

## **Agenda – Equality and Social Justice Committee**

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Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Committee Room 3 (Senedd)	Rhys Morgan
Meeting date: 11 March 2024	Committee Clerk
Meeting time: 13:30– 17:00	0300 200 6565
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### **Pre-meeting registration (13:15 – 13:30)**

- 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**  
(13:30)
- 2 Governance of Fire and Rescue Services: panel five**  
(13:30–14:30) (Pages 1 – 22)  
Adrian Crompton, Auditor General for Wales  
Gary Emery, Audit Director  
Martin Peters, Head of Law and Ethics
- 3 Motion under SO17.42 (vi) to exclude the public from items four and seven of today's agenda and from item one of the agenda on the meeting of 18 March 2024**  
(14:30)
- 4 The public health approach to preventing Gender Based Violence: consideration of Welsh Government response**  
(14:30–14:45) (Pages 23 – 45)

### **Break (14:45–15:00)**

- 5 Governance of Fire and Rescue Services: panel six**  
(15:00–16:45)

Councillor Dylan Rees, Chair of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Gwynfor Thomas, Chair of the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Roger Thomas, Chief Fire Officer of the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Councillor Steven Bradwick, former Chair of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Dewi Rose, Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

## **6 Papers to note**

(16:45)

**6.1 Correspondence between the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip to the Chair regarding the Youth Justice Summit on Speech, Language and Communication needs**

(Pages 46 – 48)

**6.2 Correspondence from Jane Dodds to the Chair regarding the creation of a new Ministerial role for babies, children and young people**

(Pages 49 – 51)

**6.3 Written response from the Welsh Government regarding the Equality and Social Justice Committee's response to the 2024–25 Draft Budget**

(Pages 52 – 77)

**6.4 Correspondence from the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee regarding Inter-ministerial standing Committee meeting**

(Pages 78 – 79)

**7 Governance of Fire and Rescue Services: consideration of evidence**  
(16:45–17:00)

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MA JH/0471/24

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice committee

26 February 2024

Dear colleagues

### **Inquiry into a public health approach to preventing gender-based violence: publication of report.**

I am writing to provide the Welsh Government's response to your Committee's report. Firstly, I very much welcome your focus on this subject; as you so aptly put it in your title, we must 'all play our part', and I welcome the broad thrust of your conclusions which support a public health approach to tackle the causes as well as the effects of gender-based violence. I share your conclusion that 'the critical context for gender-based violence is gender inequality and cultural norms of men as powerholders, decision makers and leaders at societal level, in the work-place and in families'. If we are to tackle these issues, we need a whole society approach particularly through engagement with men and boys. This is the approach we have adopted within our National Strategy, which we are delivering through our National Partnership Board and VAWDASV Blueprint. I regard your report as an endorsement of our overall approach, but there are always areas for improvement and issues where we should challenge ourselves to do better and your recommendations are a valuable contribution in this regard. I will respond to each of your recommendations in turn.

***Recommendation 1.*** *The Welsh Government should adopt a whole-of-government approach and work with partners across public services, the private and third sectors to promote gender equality and inclusivity in Wales. To help to achieve this it should implement a 'gender equality test' which assesses the impact of all policy decisions and legislative proposals on gender equality with the aim of reducing gender disparities. The gender equality test should be introduced as soon as feasibly possible and should be applied to all Welsh Government decisions from December 2024 onwards at the latest.*

#### **Accept:**

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of ensuring that all policy is integrated to achieve our policy objectives through as many interventions as possible, particularly in the context of the public health principles which underpin our approach. I believe that ensuring

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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.

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

effective use of the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is the right way to ensure an effective approach, although I also recognise that there is room for improvement in the application of both IIA and Regulatory Impact Assessment. That is why I have commissioned a review of the assessment of gender as a protected characteristic within the IIA. I believe that we can accommodate the principle of this recommendation and achieve its purpose within the review and a revised IIA process and that this would be more effective than creating an additional mechanism.

Welsh Government's Equality and Human Rights Division is currently undertaking a review of our approach to Equality Impact Assessment, which will produce a new template, guidance and support. This work began at the end of 2023 and will run through 2024, alongside ongoing review of the wider Integrated Impact Assessment process.

The Equality Team has engaged with officials across the organisation in three workshops and, following on from this, will work with departmental equality leads to draft a new template, taking into account questions linked to all of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.

Sex is a protected characteristic and the assessment of impact on gender is considered within the Equality Impact Assessment.

We are focused on the mainstreaming of equality, which along with the gender policy team, includes gender mainstreaming.

I will report the progress of the review to the Committee within the timetable set out in the recommendation.

You also suggested a further action in support of this recommendation to achieve the objective of a whole government approach:

*Action 1. The Welsh Government should ensure all equality plans address gender disparities, challenge stereotypes and foster a culture of respect and equality. It should work with partners on detailed actions it will take in the short, medium and longer-term to improve public awareness about gender issues, promote women in leadership, and enforce rights that guarantee equality and freedom from discrimination, harassment and violence. An update on these actions should be provided to the Senedd in Plenary within six months of the Senedd debate for this report and annually thereafter.*

I am happy to report on this action through the VAWDASV Annual Report and the Annual VAWDSV Blueprint updates. I would also point to our transparency mechanism for the Gender plan. Officials provide progress updates including an annual progress report to the Gender Equality Forum (GEF) members. The GEF advises on equality issues across Wales and brings together internal and external stakeholders working on gender equality issues across Wales. The membership, terms of reference and minutes are published on the Welsh Government website.

[Gender Equality Forum | GOV.WALES](#)

**Recommendation 2.** *The Welsh Government should embrace its role as an innovator and leader in applying a public health approach to gender-based violence, by:*

- *identifying opportunities to raise awareness and generate shared understanding of the approach and Blueprint;*
- *contributing to the evidence base of what works by proactively publishing progress updates and resources used to underpin the Blueprint;*



**Accept:**

On behalf of all partners within the Blueprint, Welsh Government is leading on the development of a VAWDASV Communication plan which builds on effective campaigns such as [Sound](#) and also sets out how progress of the National Partnership Board and its constituent workstreams will be communicated to stakeholders. The Board has been presented in January with a draft outline of the Communication Plan, which included contributions from Policing in Wales who undertook a stakeholder engagement analysis for the Blueprint. The Communication Plan and tools to further generate a shared understanding of the Blueprint will be finalised by the end of March 2024.

Within our wider plan, there is a commitment to publish progress reports against the VAWDASV Blueprint High Level plan on an annual basis. In addition, we will be enhancing the Welsh Government VAWDASV web pages to publish other documents which are relevant and informative for our stakeholders. We will ensure that these include the progress updates and signposting to resources, as the Committee recommends.

You have suggested a further action in support of this recommendation:

*Action 2. To further aid transparency, we look forward to seeing the workplans and membership details of each of the Blueprint workstreams published and that the Minister has committed to publishing. We will write to the Welsh Government in March 2024 to coincide with the end of the financial year to hold it to account for these commitments.*

We have published the high-level action plans. I am happy to further commit to publish the terms of reference, which includes membership, for the Partnership Board and each of its workstreams. We will ensure the Committee receives a copy of the published information when it is available and within this timescale.

**Recommendation 3.** *The Welsh Government should set out how the development and evaluation of policies which address the intersectionality of GBV will be informed by data, evidence, and analysis. In particular the Welsh Government should provide the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units with clarity regarding their priorities and agree timescales for completion of key milestones by end of April 2024. The response should include details of:*

- *the target date for completing the work to establish baseline data and a summary of the baseline indicators it intends to use;*
- *the partners it will work with to gather baseline data and the target date by which data-gathering efforts will be mainstreamed; and*
- *when it anticipates the data gathered by the Units will be able to meaningfully contribute to policy development and evaluation.*
- *continuing to prioritise work with the next generation through effective programmes aimed at children and young people.*

**Accept:**

Policy and Knowledge and Analytical Services officials from VAWDASV and Equalities teams have met to ensure there is synergy and collaboration across both policy areas in relation to addressing the intersectionality of GBV. This includes activity at a strategic level and collaboration across research agendas. Work is underway to identify ways to ensure that the lived experience of people with multiple areas of vulnerability is captured and informs policy development.

