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Welsh Parliament  
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Dear David,

I am writing in response to your letter of 15 January asking for an update on areas which we were unable to cover during the scrutiny session and some further information on areas we discussed during the session.

I have answered each question individually.

Future generations and children's rights

**How would you characterise progress on implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, given the Future Generations Commissioner has said “while progress is being made, we are not on track to achieve our seven well-being goals”, and the Auditor General has said that “the Act is not driving the system-wide change that was intended”?**

We welcome the recommendations in both the Future Generations Commissioner's and Auditor General's reports. It is important, when exploring the impact of the Act to recognise that it is not a solution for everything. While there have been significant challenges since the Act came into force, its framework and principles have enabled Wales to continue a robust focus on the well-being of our future generations.

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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.

As a result of the Act, across Wales we are seeing real impact through Public Services Boards, public bodies, and at a national level within Welsh Government. It has revolutionised the way we work and given the whole of Wales a shared purpose through the 7 well-being goals. The annual Wellbeing of Wales reports enable us to see 10 years of data and progress towards those goals and the underpinning 50 wellbeing indicators. There are many areas where progress has been made, for example, under a Resilient Wales, the quality of our water has improved overall, air quality has improved significantly, and Wales has seen a decrease in waste generation and considerable improvements in the recycling rate. For a prosperous Wales, the qualification profile of the Welsh working age population has been improving over time, moving towards the relevant milestones.

We know there is a mixed picture, however, and we will focus on these by addressing the recommendations in the reports provided to us. It is important to understand that the Act is about influencing long-term changes, and the Welsh Government has set its milestones to 2050 to reflect this. Even now, no government in the world has achieved sustainable development.

There is qualitative evidence of cultural change and increased awareness of long-term thinking in public bodies. The Commissioner's and Auditor General's statutory reports highlight progress in areas like climate action, transport, and public health planning. However, quantitative outcomes are harder to measure due to the complexity of attributing change directly to the Act. Clearly, more needs to be done and lessons need to be learned as we move to the second decade of the Act. My officials and I are already co-producing ways to improve collaboration and delivery across the public sector landscape of the Act.

Increasingly, we need to understand the complexity and challenge of the global situation in which Wales finds itself, which is why the Future Trends Report must take account of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the impact of climate change on Wales. Because of this, any post-legislative evaluation of the Act will need to be innovative and collaborative to identify how to improve on the long-term processes already underway due to the Act.

**The 2025 Well-being of Wales report highlights issues with child poverty and young people's mental well-being. The Future Generations Report 2025 suggests children and young people are underrepresented in decision-making in Wales, and employment rates for working class Welsh young-people are lowest in the UK. Ten years after the Act became law, to what extent has its implementation delivered for Welsh young people?**

Welsh Government is committed to listening to children and young people, and taking their views meaningfully into account, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2020, we passed the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in Senedd and Local Government elections. In 2025-26 we provided over half a million in funding for Young Wales, a representative participation model for children and young people to have their voices heard in Welsh Government's decision and policy making processes.

We also appoint, and support, the Children's Commissioner for Wales. The Commissioner seeks children's views on topical issues through her Monthly Matters consultations, which inform her recommendations to Welsh Government.

Our 2024 Child Poverty Strategy will continue to set the direction for the Welsh Government actions to tackle child poverty over the next decade, and to meet our ambitions for children and young people, whatever their backgrounds are. Delivering against the goals of a more equal Wales, a more prosperous Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities, the Strategy sets out our ambitions for the longer term and outlines how we will work across Government and with partners to maximise the impact of the levers available to us, including our convening powers. It provides an ambitious set of objectives and priorities through which we can deliver policies and programmes that support the outcomes we want for our children and young people now and in the future.

The 50 national wellbeing indicators are designed to represent the outcomes for Wales, and its people, that will help demonstrate progress towards the 7 wellbeing goals. 18 of the wellbeing indicators directly measure progress for young people, either explicitly (for example, percentage of children with two or more healthy lifestyle behaviours) or through age breakdowns of broader indicators (for example, number of people who can speak Welsh). The Wellbeing of Wales Report provides an annual progress update and was last published in October 2025.

Welsh Government last consulted on potential new indicators in 2021, with Young Wales directly involved to share their views and experiences.

I am conscious that progress for young people is mixed. Participation in education, employment or training is nearing the national milestone and healthy behaviours have improved, while mental wellbeing has declined and attainment gaps for children from deprived backgrounds persist.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is now being driven forward by younger people, with alumni of the Future Generations Leadership Academy and members of the Welsh Youth Parliament actively participating in the Act. Theirs are the voices we will be listening to in the future, and I am confident they will continue to drive the Act onward for the next 10 years and beyond.

**What are your reflections on the importance of the role of the Children's Commissioner in terms of providing challenge to, and scrutiny of, the Welsh Government's legal obligations to have due regard to children's rights? Given half of the 659 cases dealt with by the Commissioner in the last year related to education, as documented in her latest annual report, what are your reflections on the scale of concern raised about education?**

We are grateful to the Commissioner for her advice on how we can strengthen our approach to children's rights. The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent human rights institution. While her office is funded by Welsh Government the Commissioner sets her own work programme, totally independently of Ministers. We have increased the Commissioners budget in 26-27 to £1.8m. Our investment in the Children's Commissioner demonstrates our commitment to children's rights. It shows that the Welsh Government welcomes independent scrutiny and partnership working to meet the needs of all children.

