

Agenda – Local Government and Housing Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5

Meeting date: 7 February 2024

Meeting time: 09.00

For further information contact:

Catherine Hunt

Committee Clerk

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SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

(Pre-meeting 08.45 – 09.00)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.00)

2 Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill – Evidence from the Minister for Finance and Local Government

(09.00 – 10.30)

Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance and Local Government

Ben Crudge, Head of Local Tax Policy, Welsh Government

Simon Tew, Bill Manager, Welsh Government

Ruth Cornick, Lawyer, Legal Services, Welsh Government

[Local Government Finance \(Wales\) Bill](#)

[Explanatory Memorandum](#)

[Statement of Policy Intent for Subordinate Legislation](#)

3 Papers to note

(Page 1)

3.1 Letter from the Minister for Finance and Local Government in relation to the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25



- 3.2 Letter from the Welsh Cladiators in relation to building safety**
- 3.3 Letter from Crisis UK to the First Minister and Minister for Finance and Local Government in relation to the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25**
- 3.4 Letter from Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to the First Minister in relation to the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill**
- 3.5 Letter from the Minister for Finance and Local Government in relation to the Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill**
- 4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting**

(Break 10.30 – 10.40)

- 5 Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill – Consideration of evidence and key issues**
(10.40 – 11.40)
- 6 Forward work programme**
(11.40 – 12.30)

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Agenda Item 3

Local Government and Housing Committee

7 February 2024 – papers to note cover sheet

Paper no.	Issue	From	Action point
Paper 1	Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25	Minister for Finance and Local Government	To note
Paper 2	Building Safety	Welsh Cladiators	To note
Paper 3	Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25	Crisis UK	To note
Paper 4	Data Protection and Digital Information Bill	Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to the First Minister	To note
Paper 5	Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill	Minister for Finance and Local Government	To note

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

John Griffiths MS
Chair,
Local Government and Housing Committee

29 January 2024

Dear John

Thank you for the invitation to give evidence to you about the draft budget on 18 January. During the session I promised to write with further information about a small number of areas.

Work with local government to ensure that those entitled to support with council tax receive it

From 21 March to 7 May 2022, the Welsh Government ran a campaign to raise awareness about council tax support. The campaign was similar to the Green Pig campaign launched in 2019. Targeted ads were used to inform the public about council tax discounts and exemptions they might be entitled to. The different groups of people targeted were:

- All adults – English
- All adults – Welsh
- Carers
- Disabled Individuals
- Individuals receiving Universal Credit
- Low-income households
- Individuals with a severe mental impairment
- People who live alone
- Students

Awareness slips were distributed to local authorities to include in council tax reminder letters and summonses, along with posters for authorities to display in prominent settings. The Welsh Government also sent a digital toolkit to external stakeholders and organisations. Overall, the public response to this campaign has been positive.

The Welsh Benefits Charter was recently launched on 22 January by the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip. [Welsh Benefits Charter | GOV.WALES](#)

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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.

The Charter is a set of underpinning commitments to work together towards a person-centred, compassionate delivery of Welsh Benefits and is central to our work on streamlining the Welsh Benefits system. It applies to all the grants and payments to individuals that are governed by Welsh Government such as Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Free School Meals, Schools Essentials Grants and so on.

All 22 Local Authority leaders signed up and endorsed the Charter at the Partnership Council meeting in November 23 demonstrating the collective commitment to improving access to financial support for individuals.

The introduction of the Charter will ensure that the take-up of benefits is visible and transparent which will drive improvements to the accessibility of the system, enabling more people in Wales to take up their entitlement to financial support and ensure the efficient and consistent administration of Welsh benefits across Wales.

The launch of the Charter is the first step of the journey working towards a coherent Welsh Benefits system and not the end point. We will be working with an external steering group to develop practical actions towards our vision of a system where a person only has to tell their story once to access all their entitlements.

The group will have strategic oversight of the work to streamline the Welsh Benefits system and will use the Charter commitments to produce an implementation plan with targeted actions. The Group brings together experts from across central and local government and third sector. We recently appointed Fran Targett, with decades of experience in the field, as the Steering Group's Chair to drive the work forward at pace. The first meeting will take place on 14 February.

