

**PUBLIC BOARD MEETING**

**01 February 2024**

**via Zoom**

**09:00 - 13:00**

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| **Present:****Board Members:** Mick Giannasi, ChairAbigail HarrisCarl Cooper (items 1-11)Damian Bridgeman Grace QuantockHelen Mary JonesJane Moore (item 6 - 14)Jo KemberMaria BattlePeter MaxSimon BurchTrystan Pritchard | **Social Care Wales Officers:**Sue Evans (Chief Executive Officer) Andrew Lycett (Dir. Finance, Strategy, Corporate Services)David Pritchard (Director of Regulation)Sarah McCarty (Director of Improvement and Development)Geraint Rowlands (Assistant Director Finance & IT)Kate Salter (Assistant Director Corporate Services)Rhianon Jones (HR Manager)Jeni Meyrick (JeM) (Staff Partnership Council) Llinos Bradbury (Board Secretary) (minutes)**In attendance:**Aled Jones (Cymen) (simultaneous translation)  |

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| **Private session:** |
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| **1.** | **Minutes of the Private Board Meeting - 25 October 2023**  |
| i. | The minutes of the private Board meeting of 25 October 2023 were discussed and endorsed by the Board as an accurate record of the meeting.  |
| **Public session:** |
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| **1.** | **Welcome and Opening Comments from the Chair**  |
| i. | The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a particularly warm welcome to new members of staff who were observing.  |
| **2.** | **Apologies and Declarations of Interest**  |
| i.ii. | Apologies were noted from Emma Britton and Liz Parker, the Staff Partnership Council (SPC) Chair. Jeni Meyrick was in attendance as SPC representative. There were no additional declarations of interest to note. |
| **3.** | **Minutes of the Board Meeting 26 October 2023** |
| i. | The minutes of the meeting of 26 October 2023 were discussed and endorsed by the Board as an accurate record of the meeting.  |
| **4.** | **Action Log and Matters Arising** |
| i.ii.iii.iv.v. | Members’ attention was drawn to the rolling action log which provided updates on the progress made against outstanding actions since the last meeting. Updates were provided against the actions that remained open as follows:18/23/SCW (Local Authority Training) – SMcC advised that the data which HMJ had requested in relation to local authority training had now been obtained. It did not include the exact times when training was provided but did identify what training had been delivered in relation to foster care training. HMJ thanked SMcC and asked that consideration be given to collecting data about the timing of sessions in future years. 14/23/SCW (Consideration of Language Used in EDI Reporting) - DP advised that position statements were currently being developed which would make clear where the organisation stands. However, no decision had been made yet and the issue had not been fully considered by EMT. He advised that once a decision had been made, it would be brought to Board. HMJ said that she looked forward to seeing the position statements and emphasised the importance of follow developing caselaw in such considerations.AH asked whether the Board could have sight of the data in relation to the number of overseas workers which had been shared with the Deputy Minister following the previous Board meeting. DP agreed to share updated numbers for 2023 with the Board. **ACTION**There were no further questions or comments on the action log nor any matters arising.  |
| **5.** | **Updates from Committee Chairs**  |
| i.ii.iii.iv | The Chair thanked Committee Chairs for the succinct written summaries they had provided of the December Committee meetings and asked whether there was anything they wished to add:* CC did not have anything further to add to his summary of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting but was happy to take any comments or questions; there were none.
* TP brought the Board’s attention to the discussion which has taken place in the Improvement Committee on impact assessments; it was therefore timely that the Board had received an update on the organisation’s work in this area at the Strategic Development Day session in January.
* GQ highlighted the hard work of the Regulation team and in particular, the Committee’s forward look into the implementation of the Registration Review which is designed to enable the team to absorb the increased volume of work emerging from the expansion of the Register.

