

## Welsh Government Evidence Paper

### Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

## Response to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 – Resilience and Preparedness

### Introduction

1. The Welsh Government welcomes the opportunity to provide this evidence paper to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (PAPAC) ahead of the First Minister's attendance at its scrutiny session on 15 January 2026. This paper outlines the Welsh Government's response to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 report, which examined the UK's resilience and preparedness for the pandemic. It also addresses the findings of the Senedd's Special Purpose Committee (SPC) and subsequent scrutiny by PAPAC, including evidence presented to the committee in autumn 2025.
2. The Welsh Government has engaged fully with the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, contributing significant evidence, numerous written statements and witnesses to inform its scrutiny of government and public services' decision making during the pandemic during each module. In January 2025, we published our formal response to the inquiry's Module 1 report, followed by a six-month update in July 2025 (with a further update to be published in January 2026). This paper provides a summary account of actions taken, progress made, and future work planned.
3. Over the past two years, Wales has significantly strengthened how its emergency services and government agencies co-ordinate in preparing for and responding to major incidents. Guided by the *Wales Resilience Framework 2025* and initiatives led by the Welsh Government's National Security and Resilience Division (NSRD), Wales has built a stronger "Team Wales" approach – characterised by a robust shared risk picture, clearer response protocols and leadership, intensive joint training and exercising, coupled with independent scrutiny and an active resilience oversight function. These efforts have produced tangible gains: faster cross-government and multi-agency mobilisation, improved coordination and more unified communication. Based on feedback from the responder community, this has ultimately led to better responses to real emergencies and disruptive challenges than seen previously – from severe flooding, severe weather impacts and major water outages to industrial accidents, cyber attacks and public health and animal disease threats.

### Strengthening and simplifying resilience governance and structures

4. The Welsh Government has implemented significant reforms to its resilience governance in response to the inquiry's recommendation 1 in module 1, which called for simplified, Cabinet-level oversight of civil emergency preparedness. In 2023, we

completed a review of civil contingencies arrangements, leading to the establishment of the Risk and Preparedness Committee (RPCO) in April 2024 and Wales' first resilience strategy, the *Wales Resilience Framework* in 2025. This cross-government senior officials group meets quarterly and reports to the Permanent Secretary's Executive Committee and Ministers. It is designed to transition from risk management to crisis response when needed, through strengthened and more agile response activation procedures, which have been stress-tested and refined through more than 50 real-world incident responses in 2024 and 2025 and in exercises. These arrangements were integral to the response structures deployed during the three phases of Exercise PEGASUS last autumn.

5. At Ministerial level, the First Minister chairs at least one Cabinet session about emergency preparedness every year. The Wales Resilience Forum (WRF) was reconstituted in May 2025 to bring together senior leaders from category 1 and 2 statutory and third sector responders, supported by the strengthened Wales Resilience Partnership. These reforms address concerns raised by the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and the Covid-19 Senedd Special Purpose Committee about the complexity and fragmentation of previous structures.
6. We would emphasise however, that civil contingencies work is inherently complex; the associated structures and oversight cannot be over-simplified. It involves multiple disciplines and professions – including, but not limited to, emergency planning, risk management, crisis management, communications, business continuity management, public and animal health, environment, national security, and cyber security – across a wide-range of public sector organisations. The management of more than 100 distinct risks, as identified in the Wales Risk Register (finalised in late 2024), encompasses the involvement of more than 50 statutory responders within Wales, as well as various government departments and third sector organisations performing diverse roles and functions. Effective risk management, preparedness, and response demand a broad spectrum of capabilities, delivered through numerous working-level and expert groups that provide relevant expertise, independent evaluation, and robust oversight and coordination.
7. The effectiveness of Wales' strengthened preparedness and response arrangements has been tested and refined through both planned exercises and through real-world emergencies. The Welsh Government played a full role in Exercise PEGASUS, the UK-wide tier one pandemic preparedness exercise in autumn 2025. This provided a valuable opportunity to stress-test our revised governance and response structures, including the transition from planning to operational response, our ability to surge health and care systems and capabilities, the integration of data systems, and the coordination of partners. Lessons from Exercise PEGASUS are being incorporated into the Wales Resilience Framework Delivery Plan, Wales Resilience Forum and Pandemic Preparedness Board work programmes to help drive future improvements.

8. In addition, the Welsh Government's risk management, preparedness and response arrangements have been tested repeatedly over the past two years through a series of real-world incidents, including the strategic responses to Storms Bert, Darragh and Claudia, major disruptions to water supplies in North Wales in 2025, cyber attacks, wildfires, and the management of emerging public health and animal disease threats such as Mpox and Bluetongue. According to feedback we have received from the responder community, reflected in some of the evidence presented to PAPAC, these events have demonstrated the agility and effectiveness of our revised structures, including the activation of our national response levels, the Wales Civil Contingencies Committee, co-ordination with UK Government (via COBR), and the deployment of the UK Emergency Alert system.
9. We consider recommendation 1 of the Module 1 report to be implemented. However, we recognise the need for continued scrutiny and improvement, and we welcome PAPAC's role in assessing the effectiveness of these new structures.

