

Agenda – Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5

Meeting date: 5 July 2023

Meeting time: 09.00

For further information contact:

Fay Bowen

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddPAPA@senedd.wales

This meeting will be broadcast live on www.senedd.tv

(Private pre-meeting)

(09:00 – 09:15)

1 Introductions, apologies and substitutions

(09:15)

2 Papers to note

(09:15 – 09:25)

2.1 Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee on Civil Service Capacity

(Pages 1 – 3)

2.2 Letter from the Director General for the Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group on Town Centre Regeneration

(Pages 4 – 10)

2.3 Letter from Permanent Secretary to Chair of Equality and Social Justice Committee on Welsh Government and Future Generations Commissioner working

(Pages 11 – 16)

2.4 Letter from the Welsh Government on Gilestone Farm

(Pages 17 – 18)



3 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business:

Standing Order 17.42 ix for items 4, 7, 8 and 9.

Standing Order 17.42 vii for Item 6.

4 Draft Report – Scrutiny of Accounts Welsh Government: 2021–22

(09:25 – 09:50)

(Pages 19 – 79)

(Break)

(09:50 – 10:00)

5 Gilestone Farm: Evidence session with the Welsh Government

(10:00 – 11:00)

(Pages 80 – 100)

- Andrew Slade – Director General – Economy, Treasury and Constitution
- Jason Thomas – Director – Culture, Sport and Tourism
- Gerwyn Evans – Deputy Director – Creative Wales
- Tim Howard – Deputy Director – Property

(Break)

(11:00 – 11:10)

6 Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board: Private evidence session

(11:10 – 12:10)

(Pages 101 – 109)

- Carol Shillabeer – Interim Chief Executive
- Dyfed Edwards – Chair

7 Gilestone Farm: Consideration of the evidence received

(12:10 – 12:15)

8 Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board: Consideration of the evidence received

(12:15 – 12:25)

**9 Evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:
Consideration of a draft letter to the Deputy Minister for Social
Services**

(12:25 – 12:30)

(Pages 110 – 115)

Mark Isherwood MS

Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

22 June 2023

Civil service capacity

Dear Mark,

We have recently carried out a series of pieces of work that fall under the portfolio of the Minister for Health and Social Services and her deputies. Each of those pieces of work has highlighted concerns about the capacity of the civil service within that particularly Welsh Government department, as set out below.

Scrutiny of the Welsh Government 2023-24 Draft Budget

We believe that civil service capacity within the Minister for Health and Social Services' department may be making it challenging for the Minister and her deputies to provide us with the detail and quality of written evidence that we need to undertake effective scrutiny within tight budget timetables. We set out our concerns in more detail in our [letter to the Finance Committee dated 25 May 2023](#).

Inquiry into radical reform of services for care experienced children and young people

In its Programme for Government, the Welsh Government has committed to "Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers." However, we launched our inquiry in July 2022 because at that point in the Senedd term there was very little clarity from the Welsh Government about what exploring radical reform meant in practice.

Over the course of our inquiry we found no shortage of commitment to radical reform from the Deputy Minister and indeed from the First Minister (who has made personal commitments to reducing the numbers of children in care). We also found widespread support from stakeholders and children and young people themselves for radical reform, and many ambitious, evidenced-based and convincing ideas for what that radical reform might look like. Those ideas fed into our [report](#), which

sets out proposals for 12 radical reforms and a series of other potential improvements to services for care experienced children and young people.

What we have heard from some stakeholders during our inquiry indicates that the political commitment at ministerial level to radical reform is not being matched by the pace of policy development and implementation at civil-service level. Some of the policy examples we have received evidence about has suggested that this is at least partly due to insufficient capacity. Looking to the future, we are concerned that the Welsh Government's willingness and ability to take-forward our proposals for radical reform may be hindered by a lack of civil service capacity.

