

Budget estimate for 2025 - 20 26

FINAL. Submitted 31 October 20 24

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Budget estimate to Welsh Government.

Introduction

Under the legislation which established this organisation, I am required to submit my final estimate by end of October. My budget is based on a number of working assumptions as at October 2024 and related known risks. It has been updated from my early estimate based on a detailed consideration of our workplan and the resources required. As is set out further below, this includes two extraordinary pieces of work: the estimated legal costs of my attendance as a Core Participant at the UK Covid Inquiry; and the estimated costs of using my statutory powers to hold a safeguarding-related inquiry.

Budget estimate

	Estimate 2025-26	Indicative 2026-27	Indicative 2027-28
	(£)	(£)	(£)
Salaries	1,425,447	1,466,081	1,514,876
Premises	59,500	62,475	62,475
Office costs	62,500	63,750	63,750
Training and wellbeing	16,500	16,500	16,500
Travel and subsistence	9,000	9,000	9,000
External audit fee***	21,387	21,387	21,387
Internal audit fee	10,000	10,000	10,000
Communication*	45,000	45,000	45,000
ICT**	48,300	49,266	49,266
Project costs****	76,000	76,000	76,000
Legal costs	5,000	5,000	5,000
Covid legal costs	40,000	-	-
Safeguarding inquiry	150,000	150,000	150,000
Provision for dilapidations	10,000	-	-
Depreciation	51,500	51,500	51,500
Total Resource Budget	2,030,134	2,025,959	2,074,754
Cash Grant-in-Aid	1,968,634	1,974,459	2,023,254

Notes

*Communication: includes all spend related to our compliance with our Welsh Language Standards including translation work, the production

of all our accessible resources for children and young people and professionals, our statutory engagement work with thousands of children and young people across Wales, hosting of our website and tools for monitoring the impact of our work.

**ICT: includes our spend on cyber resilience and information management. Despite the size of our organisation, the threats to our IT network are comparable to those faced by much larger institutions. As one of our highest corporate risks, we take the management of our network and the information we hold extremely seriously - this results in us having to protect a percentage of our budget to fund critical controls. We seek assurances on our controls annually, including via Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation which is funded from this budget line.

***External audit fee: this is a requirement on our office and Audit Wales' fees continue to increase, which must be absorbed by our reduced budget.

****Projects: includes our spend on delivering commitments from our three-year strategy (which is work over and above our statutory functions). In 2025-26, this will include a significant consultation exercise with children and young people to establish priorities for our next three-year strategy. Consulting with children and young people on our work priorities is a requirement in our legislation.

Context - some facts

1. Reassurances received:

The Auditor General for Wales has recently audited my 2023-24 accounts and has provided us with an unqualified opinion, with no management letter points.

My Internal Auditors, TIAA, have provided the highest level of assurance possible on governance and financial management in their latest reports.

2. Strategic Planning cycle:

Following the consultation exercise with over 10,000 children, young people and adults, their views and experiences have directly influenced the contents of our three-year strategic plan and I will be accountable to those thousands of participants, and others, for the successful delivery of our ambitions.

3. Funding position:

I am funded by, but operate independently of, Welsh Ministers and Welsh Government and am accountable for the use of public resources made available to me. I'm also the lowest-funded Commissioner, based on the 2023-24 budget settlement.

The impact of the Budget Motions and Designated Bodies Order 2021 has been to limit the level of retained cash balance that I can independently use without the Welsh Government providing the corresponding resource budget and, if required, the cash.

This limitation and risk was highlighted in the Senedd's Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee's inquiry report, 'Review of the Welsh Commissioners' in 2022-23.

4. Remuneration of staff:

Since its inception, this office has based its pay policy on that of the Welsh Government, knowing that it has been established via negotiations with trade unions (which we do not undertake ourselves).

5. Delivering for children and young people:

The organisation has played a critical role for over twenty years as an independent organisation in Welsh civic life. Since the most recent cut to our funding in 2024-25 we have been carrying two critical officer level vacancies, the continuation of which will impact on the successful delivery of the final year of my existing three-year strategic plan. This estimate includes funding for these vacancies going forwards. Despite this situation we remain firmly committed to delivering our ambitions for children, by our small dedicated and experienced staff team.

Working assumptions

- We will not be certain of project spend in 2025-26 until after the conclusion of our internal strategic planning cycle which commences in the autumn, and therefore our forecast is estimated on previous project spend;
- We will continue to review accommodation (our only base is in Port Talbot) and staffing structure, to ensure they deliver the very best value for the public pound and for children and young people;
- We will continue to review every budget line scrupulously every month to identify possible cost savings and to ensure there is no waste;
- That inflation will affect critical aspects of our spend, we have analysed individual budget lines to reflect the anticipated effect on future spending needs;
- That we will continue to meet with and work for children and young people face-to-face, across Wales;
- That we will continue to offer a flexible and hybrid work model for staff, which enables us to employ staff from various locations across Wales;
- That there'll be at least 3 percent increase to salaries as a result of pay award and that information received from Welsh Government during the period may differ from the resulting pay award settlement;
- Future changes to employer National Insurance and/or pension contributions have not been included in our estimate;
- We will continue to seek opportunities to work in partnership, where it is possible to protect our independence, for the benefit of children's human rights in Wales. This includes

undertaking joint procurement exercises to maximise value for the public pound;

- There is a continued need to prioritise an organisation-wide approach to cyber resilience;
- We will ensure all our outputs as an organisation have a positive effect on public service delivery and on children's lives in Wales.

Related known risks

- Inability to respond swiftly and independently to new pieces of work, including any review or inquiry of public bodies, as a result of a slimmed down cash reserve balance;
- Inability to accurately determine the final pay award for the 2025-26 financial period and commit to its application due to financial pressures;
- Inability to approve work plans due to timescales of budget allocation being confirmed by Welsh Government;
- Inability to deliver our statutory functions due to insufficient budget allocation;
- Inability to deliver our statutory functions due to forced changes to staffing structure as a result of insufficient budget allocation.