Range of sources of evidence / data to understand public's views on services

The National Survey for Wales is one of the Welsh Government's main ways to know about people's views of public services. It has run since 2012, collecting information from around 12,000 people a year on a wide range of topics including views of health services, social care, schools, and local authorities. The results are used to inform decision-making by Welsh Government and other public organisations across Wales.

The Welsh Government also collects and publishes a wide range of statistical data about public services, including schools, the NHS, social care and housing.

Annually, the Chief Statistician produces the Well-being of Wales report which provides an overall assessment of Wales' progress towards the seven well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

There are further sources from other government departments which provide additional evidence. The Office for National Statistics is responsible for the Census of Population for England and Wales, through which the Welsh Government has access to a wide range of detailed information about the Welsh population.

A number of other surveys run by other government departments also cover Wales, and the Welsh Government provides some funding to boost the sample within Wales. These include:

- The DWP Family Resources Survey from which we can monitor levels of poverty and household finances in Wales.

- The ONS Annual Population Survey which provides a range of data about the labour market and the characteristics of the population in Wales.

Providing funding to boost the size of the sample in Wales for these surveys enables analysis of the data for Wales which would not be possible with the smaller sample size.

An update on discussions between the Minister for Health and Social Services and Deputy Minister for Social Services and local government colleagues in relation to healthcare funding pressures.

The Minister for Health and Social Services and Deputy Minister for Social services meet with Local Government colleagues as part of their quarterly meetings with the WLGA. The last meeting that Ministers had with the WLGA was on 15th January 2024 and prior to that it was on 19th October 2023. Topics discussed included:

- The non-residential care cap.
- winter preparedness,
- system resilience and ‘Further Faster’,
- the Draft Budget for 24-25, and
- Feedback on Welsh Government priorities and the recent rebalancing programme consultation, including development of a national office, national framework and National Care Service

In relation to continuing healthcare (CHC) and responsibilities that fall to the NHS, there are clear guidelines set out in the Continuing NHS Healthcare Framework. The Welsh Government published the “Continuing NHS Healthcare – the National Framework for Implementation in Wales”, in 2021. It sets out the Welsh Government’s policy for eligibility for CHC and the responsibilities of NHS organisations and Local Authorities. It has been operational since 1 April 2022.

The framework sets out a process for the NHS, working together with LAs and other partners, to assess health needs, decide on eligibility for CHC and provide appropriate care. Local Authorities and Health Boards are required to fully implement the requirements of the National Framework.

CHC is one element of a range of services that Local Authorities and NHS bodies need to have in place to support people with health and social care needs.

The Welsh Government expects LHBs and their partners to work together to deliver the best possible outcomes for the citizens of Wales. The fundamental principle being effective partnership working, integration and implementation of the Framework.

I hope you find this extra information useful.

Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Evans AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol

Minister for Finance and Local Government

Agenda Item 3.2

12 January 2024

As previously stated, we would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee given the lack of progress being made in the private sector. Whilst developers build on "at pace" in massive sites such as Plasdwr in West Cardiff, decent, honest, hard working citizens who did everything right are being left to wait and wait. We face years of uncertainty and disruption. We trust the Committee are conscious of the parallels between the Post Office Scandal and the Welsh / English Building Safety Crisis:

Shocking levels of corporate denial, deflection and obfuscation

A woefully inadequate legal framework

Use of expensive lawyers to intimidate victims

Officialdom indifference

Weak media coverage of a major public safety crisis

Lives being destroyed and put on hold - for six years

We ask the Committee to seek input from "on the ground victims" and to call on the WG Minister to:

Publish a comprehensive update on the numbers of buildings in need of remediation in Wales (both social and private sector homes)

The current rate of progress from developers on the remediation of their responsible fire defective homes. Homes requiring remediation, works completed, works yet to begin, expected dates for completion (there is one development in Cardiff Bay that still has scaffolding up after four years of works?!?)

We also think it is time that the Committee called developers to give evidence on the crisis. Welsh citizens need to know that any new homes they are purchasing are fire safe, particularly given the recent critical Audit Wales report on Building Control.

