

## ESJ Committee

### Questions raised by Committee in 26 January letter from Chair

#### Progress since accepting report recommendations

*The Welsh Government accepted most of the Committee's report recommendations, including several in principle. As of 2026, how many of the recommendations of the reports listed below do you believe have now been fully implemented, partially delivered, or remain outstanding.*

##### *o Gender based violence: The needs of migrant women, 2022*

There were 15 recommendations from this report, 13 were accepted, 1 was partially accepted and 1 was accepted in principle in the Welsh Government's [response](#) (2022). I determine that 9 recommendations are delivered, and 4 are partially delivered.

##### *o Women's experiences in the criminal justice system, 2023*

As part of the above report, the Committee set 18 recommendations; 7 were accepted and 11 were accepted in principle by the Welsh Government. As of February 2026, I determine that Recommendations 4, 5, 13, 14 and 16 are delivered and Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17 and 18 are partially delivered.

##### *o 60% - Giving them a voice Speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system, 2023*

As part of the above report, the Committee set 7 recommendations; 3 were accepted, 2 were accepted in principle and 2 were rejected by the Welsh Government. As of February 2026, I determine that Recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 7 are delivered and Recommendation 5 is partially delivered.

##### *o Calling time on child poverty: how Wales can do better, 2023*

Of the 5 recommendations accepted or accepted in principle by Welsh Government following the Calling Time on child poverty report 2023, as of February 2026 I determine that Recommendations 1, 4 and 5 are partially delivered and recommendations 2 and 3 are fully delivered.

##### *o Anything's Achievable with the Right Support: Tackling the Disability Employment Gap, 2025*

Of the 7 recommendations accepted or accepted in principle, recommendations 2,4,5, and 7 have been fully implemented and recommendations 1, 3 and 6 have been partially delivered with work ongoing.

#### **Gender based violence - Migrant women**

*As a result of the Committee's report the Welsh Government established a crisis fund for migrant women. What is the current status of this fund and has any evaluation been carried out to assess its impact on migrant women.*

## **Welsh Government response:**

For 2023/24 and 2024/25 we funded the Migrant Victim of Abuse Support Fund Pilot which topped-up the Home Office Support for Migrant Victim scheme. The top-up aimed to support migrant victims in Wales subject to NRP conditions, ensuring they could access longer stays in funded accommodation, alongside increased subsistence funding to support easier access to food and other essentials. During 2024/25 161 people have been supported through the Support for Migrant Victim scheme and the Migrant Victim of Abuse Support Fund pilot.

In light of a significant uplift to the Home Office Support for Migrant Victim scheme for 2025/26, internal evaluation of the pilot and engagement with the sector, Welsh Government repurposed this funding to adapt to the needs of migrant victims and survivors and professionals who support them across Wales. Two keyworkers were funded through a core grant allocation to ensure easier access to specialist support for those victims of abuse who are also subject to no recourse to public funds conditions.

In addition, during 2025/26, specialist immigration training was made available for around 100 professionals across Wales to encourage easier access to information for victims and survivors. Officials continue to work with the specialist third sector in Wales to support victims and survivors with no recourse to public fundings effectively, aligning to the Home Office Support for Migrant Victim Scheme.

## **Criminal Justice**

### Women's experiences in the criminal justice system

*Could you provide an update on the development of the Residential Women's Centre in Swansea? In particular, we would welcome clarification on progress to date, the current timeline for delivery, and any outstanding issues—such as planning, funding, or partnership working with the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS—that may affect implementation.*

## **Welsh Government Response:**

Decisions on the Residential Women's Centre are for the UK Government. However, as you may be aware, building and planning permission are confirmed, and the Centre remains a key objective for Welsh Government. It will improve the lives of women in Wales, providing therapeutic and rehabilitative services as part of a trauma-informed approach.

We understand the importance of women maintaining contact with their families, particularly since many currently reside in facilities across the border in England. The Centre will allow women to stay closer to home and maintain crucial family ties, especially with their children. By providing support closer to home, the Centre will also help address the underlying issues that contribute to offending behaviour, such as mental health issues, substance misuse or domestic violence.

The Counsel General and I regularly engage with UK Government Justice Ministers and key partners who are leading on this important programme of work.

We appreciate the interest of the Committee in this work. It is noteworthy to mention that I answered an Oral Question from Altaf Hussain MS on 14 January 2026, regarding the opening of the Centre. In my response, I confirmed I will meet soon with Lord Timpson, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, to help fully understand the latest position.

