

The new First Minister's priorities

Research Briefing

April 2024



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The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is holding a general scrutiny session on **26 April 2024** with the new First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS. This briefing sets out the pledges made by Vaughan Gething in his Welsh Labour leadership campaign and commitments made since he became First Minister.



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1. Introduction

The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is holding a general scrutiny session on **26 April 2024**. This will be the first with the new First Minister, Vaughan Gething MS, which includes an opportunity to discuss his priorities and commitments. It will follow a specific scrutiny session with the First Minister on Care Experienced Children.

Vaughan Gething MS published a manifesto during his campaign for the Welsh Labour leadership, "**For Wales, for Labour, for you**". This was previously published on his website but no longer appears to be publicly available. A **copy of the manifesto** was published as part of the Committee's agenda for the meeting of 26 April.

2. Vaughan Gething's leadership manifesto

Vaughan Gething's Welsh Labour leadership manifesto had **five main themes**, which he described in terms of "values", "ideas and policy innovations", and "priorities and policies". These are listed below, along with the commitments that were highlighted in his manifesto.

For a healthy nation: A Welsh NHS, safe in public hands and always the budget priority. Services focused on improving both physical and mental health and social care fit for our future.

- Introduce a new "Welsh NHS Covenant", embedding core principles such as ensuring NHS Wales is "safe in public hands and keeping per head spend on health and social care above that in England".
- Prioritise patient outcomes.
- Support and promote innovation in healthcare.
- Invest in technology.
- Tackle health inequalities.
- A gender-sensitive and culturally competent health system.
- Introduce a Women's Health Plan.
- Make further progress towards a "fit-for-purpose" National Care Service.
- Explore the expansion of community-led care models.
- Value and support unpaid carers.
- Prioritise investment in mental health.

For green prosperity: Green job creation at the heart of protecting Wales' future. A just transition that tackles poverty and protects our planet, with good jobs and community wealth.

- Never agree to transfer Welsh steelworkers' jobs and emissions overseas.
- Take an active green industrial policy approach.
- Make bold, systemic reforms to the planning and investment frameworks to unlock green growth.
- Support Welsh businesses and Welsh workers to adapt to, and thrive in, the transition to net zero.

- Deliver new “Clean Growth Hubs” – clusters of environmentally-friendly businesses powering local growth and better jobs.
- Never neglect the everyday economy that provides the everyday goods and services everyone relies on.
- Ensure renewable energy generated in Wales benefits people in Wales.
- Create a new Fair Work Fund – “Gwaith Teg” – open to bids from projects seeking to support fair working practices.
- Implement a key recommendation of the recent Wales TUC Devolution and Work in Wales report by creating a fair work milestone to measure and improve fair working practices.
- Double the number of worker-owned businesses in Wales and direct more public procurement spending towards co-operatives and social enterprises.
- Accelerate the rollout of banking hubs.
- Develop a new Nature Positive Bill.
- Strengthen enforcement action to protect the environment, starting with the creation of a fully-functioning environmental governance body.
- Make Wales the leader on animal welfare standards in the UK by giving RSPCA officers additional enforcement powers and banning pets being given as prizes.

For a place called home: Accelerating social housing construction. Reliable, affordable public transport. Working in social partnership, with powers and funding devolved to local government.

- Prioritise building more social housing.
- Tackle the “housing crisis”, fast-tracking major developments through an Affordable Homes Taskforce.
- Retrofitting existing housing stock, cutting carbon emissions and household energy bills.
- Strengthen security and rights for tenants.
- Examine national and international evidence on rent controls, ensuring that rents are fair for tenants, in a way that doesn't reduce the number of homes that are available to let.
- Radically overhaul the leasehold system so existing leaseholders can collectively purchase more easily and move to commonhold if they wish.
- Continue to treat tackling homelessness as a national issue.

- Continue to support mortgage holders.
- Make legislation to regulate the bus network before the end of this Senedd term.
- Introduce franchising to allow for better integrated transport.
- Explore fare reduction schemes, as finances allow.
- Work with partners to build a national charging network to support electric vehicle charging.
- Commit to active travel infrastructure, improving safety.
- Develop a package of powers for local government in Welsh regions through Corporate Joint Committees, giving local councillors more powers.
- Establish “Creative Academy Cymru” to deliver skills training in the creative industries.
- Give greater priority to health and wellbeing within arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors, through the “Wales Wellbeing Bond”.
- Support the continuation and growth of the National Plan for Music in Wales.

