

Welsh Parliament

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport,
and International Relations Committee

International Relations Annual Report 2022-23

November 2023



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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Welsh Parliament

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport,
and International Relations Committee**

International Relations

Annual Report 2022-23

November 2023



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddCulture

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Delyth Jewell MS**
Plaid Cymru



Hefin David MS
Welsh Labour



Alun Davies MS
Welsh Labour



Llyr Gruffydd MS
Plaid Cymru



Tom Giffard MS
Welsh Conservatives



Carolyn Thomas MS
Welsh Labour

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this period:



Heledd Fychan MS
Plaid Cymru

Contents

Chair’s Foreword	5
Conclusions and Recommendations	6
1. Role and responsibilities	8
Improving transparency.....	9
2. Budget	12
3. International Strategy	14
Refresh	14
Programme for Government	14
Overseas office network.....	15
4. Priority relationships	17
Bilateral agreements	17
Wales-Ireland relations	17
UK-EU relations	18
5. Overseas visits and visitors	21
6. Legislation	23
Legislative Consent	23
Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.....	23
Data Protection and Digital Information (No.2) Bill.....	23
International treaties.....	24
7. Future work	26
Annex 1: Formal evidence	27

Chair's Foreword

“Soft power”, “cymell tawel”, and “public diplomacy” are all terms used by the Welsh Government to describe its international relations work. Combined, they describe a way of building a country’s reputation through culture, sport, diplomacy and more to make a positive contribution to the world.

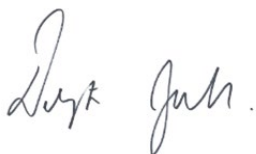
In the few short years since the Committee was established in June 2021, our world has changed dramatically at a breathtaking pace.

In Wales, the loss of a dedicated minister for international relations in 2021 means it is all the more important that the topic remains on the political agenda and in the public eye. After all, Wales’s relevance to the world has not diminished.

In the course of the Committee’s work, the Welsh Government’s willingness to share information is vital. We have succeeded in increasing information in the public domain and improving transparency. The First Minister attends annual scrutiny sessions and we are grateful for the opportunity to explore important issues with him. We hope these sessions continue to shine a light on the Welsh Government’s approach to international relations.

Our progress to date is outlined in this report alongside a roadmap for our future work. We hope this assists everyone to see our next steps and encourage you to get involved. We will publish reports on an annual basis from now until the end of the Sixth Senedd in 2026 and look forward to receiving the Welsh Government’s response to this report.

I am confident that the world is more aware of Wales now than at any time as a result of collective and determined efforts both inside and outside of government. The Committee will play its part in ensuring the world continues to learn about our historic, beautiful and unique country.



Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion 1. We welcome steps taken by the Welsh Government to increase and improve information available in the public domain on international relations, such as the international bilateral agreements webpage established on the Committee's request..... Page 11

Conclusion 2. We welcome the First Minister's offer to discuss the refresh of the international strategy with the Committee. The proposed approach will provide an important opportunity for the Committee to input its view and findings from the Sixth Senedd into the refreshed International Strategy..... Page 15

Conclusion 3. We encourage the Welsh Government to extend this invitation to other interested parties, including stakeholders..... Page 15

Conclusion 4. We welcome the publication of overseas office activity reports and office remits document by the Welsh Government and encourage the Welsh Government to provide sufficient detail in these outputs for scrutiny.
..... Page 16

Conclusion 5. We reiterate our conclusion, drawn in October 2022, that it is clear that the UK-EU relationship remains an important priority for the Welsh Government and for stakeholders in Wales. However, the absence of dedicated strategies for UK-EU relations, at a UK and Wales level, presents challenges when navigating, and providing effective scrutiny of, the post-Brexit UK-EU relationship.....Page 20

Conclusion 6. The Committee welcomes this commitment.....Page 24

Recommendation 1. We repeat our request and reiterate our statements made during the previous draft budget, that more detailed information is provided to the Committee to assist its scrutiny. This should include details of the outcomes and outputs that will be delivered by draft budget allocations to support the Welsh Government's international relations work, including delivery of the International Strategy and its action plans. Page 13

Recommendation 2. We call on the First Minister to provide oral evidence in person for draft budget scrutiny..... Page 13