In the meantime, Welsh Government officials continue to work closely with the UK Government to ensure the Centre remains a priority and is progressed as soon as possible.

### Speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system

*What steps is the Welsh Government taking to ensure early identification of SLCN during the transition from primary to secondary school, given its importance in preventing later youth justice involvement?*

*How is the Curriculum for Wales being used to strengthen universal and targeted SLCN support within education settings?*

*How many SLCN-related commitments in the Youth Justice Blueprint have been delivered to date, and which remain outstanding?*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

The focus of the Welsh Government work to date on the identification of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) has been in early years, with an investment of £1.5m in Prosiect Pengwin, our bilingual SLC surveillance and intervention package for children under 5 years old.

Joint working across the Welsh Government including 'Talk with Me' and the Curriculum for Wales, 'has led to building further capacity in the workforce. Together we are developing a speech, language and communication training pathway which will help practitioners of 5–16-year-olds identify their training needs and access the support required to strengthen their skills and improve outcomes for all learners. Alongside this a SLC training module has been developed for Hwb both of which are due to go live over the coming weeks. These complement existing support for those working with 0–4-year-olds, ensuring a coherent, whole-system approach from early years through to secondary education.

The Community Focussed Schools team also rolled out a light touch preventative intervention based on the Talk with Me key messages for early SLC development.

A consultation on 'Talk with Me phase 2' is currently underway and includes proposals to replicate this approach for children aged 5-11 years old.

Through the Curriculum for Wales, speech, language and communication are part of the mandatory cross-curricular skill of literacy meaning they are embedded across learning. Our national investment in literacy—over £13 million in professional learning and targeted programmes—is strengthening teachers' capability to identify and support SLCN within everyday classroom practice across all phases. This includes programmes such as Ein Llais Ni, which enhances oracy pedagogy for primary, secondary and special schools and supports consistent approaches to monitoring learner progress. The CAL:ON project is developing assessments to help

schools identify learners who may require additional support and to spot difficulties early so targeted support can be put in place before gaps widen.

As the Committee will be aware, the Youth Justice Blueprint was published in July 2019, and importantly delivered in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board. It set out our vision for youth justice in Wales, taking a ‘children first’ approach; working in a child-centred rather than service-focused way, meeting the individual needs of children in the justice system or those at risk of encountering the justice system. As of April 2025, the Blueprint has moved to a new delivery phase as we look to build on the existing framework and continue to embed best practice. To maintain a joined-up approach and acknowledgement of the specific needs of children, we published the Youth Justice [PREVENTION FRAMEWORK](#). The Framework provides a single view of what works to prevent offending, and how we are supporting vulnerable children towards fulfilling, crime-free lives.

### Prisons and probation

*What progress has the Welsh Government made in exploring how elements of the Manchester Model—particularly the integration of probation with locally delivered services and devolved governance structures—could be adapted for Wales, and can you update us on any discussions with the UK Government or HMPPS about piloting or implementing a similar approach here?*

#### **Welsh Government Response:**

The Welsh Government commissioned the Wales Centre for Public Policy to produce a report exploring how a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) might apply in Wales. This report is now complete and has been shared with Welsh Government Ministers and key stakeholders for their review. To support with the creation of an MoU model that is suitable for the Welsh context and to leverage operational expertise, His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has seconded an employee to the Welsh Government to lead this workstream.

Work is progressing at pace within Welsh Government to bring key stakeholders together to agree the key areas that an MoU will cover, with a view to finalising these areas by the end of February 2026. HMPPS nationally and in Wales have expressed their support for the MoU and the intention is therefore to have an agreed MoU in place by the end of 2026.

*In light of the serious safety concerns highlighted at HMP Parc and the lack of clarity around why Wales continues to have such a disproportionately high imprisonment rate, what discussions has the Welsh Government had with the UK Government to pause any plans to expand HMP Parc, and what steps you will take in response to the issues raised in Dr Rob Jones’s recent briefing on conditions and safety at the prison? A copy of Dr Rob Jones’s briefing to Committee from December 2025 is attached.*

#### **Welsh Government Response:**

As you will be aware, justice is not yet devolved to Wales. Prisons and offender management are the responsibility of the UK Government, and they remain the best and most appropriate source of information about operational matters across the

prison system in England and Wales. We work closely with HMPPS on areas where we do have responsibilities such as health, housing and social care and will continue to work together to help mitigate the risk of future harm to staff and prisoners.