Officials and Ministers regularly meet with the Commissioner and members of her staff sit on a number of policy advisory groups. We've built a robust approach to working with the Commissioner and responding to her Annual Report recommendations. The Commissioner meets with Directors, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip and myself to discuss the report. In October, I joined the Commissioner to speak to children and young people from local schools in Port Talbot about the Annual Report and issues that matter to them. I published my written response on 28 November. The Commissioner made 26 recommendations in her report. Many of these build on the ongoing work she is engaged in with us in Welsh Government.

The Commissioners investigation and advice officers are an important source of free and independent advice for children, young people, their parents and other professionals. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and her officials regularly engage with the Children's Commissioner to listen and learn from their casework.

Questions about the Additional Learning Needs system are a consistent feature of the Commissioner's casework. Their findings of the lack of consistency of the ALN system and the challenges that families face in navigating the IDP process resonate with the findings from the ALN Legislative review and the parents survey that was conducted as part of the evaluation programme. We have already taken action to strengthen information and support for families of children and young people with ALN. In November, we published the new ALN Toolkit for Parents and Carers, co-designed with families and professionals across Wales, including the Children's Commissioner. The toolkit is being used across Wales by LAs and schools to provide clear, accessible information on how the system works, what rights families have, how decisions are made, and where to turn for further help.

### Education and young people

***As discussed in the meeting, Estyn's early insights on its 2024/25 annual report indicate leadership weaknesses in around two thirds of secondary schools and you mentioned that Dysgu, the new national professional learning and leadership body that is being established, would help to address this. Would it be possible to provide further information on this and to expand on whether there is other targeted support being provided to strengthen school leadership and how the impact will be measured?***

Dysgu will lead on professional learning and support for school leaders. Dysgu is delivering the pilot of the revised National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). 96 participants, in two cohorts, are currently completing the qualification. Recruitment is underway for a third cohort of over 70 participants to commence in September 2026, and Dysgu is engaging with local authorities as part of the process. Cohort 1 is scheduled to complete the qualification by Easter 2026. Dysgu is currently recruiting members for an Advisory Board to help further develop the qualification and to oversee quality assurance processes. This work will complement robust internal QA procedures and will include commissioning an external review to ensure the highest standards are maintained.

The NPQH has been redesigned to ensure Wales continues to develop a strong pipeline of highly skilled school leaders capable of delivering the national education reform agenda and securing improved outcomes for learners. This follows an independent review of the previous NPQH model and reflects the need for headteachers who are well-prepared for the increasing complexity and responsibility of school leadership. The new NPQH is an 18-month programme that combines practical leadership experience in a range of environments with structured professional learning and has a strong element of coaching and mentoring. It is grounded in the professional standards for teaching and leadership and has a strong focus on how leadership decisions impact teaching, learning and learner progress.

Dysgu is also undertaking a review of leadership provision more widely and planning to fill gaps. This will lead to programmes being in place from September 2026 to support aspiring and experienced middle and senior leaders within schools.

Consultation closed in late January 2026 on the revised professional standards for assisting teaching, teaching and leadership, which outline the expectations for in-school leadership, headship and system leadership. The revised professional standards emphasise the expectation that headteachers develop “an open and mutually supportive culture of learner improvement through the sharing of resources for collaborative working” and use self-evaluation and professional learning within their schools to effect improvement.

Our new school improvement policy, published in January 2026 within the revised School Improvement Guidance, is designed to strengthen leadership, curriculum, teaching and learning. While school leaders and governing bodies remain accountable for improving learning in their own schools, this takes place within local improvement communities where schools work together, in partnership with their local authority, to secure sustainable improvements locally. The policy supports leadership development by setting clear expectations for schools to operate as learning organisations and by promoting collaboration that helps leaders deepen their understanding of effective leadership through working with, and learning from, other schools. Purposeful collaboration, both vertically (3–16) and horizontally (e.g. secondary to secondary), provides regular opportunities for leaders to observe practice, learn from peers and access structured professional support.

Local authorities are responsible for supporting schools to maintain high standards and holding schools and their leaders to account for this. Local authorities should fulfil this duty through the collaborative improvement model. Dysgu will also be providing professional learning to support the implementation of the school improvement guidance.

**What specific actions is the Welsh Government taking to improve standards in secondary schools in response to Estyn’s early insights on its 2024/25 findings, and what is the timetable for those actions?**

Exam results in 2025 showed some positive movement with improvements bringing awards levels almost back to pre-covid rates. Increases in attainment at A\*-A grades at GCSE in 2025 surpassed outcomes in 2019 for this grade range. Of particular note were improvements in GCSE Mathematics: Numeracy and English Language, with more awards at top grades (A\*-A and A\*-C) compared with 2019. Our A level results for 2025 saw increases at A\*, A\*-C and A\*-E compared with 2024, and saw notable increases at A\*, A\*-A and A\*-C compared with 2019 results. Additionally, our AS results saw increases at all key grade ranges [A, A-C and A-E] compared with 2024, with notable improvements on 2019 results.

