

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2025

TIME: 12PM – 1PM, LOCATION: ZOOM

PRESENT: Jenny Rathbone MS (Chair); Sarah Murphy MS; Sioned Williams MS; Rachael Clarke – BPAS; Amanda Davies – Swansea Bay UHB; Adam Tyler – Hywel Dda UHB; Helen Perry – NYAS; Kate Martin – Aneurin Bevan UHB; Debbie Schaffer – FTWW Wales; Laura Butler – Cardiff University; Kerrie Dawson – BPAS; Ali Morris – Merched Cymru; Andrew McMullan – BPAS; Ro Cutmore – BPAS; Sara Myfanwy Pitts – Swansea Bay UHB; Janine Hale – Welsh Government; Pauline Brelsford – Abortion Rights Cardiff; Bronwen Davies – Abortion Rights Cardiff; Jane Dickson – Aneurin Bevan UHB; William Parry – Welsh Government; Benjamin Jones – Endometriosis UK; Lucy Ward – BPAS

APOLOGIES: Julie Richards – RCM; Heatherjane Dangerfield – Endometriosis UK; Cathy Larkman – WRN Wales; Vivienne Rose – BPAS

1. WELCOME, MINUTES, AND MATTERS ARISING

Minutes: Minutes accepted from meeting held 11 June 2025.

2. ABORTION CARE IN WALES

Remarks by the Welsh Government Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Sarah Murphy MS

- Current gap in surgical abortion provision in Wales is unacceptable and a commitment has been made to ensure that women do not need to travel outside of Wales for care
- Chief Nursing Officer is gathering information about abortion services, and the Minister has raised the matter with the Gynae Clinical Implementation Network in Hywel Dda
- Women's Health Network is using all-Wales data to develop a sustainable abortion care plan which will include specialist services

3. ISSUES WITH ABORTION CARE PROVISION IN WALES AND HOW WE SOLVE IT

Presentation by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) Head of Advocacy, Rachael Clarke

- Current overview of abortion in Wales: in 2024 it is estimated that around 12,500 abortions were carried out (a 50% increase since 2015), around 91% of abortions took place in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy which left 1100 women a year needing access to later (often surgical) treatment, currently there is only one doctor in Wales trained to provide second trimester surgical procedures but she is unable to run theatre lists, this means that 150 women per year from South Wales are forced to travel to England for abortion care
- In 2018, the CPG's inaugural report was on abortion services in Wales. Jenny Rathbone as Chair of the CPG wrote to then-Health Minister Vaughan Gething to raise issues about later

gestation care, cross-border commissioning, and care for women with complex medical needs – nothing has changed on this topic in the last 7 years

- BPAS Cardiff is the only place where women have long been able to access second trimester surgical abortion services but challenges with premises and commissioning means that these services have been temporarily suspended. BPAS is working with Cardiff & the Vale UHB to find premises. The Welsh Women's Health Champion – Dr Helen Munro – is spearheading an SBAR (situation-background-assessment-recommendation) on abortion care in Wales which is the first step in developing a nationally-commissioned service

4. BARRIERS, DATA, AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Presentation by the Welsh Chair of the British Society of Abortion Care Providers, Dr Amanda Davies, and Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Consultant, Dr Adam Tyler

- Recent all-Wales data demonstrate that conscientious objection (CO) is inconsistently applied across health boards and is now a measurable barrier to timely abortion care and leading to inequity, delay, and harm
- Only 14% have received any formal training on CO and 85% were unaware of any guidance in their workplace. 59% had encountered cases where CO led to delayed or denied care, with CO sometimes being invoked beyond its legal scope (for example, when a patient with epilepsy became septic because no non-objecting surgeon was available)
- Mitigations proposed include: development of an All-Wales CO policy, mandatory CO training, a CO declaration register, and the implementation of an emergency response standard

5. OPEN DISCUSSION

In response to the Minister's remarks at the beginning of the session, many points were raised about the situation on the ground with abortion provision across Wales.

- An abortion care provider stated that in her health board, only 7 of 25 gynaecologists are willing to help facilitate abortion care and wanted to share that most abortion care is actually delivered by clinicians out with gynaecology
- Clinicians are exhausted from campaigning and are still unable to secure theatre lists to provider surgical abortions, with fears that concerns are being muffled
- Concerns that BPAS are providing a 'backstop' for frustrated Welsh clinicians and that it is unsustainable

A question was asked on whether there was research on which doctors are objecting (is it religion, gender etc)?

- The demographic data was widely varied and CO was mixed across men and women
- Some CO might be stemming from a misunderstanding of what it actually means

Someone asked why medics are not trained in abortion care when there are so many women needing support.

- This is a systemic issue that means many vulnerable women who present later on in pregnancy struggle to access care to travel to England as no reimbursement for abortion-related travel to England is offered (unlike Scotland) meaning that supporting charities or BPAS often end up covering the cost
- SBAR is being developed to progress commissioning for specialist abortion services

A question was asked about why only one doctor is trained to the 24-week gestational limit and why there is no capacity for surgical lists.

- This was explained as an issue that has existed since COVID, when doctors lost their hospital-based abortion lists as access to medical (tablet) abortion expanded. This meant that most health boards began to rely solely on BPAS Cardiff for later surgical treatments
- There was a suggestion that local MSs could formally write to AB UHB requesting theatre access be found

Many actions were identified that the CPG will take forward. These include:

- Mapping the geographical spread of MSs and writing to local health boards asking why services are not progressing
- Writing to the Welsh Government to highlight issues raised in the meeting and challenges around CO
- A meeting in the Senedd to take place on a Wednesday at the beginning of 2026 to raise awareness and bring cross-party MSs together along with stakeholders

6. AOB

The current Senedd session will finish after Easter, and there will be an election in May 2026.

NEXT MEETING: TIME/DATE TBC, WILL INCLUDE AN AGM MEETING AND ANNUAL REPORT