I met with Dr Robert Jones on 3 December 2025, to discuss his recent briefing entitled, 'The Expansion of HMP Parc: Wales' (Growing) Imprisonment Rate' and it is welcome that Dr Jones similarly shared this briefing with the Committee in December 2025.

It is right that academics scrutinise the decisions of both the UK Government and Welsh Government and I have expressed my gratitude to Dr Jones and his team at the Wales Governance Centre, for their committed work and research on the criminal justice system in Wales.

Following my meeting with Dr Jones, I wrote to Lord Timpson, Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, on 22 December 2025. My letter noted Lord Timpson's appearance at the Welsh Affairs Committee on Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales, on 17 December 2025. At his Committee appearance, Lord Timpson was accompanied by Ian Barrow, Chief Executive of HMPPS in Wales, who shared that an additional 160 staff members will be employed at HMP Parc, to facilitate the expansion. Despite these assurances, my letter to Lord Timpson highlighted a number of issues and implications for Wales, in relation to the expansion, and I also shared with Lord Timpson a copy of Dr Jones' briefing.

I will attend a Women's Justice Blueprint Roundtable on 11 February 2026, chaired by Ian Barrow, Chief Executive of HMPPS in Wales. Dr Rob Jones will attend the event and presented his 2024 Factfile. The event will also be attended by representatives from Third Sector organisations, Magistrates and Justice Unions, among others.

Our vision is for a preventative, trauma-informed approach to justice, which addresses the underlying causes of offending and stops crime happening in the first place. A long-term approach is needed to address these longstanding issues.

I meet regularly with Lord Timpson and Ian Barrow and have asked to discuss the expansion of HMP Parc in further detail with Lord Timpson when we meet again soon.

## **Child poverty**

*How would you respond to the UK Government's Child Poverty Strategy, published in December 2025? What impact do you think the content of the strategy will have on your efforts to tackle child poverty?*

## **Welsh Government Response**

Whilst the UK Strategy had a strong focus on England only policies, there is much we can welcome in the strategy which will support our own actions here in Wales. This includes the removal of the Two Child Limit which we have been calling for. This is a vital step in tackling child poverty in Wales, bringing relief to 69,000 children in

Wales and reducing relative child poverty rates by up to three to four percentage points.

The UK Government's Child Poverty Strategy covers a number of areas including boosting families' income, reducing the costs of essentials and strengthening local support for families. On the 2 December 2025 we published our own Child Poverty Strategy progress report outlining the significant steps we are taking across government, using every lever we have available to us in Wales to tackle Child Poverty and to mitigate the worst impacts of living in poverty.

We welcome the positive engagement with the UK Government on the development of the strategy and look forward to continuing this engagement in the delivery of our shared objectives and our priorities for Wales.

*How have you worked with the Scottish Government to better understand the legislative, fiscal and other resources that would be required to make a similar payment to the Scottish Child Payment?*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

Officials have engaged with Scottish Government colleagues to better understand the design, delivery and resourcing of the Scottish Child Payment. We have also drawn on publicly available evaluation and policy documents and have sought initial legal advice on Welsh Government competence.

The engagement with Scotland and wider research undertaken has helped the Welsh Government to better understand the potential benefits of a direct child payment and the scale of legislative, fiscal and delivery challenges involved in replicating a similar scheme in Wales. These insights continue to inform Welsh Government's broader approach to tackling child poverty.

### **Disability employment gap**

*Further to the update provided by the Cabinet Secretary on progress in delivering Recommendation 4, can the Welsh Government provide copy of the letter sent to every devolved public sector body and local authority in Wales encouraging them to take steps to become a Disability Confident 'Leader' and set a timeframe for achieving it.*

The letter provided here has been issued to all devolved public bodies and public services in Wales.



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The letter includes the following:

- The Welsh Government has urged public bodies to review employment policies and work towards Disability Confident Leader status within a set timeframe.

- Organisations are encouraged to align with the Disabled People's Rights Plan and eliminate the disability employment gap as a formal objective.
- Support is available via Disabled People's Employment Champions and the new Disability Confident Leaders Forum for Wales.

*What involvement has the Welsh Government had in the 'Timms Review' and what evidence has the Welsh Government submitted as part of the review.*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

The DWP has not yet commenced the Personal Independent Payment or 'Timms' review and is still recruiting members for the Review Steering Group. Welsh Government officials have supported the DWP during the review planning phase.