Analytical plans are being developed to meet wider evidence needs. This includes identifying global best practice and reviewing support pathways for disabled survivors of VAWDASV. Welsh Government are assisting the blueprint streams to embed awareness of the importance of intersectionality in all aspects of GBV, and within this activity an ability to monitor and evaluate the process.

A task and finish group has been set up to build on the work undertaken in 2019 in relation to the VAWDASV national indicators, which had been paused due to the pandemic. Welsh Government colleagues from policy teams, Knowledge and Analytical Services and the National Advisers for VAWDASV are currently reviewing the indicators adopted in 2019.

A mapping exercise is underway to identify sources of data best suited to inform the individual indicators. While this work is progressing well, there are a number of challenges in respect of using UK data disaggregated to a national level. The intention is that the mapping exercise and draft national indicator set with associated data, will create an effective platform for joint working with other stakeholders.

Knowledge and Analytical Services work closely with the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units and have already been sharing knowledge where work may intersect. For example, the on-going data and indicator mapping for the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan evaluation framework which is seeking to bring together existing indicator frameworks across a range of portfolio areas in Welsh Government.

You have suggested the following action in support of this recommendation:

*Action 3. The Welsh Government should set out the timelines for the creation of the Central Repository and how the repository will support collaboration, knowledge sharing and facilitate research. In particular, the Welsh Government should identify opportunities for researching interventions that engage men and boys specifically in order to add to the evidence base on this issue.*

The plan to create a repository has had to be revised due to resource restrictions and the importance of focusing available resources on front line services during a cost-of-living crisis. Whilst original plans anticipated a staffed institution, the work to develop the repository is now focused on creating 'virtual' networks of the knowledge management capacity across the sector. This work is expected to be completed during this calendar year. In the shorter term we have recognised the need to support the evidence needs of the blueprint and have been working to develop and implement an evidence plan across the VAWDASV national strategy. This initial work will be completed by the end of March this year. Overall, this revised approach represents a robust alternative to the repository previously envisaged, which will benefit from being embedded within the wider work of the Evidence Units.

***Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should take urgent action to ensure that fast-tracked, specific and specialised therapeutic services are available for all babies, children and young people who experience or witness gender-based violence and provide details of these in response to this report. This action should include:***

- *details of how the Welsh Government is enforcing the rights of babies, children and young people who have experienced or witnessed violence to access fast-tracked, specialised therapeutic services;*
- *reviewing the availability of therapeutic services for children and young people who witness or experience violence, and how well these are integrated into the broader health and education system.*

*This work should involve all relevant stakeholders (including the police, CAFCASS and local authority social services) and be progressed at pace with an update provided to the Senedd in the autumn term of 2024.*

**Accept:**

The Welsh Government as part of its Transformation Programme for Children's Services is developing a National Practice Framework. The Framework will be the first set of national standards for children's services in Wales, sitting alongside other All-Wales procedures like

the All-Wales safeguarding procedures. Its aim is to further strengthen and support the translation of policy intent into daily practice.

The Framework has been developed through working with partners to review and strengthen quality and practice to improve service delivery. The standards will reflect a multi-agency approach, as we recognise children who need help and protection often need the support of a number of professionals who work together as a team. The standards will better describe how services for children work driving greater transparency. Working is underway to finalise the first 6 new standards by the end of March 2024 with the others being co-produced by the end of 2024.

The first six new standards will be:

- The Child-inclusive practice standard;
- The Trusted Adults standard;
- Eyes on the child: the Child Safeguarding standard;
- The Missing children and young people standard;
- The Continuing Care standard;
- The Manageable workloads standard.

In addition, I would acknowledge that gaps in support for children and young people are likely to exist within survivor support services themselves. I am happy to commit undertaking a review of provision in this area and to reporting early findings to the Senedd within the timescale indicated.

The Welsh Government is currently consulting on a new, all age Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and a Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy. These strategies set out our vision and priorities for mental health, wellbeing and for suicide and self-harm prevention. A fundamental focus of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is delivering a connected system of support across health, social care, third sector and wider, where people can access the right service, at the right time, and in the right place.

Care and support will be person-centred, compassionate and recovery-focused, with an emphasis on improving quality, safety and access. People impacted by violence, domestic abuse, sexual violence and assault are identified in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy as an under-served group. During the consultation, there will be specific engagement with those with lived experience.

You have suggested a further action in support of this recommendation:

*Action 4. Some of the particular challenges faced by migrant women were set out in our report: 'Gender based violence: The needs of migrant women'. We will be requesting an update to the recommendations and conclusions of that report in Spring 2024.*

I am happy to commit to providing the update within the timescale indicated.

**Recommendation 5.** *The Welsh Government should request that Estyn's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales undertakes a national thematic review of healthy relationships in schools. The review should be included in the next available programme of thematic reviews and completed within the usual timescales.*

*The review should:*

- *include views and recommendations on the sufficiency of resources and training for teaching healthy relationships;*
- *seek to verify whether there is any link between a lack of provision and higher levels of deprivation; and*
- *identify best practice with regards to 'whole school approaches' to preventing GBV.*

**Accept:**

The last thematic review into Healthy relationships was in 2017. With the new curriculum making healthy relationships education mandatory as part of Relationships and sexuality education, this would be a good opportunity to review practice and impact at an early stage of implementation. Conversations have already taken place with the Chief Inspector who is happy to commit to a review of the nature set out by the Committee.

In addition; [The Peer on Peer Sexual Harassment Plan](#), published on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024, sets out the actions Welsh Government and partners will take to prevent and respond to the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour ([HSB](#)) in education settings. The Plan has been developed and refined by engagement with a range of partners, across sectors. This includes education, local government, Police and the third sector.

We look forward to continuing these conversations as we move into delivery of the Plan. It is this spirit of partnership that will ensure we can ensure all our learners have access to a safe learning environment.

***Recommendation 6.*** *The Welsh Government must take immediate action to ensure that teachers are reminded of the mandatory reporting duty placed on them in relation to FGM. Longer-term, the Welsh Government should work with Estyn on establishing monitoring arrangements and safeguards to provide assurance that teachers are aware of their legal duties in relation to preventing GBV. The work to establish these monitoring safeguards should be completed by September 2024.*

**Accept:**

We will write to schools to reinforce the importance of reporting incidence of FGM. Estyn inspectors will continue to evaluate whether all school staff are clear about their responsibilities and what they need to do to protect pupils, including 'PREVENT' duties. The strengthened inspection framework and inspection guidance also sees a review of the professional learning offer in schools and PRUs to assess how well teachers are supported in responding to issues of gender-based violence female genital mutilation. Estyn are also rolling out workforce skills training to the whole inspection workforce, to ensure all inspectors are equipped with skills and knowledge on responding to safeguarding issues.

You have suggested a further action in support of this recommendation:

***Action 5.*** *The Minister for Education should write to higher education institutions in Wales to remind them of the Welsh Government's expectations and direct the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to work with universities to agree actions which strengthen preventative approaches across the sector.*

I have asked the Minister for Education to write in the way that is suggested.

***Recommendation 7.*** *The Welsh Government should require its newly established Advisory Panel for Digital Resilience to agree its priorities and forward work programme at pace and publish these by the end of April 2024. The Panel should clarify which areas it will prioritise, estimated timescales for sequencing of its forward work programme and how it will address the significant areas of non-devolved policy and legislation relating to digital and online regulation.*

**Accept in Principle:**

Whilst I am very comfortable with the purpose of this recommendation I would like to consult the Panel about their role, purpose and work programme in light of this recommendation.

In addition, we have a programme of work in this area which addresses issues the Committee raises.

From a Digital Resilience in Education perspective, our information, guidance and support on online image abuse and sextortion is focussed on young learners, practitioners and parents and carers. Welsh Government holds the firm belief that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and have called for social media platforms to recognise their responsibility and duty of care to social media users of all ages.

It is critical that we hold social media platforms to account and the Welsh Government is fully supportive of introducing clear and consistent standards across social media platforms to improve user safety.