Our inquiries about the creation of national children's counselling service

On 29 January I and the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee wrote to the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. We received a response on 5 April, which we considered on 3 May.

We were concerned by the Deputy Minister's admission in that response that a high volume of correspondence is causing delays to their response times. As you know, it is agreed practice for the Welsh Government to respond to our correspondence within 6 weeks. Timely responses to Committee requests for information are crucial for us to carry out our scrutiny work effectively, as they are for all Committees. We recognise that responding to Committee correspondence takes time and is only one small part of Welsh Government officials' duties. Nevertheless, we are concerned that limitations in civil service capacity may be negatively impacting our ability to scrutinise properly across governmental departments.

I understand that the Public Accounts And Public Administration Committee scrutinises the Welsh Government annual accounts, and that this scrutiny includes consideration of the Welsh Government's workforce capacity. I very hope that the information can feed into that scrutiny process, and that it supports you in that important work.

If you would like further information about any of the issues above please don't hesitate to contact the Committee clerks. Otherwise, I would be very grateful if you could keep my Committee updated on any conclusions or recommendations you come to that relate to the issues raised in this letter.

I have copied this letter to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 2.2

Tracey Burke

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol / Director General

Y Grŵp Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mark Isherwood MS
Chair,
Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

15 June 2023

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 23 May 2023, following our attendance at the evidence session of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee meeting on 18 May 2023. I am writing to respond with the additional information you requested.

Whether, over recent years, the Welsh Government's funding for town centre regeneration has been sufficiently streamlined and focused on the right issues.

Prior to the Transforming Towns programme, a range of different funding streams existed which in many ways had the same outputs and objectives. It encouraged stakeholders to target specific funding rather than focussing on broader place regeneration. We have now streamlined our regeneration funding via the Transforming Towns programme as well as made three-year funding allocations to local authorities allowing them to plan more strategically.

Transforming Towns is a coordinated, but flexible, package of support. How it is utilised is driven by local authorities, with Welsh Government oversight. All projects and interventions supported by the Programme must be underpinned by or contribute to a placemaking plan. As a minimum, placemaking plans will set out the current conditions of a town, generate and build community interest and participation, create a new and common vision for the town's future and develop a clear and solid set of recommendations and implementation strategy.

Local authorities support individual towns by identifying the mix of interventions which best suits their specific issues, characteristics, local strengths, culture and heritage, including:

- ✓ Support for local delivery partners to develop placemaking plans to enable the development of projects, linked to other interventions in that place.



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Parc Cathays • Cathays Park
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Ffôn • Tel 0300 0258047
tracey.burke@gov.wales
Gwefan • website: www.wales.gov.uk

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- ✓ Taking enforcement action on empty properties.
- ✓ Loan and grant funding to bring vacant and underutilised commercial buildings back into use.
- ✓ Grant funding for green infrastructure and biodiversity projects.
- ✓ Grant funding for smaller scale 'place-making' interventions.
- ✓ Loan and grant funding for new build projects.

Whether the UK Government's 'Levelling Up' and 'Shared Prosperity' funds are aligned with the actions set out in your Town Centres position statement.

There have been practical challenges with aligning our town centre regeneration activities with UK funding schemes that are out-with our own investment governance structures. The UK Government's Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity funds are not exclusively town centres related, but through Regional Investment Plans, local authorities across Wales have recognised the potential for strong alignment between both of these funds and our Transforming Towns agenda. This potential alignment could in turn support actions in the position statement as a number are underpinned by the transforming towns programme.

What opportunities and possible risks are presented by local authorities being able to secure UK government funding for town centre regeneration through the Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds.

In October 2022, the Minister for Economy and the Minister for Finance and Local Government set out the Welsh Government's position on match funding when dealing with projects being supported by UK funds such as Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Fund.

The letter set out that if there is a compelling case, Welsh Government match funding could be considered for projects, provided the project met the framework of core principles and subject to the approval of all relevant Ministers.

