

Chief Executive Board Report

January 2026

1 Policy Advocacy and Pre-Election Engagement

Advocating for action to protect and improve health and reduce health inequalities is one of our core roles and is key to delivering our long-term strategy. Working with teams from across the organisation and with partner organisations, five policy advocacy messages have been identified where action at a policy level can make the biggest difference and help create a healthy and sustainable Wales.

Our five prevention-first messages are:

1. ***The best start in life builds lifelong health and wellbeing*** – the health and wellbeing of babies, children and young people need to be prioritised so they can thrive today and shape resilient communities tomorrow.
2. ***Financial wellbeing drives better health and a prosperous economy***– more people need to be supported to stay healthy and in work, and improve financial security so families can live well.
3. ***Healthy lives start in our everyday places*** – homes, shops, and public spaces need to be made healthier so it's easier for people to live well and avoid harmful habits.
4. ***Care tailored to local need builds health and resilience*** – primary and community care needs to be strengthened to prevent illness, respond early, and better meet the needs of supporting those with long term conditions.
5. ***A healthy planet protects our people now and in the future*** – people and communities need to be protected from the health risks of climate change and environmental harm.

Our messages have been shared and are informing engagement with Ministers, Welsh Government officials, opposition parties and our strategic partners and stakeholders.

A resource suite has been developed to support our advocacy engagement activities. These can be found on our webpage [Working together for a healthier Wales: Five policy priorities](#).

- [Infographic: At a glance](#)
- [Policy Messages: A summary of the five health policy priorities](#)
- [Policy Solutions: Practical actions to make a difference](#)
- [Why It Matters: Why better health strengthens fairness, wellbeing, and prosperity](#)
- [About us: Who we are and what we do](#)

Work continues with partner organisations to integrate and amplify our policy messages including work with the Welsh NHS Confederation, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. Learning from

our engagements and resources is helping inform our approach to public health advocacy for the longer term.

2 2025 Structured Assessment by Audit Wales

Our 2025 Structured Assessment from Audit Wales provides a positive and reassuring view of Public Health Wales' corporate governance, financial management, planning and assurance arrangements.

The report confirms that we continue to operate with strong, transparent governance, supported by information to enable effective scrutiny and decision-making. Audit Wales highlights further strengthening of our systems for managing risk, performance and recommendations, alongside a clear and maturing approach to delivering our long-term strategy through our Strategic Plan and the route maps for our strategic priorities.

Financial planning and stewardship remain robust, with us meeting our statutory duties in 2024–2025 and forecasting a balanced position again for 2025–2026. Importantly, the assessment makes **no new recommendations**, noting that we have fully implemented five outstanding actions from previous years, with only one longer-term recommendation still in progress. Overall, the report reflects a well-governed, learning organisation with strong foundations to deliver its strategic priorities for the people of Wales which is always a fortunate position for us to be in.

Behind the findings of the structured assessment is a significant amount of work that we do not take for granted and so a very big thank you to everyone involved.

3 Infection and Screening Division - Successful UKAS Inspections 2025

Last year, our Infection Services, encompassing 19 different laboratories and including several reference laboratories, successfully transitioned to the updated ISO standards from ISO 15189: 2012 to ISO 15189:2022. A comprehensive gap analysis was conducted by the Quality Team in collaboration with laboratory managers. Assessments against both the previous and updated standards were subsequently completed, the transition was successful, resulting in network-wide accreditation under the new standards as a Wales network.

This occasion was our full reaccreditation, which means **all** tests from **all** laboratories were assessed including our overarching Quality Management Systems.

In advance of the assessment, more than 300 specifically requested documents for evidence, were submitted for review to UKAS.

We had a total of six assessors visit our laboratories over 18 days in November. They intensely scrutinised our testing, key management systems, risk management, service agreements, non-conforming work, business continuity preparedness, quality indicators and our audit, amongst other elements. We had a total of 41 non-conformances, which were mostly very minor. Our submission date was the 2 January at which point already 94% of the findings had been overturned and our evidence accepted.

