



 <p>GIG CYMRU NHS WALES   Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales</p>	<p><b>Name of Meeting</b> Knowledge, Research and Information Committee</p> <p><b>Date of Meeting</b> 28 March 2025</p> <p><b>Agenda item:</b> 3.4</p>
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<b>Behavioural Science Unit: Assurance Update</b>	
<b>Executive lead:</b>	Dr Sumina Azam, National Director of Policy and International Health
<b>Author:</b>	Ashley Gould, Programme Director – Behavioural Science Unit

<b>Approval/Scrutiny route:</b>	Dr Sumina Azam, National Director of Policy and International Health
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<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>Present a summary of the work of the Public Health Wales Behavioural Science Unit, in follow-up to a previous Deep Dive at the Committee, and provide assurance around operations, delivery and planning.</p>
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<b>Recommendation:</b>				
APPROVE <input type="checkbox"/>	CONSIDER <input type="checkbox"/>	RECOMMEND <input type="checkbox"/>	ADOPT <input type="checkbox"/>	ASSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Note</b> the development of the Unit, since the Deep Dive in December 2022</li> <li>• <b>Receive assurance</b> that these developments are supporting efforts to deliver the Public Health Wales Long Term Strategy</li> </ul>				



**Link to Public Health Wales [Strategic Plan](#)**

Public Health Wales has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified seven strategic priorities and well-being objectives.

The work of the Behavioural Science Unit, detailed in this report, contributes to the following:

<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	All Strategic Priorities/Well-being Objectives
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**Summary impact analysis**

<b>Equality and Health Impact Assessment</b>	No assessment of this assurance report required. Intrinsic to behavioural science approaches, and the work of the Unit is the consideration of barriers and enablers to target behaviours to improve/ protect health, in target populations. The application of behavioural science is fundamentally concerned with equity and optimising health impact.
<b>Risk and Assurance</b>	Behavioural Science has been identified as a mitigating action to address Strategic Risk 3.
<b>Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act</b>	N/A – assurance report
<b>Financial implications</b>	Delivery within Behavioural Science Unit budget
<b>People implications</b>	N/A – assurance report



## 1. Purpose

At its meeting in December 2022 the Committee undertook a Deep Dive into the establishment and early work of the Behavioural Science Unit ([KRIC 7/2022.12.06](#)).

This paper presents an update of the development of the Unit and its work and summarises plans for future activity. The Committee is asked to note the progress and contribution the Unit is making, and its strategic planning, and receive assurance these are enabling delivery of the Public Health Wales Long Term Strategy.

## 2. Background

Public Health Wales' Behavioural Science Unit was launched in May 2022 and has developed as an *enabling function* for the organisation and wider public health system.

Core to the Unit's work is the recognition that behavioural science is concerned with understanding the determinants of humans' *observable measurable actions* (behaviours) and deploying approaches or techniques most likely to change or sustain them, depending on the objective. By routinely and systematically deploying behavioural science we can 'get what we aim for, more often' from our policy development and practice endeavours, across all strategic priorities in our Long Term Strategy, and all domains of public health.

## 3. Description and Assessment

### 3.1. Unit functions and positioning

The Behavioural Science Unit (BSU) and its work is an enabling function in the Long Term Strategy and Integrated Medium Term Plans (IMTP). Understanding, support and demand for the use of behavioural science in public health has, and continues to, increase and the Unit has developed its structures, modus operandi and outputs to meet these demands and opportunities to optimise impact in terms of better health.

The BSU functions have developed following a comprehensive readiness assessment undertaken across Public Health Wales and guidance and experiences from a range of sources, including international best practice via World Health Organisation (WHO) Europe and their regional Focal Points Community of Practice. The Unit has connected with and learned from similar Units and other organisations in Europe, North America and Australia, as well as sharing the Chair of the Four Nations Behavioural Science Leads Group for the UK.



Since the Deep Dive, national and international connections and reputation have been built. The Unit has engaged-with and contributed-to WHO efforts to deploy behavioural and cultural insights for better health. These efforts include global and regional resolutions, resources and an Action Framework for Behavioural and Cultural Insights (BCI). The BSU played a key role in the WHO BCI Community of Practice inaugural event in September 2023; is a Co-Investigator in the UKRI-funded *Behavioural Research-UK* consortium, building behavioural research to tackle societal priorities; and team members hold roles on NIHR Advisory Boards for Behavioural and Social Science and the Public Health Reviews Team. A productive working relationship has been developed with Transport for Wales, leading to funding of a post, based in the BSU.

Unit functions reflect the WHO guidance and learnings and have focused on supporting all Directorates in Public Health Wales with technical advice and assistance; providing rapid feedback on policy, services and communications; building capability for deploying behavioural science; and advocacy and engagement.

