

Agenda – Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid: Committee Room 5 and Video Conference via Zoom	Meriel Singleton Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 26 April 2024	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 10.00	ScrutinyFM@senedd.wales

Pre-meeting

(9.45 – 10.00)

1 Introductions, apologies and substitutions

2 Care-experienced children

(10.00 – 11.30)

(Pages 1 – 54)

Vaughan Gething MS, First Minister of Wales.

Alistair Davey, Deputy Director Enabling People, Social Services and Integration Directorate.

Taryn Stephens, Deputy Director Social Services Improvement.

3 General Scrutiny

(11.30 – 12.30)

(Pages 55 – 87)

Vaughan Gething MS, First Minister of Wales.

Rachel Garside-Jones, Director, Co-operation Agreement.

4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

5 Discussion of previous evidence sessions

(Pages 88 – 93)

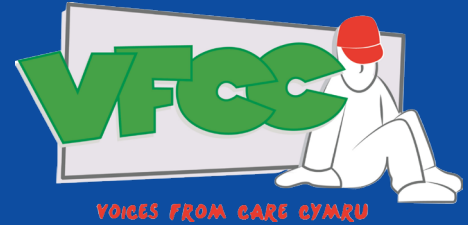
6 Discussion of future meetings



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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Radical Reform Summit

DECLARATION

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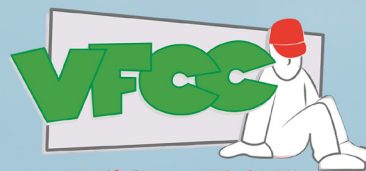
Foreword

In the 22 years since devolution, successive Welsh Governments have prioritised the rights and needs of children and young people and there have been some major achievements. In 2001, in response to the Waterhouse Report, the office of the Children's Commissioner was established; the first in the UK. In 2011 the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure was passed, partly enshrining The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Welsh law. In 2020 the Abolition of the Defence of Reasonable Punishment (Wales) Act was passed, giving children equal protection from violence under the law in our nation.

As a nation, Wales can be proud of these and other achievements but there is much more to do to allow our care community to aspire and to achieve their full potential.

Welsh Minsters and Young Ambassadors, who are here today to represent the national voice of our care experienced community of children and young people, met today to address this issue.

This Summit today has discussed steps necessary to promote the rights – based on the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) – and well-being of care experienced children and young people.



VOICES FROM CARE CYMRU

SUMMIT
Cardiff 2022



EQUALITY
FOR
EVERYONE IN CARE!

Pack Page 44

Background Statements

Welsh Government

In our Children and Young Peoples' Plan, this Welsh Government sets out our ambition:

'We want Wales to be a wonderful place to grow up, live and to work, now and in the future.'

The Plan goes on to say:

'We believe all our children and young people have the right to:

- have the best start in life
- take part in and enjoy learning and have the best education possible to expand their knowledge, develop their creativity and fulfil their potential
- enjoy healthy lifestyles and be protected from harm, abuse, neglect, and discrimination
- be able to play and have fun
- be listened to and treated with respect
- have a home and a community that is a nice place to grow up
- have enough financial and material support for that they need.'

The Plan goes on to set out some of the many actions that the Welsh Government will take, with others, to put that belief into practise and make those rights a reality.

We owe care experienced children and young people a particular duty of care to ensure that their rights are fully realised. This is a major area of concern for us.

We know that many children and young people have positive experiences in the care system and do well in life. They thrive and grow, cared for and supported, and go on to achieve their full potential. We have seen positive changes in recent years. For example, far more care experienced young people are now going to university than ever before. We are proud of young people's achievements and resilience, and we are grateful to all those who care for and support them. But far too many care experienced children and young people do not have their rights realised. Far too many care experienced young people experience homelessness. The percent of care experienced young people leave school with five good GCSE or more is still too low.

Care experienced children and young people are stigmatised, and often do not receive the support they need to overcome the trauma that they have experienced.

To us, the Government of Wales, this is unacceptable. In our Programme of Government – the document where we set out our promises to the people of Wales – there are a number of promises to care experienced children and young people and their families that we have begun to keep. For example, we have introduced a Basic Income Payment for care leavers to give them a better start into their independent lives and we have begun the process of stopping companies making big profits out of caring for children and young people. But we know this is not enough.

We have made a bigger promise in our Programme of Government. We have promised to:

'explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.'

This Summit is a big step forward in exploring what radical reform of services could mean for care experienced children and young people.

Young Ambassadors

We, the Young Ambassadors, have been working with other care experienced children and young people to explore what radical reform means. We started with the dictionary. Radical has two meanings; through, complete, total, entire: and revolutionary, progressive, reforming. Reform means improve, make better, mend. These are great words.

We are glad that Welsh Government understands the need for radical reform. Some of us have been involved in consultations before, and we haven't always felt that we were listened to and our concerns we acted on. But we are proud of the work we have already been doing with

this Welsh Government – for example around developing the Basic Income Pilot – and we believe we are being listened to now. We have been working with other care experienced children and young people to understand their experiences of current services and what needs to change. We have come to this Summit with our ideas about what radically reformed services could look like and deliver for care experienced children and young people and their families. We have shared these ideas, to help create a vision of what radically reformed services will look like and deliver. A Vision that we and Welsh Government can agree.



The Vision

Welsh Government

We have listened to what the Young Ambassadors have told us about their experiences and the experiences of other care experienced children and young people.

We have heard their ideas about what radically reformed services should look like and should deliver for care experienced children and young people. Together we have developed this Vision, which we support.

Young Ambassadors

Welsh Ministers have listened to our experiences and our ideas for a Vision of what radically reformed services could look like and deliver.

We support the Vision set out below.

Here is some of what will be different:

- All children and young people who are affected by the care system will be spoken with and listened to at every stage. People listening to them will understand that it can sometimes be hard to express your views or tell the whole truth. They will support children and young people, including little ones, to speak out. When children and young people's wishes about where and with whom they live can't be agreed to because they need to live somewhere else so that they can thrive, what is happening and why will be properly explained to them.
- No child or young person will be taken into care unless everything possible has been done to help their family look after them well, unless there is an emergency.
- Families whose children might be taken into care will all have an independent advocate to help and support them and make sure their voices are heard. Children and young people in the family will have their own independent advocates too (see below), to make sure their voices are heard.
- When a child or young person is taken into care, services will work with the family and the child or young person to do everything possible to help the family be able to come back together, if it is possible to help the family support the child or young person to thrive. Children and young people will be listened to if they say they don't want to go home, and their wishes and feelings will be considered. When children and young people do go home professionals will check in regularly to make sure everything is going well and help if needed.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will be supported to stay in touch with their birth family if this is possible. Their views about contact with their birth family will be listened to and acted on if possible. No child or young person will be pressured into contact that they do not want.
- When children and young people are taken into care professionals will continue to work with the family. This is important because these families may have more children, and because when care experienced young people are old enough, they often want to be in touch with, and sometimes live with, their birth families.