In January 2026, we published our new [school improvement policy](#) which defines clear roles and responsibilities for improvement and accountability within the Welsh education system. Our new national school improvement model requires local authorities to work in partnership with their schools to improve standards.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to monitor and support their schools, and to intervene when necessary. Given their understanding of local contexts and individual school needs, they are best placed to determine the specific actions required to raise standards, particularly within secondary schools.

The Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) provides funding to enable local authorities and schools to deliver our ambitions and priorities for the education system. We recognise the pressure on schools to support learners with increased complexity of need, including mental health, socio-emotional issues, and related attendance and behaviour challenges. We have provided additional funding including for Family Engagement Officers, Community Focused Schools and enrichment activities, alongside support for Additional Learning Needs. We have also progressed a suite of guidance to provide more up to date support for schools in dealing with these complex issues.

Dysgu will deliver consistent, high-quality professional learning for all practitioners and provide programmes aimed at strengthening teaching and leadership effectiveness—areas identified as priorities in Estyn’s early insight report.

We are investing £13.2 million over three years from 2025-26 in national professional learning and support for literacy. This nationally available support will ensure that all schools have access to the same high quality professional learning to improve the teaching of literacy across the continuum. £6.6 million has also been allocated to provide more consistent support and expertise for maths teaching across Wales.

We have also established a new Education Improvement Team (EIT) within Welsh Government to engage directly with local authorities and schools – focused on how we collectively raise standards in all our schools.

**With the operational responsibility for school improvement returning to local authorities, what assessment has the Welsh Government made of local authorities’ capacity and improvement services, and what additional resources or safeguards will be provided to ensure they can deliver?**

The new EIT will support regular dialogue with local authorities and their schools. This dialogue connects national and local priorities and feeds consolidated local intelligence directly into Welsh Government. The EIT also convenes a bi-annual meeting with local authority officers to ensure sharing across local authorities in Wales, building a more collaborative approach to ensuring good practice across Wales.

The outcomes of the Spring 2025 visits to local authorities are [summarised](#) by Professor Dylan Jones, who led the review into the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements. Professor Dylan Jones notes in his letter, ‘the vast majority of local areas had made good progress in implementing a local system of collaborative improvement’.

The EIT will embark on a new round of visits to local authorities this spring term to continue the conversation with local authorities around the implementation of the new school improvement model.

To support local delivery, Dysgu will lead the delivery of professional learning in response to national priorities – working closely with local authorities to support the improvement of standards in our schools.

These changes have taken place alongside a strengthening of independent inspection. Estyn now visits every school twice within each six-year cycle (2024–2030): once for a core inspection and once for an interim visit. This provides a comprehensive and impartial assessment of the performance of schools.

Estyn also inspects local authorities. All inspection reports are published to ensure openness and public transparency.

**How is the Welsh Government ensuring that recent additional funding for education is translated into demonstrable school-level improvements?**

The additional funding has been provided through our hypothecated education grants, to support schools and local authorities in raising standards and making school-level improvements.

The Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) terms and conditions ensure funding improves school standards by requiring all expenditure to align with national priorities such as attendance, literacy and numeracy, and by restricting use to clearly defined purposes linked to teaching quality, curriculum delivery, leadership, inclusion and equity. They reinforce evidence-based practice through alignment with national frameworks, promote collaborative school improvement, and require local authorities to maintain appropriate assurances to protect the integrity of the funding while minimising unnecessary reporting. By also safeguarding school level allocations and targeting barriers to learning, the terms and conditions ensure funding is used consistently and effectively to support better learner outcomes.

**While recognising that the Welsh Government's Revenue Support Grant for local government is unhypothecated, what assurances or mechanisms exist to ensure that increases in funding for local authorities will be reflected in the budgets they provide to schools?**

Decisions on the level of funding available to schools and to other services are made by each authority as part of their overall budget and council tax setting. This is in line with the Welsh Government's policy that local authorities are best placed to judge local needs and circumstances and to fund schools accordingly.

We have always been determined to recognise the particular circumstances of local government whilst working together on a settlement which will protect jobs and frontline services, understanding the strict rules it has to comply with when making its budgets. The 2026-27 Final Budget was secured through collaboration, engagement and full consideration of the detailed scrutiny which has taken place in the months leading up to its agreement.

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government wrote to local authorities, on 20 January stressing that investment in education remains a key priority for the government, and that the Welsh Government supports local authorities in ensuring that schools across Wales are fully funded to address the pressures they are facing, with the settlement offering a valuable opportunity for local authorities to allocate significant resources to their schools, to focus on the key pressures of Additional Learning Needs (ALN), school transport, workforce, and workload.

**Can you confirm the amount of the consequential received in respect of both 2025-26 and 2026- 27 following increases in funding for education in England, how much has been allocated to education in Wales and how that funding is being prioritised and tracked? (The Committee is aware that the Children, Young People and Education Committee has asked for clarification of this in its report on the Draft Budget 2026-27.)**

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language wrote to the Finance Committee on 5 August 2025 to provide details of the consequential funding resulting from the UK Government's Spending Review on 11 June 2025, and on 15 January to provide details of consequential funding from the Autumn Budget.