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) report that in the first 6 months of 2023, they received more reports involving 'sextortion' than in the whole of 2022. Older teens (14 – 17 years old) are the most at risk, with boys apparently being targeted most often.

We welcome the intentions set out in the UK Government's Online Safety Bill (which received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023) in seeking to address illegal and harmful content online, with the aim of preventing harm to individuals in the United Kingdom.

The Welsh Government is committed to collaborating with UK-wide partners and other governments to take coordinated actions to meet our common aims to enhance online safety provision, policy and practice.

[Reporting Harmful Content](#) is a national reporting centre that has been designed to assist everyone in reporting harmful content online.

Within the Hwb [Keeping Safe Online](#) pages, there is a range of advice and guidance for parents and carers, children and young people and practitioners on topics such as advice for children and young people:

[Online issues and worries: online body image and self esteem - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Online issues and worries: online sexual harassment - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Online issues and worries: sharing nudes - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

Last month, we published a "Views from the Experts" article by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) on sextortion (sexually coerced extortion) which may be useful; [Sextortion: sexually coerced extortion - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

**Recommendation 8.** *The Welsh Government should work with health bodies to enhance the ability of healthcare professionals to identify and respond to GBV. To give effect to this recommendation the Welsh Government should:*

- *extend the Ask and Act duty to other health and social care professionals and issue revised guidance to GPs in the first instance;*
- *track and publicly report statistics on the participation of staff in training programmes;*
- *collate and publish statistics on the timeliness of response times (between disclosure and being seen by a specialist) to Ask and Act referrals;*
- *and clearly outline the methodology for measuring the impact of training initiatives.*

*This work should be completed by March 2025.*

## **Accept:**

In accepting this recommendation, I should stress that participation in Ask and Act is not as a result of a duty. Instead, the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015 establishes the power for Welsh Ministers to issue statutory guidance and for Local Health Boards and Local Authorities to produce local strategies. Ask and Act results from this guidance and its application can be guided by those local strategies. The Sustainable Whole Systems Approach workstream of our National Partnership Board is reviewing the current guidance

and regional arrangements as part of its work plan. This review and the revised guidance that will follow can take on board the principles of this recommendation to ensure that health and social care professionals and GPs fully participate in training.

Following the review of Ask and Act, completed in 2022, from January 2023 we extended the opportunity for a wider range of VAWDASV professionals that do not fall under statutory roles to take part in Ask and Act training. Of course, the statutory bodies already covered included Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts.

The 2022 review found that Ask and Act was 'seen by those who participated in the evaluation as an important and valuable programme which is having an impact across Wales.' I do acknowledge the value of publishing additional data which would allow further scrutiny and accountability of the effectiveness of the programme. I am happy for this to be addressed through our ongoing development of the National Training Framework and recognise the timescale recommended by the Committee.

***Recommendation 9.*** *The Welsh Government should establish a seventh workstream within the VAWDASV Blueprint whose mission will be to make ambitious recommendations on how businesses and organisations can create safer and more equal workplaces. The workstream should cover practical information on the policies, procedures and training necessary to support this aim. The group should operate in a spirit of social partnership with representation from employers and trade unions*

**Accept in Principle:**

The Committee will be pleased to note progress has been made in this area. Whilst I am happy to address the issues raised by the Committee, we do have a mechanism which can successfully address them in our well-established Workplace workstream which is co-chaired by a Chief Superintendent from Gwent Police, on behalf of Policing in Wales, and the General Secretary of Wales TUC. I shall therefore refer the Committee's findings and recommendations to the existing workstream for their consideration in support of the objectives set out in your report.

***Recommendation 10.*** *The Welsh Government should consider funding a nation-wide public awareness campaign with a top male, sporting role model who can inspire other men and boys to take a stand against violence and promote positive values and behaviours. It is important this person is well-informed about the issue and receives appropriate training to effectively communicate and advocate for change. An evaluation of impact should be undertaken at the end of the campaign.*

**Accept:**

We are committed to using public awareness campaigns of the type mentioned as part of our strategy to engage with men and boys to address gender inequality, misogyny and the culture of 'toxic masculinity' which is promoted in some quarters but does not represent all men. We are engaged with the FAW and WRU to ensure that sport plays its part in the whole society approach we are undertaking. The recent findings of institutional sexism highlighted within the WRU, while being of deep concern, do provide an opportunity in the evident commitment of the WRU to turn these matters around. We will take advantage of that commitment to make a contribution which extends beyond Rugby itself.

However, in our work with communications and social media experts such as Cowshed, with whom Welsh Government is contracted to deliver campaigns of this type, we have identified that, among those who carry influence with young people, role models from outside the world of traditional sports carry significant weight. (e.g. gaming, trades and industry, music). For this reason, our next round of campaigns may well focus on other areas, as we focus on achieving the greatest possible impact.

As an example of our approach, I would point to the [Sound](#) campaign which I regard as a significant success. This campaign, which works with young men and boys in a number of settings, has proved to have considerable reach. The evaluation done so far has shown that the key messages and content reached a huge proportion of the target demographic during the campaign period (327,000 men aged 18-34, in Wales, during July-September 2023.) The campaign achieved this by targeting said demographic through segmentation of their interests, locations, language, education and professions. Content that focused on very specific areas of interest, or relatability, proved extremely effective and gave a more receptive 'in' to an often-difficult to engage topic.

We will continue to target and evaluate our campaign work in the way the Committee suggests, relying on the very practical expertise that specialists bring to our approach.

***Recommendation 11.*** *The Welsh Government perpetrator workstream should undertake a rapid review of perpetrator programmes designed to prevent GBV that are available across Wales. The review should seek to provide assurance that each programme considers the safety of survivors and can evidence effective rehabilitation. It should also consider different cultural and contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes and be completed by June 2024.*

**Accept:**

I welcome this recommendation and share the Committee's eagerness to improve our response to perpetrators as a means of reducing GBV. We have already begun an exercise which matches the purpose of this recommendation, through our Blueprint Tackling Perpetration Workstream. We launched a Wales wide survey in December 2024, which closed on Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 2025. This exercise gathered information about all existing perpetrator services currently being delivered across Wales. It includes information relating to eligibility criteria, risk levels, accreditation, victim safety and type of delivery model.

The findings of the survey, which will identify gaps in service delivery, and thematic trends, will be reported to the National Partnership Board in July 2025. This work will continue through the Tackling Perpetration Delivery Plan and the Sustainable Whole System Approach workstream to drive and support evidence based, needs led, commissioned services, that will recognise specific cultural needs as the Blueprint model progresses. This recommendation has been drawn to the attention of workstream members for their support in ensuring that the recommendation is met. An update will be included in the Blueprint annual report.

***Recommendation 12.*** *All Members of the Senedd should commit to completing training on GBV prevention by the end of 2024. Alongside this commitment, Senedd Member Support Staff and Senedd Commission staff should be encouraged via the appropriate channels to participate in such training.*

*This should be sought from a best practice provider and seek to address cultural norms and practices that perpetuate GBV whilst respecting cultural diversity.*

Whilst I very much support the principle of extending understanding of GBV to all as we must 'all play our part', it would, of course, be inappropriate for the Welsh Government to respond on behalf of the Senedd in this regard. I assume you have referred this recommendation to the appropriate authority.

***Action 8:*** *The Welsh Government should work with local authorities and/or the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure that local councillors have access to similar training and resources aimed at tackling GBV and report back by the end of 2024.*

I am happy to commit to discussing the matter with the WLGA with a view to this action being delivered.

There were two further actions set out in your report.

*Action 6. The Welsh Government should publish the results of its bystander intervention initiative as soon as possible after completion.*

I am happy to commit to this action.

*and*

*Action 7. The Welsh Government should report back on its work with Public Health Wales to consider whether a specific approach to alcohol abuse is necessary, and whether they intend to commission any research or data collection to better understand the relationship between alcohol and GBV given the gap in the evidence base. An update should be provided to the Senedd in the autumn term of 2024.*

I would point the Committee to the “Good Practice Framework for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Substance Misuse” [good-practice-framework-for-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-sexual-violence-and-substance-misuse.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/good-practice-framework-for-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-sexual-violence-and-substance-misuse.pdf) which was published in 2018, but I am happy to ensure that the Welsh Government will discuss this further with Public Health Wales and consider what action is required and provide an update to the committee in due course”.