Opportunities for town centres will exist if Shared Prosperity or Levelling Up fund investment is aligned with Welsh Government regeneration policies.

The maximum intervention rate for Transforming Towns Development Funding (revenue and capital) is 70%. There is therefore a requirement for Local Authorities to contribute a minimum of 30% towards regeneration projects. A focus on town centres and restoring a sense of community is one of the missions set out in the UK Governments Levelling Up Bill. Local authorities are therefore exploring opportunities to use match funding secured through the Shared Prosperity Fund as their 30% contribution to Transforming Towns projects.

We cannot directly influence the decisions that are made with UK Government funding, rather we have been working closely with local authorities to ensure that placemaking plans are in place that can underpin investment regardless of funding stream. Of course, there is a risk when processes are not aligned that significant strain is put on staff and capacity in the preparation of Levelling Up Fund bids.

The delivery of successful projects is also likely to be challenging given timescales, resources, and inflationary pressures. For example, Levelling Up Fund projects are expected to close in December 2024 with funding having to be completed by 31 March 2025 (barring exceptional circumstances). This could present risks to strategic projects where longer-term funding could bring more enduring value and legacy.

Whether those areas most in need of town centre regeneration in Wales are well-placed to develop investment proposals and bids to ensure they benefit from UK government funding.

The support we are providing is offered to all 22 local authorities across Wales. Local authorities determine which areas require regeneration investment and this is underpinned by placemaking plans. The plans and their respective governance structures, bring together policy objectives in a collaborative way, working across authorities and government to maximise investment from different funding streams and programmes that are “place specific”.

Delivery of a placemaking plan is overseen by a robust governance structure with representation from within each Authority, Welsh Government and other key partners. This approach and working closely with local authority partners and other key stakeholders, can turn plans into delivery across Wales and support local authorities to make strong investment cases from multiple sources. We are already enabling local authorities to share and use best practice in delivering placemaking plans with specialist support from the Design Commission for Wales. In doing so, we are ensuring projects supported by the Welsh Government, as well as other sources of investment, contribute to the long-term sustainability of towns and the communities who rely on them.

What positive impact have Corporate Joint Committees had to date in respect of enabling and encouraging the regeneration of towns.

From 30 June 2022 CJsCs came under duties to prepare Strategic Development Plans and Regional Transport Plans.

The preparation of Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) by CJsCs will enable a more consistent, cost effective and efficient approach to planning. SDPs will deliver more effective planning outcomes for communities by ensuring key issues, development and associated infrastructure is planned for in an integrated and comprehensive way across a wider geographical area.

As set out in the Town Centres Position Statement, we are currently finalising guidance to support CJsCs in the preparation of plans which presents an opportunity to ensure that Regional Transport Plans consider wider place making plans and the Town Centre First policy.

Whether the requirement to work regionally through Corporate Joint Committees, City Deals and Regional partnerships will help the regeneration of towns across Wales given the resource challenges facing local authorities, who have insufficient capacity.

It is expected that the introduction of CJsCs will continue to develop the joint working across local authorities which may help to overcome some of the resource challenges being faced.

The four Welsh City and Growth Deals reflect the existing drive to work closely with the regional delivery partners to deliver transformational investment across Wales to deliver sustainable skilled jobs and communities and towns across Wales. The City and Growth Deals have introduced a culture of working across traditional Local Authority boundaries with some officers leading on projects outside their designated Local Authority area.

By way of example, the Mid Wales Growth Deal forms a component part of a wider strategy for the region, where Regional Economic Frameworks, co-designed with key Local Authority partners outline a shared vision for the Mid Wales economy. They can ensure greater alignment and integration of activity where our approach to economic well-being is grounded on the principle that places matter.

The Mid Wales Growth Deal Portfolio has been designed to complement and add value to the range of existing initiatives in place in the region. It makes specific reference in its Strategic Case to the Welsh Government's Town Centre First Policy to ensure that town centres should be the first consideration for all decisions on the location of workplaces and services.