The Chair provide an update on the Remuneration Committee meeting that had been held in December, a summary of which was provided in the paper. The Committee was pleased to be able to support an additional one per cent pay increase for staff which had since been implemented. He also invited members to note the discussion which had taken place about the process for recruiting a new CEO, the advert for which was due to go live imminently. The Chair asked if there were any questions or comments about the Committee summaries and the following issue was raised:* AH asked about the timeline for the Job Evaluation Scheme pilot; the summary mentioned some disparities between grades, and she wondered whether concerns had been expressed by staff and if so, how staff engagement was being managed.
* AL advised that the disparity was confined to two grades where further work was needed to understand the precise impact should a new scheme be implemented. It had been made clear to staff that it was a pilot and that there was a need to ensure that the scheme would be appropriate for the organisation before it was implemented. He also emphasised that the financial climate was challenging, both for the organisation and for individual members of staff and the importance of minimising uncertainty was fully recognised by the EMT.
* JeM added that two members of the SPC had been trained as JEGS practitioners and had been involved in the review from the start. As well as looking at whether the scheme was right for the organisation, there was a need to ensure that job descriptions were updated where needed as the review was looking at the job role rather than the person undertaking the role.
* AH thanked officers for the updates. She recognised that job evaluation schemes could be divisive and felt that the cautious approach which had been described was the right thing to do. She added that it would be useful to have regular updates through the Remuneration Committee.

The Chair thanked the Board for their comments and questions and the updates were duly noted.  |
| **6.**  | **Context setting and key messages from the Chief Executive** |
| i.ii. | SE set the context for the remainder of the meeting, supplementing the briefing document which had been shared with Board members prior to the meeting with some verbal updates. She highlighted the following issues which she thought would be of particular interest to members: * Positive responses had been received from local authorities to host Board visits across Wales with hosting authorities confirmed for 2024-25.
* Further discussions were due to take place with Welsh Government later that afternoon to define the organisation’s remit for 2024-25.
* A letter had been received from Welsh Government confirming that the organisation’s ISO27001 certification confirms IT security compliance; she expressed thanks to AL and his team for leading a significant improvement in our security and hardware infrastructure.
* Government Digital Services had recently undertaken an accessibility audit on the Social Care Wales website which provided some recommendations for action. Changes had been made to the website and a subsequent audit confirmed accessibility compliance: this was important because the European Human Rights Commission had the right to follow up on audits if required.
* The Quarter 3 business plan update provided performance highlights and demonstrated good progress.
* Later in the agenda, the Board would be asked to consider proposed changes to the registration rules; this reflected a recent Welsh Government decision to make registration mandatory for special school residential managers and workers. However, the opportunity had also been taken to strengthen the fitness to practice process and provide more flexibility in the composition of panels going forward.
* The second workforce survey had recently been launched following the successful pilot conducted in 2023 and over a thousand responses had been received in the first week.
* SE and SMcC would be attending the Senedd’s Children and Young People’s Committee in March when the focus would be on scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s transformation of children’s services plans which Social Care Wales is supporting.
* SMcC would be providing an update on the Ymlaen strategy later in the agenda; in essence, the consultation had concluded, and responses were being analysed.
* The briefing note highlighted current developments in partnership working with a focus on developing community capacity and better alignment or integration of services across health and social care.
* SE was working with the Bevan Commission to identify ways to support transformation in the health and care system using the expertise of the International Federation of Integrated Care; it was likely that a multi-agency event would be developed for the Spring.
* A recent UK Alliance meeting had identified similar issues and challenges being faced by regulators across the UK and Ireland. The Alliance had jointly commissioned an economic value report which had proved useful when it was previously commissioned in 2018.
* On behalf of the UK Alliance, DP was chairing an EDI Group specifically looking at the potential for unconscious bias or discrimination within fitness to practice arrangements.
* Scotland was leading the review of 129 National Occupational Standards and had successfully negotiated a longer timescale to December 2025.
* Feedback provided during a meeting of public bodies CEOs had revealed similar pressures on services going forward, linked to financial constraint; Social Care Wales had been relatively well protected in comparison to other WGSBs which were having to make difficult decisions in terms of staffing numbers.