All assessors provided very positive feedback regarding our workforce, testing processes and quality assurance practises. One assessor noted that he is routinely asked by the assessment manager for feedback, and his response was simply, “just keep doing what you are doing” which was particularly complimentary.

Our Infection Service is able to demonstrate a continued Quality service to our users, demonstrating effective management systems, reliable non- biased audits and effective Quality assurance and control.

This has been a significant Infection team effort, led by the Quality Team and the success demonstrates our staff’s ongoing adherence to compliant processes and procedures, filling in of documentation and alerting when incidents/issues arise and their demonstration of professionalism before, during and after the assessment.

In addition, our Screening Division Laboratory – which provides testing services to Bowel Screening Wales, Cervical Screening Wales and an all-Wales Symptomatic FIT service for the investigation of symptoms associated with colorectal cancer, also had a full reassessment visit on the 19-20th November 2025. The laboratory quality manager and the wider management team had prepared for this reassessment by submitting copies of documents and records as requested by the UKAS inspection team, alongside a comprehensive review of key components of the laboratory’s quality management system. The reassessment visit by two technical assessors and an assessment manager, was a rigorous and in-depth examination of the laboratory management, systems, and processes. The assessment team raised a relatively high number of minor nonconformities, which the laboratory felt reflected the intensity of the reassessment.

The final reassessment report recommended that accreditation under ISO 15189:2022 is renewed for all activities within the laboratory’s current scope.

These are significant achievements across our laboratory system and I would like to express my enormous thanks to our teams for their unrelenting focus on quality and assurance.

4 Delivering Rapid Sequencing of the First Mpox Clade 1 Genome

On the 31 October, the first Clade 1b Mpox case was detected in Wales by the Welsh Specialist Virology Centre. Following receipt of the sample our Pathogen Genomics Unit (PenGU) successfully sequenced the sample within a week, rapidly sharing the data internationally to support global efforts to track Mpox. PenGU completed all work before the UK Health Security Agency’s (UKHSA) Rare and Imported Pathogen Laboratory (RIPL) had completed their sequencing of the sample. This rapid turnaround, with a sequencing result delivered more quickly and cheaply than the established UKHSA service, is a great credit to our staff who conducted the work.

This achievement is even more impressive given the service is still at an early stage of development. Initiated in 2025 by the Public Health Genomics programme, and led by PenGU, the Mpox service aims to provide a new sovereign Welsh metagenomics capability for sequencing Mpox and other viruses. The delivery of actionable public health information in real time, less than a year after development

started attests to a rapid pace of development. Collectively this work demonstrates effective long-term planning and collaborative working within PHW and with stakeholders including Welsh Government, Genomics Partnership Wales and Illumina.

Global challenges including climate change and international conflict increase the risk of both new and old infectious diseases reaching our shores. Mpox is one of several (re)emerging infectious diseases of global concern, with Mpox Clade 1 designated a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO in 2024 due to its disease severity. It is vital that Wales is ready to face biological threats, and further development work will help us provide a robust, reliable and sustainable capability that enhances Wales' biological security.

5 Health Impact Assessment Guides

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Regulations, passed by the Senedd in November 2025, will require specified public bodies to undertake HIAs when making strategic decisions, with a transition period from April 2026 ahead of full commencement in April 2027. In line with statutory duties under the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017, through our Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU), we are responsible for providing guidance and support to public bodies.

In support of the implementation of the HIA Regulations, our WHIASU has developed two guides to promote a consistent, proportionate and evidence-based approach to HIA across Wales and to support wider commitments to health, wellbeing and reducing inequalities.

The statutory guide, *Health Impact Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2025: A guide for public bodies in Wales*, focuses on legal compliance, setting out key definitions, required steps and practical tools. The second guide, *Health Impact Assessment (HIA): A practical guide for voluntary best practice in Wales*, replaces the 2012 guidance and provides more detailed best-practice advice for voluntary use. These guides will be supported by a programme of training, communications and ongoing support led by WHIASU, building on preparatory work underway since 2022 and continuing through the transition period to support national readiness for implementation.

