



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

UK COVID-19 Inquiry Welsh Government response to Module 1 report

The resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom

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UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1: The resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom

Welsh Government response

Ministerial Foreword

The Rt Hon Baroness Hallett DBE, Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry has published her first report for the Covid-19 Inquiry '*The resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom*'. Module 1 considered whether the pandemic was properly prepared for and whether the UK was ready for that eventuality.

I would like to thank the Chair and her team for the extensive work they have conducted through consultation, document review and oral hearings. The Inquiry has heard from factual and expert witnesses including those who were bereaved during the pandemic and those that continue to be impacted by it and has received a large volume of documentary evidence. The Welsh Government contributed 19 written statements to this process and 5 Welsh Government witnesses were invited to the oral hearings to provide evidence.

As First Minister, I reaffirm the Welsh Government's commitment to fair scrutiny of preparedness arrangements and the associated governance structures and processes. It is within this spirit that we have received the Chair's recommendations.

The Welsh Government's first priority is to keep the people of Wales safe. The pandemic, UK's exit from the EU, and the impacts of extreme weather and flooding in Wales in recent years have all demonstrated the need for a better understanding of risks, enhanced resilience, effective emergency planning at the national and local levels, and the value of robust crisis management command and control structures.

The Welsh Government remains committed to learning lessons, including from the Covid-19 pandemic, building on the existing strong foundations. We have already undertaken significant steps to learn from the experiences of the pandemic to develop our approach to preparedness and response. These changes have been informed by a number of internal reviews including the independent review of the Welsh Health Protection System conducted during October 2022 and a review in 2023 of civil contingencies, the findings of which are now being implemented through the Wales Resilience Framework programme, endorsed by the Wales Resilience Forum in late 2023. This work, along with the recommendations from the Inquiry's Module 1 report has informed changes to Welsh preparedness arrangements.

As part of this process, we have considered carefully the Covid-19 Module 1 recommendations and have already implemented new measures to strengthen Wales' preparedness. We are doing the same in relation to the findings from other relevant public inquiries such as Sir Martin Moore-Bick's Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 report, and Sir John Saunders' Manchester Arena Inquiry.

In the UK Government different directorates and departments deliver preparedness (including reform of resilience processes) and crisis management response. In the Welsh Government, a small resilience team delivers on all aspects of the resilience agenda. Despite these resource constraints, we have, and are, delivering numerous programmes of reform, as highlighted in this response.

A number of the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 recommendations, particularly those relating to risk assessment, emergency planning and exercising, need to be considered in the context of the statutory duties of Category 1 responders, as set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Part 1. In considering our response to the recommendations, the Welsh Government has assessed carefully the potential implications, in order to align with the existing statutory framework and arrangements, and to reduce the risk of fettering the statutory mandate of those bodies charged with fulfilling emergency preparedness functions.

The devolution settlement for civil contingencies varies across the UK as does the Barnett arrangement – the mechanism for providing consequential funding to Wales. While executive functions set out in Part 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 for devolved sectors sit with Welsh Ministers, legislative competence is a reserved matter. We have considered the spirit of the recommendations against the context we work within. Given the nature of Module 1 recommendations, particularly those in relation to coordination between the four UK governments, we have developed appropriate implementation actions so that they take full account of, and respect the functions and powers of, Welsh and other ministers in the United Kingdom.

As a government we believe strongly in the value of social partnership; this guides the work we do, including preparing for and responding to emergencies. Government cannot act alone; it is vital that we work with statutory responders and with communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic the close collaboration with partners helped us take the most difficult decisions and supported the response arrangements.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The primary responsibility of the Welsh Government is to keep the people of Wales safe. Policy and strategic matters relating to resilience and civil contingencies, national security and cyber security fall within the First Minister's portfolio, with Cabinet Secretaries maintaining oversight of their departments' functions and interests on resilience matters for specific portfolio areas, such as health and social care.
- 1.2 The emergency responder community and government have been working together during an extraordinary period, in which emergency structures have been stood up frequently across Wales in some form or another for over five years, and most recently to manage the significant impacts arising from storms Bert and Darragh. Keeping Wales safe and secure is becoming more complex and challenging in these unsettled times. The Welsh Government is actively monitoring and aware of the potential impacts of escalating threats and risks, including pressures across the public sector and beyond.
- 1.3 The Welsh Government's overarching objective for resilience is to provide leadership. We aim to support the emergency responder community by setting the strategy and driving a joined-up approach to enhance Wales's resilience and preparedness to major disruptive challenges and national crises, and by coordinating work in partnership with statutory responders, the UK and other devolved governments.
- 1.4 In response to the learning from emergencies in recent years, the former First Minister, Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS commissioned a review of civil contingencies arrangements in 2023. The review has already delivered a number of tangible outcomes, including a strengthening of Wales' resilience structures to ensure they are streamlined, focused and fit for purpose, particularly in the light of lessons identified from the pandemic, more recent incidents and exercises, and the evolving threats and hazards.
- 1.5 The robustness of these new arrangements was tested significantly during our strategic response to storms Bert and Darragh in November and December 2024. The restrengthened structures enabled a swift transition from preparedness to readiness and response, efficient coordination of effort across government and support for the local response. It also supported effective join-up with the UK Government to issue, for the first time on a large scale, an UK Emergency Alert to the public, and escalation of the national response when that was required.

- 1.6 In addition, work on Wales' first bespoke civil contingencies risk register has concluded, with the associated data and technical guidance having been issued across government and to the responder community.
- 1.7 To provide a clear strategic direction for resilience in Wales and as a result of the civil contingencies review, the Welsh Government is developing with local and government partners a new strategic framework - the **Wales Resilience Framework**.
- 1.8 Supported by a delivery plan, which will be kept under continuous review, the Framework will reaffirm the Welsh Government's strategic approach to resilience in Wales. The Framework and delivery plan reflect the importance of our values: community, equality, social justice and partnership.
- 1.9 To ensure our long-term approach and delivery priorities meet Wales' needs and circumstances, the Framework is underpinned by eight core principles which the Welsh Government developed in conjunction with civil contingencies partners and the third sector. Endorsed by the Wales Resilience Forum in late 2023, the core principles help to frame the collective endeavours of government, emergency responders and the voluntary sector to reduce the risk and impact of emergencies and disruptive challenges, and to strengthen Wales' resilience and preparedness.
- 1.10 These are our core principles, which have already helped to shape delivery during 2024:
- **Understanding risk:** Preparedness work is informed by an evidence-driven, shared understanding and high-level of awareness of the existing and emerging risks Wales faces.
 - **Collaboration and transparency:** Government and emergency responders adopt a transparent, systematic, and holistic approach to prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery making best use of the powers available to Welsh Ministers, with a focus on partnership working and collaboration.
 - **Tailoring our approach to meet Wales' needs:** We establish and maintain resilience arrangements that meet Wales' needs, priorities, and legislation (including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act), while recognising that Wales forms an integral part of the UK's resilience arrangements; a more resilient Wales means a more resilient UK.
 - **Once for Wales:** Where appropriate, we adopt a "Once for Wales" approach to improve efficiency and consistency that optimises the contribution of government, the wider public, private and voluntary sectors and communities.
 - **Community resilience:** We empower our communities to improve their awareness of risks, resilience and self-reliance during emergencies.

