



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

July 2021

Dear

### **ATISN 15194 – Pandemic Planning**

Thank you for your request to the Welsh Government for information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) received on 03 June 2021. I have interpreted your requested information regarding pandemic planning as follows:

1. *What plans were in place for a potential future pandemic before the COVID19 crisis began?*
2. *What conversations were had at ministerial level, before COVID19, about the potential of a future pandemic?*
3. *What plans are now in place for a future pandemic, if any?*

### **Our Response**

#### ***What plans were in place for a potential future pandemic before the COVID-19 crisis began?***

Wales, together with the rest of the UK, has been preparing its response to an influenza pandemic for many years. In 2007, Wales participated in the UK level (Tier 1) pandemic flu exercise Winter Willow, which led to the development of the 2007 National Framework for Responding to an Influenza Pandemic. This framework was used to support our Welsh Government response to the 2009 H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic.

Although the H1N1 pandemic was not as severe as initially predicted, it did identify areas for further planning and Wales worked with the other UK governments to put in place the UK [Influenza Preparedness Strategy 2011](#). This UK Strategy was agreed by the Health Ministers of all four nations.

In 2016, our pandemic influenza plans were tested during Exercise Cygnus. The subsequent lessons identified were taken forward into an ongoing review of pandemic preparedness led by the UK Cabinet Office and Department of Health and Social Care. The pandemic plans in place before the COVID-19 pandemic were focussed on our response to an influenza pandemic, these plans formed the basis of the initial national response to COVID-19.

In Wales, we also have the Pan Wales Response Plan, which sets out our command, control and co-ordination urgent response structure for national emergencies and includes activation levels and multi-agency responsibilities. At a local level, Health Boards, NHS Trusts, Local Authorities, Natural Resources Wales, HM Coastguard, Port Health Authorities and the emergency services, have a duty as Category 1 Responders or “core responders” within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, to participate in multi-agency planning; and have plans and procedures for major risks such as an influenza pandemic.

All Wales Health Boards and NHS Trusts had current pandemic influenza plans in place at the time of COVID-19. The four Welsh Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) each have multi-agency arrangements for pandemic influenza setting out procedures for co-ordination in their LRF area.

***What conversations were had at ministerial level, before COVID19, about the potential of a future pandemic?***

Your question does not provide an indication of timescale, however, Welsh Ministers are regularly consulted as part of the four nations approach to pandemics since devolution began in Wales and have been regularly involved in a number of COBR meetings which were held ahead of the pandemic. Dates of these meetings are published on the following website: <https://gov.wales/ministerial-meetings-and-engagements>.

***What plans are now in place for a future pandemic, if any?***

There are existing structures and plans in place to respond to future emergencies, including pandemics. At the UK level, the 2011 Pandemic Strategy remains in place and Welsh Government is part of a UK review of pandemic preparedness and will continue to maintain a range of health countermeasures to support our national and local response plans. The Welsh Government maintains the Pan Wales Response Plan, which includes establishing an Emergency Co-ordination Centre (Wales) (ECCW) in times of emergency.

The experience of COVID, including the need to establish services such as Test, Trace, Protect, securing additional stockpiles of PPE, running a mass vaccination program and scaling up NHS capacity are all responses that can be captured for future planning purposes at national and local levels.

Wales is very well networked in contingency planning which has been demonstrated in the way agencies have come together in the LRF areas to support each other and tackle some of the response requirements – capacity building, shielding and testing. These planning networks remain in place. There are a range of health countermeasures (antivirals, antibiotics, National Pandemic Flu Service, PPE and an advanced purchase agreement for a vaccine) that can be deployed. There are existing clinical networks, mutual aid arrangements in place and co-operation between Wales NHS and other NHS organisations across the borders. There is collaborative working between public health agencies to ensure that specialist advice, services and support is available.

Lessons will continue to be learnt from the COVID-19 experience and any recommendations will be implemented and closely monitored. The response to the pandemic in Wales has resulted in a number of strong collaborations across governments, sectors and through global frameworks to be forged and will build on and

develop a whole system approach to future planning for pandemics in the future, as outlined in the most recent [Chief Medical Officer for Wales: Special Report](#).

### **Next steps**

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,  
Welsh Government,  
Cathays Park,  
Cardiff,  
CF10 3NQ

or Email: [Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales](mailto:Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales)

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office,  
Wycliffe House,  
Water Lane,  
Wilmslow,  
Cheshire,  
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely,