



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group meeting: 19 June 2024

Minutes of the Microsoft Teams group meeting 1:30pm –
3:00pm 19 June 2024.

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Attendees

- Matt Wellington (MW): Chair - Welsh Government Head Budget Policy & Delivery
- Chriss O'Connell (CO) - Welsh Government – Head Budget Improvement Team
- Nigel Carter (NC) - Welsh Government – Budget Improvement Lead
- Cath Ashcroft (CA) – WG Spending Review Delivery Lead
- Vivienne Lewis (VL) – WG Spending Review Thematic Delivery Lead
- 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)
- Ellie Brodie (EB) - WG Head of Equality Evidence Unit
- Ceri Cryer (CC) - Age Cymru
- Janine Downing (JD) - WCVA
- Jessica Laimann (JL) - Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
- Gethin Rees (GR) - Cytun (Churches together in Wales), representing the Inter-faith Council for Wales as TSPC lead for Religion
- Annie Smith (AS) – RSPB
- Shelia Hendrickson-Brown – C3SC
- Davinia Green – Stonewall Cymru

Apologies

- Wayne Vincent (WV) – EHRC
- Rhian Davies (RD) – Disability Wales
- Karen Stothard – WG Head of Environmental Governance Policy and International Biodiversity

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Secretariat

- Nigel Carter / Chriss O'Connell - Budget & Government Business Division, Welsh Treasury

1. Welcome and introduction

1.1. MW welcomed members to the meeting of the Budget Improvement Impact Advisory Group (BIIAG) and offered apologies from members who could not attend.

1.2. MW mentioned Tabea Wilkes had left RSPB and BIIGA and noted his gratitude to Tabea for her time on BIIAG.

1.3. Minutes from the last meeting were circulated to Members on 27 March 2024 for agreement but no responses have been received so they will be recirculated with the June 2024 BIIAG minutes.

1.4. MW referred to the action points from the previous meeting and advised the SIIA review and Is Wales Fairer presentation were sent to members, the Prevention sub-group met yesterday, dates had been issued for the September and November BIIAG meetings.

1.5. MW explained that CO will be providing updates on the SIIA Review and prevention sub-group meeting, NC will provide an update on gender budgeting and CA / VL will provide an update on what Welsh Treasury is doing around the Spending Review, noting the Cabinet Secretary's statement on the Spending Review issued on 11 June 2024 [Plenary 11/06/2024 - Welsh Parliament](#) (senedd.wales).

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1.6. Finally, the substantive issue for discussion today is the opportunity for the group to take a forward look for BIIAG to ensure we are all getting the most use out of our time together.

2. 2025-2026 Budget update

2.1. MW provided the latest position on the fiscal context noting the uncertainties and the pre-election period. The key message was that there was no certainty as to the timing or length of settlement Wales might receive. MW then ran through the different scenarios.

2.2 MW went on to outline that no matter the outcome of the election the fiscal context will remain incredibly challenging.

2.3. In the context of this group, we can think about the opportunities to together, to continue some of the improvements we have been embedding over time. We are thinking about how we continue the work of impact assessment, recognising we are also doing the SIIA Review. CO will talk more about that later and VL / CA will give us a sense of the work on the Spending Review, a different approach to that longer term piece of work.

3. Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) Review & Prevention sub-group updates

Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) Review update

3.1. CO advised the review of the SIIA is progressing with information and background data being gathered and contacts in other administrations be

established. A test questionnaire was devised and sent out to internal colleagues actively involved in the budget process which is informing next steps.

3.2. A meeting with legal services has taken place to discuss their input into the review, noting that we need to consider the change in legal responsibilities since the SIIA was created.

3.3. CO also explained we are in the process of establishing the internal governance arrangements for this work.

Prevention subgroup update

3.4. CO advised members the prevention subgroup met yesterday originally to revisit the Biodiversity Toolkit which Karen Stothard's team in the Climate Change Department had developed. Unfortunately, Karen was unable to attend, so the focus of the meeting shifted to look at key priorities and opportunities which the group could focus on going forward.

3.5. Key priorities identified included more information to be provided in the SIIA on the well-being economy; improvements in the information provided for budget decisions relating to primary and tertiary health and building resilience; more information regarding evidence used to support budget decisions relating to the WBFG Act specifically around the Welsh language, culture and the well-being economy.

3.6. The group also discussed potential opportunities and ideas to be explored further, including consideration of how the Budget Improvement Plan can better reflect the five ways of working in the WBFG Act, particularly around engagement and collaboration. Also looking to others to learn from the way the budget commitments are mapped against the Programme for Government and well-being goals. Malta was used as an example in this context.

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3.7. To ensure momentum is maintained, the group will meet monthly but may decide to lengthen the period in between meetings as work progresses. The next meeting has been set for the 17 July. CO thanked the members of the subgroup for making the time to attend and making it an interesting meeting acknowledging how busy everyone is.

3.8. RH mentioned looking to develop the Budget Improvement Plan and the 5 ways of working as something the main BIAG group consider around engagement, collaboration and how the WG makes its decisions.

3.9. MW responded happy to discuss this and welcomed further ideas about this from the group.

3.10. SH-B acknowledged there was a lot of work being undertaken but was continually challenged by not seeing any difference coming through at community level and finds it difficult to find the line of sight in relation to accountability or scrutiny. SH-B asked for the group to consider how we can ensure the work remains aware of the impact of the changes we are trying to make, and the real difference being made on the ground.

3.11. MW thanked SH-B noting that the systems are intended to drive the longer-term reform that will make those differences for communities, but systemic and cultural change takes time. We want to make sure this group can feed into those short-term considerations as it is through them, we achieve those long-term outcomes.