The Chair thanked SE for her comprehensive update and asked if there were any comments or questions from members. There were none and the CEO’s updates were noted.  |
| **7.** | **Business Plan Q3 Progress Report 2023-24** |
| i.ii.iii.iv.v.vi.vii.viii.ix.x.xi.x.xi.xii.xiii.xiv.xv.xvi.xvii.xviii.xix.xx.xxi.xxii.xxiii.xxiv.xxv.xxvii.xxviii.xxix.xxx.xxxi.xxxii.xxxiii.xxxiv.xxxv.xxxiii.xxxiv. | KS provided the context to this paper, which reported on Social Care Wales performance against the 2023-24 Business Plan at the nine-month stage. The Board systematically worked through the individual sections of the report, firstly looking at priority theme one which focussed on the social care and yearly years’ workforce. There were no questions or comments in relation to this theme. The Chair reflected on a discussion which had taken place in the private session prior to the meeting in which Members had commented on how much the quarterly Business Plan report had progressed in recent months, with more relevant data and more meaningful narrative to explain where the plan was off track and what was being done to address that. That may result in less questions and it was important not to take the fact that there were less questions or comments as a lack of scrutiny. AH also added that the triangulation of data was much easier to see; for example, the workforce survey had identified ‘a third of the workforce not feeling supported by their manager’ and the report highlighted activities which had been put in place to help to move the dials in the right direction. Moving on, the Chair invited comments or questions on priority theme two, social care and year years managers, leaders and owners; again, there were no questions in relation to this priority theme.Moving onto priority theme three, strategic leaders and stakeholders, the Chair asked for an update on the development of the We Care website, given that this was taking longer than had been anticipated. SMcC advised that links had now been made with the CARREG system (Social Care Wales’s CRM system) which would provide sight of the proportion of employers who were using the We Care jobs portal. It would also enable a targeted approach where we it was identified that employers were not using the site. SMcC acknowledged that getting the technology to where it need to be was taking longer than anticipated; however, progress was being made. Work was being undertaken with employers to make it easier for them to notify Social Care Wales when vacancies had been filled. Local authority websites were now being ‘scraped’ to identify vacancies to add to the site and if that worked well, a similar approach could be adopted with other larger employers. PM said that he was aware that some providers who were not happy with the We Care jobs portal; there was a perception that it did not deliver applicants. As such, the organisation needed to be mindful that the majority of applicants would still be sourced via Indeed or other similar websites.SMcC welcomed the feedback and said that the team would continue to work with employers to improve the system. She reminded members that We Care started out as an attraction campaign for the sector with the aim of having one brand across Wales that was recognised by the public and used by others in the sector at a local level. Resources had been created and added to the site over time describing what social care was and the range of job opportunities available. The jobs portal had been seen as an added way of directing people to vacancies with employers using their existing tried and tested recruitment mechanisms. GQ said that she understood the role of We Care in promoting social care as a sector; she asked whether there were more innovative ways to work with the media or greater opportunities to consider how the communications strategy linked with recruitment through the release of more good news stories, for example, by promoting the ‘regulation for improvement’ concept. SMcC said that GQ had raised an important point given that perceptions of the sector can be driven by the media. Social Care Wales could not change perceptions on its own and conversations had been taking place with ADSS Cymru, WLGA and the Chief Social Care Officer about the role they could play. She recognised that apart from the Accolades, Social Care Wales had not been particularly proactive in regularly highlighting good practice and the difference it can make to people’s lives. There was work therefore to do on how the public perceive the sector and a more positive perception may, in turn, help with recruitment into the sector. DB advised that intelligence had been received of a malware code which could be picked up whilst ‘scraping’ and result in GDPR issues; he asked for more information on the scraping programme used by We Care. AL was not able to name the software being used but advised that the work had been conducted by an agency who had experience of ‘scraping’ local authority websites for teaching vacancies. He provided reassurance that an appropriate Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) had been undertaken and as no personalised data was being used, the risks were limited. DB advised that there had been a major breach on LinkedIn whilst scraping for adverts and there was a need to be aware of potential consequences. JM asked if there was a timescale for the increased functionality within the We Care website given the focus on the issue at a political level. SMcC was unable to provide a precise time scale but advised that final testing was now required, and the Board would receive a demonstration of the system and a sense of the data being captured at a future Strategic Development session. The Chair moved onto priority theme four, a registered social care workforce that had the public’s confidence. TP wished to acknowledge the progress made in performance in this priority area given the demand and capacity issues which the registration team had faced in recent years. The Chair agreed and acknowledged that the reassurances previously provided by DP that performance would improve over time had been shown to be well founded.The Chair said that it would perhaps be helpful to have a more in-depth discussion around the issue of “aged Fitness to Practice cases” which remained problematic in contrast to the improvement in performance in other areas. He asked GQ, as Chair of the Regulation and Standards Committee, to provide the Board with an update on discussion which had been taking place within the Committee to gain assurance in relation to this issue.GQ reassured the Board that this was a significant and regular focus for Regulation and Standards Committee discussions and that other regulators faced similar challenges, most often linked to waiting for other agency processes to be finalised. Committee members had also raised concerns about the impact of delays on registrants subject to proceedings. Discussions had been held with various agencies to seek solutions and the Chair and DP had met with Police and Crime Commissioners in order to raise awareness of the organisation’s role and remit and the potential for more joined up working. Having scrutinised the issues in some depth, the Committee felt assured that what was within the organisation’s gift, was being progressed as quickly as it could be.DP said that the performance targets in this area were particularly challenging and most other regulators also struggled to meet them. In recognition of that, a multi-agency group had been set up to specifically look at this issue. DP felt that the numbers were currently at a peak given that some of those added in the most recent stages of the expansion of the register came with outstanding issues and concerns. The