

## **Partnership Council for Wales – 13 March 2024**

10.30-12.00 Via Zoom

### **Chair's opening remarks**

#### **Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance and Local Government.**

1. The Minister for Finance and Local Government (the Minister) welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.
2. The Minister noted the minutes of the previous meeting (8 November 2023) had been circulated and asked if there were any comments or amendments, but there were not.
3. The Minister also confirmed that all actions from the previous meeting were complete.
4. Before starting on the main agenda items, the Minister provided several updates on key areas of priority for Partnership Council for Wales members (members).

#### ***Welsh Benefits Charter***

5. The Minister confirmed that the Welsh Benefits Charter, which was endorsed at the last Partnership Council meeting in November 2023, had now been formally launched.
6. The Minister informed members that the Welsh Government had set up an external steering group which would develop an implementation plan to streamline the Welsh Benefits by Summer this year. In the meantime, improvement to service delivery could continue to be made in line with the Charter's commitment.
7. The Minister also noted that the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip and the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership had between them visited councils in North, South and West Wales as part of the launch of the Charter and had been impressed by the level of commitment shown by staff delivering services.

#### ***Abuse in Politics***

8. The Minister reminded members of the tackling abuse in politics event she hosted at the end of January. Its purpose was to explore what was currently being done to address this issue across all levels of government in Wales and was attended by a range of representatives with an interest in this issue.
9. The Minister confirmed that the Welsh Government was working with the WLGA to distil the information from the event, as well as other ranges of evidence, to culminate in a workshop at the WLGA conference in June to identify key areas for action. Work was also underway on changing legislation so that spending on

candidate safety would be exempt from candidate spending limits for devolved elections.

### ***Budget***

10. The Minister updated members on the latest position regarding the Welsh Government's Final Budget for 2024-25.
11. The Minister also confirmed that the UK Government had published its Budget for 2024-25 and the Welsh Government would carefully consider the implications of this for Wales' spending and taxation plans. The Minister also stated that Welsh Government's priorities remain core, frontline public services, and protecting the most vulnerable people and communities across Wales.

### ***Local Government Climate Strategy Panel***

12. Before moving on to agenda item one, the Minister raised the Local Government's Climate Strategy Panel's paper to note which was circulated prior to the meeting. The paper highlighted the panel's four decarbonisation groups supporting local authorities in achieving their commitments in the Net Zero Wales plan – across transport, buildings, procurement and land use and asked Partnership Council for Wales to note the progress of the four groups.
13. The paper also asked to members to note the recent WLGA led discussion on decarbonising pensions. The Minister was aware a follow up event was planned to help support the momentum and invited the WLGA to give an update on the matter at a future meeting.
14. The Minister formally thanked the Local Government Climate Strategy Panel for its continued work on this key priority area.

### **[Agenda item 1: A recorded message from Mark Drakeford MS, the First Minister of Wales](#)**

15. This Partnership Council meeting (13 March 2024) was to be the last one during the tenure of the current First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford MS.
16. Unfortunately, the First Minister was unable to attend the meeting due to commitments at the Covid Inquiry but recorded a video message for members reflecting on his time as First Minister and working with local government, the public and third sectors throughout his career.
17. The First Minister thanked the members of Partnership Council for their continued work to deliver the best possible public services to the people and communities of Wales.

## Agenda item 2: The independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales' final report

18. The Minister introduced agenda item two on the independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales, which was established in the autumn of 2021, and published its final report on 18 January 2024.
19. The Minister welcomed the Counsel General and the Minister for Constitution Mick Antoniw MS, to discuss the report's findings and set out the Welsh Government's response to it.
20. The Counsel General and Minister for Constitution's update included the following key points:
  - The Welsh Government had considered and welcomed the Commission's report and its recommendations. A plenary debate on the report in the Senedd was scheduled for the 19 March 2024.
  - The report made 10 recommendations. The first three were aimed at strengthening democracy and civic engagement within Wales. The remaining seven related to the operation of the devolution settlement.
  - The Commission did not make any recommendations about potential future models for Wales' governance. Instead, they considered the options of enhanced devolution, a federal UK and independence for Wales against a set of criteria and against the current settlement.
  - The Commission found that each option would be viable, but had different opportunities, benefits, risks and challenges and felt that a national conversation about how it should be taken forward would be beneficial.
21. The Counsel General and Minister for Constitution also highlighted the points in the report, which he felt were important, relating to democratic innovation, the increased internal tensions, and importance of establishing principles relating to the purpose of the government at different levels. He also noted the report's reference to intergovernmental relations and issues of justice and policing, noting that the Commission had also recommended that UK Government should remove some constraints on the Welsh Government budget, especially where there were economic implications. The report noted issues in relation to this around energy and the rail service.
22. The Counsel General and Minister for Constitution concluded his update by stressing the need to improve democracy and to empower people and communities to be more engaged with government and society in Wales.

