

# Scrutinising the Welsh Government's response to coronavirus: key issues from Senedd Committees

## Research Briefing

July 2020



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# 1. Background

On 3 July the Senedd's **Committee for Scrutiny of the First Minister** will scrutinise the First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, on the Welsh Government's approach to tackling the coronavirus pandemic. The First Minister will be accompanied by the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, Jeremy Miles MS, as the Minister responsible for co-ordinating the Welsh Government's work on recovery. The Committee is comprised of the Chairs of all other Senedd Committees and normally meets once per term.

During the pandemic, Senedd Committees have focused their work on the impact of the virus and how the Welsh Government has responded. This research paper does not consider all of the issues arising from the pandemic which have emerged during scrutiny. Rather it focuses on key, forward looking issues. It has been prepared to support Members of the Committee. However, we are publishing it given the wider public interest in the pandemic response.

The background evidence in each Committee, and reports produced by those Committees, **can be access through their webpages.**

## 2. Children, Young People and Education Committee

### 2.1. Children's health and well-being

- Although current evidence suggests that children are less likely to be severely affected by the virus itself, the longer-term impact on their health as a result of delays in seeking, or being unable to access, advice and treatment for non-coronavirus conditions is a greater concern. As is the impact of a reduced take-up of routine vaccination programmes.
- The impact of the coronavirus restrictions on children and young people's emotional and mental health, and how we can get a clearer understanding of their long-term needs, is an area of concern. There are concerns around support services' capacity to respond to an increased demand for support.
- The Welsh Government has announced that digital services (e.g. video consultations) introduced in NHS Wales during the pandemic are here to stay. There are concerns about their effectiveness and the opportunities to identify and protect vulnerable children. Online services may not suit all children and young people and not all families have access to digital technology.
- Continuity of safeguarding and child protection services and support for vulnerable children.
- How the Welsh Government is meeting its legal duty to pay due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in decisions about the response to coronavirus, in particular what Child Rights Impact Assessments have been undertaken.

### 2.2. Childcare

- Childcare settings' role in supporting the response to coronavirus by making provision to children of key workers. How health and safety is being managed in these settings, including social distancing for very young children. The impact of the temporary relaxation of minimum standards (staffing ratios) in settings to enable continuity of provision.
- The financial viability of childcare providers during and after lockdown.
- Rules regarding who can provide childcare during the pandemic, for example family members not living in the same home as the child.
- The next steps for the reopening of childcare settings to a wider range of



children beyond children of key workers and vulnerable children.

### 2.3. Schools

- Health and safety in the schools/hubs making provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children in terms of numbers of staff and children attending, and management of social distancing measures.
- Continuity of learning for all pupils, including those who are not accessing provision in hubs. The potential inequality arising from differing home learning experiences of children and young people due to factors such as technology and other digital learning aids, housing and living conditions, and parental capacity to support home learning.
- The phased re-opening of schools from 29 June. How social distancing and staggering of pupils' attendance (maximum of one third) will work in practice; transport and other logistical issues.
- The strategic approach to schools' resumption, restructuring of school terms and what the 'new normal' will look like in September. How this fits into the Minister for Education's five principles and the Welsh Government's traffic light guide.
- The impact of the cancellation of 2020 examinations, the implications for students' next steps and the impact of loss of teaching time on the 2021 curriculum and qualifications.

### 2.4. Post-16 education

- The sustainability of the higher education sector in Wales over the next 18 months whilst ensuring students receive high quality teaching, learning and assessment. What action the Welsh Government is or would be willing to take to stabilise the sector as a whole (with or without UK Government action); or how it would seek to manage a situation where an institution was at a high risk of failing.
- The role the further education sector could play in a recession to reduce youth unemployment and re- or up-skill adults made redundant. What actions the Welsh Government will / would be willing to take to enable this role.
- Whether the Welsh Government is assessing the extent of the impact of interrupted learning for post-16 learners on progression, both within institutions, and as they progress to work or study elsewhere. Whether the Welsh Government will then look to safeguard the most vulnerable young people in this regard, and if so how?