As a public body, we will of course also be subject to the HIA regulations in relation to our decision-making on significant and strategic items.

6 Better Health Through Behavioural Science: An Enabling Plan for Wales Launch

On the 12 November 2025, over 150 colleagues from across Wales – spanning health, national and local government, Transport for Wales, academia and the third sector – convened for our most significant Behavioural Science Community for Wales event since its establishment in 2023. The event aimed to explore how applying behavioural science in our work aiming for better health and wellbeing and health equity can improve effectiveness and optimise outcomes for the people of Wales.

Sumina Azam, our National Director for Policy and International Health, opened the conference and set the scene, which along with a keynote address from Isabel Oliver, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, made the case for using behavioural science in our activities for better health.

Both leaders introduced and discussed *Better health through behavioural science; an enabling plan for Wales* which has been produced by our Behavioural Science Unit with input from a range of stakeholders in behavioural science and public health, the Plan sets out a vision that '*Activity to deliver better health and reduce health inequity is optimised through the systematic application of behavioural science, in its development, implementation and evaluation*'.

To achieve the vision the Plan provides a clear, evidence-informed route map to create the conditions required for embedding behavioural science more routinely and systematically across services, policy, communications, improvement and innovation.

The day featured a rich agenda of workshops, presentations, open-space activity and panel discussions showcasing practical applications of behavioural science. Key sessions introduced new learning and development programs from the Behavioural Science Unit and explored cutting-edge approaches, including AI and systems change. There was also an exclusive preview of emerging updates to one of the world's most widely used behavioural science frameworks and models, from Professor Robert West (University College London), a co-author of those original world-leading approaches.

7 'Do You See MY Trauma? The Lived Realities of Minority Ethnic People' Report

On the 14 November 2025, the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Hub Wales, in collaboration with Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales, launched a groundbreaking report documenting the lived realities of the experience of racial trauma that is happening daily in our communities in Wales. The report, '*Do You See MY Trauma? The Lived Realities of Minority Ethnic People*' and accompanying film, which brought the voices of participants to the audience, set out how racism and discrimination are experienced as traumatic events in communities across Wales. This includes accessing services such as health, education, and criminal justice meaning that people are often unable to get the help they need and are traumatised by trying with huge impact on health, wellbeing and social outcomes.

The report was commissioned by our ACE Hub Wales to support the commitment to developing racially-trauma -informed resources in the Criminal Justice system Anti-Racism Action Plan for Wales. The joint Senior Responsible Officers for the plan Emma Wools, Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales and Chief Constable Mark Hobrough (National Police Chiefs Council lead for Hate Crime), were keynote speakers at the launch, and we welcomed attendees from the Welsh government, policing in Wales, third sector services including mental health, support form sanctuary seekers and community based organisations. The report and films will be presented to Ministers in January and will continue to inform work to ensure that the

implementation of the trauma-informed Wales Framework is inclusive of all experiences of adversity and trauma in Wales. The report can be accessed at:

[Do+You+See+My+Trauma+Report+ENG.pdf](#) [English]

[WELSH+Do+You+See+My+Trauma.pdf](#) [Welsh]

8 Workforce Health: New Healthy Working Wales Products for Employers

Our Healthy Working Wales team has launched a trio of exciting, free products to support employers to improve workplace health and wellbeing.

The new products are:

- **[HWW Employer Survey Tool](#)** - Enables employers to assess their current approach to workplace health and wellbeing and get clear advice, feedback and suggested next steps to strengthen their workplace wellbeing strategy.
- **[Workplace Adviser Support](#)** - Allows employers to access one-to-one, virtual support sessions from HWW's Workplace Advisers to get simple ideas, tools and plans that they can put into action straight away in their workplace.
- **[Peer Mentoring Programme](#)** - Helps employers across Wales to connect and share real-world experiences, practical knowledge and proven approaches to workplace health and wellbeing.