- Recommendation 3.** We request a progress update against the short and medium term actions listed in the International Strategy’s actions plans.
..... Page 15
- Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should produce a dedicated EU strategy.....Page 20
- Recommendation 5.** If recommendation 4 is not accepted, the Welsh Government should be more explicit in setting out its priorities as they relate to UK-EU, and Wales-EU relations.....Page 20
- Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should set out how it will make the ‘European dimension’ of the International Strategy more explicit, as described by the First Minister.....Page 20
- Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government should include the EU as one of its priority relationships.Page 20
- Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government should set out its approach to the 2025-26 review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.Page 20
- Recommendation 9.** We call on the Welsh Government to clarify when costs related to overseas travel will next be published..... Page 21
- Recommendation 10.** We call on the Welsh Government to publish costs in accordance with the commitment made by the First Minister to publish the latest costs after the end of each financial year..... Page 21
- Recommendation 11.** We call on the Welsh Government to ensure the accuracy of the lists of overseas visits and visitors..... Page 22
- Recommendation 13.** The Committee calls on the Welsh Government to routinely include detailed analysis of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement where UK-EU matters are cited in their Legislative Consent Memorandums, as provided during the course this Bill’s scrutiny.....Page 24

1. Role and responsibilities

- 1.** The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee (“the Committee”) is responsible for scrutinising the Welsh Government’s approach to international relations, including the delivery of its International Strategy¹, and associated actions plans².
- 2.** The Committee is particularly keen to ensure that the global profile of Wales does not diminish because of our changing relationship with the EU. We also wish to keep abreast of how the Welsh Government’s international relations work overlaps and impacts other areas of the Committee’s remit.
- 3.** This year, we agreed³ to start issuing annual reports on international relations to provide an overview of our work and draw out key themes in one place. Our first report summarises our activities.
- 4.** The Committee routinely considers the following matters:
 - Budget;
 - International relations priorities of the Welsh Government;
 - Implementation of the International Strategy, including activities of the Welsh Government’s network of overseas offices;
 - Overseas visits and visitors; and
 - Relevant legislation, including legislation relating to international obligations.
- 5.** The Committee has undertaken proactive inquiries, including on:
 - Wales-Ireland relations⁴ (completed); and

¹ Welsh Government: [International strategy for Wales](#) – 14 January 2020

² Welsh Government: [International action plans](#) - 14 December 2020

³ Committee meeting: [25 May 2023](#)

⁴ Committee inquiry: [Wales-Ireland relations](#)

- Culture and the new relationship with the EU⁵ (ongoing).

6. The Committee also responds to:

- significant international developments. For example, it signed a joint statement⁶ with other Senedd committees on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine; and
- relevant consultations by other parliaments and institutions. For example, the House of Lords European Affairs Committee's inquiry on the UK-EU future relationship⁷.

7. The Chair represents the Committee at relevant meetings held at the Senedd, such as the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions summit (CPMR), and in diplomatic meetings with visiting Ambassadors and dignitaries.

8. Committee members also represent the Senedd in a number of relevant parliamentary bodies, including the EU's Committee of the Regions-UK Contact Group, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and the Interparliamentary Forum on Brexit.

9. We are not the only Senedd committee that considers international affairs. We work alongside the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and others to ensure that international matters are considered and the Welsh Government's approach is scrutinised.

Improving transparency

10. The Welsh Government does not report on international relations in one place and there are limited requirements to provide information to the Senedd on the topic. During the Fifth Senedd, there was a dedicated Minister for International Relations but following the 2021 Senedd elections, the post was disbanded and the responsibilities subsumed by the First Minister⁸.

⁵ Committee inquiry: [Culture and the new relationship with the EU](#)

⁶ Welsh Parliament: [Senedd Committees' joint statement on the Ukraine war anniversary](#) – 24 February 2023

⁷ UK Parliament: European Affairs Committee inquiry: [The future UK-EU relationship](#)

⁸ Welsh Government: [Ministerial Portfolio – Rt. Hon. Mark Drakeford MS](#)

11. Since its establishment in June 2021, we have sought to ensure that information is regularly provided by the Welsh Government to the Senedd. This is to ensure that, between annual scrutiny sessions attended by the First Minister, there is no diminution of focus on international relations in the absence of a dedicated Minister.

12. The First Minister is also invited to attend the Committee for scrutiny of the departmental budget of £8.38 million⁹.