## 3. Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

### 3.1. Agriculture

- The Welsh Government support scheme for the dairy industry. The application window runs from 18 June until 14 August. Will this be extended? Stakeholders state that support schemes for the beef and lamb sectors may also be required.
- Farming unions are disappointed by the lack of “transparency” on discussions about redirecting rural development payments to support the industry due to coronavirus. They are critical of the Welsh Government's proposed regulations on agricultural pollution and the timing of the announcement during the pandemic.
- Opportunities to increase horticultural production in Wales in light of the pandemic.
- How the pandemic might affect the development of post-Brexit agricultural policy.

### 3.2. Food

- What support the Welsh Government is planning for the hospitality and food and drink service sectors as they prepare to reopen.
- The Welsh Government has acted to mitigate problems in getting food into supermarkets, including relaxing planning rules around delivery and store opening times. The Committee is looking to ensure these changes are kept under review so they are not in place for longer than is necessary.
- Food processing capacity continues to be a problem in Wales with much raw produce transported to England for processing.
- The Committee is exploring opportunities which have come to light during the pandemic around shortening supply chains, including to minimise carbon emissions.

### 3.3. Nature conservation

- The Committee is exploring how environmental Non-governmental Organisations are being impacted by the pandemic. This includes funding, ability to manage nature reserves, the Welsh Government's Supplementary budget and calls for a 'green recovery'.

### 3.4. Animal welfare

- The Committee is exploring animal welfare concerns with the Minister. This includes the welfare of pets in the crisis and access to veterinary services. The welfare of livestock, including bovine TB testing, is also being considered.

## 4. Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

### 4.1. Arts

- Charitable organisations and individual creatives generally carry no sizeable reserves and so are vulnerable to the economic shock of the pandemic.
- The arts workforce is dominated by freelancers, who have lost the majority of their commissions. The UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme are unsuitable for many people working in the arts.
- Current difficulties are exacerbated for organisations (mostly venues) who achieve a high proportion of their income from ticket sales, retail income and other secondary spend. The 67 key arts organisations revenue-funded by Arts Council of Wales are losing around £1.45m a week. The Arts Council has estimated that the Wales Millennium Centre could lose £20m in income this year.
- Most cultural venues need to operate close to full capacity for events to turn a profit. Re-opening with social distancing is not financially viable for most arts organisations.

### 4.2. Creative industries

- About 40,000 freelancers work in the Welsh creative industries. **Research** by Creative Cardiff and Cardiff University's Creative Economy Unit suggests that eligibility criteria for the Self-employment Income Support Scheme "exclude significant parts of the freelance workforce", and that compensation would be a "a fraction of that received by furloughed PAYE employees".
- Many small music venues operate with small profit margins and are ill-equipped to withstand enforced closure caused by social distancing.

### 4.3. Journalism

- CWLC raised concerns over misreporting of devolved issues during the

pandemic with Westminster's DCMS Committee and media organisations.

#### 4.4. Sport

- During the lockdown overall levels of **physical activity** have not shifted significantly, though existing inequalities have deepened. People from higher socio-economic groups are doing more exercise, and people from lower groups are doing less.
- At club, national governing body, local authority and leisure trust level, the economic impact of coronavirus restrictions threatens the ability of sport to return to pre-pandemic activity levels.

#### 4.5. Welsh language

- The pandemic has had a significant impact on Welsh language cultural events. Both the Urdd National Eisteddfod and the National Eisteddfod, along with other Welsh language cultural events such as Tafwyl have been cancelled in their original format. This could have a long-term impact on the finances of these organisations. The Urdd, for instance, has suggested the pandemic could cost the organisation up to £4m after the closure of its three residential centres and the cancelled event. Supporting such organisations and events in the future will be critical for the future of the language and the Welsh Government's target of a million Welsh speakers.

## 5. Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

### 5.1. Economy

- The **Committee recommended** the Welsh Government should share its thinking on how its current economic approach might need to change in the medium to longer term as a result of the pandemic, and give an early indication of what 'building back better' might look like.
- It recommended that the Welsh Government should provide information on longer-term business support funding requirements for Wales in light of the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until October 2020.
- It asked to be updated on the role the UK Shared Prosperity Fund could play in lending additional support to help Wales recover from the effects of the pandemic, and provide an update on recent discussions with the UK Government on timescales for announcements on the fund.