- **Learning lessons:** We commit to continuous improvement at all levels by learning lessons from the past, including implementing recommendations from relevant public inquiries, and through testing and exercising of plans.
- **Innovating and communicating:** We make the best use of information and evidence, expertise and governance, with a focus on effective communication and engagement, innovation (including best use of technology), joined-up delivery and streamlined working which draws on and shapes good practice.
- **Efficiency:** We strive for optimal efficiency, and tailor, prioritise and phase our approach to delivery. We recognise and assess resourcing needs, and explore options for securing the necessary funding where required.

1.11 Working with our partners, we have made substantial progress in delivering an ambitious programme of work over the last two years, which we will continue in 2025. This work includes:

- Developing the Wales Resilience Framework and its supporting delivery plan, setting out key actions at the local and pan-Wales levels within specific timeframes.
- Streamlining the Welsh Government's internal governance arrangements through the establishment of a dedicated Risk and Preparedness Committee to ensure our structures remain efficient, focused and fit for purpose, particularly in the light of lessons identified from incidents and exercise, and an evolving threat and hazard landscape.
- Redeveloping our national resilience governance arrangements to ensure they are appropriate to support delivery of our key strategic objectives for resilience. This work is being taken forward by a Task and Finish Group comprising key partners from across the civil contingencies' community.
- Development of an improved risk evidence base, to provide responders and the Welsh Government with a Wales-specific evidence base and assessment of short, medium and long-term civil protection risks, to help inform resilience planning and priorities and enable Welsh Ministers, officials and the responder community to prepare for future incidents. This includes completion of a bespoke risk register.
- Providing funding for our four local resilience forums in 2024-25 to support the significant work they are undertaking across Wales. This development helps to meet recommendations set out in the Manchester Arena Inquiry Phase 2 report.
- Completing a refresh of the Pan-Wales Response Plan. We will also be undertaking a full review of our pan-Wales response arrangements, following the light-touch refresh of the plan last autumn. This review will provide opportunities to explore the plan's purpose and consider what a revised plan could achieve, based on a collective understanding of pan-Wales response requirements both now and in the future. These are just some of the workstreams we are taking forward, which aim to improve our understanding of risk, enhance preparedness and the effectiveness of multi-agency response and recovery arrangements and, ultimately, pan-Wales resilience.

- Successful delivery of a programme of best in class training for strategic leaders attending coordination groups. Over the last decade, Wales Gold has helped prepare our multi agency strategic leaders to work effectively in a Strategic Coordinating Group or a Recovery Coordinating Group following a major incident or emergency.
- A review of the national training, exercising and competency framework for the management of major incidents. This work will help develop recommendations to the First Minister to support continuous improvement for pan-Wales training, exercising and coordinated learning from experience.

1.12 Looking ahead, using powers under Part 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Welsh Government will be exploring the development of regulations and supporting statutory and non-statutory guidance on how Welsh responder bodies need to carry out their functions under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. We envisage that these regulations will be an important tool to support continuous improvement of civil protection arrangements in Wales.

1.13 Many emergencies do not respect national borders, so we recognise working on a four nations basis in our preparedness planning for a pandemic is critical, alongside our framework for Wales. This includes replacing the 2011 flu plan with a respiratory pandemic response plan that will form the basis for further plans for other forms of transmission. Responding to recent global public health threats including Mpox has also enabled us to test our preparedness in Wales for a highly communicable infectious disease threat alongside a four nations response. Our health and care system and population are still recovering from the impact of the pandemic. We recognise in responding to this report, and for future preparedness in Wales, our health security also requires a continued focus to support a healthier Wales that is less vulnerable to infectious disease and non-infectious disease threats.

2. Structure and Governance

Recommendation 1: A simplified structure for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each simplify and reduce the number of structures with responsibility for preparing for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies. The core structures should be:

- a single Cabinet-level or equivalent ministerial committee (including the senior minister responsible for health and social care) responsible for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience for each government, which meets regularly and is chaired by the leader or deputy leader of the relevant government; and
- a single cross-departmental group of senior officials in each government (which reports regularly to the Cabinet-level or equivalent ministerial committee) to oversee and implement policy on civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

Response

2.1 The Welsh Government agrees there is a greater need for improved governance structures to enable Ministerial and senior official oversight of civil contingencies in Wales. Much work has already been undertaken to provide clear structures for decision-making and clarity on roles and responsibilities both within the Welsh Government as well as separately within our external governance structures with our resilience partners.

Streamlined and strengthened internal governance

2.2 As set out above, the Welsh Government has been undertaking a comprehensive work programme to ensure that Welsh Ministers can be assured about preparedness and response in Wales. This programme recognises the need to balance ongoing preparedness with wider decisions about where to focus resources in a challenging fiscal context, and that the challenges of the impact of Covid-19 remain. As a nation, as noted in the introduction, we are still in recovery, and we need a continued focus to support our health security and the resilience of our population.

2.3 Following our review of our internal resilience and preparedness structures, we have put in place strengthened and streamlined oversight arrangements for the coordination of emergency preparedness and resilience work.

2.4 Ministerial and senior official oversight is established through straightforward escalation routes, either in a preparedness or response context, as set out in the diagram below. This model brings clarity to strategic, operational and tactical responsibilities, decision making and accountability. The new arrangements ensure cross-governmental input, given the potential cross-cutting nature of civil contingencies that may touch upon all aspects of society and therefore on the responsibilities across ministerial portfolios.