The Welsh Government's Disability Equality Forum members and former Disability Rights Taskforce members have been encouraged to apply for positions on the Review Steering Group, which will oversee the review, gather evidence, and develop recommendations to improve PIP.

Minister Timms has met with the Disability Equality Forum to discuss effective co-production, ensuring the voices of disabled people in Wales are heard, and the importance of the social model of disability underpinning the review and its recommendations.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip has met Minister Timms on several occasions, highlighting Wales's Disabled People's Rights Plan, and encouraging the UK Government to learn from this work.

Officials meet monthly with DWP colleagues to discuss the review.

*What work the Welsh Government is undertaking to take forward the legacy of the Engage to Change program which came to an end in March 2025, including what actions is taking to support young people aged 16-25 with a learning difficulty, learning disability and/or autism to gain meaningful employment.*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

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.

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 of all ages (including 16-24 year olds) with a learning disability, learning difficulty and/or autism can get help to move into paid work through 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 and 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.

### **Anti-racist Wales Plan (ArWAP)**

*The refreshed ArWAP is currently available as a summary document. Can you provide the full technical document?*

A copy of the full ArWAP technical document is attached.

*The Welsh Government published a progress report in 2023. What progress has been made to deliver the actions set out in the Plan?*

### **Welsh Government Response**

The refreshed ArWAP takes into account the progress report in 2023 and the recommendations of the Equality and Social Justice Committee inquiry into the implementation of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan: [Anti-racist Wales \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales).

We have recently published the ArWAP Progress tracker on the Welsh Government website. Overall, the ArWAP focus remains on leadership, evidence, stakeholder engagement, and transparency, ensuring lived experience remains central to ArWAP implementation and building momentum across the public sector.

*What has changed for people from ethnic minority backgrounds since the publication of the plan and provide evidence to support this.*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

A comprehensive evaluation, currently being commissioned, will capture quantitative, qualitative and lived experience evidence around the implementation and impact of ArWAP.

Separately, an [evaluation of the ArWAP culture, heritage and sport grants](#) programme concluded that the programme contributed to the ArWAP goals, with positive impacts at multiple levels, including for individuals, organisations, and sectors. This included widened access and participation in arts and sport; increased community engagement and collaboration; improved skills, physical and mental health; and promotion of greater empathy and understanding between communities.

*Provide an update on the development of a dashboard which shows disparities in ethnic minority outcomes in Wales and 'indicator mapping'.*

### **Welsh Government Response:**

We are due to publish the unpopulated ArWAP indicator framework by the end of March 2026. A prototype dashboard has been developed based on this framework – which pulls together publicly available data in one place – for use by the External Accountability Group. We are exploring approaches to publish or summarise the dashboard in an accessible way for everyone in Wales.

*The Committee would appreciate a written update on*

***Victims and Prisoners Act 2025: What practical impact—positive or negative—has the Act had on victim support services in Wales since its introduction, and how have UK-wide measures been integrated with Wales’s devolved VAWDASV and support frameworks?***

### **Welsh Government Response:**

We are broadly supportive of the Act’s provisions to improve victim support services, and the need to collaborate to ensure consistent support for victims aligns to provisions in our VAWDASV Act (2015). We will continue to work with UK Government to determine the impacts the Act is having on victims in Wales.

In response to section 16 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, the UK Government published statutory guidance about the specified victim support roles - Independent Domestic Violence Advisors and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors. As the guidance relates to reserved matters only in Wales, the Welsh Government has engaged with Stakeholders from across the Welsh public and specialist sectors, victims and survivors, and representatives from across reserved agencies working in Wales, to garner insights into how well the statutory guidance reflects the Welsh context, meeting the needs of victims & survivors, practitioners and service providers. Following this engagement, we are now considering options in regard to the Welsh Government’s response to the published guidance – any Welsh specific guidance will be trauma informed and rooted in the lived experience of victims and practitioners.

***Strip searches of children by Welsh police forces: What steps has the Welsh Government taken to ensure that accurate, standardised data on strip searches of children (including ethnicity breakdowns) is collected and published to support scrutiny and compliance with children’s rights obligations?***

### **Welsh Government Response:**

We take this issue seriously, to protect children in Wales and to ensure the importance of proper police conduct. As such, I have discussed the issue at regular bi-lateral meetings with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Dafydd Llywelyn, who holds the responsibility for child-centred policing.