- When care experienced people become parents they will be helped and supported to look after their babies and children. Babies and children will never be subject to child protection action just because their mother or father is care experienced.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will all have a fully independent advocate to help them get their voices heard when decisions are being made about them and their care. They will be able to stay in touch with their advocate if they wish, so they do not have to keep explaining things over and over.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will be able to stay close to their family and friends in their own communities and their own schools. They will only be sent far away if they are in danger or at risk.
- Everyone working to support care experienced children and young people will understand that being taken into care throws children and young people into trauma/crises. We as a nation need to understand how trauma affects us as individuals and as a community.
- There will be more foster carers, so children and young people who are taken into care can find the right people to take care of them straight away. Care experienced children and young people will not have to move time and time again, from home to home.
- When foster carers are recruited care will be taken to ensure that they have the right values and behaviours to support children and young people to grow and thrive.
- Foster carers will be trained to understand trauma and how it effects children and young people. They will get regular training and support.
- Foster carers will be trained to support all children and young people. They will understand the different needs of children and young people with protected characteristics and know how to support them.
- Foster carers will all be paid fairly. Kinship carers will not be paid less, and cares will not be paid more if the child or young person they are looking after is 'difficult.' Care experienced children and young people will not be labelled like that.

- There will be enough staff with the right values, skills, and experience to support care experienced children and young people. They will be provided with all the training and support they need and will show empathy and understanding at all times. Care experienced children and young people will be able to access support when they need it, not just between 9 and 4 on weekdays.
- If foster care is not right for a care experienced child or young person there will be a range of options available to them so they can live a life that suits their needs.
- Children and young people living in residential settings will have the same rights as children living in foster care.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will be supported in ways that work for them. They will have more access to interpreters to help them express their needs and do practical things like making appointments with the health service. Online translation doesn't always work.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will have the same right to an education as every other child and young person. They will be supported to learn English quickly and will be able to decide whether face to face or online learning works for them.
- They will be able to learn life skills to help them understand the community they are living in, and if, they are old enough, will be able to undertake work experience placements to help them find work when they are able to.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will have the same support as that which is provided to other care experienced children and young people. They will be supported to develop lasting relationships with adults they can trust. They will have the same support wherever in Wales they are looked after. They will receive the same financial support as other care experienced children and young people.
- Professionals working with care experienced children and young people will communicate well with each other. For example, social workers will make sure schools know about changes for a child or young person. Children and young people will never have to explain these things themselves, and they won't have to keep telling their stories over and over again.





- Organisations that plan and provide care will not make lots of money and give that money to the people who own the organisations. All the money that is spent to provide care for children and young people will be used to provide that care and to make that care better. No child or young person will be left without a home that is right for them if their care home closes or changes because of this, and all the money saved by not paying profits will stay in the system to care for children and young people.
- If children and young people raise concerns about how they are being cared for they will be listened to and believed. There will be a proper investigation of their concerns. Children and young people will never be left in placements when they have said they feel unhappy or uncared for.
- Care experienced children and young people will be supported to take part in activities in their communities, including youth work opportunities. Youth workers will be trained to understand the challenges that care experienced young people may face and will know how to support them.
- Schools and colleges, and everyone who works in them, will really understand care experienced children and young people. They will know that they might need extra support sometimes to learn and be happy, and schools and colleges will make sure they get that support. They will understand that care experienced children and young people often experience discrimination because of stigma, and they will work hard to bring that stigma to an end.
- Care experienced children and young people will do as well at school and college as other children and young people, getting good qualifications and access to opportunities.
- Care experienced young people will be just as likely to go to university as any other young person.
- Care experienced young people will be just as likely to get an apprenticeship and a good job as any other young person.
- All care experienced young people will be supported by their corporate parents until they are 25. There will be support available to those young people who want it after that age.
- All care experienced young people will be able to stay with their foster carers until they are 25 if they choose, and there will be enough money for the foster carers to carry on supporting them. Young people who are living in residential care when they reach 18 will be supported to continue to live in the community near the Home if they want to and be able to stay in touch with staff and turn to them for support.
- Young people leaving care will begin to learn to live independently long before they have to do so. They will be supported to plan for the future they want, and that support will be there for them for as long as they need it. They will not be made to live independently until they are ready.

- No care experienced young person will ever be homeless when they leave care. They will be supported to find not just anywhere to live but a comfortable home where they can learn to be independent and happy. They will be supported to keep that home. They will never be evicted if they have nowhere to go. They will be supported until they can manage.
- Young people in care and young people leaving care will be no more likely than any other young person to get in trouble with the law. If they do end up in trouble with the law, they will be treated exactly the same as any other young person. If they end up in prison, they will continue to be supported so that when they leave, they can find a home and have a chance to start again.
- Care experienced children and young people will be able to get help to support their mental health whenever they need it, as soon as they need it.
- They will never lose support when they become 18 and move to adult services. Professionals will make sure that children and young people, and their carers know what support is available and how to get it.
- How well care experienced children and young people are cared for and supported will never depend on where they live.
- People who decide things about care experienced children and young people's lives will know them and understand them. They will meet them often and they will listen to them and act on what they say.

Welsh Government and Young Ambassadors

This is just the beginning of the Vision. This is a living, growing Vision. It will grow as we work with and listen to more care experienced children and young people and those who work with them and support them now. We will learn more. There will be more things that we can make better, and more ideas as to how to do that.

The principle behind everything that we have set out and will set out in the Vision as it grows, is that care experienced children and young people should have the same chances as every other child or young person to have their rights (as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore in the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Action Plan) realised.

The Commitment

Young Ambassadors and Welsh Government

We have learned from each other today. We know that there are good things being done to provide good services for care experienced children and young people and we can learn from and build on these. We know that the changes needed to deliver on the Vision, and grow it, are huge.

We know that not everything can change overnight, but we also know that things can change quickly when everyone works together.

We trust each other to play our part in making those changes. Below we set out our commitments to the next steps.

Welsh Government

These are our commitments:

1. Delivering the Vision will be one of our main priorities – one of the things that is most important to us – in the next four years.

2. We will work closely with everyone who currently delivers services for care experienced children and young people to work out how we will deliver the Vision.

3. We will help them do it and we will make sure they do it.

4. We will make sure that delivering the Vision is placed at the heart of all actions to deliver the Children and Young People’s Plan.

5. We will make sure that all Welsh Government Ministers who are not here today meet with care experienced children and young people to help them understand how their portfolios can support Welsh Government to deliver the Vision.

6. We will put in place systems to make sure we keep checking on whether the Vision is being delivered and how.

7. We will make sure that there are enough staff, with the right values, training and skills, to support the delivery of the Vision. We will make sure that they are fairly paid and supported so that they will stay in their jobs.

8. Where we need to, we will change the law, so that organisations supporting care experienced children and young people will have to provide the right services and support. If they do not, we will support care experienced children and young people to use the law to make sure that they do.

9. We will make sure that every child or young person who is care experienced has their rights realised and duly acted upon wherever they live in Wales.

10. We will work closely with care experienced children and young people, and those organisations which support them to have their voices heard and to ensure that Vision is being delivered. We will listen to them and act on what they tell us. We will work with them to grow the Vision and to make sure that we truly deliver radical reform to improve the outcomes and eradicate all stigma associated with our care community in Wales.

11. We will meet again with care experienced children and young people in 12 months at a Follow Up Summit to review the progress on delivering this very exciting Vision.

Young Ambassadors

We speak here for the care experienced community. It may not be us as individuals, but there will be many, many others who will commit with us to taking this journey with Welsh Government to ensure that the rights of care experienced children and young people are fully

realised in our nation, and that the experiences of the next generation of care experienced children and young people are better than many of ours. We are proud of what we have already done and are looking forward to helping deliver big changes – radical reform.

