

Pre-appointment hearing – Chair of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board

July 2025

1. Introduction

Cardiff & Vale University Health Board

1. Cardiff and Vale is one of the largest integrated health boards in the UK. In serving a population of over 500,000 across Cardiff City and the Vale of Glamorgan it employs more than 18,000 staff and has a budget in excess of £2 billion.

2. The health board is responsible for a full range of health and wellbeing services including:

- primary and community-based services;
- acute services through the two main university hospitals and children's hospital;
- public health;
- a range of other services across more than a dozen sites; and,
- as a tertiary centre, specialist treatment and complex services not available in other parts of Wales such as neurosurgery and cardiac services.



2. The pre-appointment hearing process

The process

3. Welsh Government and the Senedd agreed to introduce pre-appointment scrutiny by Senedd committees of certain public appointments which are of significant public interest or which will have a significant impact on the public. The aim is to further improve the scrutiny and transparency of the public appointment making process.
4. Pre-appointment scrutiny generally takes the form of a public pre-appointment hearing with the preferred candidate. For appointments to these agreed roles, it is for the relevant committee to decide whether it wishes to carry out a pre-appointment hearing.

Pre-appointment hearing

5. On 18 June 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care announced that Kirsty Williams had been selected as the Cabinet Secretary's preferred candidate for the role of Chair of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB), subject to a pre-appointment hearing with the Committee.
6. The pre-appointment hearing took place on 3 July 2025. The meeting transcript is available on the [Committee's website](#).
7. To inform the hearing, the Welsh Government provided us with a briefing on the process ("[the Welsh Government briefing](#)"), Kirsty Williams' [CV and personal statement](#), and a copy of the [information pack for applicants](#). The Committee also asked the preferred candidate to complete a [questionnaire](#) in advance of the hearing.

3. The recruitment process

8. On 24 March 2025 the Welsh Government Public Appointments Team advertised for a Chair for Cardiff & Vale UHB.
9. The role was promoted via the Welsh Government and Cardiff & Vale UHB websites; Twitter; LinkedIn and various other social media platforms.
10. There were no paid advertisements, however a recruitment company, Goodson Thomas, was commissioned to support the process, with the aim of

ensuring that a large and diverse pool of candidates with necessary skills were attracted through outreach actions to encourage applications.

11. As part of the Welsh Government’s commitment to increasing diversity in public appointments, the advert was sent to 145 equality and other organisations who have expressed an interest.

12. Eight applications were received. Four candidates were recommended for interview, although one candidate withdrew their application prior to the interviews taking place. Interviews took place on 3 and 11 June 2025. The Assessment Advisory Panel considered there to be one appointable candidate.

Role and person specification

13. The Welsh Government set out the role of the Chair in the information pack for applicants. This included notification that, at the Committee’s discretion, appointment to the role of Chair could be subject to a pre-appointment hearing.

14. The Chair will be accountable to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care for the performance of the Board and its effective governance, upholding the values of the NHS, and promoting the confidence of the public and partners. Detailed responsibilities of the Chair can be found in the [information pack for candidates](#).

4. The Welsh Government’s preferred candidate

Background

15. Kirsty Williams, the Welsh Government’s preferred candidate, is currently the Vice Chair of Powys Teaching Health Board. She has held a number of high profile public roles in health, fire and rescue, education and the third sector, including:

- Commissioner, South Wales Fire & Rescue;
- Chair, Global Centre of Rail Excellence Community Committee;
- Chair, National Education Coherence Group;
- Chair, Taith Advisory Board;
- Vice Chair, Brecknock YFC Board of Management.

16. In the pre-appointment questionnaire, she states:

I have dedicated my working life to promoting the wellbeing of individuals and the communities of Wales. A healthy population is the cornerstone of a prosperous, resilient society and the NHS is essential to that mission.

Throughout my career, I have been extensively engaged in the health sector. From serving on the Health and Social Care committee at the Senedd, introducing groundbreaking nurse staffing legislation, to now contributing to the governance and oversight of a Health Board. I have gained a deep understanding of the complexities and scale of the challenges the NHS and its partners face. I am determined to contribute meaningfully to the development of sustainable long-term solutions.

I am particularly excited by the challenge to do so at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board due to the diversity of the local population it serves and the strategic role it plays in the region and as a tertiary centre. To lead the Board is an opportunity to make a positive impact, at scale, to drive quality, support innovation and shape services that improve outcomes for patients.

Healthy life expectancy differences between different socio-economic groups in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are stark, whilst there is an understandable and necessary urgency to address waiting lists in secondary care, driving improvements in population health cannot be forgotten.

My other public policy passion is education. Cardiff and Vale University Health Board is an organisation that sits at the heart of developing the next generation of healthcare professionals. Clinical education is fundamental to delivering safe high-quality care today and is the foundation upon which we will build the future of our health and care system, and I am eager to contribute to that agenda.