Consequential funding from the UK Government forms part of the total block grant provided to Wales. Decisions about how money is spent in Wales are made collectively by the Cabinet, based on Wales' needs and our priorities. Decisions around how the block grant, which includes consequential funding, are taken as part of the budget setting process. These decisions are explained in the budgetary documentation published as part of the Draft and Final Budget and are subject to a full scrutiny process by the Senedd. Consequential funding is not routinely passed on to replicate decisions taken by the UK Government for England. Where there is a case for consequential funding to be spent in the same area, Ministers will consider as part of the budgetary process.

According to the most recent Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis, published by HM Treasury last year, spending on education in Wales is 8% per head higher than in England. Table 9.15 in chapter 9 refers: [CP 1363 – Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2025](#). It should also be noted that Wales has spent over £3.7bn since 2014 on rebuilding the school and college estate in Wales which has improved over 330 schools and colleges through major refurb and new build projects, which is not a situation which has been seen in England.

The funding we provide to Local Government through the Revenue Support Grant is un-hypothecated. Where appropriate, the local government settlement letter sets out the context of our decisions and therefore our expectations of local authorities. As set out in the response to recommendation 8, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government's letter to local authority leaders of 20 January acknowledges that the additional £112.8m being provided to local authorities in Final Budget will help protect core frontline public services, particularly those key sectors facing increasing demands such as Education and Social Care. Given that local authority funding accounts for over 80% of education funding, the 4.5% increase in the local government settlement offers an opportunity for local authorities to allocate significant resources to their schools, to focus on the key pressures of Additional Learning Needs (ALN), school transport, workforce, and workload. The additional funding will also support the continuing delivery of essential social services for both children and adults.

**There has been a rise in exclusions in secondary schools. What is the Welsh Government's analysis of the causes and what steps are being taken to keep pupils in school as much as possible, while balancing this against behaviour management and the impact on other pupils?**

The significant increase in both short-term and permanent exclusions in recent years is concerning and unacceptable. Exclusion from school should be used as a last resort.

The national exclusions data release published on 11 November, reported on permanent and fixed-term exclusions from maintained schools and EOTAS provision in Wales from September 2023 to August 2024.

We have seen exclusions rising year on year post pandemic, and we know how devastating exclusion can be for learners. It is not just about their loss of education. We know from work led by our Senedd Committees about children on the margins, that exclusion places children at greater risk of exploitation and criminality.

The rise in short-term exclusions in Wales is driven by a combination of persistent, disruptive behaviour, post-COVID mental health and behavioural challenges, neurodiversity-related distress, inconsistencies in early intervention, local policy variability and improved data recording practices.

Exclusions remain one of the tools available to schools to manage serious behavioural incidents. In light of the increasing reports of poor behaviour and violence in some settings, a rise in exclusions may reflect the challenging circumstances schools are currently facing.

Welsh Government guidance is very clear that exclusions should only be used when there are no other options and are used alongside wider support measures to address underlying issues and promote positive behaviour, including restorative and relational approaches.

Our National Behaviour Summit in 2025 set a clear direction for a comprehensive programme of action to tackle behaviour. Immediately after the Summit, a dedicated exclusions and detentions forum was established, comprising a broad range of practitioners, headteachers, local authorities, unions and third sector experts.

The Forum is in the process of concluding their work and have been integral to conducting a full review of current guidance, advising on best practice and preventative approaches and promoting consistency across schools to reduce exclusion rates. Revised guidance will issue in readiness for the new school year.

During the Spring Term, a programme of specific, targeted pilots with schools, local authorities, and key partners, will launch across Wales. The overall aim will be to provide preventative and restorative interventions to keep young people in school and address the social, emotional and behavioural factors that contribute to disengagement. The pilot programme will be evaluated by university partners, to provide a robust evidence base to inform next steps.

**There was some discussion of NEET and youth unemployment rates during the meeting. What specific, measurable plan does the Welsh Government have to reduce the number of 16 to 24 year olds who are NEET, including targets, timelines, and evaluation metrics? How do current plans join up across education, skills and employment policy to reduce the number of young people who are NEET?**

Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales - A Plan for Employability and Skill (March 2022) present a system-wide strategy to improve employability and skills with five action areas, including helping young people realise their potential. Central to this is the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), focused on the national milestone for at least 90% of 16–24-year-olds in education, employment, or training by 2050, supported by targeted initiatives and transition support for individuals.

The YPG offer covers education, skills and employment and it has helped 64,000 young people since its launch in November 2021. Its flagship programme, JGW+, has supported 18,530 young people since 2022. Progress is tracked by management data as well as regular evaluations, which include the JGW+ [Formative evaluation of Jobs Growth Wales+: final report](#) published in June 2025 and the Young Person's Guarantee [Process Evaluation](#) published in September 2025.

Operationally, agencies coordinate as a single network to link education, employers, and support services, enabled by a proposed data hub. Complementing the YPG, the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework provides a blueprint on how local authorities and partner organisations can work together to identify 11 to 18-year-olds at risk of becoming NEET, or who are NEET, in order to put appropriate support in place.