Over 70 employers and partner organisations attended a launch event with a variety of guest speakers including Sarah Murphy MS, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, along with exhibitor stands run by organisations providing health and wellbeing support to employers including Business Wales, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Case UK, Mind in Powys and Hapus (a mental wellbeing programme run by us).

In her speech on the Welsh Government's vision for workplace wellbeing, Sarah Murphy MS, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, stated: "Healthy Working Wales provides employers with a valuable service, offering free, evidence-based guidance and tools to improve workplace health and well-being. This is not a 'nice to have'—it is an economic imperative." Other guest speakers at the event included Professor Jim McManus, our National Director of Health and Wellbeing, Paul Billington from Admiral provided a success story with a real-life example of workplace health tools making a difference in Wales and Emily Van De Venter, Consultant in Public Health, talked about recent research by our Mental Health and Wellbeing Team on 16 to 24 year olds' mental health. This was followed by a solution-focused workshop on practical ideas for how organisations in Wales can better support young people (aged 16 to 24) in the workplace.

Additional information on the HWW programme, the new products, and all resources, can be found on the [HWW website](#).

9 The All-Wales Immune Patrol Pilot

What is Immune Patrol? 'Immune Patrol' is a digital, game-based learning platform created by the World Health Organization (WHO). The game helps students aged 10-12 learn about the immune system, vaccine-preventable diseases, and the public health rationale behind immunisation. Research in other European countries show that students learn more, stay motivated, and take part more actively when using the game.

Immune Patrol in Wales: Immune Patrol offers a pioneering way to improve young people's vaccine and health literacy through Welsh schools. We are proud to be the first nation in the UK to introduce Immune Patrol to schools. In 2024, we worked with a selection of schools across Wales to test Immune Patrol in classroom settings, focussing on pupils in Years 6 and 7. Analysis of pre and post linked knowledge quiz scores showed gains in pupil knowledge on vaccines and immunisation. For example, 47.8% of pupils showed improved knowledge on vaccine development, and 47.8% showed improved knowledge of herd immunity. Teacher evaluation highlighted pupils "really enjoyed learning through the missions" and that many were "very much engaged and particularly loved the game". This appeared to facilitate understanding of key concepts, with one teacher noting that pupils had gained "an understanding of their bodies and how vaccinations help them".

The rationale for why Immune Patrol was introduced in Wales: In recent years we have seen decreasing uptake and widening inequalities in adolescent vaccinations (annual cover report 2024-2025). This means that more young people are missing out on opportunities for protection against serious infections. Ensuring young people understand vaccinations, immunity and trusted sources of information, is key to improving immunisation uptake and equity. This approach uses partnership working; a trusted, inclusive and health promoting setting; and aligns with the National Immunisation Framework (NIF) and vaccination literacy standards.

Our Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme Team worked with the WHO, the Welsh Language team and partners to produce a complete Welsh language version of Immune Patrol, '*Helwyr Heintiau*', to enable a large-scale national pilot to take place with both Welsh and English language versions over the 2025-2026 academic year.

Improvements from evaluation feedback and learning from the test-phase in 2024-2025 have been applied to the larger 2025-2026 pilot. These include broadening effective partnerships, including gaining support from the Welsh Government in a letter to all Directors of Education, mapping the learning outcomes of Immune Patrol to the Curriculum for Wales to enable teachers to identify where the programmes fits within their tailored curriculum planning, offering increased flexibility and convenience for schools taking on the programme, online registration and reducing number of contacts for busy teaching staff to enable easier access and onboarding, offering an e-resources platform for schools and partners to access all information and creating accessible bitesize educational videos in English and Welsh about the school-age vaccination programmes for partners to use across Wales to increase our reach and mobilise local connections (Public Health Wales Asset Library).

10 Update on the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

The UK COVID-19 Public Inquiry is now in its final stages of its public hearings and our input into the Inquiry has continued to be scaled back.