Chair thanked GQ and DP for the reassurance they had provided. There were no further questions or comments on this issue, and he moved on to look at priority theme five, a social care and early years workforce that was suitably qualified, knowledgeable and skilled, with the right values, behaviours and practice.HMJ asked about the delays in moving forward with the Welsh language work as part of the workforce plan and wanted to know whether work would progress from yellow to green in the next quarter. SMcC advised that there were problems with the level checker provided by the National Centre which had meant more manual checking of individuals Welsh language proficiency; that was more time consuming meaning the work had not progressed at the pace anticipated. Another challenge had been employers’ availability; there were a number who were committed and wanted to work through the pilot scheme but finding the time to have those conversations was challenging in the pilot phase. There were also practicalities in engaging with employers going forward given the challenging delivery environment in which they were operating. HMJ thanked SMcC for the explanation.The Chair moved onto priority theme six, social care services that embed and deliver strengths-based approaches to care and support. There were no questions on this area nor in relation to priority theme seven, social care practice and policy that was underpinned by innovation, high-quality research, data and other forms of evidence.Moving onto theme eight, Social Care Wales provides effective, high quality and sustainable services, PM shared some feedback he had received about Social Care Wales telephone lines and website. He had been made aware that it was difficult to contact the organisation by telephone, especially in the afternoon and it seemed that calls were not being answered; he also understood that links via the website did not work. He asked whether it was possible to say whether calls were being answered and tracked?AL advised that software had been implemented towards the end of Summer 2023 which enabled basic call data such as call volume and drop-out rates to be measured and monitored. A contract had been awarded at the end of 2023 for a new Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) system with the system hopefully being implemented by the end of March 2024. This would provide greater functionality to manage, and track calls in real time, similar to the environment which existed in a call centre. AL also said that telephone opening hours had been extended into the afternoon and the data which was now being gathered would allow better analysis of call volumes and responses. This would enable opening hours to be extended where necessary to match demand for service, although this would clearly be dependent on capacity. It was worth noting that in addition to answering the call, time and capacity would also be needed to complete the actions arising from the calls as each call generates workload for teams.PM thanked AL for the update but remained concerned that the organisation was not currently able to answer phone calls from 9am to 5pm and felt that there was a need to ensure that sufficient capacity was made available to enable that to happen. AL agreed that this may be desirable but emphasised the need to ensure that there was capacity should the telephone lines opening hours be extended and reassured members that the new CTI system would provide the evidence base for doing so. The Chair thanked PM for raising this issue. He was not aware that the telephone lines were not open from 9am to 5pm and acknowledged that as a gap in his knowledge; he thought it would be a good idea to schedule some time at a near future development session to have a more in-depth conversation about what Social Care Wales looks and feels like from the perspective of those on the register, as well as managers and owners.DP reassured members that there was a plan in place to ensure that the demand to answer telephone calls was balanced against the requirement to manage email enquiries and that resources were allocated accordingly. The employee support service had also been gathering data and intelligence and that would be helpful when considering the way the organisation is viewed by its customers.The Chair thanked DP for his comments and suggested that a conversation be held at the next Chairs Coordinating Group (CCG) meeting to think about the format and timing of a Strategic Development Day session. All agreed. **ACTION**. JM said that there was a reputational issue to be considered with the phonelines not being open and addressing this should be a priority. DB said that it was also an equalities issue as for some people, being able to pick up the telephone and speak to someone could be their most accessible way of communicating with the organisation. He also asked whether this was a legacy of having to work differently during Covid that still existed?DP advised that the phone lines were currently open 6 hours a day and that was a legacy of both Covid and the significant growth in the register. The recently completed registration review had set out a three-to-five-year plan to move the organisation into a new digital space with wider methods of access and better service. DB re-emphasised that a move to digital would not be a fix for everybody as some people may need physical documents.The Chair thanked everyone for their comments and asked if it was okay to move the discussion onto the finance update. Members were happy to do so.GR provided an overview of the budget position at the nine-month stage. He highlighted significant changes since the last report as follows:* The budget had increased since the 6-month update to £33m; £145k of that was due to the innovation allocation being £1.3m rather than £1.2m as anticipated and additional funding of £140k being secured for the anti-racist Wales action plan which was not reflected in the previous budget report.
* Income was £64k greater than budgeted due to an increase in registration income although the totality was £328k lower due to the lower numbers of bursaries allocated. As the bursary element of the budget was ring-fenced, the full allocation of bursary funding would not now be drawn down from Welsh Government.
* In relation to expenditure, the organisation was £540k underspent in the grants programme but £226k of that related to SCWWDP funding and was a matter of timing.
* Due to the smaller number of bursaries being awarded than budgeted, the out turn for the grants programme had been reduced by £677k.
* The Workforce Regulation budget was £98k underspent; within this there was a salary overspend but the hearings budget was significantly lower than budgeted due to efficiencies such as more streamlined hearings. An overspend of £41k was expected at year end.
* The Improvement and Development budget was £147k underspent with the level of investment in certain projects lower than anticipated. The end of year position was expected to be at £193k underspent.
* The Early years and Childcare budget, although currently underspent by £60k, was expected to be fully spent at year end.
* Strategy and Business Support was underspent by £252k due to a large underspend in the salary budget due to difficulties in recruiting to the communications and digital teams. There were some overspends in CARREG areas and an underspend of £194k was expected at year end.
* At year-end income was projected to be £328k less than budgeted and expenditure was expected to underspent by just over a £1million which would mean a projected underspend of £694k.
* To meet the 2% cash carry forward limit, all grant in aid would be spent in full and that was reflected in the outturn figures.