Regional partners recognise the importance of the evolving role and function of the region's market and coastal towns – The Growing Mid Wales Partnerships Vision for Growing Mid Wales and Strategic Economic Plan highlights the importance of 'place', where its towns are intrinsically linked to the region's wealth of outstanding natural assets, key sectors such as tourism and wider foundational economy, as well as the regions rich heritage, culture, and Welsh language attributes.

What overall lessons the Welsh Government could learn from approaches in other parts of the UK or beyond.

Town centres face complex challenges which are sometimes unique to specific places. There is no single solution to those issues.

In establishing the Ministerial Town Centre Action Group (MTCAG) we secured membership from people and organisations outside of Wales, including Phil Prentice, Chief Officer of Scotland's Towns Partnership and Peter Williams, Director of The Means, a UK wide placemaking consultancy. This helped provide a different perspective to the challenges, issues and potential solutions. We heard about the experiences in Scotland which informed the groups thinking.

Placemaking plans (used across the UK) are now embedded in our Transforming Towns Programme and indeed inform a range of investments. Learning and best practice from across sectors is an on-going activity for the delivery of the actions in the Town Centres Position Statement.

You have also asked for the following additional information, which we committed to providing during the meeting.

A note summarising the key groups that the Welsh Government is working with on town centre regeneration, including regional groups and sub-groups.

The Ministerial Town Centre Action Group (MTCAG) was set up in June 2020 and combined experience from across private, public and community-led sectors to support the delivery of positive changes for Wales's town and city centres and to tackle the issues they faced during the Coronavirus pandemic. The Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government established and used the MTCAG to implement a cross Wales response to the very real economic, social and physical challenges faced by town centres as a result of Covid-19. The MTCAG is composed of a broad range of external stakeholder as well as Welsh Government officials from across a range of Ministerial portfolios and town centre policy interests.

In addition to the Ministerial Town Centre Action Group, four regional sub groups were established to drive through the MTCAG priorities in the regions and feedback. These Regional Town Centre Action Groups had a broad membership comprised of all influencers and regional actors capable of effecting local and regional change in our town centre environments.

In September 2021 the MTCAG was refocussed to play a key role in and oversee the Welsh Government's implementation of the recommendations made in the Audit Wales report: Regenerating Town Centres and the independent FERL report: Small Towns, Big Issues. The MTCAG systematically reviewed the findings of the FERL report in order to test them and, under the auspices of the MTCAG, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change (DMCC) established three Task & Finish Groups to support the MTCAG by undertaking "deep dive" work on the recommendations and to report back. The three groups' focus was as follows:

- ✓ Financial incentives for town centres and disincentives for out of town.
- ✓ Funding streamlining and simplification.
- ✓ Planning and community engagement.

The groups work fed back into the MTCAG by January 2022 and in February 2022 the DMCC established a smaller, more focussed Ministerial Town Centre Delivery Group (MTCDG) to take forward the task and finish groups work and explore further the issues and barriers set out in the reports and consider practical responses. The MTCDG membership was made up of a number of regeneration professionals and worked through the issues leading to the development of the Town Centres Position Statement.

How we take forward the actions in the Position Statement through appropriate governance is critical. We will set up task and finish groups to oversee the development and delivery of the actions, grouped in themes. These groups will include officials from relevant Ministerial departments as well as key external stakeholders. We will also repurpose the Ministerial Town Centre Action Group to monitor and oversee progress which will report to Ministers as required.

A note, from the transport team, on the Welsh Government's transport strategy, in the context of town centre regeneration, with an indication of timescales and applicable KPIs relating to the targets set in this area.