- EIS Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should set out details of any representations it has made to the UK Government regarding the importance of funding for business support, apprenticeship and skills programmes to aid Wales' recovery from coronavirus. These areas currently receive funding via EU Structural Funds, which will need to be replaced.
- It recommended the Welsh Government should update the Committee on its thinking around regional policy in light of the pandemic and the requirements of recovery support for different regions, in particular any changes to current regional support structures or regional economic priorities needed.
- The Committee recommended that the Welsh Government should regularly report on the impacts of the pandemic on different economic sectors, regions of Wales and on different sections of society such as people with different protected characteristics.
- It said the Welsh Government should issue clear, consistent guidance on social distancing for all businesses when lockdown is eased as far in advance as possible to allow them to prepare.
- It recommended that, when issuing its sectoral return-to-work safety guidance, the Welsh Government should consider prioritising sectors which will require most work as well as sectors which will open first. For example, tourism may be one of the last sectors to reopen, however some tourism businesses will need to implement structural changes.

## 5.2. Transport

- The Committee highlighted issues around the availability of buses and trains for socially distanced services. Bus operators were unclear in mid-June about public funding arrangements to support socially distanced services from 1 July.
- Taxi and private hire drivers are struggling on low incomes, and there are safety concerns around the cost and approval process for protective screens.
- The aviation industry has been hit hard. Existing loans to Cardiff Airport have been "reprofiled" and it is not clear how the airport will now fund certain regulatory obligations with funding now diverted to the survival of the business.
- The Welsh Government has issued a call for local authorities to submit proposals for temporary active travel and sustainable transport measures. The Committee queried the process and criteria involved. The Welsh Government **has now announced** the outcome of this process.
- Given public concerns about the safety of public transport the long-term future of public transport is uncertain if habits change and car travel increases.

### 5.3. Skills

- Professor Ewart Keep told EIS Committee that youth unemployment is a “huge looming issue” in the coming recession. He explained that “research evidence and the experience from previous recessions like this is that, for the most disadvantaged young people, the key is the provision of work experience and transition support, but work experience is utterly critical”. How is Welsh Government going to tackle this issue and offer work experience (for example through apprenticeships) at a time when the labour market will have contracted and opportunities may be far fewer?
- The first supplementary budget (May 2020) reduced the original allocations for the apprenticeship programme and the employability and skills programme. It is also not known what quantum of EU funding will be allocated to both. At a time when youth unemployment is a “huge looming issue”, and adult re-skilling likely to become very important, the level of funding available to two key programmes appears to have been reduced by £17.7m (£11.8m for apprenticeships, £5.9m for employability and skills).

## 6. Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

### 6.1. Equality and human rights

- The Welsh population is more vulnerable to coronavirus because of its older population and the higher prevalence of certain health conditions. Men and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have much higher proportional death rates. Mortality rates in the most deprived areas of Wales are almost twice as high as those in the least deprived areas. The higher mortality rates have been attributed to demographic and socio-economic factors, as well as peoples' health profile. The economic impact of the virus is also likely to disproportionately affect those already on low incomes.
- The Welsh Government has taken a range of measures to alleviate the disproportionate impact on groups, such as establishing an advisory group on specific issues faced by black, Asian and ethnic minority groups (including the roll out of a self-risk assessment tool for health workers), increasing the Discretionary Assistance Fund, providing a sign language interpreter at daily press briefing, amending the lockdown restrictions to allow people with particular health conditions or disabilities to leave their houses more than once a day to exercise, and ensuring people with no recourse to public funds can

access emergency shelter.

- The Deputy Minister and Chief Whip told the Committee “all policies, not just policies relating to my portfolio, but across the Welsh Government, are rigorously scrutinised in terms of equality impacts”. These assessments have not been published.
- The Committee heard concerns that, as lockdown eases, more people who have experienced abuse will come forward to access services. The sector is calling for emergency funding to cover losses in revenue, PPE costs and reductions of refuge beds due to social distancing. The Committee was told about rises in calls to their helpline, and concerns about older people who are shielding and reliant on abusive partners or relatives during this period. The Committee is concerned about the long term financial sustainability of the sector, given that the Welsh Government's commitment to find a sustainable funding model has not been fulfilled after four years.
- The Welsh Government's plan for leading Wales out of the pandemic sets out principles that will be used to examine ways to ease the current restrictions. One of these seven principles is an assessment of whether the measure will have “a high positive equality impact”, but doesn't mention human rights, unlike the equivalent Scottish plan.
- The Committee is continuing to take evidence on the longer term impact on equality in Wales, including health inequalities, the impact of predicted grades on black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils, the human rights of older people and disabled people, and the socio-economic impact on women.