### 3.2. Operational activity

Since the Deep Dive the BSU has engaged in over 220 discrete projects contributing timely specialist advice, insight, rapid technical feedback, and specialist capacity for the development, commissioning or delivery of behavioural-science informed interventions (see Annex A for further information).

The Unit has responded to requests from all Directorates, along with a range of external stakeholders - providing specialist consultation and advice to projects of varying depth and duration.

The BSU has also engaged with colleagues from health boards, local government, Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), to support the use of, and capability to use, behavioural science.

Over the last 12 months a more proactive approach has developed to optimise the use of behavioural science, at increasing scale across the organisation and wider public health system. This is illustrated by the Behaviourally Informed Communications Initiative (BICI), which has involved Health Protection, Screening Services, Microbiology, Health Improvement, Primary Care and health boards in improving key communication pieces (letters, SMS, forms). Virtual and in-person workshops have been delivered with international speakers, and 30 communication pieces have been taken through a behavioural redesign process. A process evaluation (to be published shortly) indicates high levels of utility in the approach and increased knowledge, skills and confidence; an evaluation of implementation and effectiveness is to follow.



Capability building activity has included a Behaviour Change Agents programme, with a cohort of approximately 50 staff from Public Health Wales, Transport for Wales and the wider public health system in Wales. This pilot programme has developed knowledge, skills and motivation to use behavioural science in interventions and has been delivered with professional educators from University of Manchester and University College London. The programme blended online learning, team-based learning and action learning, and is currently being evaluated.

A Behavioural Science and Public Health Network Community of Practice was launched by the BSU in January 2023, and has grown to over 320 members. A steering group representing the composition of membership, includes Welsh Government, Universities, Public Health Wales, Health Boards, and WLGA, has shaped the programme of work, including six in-person and online events so far.

The BSU has co-created/authored, curated and mobilised [guides and tools](#) and globally sourced [knowledge](#), providing supplementary capability for staff. The tools and guides produced by the BSU have been viewed 1356 times, by 1124 users thus far.

The Unit has, and continues to, work on integrating behavioural science into systems and processes, including significant reference in the CMO annual report (2023); advising the Public Health Wales Publication Principles group; and collaboration with the Evidence Service, Central Evaluation Team and Engagement Team.

As demand and reach has increased the BSU have developed informal prioritisation and planning considerations, centred on the content of the Long Term Strategy and IMTP, Ministerial priorities, our Duty of Quality, as well as stakeholder importance and influence and the opportunity to improve health outcomes.

### 3.3. Evaluation and forward planning

The BSU continuously reflects on its contribution and understanding impact and needs. Additionally, academic partners have undertaken an external review of the Unit's progress, using realist ripple effects mapping to explore associations between BSU activities and the impact on use of behavioural science in practice, and mechanisms of success and opportunities for improvement. The final report, due to be published in March 2025, suggests BSU activities are influencing the work of colleagues and teams, who are incorporating frameworks, models and methods in their work. Success factors included BSU approachability, flexibility to adapt technical input, and the building of effective working relationships, leading to impact.

In 2024, the Unit set out to develop an enabling plan for the ongoing use of behavioural science in support of the Long Term Strategy to 2035. *Better Health Through Behavioural Science: an enabling plan for Wales*, was approved by the Business Executive Team on 5 February 2025 (subject to minor changes). The plan



is the first of its type in the UK, and the first in the European region that reflects all the strategic commitments of the WHO Action Framework. A Task and Finish Advisory Group oversaw development of the plan, chaired by Prof. Ceri Phillips, Vice Chair, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, and included a range of internal and external stakeholders who will form the basis of an Expert Reference Group to strengthen the operations and connections of the Unit.

Actions are included around each of the priority enabling areas described in Figure 1 below. Plans to socialise *Better Health Through Behavioural Science* are in development, including through staff communications, a Leadership Forum session, lunch and learn webinars, and continued contributions to Directorate meetings.

Activity and impact planning, reporting and assurance around delivery of the plan is via the Behavioural Science Unit milestones and actions in the Integrated Medium Term Plan and Operational Plan.

Figure 1: Priority enabling areas in *Better Health Through Behavioural Science*



#### 4 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The work of the unit and the recently approved enabling plan explicitly recognises the requirements of the sustainable development principle and five ways of working from the Act. The plan contains details of how the application of behavioural science can directly contribute to the five ways of working, required by the Act.