3.12. AS supported SH-B's comments adding the need to better understand the link between strategic budgeting processes and the practical impacts in terms of delivery.

3.12. MW committed to considering how we can do more in this space noting this is what we are trying to do with the SIA.

3.13. The group then debated this issue further reflecting on topics like the WFG Act including the 5 ways of working.

3.14. SH-B said that the feedback loop is something to consider so the group is clear what difference it has made to the budget.

3.15. MW assured the group of the important role it plays and committed to considering how this can be better communicated.

3.16. EB mentioned that there is more the Equality Evidence Data Unit can do to track outcomes data. She would welcome a conversation about what additional data needs to be collected across Welsh Government. She asked the group, if they had any evidence/data they wished to share for consideration in the budgeting process, to send it to: equalityevidenceunit@gov.wales.

3.17. There was then a discussion around equality impact assessment, cumulative impact assessments and the SIIA.

4. Spending Review: Introduction

4.1. MW introduced Cath Ashcroft (CA) Spending Review Delivery Lead and Viv Lewis (VL) Spending Review Thematic Lead, to talk about the thinking that Welsh Treasury's doing on the Spending Review, a relevant topic which adds to the discussion we are having and hopefully will inform some of the thinking for the later discussion.

4.2. CA gave a brief introduction on what the Spending Review aims to do and advised a more detailed presentation will be given at the September meeting.

4.3. The Welsh Spending Review is a two-year programme and unlike the budget process, is much more about long term strategic planning. It is a response to some of the experiences of recent years and some of the short-term

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decisions that have needed to be made due to the cost-of-living crisis; COVID; the impact of the Ukraine war; the massive impact that inflation has had on the budget. It is something that has been in the pipeline for a while but has been put on hold to some extent because of various crisis.

4.4. The programme is in the early stages, which is why a brief introduction is being provided today, but more information will be available in September. CA explained it is very much about long term fiscal planning. The conversations taking place as part of the previous agenda item, highlight the importance of having the space to be much more strategic and recognising that some change cannot be immediate.

4.5. Prevention will be a key feature within the Spending Review and the WCFG Act, as with all Welsh Government work, will be embedded within the programme. There has been an oral statement in the Senedd last week delivered by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office.

4.6. CA commented, there is a useful discussion to be had around the current fiscal context, the fact that it is not likely to improve anytime soon and the real benefit of long-term strategic planning. At this stage little to add, we recognise that engagement, particularly external engagement is a key priority for this piece of work, and we are keen to tap into existing forums such as this group. We would really like to take members of the group with us and tap into your experience and expertise.

4.7. VL added that the Welsh Spending Review is about strategic medium to long- term planning around policy development. It is not a replacement for the budget. The Spending Review Team are here to compliment the work carried out by the Budget Delivery Team, a resource to support the budget work.

4.8. MW thanked, CA and VL for introducing themselves today at this early stage of the Spending Review and reiterated at the September meeting it would be a more substantive item.

4.9. RH commented positively on this work and asked about the timeframes this work will cover and involvement.

4.10 CA confirmed it is looking at lessons learnt but more about looking forward to the opportunities that the longer-term planning will give us. CA gave an overview of the current thinking on the process including early thinking on external engagement.

4.11. VL added, in terms of external engagement, we are working with our communications team now to develop a plan and discussing external engagement with Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office, who sees this element as important. 4.12 The group asked questions around BIIAG's potential role. VL commented this is still in early development, but BIIAG will be an important forum.

4.13. The group then discussed the potential merits of the Spending Review approach including how prevention could be considered, what strategic could mean in this context and how this could inform budget processes.

4.14. MW thanked CA and VL for attending and welcomed them back in September.

5. BIIAG forward look

5.1. MW noted we have talked a lot about systems lately and while important, we want to hear from you about how we can make the best use of this time.

5.2 SH-B suggested some kind of mutual benefit from this group. SH-B reiterated the need for the group having a clear understanding of the changes we are trying to bring about within the system.

5.3. MW reinforced the importance of the SIIA Review in this space and asked

the group to feed into this work.

5.4 CC in terms of future agenda items, asked about cumulative impacts and access to services and suggested the merit of the BAGE's deep dive sessions into specific areas like housing or public transport as it gave people a chance to discuss some of the evidence that they had knowledge of from their own research. They were very productive and interesting sessions.

5.5. MW committed to considering these areas noting some of this might be in the Spending Review space.

5.6. JL asked to look at improving equality impact assessments.

5.7. HG asked for consideration of the availability of data.

5.8. MW thanked HG as a good suggestion for a future agenda item.

5.9. MW brought the discussion to a close, thanked members for their contribution in what had been a valuable discussion. He apologised that the gender budgeting item had been pushed off the agenda but provided a brief Update with NC due to give a fuller update at the next meeting.

5.10. MW closed the meeting thanked everyone for attending and contributing, reminding members to please get in contact if they want to discuss any of the areas covered and not to wait until the next meeting, scheduled in for the 16th of September.

5.11. The Spending Review will be on the agenda at that meeting, we will know the outcome of the election and what that means to the budget process, so there will be a lot to discuss. Thank you for sharing your views so freely.

2024 BIIAG meetings

Meetings scheduled for:

- Monday 16 September 1:30 – 3:00pm
- Monday 11 November 1:30 – 3:00pm

As we have stated several times this conversation does not have to stop when this meeting ends, if you have ideas or thoughts following these discussions and would like to talk about things in further detail please get in touch with the team, don't feel that you need to wait for the next meeting.

bgb.policyanddelivery@gov.wales

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)

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