## 6.2. Local Government

- Local authorities have received additional funding support from the Welsh Government in response to the pandemic (c£110m with an additional £78m expected). A significant proportion has been allocated to specific services and policy areas, such as social care, free school meals and rough sleeping. The funding provided does not necessarily compensate for the loss of income from the closure of leisure centres, sports and performance venues, and from reduced parking fees, moving traffic offences and rent on industrial units for example.
- The Minister for Housing and Local Government also confirmed that the Welsh Government has ‘front-loaded’ some of the revenue support grant to support local authorities during the pandemic (c.£526m), and that she is working with local authorities to understand their shortfalls in income. The **Minister noted:** “Our big worry is not now. I'm not worried about now. We're worried about what

will happen at the other end of the year.”

- Members were encouraged by some positive changes to service delivery and local authority working practices as a result of the pandemic. Some of these could or should be continued post pandemic. In particular, the shift in attitude by some local authorities towards third sector bodies stood out. These are now seen as integral partners in the decision-making process.

### 6.3. Housing

- The Committee wanted to see rough sleepers and other homeless people who have been provided with temporary accommodation during the pandemic supported into sustainable long term accommodation. The Welsh Government has launched guidance to support phase two of its response to homelessness during the pandemic. A £20m one-off fund (revenue and capital) has been made available to support local authorities with this. Phase 2 plans need to be submitted to the Welsh Government by the end of June 2020.
- The Committee has concerns about non-devolved areas that impact directly on housing, including Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates (which were increased by the UK government as a result of the pandemic) and restrictions on people with no recourse to public funds.
- It's uncertain what will happen when the moratorium on court possession proceedings ends in August and landlords can evict tenants again. While social landlords have agreed that nobody will be evicted because of financial hardship caused by coronavirus, there are concerns about what may happen in the private rented sector.

## 7. External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee

- The Brexit transition period is due to end on 31 December 2020. Both the negotiations on the UK-EU future relationship and domestic preparations, which are required regardless of whether agreement is reached, have been disrupted by the pandemic. The UK Government has confirmed that it will not seek an extension to the transition period. This leaves five months for negotiations on a future relationship to conclude, and for a deal to be ratified by both the UK and EU. Both sides agreed at a high level conference on 15 June to intensify talks between the parties. The First Ministers of Wales and Scotland have written to the Prime Minister to call for an extension to the transition period in light of the pandemic.



- The **Counsel General and Minister for European Transition (CGMET) told the Committee** “the scale of the immediate crisis has hugely reduced the capacity of people, businesses and other organisations to consider, let alone take action to prepare for, the end of transition.” This includes implementation of any future relationship arrangements, including infrastructure, new border checks and operations, new travel and trade rules and the potential disruption to food and medicine supplies. Preparedness also includes the implementation of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, including the Ireland-Northern Ireland Protocol, which will likely impact Welsh ports, road and rail usage for freight transport, and citizens' rights.
- A domestic legislative programme to prepare for the end of transition is ongoing, including primary legislation, “**a significant programme of statutory instruments**”, and agreement on new UK common policy frameworks to replace those currently in force via the EU. The UK Government is also seeking to negotiate and/or join a series of international agreements, including its Trade Continuity Programme, and new trade agreements with the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, all of which have been affected by the pandemic.
- The CGMET has also advised that there has been **significant redeployment** of Welsh Government staff from preparedness to the pandemic response.

## 8. Finance Committee

### 8.1. Welsh Government funding and spending

- The Welsh Government needs to continue to explore with the UK Government the case for funding consequentialities relating to coronavirus to reflect the additional needs of the elderly population and hospitality sector in Wales.
- The Committee discussed the **Welsh Government's request** that the UK Government relax both the annual limits within borrowing powers and access to the Wales reserve, and also whether borrowing limits can be increased “to further support its capital programmes this year if necessary and to aid the economic recovery over the longer term”.
- The Welsh Government is seeking powers to move capital funding to revenue. It is important that the wider impacts of delaying or cancelling capital projects is considered as part of any such decision.
- The Committee discussed with the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd how her role interacts with that of the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition. It is important that the Finance Minister has a role in impact

assessing and overseeing funding allocations for the wider impact of proposed policies to relax lockdown and support businesses, the public sector and individuals.