The Chair thanked GR for the clear and comprehensive overview and asked if there were any comments or questions. The following issue was raised:* HMJ asked what conversations had taken place with the sponsor team given the scale of the underspend and a challenging financial environment to come; she wondered whether this would cause difficulties going forward.
* GR advised that all budget reports were discussed at the regular quarterly monitoring meetings and sponsor was therefore aware of the organisations’ financial position.
* SE added that there was a reserves policy that was agreed with Welsh Government and thought it was commendable that the organisation had been able to manage its budget within the 2% limit each year.

The Chair reminded the Board that money which could not be spent was returned to Welsh Government in 2022/23 which reflected the culture of fiscal responsibility within the organisation. There were no further comments or questions and the members agreed that they had **scrutinised** and **approved** the progress against the Business Plan 2023-24 at the third quarter stage.   |
| **8.**  | **Changes to the Social Care Wales Panel Constitution Rules and Social Care Wales Registration Rules** |
| i.ii.iii.iv. | DP provided an overview of the paper and emphasised that changes to the Rules were a significant matter, responsibility for which rested with the Board. The rules set the legal framework by which the organisation carried out its regulatory work, highlighting the need for thoroughness in the process. He reassured members that the proposed changes to the Rules had been drafted in collaboration with legal advisors, ensuring alignment with the organisation’s scope and remit.He emphasised that pre-RISCA, there was a requirement for detailed analysis by the Welsh Government and whilst the Board's newfound autonomy in this regard enhanced the efficiency of the process, it also created a requirement for accuracy. In that context, DP outlined the key changes which were proposed within the Rules: * Inclusion of Special Schools; the addition of special schools' residential services to the register was a change proposed by the Welsh Government. He highlighted engagement with stakeholders and the rationale behind the amendment, ensuring a smooth transition to the mandatory register.
* Extension of Panel Member Appointment; if approved, the amendments would allow for the appointment of panel members beyond the current eight-year limit in exceptional circumstances such as those arising from ongoing legal cases in the UK and greater flexibility to maintain capacity.
* Strengthening Regulation Work; the proposed changes provide for the tracking individuals through National Insurance (NI) numbers which cannot be changed and was therefore and important safety measure. The proposals also enhanced requirements for reporting issues of concern with the aim of strengthening regulatory processes.