23. The following key points from members were raised:

- Councillor Andrew Morgan welcomed the update from the Counsel General and the Minister for the Constitution. He felt it was important that local communities have powers as well as national and local government, and that local government should not just be considered as a delivery arm for the Welsh Government. Councillor Morgan also noted that during the Covid pandemic it was evident that local authorities were connected to their communities and developed a number of good links, particularly with the voluntary and third sectors and faith groups, and that it was important to keep building on these.
- Canon Aled Edwards felt the report was extremely important and a platform to take Wales to a better place.
- Mike Theodoulou felt it was important that the debate on further devolution to Wales must be accompanied by a discussion on devolution within Wales. Also thanked the Counsel General and Minister for Constitution for putting together a task group on democratic deficit in town and community councils.
- Councillor James Gibson-Watts queried the level of conversations that were being had amongst political parties at UK government level as he felt they were an important part of taking forward this agenda.

24. The Chair commented that it was interesting to learn the perspectives of the Co-Chairs of the Commission in terms of bringing together views of differing political parties and also broader viewpoints in order to find common ground on the shared agenda. She also informed members that she was keen to move towards a four nations approach with independent arbitration on fiscal formula. She felt the importance of devolution in enabling people at the right levels to deliver links with the ambition to move the relationship between the Welsh Government and local government to a more formal footing.

25. The Counsel General and Minister for Constitution welcomed the comments raised by members and the Chair and agreed with each of the points raised.

### Agenda item 3: A discussion on Winter Pressures

26. The Minister introduced the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, and Nick Wood, Deputy Chief Executive of NHS Wales, to the meeting to lead a discussion on Winter Pressures, which had been requested by the WLGA.

27. Nick Wood began by delivering a presentation on some of the specific Winter Pressures from a health perspective. The presentation provided an overview and insight in to:

- the priorities in advance of Winter and action undertaken
  - National Programme for Urgent and Emergency Care
  - planning for peaks in demand
  - guidance to NHS
- Importance of robust planning across the system
- Concurrent risks

- Coverage of the current COVID-19 Vaccination campaign in Wales by eligible population groups.
- COVID-19 modelled scenarios compared to actual data (daily hospitalisations)
- Influenza winter scenarios compared to actual data (weekly hospital admissions)

28. The Deputy Minister for Social Services (the Deputy Minister) began her update by paying tribute to the continued commitment and hard work of all delivery partners across the health and social care system during the most challenging months experienced during the pandemic. This included the collaborative effort that has been invested in ensuring a more robust data and evidence provision to enable better system planning and response, in particular the social care checkpoint reporting and the pathways of care delays data set.

29. The Deputy Minister reminded members that the Care Action Committee was stood back up during the Winter and confirmed that the three main priorities for the period were: reducing pathways of care delays due to assessments; increasing community nursing capacity; and increasing enhanced community care offer, including anticipatory care planning for people at greater risk and complexity.

30. The Deputy Minister also noted the work that Councillor Andrew Morgan, Leader of the WLGA, and Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive of the WLGA, had supported in relation to improving assessment delays. The Deputy Minister commented that the collaborative work undertaken to develop a robust data set for Pathways of Care Delay has enabled a much clearer view of delay in the system, enabling collective targeted action.

31. The Deputy Minister also highlighted the following developments:

- 23% reduction in pathways of care delays due to assessments
- 76% increase in Trusted Assessor capacity was a positive change, while noting the need to improve further.
- Work undertaken to establish monthly checkpoint reports was providing clearer insight into system pressures and risks.
- Since November 2023 the number of people waiting for residential care and domiciliary care has dropped. The number of people waiting to receive reablement has also decreased, with most people receiving it within two weeks.

32. The Deputy Minister concluded by thanking members for their continued efforts and urged them to continue to work with Welsh Government and stakeholders in partnership to ensure people can be supported to live well at home for as long as possible.

33. The following key points from members were raised:

- Councillor Steve Hunt referenced the system benefits of additional funding for local authority care and wanted to understand what additional system pressure was created as a result of long covid.

- Councillor Andrew Morgan and Councillor Huw David acknowledged the work of the Care Action Committee and benefits of deep dives into pathways of care delays. They noted the need for 12-month winter planning cycle, building on the work of the Care Action Committee as well as a call for further investment in increasing community capacity.
- Councillor James Gibson-Watts queried the work to improve diagnostic capacities in primary care to keep diagnostic testing out of hospital, particularly in accident and emergency departments, and to be carried out through GP surgeries. This was seen as especially important in cases of rurality / geographic isolation.

34. Nick Wood acknowledged points raised in relation to year-round planning and referred to planning guidance and resilience forums developed to help with this. He also noted that there was a national diagnostic plan and also diagnostic equipment investment in place but recognised the need to do more in relation to local diagnostics and diagnostic centres.

35. The Deputy Minister agreed with the points raised in relation to the approach to the Care Action Committee, and the importance of maintaining collaborative working and investment.

#### Concluding remarks

36. The Minister thanked members for attending and for their contributions to the meeting and confirmed that the next meeting would take place on 8 July 2024.