13. At our request, the Welsh Government agreed to provide the following information:

- Monthly lists of overseas Ministerial visits and diplomatic visits to Wales. Prior to receiving these lists, the Committee relied on a number of different sources to monitor visits which presented challenges in effectively scrutinising the Welsh Government's activities;
- Annual activity reports of the Welsh Government's overseas offices;
- Notifications of British-Irish Council meetings under the Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement¹⁰;
- Specific information in response to Committee requests, including copies of correspondence, statistical requests and detailed information on specific aspects of our work.
- At the Committee's request, the Welsh Government also launched a new webpage for international bilateral agreements¹¹, giving them parity with how equivalent domestic agreements¹² are presented on its website.

14. We continue to make recommendations to the Welsh Government on ways it could further improve information in the public domain to improve scrutiny, assist interested parties and showcase its activities. For example our Wales-

⁹ Welsh Government: [Final Budget 2023 to 2024](#) – 28 February 2023

¹⁰ Welsh Parliament: [Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement](#) - November 2021

¹¹ Welsh Government: [International bilateral agreements](#) - 13 June 2023

¹² Welsh Government: [Concordats, memorandums of understanding and other agreements](#) – 9 June 2023

Ireland relations inquiry report¹³, and our consultation response to the House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship¹⁴, makes recommendations on these issues.

Conclusion 1. We welcome steps taken by the Welsh Government to increase and improve information available in the public domain on international relations, such as the international bilateral agreements webpage established on the Committee's request.

¹³ Committee report: [Wales-Ireland relations: Exploring an old relationship in a new age](#) – October 2023 [PDF 1.9MB]

¹⁴ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

2. Budget

15. The Committee carries out annual scrutiny¹⁵ of the Welsh Government's draft budget for international relations work.

16. In relation to the last draft budget¹⁶ (2023-24), we noted that, like many budget lines, the International Relations budget is not immune from challenges presented by inflation, the cost of living increases or the war in Ukraine.

17. The departmental budget of £8.38 million¹⁷ was to be maintained in 2023-24 but inflation means that this amounts to a real term cut for the overseas offices which makes the prioritisation of activity important.

18. We expressed our disappointment that the First Minister:

- would not give oral evidence¹⁸ and would instead provide written responses to our questions; and
- was unwilling to commit to sharing outcomes and outputs that will be delivered by draft budget allocations to support the International Strategy and actions plans. We explained our rationale for the request for this information, including that it would improve its understanding and would provide assurance to Committee Members and stakeholders that spending in this area would be targeted, effective and deliver value for money. We asked the First Minister to reconsider this request.

19. We will next undertake budget scrutiny in January 2024, and have invited the First Minister to give oral evidence.¹⁹

¹⁵ Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee: [Completed work and Published Reports](#)

¹⁶ Committee report: [Scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2023-24](#) – February 2023 [PDF 267KB]

¹⁷ Welsh Government: [Final Budget 2023 to 2024](#) – February 2023

¹⁸ Letter to the First Minister: [Providing oral evidence for Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2023-24](#) – 30 November 2022 [PDF 77KB]

¹⁹ Letter to the First Minister: [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25](#) - 25 October 2023 [PDF 169KB]

Recommendation 1. We repeat our request and reiterate our statements made during the previous draft budget, that more detailed information is provided to the Committee to assist its scrutiny. This should include details of the outcomes and outputs that will be delivered by draft budget allocations to support the Welsh Government's international relations work, including delivery of the International Strategy and its action plans.

Recommendation 2. We call on the First Minister to provide oral evidence in person for draft budget scrutiny.

3. International Strategy

20. The Welsh Government does not report specifically on its International Strategy (2020-25). However, the Committee monitors international relations activity for progress using a combination of Welsh Government overseas office reports, Ministerial statements, and evidence sessions, Senedd business and social media.

Refresh

21. During our annual scrutiny session with the First Minister²⁰ in May 2023, the First Minister announced that the International Strategy will be refreshed when it expires in 2025 to cover the remaining time before the 2026 Senedd elections.

22. In 2022, the Committee asked the First Minister to explain the process by which the Strategy would be refreshed as 2025 approaches, he said:

“Absolutely happy to have that sort of discussion [with the Committee]– set it out on paper to begin with, and then at a future occasion to discuss it, if that was useful.”²¹

Programme for Government

23. The Welsh Government’s Programme for Government²² includes commitments to “give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage”. The Programme for Government, which was first published in 2016 and updated in 2021, does not mention the International Strategy.