The Employability Support Programme (ESP) is being designed to tackle employment challenges by offering support that is simpler, more focused on individual needs, and is better coordinated. With input from almost six hundred stakeholders—including service users, young people, local authorities, training providers, and community organisations—the ESP brings together Jobs Growth Wales+, Communities for Work+, and ReAct+ into a single streamlined system. This consolidation aims to reduce duplication and offer consistent, timely support.

Since April 2025, we have been working with the UK Government on an [Economic Inactivity Trailblazer](#) pilot project to explore local ways of reducing inactivity for 16 to 60 year olds.

### Disabled people and employment

**What progress has been made in public sector bodies in Wales achieving Disability Confident employer status, particularly since the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report in June 2025 and recommendation that further action be taken on this? Can the Welsh Government provide a breakdown by health boards and local authorities?**

We continue to encourage public sector employers to sign up to the Disability Confident scheme and to progress to Leader status.

Since the Committee's report, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice wrote to all devolved public bodies encouraging them to sign up to the scheme and work towards Leader status. In January 2026, Cabinet Secretary also launched the Disability Confident Leaders Forum for Wales. The Forum brings together Leader-status employers, wider employers and key stakeholders to share best practice and support more organisations on their journey toward Disability Confident Leader status.

The Welsh Government's team of Disabled People's Employment Champions has continued to work with public sector employers on their Disability Confident journey, and this has seen a growth in those with Disability Confident Leader status.

The Disability Confident Scheme is a UK Government programme, and a Wales level breakdown is not currently collated. Wales level reporting is something we are pursuing with the DWP. The data below is drawn from a manual interrogation of the UK-wide database and may be subject to human error.

Of the 56 devolved public bodies subject to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, 49 are registered with the scheme and are currently at the following levels:

- Level 1 Committed: 8
- Level 2 Employer: 29
- Level 3 Leader: 12

All Local Authorities in Wales are now registered with the scheme and are currently at the following levels:

- Level 1 Committed: 1
- Level 2 Employer: 18
- Level 3 Leader: 3

Four of those at Employer status are due to be assessed and hope to receive Leader status in early 2026.

Six of the 7 Health Boards, and all 3 Health Trusts are registered with the scheme and are currently at the following levels:

- Level 1 Committed: 1
- Level 2 Employer: 2
- Level 3 Leader: 6

### **What is the Welsh Government doing to build on the legacy of the Engage to Change project and how it is ensuring disabled people have access to supported employment and specialist job coaching?**

The Welsh Government is building on the Engage to Change legacy by strengthening specialist employment support for disabled people through a mix of employer engagement, tailored programmes and targeted support.

Between them, a network of Disabled People's Employment Champions and Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors supports employers of all sizes to improve the recruitment, retention and progression of disabled workers. New online employer resources also provide practical guidance.

People with a learning disability, learning difficulty and/or autism can get help to find job coaching, via a wide range of Welsh Government programmes, including Working Wales, Communities for Work Plus, Jobs Growth Wales+ (delivering Supported Employment provision). We also have in place the Individual Placement Support and Out of Work Service. All these services offer personalised careers advice, mentoring, skills development, confidence-building and progression into training or work. Apprenticeships remain fully accessible, with Welsh Government funding 100% of training costs and offering an Employer Incentive Scheme for disabled apprentices. Participation has grown to 13% of apprenticeship starts.

Three new Economic Inactivity Trailblazer areas are testing innovative approaches for disabled people and those with health conditions, offering mentoring, counselling and tailored health-related support.

Learning from all of these programmes is informing the development of the new Employability Support Programme. Overall, the Welsh Government is committed to improving access to supported employment, specialist coaching and inclusive pathways into work for disabled people across Wales.

The UK Government's Connect to Work initiative also provides intensive voluntary support for disabled people seeking or sustaining employment.

### **How will the Welsh Government work with disabled people, employers and local partners to co-design sustainable employment pathways that avoid short-term or fragmented interventions?**

Through the Welsh Economic Inactivity Trailblazers and our wider reform activity, we are deliberately testing the system to understand where current services fall short and what needs to change. This includes examining how people move between employability, skills, health and local authority provision; identifying where hand-offs break down; and understanding the barriers faced by disabled people and employers at each stage of the journey.

This approach allows us to see how well services work together in practice, not just on paper, and where greater alignment or investment is needed. We are using these insights to develop clear recommendations for system improvements—for example, simplifying referral routes, strengthening shared assessment processes, improving data-sharing, and clarifying roles across partners so individuals do not fall through the gaps.

The findings are being fed directly into the design of the Employability Support Programme, to ensure Wales moves towards a fully integrated, holistic system where support is coordinated, continuous and responsive to individual need, rather than fragmented across programmes.

## Transport

### **How is the Welsh Government providing funding to support bus services, what is the budget position for commitments relating to the Bus Services (Wales) Bill, and what contingency plans exist if funding pressures continue?**

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language announced over a 6% rise in bus revenue funding as part of the 2026/27 Final Budget. This represented a larger increase in budget than industry representatives were calling for, and it will allow us to protect services in advance of bus franchising. He also announced an additional £10m of capital funding to support plans for franchising through the acquisition of fleet and depots.