The Chair thanked DP for the overview and invited questions or comments; the following issue was raised:* DB raised a query regarding the extensions for panel members, seeking clarification on the link to public appointment rules.
* DP advised that panel members are appointed by Social Care Wales rather than the Welsh Government and it was therefore within the Board’s gift to determine the rules which underpinned their appointment.
* CC wished to note his support for the changes as proposed and thanked the officers for the paper.

There were no further questions or comments, and the Board **approved** the changes to the Social Care Wales Panel Constitution Rules 2022 and the Social Care Wales Registration Rules 2022. The documents would now progress for the Chair’s signature in due course. |
| **9.** | **2024-25 Business Plan Framework and Updated 2-24/27 Budget Strategy** |
| i.ii.iii.iv.v.vi.vii.viii.ix.x.xi.xii.xiii. | SE introduced this item and highlighted key elements in the paper. She began by expressing gratitude to the team for their collective effort in drafting the paper and emphasising the challenge of assessing government priorities amidst the anticipation of receiving a detailed remit letter earlier than usual. She referred to ongoing discussions regarding public finances and the upcoming preliminary meeting, highlighting the need to align activities with the five-year strategic plan and high-level objectives.She directed members attention to page 139 which outlined the context of public finance and the importance of maintaining focus on strategic outcomes. She also highlighted the relative budget protection for health and social services in the Welsh government and emphasised the need for early receipt of the remit letter and budget confirmation.Moving to page 142, SE discussed the principles guiding the organisation’s approach, including the use of a "must, should and could" framework and a prioritisation review process. She emphasised the organisation’s statutory obligations, government expectations, ring-fenced funding and the importance of strategic partnerships to ensure efficient resource utilisation.SE explained performance management strategies, such as key performance indicators and the use of Google Analytics, whilst acknowledging that there were areas for improvement. She also emphasised the need for sustainable project rationalisation and transparency in organisational processes.Regarding efficiency measures, SE highlighted the accommodation strategy and the registration transformation program, both of which aimed to deliver long-term benefits. She stressed the importance of organisational efficiency amid budget constraints and highlighted existing efficiency achievements.The Chair thanked SE for the comprehensive overview and asked if there were any comments or questions before moving on to receive an overview on the budget strategy. The following issues were raised:* CC asked about the planning considerations for the new National Office and potential overlap with existing responsibilities whilst developing this paper.
* SE provided reassurance, citing ongoing discussions and collaboration with the National Office to avoid duplication.
* AH raised concerns about the paper's alignment with broader policy initiatives and the need for clarity amidst multiple policy agendas. She asked for further detail in the context setting which was wider than the financial outlook to recognise that demand was growing exponentially.
* SE agreed to add the wider external context into the paper for the next iteration.
* HMJ highlighted the political context and potential changes in government leadership, emphasising the need for proactive engagement to ensure social care priorities remain prominent.
* The Chair and SE acknowledged the importance of adapting to potential political change and reassured the Board that they were engaged in ongoing discussions to address revised political priorities as they emerged.
* HMJ challenged the language in the paper, emphasising that the Board’s role was to scrutinise and where appropriate, challenge the initiatives which were proposed by officers. As currently written, the planning principles emphasised the importance of ensuring that ‘the activities that we are prioritising and delivering […were] clearly understood and accepted by the Board’; this was not consistent with the principles of effective governance and gave the wrong impression which did not reflect the reality of how things worked.
* SE accepted the point and agreed to amend the planning principles accordingly. In doing so, she emphasised that 2024-25 would be the mid-point of the current strategic plan and this offered the opportunity for the Board to review its priorities once the priorities of the new First Minister and the new Government were known.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions and asked AL to provide an overview of the budget strategy as included within the paper. AL began his summary by highlighting the overarching planning principles which had guided the budgeting process. He stressed the significance of ensuring affordability and sustainability in the face of the evolving funding landscape. He highlighted the transition from an annual budgeting cycle to a three-year cycle, citing the need for a more strategic approach given the uncertainties surrounding future funding settlements. He explained the concept of a consolidation year, explaining the challenges and opportunities that presented in terms of sustaining ongoing activities beyond their initial phase.AL also highlighted the importance of aligning the budget with performance frameworks, emphasising the need for activity-based budgeting to ensure that resources were allocated effectively based on service delivery outcomes. He provided updates on the various efficiency measures implemented in recent years, including the accommodation strategy which aimed to optimise office space and the adjustments made to pension contribution rates.AL drew the Board’s attention to the bottom line within the budget on page 152 of the papers. The Board would see that all activities were affordable and sustainable into 2025-26 but by 2026-27 the impact of increasing prices and pay awards would mean a predicted deficit position; this would require reserves to be used to achieve a balanced budget. The next iteration of the budget would focus on any further efficiencies or changes to programme delivery which would potentially reduce the in-year deficits. The Chair thanked AL for the comprehensive overview and asked members if there were any questions or comments. The following issue was discussed:* SB asked about potential fee increases given that this was income that the organisation had some control over.
* AL advised that a detailed proposal was submitted to the Welsh Government in November 2023, but informal feedback indicated that there was no appetite to support an increase in the fees; however, he did think that there was a need to keep the issue on the agenda. Not having a basic uplift in fees was the equivalent of half a million pound less income.

