

National Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – 23 September 2025

The minutes from the National Advisory Board Meeting on 23 September 2025

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Welcome, attendees and apologies

Attendees

- Ruth Hussey (Chair)
- Natalie Fletcher (Provider)
- Rachel Harris (Provider Full Day Care)
- Peter Max (Provider Residential Care)
- Melanie Minty (Care Forum Wales)
- Claire Protheroe (PACEY)
- Alyson Thomas (Llais)
- Jenny Williams (ADSS Cymru)
- Gillian Baranski (Chief Inspector)
- Julie Heal (CIW)
- Annette Hennessey (CIW)
- Margaret Rooney (CIW)
- Nev Thomas (CIW)
- Elizabeth Wallwork (CIW)
- Meg Williams (CIW)

Apologies

- Valerie Billingham (Office of the OPC)
- Orlaith Brennan (Provider Domiciliary Support Service)
- Kate Cubbage (Carers Trust)
- Stuart Davies (Provider Domiciliary Support Service)
- Margaret Rooney (CIW)

Approval of previous minutes

Decision: Board members approved the minutes from the meeting of 4 June, 2025.

Actions from previous minutes

Circulate slides and web links shared during the meeting.

- Update: Circulated along with ELT pen portraits prior to the meeting.

Continue to share positive practice case studies.

- Update: This work is ongoing, and we are introducing positive practice examples for adult and children's services later in September.

Review how to enhance service user and stakeholder feedback in inspections.

- Update: This work will be an integral part of the comms and engagement strategy we are developing.

Engage stakeholders in simplifying the annual return process.

- Update: This work is ongoing. We will be setting up user testing groups as part of the data collection simplification work we are doing with Social Care Wales and will keep NAB members updated as work progresses.

Track implications of website publication requirements for small providers.

- Update: This issue was also raised by providers at a recent provider event. We encourage all providers with concerns to feed this back through the Welsh Government consultation.

1. CIW round-up

Gillian Baranski provided the following updates from CIW:

1.1 COVID-19 inquiry

CIW gave evidence to the UK COVID-19 inquiry in July, underlining the importance of the decision to pause routine inspections for periods during the pandemic. The inquiry's reports are awaited.

1.2 Safeguarding reviews

An independent child practice review from Gwynedd is expected to be published shortly.

1.3 Positive culture framework

CIW continues to embed the positive culture framework internally and externally..

1.4 Annual report

The 2024–25 annual report is due for publication on 14 October..

1.5 Inspector recruitment

CIW has recruited 20 new inspectors, with more to follow. Recruitment of Welsh-speaking inspectors in North Wales remains a challenge. A targeted campaign is planned.

1.6 Joint data collection

Progress on combining the annual return data collection with Social Care Wales's workforce data exercise is ongoing, with plans in place for a joint data collection exercise in 2026..

1.7 Awards recognition

CIW has been shortlisted for two Welsh Government awards in leadership and communications. Winners will be announced in November.

2. CIW performance update

Gillian Baranski presented a detailed performance update:

2.1 Inspection volumes and staffing

Despite a reduction in staffing (from 265 to 236), inspection volumes have slightly increased. Staff commitment has been key to maintaining performance:

- 94.5% of inspection reports were issued on time (Q1 2025–26)
- 94% were published on time

2.2 Overdue inspections

Overdue inspections remain a concern, particularly in fostering and adoption services. A targeted plan is in place to address the backlog, supported by the arrival of our new inspectors

2.3 Registration and enforcement

The number of services operating without registration(OWR) are generally lower than in 2023/24, partly due to more local authorities registering their own children's homes.

Quarter 1 saw 86% of OWR concerns considered on time, with a breakdown of:

- 93% for RISCA
- 58% for CCP, indicating a need to improve CCP timescales.

2.4. Local authority inspections

All reports have been issued on time. Peer inspection continues to add value.

3. Voices from members

3.1. Sector concerns

Rachel Harris raised concerns about the voluntary approval scheme and its implications for safeguarding. Kevin Barker and Ceri Herbert confirmed there were ongoing conversations with WG policy colleagues on this subject and encouraged providers to respond to Welsh Government consultations.

3.2. Consultations

Claire Protheroe highlighted the difficulty of engaging providers with multiple consultations running simultaneously. CIW acknowledged the challenge and committed to raising this with Welsh Government. Providers were encouraged to respond to Welsh Government consultations.

3.3. Residential family centres

Peter Max raised concerns about services re-registering as residential family centres and the need for clarity on regulation. He also asked about the use of AI safely and in accordance with data protection, to ensure the safeguarding of personal / sensitive information in care settings.

3.4. Representation

Members noted the absence of representation from adult residential care. CIW will review board membership.

4. Ratings for adult and children's services – six-month update

Nev Thomas presented an update on the implementation of ratings:

4.1. Overview of inspections

Between 1 April and 1 September 2025, CIW published inspection reports for 337 services, comprising:

- 183 older adult care homes
- 60 children's homes
- 94 domiciliary support services

4.2. Ratings outcomes

The majority of services were rated Good, with Excellent ratings a close second across all themes. Notably:

- In the well-being theme, nearly 200 services were rated Good, with a significant number rated Excellent.