I hope this response demonstrates my commitment to work effectively with others and as I told the Committee during your evidence sessions, ‘we will learn together’. Once again, I thank you for your important contribution to our shared endeavour to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman or a girl.



**Jane Hutt AS/MS**  
**Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip**  
**Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip**



# Agenda Item 6.1

Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip  
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

29 February 2024

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February about the Youth Justice Summit on Speech Language and Communication needs held on 24 January 2024. Although Speech Language and Communication in the justice system is the responsibility of the Minister for Health and Social Services (MHSS). I am responding as my officials led on organising the summit and capturing the outcome, although officials from both my portfolio and the MHSS portfolio attended the summit as part of a coordinated approach.

The Summit was held virtually. It was well attended by over 40 participants, including representatives from Welsh Government Health and Social Services, Youth Justice Services, Youth Justice Board, Royal College of Speech, Language and Communication Therapists (RCSLCT), York St John University, policy leads from across Welsh Government departments, youth justice, health, education, social services, early years and others.

Participants heard presentations from the RCSLCT, Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service (YJS), Milton Keynes YJS and about 'The Box' a free online e-learning tool designed to give professionals in the justice system the ability to identify communication issues and the skills to work with individuals who have such issues.

They then discussed the barriers/mitigations and resources/opportunities in the area and identified potential avenues for improvement under the current system. Pippa Cotterill, Head of RCLSC, in her closing remarks commented on how positive the summit had been.

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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.

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

Once officials across government have considered all the information and ideas shared and defined a planned way forward in more detail, the relevant Ministers will be advised in order to help inform their decisions on the way forward. I will continue to update the Committee on progress.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the first letter of "Jane".

**Jane Hutt AS/MS**  
**Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip**  
**Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip**

Jane Hutt, MS  
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip

09 February 2024

Dear Jane,

**Youth Justice Summit – Speech Language and Communication Needs**

I was pleased to learn that on 24 January 2024 officials from Welsh Government attended the Youth Justice Summit on Speech Language and Communication Needs.

From the summit's agenda, it appears as though the UK Youth Justice Board as well as representatives from every youth justice team in Wales were able to discuss matters with health officials, which is very encouraging.

Given that the summit took place as a result of our Committee's [report](#) I would be grateful if you could share with the Committee any outcomes of the summit and any next steps that Welsh Government and other partners will be taking further to the summit including timescales.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee  
Welsh Parliament

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

## Jane Dodds

Aelod o'r Senedd dros  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru


Member of the Senedd for  
Mid and West Wales


# Agenda Item 6.2

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## Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Jenny Rathbone MS

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay

Cardiff

CF99 1SN

**Dyddiad | Date: 04.03.2024**

**Pwnc | Subject: New Ministerial Role for Babies, Children and Young People.**

Annwyl Cadeirydd,

I would like to reiterate the need for a dedicated Minister for Babies, Children and Young People as outlined by the Equality and Social Justice Committee in their "Calling time on child poverty: how Wales can do better" report.

A portfolio specifically focusing on babies, children and young people is crucial to reducing child poverty in Wales. The evidence is clear – in countries where similar roles exist, child poverty is considerably lower. Scotland, New Zealand, Finland, Ireland and Australia all have a Minister focusing specifically babies, children and young people, and the poverty rates in these countries is much lower than it is here in Wales. The child poverty rates in these countries are no higher than 15%.

Here in Wales, it is 28%. Here in Wales, we don't yet have a Minister dedicated to babies, children and young people. As I mentioned earlier this month, when an issue as important as child poverty is spread across many ministerial roles it obscures accountability and failures, like the 28% of children in poverty who live in Wales, happen time and time again.

## Jane Dodds

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Member of the Senedd for  
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I therefore reiterate the call for the creation of a new Ministerial post dedicated solely to focusing on babies, children and young people. This role is needed to provide ultimate accountability, visible leadership and oversight on issues affecting children. This change is not just my personal recommendation - it is supported and recommended by leading organizations in Wales that work with children and families. During my role as Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Children and Families, the following groups voiced their full endorsement for establishing this new position:

Barnardo's Cymru

Children in Wales

NSPCC Cymru

NYAS Cymru

Play Wales

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Parent Infant Foundation

The Fostering Network

TGP Cymru

These organisations work directly with children, families, and practitioners on the ground. They know the challenges that children and families are facing first hand, and their support is crucial. If they are calling for a Minister to address the needs of children, then we must listen.

I hope that highlighting the support of these key organizations will lead to reconsideration of the recommendation for a Minister for Babies, Children and Young People. Their unified voice should prompt the current and future Welsh Government to re-evaluate and ultimately implement this needed structural change.

Yn gywir,



## Jane Dodds

Aelod o'r Senedd dros  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

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Member of the Senedd for  
Mid and West Wales



### Jane Dodds MS/AS

Member of the Senedd for Mid and West Wales  
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# Agenda Item 6.3

## Written response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Equality and Social Justice Committee on the 2024-25 Draft Budget

### Recommendation 1.

The Welsh Government should strengthen mechanisms for coordinating spending activities across ministerial portfolios. These mechanisms must include better, more effective monitoring of outcomes to ensure that they deliver on objectives including equality and social justice objectives. Details of how outcomes are being monitored across government should be published regularly with an update provided to the Senedd at 6 months and at the end of the financial year.

### Response: Accept in Principle

We already outline substantive information throughout the financial year through our Draft, Final and Supplementary Budget publications. We report the monitoring and delivery of outcomes through the Programme for Government report. In addition, throughout the year we publish a range of information through our website on the monitoring and outcomes of policy areas. We are happy to consider improvements through our work on the Budget Improvement Plan recognising that such changes must be proportionate and should also be considered through any changes to the Budget Protocol.

## **Recommendation 2.**

It remains unclear to us from the evidence presented either in the budget documentation or the session with the Minister what role data or the work of the evidence data Units have had in shaping budget decisions. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how it can improve this aspect of the budget documentation as part of its review of the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment and that this work is concluded in time for publication of the Draft Budget for 2025-26.

### **Response: Accept**

We are happy to consider how we can better reflect the role the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units play in shaping budget decisions are part of our review of the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment. In terms of the timescales of the review, which is currently in a formative stage, we intend to conclude the review by December 2024. While we would intend to take on board improvements where possible for the 2025-26 Budget, we anticipate substantive changes being taken on board for the 2026-27 Budget. This is on the basis the review will be considering the process by which the SIIA is undertaken alongside its presentation so implementation of process reforms coming out of the review will not be possible for the 2025-26 Budget.

The purpose of the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units is to improve the availability, quality, granularity and accessibility of equalities evidence to enable decision makers across Wales to develop better informed policies and measure their impact. This will in the longer term provide better evidence to inform the budgetary SIIA process as well as all policy decisions and monitoring and evaluation.



### **Recommendation 3.**

The Welsh Government should publish full details of the changes it intends to make to unprotected spending programmes associated with delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy as a result of its reprioritisation exercise. This should include comparative details of the planned spending before and after the reprioritisation exercise. This should be published as soon as possible and no later than one week before the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

### **Response: Accept in Principle**

The Child Poverty Strategy sets the priorities and objectives for tackling child poverty, with activity to deliver against them taking place across the whole of government. The spending priorities and intended changes to spending programmes across government are set out in the draft budget documentation published on 19 December.

#### **Recommendation 4.**

The Welsh Government should commission independent, expert research advice to improve how we measure the effectiveness and impact of preventative spending measures, the findings from which should be shared with the Committee by the end of September 2024.

#### **Response: Reject**

In line with Welsh Government's finance and budgetary procedures and arrangements we remain committed to embedding prevention within our Budget processes. However, through our engagement with other Governments, it is clear that there is no simple single approach that can be applied to our budget process.

As part of the work with the Budget Improvement Impact Advisory Group (BIAG) we are already working with sub-group looking at embedding prevention into our processes, using biodiversity as an area to pilot ideas. Subject to the findings from this work, a whole budget approach to preventative activity will be explored, testing practicalities, and identifying the conditions needed to do this effectively across the whole organisation.