2.5 Most recently, the Welsh Government's restrengthened and simplified response structures were tested significantly as a result of the impacts of Storm Darragh in early December 2024. This was the most significant national test of Wales' resilience since the Covid pandemic in 2020-22. With the Met Office forecast highlighting red warning for wind and amber warnings for rain, the Welsh Government preparedness structure transitioned swiftly to response, with activation of First Response, to complement the activation of response structures of Wales' 4 Local Resilience Forums. This initial response helped with mutual aid, the issuing of an emergency alert, warning and informing arrangements, including a statement from the First Minister, and coordination into UK Government including power supply restoration. Given the severity of the situation, this was escalated to a Level 2 response, as set out in the Pan Wales Response Plan, convening the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee to bring together leaders from the responder community and senior officials from the Welsh Government and UK Government's COBR unit. Welsh Ministers decided to issue an Emergency Alert in light of the Met Office red wind warning of risk to life. Working through agreed protocols incorporated into the Wales resilience structure, the content and timing of the message was agreed between the UK and Welsh Governments. This was the first time the UK Emergency Alert system was used on a large scale since the national test in 2023. The alert was issued to approx. 3 million people.

2.6 Ministers have long taken responsibility for preparedness, with the First Minister chairing the Wales Resilience Forum, which brings together senior leaders and chief officers from responder organisations. Cabinet has previously considered preparedness issues on an ad hoc basis, rather than a routine basis, with the exception of winter preparedness, which it considers each year. To further strengthen ministerial oversight and to reflect that all Ministers maintain interests and functions in relation to emergency preparedness, the First Minister has confirmed that Cabinet will have at least one dedicated meeting each year (or more frequently if warranted by the risk profile) to consider risks and preparedness readiness. This will enable a focus on emergency planning to take place at the highest level of government and include all ministers collectively.

2.7 Further changes have been made to improve the understanding of the range of risks and threats Wales faces, the impacts on devolved functions and services that might arise should these risks materialise, and to strengthen preparedness and response and recovery capabilities. As a result, the First Minister, Cabinet

Secretaries and the Permanent Secretary's Executive Committee now receive reports from the **Risk and Preparedness Committee** established in April 2024, which provide updates on key issues, strategic priorities and decisions taken.

2.8 Chaired by the Director General, Education, Culture and Welsh Language Group, the Risk and Preparedness Committee brings together senior leaders from across the Welsh Government each quarter to:

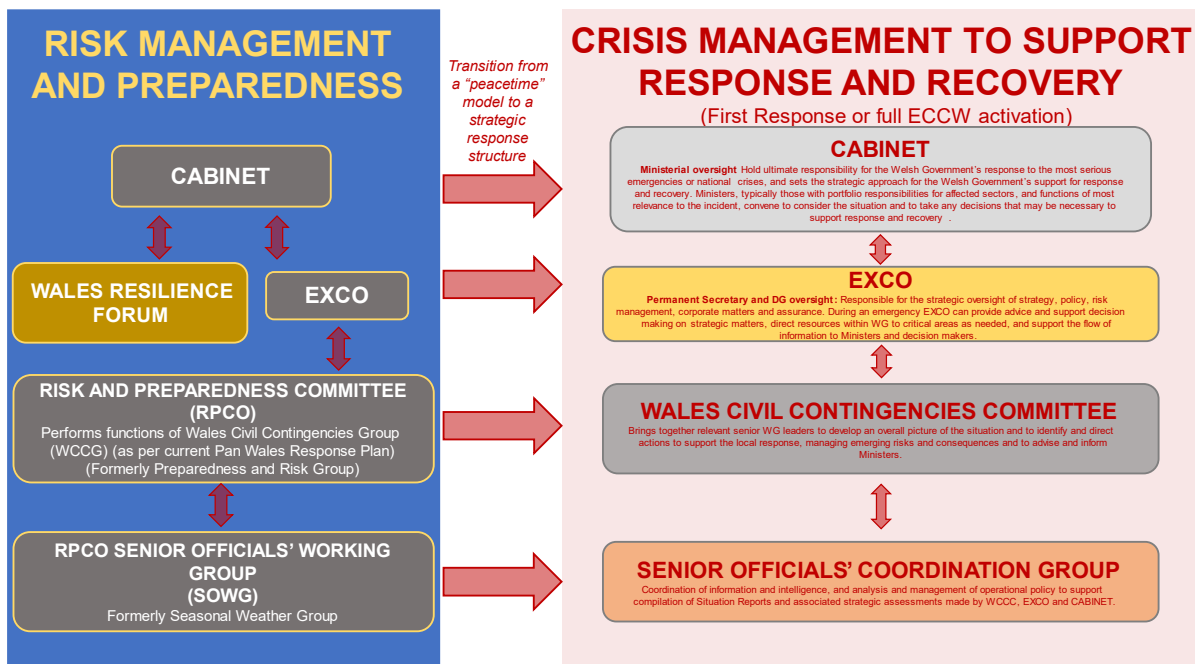
- **Provide senior level oversight for major risks affecting Wales** drawing on the new evidence base;
- **Coordinate and drive, at a strategic level, departmental and associated sector preparedness** to reduce and prevent risks from materialising where possible;
- **Consider issues escalated from the Senior Officials' Working Group and issues requiring escalation to the Permanent Secretary's Executive Committee;**
- **Provide assurance on resilience and preparedness matters** to the Permanent Secretary's Executive Committee and Welsh Ministers; and
- **Advise the Executive Committee and ministers on risk tolerance and appetite**, including consideration of executive and legislative competence in relation to management of resilience risks.

2.9 To provide the necessary support to the Risk and Preparedness Committee and to prioritise, coordinate and drive delivery, a Senior Officials' Working Group chaired by the Deputy Director, National Security and Resilience, meets on a monthly basis, bringing together relevant senior officials and policy leads to focus on:

- **Coordination and preparedness:** sharing information and coordinating activities at a working level, identifying data and evidence requirements and provide a forum for officials to request and offer mutual support where needed. The Senior Officials Working Group provides a forum for the identification of preparedness and capability building priorities and making appropriate recommendations to the Welsh Government's Executive Committee accordingly.
- **Lessons identified:** Providing oversight for cross Welsh Government efforts to "locking-in" resilience lessons identified emerging from relevant incidents, exercises and inquiries.
- **Training and exercising:** provide oversight for identification and coordination of resilience training and exercising.
- **Escalation:** consider issues escalated and recommendations from relevant task and finish groups for action (such as the Health and Social Services Emergency Planning Group, Drought Liaison Group, Energy Resilience Subgroup, Cyber Resilience Advisory Group and Warning and Informing Group) and any relevant issues requiring escalation to the Executive Committee or ministers.