24. Three additional commitments are set out to:

1. Establish a Peace Academy - Academi Heddwch - in Wales;

²⁰ Committee meeting: [10 May 2023](#)

²¹ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee - 23 June 2022, paragraph 64](#)

²² Welsh Government: [Programme for government](#) – 4 July 2023

2. Put in place a £65 million international learning exchange programme; and
3. Reinvigorate our twinning relationships across the EU through a Young People's Twinning Fund.

25. International matters, like biodiversity, refugee policy and incorporating treaties into Welsh law are threaded throughout the Programme for Government and will also play an important part in Wales's international relations.

26. We will monitor progress²³ against these Programme for Government commitments.

Conclusion 2. We welcome the First Minister's offer to discuss the refresh of the international strategy with the Committee. The proposed approach will provide an important opportunity for the Committee to input its view and findings from the Sixth Senedd into the refreshed International Strategy.

Conclusion 3. We encourage the Welsh Government to extend this invitation to other interested parties, including stakeholders.

Recommendation 3. We request a progress update against the short and medium term actions listed in the International Strategy's actions plans.

Overseas office network

- 27.** The Welsh Government's:
- annual reports on its overseas network²⁴; and
 - overseas office remits document²⁵,

form key parts of the Committee's international relations scrutiny.

²³ Senedd Research: [Wales at home and abroad](#) – September 2023

²⁴ Welsh Government: [Overseas network: Annual report 2022 to 2023](#) – 19 May 2023

²⁵ Welsh Government: [Welsh Government international office remits](#) – 27 September 2023

28. In April 2023, we visited the Welsh Government’s Dublin office as part of our Wales-Ireland relations inquiry²⁶, where Members met with staff to better understand its day-to-day operation.

29. Members of the Committee also regularly visit the Welsh Government’s Brussels office in their capacity as Senedd representatives on post-Brexit UK-EU bodies, such as the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly²⁷ and EU’s Committee of the Regions - UK Contact Group²⁸.

Conclusion 4. We welcome the publication of overseas office activity reports and office remits document by the Welsh Government and encourage the Welsh Government to provide sufficient detail in these outputs for scrutiny.

²⁶ Committee inquiry: [Wales-Ireland relations](#)

²⁷ Senedd Research: [“Developing Muscle”: UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly sets out an imperative need for further cooperation](#) – 24 November 2022

²⁸ Senedd Research: [Forging Future Relationships: Senedd to host first UK meeting of the EU Committee of the Regions - UK Contact Group](#) – 17 March 2022

4. Priority relationships

30. The Welsh Government's International Strategy sets out its priority relationships:

"Country: Germany, France, Ireland, US and Canada Regions: Basque Country, Brittany and Flanders."

Bilateral agreements

31. The Welsh Government has a number of active international bilateral agreements in place with Quebec, Brittany, Basque Country, Ireland, Oita Prefecture and Flanders.

32. As a result of the our work, these are listed on a dedicated Welsh Government webpage. We will continue to monitor the conclusion of international bilateral agreements by the Welsh Government.

Wales-Ireland relations

33. The Welsh Government's International Strategy identifies Ireland as a priority country relationship. Both governments have signed a Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan²⁹ outlining how they will cooperate on shared policy areas.

34. This is the Welsh Government's most developed strategic international relationship with another country and its government, with structured engagement mechanisms, strategic objectives and specific actions.

35. We conducted an inquiry³⁰ into this relationship and published our report³¹ on 5 October 2023.

²⁹ Welsh Government: [Ireland-Wales shared statement and joint action plan 2021 to 2025](#) – 1 March 2021

³⁰ Committee inquiry: [Wales-Ireland relations](#)

³¹ Committee report: [Wales-Ireland relations: Exploring an old relationship in a new age](#) – October 2023 [PDF 1.9MB]

36. We look forward to see the results of this work develop, including our own commitment to strengthen ties with our sister committees in Ireland's Oireachtas.