We will continue to explore as part of the work of our Budget Improvement Plan and remain open to considering the role of independent expert advice when this work has been undertaken. We will provide an update on this work when we publish an update of our Budget Improvement Plan alongside the 2025-26 Draft Budget.

## **Recommendation 5.**

The Welsh Government should provide clarity and certainty on the implications of reductions to the equality, inclusion and human rights BEL for the sector including details of the likely impact on programme delivery. This information should be provided ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

### **Response: Accept**

The most significant impact in the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights BEL for 2024-25 are in the reductions in the Period Dignity Grant, rationalisation of research and analysis workstreams, and reductions in the discretionary funding available for Equality and Inclusion Grants.

For the Period Dignity Grant, a planned uplift was removed, and the budget line was reduced by a further £300k. Although most of the funding for this grant goes on procuring products, a recent review of the grant has indicated some areas of potential cost savings in procurement, and there had been small underspend in the previously recorded financial year. We are therefore expecting to be able to continue to sustain previous levels of provision through streamlining our approach. In addition, an associated communications campaign will not go ahead.

Some funding has been released by using more cost-effective approaches to research and analysis, such as undertaking some work in-house, although no planned activities have had to be cut.

For the Equality and Inclusion grant funding, the overall availability of flexible funding for the third sector has been reduced, although the level of core funding awards provided to key third sector partners has been sustained. The flexible grant funding is allocated through in-year grant awards, so no existing grant awards have been cut. We are revising our competitive grants process and we expect to spend the allocated funding but as the overall budget for these grants has been reduced, there will be fewer and / or smaller awards than originally envisaged and we may not be able to respond as flexibly to emerging priorities.

## Recommendation 6.

The Welsh Government should give a full account of the reasons for the unacceptable situation whereby the Gypsy and Traveller Site Capital Grant has resulted in £0 being awarded to local authorities for the whole of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years. This account should set out the reasons for this failure and how the Welsh Government intends to address them. We expect this to be available ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

### Response: Accept

The capital funding of £3.69m and £3.19m was available to local authorities in 2022-23 and 2023-24 respectively. There were no applications for capital funding in 2022-23. There were then no applications for funding from local authorities until late in 2023, by which time the funding had been offered up as part of the in-year cost saving exercise. The capital funding was offered up because the lead time for capital projects meant it was highly unlikely to be spent in 2023-24. However, funding of £3.44m is available in 2024-25 and local authorities will be strongly encouraged to submit applications alongside the current Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA) process being completed.

Some local authorities have indicated that they have not applied for the capital grant because they are awaiting the outcome of the latest GTAA from Welsh Government. However, any local authority's existing GTAA remains approved and valid until it is superseded by a local authority's subsequent approved GTAA and the duty to meet the needs identified remains with the local authority. Local authorities could therefore have applied for the funding.

With what I understand is a strengthened team working on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller equality in recent months, significant progress has been made on GTAAs and other areas of work. I will shortly start to write to local authorities in relation to the outcome of the outstanding GTAA assessments. In addition, the Gypsy and Traveller Site Capital Grant guidance is being revised and will be circulated in March. I have been meeting with local authority Cabinet members responsible for Gypsies, Roma and Traveller people and communities emphasising the need to respond to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' needs and making progress against meeting their duties under the Housing Act (Wales) 2014, including delivering on needs identified in approved GTAAs.

In relation to improving the provision of transit accommodation for Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities across Wales, my officials met with all local authorities in January to discuss the issue and consider whether regional transit sites might be appropriate in some cases. Further discussions with local authorities, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) and Public Services Boards (PSBs) are planned. We will be supporting local authorities by strengthening the evidence base for transit provision by gathering a comprehensive understanding of patterns of travel by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, and key

cultural and/or religious festival locations and dates, and seasonal movement due to employment opportunities.

I am undertaking a series of meetings with local authorities to discuss their current position in relation to meeting their obligations to ensure suitable accommodation is provided for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. I meet WLGA cabinet equality leads regularly, most recently focussing on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller related matters on 7 December 2023. I have also met with Gypsy Roma Traveller families and advocacy groups to discuss specific concerns.

**Recommendation 7.**

The Welsh Government should work with policing partners to assess the impact of reduced investment on community safety particularly tackling hate crime and undertake an evaluation of the role of Welsh Government funded PCSOs in previous years in relation to these, by September 2024. A copy of the evaluation should be provided to this Committee when available.

**Response: Accept**

We have discussed this recommendation with Policing in Wales, and will look to deliver a light touch review of the impact of Welsh Government's investment in PCSOs which will include consideration of their impact on tackling hate crime. This should be possible within current resources and within the September 2024 timescale specified by the Committee, and we will share the work with the Committee once completed.

# Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25

February 2024

## 1. Background

**1.** This report sets out the Equality and Social Justice Committee's views and recommendations regarding the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2024-25 (the Draft Budget). It is not an exhaustive commentary on every area within the Committee's remit; it focuses on key policy and process issues that were part of our Budget scrutiny.

**2.** It is intended to inform the Senedd's debate on the Draft Budget, scheduled for 6 February 2024 along with reports of other Senedd committees.

### **Approach to scrutiny**

**3.** We received a response from the Minister for Social Justice on our priority areas for budget scrutiny on 16 December 2023.

**4.** We held an evidence session with the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt MS (the Minister) and the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn MS (the Deputy Minister) on 22 January 2024.

**5.** We exchanged correspondence with the Minister for Social Justice on several areas of follow-up, copies of which can be found on the [Draft Budget 2024-25 webpage](#).



## 2. Overview of the Draft Budget 2024-25

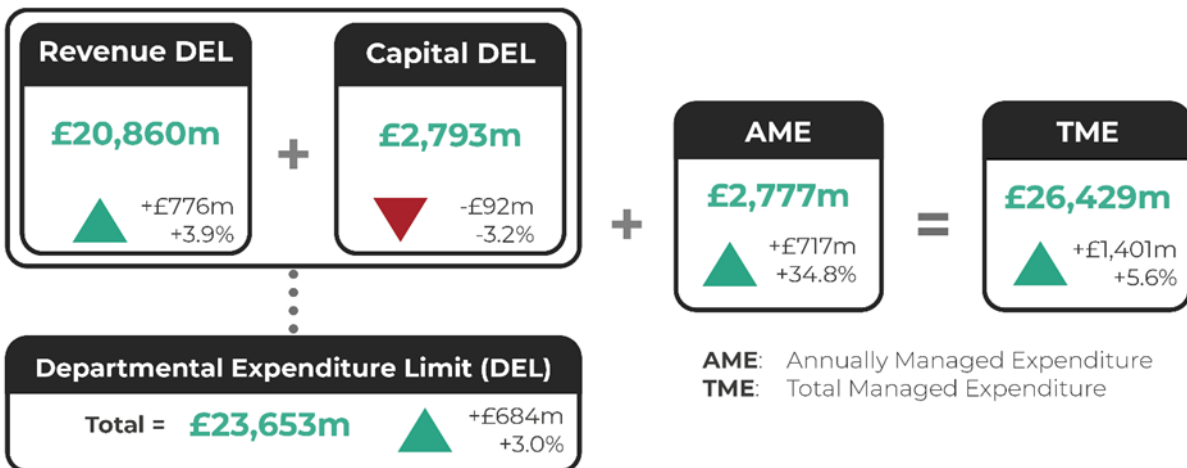
6. The Welsh Government’s Draft Budget for 2024-25 (resource and capital combined) is approximately £23.7 billion, just over half of which is allocated to Health and Social Services.<sup>1</sup>

7. According to the Welsh Government the Draft Budget was “developed amidst the toughest financial situation Wales has faced since the start of devolution”. They also stated that:

- Wales’ settlement from the UK Government “is insufficient to respond to the extreme pressures public services, businesses and people are facing”; and
- inflation means Wales’ overall budget is worth £1.3 billion less than when it was set in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

8. Figures 1 and 2 provide an overview of the headline Budget; and Draft Budget allocations broken down by spending department and how these have changed from the Final Budget 2023-24 respectively.