Since our last update, the Public Inquiry has heard evidence in Module 9, Economic Response. We were not involved in this module. The evidence largely focused on the UK Government's financial response, with there being limited reference to Wales or the other devolved administrations.

The module 10, Impact on Society, public hearings will commence on the 16 February 2026 and conclude on 5 March 2026. This will be the final public hearing that the Inquiry holds. We have had no involvement in this module.

The Public Inquiry published its Module 2, A, B and C combined report on the 20 November 2025. The report contained 10 lessons and 19 recommendations, which the UK Government and devolved administrations are to consider and implement. The Inquiry requires each government to provide a response to the report within three months of its publication.

The Board will be updated in full in the public session of the Board on 29 January 2026. The Public Inquiry has provided an update on its schedule for publishing its reports as recommendations as follows:

Module 3: Healthcare systems	19 March 2026
Module 4: Vaccines and Therapeutics	16 April 2026
Module 5: Procurement	Summer 2026
Module 6: Care Sector	Towards the end of 2026
Module 7: Test, Trace and Isolate	Towards the end of 2026
Module 8: Children and Young People	First half of 2027
Module 9: Financial Response	First half of 2027
Module 10: Impact on Society	First half of 2027

We are core participants in modules 4, 6 and 7, and will be invited to the report publication event and have sight of the report and recommendations ahead of publication. We will plan for and attend these events in the same way as we did for other modules.

We are not core participants in modules 3, 5, 8, 9 or 10. We will therefore not be invited to the report publication events, nor will we have sight of the reports and recommendations prior to publication. We will be able to review the reports once they have been published on the Inquiry website and will consider them immediately upon publication.

11 Gold Award for our Armed Forces Community in Public Health Wales

As proud supporters of the Armed Forces Community, we are pleased to confirm that we have retained our Employee Recognition Scheme Gold Award until 2030.

We first signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2017. By signing the Armed Forces Covenant, we committed to supporting the Armed Forces Community; Serving Regular and Reservist Personnel, Veterans and their families and provided the opportunity to be recognised by the Employer Recognition Scheme award. The Scheme allows the Ministry of Defence to publicly thank, honour and acknowledge those employers that provide exceptional support to the Armed Forces Community, by going above and beyond their covenant pledges. We first achieved our Bronze award in 2018, progressing through to Silver in 2019 and Gold in 2020.

To attain, and retain the Gold Award, holders must be able to demonstrate a number of criteria including:

- signing of the Armed Forces Covenant
- be an exemplar within their sector, advocating for the Armed Forces Community and the Employee Recognition Scheme to partner organisations
- actively encourage a positive workplace environment for Active Reservists by ensuring that the relevant policies are in place to support the community, such as a Mobilisation Policy and demonstrate an understanding of the Mobilisation process and supporting their training requirements
- engagement with Career Transition Partnership to support recruitment of services leavers and have registered with the Forces Families Jobs website
- ensure that the service leavers/ veteran community are not unfairly disadvantaged as part of the recruitment and selection processes
- for those organisations who have Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, that their working hours are accommodated to support their volunteering requirements.

12 MBE Award for One of our Former Senior Nurses

We are delighted with the announcement that Caroline Whittaker, RRC, retired Professional Lead, Nursing Midwifery and Standards Manager at Public Health Wales, has been awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the King's New Years Honours list for services to nursing and voluntary work.

Caroline has dedicated her career to improving standards of nursing and midwifery practice, supporting the workforce, and strengthening public health services across Wales. Alongside her professional leadership role, she also made a significant contribution through voluntary work, supporting communities and championing health and wellbeing.

Her work at Public Health Wales included providing expert leadership on professional standards, quality improvement and workforce development, helping to ensure safe, effective and compassionate care for the people of Wales.

We are thrilled for Caroline for this very well deserved honour.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to receive this information.

Tracey Cooper

CHIEF EXECUTIVE