm on Wednesday. There were a number of important Oral Statements scheduled for Tuesday, and it was noted that a Written Statement on the Future of Farming in Wales would issue in advance of the Oral Statement.

Item 4: Consultation on the School Year

4.1 The Cabinet Secretary for Education introduced the paper, which provided the summary of findings from the consultation on the school year and asked Cabinet to agree to continue exploring the options as set out under Option 2, subject to further engagement with stakeholders. Cabinet was also asked to agree that the decision on timing of implementation was deferred to the next Senedd.

4.2 The government was committed to exploring reform of the school year, both within the Programme for Government and as part of the Co-operation Agreement. The consultation was published on 21 November and closed on 12

February with over 16,000 responses, making it one of the Welsh Government's widest-reaching consultations.

4.3 The consultation findings were inconclusive and contradictory. Results indicated that whilst there was support for changes to the pattern of the school year, there was no significant majority in favour of any one of the options proposed. The responses to most questions were split roughly 50:50, and whilst they indicated support for change, they also highlighted concerns with aspects of each of the options.

4.4 One major concern was the current pressures on schools. A wide-ranging programme of reform and improvement was already underway in schools across Wales, including the roll out of the Curriculum for Wales and a new system for supporting learners with Additional Learning Needs. Implementing this work continued to provide both opportunities and challenges and feedback during headteacher roundtables indicated that school year reform was not amongst the top priorities for schools at present. These reforms, and other vital strands of work would all contribute to the overall priority of delivering a sustained improvement in educational attainment.

4.5 While there was some evidence that reform of the school year could improve attainment and provide benefits for the most disadvantaged learners, this was still an evolving landscape and the evidence presented a mixed picture of effects and impacts.

4.6 Cabinet had previously recognised the potential benefits of reforming the school year and indicated a preference to take forwards reform in 2025/2026.

4.7 However, following the consultation, it was proposed the reforms should not be implemented during the current Senedd and instead a decision on timing be deferred until the next Senedd, and to be taken by the next Government. However, the proposals in Option 2 of the consultation should continue to be explored including engagement with stakeholders on the timeline for reform.

4.8 This approach recognised the equivocal response to the consultation and allowed more time to consider the evidence base for the potential benefits of reform.

4.9 Cabinet agreed with the principle of changing the school year as outlined within Option 2 of the consultation. Not least because it could help mitigate the impact on those families and students that faced the disadvantages associated with long summer holidays. There was also the impact on Welsh language learners from non-Welsh speaking homes.

4.10 However, it was also agreed that the focus on this stage should be the radical and wide-ranging programme of reforms and improvements underway in schools across Wales to improve learner outcomes.

4.11 In the meantime, work should continue on exploring the proposals in Option 2 with stakeholders on the understanding that implementation would be a matter for the next administration.

4.12 Cabinet approved the recommendation in the paper.

Cabinet Secretariat
May 2024

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