- **Assurance:** providing assurance to the Risk and Preparedness Committee on risk management and preparedness.

2.10 These preparedness structures have been designed to transition from planning to response as required, as set out in the diagram below. The membership remains the same, meaning experience and expertise is consistent, but the operation of the group adapts to reflect the demands and nature of specific incidents and/or disruptive challenge.



External Review

2.11 To ensure effective governance arrangements exist not only within the Welsh Government but also at a pan-Wales level, as part of the Wales Resilience Framework programme, a review of Wales' external resilience structures is being undertaken in partnership with the statutory responder community. The first phase of the review was completed in 2024, with the second and final phase of this work to be completed in Spring 2025.

2.12 This reflects the need to provide different structures to enable effective coordination at the national and local levels.

2.13 The purpose of the review is to ensure appropriate external governance arrangements are streamlined and fit-for-purpose, including providing each group with a clear purpose, clear lines of accountability and clarity on roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 2: Cabinet Office leadership for whole-system civil emergencies in the UK The UK government should:

- abolish the lead government department model for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience; and
- require the Cabinet Office to lead on preparing for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies across UK government departments, including monitoring the preparedness and resilience of other departments, supporting departments to correct problems, and escalating issues to the UK Cabinet-level ministerial committee and group of senior officials in Recommendation 1.

Response

2.14 The Welsh Government adheres to the long-established and best practice emergency planning principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level, while coordination occurs at the highest necessary level. To meet this principle, the Welsh Government adopts the lead department model to cover all phases of risk assessment, emergency preparedness, response and recovery¹. Lead departments and policy teams, with the support of National Security and Resilience Division and expert services (such as Communications, Legal Services and Knowledge and Analytical Services) are responsible for:

- **Risk anticipation:** Maintaining awareness of the changing set of risks, threats and vulnerabilities including horizon-scanning for new and emerging risks within the areas of responsibility assigned to them, identifying specific risks to prepare for, and updating their risk assessment accordingly.
- **Risk assessment:** Assessing the potential scenarios, including the reasonable worst-case scenarios, should the risk materialise, and assessing the impact and likelihood of these scenarios.
- **Prevention and Mitigation:** Introducing measures which build resilience, preventing risks from occurring or reducing their severity.
- **Preparation:** Developing plans for responding to and recovering from an emergency and testing their effectiveness, including regular exercises.
- **Response:** Leading the strategic response to an emergency. Response encompasses the decisions and actions taken to deal with the immediate effects of an emergency.
- **Recovery:** Leading a recovery process following an emergency, if needed. This might include long-term activities like the reconstruction of physical

¹ [UK National Leadership for Risk Identification, Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery](#)

infrastructure or the restoration of emotional, social and physical well-being for affected communities.

2.15 To provide the necessary support to policy teams, the Welsh Government draws on the strategic advice of the aforementioned Risk and Preparedness Committee and supporting subgroups to oversee, direct and coordinate this work.

2.16 In the event of a prolonged, whole system emergency, it is recognised that the lead government department model has limitations and a different model might be required.

3. Strategy, Data and Risk

Recommendation 3: A better approach to risk assessment

The UK government and devolved administrations should work together on developing a new approach to risk assessment that moves away from a reliance on single reasonable worst-case scenarios towards an approach that:

- assesses a wider range of scenarios representative of the different risks and the range of each kind of risk;
- considers the prevention and mitigation of an emergency in addition to dealing with its consequences;
- provides a full analysis of the ways in which the combined impacts of different risks may complicate or worsen an emergency;
- assesses long-term risks in addition to short-term risks and considers how they may interact with each other;
- undertakes an assessment of the impact of each risk on vulnerable people; and
- takes into account the capacity and capabilities of the UK

In doing so, the UK government and devolved administrations should perform risk assessments that reflect the circumstances and characteristics particular to England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole.

Response

3.1 The Welsh Government acknowledges the importance of robust risk evidence and management to support the prioritisation of emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

3.2 Our understanding of civil contingencies risks in Wales, whether from natural hazards and public health emergencies to major accidents and malicious threats (including those from terrorism, cyber attacks or adversary state-sponsored activity) has improved considerably in recent years.

3.3 Partly in response to lessons emerging from the pandemic, the Welsh Cabinet commissioned officials in 2023 to develop a tailor-made risk register for Wales, moving away from a reliance on the National Security Risk Assessment to

creating a bespoke risk register, which addresses the specific characteristics and challenges unique to Wales.

3.4 Over the last two years, work has been undertaken on creating a suite of risk evidence documents to provide an improved risk evidence base for Welsh responders and the Welsh Government. This Wales-specific evidence base provides:

- Higher quality information to raise awareness and collective understanding of short, medium and long-term civil protection risks and to inform emergency preparedness and response and recovery capability building work.
- Identification and assessment of concurrent risks to help inform preparedness and consequence management planning.
- An assessment of preparedness of each of the four Local Resilience Forums in Wales against the common consequences that could arise should any given risk materialise in future, and specific preparedness assessments against each system-wide disruptive challenge identified in the UK National Security Risk Assessment. This preparedness element of the risk register is unique in terms of national risk assessments in the UK and contributes to the development of our capabilities programme.
- Help to inform the Welsh Government's risk management and preparedness work while complementing emergency responders' work at the local level by supporting them in fulfilling their statutory risk assessment and emergency planning obligations.

3.5 The bespoke risk register draws upon the National Security Risk Assessment data but working directly with Wales's four Local Resilience Forums has enabled us to better account for the impact of the full range of risks on different communities across Wales, as well as Welsh specific risks, not covered in the National Security Risk Assessment. The methodology was endorsed by the Wales Resilience Forum in December 2023 following close consultation with the Local Resilience Forums. The Emergency Planning College² have independently assessed the register, stating the risk assessment process is 'robust', and the preparedness methodology is 'logical and pragmatic', which delivers 'good and leading practice.'