Llwybr Newydd, our transport strategy, strongly recognises the links between town centre regeneration and transport. Many of the strategies priorities involve land use planning considerations such as:

- ✓ to locate new public services such as education, health and leisure facilities close to where people live, and to existing public transport routes, adopting a Town Centre First approach.
- ✓ to build new workplaces and homes close to public transport and design new developments to be walk- and cycle-friendly from the outset.
- ✓ to ensure a joined-up approach to infrastructure investment decisions across Welsh Government and in regional planning.
- ✓ to maximise the use of land close to transport hubs including railway stations and ports, as sites for investment and growth.

We aim to use the forthcoming Regional Transport Plans and the geographically-aligned Strategic Development Plans as a platform for increasing co-working between transport and land use planning teams within Local Government, Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. Regional Transport Plans will commence development now and be ready for implementation in 2025.

We are also working to appoint an independent Place Based Advisory Group to review linkages between transport and land use planning and make recommendations on how ways of working can be improved to benefit areas such as town centre regeneration.

The KPI monitoring framework for the Wales Transport Strategy is set out here: [HYPERLINK](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftfw.wales%2Fprojects%2Fmonitoring-and-evaluation%2Fwales-transport-strategy&data=05%7C01%7CRhidian.Jones%40gov.wales%7Ce40b442f38654e15765608db67f5a1c8%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638218076891100643%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=jpWrDktlhEICPYbrTiklanS1vH%2BKdEWRb7NpVIPnXs0%3D&reserved=0) "Wales Transport Strategy Monitoring | Transport for Wales (tfw.wales)". The framework has been designed to track progress against achieving the above priorities which link strongly to town centre regeneration. Specific metrics that will be tracked annually include % of people satisfied with their ability to access services in their local area, and average travel time to education, health and leisure services.

The quantifiable criteria you will be considering, to monitor and evaluate the progress being made as a result of the Welsh Government's initiatives and strategies on town centre regeneration. The Committee notes that the Auditor General's report, Regenerating Town Centres in Wales, was accompanied by a comprehensive, publicly available, data tool, which provides a series of relevant data points and indices for measuring performance in this area.

The previous regeneration funding programme, Vibrant and Viable Places was e-places-targeted-regeneration-investment-process-evaluation" [evaluated](#) in 2015, which helped informed the current Transforming Towns programme, in particular its focus on investment being prioritised for town and city centres. Evaluation of the Building for the Future regeneration programme designed to redevelop unused buildings and land within, or aligned to, town and city centres began in December 2018 . [HYPERLINK](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.wales%2Fevaluation-building-future-mid-term-report&data=05%7C01%7CRhidian.Jones%40gov.wales%7C824f46947b584c56637108db681e9839%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638218252819651289%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ikl1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=x7e40Ms9spYrvWfixs%2Bhngiik747TyObPn2iK%2BoEx7s%3D&reserved=0) "Evaluation of Building for the Future: mid-term report | GOV.WALES" was published in June 2021. Final evaluation is due to be completed in September this year on completion of the programme.

The Transforming Towns 'SMART Towns' programme supports the use of digital technologies and data to help businesses make data-driven, evidence-based decisions to boost sales and profits, reduce costs and accelerate growth. Over the last year the Programme has engaged with 67 towns and has produced 24 case studies to ensure learning is shared. Following a full re-procurement exercise, Menter Mon will continue to deliver the next phase of the Smart Towns Programme across Wales between April 2023 and March 2025. The Programme is required to contribute to any broader evaluation of the Transforming Towns Programme, which [Pack Page 9](#) overall impacts on town centres

through metrics such as footfall, dwell time, empty properties, use classes (e.g. charity shops), instances of crime and/or anti-social behaviour, prevalence of green space and numbers of events. The Smart Towns Programme will also align to the new Business Wales delivery contract, which includes digital support to businesses, and will feed into future evaluations of that contract.