These are our commitments:

1. We will continue to work with Welsh Government to grow the Vision, working with care experienced children and young people and those who work to support them.

2. We will meet with those Ministers who were unable to be present at the Summit to support them in developing an understanding of how their portfolios can contribute to delivering the Vision.

3. We will work with Welsh Government to share the Vision with all those responsible for delivering services to care experienced children and young people and to help them understand the Vision. This will enable them to work to deliver services that we can all be proud of, ensuring children and young people in their care are not part of a system that does not appear to care, building services that help us develop long-lasting, loving relationships. We will work with our collective corporate parents and with our corporate grandparents, our Ministers, our Government.

4. We will continue to work with care experienced children and young people throughout our nation to ensure that their experiences and ideas are fed into the growth of the Vision and all subsequent work to ensure that the Vision is co-delivered with children and young people remaining at the heart of the journey.

5. We will meet with Welsh Ministers in 12 months at a Follow up Summit to review progress on delivering our Vision.

We will work with Welsh Government on the basis of trust and mutual respect enshrined in the UNCRC, setting out the key principles of a children's rights approach that will be central to this incredibly important and historic journey. Some of us are concerned that we might do this work and change may still not happen. But we believe in the good intentions of Welsh Government and the commitment and dedication of our First Minister, Mark Drakeford. We thank him for his strong commitment to improving our lives and our futures, and those of future generations.

Because of his commitment, and that of other Ministers across Welsh Government, we believe that, this time, radical reform can truly be delivered.

Signed on behalf of the Welsh Government:

Signed on behalf of the care experienced Young Ambassadors:

Young Ambassador

Young Ambassador

Young Ambassador

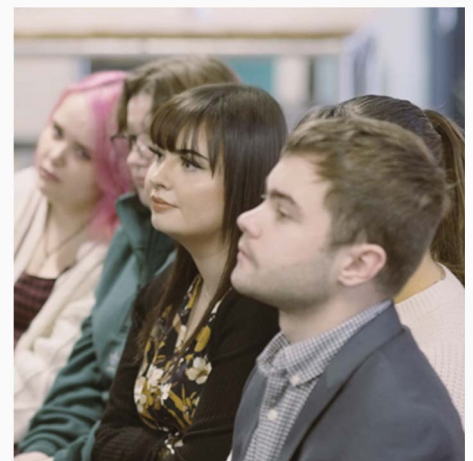
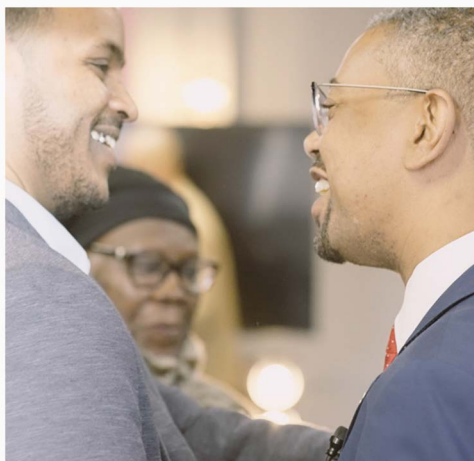
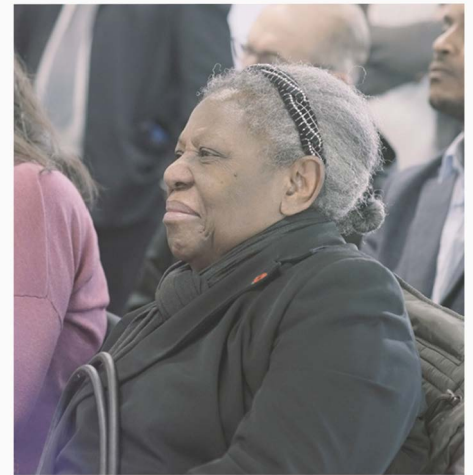
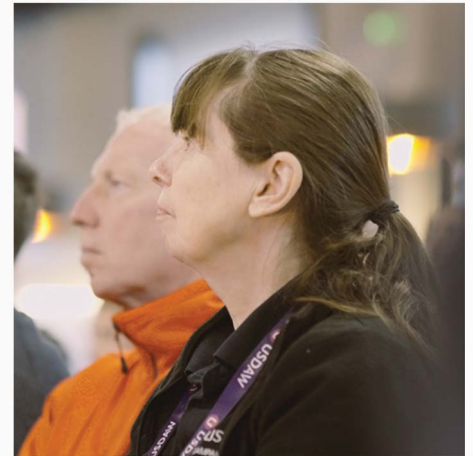
Young Ambassador

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Vaughan Gething

For **Wales**, for **Labour**, for **you**:

The 2024 Welsh Labour Leadership Manifesto





For Wales, for Labour, for you.

FOREWORD



I am proud and deeply honoured to be putting myself forward to serve our country and our party as the next Welsh Labour leader and First Minister of Wales.

This manifesto sets out a vision for a fairer future for Wales we can build together, based on our common values - a future where everyone, no matter their background or what they look like, has the opportunity to succeed.

Our shared Welsh Labour values of equality and fairness have guided me all my life, and they are at the heart of the policies outlined here.

Reading newspapers on my teenage paper round, I was inspired by stories of Nelson Mandela's resilience and dignity, and at 17 I joined Labour to campaign for our great party – a tried-and-proven engine for social justice.

From there, I've spent my life fighting for fairness. From leading Students Say Yes during the 1997 devolution campaign, to choosing to become a trade union lawyer representing working people – women and men suffering from exploitation, bullying and discrimination.

The reason I got up in the morning when I was a trade union lawyer – to stand up for people – is the same that drives me every day in my current role as Economy Minister. It's also why I'm standing to be First Minister.

This is a high stakes moment for Wales - a Tory cost-of-living crisis has pushed many to the brink and we're facing a must-win General Election. We need a Welsh Labour leader and First Minister ready to lead from day one in the job.

As Health Minister during the pandemic, I was tested under the toughest circumstances. While Tories partied in No10, Mark Drakeford and I worked round the clock keeping Wales safe, putting people first - no VIP lanes for PPE; no payday for political pals.

We worked together with our brilliant NHS, local government, Welsh businesses and trade unions. In those darkest of days, we held fast to our Welsh Labour values.

We know there are difficult days ahead, but I'm optimistic for the future we can create together.

As a black Welshman born in Zambia to a Zambian mother and a white Welsh vet from Ogmores-by-Sea, I know what it's like to experience prejudice, to have your place in your community questioned. I don't want anyone in Wales to feel that way. I want young people across Wales to look to the future with hope for the happy, fulfilled lives they can build here - a future where we grow the economy to support public services that are a source of pride and properly funded, where good, meaningful work helps to lift people out of poverty and tackles the climate emergency, where we work to spread opportunity to all and understand that only by working together can we deliver for everyone.

This manifesto outlines ideas and policy innovations rooted in Welsh our shared Labour values:

- For a healthy nation: A Welsh NHS, safe in public hands and always the budget priority. Services focused on improving both physical and mental health and social care fit for our future.

- For green prosperity: Green job creation at the heart of protecting Wales' future. A just transition that tackles poverty and protects our planet, with good jobs and community wealth.

- For a place called home: Accelerating social housing construction. Reliable, affordable public transport. Working in social partnership, with powers and funding devolved to local government.

- For ambitious futures: Educational opportunity at every age and stage of life. Putting the weight of the First Minister's office behind achieving excellence in our schools and colleges, working with teachers and school support staff.