**Figure 1 - Overview of headline amounts in Draft Budget 2024-25**











<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, [Draft Budget 2024 to 2025](#), 19 Dec 2023

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, [A Budget to Protect the Services which Matter Most to You](#), 19 Dec 2023



**Figure 2 - Headline allocations by spending department and changes from 2023-24 Final Budget to 2024-25 Draft Budget<sup>3</sup>**

	Total revenue and capital allocation	Change 2023-24 Final Budget (restated) to 2024-25 Draft Budget	
 Health and Social Services	£11,690m	£929m 8.6%	▲
 Finance and Local Government*	£5,092m	£33m -0.6%	▼
 Climate Change	£2,848m	£84m -2.9%	▼
 Education and the Welsh Language**	£2,586m	£56m -2.1%	▼
 Economy	£541m	£4m -0.8%	▼
 Rural Affairs	£420m	£29m -6.4%	▼
 Central Services and Administration	£333m	£27m -7.4%	▼
 Social Justice	£142m	£12m -7.6%	▼

## Spending on Social Justice

**9.** The social justice budget faces the deepest cuts of any spending area in 2024-25, alongside rural affairs, climate change, central services and administration. £12 million or 7.6 per cent will be cut when compared with the 2023-24 Final Budget. The Minister for Social Justice described “stark and painful choices” faced by ministers and explained that spending plans have been “radically reshaped to focus funding on the core public services which matter most to people.”<sup>4</sup>

**10.** The allocation for the Draft Budget 2024-25 for the Social Justice main expenditure group (MEG) (revenue and capital) is £142 million, compared to £154 million for 2023-24 ( see Table 1).

<sup>3</sup> \* Excludes around £1.1 billion non-domestic rates income. \*\* Includes allocation of £514 million of non-fiscal revenue due to student loans. Figures are rounded. Refer to the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#) for exact figures.

<sup>4</sup> Minister’s written evidence

**Table 1 - Total allocations to the social justice MEG<sup>5</sup>**

	£ million
<b>Draft Budget 2024-25</b>	142
<b>Draft Budget 2024-25 (in 2023-24 prices)</b>	140
<b>2023-24 Final Budget</b>	154

11. This represents a reduction of £11.6 million compared with the Final Budget 2023-24 or 7.6% (see Table 2).

**Table 2 - Change in social justice MEG from 2023-24 to 2024-25 in nominal and real terms**

Nominal/Cash	Real terms
<b>-£11.6 million</b>	<b>-£14 million</b>
-7.6%	-9.1%

## Our View

### Overall allocations

We accept that the Welsh Government has to make difficult decisions especially when faced with a challenging fiscal settlement. In order to prioritise additional funding for the NHS and local government, it follows that cuts to other parts of the budget would be unavoidable. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of economic hardship for many, the impact of cuts to social justice are likely to be felt by some of the most vulnerable.

At 7.6%, social justice faces the deepest cuts of any spending area in 2024-25. Due to their cross-cutting nature, several areas of spending that advance equality and social justice objectives appear in other departmental expenditure groups. Spending on homelessness prevention (in the finance and local government portfolio), the Warm Homes Programme (in the climate change portfolio) and promoting Healthy Start vouchers (in the health and social services portfolio) are just some examples. Given that the financial squeeze is distributed unevenly across portfolios, it is more important than ever that Ministers coordinate spending activities effectively. This should include placing a greater emphasis on monitoring outcomes (rather than outputs) to ensure

<sup>5</sup> Senedd Research, [Interactive diagram to explore the 2024-25 Welsh Government Draft Budget \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales).

that they deliver key government objectives including in relation to equality and social justice.

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should strengthen mechanisms for coordinating spending activities across ministerial portfolios. These mechanisms must include better, more effective monitoring of outcomes to ensure that they deliver on objectives including equality and social justice objectives. Details of how outcomes are being monitored across government should be published regularly with an update provided to the Senedd at 6 months and at the end of the financial year.

### Summary of changes by Budget Expenditure Line (BEL)

**12.** Within the Social Justice MEG, spending is categorised into sub-groups known as Budget Expenditure Lines (BELs). A summary of changes to key BELs is provided in Table 3.<sup>6</sup>

**13.** The Minister explained that “substantial savings from this small portfolio” had been guided by several principles including protecting frontline services and avoiding decisions that widen inequalities.<sup>7</sup> Paragraphs 11 to 46 of the Minister’s evidence paper set out the rationale behind changes to revenue funding for each BEL.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 3 - Summary of changes to BELs in the Draft Budget 2024-25 compared with the 2023-24 Final Budget**

BEL	What initiatives are included within this BEL?	Change on 2023-24 Final Budget in nominal/cash terms	Percentage change on 2023-24 Final Budget
<b>Supporting Communities</b>	Financial and digital inclusion, basic income, international sustainable development, community bank and social partnership.	-£2.4 million	-5.7%

<sup>6</sup> The figures provided below, and included in Annex A of the Minister’s paper compare the Draft Budget 2024-25 with the previous years’ allocation (the Final budget 2023-24).

<sup>7</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annex A](#)

<sup>8</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annex A](#)<sup>8</sup>

BEL	What initiatives are included within this BEL?	Change on 2023-24 Final Budget in nominal/cash terms	Percentage change on 2023-24 Final Budget
<b>Community Support and Safety</b>	Funding for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).	-£7.5 million	-34%
<b>Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights</b>	Cohesive communities, equalities, poverty and children's evidence and support. Previously included gender equality charity, Chwarae Teg.	-£1.2 million	-12%
<b>Advocacy Services</b>	Funding for advice services.	Unchanged	-1.6% (real terms)
<b>Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)</b>	Covers funding for VAWDASV.	Unchanged.	-1.6% (real terms)
<b>Support for Voluntary Sector</b>	Support for volunteering and the Voluntary Sector.	+£8.5 million	+11%
<b>Community Facilities</b>	The community facilities programme.	+£6.5 million	+9%
<b>Fire and Rescue Services Resilience</b>	Fire and Rescue Services – communications systems, and community fire safety.	-£1.6 million	-21% (in real terms)
<b>Gypsy Traveller Sites</b>	Capital to improve or increase Gypsy Traveller sites.	+£0.21 million	+8%
<b>Commissioners</b>	Costs of the offices of Older People; Children's; and Future Generations Commissioners and Wales Public Appointments.	-£0.1 million	-6.6%
<b>Female Offending and Youth Justice Blueprints</b>	The female offending and youth justice Blueprints.	+£0.2 million	+16%

### 3. Equality considerations and the Draft Budget process

14. The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) notes:

- Households with children, women, disabled people and people from some Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately affected by low wages and part time work, and the impact of the cost of living crisis. These groups are therefore at greatest risk if the budget impacts on services that they rely on such as those aimed at tackling poverty.
- People on low incomes are particularly affected by food price increases; lower income groups will continue to struggle with the impact of higher food prices on their living standards even as the rate of increase falls.
- Children and young people face compounded effects from the Covid-19 pandemic.

15. The Minister outlined the role of the three evidence data units in shaping the SIIA and described their role as “critically important”.<sup>9</sup>

#### Gender equality and gender budgeting

16. Persistent gender inequality has meant women in Wales have been hit harder by cost of living pressures according to the Wales Women’s Budget Group of the Women’s Equality Network (WEN Wales). They called on the Welsh Government to take further action to address gender inequality and implement the recommendations of the Gender Equality Review ‘Deeds Not Words’ which they say “remains regrettably slow”.<sup>10</sup>

17. To support the aim of gender budgeting, the Welsh Government has conducted three pilots in recent years. WEN Wales welcomed these but said it remains unclear how the learning from the pilots will inform wider policy

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<sup>9</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>10</sup> Finance Committee, written evidence, [Women’s Budget Group and Women’s Equality Network](#)

making. They told us that more information is needed regarding progress and evaluation and would like to see gender budgeting mainstreamed in future.<sup>11</sup>

**18.** The Minister said that gender equality was “an absolute priority” and highlighted protection of funding for VAWDASV and childcare as evidence of this.<sup>12</sup>

**19.** According to the Deputy Minister, learning from the gender budgeting pilots had “very much shaped” the Budget and the Government were looking at ways to “further embed gender-budgeting approaches to both budget and tax processes” as part of a wider review of the SIIA to be undertaken this year.<sup>13</sup>

**20.** Sioned Williams MS asked how the impact on women of two specific examples - cuts to personal learning accounts and the period dignity grant - could be reconciled with this approach. The Deputy Minister explained that the Draft Budget allocation for period dignity was based on current projected spend in 2023-24 and savings that could be made by adopting a more strategic approach in future. The issue of personal learning accounts was not addressed.<sup>14</sup>

### Support for disabled people

**21.** Life is more expensive for disabled people and their families. This is in part due to the higher costs incurred for essential goods and services such as heating, insurance, specialist equipment, accessible transport, specialist food and therapies.