These additional allocations build on the huge investment we have made to support the bus industry during this term of government – we will have provided over £600m by the end of this Senedd term. The availability of revenue funding impacts the number of bus services that will run, just as capital funding influences the pace and scale of fleet and infrastructure changes. We have signalled our intent as a government over a prolonged period.

### **While there may not yet be a firm budget for the project, what are the likely funding implications for Wales in relation to the Liverpool to Hull rail line classification as an England and Wales project?**

There are no direct implications for the Welsh Government's Budget, as the relevant Network Rail infrastructure programme covers both England and Wales. However, we remain in close contact with the UK Government on the matter of rail funding and continue to make the case for a fair share of investment to improve connectivity within Wales and with other parts of the UK.

The UK Government's investment in Northern Powerhouse Rail will boost cross-border connectivity and complement our vision for Network North Wales, demonstrating the importance of our partnership approach to ensure passenger benefits from any investment are maximised.

### **What assurances can you provide that the Welsh Government is proactively planning, and involved in discussions, regarding improvements that could be made should further UK Government investment in rail infrastructure be forthcoming? For example, is there a pipeline of projects in place and to what extent are they ready to be put into action?**

Transport for Wales has recently launched '*Today, Tomorrow, Together: A vision for rail across Wales and Borders.*' Jointly backed by the Welsh and UK Governments, this is a £14bn package of bold, generational schemes that cover the length and breadth of our Welsh railways. The pipeline includes projects at various stages of development and builds on the £445m investment announced as part of the UK Government's Spending Review. The Wales Rail Board will play a key role in overseeing these exciting developments.

## Health

### **How does the Welsh Government's preventative health strategy align with the Primary Care Model for Wales and the Public Health Wales Long-Term Strategy? What specific funding streams and performance indicators are in place to ensure delivery, and how will progress be monitored across health boards?**

Our approach to preventative health is outlined in our long-term strategy for Health and Social Care, 'A Healthier Wales.' It sets out the long-term future vision of a 'whole system approach', including the Primary Care Model for Wales (PCMW), which is focused on health, wellbeing, care and support and on preventing illness. The Public Health Wales' long term strategy from 2023-2035 covers six strategic aims, all of which dovetail with the vision and aims of 'A Healthier Wales'.

The actions that support this strategy were refreshed and published in 2024. These included a focus on preventing the onset of poor health and disease and intervening early when disease occurs, helping people stay well or closer to home and improve individual and population health outcomes through targeted and population level support including vaccination and screening.

The NHS Planning Framework for 2026-2029 - Transforming Services to Deliver Better Health Delivery includes population health and prevention as one of the six strategic priorities. This sets out the requirement for NHS plans and resources to focus on prevention and earlier intervention to improve people's long-term health and reduce health inequalities. Specific funding streams include Healthy Weight Healthy Wales, prevention and early years, substance misuse, vaccination programmes, screening and health protection.

As well as placing prevention and population health at the core of NHS Wales the planning framework also prioritises the need for greater progress with the delivery of integrated services in the community, moving from a hospital by default approach to one of community by design, in particular supporting people with long-term conditions or frailty remain well and receive care in their communities.

The NHS Performance Framework sets out measures aligned to the planning priorities and the delivery of health board plans, performance and outcomes are monitored and scrutinised through a range of interactions with NHS organisation under the accountability and escalation arrangements in place. The Chief Medical Officer has also established a Preventing Ill-health Advisory Group to maintain an overview of policies, activities and outcomes relating to improving health and wellbeing and preventing ill-health.

### **What modelling has the Welsh Government undertaken to assess workforce flexibility across education and health (for example teacher workforce flexibility and NHS nursing workforce), and what contingency plans measures are in place to address critical shortages?**

Cross-sector workforce models face significant structural barriers due to sector-specific regulatory systems and qualification pathways, differing governance and accountability frameworks, and separate workforce planning arrangements. Workforce modelling and planning is undertaken within each sector separately.

For health, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) leads national workforce planning for the NHS in Wales and provides the modelling and intelligence that underpin decision-making on health workforce supply. HEIW's profession-specific workforce strategies identify where shortages are most acute and recommend targeted action to grow, support and transform the workforce.

The Welsh Government will shortly publish a Strategic Education Workforce Plan, setting out a range of actions to support the recruitment, retention and development of our current and future school practitioners.

**What conversations has the Welsh Government had with the UK Government regarding extending the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to include milk-based and ultra-processed sugary drinks? How will the Welsh Government assess the potential impact of these fiscal measures on reducing obesity and health inequalities?**

Following their consultation on strengthening the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, UK Government will reduce the minimum sugar threshold at which the Levy applies from 5g of total sugar per 100ml to 4.5g of total sugar per 100ml and remove the current exemption for milk-based drinks and milk substitute drinks with added sugar. UK Government have made a further commitment in their recently published 10 Year Health Plan for England to uplift the rate at which the Soft Drinks Industry Levy is paid in line with inflation.

Welsh Government regularly engage with UK Government to support them in their work on the Levy. Evaluations of the current policy have shown how effective this measure is at removing sugar from our diets. Whilst it is difficult to obtain Welsh-specific data on the impacts of the Levy given its nature and the UK-Wide food system, we will continue to work closely with UK Government to assess the impacts of the planned changes to the measure on both levels of obesity and health inequalities.