3.6 This is the first version of the Welsh risk register and to ensure it remains a robust and dynamic process, it will require ongoing review and updates to reflect the ever-changing risk landscape. We will continue to work with the UK Government in the development of risk assessment processes for the UK National Security

² The Emergency Planning College is operated for, and on behalf of the UK Government, and delivers training, exercising and advisory services in all resilience disciplines, and supports the development of UK national doctrine, guidance and standards.

Risk Assessment to ensure our risk register can continue to draw upon it in the future and ensure continued consistency.

3.7 The Welsh Government's new risk assessment products have been designed specifically to complement Wales' Local Resilience Forums Risk Group outputs, including Category 1 responder statutory requirements to update and maintain Community Risk Registers, while supporting and informing the work of the Welsh Government's Risk and Preparedness Committee.

3.8 An external public summary of the Wales Risk Register will be published in early 2025.

Recommendation 4: A UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy.

The UK government and devolved administrations should together introduce a UK-wide whole-system civil emergency strategy (which includes pandemics) to prevent each emergency and also to reduce, control and mitigate its effects. As a minimum, the strategy should:

- be adaptable;
- include sections dedicated to each potential whole-system civil emergency – for example, one on pandemics with a clear explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the UK government, devolved administrations and their departments/directorates as well as local responders;
- consider a wide range of potential scenarios for each type of emergency;
- identify the key issues and set out a range of potential responses;
- identify how the strategy is to be applied to ensure that any potential responses are proportionate to the particular circumstances of the emergency;
- include an assessment in the short, medium and long term, based on published modelling, of the potential health, social and economic impacts of the emergency and of potential responses to the emergency on the population and, in particular, on vulnerable people; and
- include an assessment of the infrastructure, technology and skills the UK needs to respond effectively to the emergency and how those needs might change for different scenarios.

The strategy should be subject to a substantive reassessment at least every three years to ensure that it is up to date and effective, incorporating lessons learned between reassessments.

Response

3.9 Most emergencies in Wales are managed at the local level by the emergency services, local authorities, and other responder organisations, such as Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales, water and energy companies and transport operators, with multi-agency coordination and decisions being undertaken through Strategic Coordination Groups where necessary. However, because of scale or complexity, some emergencies may need a degree of government coordination or support, with the Welsh and UK Governments taking

the lead where appropriate, in line with the devolution settlement. The Pan Wales Response Plan sets out the arrangements for management of major emergencies affecting several or all parts of Wales. The Plan was updated in 2023 and endorsed by the Wales Resilience Forum in December 2023.

- 3.10 In the event of a major or catastrophic emergency, for example widespread and substantial flooding across Wales, major industrial accident or disruption, or terrorist attack, the Welsh Government's activates strategic response structures to keep ministers apprised of the situation, coordinate the Welsh Government's response, share information (including with the UK Government, via COBR Unit), record and disseminate decisions, and advise ministers on any high-level decisions they may need to take to support response and recovery efforts.
- 3.11 In addition, recognising the impacts on the organisation and partners that arise from activation of the Emergency Coordination Centre Wales and the efficiencies to be gained from coordinating a response virtually by making best use of current IT tools, the Welsh Government developed and implemented in 2022 a more agile, proportionate approach to help meet strategic response demands. Known as "First Response", this refreshed approach does not discount the need to stand-up the Emergency Coordination Centre Wales, and bring together in one location government officials and responders when required. However, it recognises that full Emergency Coordination Centre Wales activation is not always proportionate to the level of response required or the most efficient way of meeting response demands.
- 3.12 First Response is supported by the Risk and Preparedness Committee and effectively presents a rapid response mechanism for the organisation to develop sustained response structures, if these are needed. This enables cross government oversight, shared situational awareness and understanding of risk, effective governance with clear decision points, whilst supporting incident preparedness and response. Following a successfully trial of the approach in 2022, First Response arrangements have been activated on multiple occasions in the last two years, including, most recently, in relation to Storm Darragh in early December 2024.
- 3.13 The First Response approach fits with UK Government response processes, including Calling Notices for both Official and Ministerial COBR meetings, and management of reporting requirements, such as Commonly Recognised Information Picture for Wales and Situation Reports, ensuring that Wales' interests are informed, accurate and well-represented.
- 3.14 First Response manages co-ordinated action across Welsh Government, and when required, across local partners, emergency planners and Category 1

responders. Maintaining these links enables informed early action and wider awareness across key stakeholders, supporting early calls for mutual aid and/or government support.

- 3.15 A strong resilience system, however, requires all partners and interested parties working collaboratively - including UK Government, local authorities, emergency services and the private and voluntary and community sectors. As part of the Wales resilience framework programme, the Welsh Government will be undertaking further work to identify how best to enhance community and societal resilience, and to better understand and integrate this into resilience and emergency management activities.
- 3.16 Alignment and interoperability across the UK and devolved governments is absolutely critical to our ability to effectively respond to whole-system risks. However, all governments agree that a single UK-wide strategy which covers all of the sub-recommendations would be unwieldy and would not be appropriate given devolution arrangements, responsibilities and accountabilities. We agree that risk planning should be done jointly or in concert, and we will cooperate closely going forward.

Recommendation 5: Data and research for future pandemics

The UK government, working with the devolved administrations, should establish mechanisms for the timely collection, analysis, secure sharing and use of reliable data for informing emergency responses, in advance of future pandemics. Data systems should be tested in pandemic exercises.

The UK government should also commission a wider range of research projects ready to commence in the event of a future pandemic. These could be 'hibernated' studies or existing studies that are designed to be rapidly adapted to a new outbreak. Better working with international partners should be encouraged.

This should include projects to:

- understand the prevalence of a new virus;
- measure the effectiveness of a range of different public health measures; and
- identify which groups of vulnerable people are hardest hit by the pandemic and why.

Response

Mechanisms for the timely collection, analysis, secure sharing and use of reliable data for informing emergency responses

3.17 In Wales a range of work on developing access to reliable data for civil emergencies including pandemics is in progress. This includes improving how data is collected, analysed and shared in response to both operational and pandemic emergencies. There is still work to be completed given the complexity and capacity for change especially on digital systems that can manage data at scale and share securely across public sector organisations. The Welsh Government is actively working on this across key systems. Further work and engagement is also needed at a UK Government level to actively engage with the digital, data and analytical community in devolved governments on their plans for improving cross-UK interoperability.