#### **Lead department model and subsidiarity**

10. Recommendation two in the module 1 report proposed abolishing the lead government department model in favour of centralised UK Government leadership, via the Cabinet Office. While this was a recommendation specific to the UK Government, we maintain that the principle of subsidiarity remains appropriate in Wales, where respective Welsh Ministers and their departments lead on preparedness for risks within their remit, supported by central co-ordination through the Risk and Preparedness Committee (RPCO) and associated structures, with expert advice, leadership and challenge provided by the Welsh Government's National Security and Resilience Division, which retains expertise and dedicated capabilities relating to civil contingencies, national and cyber security, risk and crisis management.
11. The Welsh Government's approach blends departmental expertise with cross-government oversight. In the event of a whole-system emergency, our structures allow for escalation and coordination across departments and with the responder community, with these arrangements having been refined and tested extensively since the pandemic. Some risks, including pandemics, do not respect borders and the Public Health Directorate is exploring with the Department for Health and Social Care areas where it would be effective and beneficial to develop UK-wide capabilities in our preparedness planning for a future pandemic.
12. We believe our model is proportionate and effective within the devolved context and aligns with the framework set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

#### **Risk assessment and strategic planning**

13. The Welsh Government has taken decisive steps to improve risk assessment and strategic planning, in line with recommendations three and four in the module 1 report. In 2024, we completed Wales' first bespoke civil contingencies risk register, which was independently reviewed and endorsed by the UK Resilience Academy (formerly Emergency Planning College). This register assesses more than 100 risks, including those specific to Wales, and evaluates preparedness levels across the four local resilience forums (LRFs).
14. The *Wales Resilience Framework 2025* articulates our shared vision with the responder community for "whole of society" resilience in Wales, underpinned by partnership working and eight core principles (including engagement, transparency equality, and continuous learning). It serves as Wales' resilience strategy to meet Wales' needs while complementing UK arrangements. For instance, it mandates a once-for-Wales approach where appropriate – seeking consistent all-Wales processes – but also explicitly recognises that Wales is an integral part of UK resilience and must interface smoothly with UK arrangements. The accompanying delivery plan sets out key actions and timelines.
15. We have committed to ongoing updates of the classified risk register and six-monthly risk outlook reports to ensure government departments and the responder community are equipped with a unified assessment of the full range of risks facing Wales. Our approach addresses the inquiry's call for dynamic, inclusive, and prevention-focused risk planning. We are also working with the UK Government and devolved governments to improve risk methodologies and ensure consistency across the UK.
16. To support strategic planning, the *Wales Resilience Framework* is in place and we are actively contributing to the establishment of a four nations Interministerial Group on Resilience. This will facilitate strategic cooperation and policy alignment across the UK, ensuring Wales' needs are reflected in joint planning, preparedness and capability building.
17. The Welsh Government's new resilience overwatch function, delivered by National Security and Resilience Division and overseen by the Risk and Preparedness Committee, has played a critical role in ensuring that risk management and readiness are focused, evidence-based, and responsive to emerging threats. This provides senior-level assurance and challenge, enabling the Welsh Government to prioritise resources effectively and maintain a clear line of sight on the most pressing risks. The Welsh Government is actively managing a small number of resilience overwatch operations currently including in relation to environmental and winter-related risks to provide strategic support to the responder community and assurance to ministers.

### **Multi-agency collaboration and local engagement**

18. Effective emergency response requires seamless collaboration across government, emergency services, local authorities, health boards, the voluntary sector, and communities. The Welsh Government has strengthened multi-agency coordination through the Wales Resilience Partnership and enhanced support for local resilience forums (LRF), including dedicated funding from 2024-25 (£30k per LRF). This provision was increased in 2025-26 to £50k per LRF.
19. The Pan-Wales Response Plan was refreshed, in consultation with the responder community in 2023. A full review is underway with a draft Welsh Government crisis management Concept of Operations (CONOPS), which was tested and refined during 2025. We anticipate the Concept of Operations will be published towards the end of 2026 following final work, consultation with partners and an independent 'red team' review (Red teams are groups of people who provide independent and objective scrutiny through test and challenge). A complementary Pandemic Concept of Operations is also being developed by the Public Health Directorate, as the lead department for pandemic preparedness.
20. We have improved data sharing and situational awareness through tools such as the JIGSO Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping platform, which enables responders to prioritise support for vulnerable individuals. The Nottingham Trent University Gap Analysis and the Covid-19 Inquiry Senedd Special Purpose Committee's report highlighted the need for better integration of health and social care data. In response, we are enhancing inter-operability through the Welsh Emergency Care Data Set, and new data-sharing protocols.
21. We have also prioritised engagement with the voluntary sector. The Wales Resilience Forum now includes representation from the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action and other partners. They have a key role to play in providing local intelligence and support for communities to prepare and respond to emergencies.