*(NB. The Chair lost connection at this point and JK Chaired in his absence.)** DB recognised that a fee increase may not be palatable but in difficult financial times there was a need to consider ways in which income could be increased and there was a need for a further conversation with the Welsh Government in that regard.
* AL advised that fees were a matter for the Board but in reality, it was difficult to progress without support from Welsh Government; a formal consultation process would also be required within the sector.
* DP offered an insight into how other regulatory bodies across the UK were addressing similar challenges. One of the four UK regulators was going out to consultation on fees soon and that could open up a wider debate and provide leverage to ask about fee levels again.
* JK said that going out to consultation could be potentially damaging to the organisation’s reputation as individual registrants would inevitably not want their fees raised. There was, therefore, a need to clearly communicate the organisation’s core responsibilities in order to justify any increase.
* TP agreed with DB’s comments; unpalatable as it was given the financial challenges experienced by the social care workforce, it might not be possible to maintain the current line on fees for much longer.
* GQ shared her personal experience in order to illustrate the potential impact of fee increases on individuals, particularly those facing financial hardship. She emphasised the need for empathy and understanding.
* SE reminded the Board that fees had not been increased for 10 years. She was surprised at the time that there was not a progressive indexed linked way of naturally increasing fees in a proportionate way to avoid destabilising people’s income. The previous increase was done on the basis of an incremental four-year uplift. Difficult decisions would need to be made in the absence of a fee increase to continue to deliver statutory functions and government priorities.

There were no further comments or questions and the Board agreed discussedand **considered** the draft Business Plan framework for 2024/25. There would be the opportunity for further informal discussion during the February Strategic Development Day, before the plan was presented for final approval at the 14 March Board meeting. *(NB – MG chaired from this point onwards.)* |
| **10.** | **Strengthening Governance Action Plan update** |
| i.ii.iii.iv.v. | The Chair provided the context for this item, reminded members that a rolling Strengthening Governance Action Plan had been in place since April 2020. The purpose of the Plan was to incrementally enhance the organisation's governance arrangements based on opportunities identified through successive efficiency reviews. Despite the impact of Covid, consistent progress had been made over the past two to three years, which had moved the organisation incrementally forward. Further details were provided within the paper.Most of the existing actions within the Plan had been delivered or were no longer relevant for reasons which were set out within the paper. Only two issues remained work in progress, namely: * Consideration of whether and when it would be appropriate to formally put in place a board assurance framework,
* Exploration of the reverse mentoring concept, which would likely be pursued in the next financial year.