Our view

17. In line with the guidance on pre-appointment hearings agreed between the Welsh Government and the Senedd, our role is to set out our views on the suitability of the Welsh Government's preferred candidate.

18. During the pre-appointment hearing, we had a wide-ranging discussion with the preferred candidate, Kirsty Williams. This covered her experience of working in other organisations, including roles in health, fire and rescue, education and the third sector.

19. We asked Ms Williams how she proposed to make sufficient time available for the role of Chair of Cardiff & Vale UHB, given the number of existing commitments she currently holds. She said that she would not have put herself forward for selection if she was not confident that she could fulfil the commitments required of her, and this had been explored during her interview with the Advisory Assessment Panel. Ms Williams said she was used to carrying a significant workload and was adept at managing and prioritising her time. She pointed out that her role at South Wales Fire and Rescue Service was time-limited and Taith was a voluntary commitment, which was able to offer flexibility in planning meetings, in conjunction with other diary commitments. Ms Williams went on to say that if it became clear that she could not manage all her commitments, then she would have to reassess them, “but at this point of time, I'm confident that I can do so.”

20. We talked about the need for strong governance and good financial management, given that the Board was currently in targeted intervention for finance and planning. Ms Williams acknowledged that the Board was forecasting a deficit position in the region of £58 million this year and said she would want to understand why the health board had moved from a position where, two years ago, it was predicting that it would have a sustainable balanced budget by the end of the 2025-26 financial year.

21. In respect of the serious findings of the service review of the main theatres at the University Hospital of Wales, we asked how Ms Williams would drive meaningful cultural change in the organisation.

22. Ms Williams said that one of the most striking things coming out of that review was that staff were either too scared to speak up, for fear of consequences and retaliation, or there was a pessimism that even if they did speak up, nothing would change.

23. She said her immediate priority was to be a visible leader within the organisation so that people could see her out and about, listening to staff directly. She said she wanted to have assurance from executive colleagues about the cultural change programme and hold them accountable for that process. Finally, she told us she wanted to engage with stakeholders and staff groups, because

“what's really important, I think, as a chair and as an independent member, is that whilst you are respectful of the information that is given to you by executive colleagues, you should never, ever just take that as it is. That's reassurance, it's not assurance.”

24. We asked Ms Williams how she would lead, develop, and support the Board of Cardiff & Vale UHB. She told us that one of her first priorities would be to gain an understanding of the skill sets, passions, interests and experience of her fellow board members. She said it would be really important for her to hear from a variety of voices on the Board, because that diversity of opinion resulted in better decision making. She highlighted the need for professionalism and respect, but said that, as Chair, she would need to maintain an element of independence to enable her to take a step back and look critically at the information being given to her, and whether she needed to challenge it.

25. She acknowledged that having a new Chair can be an unsettling time for an organisation, so “would want to work very closely with the executive responsible for corporate governance to land appropriately in the organisation.” She said that the UHB was experiencing a period of churn in terms of board members, so she wanted to “settle everybody in quickly, and build that team ethos”.

26. She added that the relationship between the Chair and Chief Executive was an important one, so she wanted that to be a good, strong working relationship. She told us:

“I've built my life on working relationships, on the ability to influence and to persuade and to work alongside people, and have difficult conversations where necessary, hold people to account, but also be supportive.”

27. We talked about the need to promote diversity and inclusion, given the diverse nature of the Cardiff and Vale region. Ms Williams told us that, while it was important to recognise the cultural diversity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of the population, it was equally important to ensure that the organisation was representative of the communities that it serves “so that, when they look at Cardiff and Vale health board, they see themselves reflected in that”. She said that such an approach helped to build public confidence and helped an organisation to deliver culturally competent care to people who may otherwise have concerns about being treated appropriately.

28. Finally, we asked Ms Williams how she would ensure that the Welsh language is a living language and is mainstreamed throughout the health board.

29. She said this was a really important issue, as Cardiff and Vale is the area with the greatest growth in the use of the language. She saw provision of services through the medium of Welsh as a service need to be met and not a 'nice to have'. She added that the health board currently had a target to increase the number of speakers with skills between level 2 and 5 by 25 per cent, within two years, and she wanted early sight of the current position and the actions being taken to achieve that target. She said she would also use patient-experience feedback to see how many patients were able to access the care they wanted through the medium of Welsh.

Conclusion 1. Based on her performance and responses to questioning at the pre- appointment hearing, we see no reason why the Welsh Government's preferred candidate, Kirsty Williams, should not be appointed to the post of Chair of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board.

30. We wish her well for the future and look forward to scrutinising her constructively in her role as Chair of Cardiff & Vale University Health Board during the remainder of this Senedd.