- For a stronger Wales: More powers for Wales and across Wales. An ambitious, progressive nation taking its place on the world stage with a thriving future for Cymraeg.

Taken together, I believe these priorities and policies meet the challenges Welsh Labour members should demand of their future leader. They are rooted in our values and history - and with your support, they will deliver a brighter, better, fairer Wales for our future; a future built by all of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Geste". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'e'.

FOR A HEALTHY NATION:

A Welsh NHS, safe in public hands and always the budget priority. Services focused on improving both physical and mental health, and social care fit for our future.

Good health – mental and physical, throughout every stage of life – is essential for a good life, for people, communities, and our country. Aneurin Bevan understood this in founding the NHS, and it was clear to me every day as Health Minister, working alongside Mark to lead Wales through the pandemic – the hardest challenge of my professional life.

We rose to that challenge by holding true to our shared Welsh Labour values – no crony contracts, no VIP lanes, no parties in our Welsh Government offices. Those values would underpin our approach to health and social care policy if I'm elected as First Minister, with core principles embedded in a Welsh NHS Covenant. We would ensure NHS Wales is safe in public hands, with per head spend on health and social care never falling below that in England, ready to meet the challenges of mental and physical health as equal priorities. We would also move Wales towards the National Social Care Service we desperately need.



NHS

We would introduce a new **Welsh NHS Covenant**, based on Bevan's principles, and a new ambition for our health service. NHS Wales will always be safe in public hands; under my leadership, NHS services would never be sold off. It would be run to Welsh priorities, on Welsh Labour values. It would be a truly distinct NHS Wales focused on patient outcomes. It would always be the budget priority, with per head Health and Social Care spend never falling below that of England. We would publish a new partnership agreement with the service, patients, unions, and local government to meet the challenges across health and social care, together.

NHS Wales would prioritise **patient outcomes**, right across the country and throughout every part of the healthcare pathway. Learning from international best practice, we would use our resources wisely to get the best possible outcomes for patients, reducing waiting times, helping people to manage chronic conditions, and prioritising mental health alongside physical health.

To make good on that ambition we need to support and promote **innovation in healthcare**. Our government would continue to work with universities, third sector and commercial partners to support the cutting-edge developments needed to improve our cancer survival rates. As soon as finances allow, we would invest in the medium term in a new cutting-edge digital pathology centre to speed up diagnosis.

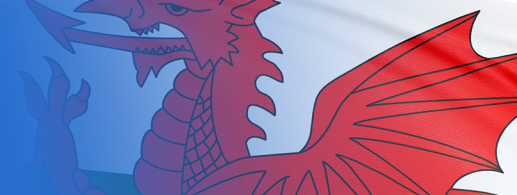
We will continue to **invest in technology** to streamline processes, avoid duplication and ensure critical information is available to support patient care wherever it is delivered.

We would also extend digital monitoring for specific health conditions including COPD, heart failure and glucose monitoring.

I am committed to working with our NHS staff and with patients to ensure the NHS App is widely available, easily accessible and responds to patients' needs and to rollout digital prescribing to every GP and pharmacy.

We must **tackle health inequalities** to make sure the NHS is a service that works for everyone. Our Welsh Labour Government would ensure that equalities are routinely considered throughout health services – something I was committed to as Health Minister. We made PrEP widely available in NHS Wales via sexual health services in 2017 – over three years before it was routinely available in England.

Going further on health inequalities would mean addressing the socioeconomic inequalities that mean someone born in our most deprived areas can expect to die seven years earlier than someone from a more affluent area. It also means a **gender-sensitive and culturally competent health system** which acknowledges the unique health needs and experiences of women, and black, Asian and ethnic minority people. We would take decisive action on racial health inequalities, beginning with examining outcomes in maternity and mental health services, as well as reviewing disciplinary processes for staff and improving data collection.



Women's voices are too often not taken seriously enough in healthcare and our government would be a passionate advocate to rectify this issue, including by introducing a **Women's Health Plan**.

We would continue our programme of dental reform, extending the skills mix in dentistry by increasing the number of dental therapists and ensuring that the dental contract delivers for both patients and the dental profession. We would ensure lifelong support for dental health, building on schemes from primary schools (Design to Smile) all the way through to care homes (Gwen am Byth/Smile for Life).

Social Care

Our government would make further progress towards a fit-for-purpose **National Care Service** meeting the needs of those who receive care, and supporting care workers.

We know how important it is for people to feel in control of the care they receive and the choices they make for themselves and their loved ones, and so we would explore the expansion of **community-led care models** such as social care co-operatives.

We know too that behind our formal, professional care system in Wales is a network of friends, families and others supporting loved ones. We would ensure we properly **value and support unpaid carers**, with guidance for NHS professionals to identify and signpost them to support networks.

Alongside this, our government would make more - and better - use of technology-enabled care to support people to live well and safely at home for longer. This includes extending the use of digital monitoring for care home residents, enabling early intervention and reducing unnecessary hospital admissions.

Mental Health

We would continue to **prioritise investment in mental health**, building on the significant steps we have taken to achieve parity between our approaches to mental and physical health.

Our government would deliver our existing pledges and go further, building on our nationwide 24/7 '111, press 2 for mental health' service and our whole-school approach to supporting children's and young people's mental health.

Recognising the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life, we will focus on developing services for our very youngest children and babies. We will redouble efforts to ensure all mental health services are equipped to respond to the needs of people who are neurodivergent.

FOR GREEN PROSPERITY:

Green job creation at the heart of protecting Wales' future. A just transition that tackles poverty and protects our planet, with good jobs and community wealth.

The economic challenges facing Wales have changed fundamentally since we campaigned for devolution in 1997. Then, our central problem was chronic, stubbornly high unemployment following the Tories' reckless pit closures. Since then, the Welsh Labour Government has succeeded in cutting unemployment. Today, we face a different challenge.

After 14 years of failed, Tory, trickle-down economics, our focus must be on relentlessly driving down poverty by driving up job quality. At the same time, we must tackle climate change - the biggest collective challenge of our generation.

We can do both, together.

As First Minister, achieving climate justice and social justice would be our twin economic missions.

We would harness Wales' advantages in industries such as clean energy and advanced manufacturing. Our Welsh Labour Government would help shape the kind of economy we want to see. Wales would join the wave of countries recognising governments must take more active roles in private markets to secure better results for citizens and bolster industries providing good jobs.

Wales once led the world into the Industrial Revolution; now we must lead the way in the Green Industrial Revolution. We would use the tools of devolution to ensure it helps us build a stronger, fairer, more sustainable future. The next generations rely on us to deliver. Together, we will.



Industrial policy for green growth

As First Minister I would continue to fight for our vital steel sector to have the strong future it deserves. We will do whatever it takes to stand up for our steel workers – and our Government **will never agree to transfer Welsh steelworkers' jobs and emissions overseas.**

Our Welsh Government would continue to build on our Economic Missions and take an **active green industrial policy** approach that has the whole weight of government behind it. We would task Net Zero Industry Wales with identifying where Wales has a comparative advantage and targeting support to ensure that we are at the forefront of the competitive industries of the future - creating good, local jobs in sectors from semiconductors to tidal power. In doing so, we can steal a march on the industries of the future, despite a Tory government in Westminster held back by chronic UK centralism and an ideological commitment to failed laissez-faire economics. And if Labour wins the next General Election, we would use the Welsh Government's seat on the new UK Industrial Strategy Council to ensure that funding is leveraged to the industrial and economy priorities we set for Wales.