**22.** Disability Wales highlighted these higher costs faced by disabled people. Research by Scope shows that households with at least one disabled adult or child need an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households.<sup>15</sup> Alongside the Expert Group on the Cost of Living Crisis, Disability Wales called on the Welsh Government to include specific financial support for disabled people in the Draft Budget. This was raised with the Minister by Sarah Murphy MS, and the Minister responded:

*“It's pretty clear, isn't it, why it hasn't happened. We've got a £1.3 billion cut to our budget. My budget is £139 million [...] The money isn't there.”<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Finance Committee, written evidence, [Women's Budget Group and Women's Equality Network](#)

<sup>12</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>13</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>14</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>15</sup> Scope, [Disability Price Tag](#), December 2023

<sup>16</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

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## Our view

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### Evidence base for spending decisions

Clearly, setting the 2024-25 Draft Budget has involved difficult decisions by Ministers. However there is a mismatch between the evidence base underpinning these decisions with some of the rhetoric and the detail of the evidence presented to us. For example, the Women's Equality Network highlighted a lack of clarity on how learning from the gender budgeting pilots has been applied. Similarly, in terms of impact on other protected characteristics we are not convinced that the SIIA demonstrates the level of detail and rigour that is being claimed by the Welsh Government. We recognise that this is work in progress and support the Government's ambitions for more accurate data. However, the Welsh Government should consider whether being more upfront about the balance between hard evidence and the political choices involved in some spending decisions at times would be more plausible and transparent.

**Conclusion 1.** We are frustrated at the slow pace of progress in mainstreaming gender budgeting processes. We note that these concerns are not new and that our predecessor Committee expressed similar concerns in 2019-20. We expect to see gender budgeting mainstreamed as part of the process for formulating 2025-26 budget spending plans at least 6 months out from publication of the Draft Budget 2025-26. This should include providing clear examples that demonstrate the impact of gender budgeting on spending decisions in budget documentation and other evidence provided to Senedd Committees on the Draft Budget 2025-26.

**Recommendation 2.** It remains unclear to us from the evidence presented either in the budget documentation or the session with the Minister what role data or the work of the evidence data Units have had in shaping budget decisions. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how it can improve this aspect of the budget documentation as part of its review of the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment and that this work is concluded in time for publication of the Draft Budget for 2025-26.

**Conclusion 2.** We welcome the commitments the Minister gave to discuss the work of all three Units in more detail at a future meeting.

## 4. Tackling poverty

### Poverty and the rising cost of living

**23.** In September the Wales Expert Group on the Cost of Living Crisis published its report to the Welsh Government which made 29 recommendations.<sup>17</sup> The Welsh Government published its response after our scrutiny session on 23 January 2024.<sup>18</sup> Prior to publication of the full response, the Minister told us:

*“There are some [recommendations], for example the work on the Welsh Benefits Charter and the refreshed Child Poverty Strategy, which we are able to proceed with, and which will help to direct and inform the way we align our programmes across government and get the most out of our individual anti-poverty actions.*

*There are a number of recommendations however, which, owing to the current budgetary pressures, we have not been able to take forward in the way that we would have wanted, and which will only be realised if significant additional funding becomes available.”<sup>19</sup>*

**24.** When asked by the Senedd’s Finance Committee whether the Expert Group’s report had influenced allocations in the Draft Budget, one of its members, Dr Victoria Winckler of the Bevan Foundation, said: “If it has, it’s hard to see”.<sup>20</sup>

**25.** In relation to tackling poverty and the Welsh Government’s response to cost of living pressures, the Minister highlighted the protection of funding for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF), the Single Advice Fund (SAF) and the Basic Income Pilot as key priorities. Responding to concerns that demand for the DAF was about to exceed the maximum budget in this 2023-24 financial year, the Minister told us that as a demand-led budget: it “will continue to meet that demand”.<sup>21</sup>

**26.** The Minister also highlighted other areas of spending including budget allocations for tackling food poverty through improving cookery skills,

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<sup>17</sup> Wales Expert Group on the Cost of Living, [Report to the Welsh Government](#), 26 Sept 2023

<sup>18</sup> Welsh Government Written Statement, Response to the Report by the Expert Group on Cost of Living, 23 January 2024

<sup>19</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annex A](#)

<sup>20</sup> Finance Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 10 January 2024

<sup>21</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024



emergency fuel support and spending within the wider Budget on homelessness prevention.<sup>22</sup>

## Child poverty

**27.** The Minister told us that spending allocations for tackling child poverty had been reduced “by reprioritising or deferring activity, rather than cutting or ending programmes” and that programmes identified within the Child Poverty Strategy would still be delivered but at a lower scale.<sup>23</sup> She also highlighted spending in other ministerial portfolios which would alleviate child poverty such as the School Essentials grant, Pupil Deprivation Grant, and universal free school meals:

*“we’ve done everything that we can to protect, not just in my budget, but across the Welsh Government.”<sup>24</sup>*

## The Welsh Benefits Charter

**28.** The Welsh Benefits Charter was launched on 22 January 2024 and the Minister highlighted its important role for alleviating poverty and the Child Poverty Strategy in particular.<sup>25</sup>

**29.** To increase the take-up of benefits, the Minister and her officials highlighted the cross-governmental working that was taking place to ensure that “Every Contact Counts” and cited Welsh Government funding for [Dangos training for frontline staff](#) and a new national network of advice networks.<sup>26</sup>

## Preventative spending

**30.** The Welsh Government emphasised that the Draft Budget had been shaped by the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act including the principle of prevention. However, the Future Generations Commissioner in his evidence to the Finance Committee largely disputed this claim stating that “the process of embedding prevention into the budget process has not yet materialised” and that the Draft Budget documents showed only a “generic commitment to a preventative approach”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annexe A](#)

<sup>23</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annexe A](#)

<sup>24</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>25</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>26</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

<sup>27</sup> Finance Committee, [Letter from the Future Generations Commissioner](#), 10 January 2024

**31.** Cwmpas wrote to highlight the impact of a 50% reduction in funding for Digital Communities Wales which includes programmes to combat digital exclusion.<sup>28</sup> They noted that marginalised groups are more likely to be digitally excluded and that recent trends such as the rising cost of living, risked widening the digital inclusion gap even further. Tackling digital exclusion are key to objective 1 of the Child Poverty Strategy and Mission 2 of the Digital Strategy for Wales.<sup>29</sup>

## Our view

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### Tackling poverty

We note that the Minister has protected several spending allocations which include measures designed to tackle poverty and address the cost of living crisis. These include spending on the DAF, the SAF, and the Basic Income Pilot. Given the difficult economic circumstances that many people face, it is particularly welcome that the Minister confirmed that demand placed on the DAF will be met.