The Chair asked if there were any comments or questions arising from the paper and the following was raised:* HMJ emphasised the importance of maintaining effective collaboration between the Executive and the Board, especially during transitions such as the arrival of a new Chief Executive.
* SE agreed with HMJ’s comments, highlighting the need for transparency, scrutiny and a respectful relationship between the executive and the Board.
* Both agreed on the importance of actively maintaining this dynamic rather than taking it for granted.

The Chair also recognised the need to sustain these practices, especially with the impending recruitment of a new Chief Executive. The selection criteria for the new CEO included values aligned with the organisation's culture and the ability to maintain an open relationship with the board. He provided an overview of the plans for the new Board member induction and training, emphasising the importance of team building and instilling the right culture from the outset.There were no other comments or questions, and the update was **noted** by the Board. The Chair anticipated that new actions would emerge from the 2023/24 Board Effectiveness Review in March 2024, which would lead to a refresh of the rolling plan.   |
| **11.** | **Ymlaen Strategy**  |
| i.ii.iii.iv. | SMcC provided a verbal update on the progress of the Ymlaen strategy. She explained that the final draft of the strategy was awaiting feedback from the Deputy Minister’s Office. She highlighted the extensive consultation process which sat behind the strategy, including sessions with various stakeholders and consideration of the twenty-three written responses which had been received.The final draft was currently undergoing review before being presented to the Executive Management Team (EMT) and then to the Board in March.SE said that positive feedback had been received from partners regarding the draft strategy. The leadership role being undertaken by the organisation and the collaborative effort involved in pulling together various elements of the strategy had been appreciated as various activities would sit with other organisations.There were no further comments or questions, and the update was **noted** by the Board. |
| **12.** | **Strategic Development Session Synopsis** |
| i.ii. | The paper provided a brief summary of the topics which had been discussed at Strategic Development sessions held since the last Board meeting. This was intended to provide insight of the work which had been undertaken between the formal Board meetings to a public audience.  It was not intended that the item was discussed unless a member wished to do so. No issues were raised, and the Board noted the information contained within the paper.   |
| **13.** | **Meeting Effectiveness** |
| i.ii.iii.iv. | All Board members were asked to retrospectively and anonymously complete a Microsoft Forms evaluation of the effectiveness of the meeting. In the meantime, the Chair asked for any general reflections. However, none were offered.The outcomes of the retrospective evaluation exercise which was subsequently undertaken was as follows (based on a rating scale of 1 to 5, 1 being poor and 5 being excellent):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Issue | Average Rating |
| Quality of papers? | 4.5 |
| Level of discussion and debate around key issues? | 4.25 |
| EMT response to challenges and suggestions raised? | 4.63 |
| Effectiveness of meeting overall | 4.38 |

The following free text comments were also provided in response to the question … ’How could today's meeting be improved?’:* Very smooth and well-planned meeting but with plenty of time for challenge and debate;
* I do find that on line meetings and the way we interact .. can mean the discussions is a little stilted at times.

The following free text comments were also provided in response to the question … ‘What opportunities were missed today?’;* Sometimes I think Board members, including myself, need to be more challenging to EMT;
* The CEO briefing was excellent and covers a lot of ground [but…] it raises a lot of questions and there is not always time to cover all of these.

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| **14.** | **Any Other Business** |
| i.ii. | No other business was discussed. The meeting finished at 12:30 |
| **Date of Next Meeting:**Thursday 14 March 2024**Actions** |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number** | **Item** | **Action** | **Who** |
| 01/24/SCW | 4 – Action log and matters arising  | Share data on number of overseas workers with the Board  | Llinos Bradbury  |
| 02/24/SCW | 7 Business Plan Q3 Progress report 2023-24 | Conversation at CCG meeting – Strategic development session how the organisation is viewed by tis customers | Llinos Bradbury  |