Scheme or project level monitoring is already carried out within the Transforming Town Programme. By way of example, the delivery of a new library and leisure centre in Neath town centre is already demonstrating impact, with Leisure Centre membership figures increasing from 1000 to 2300 following the opening of the new facility. In addition, figures for the Library from 1 February to 29 April this year show 34007 visits - an increase of 137% on same period last year; 23477 books borrowed – an increase of 93% on same period last year; and over 3000 attendees at events since 1 February – an increase of 300% on same period last year.

Empty buildings in town centres are an obvious metric to consider. As part of our Programme for Government we are committed to “support the development of a register of empty buildings and help small businesses move into vacant shops.” During 2023-24, we will be conducting an evaluation of our property enforcement support and the impact it has had. The outcome of that evaluation will inform future approaches.

We will be conducting a full evaluation of the Transforming Towns programme including the effectiveness of placemaking plans. Whilst the exact remit has not yet been set, we will ensure that it is informed by the Auditor General’s data tool and other relevant studies, including the learning from previous evaluations on individual elements of the programme. We will need to carefully consider the impact Covid has had on towns and cities in Wales when carrying out a full evaluation of the Transforming Towns Programme.

I trust this information is of value to you and the Committee in this area of work. Please let me know if you would like any clarification or additional information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Burke'.

Tracey Burke
Director General, Climate Change and Rural Affairs Group



27 June 2023

Dr Andrew Goodall
Ysgrifennydd Parhaol
Permanent Secretary

Dear Ms Rathbone MS

On 27 May 2022, I wrote to you with the Welsh Government's response to recommendation 3 of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report Annual scrutiny of the Future Generations Commissioner: An update as the recommendation concerned the training and professional development of the Welsh Government civil service. In relation to the report's claims of a 'heavy reliance' on the Commissioner by the Welsh Government, I stated that further analysis would take place and that Welsh Government officials would work with the Commissioner's officials to better understand the nature and quantity of these requests for support to provide a clearer picture on the situation and to help the Commissioner manage their resources.

In your letter to the Commissioner on 23 March 2023, you refer to a perception that that 'too much of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner's time and resource has been dedicated to helping the Welsh Government apply its own legislation, sometimes to the detriment of other public bodies'. I therefore wanted to take this opportunity to share Annex A below, which provides an analysis of the Welsh Government's requests for support to the Commissioner's office in 2021-22. Welsh Government officials have worked closely with the Commissioner's officials in developing this analysis and I am grateful for the collaborative approach we continue to take in strengthening sustainable development within Wales.

*Yours,
Andrew Goodall*

Dr Andrew Goodall
Ysgrifennydd Parhaol/ Permanent Secretary
Llywodraeth Cymru/ Welsh Government

Cc: First Minister, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, Minister for Finance and Local Government, Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.



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ANNEX A: ANALYSIS OF WELSH GOVERNMENT 'REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT' TO THE FUTURE GENERATIONS COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

BACKGROUND

In May 2022, following the Equality and Social Justice Committee's reference of a 'heavy reliance' on the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales by Welsh Government, officials in the Sustainable Futures Division have worked with the Commissioner's officials to better understand the nature and quantity of these Welsh Government requests to provide a clearer picture on the situation and to help the Commissioner manage her resources. Welsh Government demand on the Commissioner has been raised publicly on several occasions.

Example 1: on [1 February 2021](#), at the Public Accounts Committee (fifth Senedd), the Commissioner stated that:

So, over the last two and a half years, we've had 663 requests for advice from public bodies; 43 per cent of those requests have been from Welsh Government [...]

Example 2: on [7 February 2022](#), at the Equality and Social Justice Committee, the Commissioner stated that:

So, in all, we've received, to date, 1,061 requests for support since May 2018 [...] The number of requests from public bodies in total is 362 [...]. Of those 362, 157 have come solely from Welsh Government. The Welsh Government are one public body out of 44, and yet almost half of all requests for support are coming from Welsh Government and, as I said, often in these big, meaty topics and subject areas.