More qualified protections have been given to spending areas such as delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy. According to the Minister, activities relating to this have been “reprioritised” or scaled back; without more detail it is difficult for us to understand what that means in practical terms. We are particularly keen to understand the nature of the changes being made and think the Welsh Government should provide full details of what spending before and after budget reprioritisation looks like.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should publish full details of the changes it intends to make to unprotected spending programmes associated with delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy as a result of its reprioritisation exercise. This should include comparative details of the planned spending before and after the reprioritisation exercise. This should be published as soon as possible and no later than one week before the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

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<sup>28</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Correspondence from CWMPAS to the Chair regarding the Draft Budget 2024/2025](#), 31 January 2024

<sup>29</sup> Welsh Government, [Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024](#), 23 January 2024; [Digital Strategy for Wales](#), 23 March 2021

## Welsh Benefits Charter

We warmly welcome the adoption of the Welsh Benefits Charter by the Partnership Council for Wales and hope that the work of the Steering Group will maintain momentum as the focus shifts to delivery. The statistics on awareness and take-up of Welsh benefits such as the Schools Essentials Grant (19 per cent), help with health costs (17 per cent) and even the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (58 per cent) are a sobering reminder of why this work is so vital.<sup>30</sup> They also underline our expectation that rapid progress should be possible given the very low base in some instances. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to provide us with regular monitoring updates and ask that these include figures broken down by local authority area so that progress can be monitored effectively.

## Preventative spending

Despite a rhetorical commitment to prevention, previous experience suggests that preventative spending measures are being diluted in this Draft Budget. Cuts to the budget for digital inclusion are one example of this as ensuring that disadvantaged groups have the ability to access digital information and services constitute a preventative, invest to save approach. Furthermore, we note the comments of the Future Generations Commissioner who identifies several ways in which a more preventative approach could be adopted. Our scrutiny of the 2023-24 Draft Budget, recommendation 10, called on the Welsh Government to commission independent, expert research advice to improve how we measure the effectiveness and impact of preventative spending measures. This was rejected. In light of the Future Generations Commissioner's comments and the need to maximise the value of every pound spent, we urge the Welsh Government to reconsider.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should commission independent, expert research advice to improve how we measure the effectiveness and impact of preventative spending measures, the findings from which should be shared with the Committee by the end of September 2024.

**Conclusion 3.** We would also welcome more detail from the Welsh Government on what a 50% reduction in spending on Digital Communities Wales will mean for digital inclusion particularly in terms of programme delivery and outcomes

<sup>30</sup> Figures are for respondent's awareness of each benefit and are from the Bevan Foundation, [Making the Case for a Welsh Benefits System – people's experiences](#), January 2024

including for objective 1 of the Child Poverty Strategy and Mission 2 of the Digital Strategy for Wales. This information should be provided ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

## 5. Equality, inclusion and human rights

**32.** The budget for equality, inclusion and human rights faces a reduction of £1.2 million in the Draft Budget (when compared with 2023-24) and a £3.2 million reduction overall compared with the Indicative Budget.

**33.** Stakeholders including the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and WEN Wales expressed concerns regarding the consequences for equality focused voluntary organisations. WEN Wales also highlighted the cuts faced in the current 2023-24 financial year and called for clarity on which programmes would be affected by these spending changes.<sup>31</sup>

**34.** The Minister confirmed that despite these cuts, the Welsh Government was confident it would still meet its Programme for Government commitments, including those “associated with the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, LGBTQ+ Action Plan, and Disability Rights Task Force work”.<sup>32</sup>

### Gypsy, Roma, Traveller sites

**35.** Funding for Gypsy Traveller sites will be increased by 8% or £0.21 million when compared with the Final Budget 2023-24, which means a total allocation of £3.4 million in the Draft Budget for 2024-25.

**36.** In 2022-23 it emerged that no grant funding had been disbursed. For the current 2023-24 financial year, the Minister confirmed that no grant funding had been disbursed or is expected to be disbursed for a second year in a row. The Minister outlined her hopes for the next financial year:

*“the key thing is that we've got this allocation for the next financial year. And as I've been meeting authorities—and some of those authorities have been the ones, from north to south, with perhaps the most challenging issues in terms of those accommodation assessments—I am urging them to get their proposals ready for access to this sites grant for the next financial year, and have protected that capital budget.”<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> WCVA, [Draft budget 2024/25 – statement from WCVA](#), 19 December 2023

<sup>32</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annex A](#)

<sup>33</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Record of Proceedings](#), 22 January 2024

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## Our view

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### Equality, inclusion and human rights

We note that the funding for equality, inclusion and human rights faces some of the largest reductions of any spending area. We welcome assurances that the Welsh Government will still meet all its Programme for Government commitments, however, the impact on the broader sector is likely to be considerable. It is vital that the Welsh Government provides more clarity and certainty on what these budget reductions will mean for the sector particularly in terms of programme delivery.

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should provide clarity and certainty on the implications of reductions to the equality, inclusion and human rights BEL for the sector including details of the likely impact on programme delivery. This information should be provided ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

### GRT sites

We are shocked to learn that for a second year in a row a total of £0 has been disbursed to local authorities to provide gypsy traveller sites. We do not doubt the Minister's personal commitment to this issue, but serious questions need to be asked to establish why for over two years, not a single local authority has successfully submitted an application resulting in a grant award. This failure is unacceptable and we expect a full account of the reasons for this and how these will be addressed. We share this view with the Local Government and Housing Committee and therefore submit a joint recommendation for the second time on this topic.

**Recommendation 6.** The Equality and Social Justice Committee and the Local Government and Housing Committee jointly recommend that the Welsh Government should give a full account of the reasons for the unacceptable situation whereby the Gypsy and Traveller Site Capital Grant has resulted in no funding being awarded to local authorities for the whole of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years. This account should set out the reasons for this failure and how the Welsh Government intends to address them. We expect this to be available ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

## 6. Other areas

**37.** The Welcome Ticket provides concessionary bus travel for refugees in Wales and was introduced in response to the war in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup> In December 2023 the Welsh Government indicated that they were considering next steps for the scheme and the Welsh Refugee Council called for its extension beyond March 2024.<sup>35</sup>

### Our view

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Welcome Tickets have played an important role in Wales' collective response to people fleeing war and crisis abroad. It would be disappointing for this scheme to come to an abrupt end in March 2024.

**Conclusion 4.** We would welcome more detail from the Welsh Government about arrangements for a successor to this scheme ahead of the debate on the Final Budget scheduled for 5 March 2024.

### Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)

**38.** The budget for PCSOs is included in the Community Support and Safety BEL, which has been cut by £7.4 million in the Draft Budget 2024-25 (this equates to a cash reduction of -34%). The Minister told us that the saving is based on a reduction of Welsh Government funded PCSOs from 510 at the end of 2023-24 to 300 by the end of 2024-25.<sup>36</sup>

### Our view

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Welsh Government funding in non-devolved policy areas is increasingly hard to justify in the context of difficult spending decisions. Even after the cut in the Draft Budget, the Welsh Government's investment in PCSOs will remain substantial at £15.5 million.

The Minister indicated that she will work with policing partners on the implications of the Welsh Government's reduced investment. It is important that such work considers the impact on community safety particularly tackling hate

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<sup>34</sup> Welsh Government, [Wales Free Bus Travel Scheme for refugees 'Welcome Ticket': terms and conditions](#), May 2022

<sup>35</sup> Senedd Cymru, [Written Question 89921](#), Written evidence, [Welsh Refugee Council and Welsh Refugee Coalition](#)

<sup>36</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Welsh Government's evidence paper and Annexe A](#)

crime. We therefore urge a jointly-funded evaluation of the impact of funding from previous years to enable the targeting of remaining funding going forward and would welcome a copy of the evaluation when available.

**Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government should work with policing partners to assess the impact of reduced investment on community safety particularly tackling hate crime and undertake an evaluation of the role of Welsh Government funded PCSOs in previous years in relation to these, by September 2024. A copy of the evaluation should be provided to this Committee when available.

# Agenda Item 6.4

Y Cwnsler Cyffredinol a Gweinidog y Cyfansoddiad  
Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref CG/PO/72/2024  
Ein cyf/Our ref CG/PO/72/2024

Huw Irranca-Davies MS  
Chair  
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee  
Senedd Cymru

5 March 2024

## Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement: Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee

Further to my letter of 24 February and in accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I can confirm the sixth meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) has been re-scheduled to take place on 12 March 2024.

I will be chairing the meeting and the topics for discussion will be unchanged.

I have copied this letter to the Llywydd, and to the Chairs of the Finance Committee, the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee.

I will provide an update after the meeting.

### Mick Antoniw AS/MS

Y Cwnsler Cyffredinol a Gweinidog y Cyfansoddiad  
Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution

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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.