Diolch yn fawr

With regards

Mark Thomas - Robert Nicholls - Welsh Cladiators

30 January 2024

Since last writing we would like to advise the Committee of important legal developments in England.

The first-tier tribunal (FTT) has ruled that Stratford Village Development Partnership SVDP, the developer of East Village, (former Stratford Olympic Village) and its parent company Get Living must pay £18m towards making five of the 66 blocks safe.

The ruling makes use of the new BSA (sections 116-125) that invokes the use of Remediation & Contribution Orders (RCOS) to force responsible persons - developers and freeholders - to pay for fire defective homes. Other RCOs have also now been announced in England since the profound Stratford Village ruling

The Committee will no doubt recall that in November 2022 the Welsh Labour Government voted against Sections 116-125 becoming law in Wales. To quote Minister Julie James "we just don't need the sections in Wales."

Consequently, many totally innocent Welsh private homeowners have had to take the difficult decision of litigating against developers in Wales with all the attendant personal costs and risks. In recent weeks we have been made fully aware of the similarities with the long suffering plight of the victims of the Post Office Scandal.

Despite Julie James' continued upbeat Senedd statements about the Welsh crisis, remediation works by responsible developers are not progressing "at pace." We know, almost one year on from developers signing the WG's contract, that both at Celestia (Redrow) & Altamar (Swansea - Bellway Homes) no remediation work is taking place.

In a recent reply to a written question from Rhys ab Owen , the Minister confirmed that of the 113 buildings in Wales requiring fire remediation works:

- *1 building has been completed.*
- *34 buildings have contractors on site and works underway.*
- *9 buildings are having fire safety solutions designed or procurement is underway.*
- *69 are having preparatory work undertaken to inform the schedule of work.*

These figures (which lack important details) are deeply concerning and should be a matter of widespread Welsh public concern and safety. We also have no idea of what progress is being made on the many orphan buildings in Wales. The depressing figures mirror the English crisis, where there is also widespread anger at the dismal rate of progress being made by developers.

We thank the Committee for their time and look forward to hearing from them

We are copying some of our wider political supporters so that they are advised of our long running concerns

With kind regards

Mark Thomas & Robert Nichols - on behalf of Welsh Cladiators

Paper 3 / Papur 3

Agenda Item 3.3

Dear First Minister and Minister for Finance and Local Government,

We write on behalf of the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board as chair of the board and of its associated working group on the housing and homelessness workforce to emphasise the significant and pressing concern regarding the static Housing Support Grant (HSG). This grant provides vital funds to deliver homeless prevention services across Wales but has long been overstretched.

We appreciate that these are incredibly difficult economic times and that, amidst cutting many other areas of Welsh Government funding, the HSG budget has sustained the same level of funding as last year. However, with the rise in numbers of people seeking support for homelessness and inflation driving service delivery costs upwards, these budgets are being stretched well beyond their limits.

You will, no doubt, be well aware of the recently published [Housing Matters](#) report by Cymorth Cymru and Community Housing Cymru, which indicates that 77% of services say they are likely to reduce their services and 40% to hand back contracts with the HSG remaining static.

As Chair of the board, I previously wrote to the Minister for Climate Change and the Minister for Finance and Local Government to share these concerns. However, the board has just met for the first time since the publication of the draft budget and it is clear from colleagues in local government and from providers of housing support that we have now reached a tipping point. The board heard reports from service providers who no longer consider it viable to bid on contracts as well as from commissioning local authorities who cannot find providers to deliver services due to insufficient funding.

Members of the board strongly support the Welsh Government's national plan to End Homelessness, alongside the world-leading proposals contained in the recent White Paper on legal reform. However, stakeholders across the board feel the current reality and likely reduction in services caused by a real term cut to the HSG budget will undermine those plans.

We are lucky in Wales to have many dedicated staff supporting those facing homelessness, but the board's subgroup on workforce is concerned that these valuable workers are being pushed beyond their limits. The group has spent the past year looking at how we can better support, recruit and retain our much-needed workforce, but is anxious that the ongoing budget situation places this in jeopardy. We are aware that Cymorth and CHC have recently written to you with concerns that a substantial proportion of staff working in HSG services are currently being paid below the forthcoming minimum wage and the Real Living Wage. Members of the board are concerned that a cash-flat budget will make it extremely difficult for providers to increase pay to even the minimum wage, and to retain these hardworking, highly skilled staff.