Securing good jobs means making **bold, systemic reforms to the planning and investment frameworks to unlock green growth.** Our government would review our planning system to give greater speed and certainty to decision-making for major projects that bring good jobs to Wales – especially on renewable energy.

We would also review our inward investment pathways with the aim of streamlining the process and making it even easier to invest and bring good jobs to Wales. This review would look at the best practice strategies adopted elsewhere in the world to ensure Wales is an attractive place for companies to locate high quality employment.

While attracting more green investment, we would also limit public investment that contributes to climate change by supporting local authority pension funds divesting from fossil fuel.

A vibrant private sector is essential to meeting my twin economic missions, and our government would **support Welsh businesses and Welsh workers to adapt to, and thrive in, the transition to net zero,** ensuring that workers are the priority during this process.

We would create a National Manufacturing Institute for Wales and deliver new **Clean Growth Hubs** – clusters of environmentally-friendly businesses powering local growth and better jobs – building on those that I have supported as Economy Minister. We would also extend Green Business Loans, helping businesses decarbonise and lowering energy bills for good.

While looking to secure and create jobs in the green industries of the future, we would never neglect our vital **everyday economy** that provides the everyday goods and services we all rely on. It supports so many jobs and livelihoods and makes a huge contribution to our overall economy, and also has potential to increase quality of life for everyone. We would focus on



improving the quality of jobs in the everyday economy, including in sectors like care, food, and manufacturing. We would nurture our everyday economy to support local businesses and build stronger community wealth. We would also embed foundational economy principles across public bodies, explicitly linking all public investment to better outcomes for local economies.

Our government would harness our natural assets like wind and tidal power, while delivering nature protection. **We would ensure renewable energy generated here benefits people in Wales.**

We would push for an end to UK Government inaction on strengthening the grid in Wales to enable the transition to net zero.

Better jobs and higher living standards

We would create a new **Fair Work Fund – ‘Gwaith Teg’** – open to bids from projects seeking to support fair working practices. Examples could include better progression opportunities in low-paid work; helping pay workers a Real Living Wage; improving management standards; increasing trade union membership among young people and the private sector; encouraging greater trade union involvement in policy development and delivery; and combating discrimination in the workplace including by tackling the gender and ethnicity pay gaps. The funding would come from returned post-EU development funding under a UK Labour Government and the fund would be co-developed with the Social Partnership Council.

We would empower workers and their unions through initiatives as diverse as greater support for remote and flexible working - especially where it empowers disabled people and parents - and the introduction of a living wage for agricultural workers. This would sit alongside a review of the operation of the Agricultural Advisory Panel to ensure it is truly independent and has the confidence of unions and employers. We would **implement a key recommendation of the recent Wales TUC Devolution and Work in Wales report** by creating a fair work milestone alongside trade unions and businesses to ensure we are measuring and seeking to improve fair working practices.

We would aim to again **double the number of worker-owned businesses in Wales**, after my commitment as Economy Minister to do just that looks set to be met early, and we would **direct more public procurement spending towards co-operatives and social enterprises.**

We would work alongside an incoming UK Labour Government to **accelerate the rollout of banking hubs** and urge Cash Access UK to prioritise rural and underdeveloped areas so these hubs reach the most important areas more quickly. We would also explore expanding the Development Bank of Wales’ work to more easily provide business finance to people wishing to establish or expand businesses outside our big towns and cities.

Rural and natural Wales

Wales has some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, from coastlines to mountain ranges, enjoyed and cared for by people across the country.



We have an opportunity to ensure nature-friendly farming becomes the norm. A new **Nature Positive Bill** must be developed alongside the Sustainable Farming Scheme which better connects families with affordable, nutritious food. We would set strong statutory targets for the protection and restoration of nature and include payment for farmers in exchange for public goods. By 2030, 30% of our land and sea would be protected and we would lead by example in sustainably managing and expanding woodland.

Our Welsh Labour Government would strengthen **enforcement action to protect our environment**, starting with the creation of a fully-functioning environmental governance body, filling the gap left post-Brexit. The pollution of our rivers and watercourses has been one of the great scandals of the last 14 years of Tory rule, and we would introduce stricter penalties for those who break environmental rules. We would also invest to protect communities from flooding, coastal erosion and other impacts of the climate emergency. We would do all we can to ensure the UK Government works with us – especially if we have a constructive Labour administration in Westminster – to bring about overdue action on unsafe coal tips, which are only likely to be made more dangerous by more frequent and intense storms.

We would **make Wales the leader on animal welfare standards in the UK**, by giving RSPCA officers additional enforcement powers and introduce an outright ban on pets being given as prizes, as many Welsh Labour local authorities have already done.

FOR A PLACE CALLED HOME:

Accelerating social housing construction. Reliable, affordable public transport. Working in social partnership, with powers and funding devolved to local government.

Home is more than the place we live, it is a cynefin – a place where we belong, connected with the people and places around us into a strong community. Home is the centre of our day-to-day lives: our homes, high streets, local transport networks, and local government services.

We can restore that sense of belonging, of connectivity and community.

That is why, if I'm elected as First Minister, we would accelerate building social housing. Constructing green homes across Wales will help tackle the housing crisis and create good quality jobs.

How these homes are connected to each other matters too. Improving the links within and between our communities brings people together and ensures growth and opportunities reach every community.

We also need to ensure more of those journeys are made by public transport - possible with reliable, integrated, affordable services.

We must also empower communities by devolving power within Wales. We would establish an agreement with local leaders on economic development to drive our economy forward and create new jobs.



Housing

Building more social housing would be a priority for me as First Minister. It is one of the most powerful tools in alleviating poverty and helping people to build better, more secure futures. We would use the existing Social Housing Grant to boost innovation in this next generation of social housing. Latest construction methods and modular housing offer sustainable and cost-effective means of delivering new homes. New homes that help to meet the climate crisis challenge and lower energy bills. We would prioritise Welsh supply chains and work with the housing sector to ensure our workforce has the skills to fill these opportunities, including through apprenticeships. Our government would also increase the number of accessible homes for disabled people.

To **tackle the housing crisis**, we need to slash planning backlogs. Local authority planning departments have suffered from 14 years of austerity. With our Government, an Affordable Homes Taskforce would fast-track major developments.

We would prioritise new developments close to town centres to support local high streets and reduce dependency on car travel. We would ensure that all new build housing has gigabit capable connections so that new housing in Wales is fit for the future.

To cut carbon emissions and household energy bills, we need to embark on an ambitious programme of **retrofitting existing housing stock**. Our Government would work with the sector and private finance to roll out this programme at the pace and scale needed. The commitment to more apprenticeships would help ensure we have a pipeline of skilled people to carry out the work as part of a wider green jobs revolution. We would pilot the creation of local retrofitting networks bringing together small-scale providers and sole traders into a co-operative, with access to public sector retrofitting contracts – giving contractors opportunities to grow. Welsh Labour has a proud record of **improving security and rights for tenants** through the Renting Homes (Wales) Act, which simplified the process of renting a home and created a new system for tenancies. We would also look to strengthen those rights so renters can make their house a home – including by ending unreasonable ‘no pet’ clauses. We would examine national and international evidence on **rent controls**, ensuring that rents are fair for tenants, in a way that doesn’t reduce the number of homes available to let.