3.18 A key learning from the pandemic was the importance of data or surveillance to understand the epidemiology of pathogens, deliver intervention measures and

consider impact especially on the most vulnerable in our communities. Welsh Government has provided continuous funding to Public Health Wales to improve virological surveillance for acute respiratory illness including implementation of sentinel pharmacy surveillance to support more reliable surveillance data and insights. We are also developing a 'One Health' approach to surveillance to aid our preparedness for other routes of transmission. This includes continued investigation into wastewater surveillance. A recently established surveillance stakeholder panel within Public Health Wales, with representation from health boards, local authorities, and the Welsh Government, will help direct future surveillance capability for preparedness planning.

3.19 Further work has been done to improve the recording, quality and dissemination of data in our health system in a timely way that also supports preparedness.

- A new Welsh Emergency Care Dataset has been developed to better capture the demands on urgent care centres in Wales that supports civil and pandemic emergencies response. The new dataset is currently being implemented across Wales following the issue of new data standards in August 2024.
- Public Health Wales led a detailed exercise to identify the user needs for health protection across Wales concerning the replacement of the TARIAN and Customer Relationship Management health protection platforms. This work has engaged system and international partners in addition to citizens. The Digital Health Protection Programme aims to establish an internationally recognised, high quality and resilient service that will ensure data is collected, analysed and shared during times of stability and emergency in an effective and timely way –including the capacity to scale up contact tracing arrangements. This new service will provide the mechanisms to share health protection data with other agencies. The programme is currently at an alpha phase.
- The Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) databank, hosted by Swansea University, provides infrastructure to enable the linking of datasets, securely and anonymously, from across NHS Wales and other sources. SAIL allowed Welsh Government, the NHS and researchers to quickly use data to understand the impact of the pandemic on the Welsh population. Welsh Government continues to part fund SAIL through Health and Care Research Wales and alongside the Administrative Data Research – Wales partnership will continue to increase its access to different administrative datasets and builds its capability to help government understand its population when preparing for, and responding to, pandemic emergencies.

- A significant programme of work is being undertaken to transition the Welsh Immunisation System, which was developed during the Covid-19 pandemic, into a core system to support current and new vaccination programmes. This will result in more accurate, detailed and timely vaccination data in Wales.
- Public Health Wales is currently piloting the National Data and Analysis Platform, an element of the National Data Resource Programme led by Digital Health and Care Wales. This will significantly increase Wales' capacity to store and analyse large volumes of data and to access data held by Digital Health and Care Wales and the health boards through the Care Data Repository. It is anticipated that core datasets and analysis on the National Data and Analysis Platform will be live by spring 2026.
- As part of wider work to enhance digital collaboration between Welsh Government and public bodies, the Welsh Government has improved our ability to provide officials with direct access to NHS dashboards both routinely and in the event of an emergency. This had been identified as a barrier to information sharing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.20 As a result of the pandemic, in 2022 the Welsh Government established Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units following reports on disparities in outcomes for different ethnic groups and disabled people from Covid-19. These specialist units provide capacity for a greater focus on equality in data, research and analysis. A number of improvements to data collection and analysis have been implemented across the NHS and government in response, for example development of the Workforce Race Equality Standard for Health and Social Care, recording of ethnicity on death records and ability to link census data to other records for analysis.

3.21 In terms of analysing data, Welsh Government has continued to improve its capacity to respond to pandemics. The Technical Advisory Cell, established during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been transitioned to a permanent division within the Health, Social Care and Early Years Group. The Wales Policy Modelling Group has been established to better co-ordinate modelling resources from across the NHS in Wales and within academia, and to create and maintain strong relationships with partners which would be vital in responding to a possible future pandemic. A plan on how to deliver long term resilience for communicable disease modelling in a Welsh context is currently being developed along with an active programme to increase in-house capability.

3.22 The Welsh Government will be working closely with stakeholders to capture more detail about the barriers towards timely and effective data sharing, both locally and nationally, with regard to pandemic emergencies. We recognise the importance of two-way data and intelligence sharing with other devolved governments, UK Government and local government and further work is needed

in this space. We attend and contribute to Scientific Pandemic Influenza – Modelling and Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies meetings however, greater clarification on membership and the roles of different attendees from Welsh Government would help provided greater clarification. It is critical to agree rules of engagement around access to evidence and intelligence considered by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies across the UK at the outset of a pandemic or any other emergency, to minimise the risk of information sharing barriers due to lack of clarity on roles or security credentials.

- 3.23 The Welsh Government is establishing a data and evidence team within National Security and Resilience who will embed the use of data in future crisis responses, including any future pandemics. This includes mapping data and evidence requirements against risks in order to establish data pipelines well in advance of an emergency. Responsibilities will also include arrangements for surge capacity for analysts in the event of a civil or pandemic emergency.
- 3.24 The UK Cabinet Office's National Situation Centre has sought to establish an approach, mechanism and scope for high-level data sharing between the UK Government and devolved governments to improve rapid situational awareness during crisis preparedness and response, thereby improving resilience and crisis outcomes. The National Situation Centre has also created a Crisis Data Liaison Officer network to find data pathways, which consists of representatives from each central government department and the devolved nations to facilitate this. The data and evidence team referred to above will develop the relationship further with the National Situation Centre and the Crisis Data Liaison Officer network to ensure an effective and well-coordinated two-way flow of data between governments.
- 3.25 Despite the positive progress made by UK Government and the devolved governments during the pandemic in rapidly developing data sharing agreements and more recently through the National Situation Centre, further progress is needed to achieve a system that is equitable for all nations and shares the right data to be able to make rapid decisions in a pandemic emergency. We would welcome continued consideration of the potential for the Digital Economy Act and other legislation to ensure there is a clear legal framework for sharing data across the UK and with other public bodies to support both preparedness and response.
- 3.26 When solutions or changes to data sharing, analysis or visualisation are developed at pace by UK Government without due consideration and engagement with devolved governments this can cause challenges in adoption. Access to dashboards and analysed data across the UK continues to be complex, as different nations and government departments operate separate computer systems and have individual responsibilities in data protection

legislation and differing risk appetites. We would welcome more active engagement through our digital, data, technology and analytical communities at a UK level to ensure any differences and understanding is understood, so that solutions developed work at all levels.

3.27 The UK Government should also commission a wider range of research projects ready to commence in the event of a future pandemic.