4.3. Positives

Feedback from providers has been largely positive:

- Providers appreciated the clarity and structure of the new framework, particularly during post-inspection discussions.
- Staff reported feeling more engaged in the inspection process.
- The framework helped providers understand areas requiring improvement and agree on next steps with inspectors.

4.4. Training and consistency

- Monthly drop-in sessions for inspectors have been well attended, supporting consistency and shared learning.
- Ratings training is now embedded in the induction programme for new inspectors.
- Dip sampling of reports continues to monitor consistency and identify trends.

4.5. Next steps

- A more in-depth evaluation of the ratings programme is planned once all services have been inspected under the new framework.
- CIW will explore how to adapt inspection cycles for services which are awarded excellent ratings.

4.6. Sector feedback

Positive feedback was received from providers, including a children's home that successfully challenged a rating through professional dialogue and evidence submission. The inspector reconsidered and revised the rating, demonstrating openness and transparency in the process.

5. Childcare and play – sector update and framework review

Ceri Herbert presented an update on the childcare and play sector and the inspection framework review work:

5.1. Self-Assessment of Service (SASS) returns

- The 2025 SAS return achieved a 97% response rate, providing a strong evidence base for sector insights.
- CIW acknowledged the collaborative effort across internal teams, umbrella organisations (e.g. Coram PACEY), and local authorities in supporting providers to complete returns.

5.2. Key sector trends

- Swansea, Cardiff and Denbighshire saw significant increases in the number of children attending settings, with over 1,200 additional children in Swansea alone.
- A shift from part-time to full-time attendance was noted, likely linked to the Flying Start expansion and the Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (ECPLC) approach.
- Staff numbers have increased, with fewer leaving the service. Though many are on zero-hour contracts, raising concerns about workforce stability.

5.3. Welsh language provision

A drop in settings reporting bilingual elements was observed, attributed to improved clarity in the SASS help text. The number of Welsh-medium and bilingual settings remained broadly stable.

5.4. Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The number of children identified with ALN decreased by 241, likely due to improved understanding of the ALN code and criteria.

Positive increases were seen in:

- Settings appointing ALN leads (+54)
- Awareness of the ALN Code
- Referrals and liaison with local authorities

5.5. Framework review

CIW and Estyn are reviewing the joint inspection framework, aiming to reduce the current four themes to three by integrating Environment across all areas.

The revised framework will better reflect current policy developments, including:

- Curriculum for Wales
- Anti-racist Wales Action Plan
- ALN legislation
- ECPLC principles

5.6. Next steps

- A new framework is expected by December 2025, with trials in Spring 2026 and full rollout from September 2026.
- CIW aims to streamline inspection reports to be clearer, more concise, and focused on cause and effect.

6. Strategic plan – focus on improvement

Kevin Barker presented an overview of CIW's strategic focus on improvement:

6.1. Strategic context

Improvement is now one of CIW's three strategic pillars, alongside Assure and Influence. CIW's commitment to improvement includes:

- Celebrating success
- Encouraging continuous improvement
- Promoting positive and inclusive organisational cultures
- Enhancing internal and external learning
- Leveraging digital tools to improve efficiency and impact

6.2. Inspection and improvement

Kevin reflected on the evolving role of inspection in supporting improvement:

- CIW aims to move from a purely assurance-based model to one that fosters mutual trust and improvement.
- A key question: “Do we leave services in a better place than we found them?”
- Ratings are seen as a valuable tool, but only when combined with broader improvement activity.

6.3. Relationship model

CIW referenced a model from the King’s Fund distinguishing between:

- Pathological (compliance-driven) relationships
- Generative (improvement-focused) relationships

A live poll of attendees placed CIW at an average of 3.6 out of 5, indicating progress toward a more improvement-focused approach, but with room to grow.

6.4. Current improvement initiatives

CIW has implemented several initiatives to support sector-wide improvement:

- Quality meetings between inspections, informed by ratings(childcare and play sector)
- Practise worth sharing: examples of good practice published online
- Quality conferences: open events for providers to share learning (childcare and play sector)
- Plans to expand these initiatives to adult and children’s services

6.5. Feedback from members

Members welcomed the direction of travel and shared the following reflections:

- Earned autonomy and proportionate regulation were seen as positive principles
- Local authority representatives noted inspections can still feel overly compliance-focused
- Providers valued consistency in inspectors and the opportunity to build trust
- Concerns were raised about inconsistencies in inspection approaches, particularly in North Wales

Members suggested CIW could do more to:

- Promote adoption of best practice
- Align improvement discussions with local authority contract monitoring

Actions

- CIW to continue targeted recruitment for Welsh-speaking inspectors
- Volunteers sought for the comms and engagement strategy group (Alison Thomas and Melanie Minty volunteered)
- CIW to review NAB membership and ensure full sector representation
- CIW to consider guidance on AI use in regulated services
- CIW to share concerns about consultation timing with Welsh Government
- Encouraged providers to respond to consultations and share feedback with CIW
- CIW to confirm date of next meeting



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