



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group meeting: 22 March 2024

Minutes of the Microsoft Teams group meeting 10:00 – 11:30  
22 March 2024 via Teams.

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## Attendees

- Matt Wellington (MW) - Welsh Government – Chair
- Chriss O’Connell (CO) - Welsh Government – Budget Improvement Team
- Nigel Carter (NC) - Welsh Government – Budget Improvement Team
- Ruth Coombs (RC) - Head EHRC Wales
- Sean O’Neill (SO) - Children in Wales
- Rhiannon Hardiman (RH) - Office of Future Generations Wales
- Hannah Griffiths (HG) - Wales Women’s Budget Group
- Iestyn Wyn Lewis (IWL) - WG Education Directorate (Public Services and Welsh Language)
- Stuart Evans (SE) - WG Head of Race; Faith & Belief; Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Policy
- Karen Stothard (KS) - WG Head of Strategy Environment and Marine
- Samantha Andrews (SA) - WG Policy Manager International Biodiversity
- Ellie Brodie (EB) - WG Head of Equality Evidence Unit
- Ceri Dryer (CD) - Age Cymru

## Apologies

- Janine Downing (JD) - WCVA
- Jessica Laimann (JL) - Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
- Wayne Vincent (WV) - EHRC
- Gethin Rees (GR) - Cytun (Churches together in Wales), representing the Inter-faith Council for Wales as TSPC lead for Religion.
- Tabea Wilkes (TW) - RSPBA
- Gethin Rhys (GR) - Cytun Cymru

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## Secretariat

- Tamzin Greatrex (TG) - Budget & Government Business Division, Welsh Treasury

## Actions

Action	Who	When
1. Circulate SIIA Review and 'Is Wales Fairer 2023' presentations to Members	Chriss / Nigel	Issue with minutes
2. Confirm a date (after Easter) for the BIIAG Prevention Subgroup meeting	Chriss	By 29 March 2024
3. Members to confirm if they want to participate in the SIIA review	Members	By end of April
4. Issue Poll to Members for date of next meeting to maximise attendance	Nigel	By 29 March 2024

## 1. Welcome and introduction

1.1. MW welcomed members to the meeting of the Budget Improvement Impact Advisory Group (BIIAG), explained some people couldn't attend due to a clash with the WCVA conference. He made members aware he was trialling Microsoft CoPilot AI to help with minute taking.

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1.2. MW welcomed Hannah Griffiths from the Wales Women's Budget Group, noted the apologies received and mentioned that Steffan Evans (Bevan Foundation) had resigned due to work commitments. MW noted his gratitude to Steffan for his time on BIIAG and that a replacement is being sought.

1.3. Members were advised that the minutes from the last meeting had been circulated and asked members if they were content to agree them. No amendments were noted.

1.4. MW referred to the action points from the previous meeting and advised there had been no feedback to action point 1 (SIIA preparation for 2024-2025 Budget), which he would pick up on in the meeting. Referring to action point 2, he was pleased that people had indicated they'd like to be part of the Prevention subgroup, which would also be discussed later in the meeting.

## 2. 2024-2025 Budget update

2.1. MW outlined how challenging it had been to produce the Welsh Government's Draft and Final Budget with only 3 weeks and four days to prepare and also noted the substantive challenges this timescale and the outcome of the Budget will have been for all members. Welsh Treasury has continued to try to improve the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA), further identifying reductions and mitigations to budgets to improve transparency. He confirmed that following the appointment of the new First Minister, the Finance Minister remained the same but with a new title. He advised that ministers will now be known as Cabinet Secretaries. He then welcomed comments from members on the Budget process.

2.2. RC raised concerns around the impacts for older people which she felt had not been considered in the same way as other protected characteristics.

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2.3. RH felt the SIIA had improved in terms of identifying decisions made but not in how the decisions were made. She also suggested a different approach was required in budget setting for prevention.

2.4. HG felt the SIIA was more comprehensive and addressed a wider range of policy areas but was concerned with cuts to the childcare offer and the reasons provided for this decision i.e. low uptake, when we know the demand amongst women and parents is high right now. HG was keen we explore why demand is lower and whether there are issues with the childcare offer.

2.5. SO acknowledged that the timescale made it difficult. Children in Wales had submitted a paper to the Finance Committee reflecting the need for greater investment in children's services, early intervention, and prevention. Cuts to the early years' integration fund came late in the day, making cuts to the Baby Bundle difficult to understand. SO advised that Children in Wales will continue to push for a separate Children's Rights Impact Assessment but was pleased to see that the comments they had discussed throughout the year had been taken on board.

### **3. Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment Review**

3.1. CO explained that the SIIA which takes both a strategic and an integrated approach to how we assess budget impacts in line with statutory and non-statutory responsibilities, was set up in 2015 and has never been formally reviewed. For that reason, a formal review was being proposed and we wanted to share our proposal with BIAG members at this initial stage.

3.2. CO provided a presentation outlining the process for the SIIA, the source of the information which informs the SIIA, and how the information is used. The presentation also established why a review of the SIIA is important and why this

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is the optimum time to undertake the work - coinciding with a spending review and a review of the integrated impact assessment. A review would provide the opportunity to either validate our existing approach or to establish a new one.

3.3. Given the work we have been doing including on gender budgeting and carbon and nature impacts these are some key areas which we would want to integrate within the SIA process that would raise the overall standard of information on which spending decisions are made. We can take this opportunity to develop the process that we use.

3.4. CO reiterated the importance of the support from BIIAG, valuing the expertise of group members, their support and challenge to ensure that we arrive at a product which is fit for purpose. An indicative timeline for the review was provided and proposed next steps outlined and members were asked to confirm if they would be willing to join a subgroup to support the SIIA review.