3.28 The work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the Welsh Government worked with the National Institute of Health Research and UK Research and Innovation to support UK-wide funding programmes has been built upon through the UK Government establishment of a pandemic preparedness research framework.

3.29 The framework looks to ensure research infrastructure and capacity is in place to better respond to the evidence needs during a pandemic emergency. Welsh Government is a member of the Pandemic Preparedness Research Group, which oversees the processes and commissioning through the framework.

3.30 In Wales, Public Health Wales has established a behavioural science unit to develop expertise in communicable disease prevention and control intervention design, in addition to joining UK-wide pandemic research projects, e.g. SIREN (the SARS-CoV-2 immunity and reinfection evaluation study), vaccine development trials. Through the Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales and the social research profession, Welsh Government is also actively involved in the new cross-government Social and Behavioural Science for Emergencies group established by Sir Ian Diamond and Sir Patrick Vallance in 2022.

3.31 During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government established the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre to undertake evidence synthesis and rapid primary research addressing issues of specific and urgent importance to policy and practice in Wales. An appraisal of the knowledge mobilisation processes of the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre, its broader impact and lessons learnt has been published. In response to its effectiveness, the centre has since been recommissioned as the Health and Care Research Wales Evidence Centre, with a broad health, social care and public health remit. This Evidence Centre capacity could be repurposed in times of future pandemics or national emergencies as required.

4. Accountability, lessons learned and challenge

Recommendation 6: A regular UK-wide pandemic response exercise

The UK government and devolved administrations should together hold a UK-wide pandemic response exercise at least every three years.

The exercise should:

- test the UK-wide, cross-government, national and local response to a pandemic at all stages, from the initial outbreak to multiple waves over a number of years;
- include a broad range of those involved in pandemic preparedness and response; and
- consider how a broad range of vulnerable people will be helped in the event of a pandemic.

Response

4.1 The Welsh Government has long-recognised training and exercising as an essential component of effective emergency planning and major incident response. We agree that regularly programmed pandemic preparedness exercises should be tested, without de-prioritising other catastrophic risks which also need to be tested.

4.2 We, alongside the other governments of the UK accept that catastrophic risks should be tested at national and local levels through response exercises across all of the UK's catastrophic risks through a National Exercise Programme that establishes annual Tier 1 exercises.

4.3 Currently, planning is underway for a cross-system, UK Tier 1 national level pandemic exercise to take place in Autumn 2025, with the high-level aim to “assess significant elements of the UK's preparedness, capabilities, and response arrangements in the context of a pandemic arising from a novel infectious disease”.

4.4 The Welsh Government is fully engaging with this Tier 1 exercise and engaging with partners from the other nations on planning alongside our local responders. We are establishing a Wales Coordination Group to oversee planning and participation in Wales, which will have representation from all key organisations involved in the exercise. This will also include the third sector to ensure the

exercise considers how a broad range of vulnerable people will be helped in the event of a pandemic.

4.5 We also recognise that regular exercising at a Wales and local level will remain a core component of our preparedness work alongside the Tier 1 exercises. This will include desk top exercises to support and test our preparedness plans across identified risks. Since the pandemic, Public Health Wales has led on two desk top exercises. The first was in March 2023 to test the revised communicable disease outbreak control plan and the more recent was focused on High Consequence Infectious Disease arrangements as part of the Mpox preparedness work.

4.6 Where appropriate, as a further future step, we are considering the use of powers conferred on the Welsh Ministers in 2018 to make clear ministers' expectations in relation to exercising; for example by issuing statutory guidance and whether regulations would be appropriate, especially where this will enhance the legal clarity for the emergency responder community.

Recommendation 7: Publication of findings and lessons from civil emergency exercises

For all civil emergency exercises, the governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each (unless there are reasons of national security for not doing so):

- publish an exercise report summarising the findings, lessons and recommendations, within three months of the conclusion of the exercise;
- publish an action plan setting out the specific steps that will be taken in response to the report's findings, and by which entity, within six months of the conclusion of the exercise; and
- keep exercise reports, action plans, and emergency plans and guidance from across the UK in a single, UK-wide online archive, accessible to all involved in emergency preparedness, resilience and response.

Response

4.7 We recognise the importance of learning and sharing lessons from civil emergency exercises. A key priority for the Welsh Government is to learn the lessons from exercises and emergencies, and to help us, and the responder community, prepare for future incidents. It is also important we learn from past mistakes.

4.8 To support our approach to the implementation of lessons identified from inquiries, exercises and incidents, we are developing a new lessons management system, which enables improved prioritisation, coordination and monitoring of implementation. By introducing this new management system, we aim to close the loop between identifying lessons and achieving positive, lasting, improvements in practice.

4.9 This new management system also helps to identify and prioritise areas for enhancing capabilities, and drive continual improvement in the way that we assess, prepare and respond to emergencies.

4.10 We are also engaging with many of our key partners, including Public Health Wales, who also have identified the benefits of a consistent approach to lessons management within their organisations.

- 4.11 We also utilise Resilience Direct as a secure means of sharing information with the responder community in Wales.
- 4.12 We currently participate in discussions on exercising through the UK Government's Training and Exercising Advisory Board, which provides access to developments within the UK Government's National Exercising Program, including Tier 1 exercises.
- 4.13 We accept that for tier 1 civil emergency exercises the Welsh Government should publish findings and lessons from exercises (except where there are legitimate security or public safety reasons not to do so).

Recommendation 8: Published reports on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each produce and publish reports to their respective legislatures at least every three years on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience. The reports should include as a minimum:

- the risks that each government has identified are likely to result in whole-system civil emergencies;
- the recommendations that have been made to each government to mitigate those risks, and whether these recommendations have been accepted or rejected;
- a cost–benefit analysis setting out the economic and social costs of accepting the risks as against taking action to mitigate the risks;
- who may be vulnerable to the risks and what steps are being taken to mitigate those risks;
- a plan setting out the timescales for implementing the recommendations that have been accepted; and
- an update on the progress that has been made on implementing previously accepted recommendations.

Response

4.14 Underlying principles of our Wales Resilience Framework is the need for improved transparency and accountability in relation to emergency preparedness and the Welsh Government accepts the need to provide regular updates to the Senedd.