Hirdymor



Long Term

*The deliverables in Section 4 of the plan are all presented in a way that balances action to meet short-term needs, with longer-term aspirations. The plan mirrors the timeframe of the Long Term Strategy, with consideration given to action needed out to 2035.*



Atal



Prevention

Integreiddio



Integration

Cydwethio



Collaboration

Cynnwys



Involvement

*The plan has been developed, and contains actions around, enabling optimisation of extant activity and contributing to the development of new interventions, across all public health domains. This enabling approach is focused on preventing problems occurring (in delivering our interventions).*

*All the wellbeing goals have some reliance on people doing something differently. The plan has been developed with consideration of this, and contains actions to ensure behavioural science can contribute to the goals, including clear actions on the integration of behavioural science into systems and processes.*

*As noted in Section 3 above, the work of the Unit has been largely collaborative, both in terms of working alongside services to strengthen interventions, and in developing outputs with academics, WHO and others.*

*The plan has been developed with an independently chaired advisory group with involvement from a diverse range of disciplines and organisations. The Unit has established the diverse Wales Behavioural Science and Public Health Network which has also been engaged in development of the plan.*

## 5. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

- **Note** the development of the Unit, since the Deep Dive in December 2022
- **Receive assurance** that these developments are supporting efforts to deliver the Public Health Wales Long Term Strategy

## Annex A: Support provided by the Unit within Public Health and to stakeholder organisations

Directorate	Division	BSU Activities
Health Protection and Screening Services	VPDP	Collaboration and training, specialist capacity and behavioural diagnoses for vaccination communication interventions.
	AMS	Provided evidence on behavioural determinants of important AMS behaviours, support the All-Wales Communications and Engagement group for AMR.
	IP&C	Undertake behavioural analyses to support winter respiratory viruses campaigns, provided Motivational Interviewing training for contact tracing on TB, behavioural analyses and capacity on communications in TB outbreaks/incident management.
	Screening Services	Training and behavioural diagnoses with the Screening Engagement Team, Public Information Group, DESW and Bowel Screening. Supported behaviourally informed communications across majority of SS. Provided training and script edits supporting the National Health Protection Support Team, increasing uptake of screening services.
Health and Wellbeing	Health Improvement	<p>Diabetes Prevention Programme supported with behavioural systems mapping and analyses to inform action. Provided behavioural specification and diagnoses, specialist input to screening and evaluation tools, contributed to redevelop resources for the PIPYN pilot programme. Supported the development of Healthy Weight Healthy You website content.</p> <p>Provided consultation and guidance to the national active school travel campaign development.</p> <p>Collaborated, advised and contributed to behavioural specification and diagnoses to increase breastfeeding as part of the 10 Steps to a Healthy Weight programme. Behavioural science in systems working for the Obesity Systems Leads group.</p> <p>Consulted and provided behavioural science evidence to inform the MECC logic model development. Provided training for Advanced Practitioners and the Social Marketing Team. Worked with the Tobacco Control Team on a range of projects including behaviourally</p>

		informed communications for HMQ, training for the all-Wales practitioners network.
	Primary Care	Training and feedback on a number of projects including the tackling obesity in primary and community care, development of the Prevention-Based Primary Care model, and the Greener Primary Care Wales work.
Research Data and Digital,	Evidence Service	Informed a behavioural diagnosis to increase uptake of HIV testing, provided training on behavioural science and facilitated discussion on integration of Behavioural Science (BeSci) in evidence review processes.
	Evaluation Team	Co-produced tool for evaluation of behaviour changes interventions and co-hosted a Behavioural Science Community of Practice for Wales focussed on evaluation.
	Publication Principles Group	Supporting the use of BeSci in the development and uptake/adherence of the group's work.
Nursing, Quality and Integrated Governance	Engagement Team	Provided consultation and feedback on strategic direction to improve PHW engagement processes.
NHS Executive	Improvement Cymru	Training and development on BeSci in improvement approaches
	NHS Collaborative	Training and development on BeSci in Improvement approaches
Policy and International Health	Health and Sustainability Hub	Provided consultation and written contribution to the commissioning and activity in developing behaviourally informed communications interventions for protecting health in adverse weather.
Operations and Finance	Communications	Developed and promoted Behaviourally Informed Communications Guide and provided training on incorporating behavioural science into communications interventions.

Organisation	BSU Activities
Health boards	<p>Worked with all health boards on the Behaviour Change Agents programme.</p> <p>BCUHB: training and ongoing support to implement behavioural science in a range of public health work including increasing uptake of financial assistance with local government partners, obesity and tobacco control programmes and the health protection team.</p> <p>CTMU: training and ongoing support for a range of public health work, particularly the Think Quit intervention study supporting nurses to address smoking with inpatients, supported the recruitment of a behavioural science specialist to work with the team.</p>



Future Generations Commissioner's Team	Training and feedback on the Commissioner's Report 2025
Welsh Government	Co-developed/delivered a Behavioural Science Community of Practice focussed on behaviourally informed policy making. Provided consultation and advice to the Climate Action Wales communications intervention.
WAST	Provided advice and consultation with Communications in developing a communications campaign to reduce violence and aggression to all emergency response and front-line staff
WLGA/local government	Provided training for Local Authorities through WLGA.
Transport for Wales	Developed a behavioural science strategy for the organisation. Undertaken behavioural diagnoses to underpin a range of communications and other work in Transport for Wales.