Strip searches are potentially extremely traumatic for children, and it is crucial for the police to ensure that this only happens when absolutely necessary, with robust safeguards in place. Every case should be fully justified, appropriately conducted and used as a last resort. This includes the presence of an appropriate adult.

The term ‘strip search’ covers a wide range of activity. Crucially, it does not differentiate between someone being asked to remove an outer item of clothing, like

a jacket, and a much more intimate search. It is important that we understand this nuanced language, to ensure accurate data is captured to support a comprehensive understanding of how searches are used and what action may be necessary to improve practice further.

Policing in Wales has an established Child Centred Policing portfolio and the strip searching of children is one of the main priority areas for that group. The Chairs of this group are Deputy Chief Constable, Nicky Brian (Gwent Police), Police and Crime Commissioner, Dafydd Llywelyn (Dyfed Powys Police) and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, Eleri Thomas (Gwent Police). The Police Liaison Unit have also created a data dashboard for the Child Centred Policing portfolio, focussing on stop search. This collates data from across the four Welsh forces on stop search (including strip searches) and allows central governance and scrutiny in the Child Centred Policing portfolio.

***Taser use:*** *What assurances has the Welsh Government now received from the UK Government regarding the evidence base, equality impact assessment, and the undertaking of a full Children's Rights Impact Assessment before any authorisation of Taser 10 for police forces in England and Wales, given the concerns set out in your letter of 17 July 2025 about potential negative or disproportionate impacts on children and ethnic minority young people?*

#### **Welsh Government Response:**

The Equality and Social Justice Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee wrote to me on 4 July 2025, to bring my attention to the potential authorisation of Taser 10, for use by police forces in England and Wales.

Following receipt of this letter, I wrote to the former Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention, Dame Diana Johnson, on 17 July 2025. My letter affirmed our commitment to an evidence-based, trauma-informed criminal justice system in Wales, to prevent crime happening in the first place. I noted the positive work of the Youth Justice Blueprint and emphasised our commitment to the delivery of children's rights in Wales. I also upheld our commitment to delivering an Anti-Racist Wales with our Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

In my letter, I raised concerns with the Minister, that this policy position might be incompatible with the UN Convention on Rights of a Child. I requested further details regarding the evidence base and assessments carried out, to ensure this approach does not negatively impact children and young people and does not disproportionately impact children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. I also requested further information and assurances regarding how the UK Government intend to assess the impact of this policy position on children, in England and Wales, explicitly querying whether the UK Government would conduct and publish a Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

The former Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention replied to my letter on 29 July 2025. The Minister confirmed that UK Government departments and police forces must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and that the PSED includes consideration of the potential impact of policies and decisions on all groups with protected characteristics, as well as children. The Minister noted that the UK Government would progress with an equality impact assessment (EIA) of Taser 10.

The Minister stated that the EIA would consider any relevant risks and mitigations, in relation to the impact of a new model of Taser should it be used on children.

The Minister noted the UK Government's approach to the use of force, including Tasers, aligns with Articles 2 and 3 of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms. The Minister also confirmed that there are times when it is deemed operationally necessary by officers for the police to use a Taser, including on children, in the interests of public safety.

The Minister confirmed there are a number of safeguards and mitigations in place around police use of Tasers. These include specific mitigations for Taser use on children. All officers who are selected to use Taser must pass a comprehensive training programme and need to have an appreciation of the physical and psychological effects of the device on children. This includes training officers to have a thorough understanding of de-escalation skills and to factor in the potential vulnerability of a person and factors such as age and stature when assessing each situation. Furthermore, College of Policing guidance sets out that individuals in police custody, who have been subjected to a Taser discharge must be examined by a specially trained healthcare professional working in General Forensic Medicine.

Since my engagement with the former Minister on this matter, I understand that Taser 10 has received National NPCC sign-off, as of October 2025. The Police Liaison Unit have also updated that Welsh Forces are in the process of undergoing the necessary training, to then rollout out the new devices operationally from March 2026 onwards.

Although we work closely with Policing in Wales on areas of interface and joint interest across our responsibilities, forces have autonomy over the operational decisions they make, and it would be inappropriate for the Welsh Government to comment on a reserved area of practice or intervene in individual cases. The decision is for Chief Officers to determine whether to authorise Taser 10 in their force area including in Wales, based on their assessment of threats and risks.