4.15 Under the Wales Resilience Framework we have committed to provide the Senedd with a regular update on our work, a progress report on delivery and an outline of the key challenges Wales faces.

4.16 Our new risk evidence base will support the development of the report by providing information on the key risks faced by Wales, in particular those which are likely to result in whole-system civil emergencies.

4.17 To address this recommendation in full, we will continue to work across the Welsh Government and with other partners to develop in full how and when

reports on whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience should be provided to the Senedd.

- 4.18 To also provide improved transparency to the public, a summary of the risks Wales faces will be published in early 2025, which will accompany existing community risk registers for Wales.

Recommendation 9: Regular use of red teams

The governments of the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should each introduce the use of red teams in the Civil Service to scrutinise and challenge the principles, evidence, policies and advice relating to preparedness for and resilience to whole-system civil emergencies. The red teams should be brought in from outside of government and the Civil Service.

Response

- 4.19 We agree with the principle and welcome the view that there should be greater external scrutiny and challenge to the resilience agenda and will continue to develop that approach.
- 4.20 The Welsh Government regularly employs a ‘critical friend’ approach to test, refine and help shape our policy and delivery work in relation to risk management and policy products. In addition, we commission independent experts to quality assure our work and exercise programme. For instance, the Emergency Planning College has been commissioned to independently assess the methodology and data set out in the Wales Risk and Preparedness Register we have developed in conjunction with the four Local Resilience Forum risk groups. Furthermore, we established in 2024 a new Cyber Resilience Advisory Group comprising cyber security experts, from across the UK and independent of Welsh Government, to help shape our policy and delivery programme and advice to the First Minister on this agenda. The Welsh Government will continue to independently challenge and help shape our resilience policies and programmes.
- 4.21 Our actions outlined in response to recommendations 8 and 9 will increase the scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s actions and plans. There will be greater independent expert advice which will advise ministers, decision makers and policy developers providing input into strengthened emergency preparedness.
- 4.22 The structures in place in Wales often go beyond consultation with the voluntary and community sector and lead to co-production as we saw in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 10: A UK-wide independent statutory body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience

The UK government should, in consultation with the devolved administrations, create a statutory independent body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness and resilience.

The new body should be given responsibility for:

- providing independent, strategic advice to the UK government and devolved administrations on their planning for, preparedness for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies;
- consulting with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector at a national and local level and directors of public health on the protection of vulnerable people in whole-system civil emergencies;
- assessing the state of planning for, preparedness for and resilience to whole-system civil emergencies across the UK; and
- making recommendations on the capacity and capabilities that will be required to prepare for and build resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

As an interim measure, the new body should be established on a non-statutory basis within 12 months of this Report, so that it may begin its work in advance of legislation being passed.

Response

4.23 We agree that external scrutiny, challenge and assurance would be beneficial to help strengthen Wales' resilience and to secure preparedness and response outcomes. In particular, we welcome the recommendation that independent and strategic advice be provided to the UK and devolved governments on their planning for, preparedness for and building resilience to whole-system civil emergencies.

4.24 The UK Government is committing to a shift from self-assessment to meaningful independent strategic advice and to working with the devolved governments to co-design a new independent function that will deliver the Inquiry's recommendation and provide a model for additional external advice and scrutiny.

4.25 The Welsh Government is keen to work further with the UK Government to develop that function. To ensure the model best serves the interests of the whole

of the UK and respects the devolution settlements it is crucial that those offering advice to the governments within the UK are well-versed in the devolution agenda. The representatives will need to understand not only the risk and preparedness landscape, but the constitutional context in which a UK-wide response is coordinated.

| Action | By when | Comment |
|--|---|--|
| Recommendation 1 | | |
| Establish Risk and Preparedness Committee (RPCO) | April 2024 | Operational |
| Establish RPCO Senior Officials' Working Group | April 2024 | Operational |
| Agree approach to dedicated Welsh Cabinet items on resilience and preparedness (with Cabinet having considered 3 specific items during 2024) | summer 2024 | Agreed |
| Review of RPCO arrangements | April 2025 | |
| Recommendation 3 | | |
| Commission development of bespoke Wales risk register | autumn 2021 | |
| Appointment of Principal Risk Adviser | March 2022 | |
| Suite of new risk assessment and risk management products focus on horizon scanning and winter preparedness developed and issued by Welsh Government | autumn 2022 to autumn 2023 and on-going | In place and regularly distributed to the responder community. |
| Wales risk management guidance completed to support delivery of Category 1 responders' risk assessment functions | spring 2024 | |
| Independent quality assurance of risk methodology and assessment | autumn 2024 | |
| Wales risk register completed | November 2024 | |
| Publication of public facing risk summary | early 2025 | |
| Review and refresh of short-term risks | March and October 2025 | |
| Review and updating of long-term risks | from autumn 2024 onwards continuous | |
| Recommendation 4 | | |
| Establish streamlined Welsh Government response structures (including "First Response") | Spring 2022 | |
| Welsh Government commissions review of civil contingencies arrangements | March 2023 | |

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| Refresh of Pan Wales Response Plan completed | December 2023 | |
| Completion of Phase 1 of Wales resilience governance | September 2024 | |
| Completion of Phase 2 of Wales resilience governance | March 2025 | |
| Commencement of new external governance arrangements | May 2025 | |
| Recommendation 5 | | |
| Welsh Emergency Care Dataset | Autumn 2026 | |
| Replacement of TARIAN with new health protection management system | Winter 2026 | |
| Long-term modelling strategy | Spring 2025 | |
| National Security and Resilience Data and Evidence Unit | Autumn 2025 | |
| Stakeholder engagement on Welsh public sector data interoperability and sharing | Autumn 2025 | |
| Recommendation 6 | | |
| UK Tier 1 pandemic exercise | autumn 2025 | |
| refreshed Wales Gold 5 | June 2025 | |
| development of new capability exercise programme | Winter 2025 | |
| Recommendation 7 | | |
| Publish findings from exercises | | |
| Establishment of lessons management system | Spring 2025 | |
| Recommendation 8 | | |
| Wales Resilience Framework principles developed in conjunction with responder community and endorsed by Wales Resilience Forum | December 2023 | |
| Publish Wales Resilience Framework and delivery plan | May 2025 | |
| FM statement to Senedd on preparedness | Winter 2026 | |
| Recommendation 9 | | |
| Independent assurance review of Wales risk register | October 2024 | |