**What actions has Public Health Wales taken since your last update to increase breastfeeding rates, and what measurable progress has been made towards achieving UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative accreditation across health boards? What additional interventions are planned to address persistent regional disparities?**

Welsh Government continue to fund the National Breastfeeding lead in Public Health Wales, to undertake a programme to strengthen support for families at every stage of the maternity and early years pathway. This is a Welsh Government Grant funded initiative which independent, volunteer-led organisation providing 24/7 helpline access, local peer-support groups, online guidance, and evidence-based breastfeeding information, supporting Welsh families alongside NHS and Public Health Wales services.

Public Health Wales have recently relaunched the Breastfeeding Welcome Scheme, giving increased access to new mothers to breastfeed in public areas. This links the work already undertaken by breastfeeding in the workplace with the development of the Breastfeeding at Work framework, which helps normalise breastfeeding and removes practical barriers for women returning to employment.

Welsh Government has an expectation that every health board in Wales has a UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) accreditation. The initiatives, from the previous Breastfeeding Action Plan and work of Public Health Wales further support the culture, education and environment to optimise breastfeeding rates in Wales.

The Welsh Government has also strengthened its engagement with UK partners through the re-procurement of the National Breastfeeding Helpline. Although Wales has not previously contributed financially, we recognise the importance of Welsh-language provision and culturally appropriate support, and we are now actively involved to ensure the needs of Welsh families are fully considered.

Looking ahead, the Welsh Government has commissioned Public Health Wales to develop a new national Infant Feeding Action Plan from 2026, informed by multi-agency workshops and engagement events. This refreshed plan will place targeted emphasis on regional variation, behavioural science, Flying Start communities, and improved analysis of protective and risk factors to ensure that improvements are felt consistently across Wales.

Our wider work through the Maternity and Neonatal Safety Support Programme further supports regional equity by improving consistency in early postnatal care, workforce capacity, and real-time quality data, factors that are closely linked to breastfeeding outcomes.

**What criteria does the Welsh Government use to identify key NHS services and what emergency funding or commissioning mechanisms are in place to maintain continuity of those services? How will prioritisation decisions be made transparently, and what lessons have been learned from previous interventions to protect essential NHS provision?**

Health boards are responsible for planning, commissioning, and delivering services that meet the needs of their local populations. They must produce financially balanced Integrated Medium-Term Plans (IMTPs) that comply with the NHS Wales Planning Framework issued annually by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. This Framework sets the strategic priorities all health boards must deliver, reflecting Ministerial ambitions to improve services, ensure sustainability, and address areas of public concern or performance challenge. It also reinforces the core requirement to provide safe, high-quality care within available resources.

Given the challenging financial climate - and the absence of discretionary investment funding - health boards are expected to reduce waste, harm, and unwarranted variation while improving productivity and efficiency. Although Ministerial priorities must be met, health boards retain flexibility to direct resources according to local population needs and to prioritise services where demand or risk is greatest.

Where service continuity is at risk, health boards may implement temporary urgent service changes, provided they act in line with NHS Wales service change guidance. This guidance requires early and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including patients, to ensure transparency and accountability.

Health boards must publish their IMTPs and report regularly to their Boards on progress, including any deviation from planned activity. These updates are made publicly available as part of their Board papers. To further strengthen transparency, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has recently introduced Public Accountability Meetings, creating a public formal mechanism to scrutinise organisational performance and hold health boards to account for delivering agreed priorities.

Lessons have also been applied at national and regional levels. The Joint Commissioning Committee (JCC) was established following an independent review of national commissioning arrangements involving the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC), the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee (WHSSC), and the National Collaborative Commissioning Unit (NCCU).

The JCC now commissions services on behalf of all seven health boards and oversees contract monitoring, reducing unnecessary duplication and burden on individual health boards. Two Joint Regional Committees - in West Wales and Southeast Wales - have been created to strengthen regional working, including regional commissioning, and to support more resilient, sustainable service models.

**The committee raised examples of third sector services closing due to funding pressures (for example early years cerebral palsy services and hospice support). What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the financial resilience of third sector health and social care providers? What immediate measures are in place to prevent service closures and what longer-term funding models are being considered to ensure sustainability?**

The funding pressures faced by the third sector and the fragility of organisations in this sector have been exposed by the challenging financial climate in recent years. Some have raised concerns with us, in particular those who are providing specialist services on behalf of, or with the NHS, on either a regional or national basis, including those in the hospice sector and Cerebral Palsy Cymru (CPC).

Following discussions with the hospice sector and CPC it was recognised that many of the challenges they described as contributing to their financial pressures, were rooted in the poorly designed commissioning arrangements in place with health boards. This resulted in protracted and resource intensive processes that serve neither side well and are not conducive to collaborative relationships between the third sector and the NHS organisation. This was unlikely to be exclusive to CPC and hospice care providers.

It was determined that a solution to benefit the wider sector providing such services was possible, and necessary, and that the establishment of the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee (JCC) provided an opportunity to address many of the challenges relating to existing inefficient commissioning arrangement.