- The Committee believes that considerable additional funding will need to be provided this year. It recommended that: the Welsh Government accelerate work to support local economies, including refocussing this to account for current circumstances, such as the impact on town centres; provide more information on how funding is being reprioritised to focus on a green recovery; and more detail on how much will be provided to embed positive transport changes. There is also a need to be more explicit regarding planning scenarios that are being considered for the end of the EU transition period and the associated funding that is needed.

## 8.2. UK Government funded schemes

- The Committee believes it is important that the Welsh Government is informed about key announcements that impact Welsh people and businesses, such as changes to the Job Retention Scheme, in a timely way that enables it to plan complimentary policies effectively.

# 9. Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

## 9.1. Testing

- The Welsh Government and Public Health Wales (PHW) have been criticised for a sustained failure to meet daily testing targets, with concerns also about difficulties encountered by many in being able to access testing. Policy on testing in care homes has changed frequently, with testing for all care home residents and staff only recently made available.
- The transition from 1 June into the Test, Trace, Protect phase represents a major challenge, involving the need for significantly increased testing capacity and delivery, as well as substantial contact tracing work.
- An effective testing and contact tracing programme forms part of the Welsh Government's framework for leading Wales out the pandemic and is considered important to be able to lift further restrictions.

## 9.2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- After initial pressures, PPE supply and availability has improved across both health and social care. The Welsh Government has been actively supporting more domestic production, although about 90% of Wales' PPE still comes from

abroad. However, professional bodies have identified pressure points, especially within the care sector and ensuring appropriate fit of PPE; they would continue to seek re-assurance on the continuity of PPE supplies, particularly once current lockdown arrangements are eased.

### 9.3. Vulnerable people and shielding

- Getting help and support from services, such as priority deliveries from supermarkets, is conditional on receiving a shielding letter from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales. The **Royal College of General Practitioners said** GPs were being asked to put people on the list as they need these services and that “it would have been better to try and separate the access to services from the medical advice”. This issue has also been raised by care homes struggling to access food deliveries.
- Pharmacies have seen significant increases in medicine delivery. The **Royal Pharmaceutical Society raised** the issue of sustainability around the delivery service, particularly if this trend continues into the winter months.
- Those who are **shielding** are currently being asked to do so until 15 August 2020.

### 9.4. Care homes

- HSCS Committee is concerned about the significant financial pressures Welsh care homes are facing. The care home sector was already financially fragile. Falling occupancy rates during the outbreak mean many homes are struggling financially. Care Forum Wales said unless urgent support is forthcoming, there will be care home closures week on week during the summer. It explained occupancy is falling with residents passing away and homes have felt unable to accept new admissions (particularly on discharge from hospital) in order to protect current residents. There are additional concerns that a new PHW policy that care homes should not routinely accept new residents until they have no new cases for 28 days will put further financial strain on the sector.
- There is significant concern about whether sufficient protection has been (and will be) provided for vulnerable care home residents. Both the UK and Welsh Governments have been criticised for a lack of testing in care settings, and particularly for not testing hospital patients sooner on discharge to care homes. On 21 May the Older People's Commissioner for Wales called for the Welsh Government to be investigated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) over concerns that older people's human rights may have been breached. The EHRC said it 'deeply concerned' and 'is considering the use of all its powers to protect older people's rights'. Residents' wellbeing has also

been significantly affected by the lack of contact with loved ones. This is now beginning to change, with some outdoor visits being permitted, in line with the easing of lockdown restrictions on 1 June.

## 9.5. Resuming routine health services

- Use of NHS services in Wales fell considerably during the outbreak, including a 25% fall in patients seeing their GP, reports of 60% reductions in A&E attendances and 35% in emergency admissions at one stage. A&E attendances in May 2020 were still 36% lower than May 2019. As of 15 June, around 23% of hospital beds in Wales were unoccupied. This fall in usage could lead to late diagnosis, complications or deterioration in a patient's condition, with increased waiting times also for elective care and cancers.
- The Welsh Government has published a framework for potential resumption of a number of routine services. However, there are concerns about the long-term clinical demands on the NHS once the current constraints are eased, with increased numbers of patients needing rehabilitation support, including those recovering from coronavirus.