UK-EU relations

37. It is clear that the UK-EU relationship remains an important priority for the Welsh Government and for stakeholders in Wales. We have made a number of observations in this area, including that:

- the absence of dedicated strategies to UK-EU relations at a UK- and Wales- level presents challenges when navigating, and providing effective scrutiny of, the post-Brexit UK-EU relationship. This is compounded by the breadth of Ministerial responsibilities at Welsh Government³² in delivering the new arrangements.
- the nature of UK-EU relations could impact the delivery³³ of the Welsh Government's international strategy and Wales-EU relations more generally.
- the four nations should be engaged and represented³⁴ in future UK-EU relations.
- We continue to believe in the importance of direct contact³⁵ between devolved governments and legislatures with EU institutions.
- We are concerned that the post-Brexit challenges faced by stakeholders to engage in UK-EU relations has led to reduced³⁶

³² Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

³³ Committee Report: [Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#) - November 2022

³⁴ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

³⁵ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

³⁶ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

representation of Welsh interests³⁷, which could reduce further in future.

- Wales has a direct interest in the Northern Ireland Protocol³⁸, including on all matters affecting Welsh businesses and NI-GB trade flows given the strategic importance of its west-facing ports.
- We welcome the conclusion of the Windsor Framework³⁹ and the potential opportunities it unlocks, particularly with respect to the UK's association to Horizon. Prior to its conclusion, we called the UK and EU to urgently seek a negotiated solution⁴⁰ to the issues raised by the Protocol.

38. The Committee pursues these matters on an ongoing basis, including during our annual scrutiny session with the First Minister⁴¹ in May 2023.

39. In relation to the refresh of the International Strategy in 2025, the First Minister told⁴² the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee on 18 September that:

"...there may be opportunities to make the European dimension of [the refresh] a bit more explicit." [paragraph 105]

40. The First Minister also set out his strategic forward approach to the EU⁴³ in correspondence to that Committee on 6 October.

³⁷ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

³⁸ Committee report: [Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#) – November 2022 [PDF 152KB]

³⁹ Committee report: [Wales-Ireland relations: Exploring an old relationship in a new age](#) – October 2023 [PDF 1.9MB]

⁴⁰ Committee report: [Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#) – November 2022 [PDF 152KB]

⁴¹ Committee meeting: [10 May 2023](#) – Agenda Item 6

⁴² [Record of Proceedings: Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee – 18 September 2023, paragraph 105](#)

⁴³ [Letter from the First Minister to the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee: Welsh Government's strategic forward approach to the European Union](#) – 6 October 2023 [PDF 154KB]

Conclusion 5. We reiterate our conclusion⁴⁴, drawn in October 2022, that it is clear that the UK-EU relationship remains an important priority for the Welsh Government and for stakeholders in Wales. However, the absence of dedicated strategies for UK-EU relations, at a UK and Wales level, presents challenges when navigating, and providing effective scrutiny of, the post-Brexit UK-EU relationship.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should produce a dedicated EU strategy.

Recommendation 5. If recommendation 4 is not accepted, the Welsh Government should be more explicit in setting out its priorities as they relate to UK-EU, and Wales-EU relations.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should set out how it will make the ‘European dimension’ of the International Strategy more explicit, as described by the First Minister.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should include the EU as one of its priority relationships.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government should set out its approach to the 2025-26 review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

41. We note the First Minister’s correspondence to the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee setting out the Welsh Government’s strategic priorities.

⁴⁴ Committee response: [House of Lords European Affairs Committee inquiry into the future UK-EU relationship](#) - December 2022 [PDF 802KB]

5. Overseas visits and visitors

42. The Committee receives monthly lists of overseas Ministerial visits and incoming diplomatic visits to Wales.

43. Costs for 2021-22 were published on 15 December 2022, totalling £10,406.34. In March, the First Minister responded⁴⁵ to written requests for costings in relation to two Ministerial visits, to Paris and Brussels in March 2023. In response, the First Minister said costs would be published after the end of each financial year in April but these have not yet materialised.

44. The Welsh Government's Ministerial Code⁴⁶ requires that:

"Annually, a list will be published of all travel overseas by ministers costing more than £500 per trip, together with the total cost of all ministers' visits overseas." [paragraph 9.8]

45. Paragraphs 9.2-9.10 of the Ministerial Code set rules for Ministerial visits overseas.

46. Paragraph 5.22 also requires list of gifts and hospitality received by Ministers on behalf of the Welsh Government valued at more than £320 to be reported annually.

47. The Committee is aware of multiple overseas Ministerial which are likely to meet these reporting requirements and we will continue to monitor overseas visits.