In writing to you, the board is also keen to stress the ripple effect that the failure to uplift these services in such difficult times will, in turn, have upon other services. As experts on homelessness prevention, it is clear to members of the board that investing in homelessness prevention not only saves individuals from living out the trauma of homelessness, but also saves the public purse in the longer term. Through the support that it funds, the HSG reduces pressure on a range of public services. For example, by investing in homelessness prevention and keeping people in homes, we reduce future demand on health services and delayed discharges from hospitals; we reduce safeguarding risks; and we reduce re-offending rates among prison leavers. Indeed, research conducted by Cymorth Cymru and Cardiff Metropolitan University found that every £1 invested in HSG services delivers £1.40 net savings to our nation's wider public services.

The ongoing monetary constraints on homelessness prevention also place wider key Welsh Government initiatives at risk. For example, the national approach to end violence against women,

domestic and sexual abuse, as refugees rely on the HSG to fund their support for women and children fleeing abuse.

We understand that the Welsh Government is facing incredibly difficult budget decisions in exceptionally hard financial times, but it is precisely because times are economically harsh that we must prioritise investment in homelessness prevention. This will not only help to protect the increasing numbers of people at risk of losing their homes, but will also help to protect wider public budgets for the future. As the Welsh Government draws closer to making its final budget announcement, we are under no illusions that there will continue to be tough decisions to be made. However, we strongly urge that, wherever it may be possible to do so, an uplift is granted to the crucial HSG funding.

Many thanks in advance for considering the points raised within this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Downie, Chair of the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board

Clare Budden, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Workforce group

Matthew Downie
Chief Executive



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**Legislation, Justice and
Constitution Committee**

—
Welsh Parliament

Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister of Wales

31 January 2024

Dear Mark,

Data Protection and Digital Information Bill

As you are aware, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee has been considering and reporting on Welsh Government legislative consent memoranda laid before the Senedd relating to the UK Government's Data Protection and Digital Information Bill (the Bill).

At our meeting on 22 January 2024, during which we agreed our report on Memorandum No. 3 on the Bill, we discussed the provisions in the Bill relating to direct marketing for the purposes of democratic engagement (clause 114 in the Bill as brought from the Commons). As we understand it, the UK Government does not consider that this clause engages the legislative consent process in Wales, and legislative consent memoranda laid before the Senedd to date have not included reference to this clause as a relevant provision.

We also discussed a report in the Financial Times which referenced a letter sent by the then Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure, Sir John Whittingdale, to a Member of the UK Parliament reportedly confirming that the UK Government in future may temporarily 'switch off' some direct marketing rules in the run-up to an election.

Given our consideration of the legislative consent memoranda and our broader interest in constitutional matters, we would welcome your views and further details on a number of matters:

1. What is the Welsh Government's assessment on clause 114's engagement with Standing Order 29 (if any)?
2. Has the Welsh Government made any assessment on the provision's potential impact on devolved Welsh elections?

3. Clause 114(5) of the Bill provides that, before making regulations under this power, the Secretary of State must consult the Information Commissioner and any other persons the Secretary of State considers appropriate. Has the Welsh Government had any discussions with the UK Government about whether the Welsh Ministers would be consulted in relation to any impact on data use relating to devolved Welsh elections by regulations made under clause 114?
4. Is the Welsh Government aware of any UK Government plan to 'switch off' direct marketing rules in advance of a UK General election?

I would be grateful to receive a response by Wednesday 14 February 2024.

I am copying this letter to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee, and to the Local Government and Housing Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Huw Irranca-Davies

Huw Irranca-Davies
Chair



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

John Griffiths MS
Chair – Local Government and Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament
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1 February 2024

Dear John,

Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill

During my attendance at the committee's meeting on 13 December 2023, I referred to work carried out by Bangor University in respect of a land value tax. The work, published in 2020, provides an appraisal of the practical viability of a land value tax and identifies further work which would be required in order to further progress a move towards delivering this tax.

Details of this work can be accessed [here](#).

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Finance and Local Government

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