## 9.6. Mental health

- The impact of the pandemic and the stay at home measures on mental health and wellbeing is a concern. There are a wide range of contributory factors, including increased stress, isolation, disruption to routines, financial insecurity, relationship issues, abuse, and bereavement. Those with existing mental health problems may be worried about reduced access to support. There are also concerns about the mental health impact on health, social care and other frontline staff.
- The mental health impact of the pandemic is predicted to last much longer than the physical health impact. There are concerns that suicide rates may rise, although it may be too early for data to show an impact. Suicide prevention, however, needs urgent consideration.

# 10. Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

## 10.1. Legislation

- The Committee has redeployed resources to the scrutiny of a significant number of statutory instruments in response to the coronavirus pandemic (not

only those concerning coronavirus restrictions but also in other policy areas such as planning, local elections, agriculture and the environment)

- This has meant that business such as the scrutiny of Welsh Government LCMs relating to significant Brexit UK Government Bills has been done by written correspondence rather than oral evidence sessions. The redeployment is likely to be on-going.
- The Committee will also need to prepare for scrutiny of the large volume of Welsh and UK legislation expected before the end of the Brexit transition period, both to implement the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement and any agreement on a future relationship.

## 10.2. Justice

- The Welsh Government's coronavirus response has had an impact on its implementation of the recommendations of the Thomas Commission on Justice.
- The pandemic has impacted the functioning of the justice system in Wales. The Committee will continue to consider issues such as the impact of the pandemic on access to justice as part of its justice inquiry.

## 10.3. Constitution

- The Committee will consider the effectiveness of intergovernmental working between Welsh and UK government in response to the pandemic and what lessons can be drawn for future intergovernmental working.

# 11. Petitions Committee

Petitions relating to coronavirus have incorporated a wide-range of subjects, including:

- Support for staff within the NHS: for example support for **funeral costs** and **for vulnerable and pregnant NHS Wales bank workers;**
- Education decisions: for example **the awarding of AS Grades** and **funding for educational placements for students with Additional Learning Needs;**
- Financial support for businesses: for example **small businesses, large stores** and attractions such as **zoos and aquariums; and**
- Relaxation of certain restrictions: for example **the distances people are able to travel** and **reopening of dental services.**

## 12. Public Accounts Committee

### 12.1. Economic recovery

- Figures, such as the fall in GDP and scale of UK Government borrowing, are reminders of the significant economic damage arising from coronavirus and the long term work needed for economic recovery.
- The Committee noted the additional pressures arising from Brexit and implications this will have during coronavirus recovery, not to mention the risk of further peaks that might require lockdown measures to be revisited. This will present particular challenges for the Welsh Government. The Committee heard that a significant proportion of officials had been deployed to work on coronavirus measures. The Committee is concerned about Welsh Government capacity to manage its response to the current situation from an economic policy perspective while at the same time managing rapidly approaching EU transition issues.

### 12.2. Co-operation with the UK Government

- The Committee heard evidence about the constraints on the Welsh Government of not having access to HMRC data. Access would make it easier to verify individuals and businesses applying for support and to appraise applications.
- The Committee was interested to contrast the evidence in the National Audit Office (NAO) report about the use of Ministerial Directions in relation to coronavirus spending with the situation in Wales. The NAO report says that, as of 4 May, there had been 11 Ministerial Directions related to the UK government's response to coronavirus. Ministerial Directions have been sought and granted to support urgent spend, and because it had not been possible for departments to carry out as full an appraisal of the value for money of some schemes as would usually be undertaken. While UK government spending is on a different scale, there are nevertheless certain parallels with some Welsh Government schemes for business support. The Committee understands no Ministerial Directions have yet been sought in Wales.
- Members were concerned about the plans and costs faced by schools in managing the return of pupils within social distancing requirements, and ensuring pupils have access to education in September. They stressed the importance of ensuring children and their families are supported over the summer months.

- The Committee will be monitoring closely developments in a number of key areas. These include: funding allocations to support Local Government, including the Local Authority Hardship Fund; resources made available for the 'Test, Track Protect' strategy; measures to support homeless people throughout the pandemic and into the future; the impact of the crisis on the housing sector; and the financial resilience of the third sector in Wales.