For ambitious futures: Educational opportunity at every age and stage of life. Putting the weight of the First Minister's office behind achieving excellence in our schools and colleges, working with teachers and school support staff.

- Give all children in Wales a strong start, focusing on the first 1,000 days of a child's life.
- Deliver excellence in education, closing the attainment gap and addressing absenteeism and disruptive behaviour.
- Prepare young people for the world of work.
- Ensure that equality and diversity form a key part of schooling.
- Make reinvesting in apprenticeships a priority for EU replacement funds.
- Support further education colleges to train people in the green skills needed for the future.
- Do more to retain and develop diverse talent and skills across Wales.
- Prioritise free, flexible learning for workers on low pay.

For a stronger Wales: More powers for Wales and across Wales. An ambitious, progressive nation taking its place on the world stage with a thriving future for Cymraeg.

- Commit to building an anti-racist Wales, supporting the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan to the end of the two-period in June 2024, then build on learning with a renewed set of “ambitious” actions.
- Support making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe, and “see through” the LGBTQ+ Action Plan.
- Push for a Wales that strives for the rights and equality of all disabled people by continuing to assess the feasibility of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into law.
- Lead a feminist government that advances gender equality. Continue to have a gender balanced Cabinet.
- Consult on plans to drive higher standards in public bodies.
- Continue to tackle child poverty and progress work on a Welsh Benefits System.
- Examine how to bring services together to create a digital pass for public services.
- Retain Wales’ Nation of Sanctuary status.
- Support the devolution of justice and policing powers, as well as the devolution of prudential borrowing powers.
- Have a Minister for North Wales and an office and team of officials based in North Wales from across key Welsh Government departments.
- Establish a new Office of the First Minister, focused on delivery.
- Back creating an independent secretariat to “ensure the UK Government cannot continue to mistreat the devolved nations” (using the classification of HS2 as an England-only project as an example of denying funding for Wales).
- Commit to ensuring Wales reaches a million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- Champion Welsh cultural assets, including pushing for the Eisteddfodau to receive UNESCO protected status.

3. Statements since becoming First Minister

Announcing his Cabinet, the new First Minister said:

In particular, I am pleased to appoint a Minister for Mental Health and Early Years to ensure we deliver in the first 1,000 days of the life of every child.

This Ministerial team will answer the call of the generation in waiting, to create a stronger, fairer, greener Wales. We will take action to strengthen our economy by providing opportunities for everyone and being steadfast in our commitment to a just transition to net zero. Our goal to deliver green prosperity is reflected by the creation of a new Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language.

Vaughan Gething MS did not give detailed information on specific policy commitments in his speech in **Plenary on 20 March**, following the Senedd's nomination of him as First Minister. Instead, he focussed on the approach he would take in the role.

The First Minister subsequently made a **statement in Plenary on 16 April 2024 on "Delivering Wales's priorities"**. He highlighted meetings he had held in his first weeks in post. These included meetings with the British Medical Association to "discuss NHS strikes", with farming unions, and with steelworkers. He suggested these provided the opportunity to engage on "difficult issues that require partnership working and compromises to find a solution for the future". He went on to say:

These early engagements were a priority, and they serve, I hope, as a signal of the investment that Ministers across the Welsh Government will put into the serious business of dialogue, negotiation and partnership working.

The First Minister pointed to the "gravity of the financial situation" and the need to "focus on a set of core priorities". He also highlighted the following:

- **The NHS and reducing waiting times** is a "top priority". Patient care will be "at the forefront" and the Welsh Government will prioritise funding for the NHS and social care in its budgets.
- **Lifting children out of poverty** will be "at the heart" of the Welsh Government's mission, by renewing a focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life. This will require "a long-term and co-ordinated response" across government and public services.

- **A sustained improvement in educational attainment** will be the first priority in achieving excellence in schools, while improving attendance will also be a priority.
- The Welsh Government will prioritise **“building a greener economy”** where people find “good, secure employment”. New Clean Growth hubs will deliver better paid jobs, “Green Business Loans” will help businesses decarbonise, and planning reforms and “ambitious investment” will “unlock green growth”.
- The Welsh Government will **“radically shake up” the way the public transport system operates**, including through a new Bus Bill that will move away from a privatised system based on profit to one centred on the needs of passengers.

The First Minister summarised:

Reducing NHS waiting lists, support for children in early years, educational excellence in our schools, better, greener jobs, improved transport links across the country—these are Wales’s priorities, and these are our priorities.

He added that he has established a new **Cabinet Office** role, which will support the First Minister and Cabinet to deliver their strategic priorities. Rebecca Evans MS has been appointed as the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office.