Our Welsh Labour Government would work towards a **radical overhaul of the leasehold system** so existing leaseholders can collectively purchase more easily and move to commonhold if they wish. I am also keen to simplify the process for leaseholders to establish the right to self-manage or to better hold to account estate managers. We would continue to treat **tackling homelessness** as a national issue, collaborating with local authorities and charities to take a strategic approach to ensure that expertise is pooled across regions, sharing best practice in delivering much-needed temporary accommodation. We can support people off the streets and to build more sustainable and secure futures.

We would continue to **support mortgage holders** who have been impacted by the Tory mortgage crisis through the Help to Stay Wales Scheme.



Transport and Travel

Our Welsh Labour Government would pass **legislation to regulate the bus network** before the end of this Senedd term. Introducing franchising would ensure services meet communities' and people's needs – especially those who rely on buses, such as some elderly and disabled people.

Franchising would also allow **for better-integrated public transport**, with bus schedules linking better with each other and train timetables, with more availability of single tickets for trains and buses.

We would **explore fare reduction schemes** as finances allow, including free-at-the-point-of-boarding bus travel. Our Welsh Labour Government would review the application process for bus passes for disabled people, to ensure everyone entitled to a bus pass can navigate the application system.

We would continue to work with the sector to increase the use of electric buses and support hydrogen bus trials.

Alongside more electric vehicles, it is vital the necessary infrastructure to **support EV charging** is ready. We would work with delivery partners to build a reliable and efficient national charging network, in line with the existing strategy.

Cardiff Airport is a vital economic and transport resource for South Wales. We would continue to support innovation and growth. We would work with the aviation industry to use the airport as a catalyst for lower carbon air travel.

Active travel is the cheapest, greenest form of transport, but people choose to walk or cycle for their commute if they feel safe. We are committed to active travel infrastructure improving safety.

We would broaden the body of advice that Welsh Government relies on to formulate transport policy and empower citizens to have a greater role in policy planning. We would also make the necessary infrastructure improvements to relieve pressures on the M4 corridor and strengthen transport links across South East Wales by delivering on the Burns Commission. This includes by co-ordinating bus and train timetables, with integrated ticketing.

We would increase the presence of Transport for Wales in North Wales, improving transport connections, including pressing the UK Government to deliver a credible and properly funded plan for railway upgrades so we can deliver reliable metro services on key routes. We remain committed to developing a Swansea Bay and South West Wales Metro, to improve public transport connections within the region.



More powers for local government across Wales

Our future Welsh Labour Government would develop a **package of powers for local government in Welsh regions** through Corporate Joint Committees. For North Wales, this package of powers would be developed by the Minister for North Wales, reporting to the First Minister.

Devolution of powers cannot come without resources. We would develop a list of jointly agreed priorities across each region that can be used to leverage in key drivers of good jobs and higher living standards such as private investment, UK Government investment, and research and development funding.

These measures are aimed at devolving powers from Welsh Government to Corporate Joint Committees, not moving powers currently held by local councillors into Welsh Government. We would also develop a stronger role for all local councillors within Corporate Joint Committees meaning that democratically elected **local councillors will have more powers as a result of these changes, not fewer.**

Councils have been at the coalface in dealing with the harsh realities of Conservative austerity. Our government would work in a partnership of equals with Labour councillors to take on the shared challenges we face.

Culture, Heritage, and Sport

The growth of our creative sector has been one of the great success stories of Welsh devolution. Creative industries make a growing contribution to our economy, providing employment in good jobs. However, the industry is reporting shortages in skills and missed employment opportunities. We would work with partners in the sector, to deliver skills training by establishing **Creative Academy Cymru.**

Working with our national cultural, heritage and sporting organisations, we would improve the energy efficiency of their estates, helping to reach our net zero targets and reduce running costs. We would give greater priority to health and wellbeing within arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors through the **Wales Wellbeing Bond.**

We would ensure there is greater protection for buildings of local or cultural significance by reviewing frameworks around the preservation of historic buildings.

We would call on the UK Government to amend the listed events regime to include events of national significance in Wales, such as the Six Nations, on free to air television. We would also champion grassroots sport for the mental and physical health benefits.

We would support the continuation and growth of the **National Plan for Music in Wales.** We would also work to safeguard live music venues of all sizes, including promoting co-operative ownership models.



Alongside this, we would investigate the potential for introducing a cultural passport for under 18-year-olds, to ensure that young people from every background can access arts, culture, and creative opportunities.

We would continue the work to deliver a National Contemporary Art Gallery, and complete work on Theatr Clwyd, The Museum of North Wales and The Football Museum. We would also work with the tourism sector to promote Wales as a land of adventure and sustainable tourism.

Our Welsh Labour Government would also be a strong advocate for a City of Culture bid in Wales.

FOR AMBITIOUS FUTURES:

Educational opportunity at every age and stage of life. Putting the weight of the First Minister's office behind achieving excellence in our schools and colleges, working with teachers and support staff.

Learners of all ages should have ambitious futures in Wales. Our Welsh Labour Government would lead a new national mission to ensure everyone has the essential life skills they need for the future. To achieve this, we must work together in partnership – government, the education sector, trade unions, and businesses from different industries – to radically improve education and career pathways in Wales. Despite the pressures they face, our teachers' and school support staff's dedication is inspiring. Staff in schools and colleges are increasingly providing emotional and mental health support to learners whose families are struggling financially, and in other ways. We will always be there for our dedicated school staff.

In the rapidly changing world of work today, learning and skills development does not end at the school gates. We would recognise the need for tailored support at different ages and stages of people's lives through post-compulsory, community and adult learning. We want people to have flexible, timely reskilling opportunities at any time of life. Achieving this requires political will and a whole of society effort. This is a vital tool in ensuring that people have dignity and reward in their working lives, while best positioning Wales to tackle the climate emergency and adapt to AI and automation.



Childcare

I am determined that together, we will give **all children in Wales a strong start**, no matter their background, while also enabling parents to work or learn as they choose. The cost of childcare should not be holding people back. Our Welsh Labour Government would renew our focus on the first 1000 days of a child's life. We are committed to expanding our offer as resources become available.

Education

We want to see Welsh schools consistently delivering **excellence in education** for our children and young people. Welsh schoolchildren are still feeling the learning and social impact of the Covid pandemic. We are committed to closing the attainment gap and addressing the rise in absenteeism and disruptive behaviour in schools by focusing on support for families. We would work with local authorities, schools and parents to promote access to Welsh medium education and to support children and young people with Additional Learning Needs.

In a rapidly changing economy, it is vital our **education system prepares young people for the world of work**. Pre-16, in-school employer engagement, with a particular focus on supporting pupils to map career paths according to their ambition and skills is essential. Our government would also expand the Tech Valleys Hive to more schools in the Valleys. At the same time, we need to ensure young people know their rights when they enter the workplace. We would promote the Wales TUC Unions and the World of Work programme and reform the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales to include a short online module on working rights for all apprenticeships.

It is more important than ever that we continue to ensure that **equality and diversity form a key part of our schooling**, so that our children grow up with a perspective on different walks of life. We would support measures to ensure that pupils gain a wide experience and understanding of diverse communities throughout their time at school, and also ensure that homophobia, sexism, racism, and ableism are not welcome in our education system.