3.5. Members thanked CO for her presentation, with the following saying they would like to be involved in the SIIA review subgroup: RC, EB, HG, RH and SO.

3.6. RH queried if the review was being undertaken externally or in-house? MW explained both options had been considered but due to the cost and time implications, it would be dealt with in-house, asking members for their support and input along with other stakeholders.

3.7. RC asked about the Governance Group and how it would fit in. CO and MW advised details were still be worked on as in the spirit of BIIAG we were sharing these details at a very formative stage but the intention is for internal and external involvement.

## 4. Is Wales Fairer 2023 presentation

4.1. RC, Head of the EHRC in Wales, delivered her presentation on the EHRC 'Is Wales Fairer' 2023 report, which provided an overview of the report and summary of key findings.

4.2. Before inviting questions on her presentation, RC explained that 3 Wales-specific factsheets were available on the EHRC's website; stated there was a need for greater use of positive action measures and improved demographic data collection and then invited questions.

4.3. SO echoed RC's position around the need for better data collection and referred to the needs and rights of children in the care sector not being a protected characteristic. RC explained children in the care sector would be covered by the protected characteristic of 'Age' but would make a note to raise the issue when she meets the new minister. She went on to say she had held meetings with the previous Deputy Minister around children looked after and children who are care givers and would be seeking a meeting with the new Minister where she'll raise these issues.

4.4. KS asked if the EHRC covered environmental inequality within their work. RC confirmed it was not within the EHRC's statutory remit but the work of inequality resulting from climate change is interwoven through their international work.

## 5. Gender budgeting

5.1. NC gave an update on the work taking place to support gender budgeting.

- Working with colleagues in the Welsh Government's Equalities Unit, 'An

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Introduction to Gender Budgeting' guidance document would be launched on the Welsh Government's website by the end of March 2024. The guidance would help WG colleagues / policy makers to understand what gender budgeting is and how it should be considered as part of policy making, policy review and monitoring. He noted his thanks to his predecessor Janine Downing for her work around gender budgeting.

- As part of the work being carried out across Welsh Government to review the Integrated Impact Assessment, NC has been speaking to WG Equalities colleagues to embed gender budgeting questions within their review of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) section.
- A gender budgeting action plan to cover 2024 and 2025 is being developed and as previously outlined, gender budgeting will be considered as part of the SIIA review.
- Closer working relationships with the Wales Women's Budget Group and other countries who are working on gender budgeting through WeGo are being developed, with regular meetings being arranged.

5.2. MW thanked NC for the update, acknowledging members previous comments about wanting to move beyond the pilot schemes. MW drew members attention to the announcement on International Women's Day, of the Welsh Government's 'Gender Inequality Health Research Fund' which was an idea which originated with the Budget Improvement Team.

5.3. HG was pleased to hear about the guidance document and the work to embed gender budgeting within the EqIA process. She queried the evaluation of the gender budgeting pilots. NC explained briefing on the pilot schemes was currently being drafted and MW confirmed this would be reported through the Budget Improvement Plan (BIP).

5.4. RH asked whether the guidance document could be shared across public bodies. NC explained at this stage it was aimed at Welsh Government staff. However, it was something to be considered in the future as more resources are developed, for example, working with Academy Wales.

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5.5. CO reiterated the importance of gender budgeting being a consideration within the EqIA process.

## 6. Prevention Biodiversity | Subgroup

6.1. MW provided background to this item, linking to the feedback received following the 2024-2025 Budget, and how the SIIA review aims to consider how to assess the impacts of budget decisions on different areas and groups, e.g. gender budgeting, carbon impacts, and prevention. He acknowledged that due to staff changes, it had been some time since this subgroup last met and suggested it was a good time to take stock of where we are and whether this was still an area members wanted to explore.

6.2. RH queried progress with the work of the subgroup. MW advised that BIIAG had previously identified biodiversity as an area to explore and that the subgroup had met twice.

6.3. KS, a member of the subgroup, confirmed that BIIAG had expressed a desire to explore biodiversity and that Welsh Government have developed a biodiversity toolkit. The intention was the subgroup would consider how this toolkit might be tailored for other areas of prevention work. She also reminded members that the subgroup had also been involved in discussions around the development of the young person's Budget Improvement Plan.

6.4. CC queried if the toolkit was available for use in other areas? KS agreed there is potential to take the actions from the biodiversity toolkit into other areas.

6.5. CO will arrange a meeting of the subgroup for after Easter and asked members to confirm if they would be interested in taking part in this work. Interest to-date received from: TW; WR, and KS.

6.6. RH expressed her interest and possibly her colleague Marie Brousseau-Navaro.

## 7. Next steps for BIIAG, Questions and AOB

7.1. MW confirmed that the work undertaken with Children in Wales to develop a young person guide to the Budget Improvement Plan (BIP) was launched at the Senedd on 24 February. The leaflet and animation can be found at the following links:

- [Leaflet](#)
- [Animation on the Budget Improvement Plan](#) (youtube.com)

7.2. We will be in touch to poll members on potential dates for future BIIAG meetings during 2024, with a view of maximising online attendance.

7.3. Members were invited to share their views on what they would like in terms of this year's meetings e.g. to consider how BIIAG is working, anything we should consider changing or adding etc. and asked for suggestions to be sent to the mailbox. (Note the new mailbox address is [bgb.policyanddelivery@gov.wales](mailto:bgb.policyanddelivery@gov.wales))

7.4. Finally, as previously stated, the conversation does not have to stop when this meeting ends. MW reminded members to get in touch with the team if they had ideas or thoughts following these discussions, which they wanted to share.

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