Recommendation 9. We call on the Welsh Government to clarify when costs related to overseas travel will next be published.

Recommendation 10. We call on the Welsh Government to publish costs in accordance with the commitment made by the First Minister to publish the latest costs after the end of each financial year.

⁴⁵ Welsh Parliament: [Written Questions tabled on 21/03/2023 for answer on 28/03/2023](#)

⁴⁶ Welsh Government: [Ministerial code](#) – 5 August 2021

Recommendation 11. We call on the Welsh Government to ensure the accuracy of the lists of overseas visits and visitors.

6. Legislation

48. The Committee considers legislation relating to international relations, as follows.

Legislative Consent

49. We were tasked with scrutiny of the following Legislative Consent Memorandums (LCMs)⁴⁷:

Northern Ireland Protocol Bill

50. In our report⁴⁸, we:

- Raised concerns the Bill poses a risk to the UK's international reputation and its credibility in international law;
- Raised concerns that the Bill marks a deterioration in UK-EU relations which could in turn impact the delivery of the Welsh Government's International Strategy, Wales-Ireland cooperation, and Wales-EU relations. We urge both parties to urgently seek a negotiated solution to the issues raised by the Protocol;
- Agreed with the Welsh Government's view, that Wales has a direct interest in the Protocol, including on all matters affecting Welsh businesses and NI-GB trade flows given the strategic importance of its west-facing ports; and

Data Protection and Digital Information (No.2) Bill

51. In light of the potential risks outlined by the Welsh Government to the UK's EU data adequacy decision, our report⁴⁹ called on the Welsh Government to:

⁴⁷ Welsh Parliament: [Legislative Consent – Sixth Senedd](#)

⁴⁸ Committee Report: [Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#)- November 2022

⁴⁹ Committee report: [The Data Protection and Digital Information \(No.2\) Bill Legislative Consent Memoranda No.1 and No.2](#) – July 2023 [PDF 189KB]

- provide regular updates to the Committee on the Bill's impact on UK-EU relations, including intergovernmental discussions on the Bill as it progresses through the UK Parliament and on an ongoing basis should it be enacted.

The First Minister's response⁵⁰ said that:

"I will continue to provide updates on the potential impact of the Bill on EU-UK relations through the LCM process, in particular regarding concerns around the EU's data adequacy decision, until such time that I am content that the Bill will not impact on EU data adequacy."

Conclusion 6. The Committee welcomes this commitment.

52. The response also provided the Welsh Government's assessment of the Bill against specific provisions of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement⁵¹. We found this particularly informative in its scrutiny of matters raised in the Bill.

Recommendation 13. The Committee calls on the Welsh Government to routinely include detailed analysis of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement where UK-EU matters are cited in their Legislative Consent Memorandums, as provided during the course this Bill's scrutiny.

International treaties

53. We consider treaties drawn to our attention by the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee which has a dedicated process for treaty scrutiny⁵². That Committee notifies other Senedd committees of treaties agreed by the UK Government that fall within their remits.

⁵⁰ Welsh Government response: Committee report "The Data Protection and Digital Information (No. 2) Bill Legislative Consent Memoranda No.1 and No.2" – 5 September 2023 [PDF 175KB]

⁵¹ Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of the one part, and the European Union and the European atomic energy community, of the other part

⁵² Welsh Parliament: International agreements

54. The First Minister recently welcomed our interest⁵³ in international agreements during our consideration of the Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach to Football Matches and Other Sporting Events.

⁵³ [Response from the First Minister: Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach to Football Matches and Other Sporting Events – 25 July 2023 \[PDF 156KB\]](#)

7. Future work

55. Throughout the year, Committee Members have identified and discussed ideas for potential future work. These are additional to our routine international relations work and our inquiry on Culture and the new relationship with the EU⁵⁴.

56. The Committee's future work could focus on:

- International Strategy implementation and refresh
- Priority country and regional relationships
- Review of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

⁵⁴ Committee inquiry: [Culture and the new relationship with the EU](#)

Annex 1: Formal evidence

All evidence can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in the [Record of Proceedings](#).

Date	Name and Organisation
10 May 2023	<p>Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister for Wales Welsh Government</p> <p>Andrew Gwatkin, Director, International Relations and Trade, Welsh Government</p> <p>Paula Walsh, Deputy Director, International Relations, Welsh Government</p>