Skills

Our Welsh Labour Government would make **reinvesting in more apprenticeships** a priority for EU replacement funds, which the next UK Labour Government would repatriate to Wales – a commitment I secured. At the same time, we would increase the diversity of industries providing work-based training apprenticeships to meet demand for skilled jobs in emerging sectors. We would review the delivery of Essential Skills Wales in work-based learning apprenticeships and target higher and degree-level apprenticeships to those areas with the highest demand for skills.

We would place a major focus on strengthening Wales' vocational and technical education and training offer, developing a strategy for government, employers and trade unions. We will continue to invest in the successful Wales Union Learning Fund.



Our government would **support further education colleges to train people in the green skills we need for the future**, following our Net Zero Skills Action plan covering construction engineering, manufacturing, and much more. We would also want to ensure all learners are supported as they make the transition into work and that we are strategic in our approach to cross-sector issues. This means encouraging better coordination between our various education sectors as well as structuring the Commission on Tertiary Education and Research to focus on cross-cutting themes such as lifelong learning and green skills.

We would collaborate with partners to raise awareness and increase access to the full Adult Community Learning partnerships offer and promote the value of multilingualism. We would also broaden the Welsh Government's Economic Contract with businesses to include an education and employment exchange.

As part of our determination that everyone should feel they have the prospect of an exciting future here, we would do more to **retain and develop diverse talent and skills across the nation**. We would bolster work-based learning opportunities and promote green career pathways for people of all ages, working with local authorities, businesses, and further and higher education institutions to develop regional, sectoral skills centres for excellence. I would prioritise **free, flexible learning for workers on low pay**, mainstreaming our personal learning accounts approach. Building equity into the industries of the future is essential, and we would support equal access to green skills and jobs so that current inequalities are not replicated or worsened as we transition to new industries.

FOR A STRONGER WALES:

More powers for Wales and across Wales. An ambitious, progressive nation taking its place on the world stage with a thriving future for Cymraeg.

Together, we can build a stronger, fairer future for Wales where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. The first 25 years of devolution are proof of what we can achieve together, for all of us. I'm proud to have led Students Say Yes in 1997, alongside so many people in our movement, and to have campaigned for more devolution in 2011. Now it's time to secure more powers for the Senedd and to

strengthen the devolution settlement by sharing powers out across Wales. We can spread power out of Cardiff and put it into the hands of people so that every region of our country has a say, and feels a strong connection to our Senedd.

As a Welshman born in Zambia, I know what it's like to face prejudice and to have your place in your community questioned. I don't want any young person in Wales to ever feel that way. Wales is stronger through benefitting from the talents of all our citizens, which is why this manifesto contains strong commitments to equalities. We would continue the Welsh Government's good work in this area and strengthen provisions on equality for women, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, and ethnic minorities. However, our commitment to equality is not just contained within this section, but throughout this manifesto.

We are also committed to a thriving future for Cymraeg in our communities with our mission to reach a million Welsh speakers. Like so many of us across the country, I'm learning Welsh myself. Having a dysgwr as First Minister would be a positive signal to people across Wales learning the language and encouraging everyone to use the Welsh you have.



Equalities

Our government would be committed to building an **anti-racist Wales**. We would support the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan to the end of the current two-year period in June 2024, then build on our learning for the next two years with a renewed set of ambitious actions. Gwaith Teg – our new Fair Work Fund - would provide support for a fairer economy, including action to tackle racial and disability discrimination and the gender pay gap and ethnicity pay gap.

We would support making Wales the most **LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe** and continue to support and see through the actions of the LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales. We would continue to support the new RSE curriculum and the production of more supportive materials for teachers and schools to implement it. We would also continue to support the right of trans people to self-identify as the gender of their choice.

We would continue to push for a Wales that **strives for the rights and equality of all disabled people** by continuing to assess the feasibility of implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) into law.

We would lead a feminist government that **advances gender equality** in a Wales that continues to support the findings of the Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan, strengthening and updating the provisions where necessary. Tackling violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence would remain a strategic priority for the Welsh Government.

Welsh Labour has taken great strides forward in gender equality, and most of our Members of the Senedd are now women. However, we know we still have more to do. Our government would therefore always continue to have a **gender balanced cabinet** as we seek to develop the leaders of the future.

We will explore new approaches to create safer workplaces. We will drive up leadership standards needed to prevent abuse and deliver robust, consistent accountability at work. Where needed, we will revisit the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act to strengthen these priorities.

We would consult on plans to drive **higher standards in public bodies**, with an option of placing a stronger standard on sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination for public bodies on a statutory basis. In recent years we have seen too many instances of improper behaviour in our public bodies.

We would continue to tackle child poverty and progress work on a **Welsh Benefits System**, streamlining the benefits the Welsh Government currently offers - increasing awareness and ease of use among potential users. As part of this work, we would examine how to bring services together to **create a digital pass for public services**. This would make it easier for people to access support on which they rely and opportunities they deserve. Making access easier for all is a tool for social justice – one that can build greater trust. We would ensure analogue options are retained for those who struggle to use digital services.



Our government would also keep eligibility thresholds for Welsh benefits under review, to ensure vulnerable families who rely on provisions such as Free School Meals do not find themselves without our support without any increase in their living standards. This will form part of our work to continue to tackle issues such as holiday hunger.

Our government would proudly retain **Wales' Nation of Sanctuary status**, welcoming refugees fleeing war and persecution, and oppose narratives and voices that peddle division and hate.

Constitution and Democracy

As someone who campaigned for devolution in the referenda of 1997 and 2011, alongside so many others across our movement, I'd continue to advocate for stronger powers for the Senedd. We would support the devolution of the Crown Estate to Wales, in order to allow us to utilise our natural resources to bring good quality, green jobs to Wales.

We would also support the devolution of youth justice and probation as recommended in Gordon Brown's report, and the **devolution of justice and policing powers**, as is established Welsh Labour policy. We'd also support the **devolution of prudential borrowing powers**, which would reduce the cost of infrastructure building projects in Wales, allowing us to achieve more.

Our support for devolution would also extend beyond more powers to the Senedd. Alongside our regional devolution proposals outlined earlier, our government would give **more power to the Minister for North Wales**, including an office in North Wales and a team of officials based in North Wales from across key Welsh Government departments.

Our government would have a relentless focus on the bread-and-butter issues that matter to people, and we would **establish a new Office of the First Minister focused on delivery**. This office would ensure that core government priorities are progressing. It would also have a remit focused on cross-governmental priorities such as a fair work, climate change, and mental health, helping Ministers in these areas to deliver their agendas.

HS2 is clearly an England-only project that has been classified as England-and-Wales to deny us funding that we are entitled to. I back creating an independent secretariat to ensure the UK Government cannot continue to mistreat devolved nations.

Welsh language and culture

Like many of you, I am a Welsh learner. The Welsh language is an essential part of our national identity and I'm committed to ensuring we **reach a million Welsh speakers by 2050**. We would promote work-based and lifelong learning opportunities with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. We would roll out the innovative Arfor Programme to more Local Authority areas, to support and grow the Welsh language alongside local economies. Our government would also expand the Perthyn Project to provide specialist support to more communities who want to develop Welsh language co-operative initiatives.



Our Welsh Labour Government would champion of our great **Welsh cultural assets**, including pushing for the Eisteddfodau to receive UNESCO protected status through the UNESCO register of intangible cultural heritage. We would use all Welsh Government levers to promote a high standard and sustainable level of Welsh language media and broadcasting. We will support adapting Ofcom's remit to require Welsh language commentary for specific events.