Example 3: on [11 April 2022](#), the Equality and Social Justice Committee published their report *Annual scrutiny of the Future Generations Commissioner: An update*, which stated:

There appears to be a heavy reliance on the Commissioner's office by the Welsh Government to support and advise on how the Act is incorporated into its work and this necessitates a culture change.

Recommendation 3 of the report stated:

The Welsh Government should set out how it uses training and professional development to ensure its employees fully understand and comply with the Act, so as to reduce the apparent need for reliance on the Commissioner's office.



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On [27 May 2022](#), the Permanent Secretary responded:

The Commissioner has suggested that the Welsh Government have accounted for around fifteen percent of the total requests for support received by her office since May 2018. Further analysis is required to establish the nature of these requests to substantiate claims of a 'heavy reliance' on the Commissioner by the Welsh Government and to what extent these requests for support stem from a lack of understanding of how to comply with the Act. Officials are working with the Commissioner to better understand the nature and quantity of these Welsh Government requests to provide a clearer picture on the situation and to help the Commissioner manage her resources.

On [23 March 2023](#), the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee wrote to the new Commissioner to welcome him into his new role. The letter included the following wording:

Our report recommended that to aid transparency and scrutiny of the relationship between the Commissioner and the Welsh Government, you should consider how business with Ministers is conducted, including how meetings and communications are recorded and disclosed. This would help address the perception that too much of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner's time and resource has been dedicated to helping the Welsh Government apply its own legislation, sometimes to the detriment of other public bodies.

On [24 April 2023](#), the Commissioner responded:

In your letter you refer to a perception that too much of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner's time is dedicated to supporting the Welsh Government to the detriment of other public bodies. This is something I will pay close attention to. However, I must say, on the evidence of the last few weeks this has not been my impression.

ANALYSIS

Example 1: From 2018-19 to 2020-21, the Commissioner's office received 268 requests for advice from public bodies, of which 124 were from Welsh Government and 144 from other public bodies.

Example 2: The figure of 157 Welsh Government requests aligns to the information provided for 2018-19 to 2020-21 (further information is provided in the sources of information section). In this period, Welsh Government request for support represented around 15% of all requests for support. The figures quoted by the Commissioner here also include requests that were not actioned by the office.



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Example 3: The Commissioner’s office provided the Sustainable Futures Division with information from 2021-22 on the Welsh Government requests for support, the other public body requests for support, and all other requests for support. Estimates of the time ranges required to respond to these requests was also provided from ‘minimal’ (up to one hour) to ‘gold’ (more than ten days). The table below summarises this information.

Requests for support vary from basic queries and requests for information to invitations to be involved in significant projects. The Commissioner is not a statutory consultee on Welsh Government decisions apart from on developing national indicators and milestones, statutory guidance on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act), and in amending the list of bodies subject to the WFG Act.

Requests for support to the Future Generations Commissioner’s office (2021-22)					
Requests for support	Number of total requests received	Number of requests accepted*	Response time required (hours)**	Human resource (FTE)***	Percent of time taken (%)
Welsh Government	49	32	493.50	0.26	36
Other public bodies	84	67	264.00	0.14	19
All other	239	161	609.75	0.33	45
TOTAL	372	260	1367.25	0.73	100

* Also includes entries listed as ‘completed’, ‘in progress’, or ‘part of a workstream’.

** Taking the mid-point of the time ranges listed.

*** Assuming 42-hour working week with 38 days leave.

On the quantity of the ‘requests for support’, the analysis shows that, in 2021-22, 12.3% of actioned ‘requests for support’ came from Welsh Government, representing 36% of the total time commitment required by the Commissioner’s office (0.26 FTE). It is worth noting that responding to these requests represents a small part of the Commissioner’s office’s time and human resources.

To better understand the nature of the Welsh Government requests for support, and the responses they received from the Commissioner’s office, feedback was requested from all the Welsh Government teams that had required a ‘bronze’ level and above time commitment from the Commissioner’s office (more than one day’s work equivalent) to better understand the nature and purpose of the engagement with the Commissioner. The summary of the findings is presented below.