### **Data, evidence and communications**

22. The Welsh Government is actively enhancing its data management capabilities, in line with recommendation five in the Module 1 report. We have dedicated data, evidence and analytical capability in place to integrate data gathering and analysis into emergency planning and response activities, and a Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with the UK National Situation Centre to ensure reciprocal data-sharing during emergencies. Our data, evidence and analysis capabilities were tested during Exercise PEGASUS and other real-world incidents, with the senior lead providing a crucial coordinating role across UK administrations and with LRFs.

23. We have started work on a modelling strategy for health and social care in Wales. This aims to embed a sustainable arrangements for health and social care modelling in Wales, which can respond to pandemic situations and other demands to support Ministers' priorities. The Welsh Emergency Care Data Set is being developed, with full adoption targeted for autumn 2026.
24. We are in the process of transforming Wales' core digital health protection system so it can manage major incidents and mass contact tracing and improve the sharing of data and intelligence. Public Health Wales has been awarded more than £2m to lead this work and an initial build of the new system is scheduled to be completed in 2026.
25. In relation to communications, we have improved co-ordination between the Welsh Government and local responders to ensure consistent public messaging. Lessons from the pandemic have informed new protocols for joint information management and clearer branding of Wales-specific guidance. We are also working to ensure any differences in policy between UK and Welsh governments are communicated clearly and promptly.

#### **Continuous learning and independent scrutiny**

26. The Welsh Government is committed to continuous improvement. We have implemented a learning management system to track lessons from incidents and exercises. A national review of training and exercising has been completed, and Welsh Ministers and officials participated in Exercise PEGASUS during the autumn. We have committed to publishing the findings, lessons and actions emerging from major exercises, in line with recommendation seven of the Module 1 report.
27. We support the principle of independent challenge as outlined in recommendation nine, and have integrated independent scrutiny through partnerships with academia, the responder community and other government departments (having trialled this through the review of civil contingencies arrangements in 2023, and review of the Wales risk register and preparedness report in 2024). We are also engaging with the UK Government on the establishment of expert panels to assess UK-wide preparedness against risks that may give rise to catastrophic impacts, one of which is the continued risk of pandemic.

#### **Addressing inequalities and supporting vulnerable people in emergencies**

28. The Welsh Government recognises the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and other emergencies on vulnerable groups. Equality and social justice are central to our resilience planning. The *Wales Resilience Framework* includes community resilience as a core principle and the *Health Protection Framework for Wales* includes an aim to address equity of access and opportunity recognising the need to work with wider partners to address the wider determinants of health and reduce inequalities. Equality impact assessments are now integral to our risk assessment, emergency planning and incident management procedures.

29. We will continue to improve data and systems to identify and support vulnerable individuals, including through the JIGSO platform and Priority Services Registers. We have committed to develop a community resilience strategy and will be engaging with community groups to capture lived experience and to inform future risk management and planning.
30. Future iterations of the Wales Risk Register will assess the impact of risks on vulnerable people. We are aligning our resilience work with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and incorporating information from the Covid-19 Senedd Special Purposes Committee and stakeholders into our planning. We are committed to putting people – especially the most vulnerable – at the centre of resilience planning. We are challenging ourselves to adopt a “whole society” approach by engaging with and valuing the knowledge of communities and by hardwiring equality into our risk and response systems. There is always more to learn and do, but the direction is set firmly towards a more inclusive, socially aware model of emergency preparedness in Wales.

### **Conclusion**

31. The Welsh Government has made significant progress in delivering the UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 recommendations while strengthening our broader resilience arrangements. We have reformed governance structures, developed a bespoke risk register, launched a strategic resilience framework, enhanced data and communication systems, and embedded continuous learning and external challenge.
32. We acknowledge areas of divergence from the findings set out in the Module 1 report, particularly regarding the lead department model and the structure of UK-wide strategies. However, our approach is rooted in the devolved context and aims to achieve the objectives advocated in the Module 1 report through proportionate and effective means and in a way that reflects the role of Wales’ democratic institutions.
33. Future work includes finalising the *Wales Resilience Framework Delivery Plan*, evaluation and learning from Exercise PEGASUS, delivering a new digital health protection system, adopting the Welsh Emergency Care Data Set, publishing a public summary of the Wales Risk Register, and continuing engagement with the Senedd and stakeholders. We are committed to transparency, accountability, and ensuring Wales is better prepared for future emergencies.
34. There is no room for complacency. The UK and Wales faces a wide array of significant risks driven by climate, economic uncertainty and cost-of-living pressures, public and animal health risks, increased global competition, national security challenges and technological developments. The need for continuous improvement and to embed learning means our work will continue – the risk register will be updated, more outlooks will be produced, new information and guidance will be issued to the public, the lessons database will be implemented, data provision and analysis will be strengthened, and risks prepared and planned for. The *Wales*

*Resilience Framework* makes clear the priorities of maintaining the resilience architecture and enhancing capabilities further.

35. We welcome the committee's scrutiny on these matters and the evidence put forward by representatives of the bereaved families and responder community. We thank PAPAC for its scrutiny and welcome further insight and proposals to build a more resilient and prepared Wales.