Welsh Labour would push for tailored support to encourage Welsh-speaking Labour members to stand as candidates for elections.

**For Wales,
for Labour,
for you.**



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

David Rees MS
Cadeirydd, Y Pwyllgor Craffu ar Waith y Prif Weinidog
Chair, Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister
Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff
CF99 1SN

15 February 2024

Dear David,

I am writing in response to your letter of 17 January 2024 requesting further information following the scrutiny committee session on the 8 December 2023.

Warm and Fed this Winter

The Committee noted the reasons given in relation to the slippages in this programme, and would welcome any further information on these slippages that may be available. The Committee would also welcome assurance that the programme is undertaking different work to the UK Government schemes.

The Warm Homes Programme is the only fully Government funded home retrofit programme in the UK to have delivered uninterrupted support to lower income households for over a decade.

Given the complexity of the services being procured to deliver this scheme, extra assurance steps in the evaluation process were required, resulting in slippage to the procurement timeline. The small risk generated by this delay is more than offset by the reduced risk of legal challenge, which could have derailed the whole programme. Prior to Christmas, the Minister for Climate Change agreed to move the procurement to the next stage and we issued the outcome letters to all bidders on 2 January. The ten-day standstill period and 30-day statutory time limit for starting procurement challenge proceedings have now passed without any challenge being lodged.

Officials are now finalising contract terms for these complex services and mobilisation activity has started in parallel. We are on track to be operational on 1 April, as set out by the Minister for Climate Change on several occasions.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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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.

Officials are working with our contractors, local authorities and other partners to ensure the new demand-led scheme is complementary to other energy efficiency and fuel poverty schemes operational across Great Britain. Our advice service will have an important role in understanding their client's circumstances and supporting them to access the most appropriate scheme for their needs. Our in-home support services give fuel-poor households confidence to make the changes to a cleaner, more energy efficient future.

The Committee would welcome further information on any discussions the Welsh Government have had with Local Authorities in terms of the EcoFlex programme and confirmation of whether Local Authorities would be able to benefit from the programme if they adopt a regional approach as has happened in South Wales.

Officials met local authority representatives and the Welsh Local Government Association most recently on 25 January to discuss progress being made on ECO LA Flex. We have been working together to grow the ECO LA Flex offer and this meeting provided an opportunity for the authorities to feedback on progress and issues, share good practice, and identify areas for targeting further support.

19 local authorities now have operational schemes at varying levels of maturity, while the remaining authorities will soon have schemes in operation. There are many examples of local authorities working collaboratively. For example, authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region have worked together, generating benefits from a regional approach. There is also evidence of knowledge transfer taking place between authorities.

However, a regional approach could, in some cases, hinder local authorities who are able to move more swiftly individually and so it is right to take a case by case approach. Our priority is to ensure full coverage across Wales as soon as possible, to leverage as much support as possible and ensure support is available to those most in need.

The committee would welcome an update on the anticipated timescales for the Ofgem review of standing charges, particularly in relation to North Wales, which has higher than average standing charges.

We have published our response to the Ofgem review on standing charges <https://www.gov.wales/ofgem-call-input-standing-charges-response-welsh-government>. We understand Ofgem have received a very large number of responses and analysing them will take a significant amount of time. We have asked for further discussions with Ofgem, regarding their modelled impacts of potential changes to the policy, which suggested a switch of costs from standing charges to volumetric costs would be detrimental to Welsh customers. In the meantime, we will continue to press for a solution which is fair to lower income and low usage households, and which does not continue to disadvantage households in north Wales.

Co-operation Agreement

Could you please provide details of the amounts of funding allocated to each of the 13 areas, in the 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 budgets and in which Main Expenditure Groups (MEGs) and Budget Expenditure Lines (BELs) this funding is contained? You referred several times to funding being “ring-fenced” and monitored for potential underspends so presumably it can be quantified in this way.

Please see the table at Annex A which sets out the latest detail of the allocations for the thirteen areas with funding attached to them as part of the Co-operation Agreement. It also includes the associated Budget Expenditure Lines within which these allocations sit.

Spend against these allocations is monitored regularly and where there is joint agreement between the Designated Members and Welsh Government Ministers, any underspends can be used for areas that are within the Co-operation Agreement, including but not limited to the thirteen areas of allocation, or on other priorities such as cost of living or public services. All changes are agreed between the Minister for Finance and Local Government and the Lead Designated Member as members of the Co-operation Agreement Finance Committee.

As set out in the Draft Budget documentation, some aspects of the Co-operation Agreement will continue to be delivered beyond the conclusion of the 2024-25 financial year. Where this is the case, and where funding has been reprofiled to ensure delivery of these commitments, we will work collaboratively with the Lead Designated Member to establish a mechanism to ensure appropriate governance arrangements for this ongoing financial commitment. This grid does not include those allocations.

The following points should be noted when considering the grid at annex A:

1. The Co-operation Agreement allocation table is a working document which is updated as and when required. Allocations represent financial plans that are then actioned and updated throughout the financial year.
2. The table provides details of Co-operation Agreement allocations and provides details of which Budget Expenditure Lines (BELs) these sit within. On this basis these are not final expenditure outturn figures, and do not represent the total BEL amounts. They are provided to the Committee on an extraordinary basis, for the purposes of this response.
3. 2022-2023 figures show planned allocations as at 6th March 2023.
4. 2023-2024 & 2024-2025 allocations reflect the updated 2023-2024 plans announced on 17th October 2023 and the 2024-2025 Draft Budget plans published on 19th December 2023.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD

Annex A: Co-operation Agreement – Planned Budget Allocations

Commitment Item	Revenue £m						Capital £m			
	MEG	BEL	22-23	23-24	24-25	Total	22-23	23-24	24-25	Total
Free School Meals	EWL	5219	18.10	58.50	93.50	170.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Childcare (Flying start)	HSS	1087	9.40	35.16	37.28	81.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
National Construction Company (Unnos)	CC	6410	0.10	1.33	1.40	2.83	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Building Safety	CC	2555	0.00	3.90	4.50	8.40	55.00	90.00	105.00	250.00
Net Zero Energy Company (Ynni Cymru)	CC	3770	0.05	2.47	3.48	6.00	0.00	2.00	20.00	22.00
Flood capital investment & national resilience	CC	2230	8.00	16.00	24.00	48.00	34.00	34.00	34.00	102.00
Public transport - feasibility studies	CC	2030	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Econ - Broadcasting & media financial support; Culture Strategy	Econ		5.00	4.52	9.25	18.77	0.89	2.92	4.55	8.36
of which: Broadcasting		3762	1.00	0.16	1.00	2.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Media financial support		3762	0.25	0.55	0.75	1.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Culture		6170	2.65	3.81	7.50	13.96	0.89	2.92	4.55	8.36
Arfor	Econ	3751	0.00	4.00	5.00	9.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00
Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and National Centre for Learning Welsh	EWL	5164	1.50	4.50	4.50	10.50		0.00		0.00
Mental Health	HSS	230	0.35	1.70	3.00	5.05	0.46	2.00	4.00	6.46

1. Universal Primary Free School Meals 22-23 & 23-24 - capital funding has also been allocated as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme budget.
2. The Culture heading includes funding allocations relating directly to the Co-operation Agreement commitments, where joint agreement is required between the Deputy Minister and the Designated Member.