In February 2024, the Director General for Department of Health Social Care and Early Years/Chief Executive Officer of NHS Wales wrote to health board CEOs asking them to consider how they could better support such third sector organisations, with a view to putting the commissioning arrangements of such services on a more sustainable footing. It was agreed that the JCC would take this forward.

In the first instance, the focus of this work has been on the hospice sector, and it is anticipated that this will provide a blueprint to support the commissioning or procurement of similar services provided by other third sector providers, including CPC.

From a hospice perspective, we have already taken a number of immediate steps to help prevent service reductions or closures. Despite wider pressures across the health and care system, we have protected hospice funding and substantially increased investment in palliative and end of life care during this Senedd term. This includes an additional £5.2 million per year, alongside more than £9.5 million in one off grants, which has enabled hospices to manage rising costs and sustain vital services. The further £3 million recurrent funding secured for 2025–26 reinforces our commitment to ensuring that hospices remain financially resilient and able to deliver high-quality, person-centred care.

It is important to recognise that hospices in Wales operate as independent charities, and their long-standing partnership with the NHS blends public funding with community driven support. This mixed model has served Wales well, but we acknowledge that it must evolve to reflect current and future pressures. To that end, we are working with the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee to develop a new commissioning approach for hospice and end of life care. This work is focused on creating a sustainable and equitable funding model, ensuring consistent access to hospice services across Wales, including in rural and remote communities.

The sector's insight and experience are central to this process. Hospices have engaged constructively in shaping the emerging model, helping us ensure that it reflects the realities of delivering specialist palliative care and supports long term service planning. This collaborative approach will underpin a more stable funding framework, reduce the risk of service closures and strengthen the resilience of the third sector as a whole.

The National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 and is a statutory Code of Practice that applies to the commissioning of care and support services by local authorities, health boards and NHS trusts: [National framework for commissioning care and support: code of practice](#). This Code of Practice is issued under section 145 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 ("the Act"<sup>1</sup>). It also constitutes guidance under section 169 of the Act and guidance under section 2 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act"<sup>2</sup>).

This Code applies to the provision of 'care and support' by a local health board or NHS trust provided as part of a package of care arranged and funded by them to meet a person's primary health care or nursing needs, which may or must be provided under section 2(1) and section 3 of the 2006 Act, and which the local authority are prohibited from providing by virtue of section 47(1), (4) or (5) of the Act.

### Programme for Government

Turning to your questions on the Programme for Government, I can confirm that the Welsh Government Annual Report (published 11 July 2025) was the final such document which we will publish this Senedd term. Whilst the Annual Report and its associated annexes continue to provide a comprehensive account of delivery over this Senedd term, I am pleased to provide the committee with the following bullet points which summarise some key achievements and developments, some of which have been delivered in the months since the report's publication:

- On delivering more homes, we backed our commitment concerning securing 20,000 additional low-carbon homes for rent in the social sector with over £2 billion of investment. By the end of this year we will have delivered 20,000 more homes, the most ambitious social housing target in our nation's history: that's more homes for people who need them the most.
- On delivering better transport, we've transformed travel, with over £1bn of upgrades on the Core Valley Lines, a new and expanded rail fleet, the Heads of the Valleys road network, and a Metro system fit for a modern nation. We've introduced the £1 bus fare pilot for young people, and the Bus Services (Wales) Bill passed in December will modernise local services around community needs. And on our roads, we've improved 500km of surfaces and fixed or prevented more than 200,000 potholes.
- On delivering more jobs, we have directly supported nearly 46,000 private sector jobs across Wales, helping our economy grow and businesses thrive. We are also firmly on track to deliver 100,000 apprenticeship opportunities this Senedd term – each one a potentially life changing pathway for an individual.
- We're also making real progress in delivering better health. In 2025 we saw a 23,400 reduction in the overall waiting list – the biggest monthly fall on record and the sixth consecutive month in which the list has come down. People waiting over 2 years fell to just under 6,900, down more than 90% from the peak. Provisional December data suggest further reductions in the overall waiting list, with 2 year waits dropping to around 5,300. Women's health is a priority for this government – by early March, every health board will have women's health hubs dedicated to offering improved support and services.

- In December we announced a major investment of over £8.94 million to strengthen Wales iconic museums, archives, libraries and cultural institutions grow and bolster the nation's essential cultural foundations.
- The Sustainable Farming Scheme's Universal Layer started on 1 January. The Sustainable Farming Scheme represents a truly landmark moment for Welsh agriculture, designed to support farmers in Wales to produce world class, high-quality food whilst caring for the environment, tackling and adapting to climate change and building resilience for those who will work and care for this precious land in the years to come.
- In education, Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) continues to go from strength to strength, with 57 million meals being served in primary schools across Wales since 2022. In July, we announced an additional £8m of investment in Universal Primary Free School Meals across Wales over the coming two years.

I would be happy to discuss delivery in these areas (and others) in greater detail at our session before the end of this term. Furthermore, I can also confirm that I intend to deliver an Oral Statement to the Senedd before dissolution. This statement will provide an opportunity to look back at the Welsh Government's delivery over this term.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Eluned Morgan'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Eluned Morgan**