CONCLUSIONS

- There is not sufficient evidence to substantiate claims of a ‘heavy reliance’ on the Commissioner by the Welsh Government.



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- The Commissioner's team were invited to be involved in projects as stakeholders as part of normal involvement and engagement approaches by teams, and to invite or provide an opportunity for the Commissioner to comment if they so wish. As many of these pieces of work interact heavily with the WFG Act, it is a logical decision to involve the Commissioner, and engagement is of mutual benefit.
- The requests are not stemming from a lack of officials' understanding of the WFG Act.
- The lower end of the time estimates from the Commissioner's team seem broadly accurate, although in two instances it was felt that the time commitment suggested was inflated.
- Welsh Government officials are happy with the quality of input they had from the Commissioner's officials.
- Most Welsh Government officials feel there is sufficient support within Welsh Government for teams to apply the sustainable development principle, although it was acknowledged that more tailored guidance would be beneficial in some areas at the early stages of policy development.
- The wording 'requests for support' does not accurately capture the nature of the interactions between Welsh Government and the Commissioner's office. In many instances, these 'requests' would be more appropriately labelled 'invitations to be involved', in public consultations, for example.
- As part of the five ways of working that make up the sustainable development principle in the WFG Act, Welsh Government uses various methods to involve people and stakeholders (including Commissioners) in the policy process and to maximise integration with policies and approaches taken more widely across Wales.



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Mark Isherwood MS
Chair
Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

29 June 2023

Dear Chair

I am writing in advance of the Committee evidence session on 5 July in relation to Gilestone Farm, to set out the latest position for members of the Committee.

Current Position and Community Engagement

Following initial due diligence, the Minister for Economy provided a [Written Statement](#) to the Senedd on 17 May announcing the decision to proceed to the following next steps:

- to grant access, by licence, to Green Man representatives to undertake environmental and other surveys required to secure appropriate licences and permissions for their proposal; and
- for officials to commence formal lease negotiations with Green Man.

Alongside the Written Statement, Welsh Government published a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the Welsh Government website which can be accessed [here](#). These FAQs are intended to provide the community with official, and accurate, information relating to the progress of the project.

Representatives of Green Man have also independently engaged with the local community. A website has been launched at www.gilestonefarmproject.co.uk which provides further information from the business plan and leaflets promoting the website and its information have been delivered to all properties within the locality.

Future engagement with the local community will be coordinated through the Community Council as the organisation with a democratic mandate to represent the residents. This is currently under discussion following the appointment of a new Chairperson and Clerk and will be accelerated over the coming weeks.

Next Steps

Once the next steps outlined above have been completed, further assessment by officials will be undertaken based on the outcomes. This will include an assessment using the Five Case Business Model as well as consideration of any specific Accounting Officer issues. The output from these exercises will be reviewed by a group of independent senior officials and the Property Leadership Team (the latter will consider the detail of the property transaction only), and any subsequent advice or recommendations will be considered by lead officials and the Additional Accounting Officer, as appropriate, prior to the final submission.

Ministers will then be presented with a full and final options appraisal on the potential future use of Gilestone Farm to make a decision.

Timescale

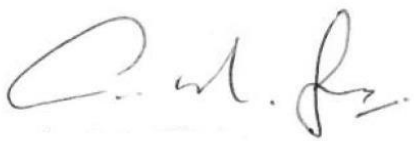
A Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) is in place, on commercial terms, to October 2023. This FBT ensures:

- the appropriate management of the site in the interim;
- sufficient time for initial assessment of the Green Man business plan; and
- an income for the Welsh Government investment at the site.

Once final due diligence has been completed, a full and final options appraisal will be submitted to Ministers for consideration.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Slade
Director General
Economy, Treasury and Constitution

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Agenda Item 5

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Agenda Item 9

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