

Media briefing for interview with Morning Ireland during Dublin trip

Date & Time	08:00 Thursday 29 February 2024
Interviewers	Morning Ireland
Format	Live interview over the phone
Venue	Phone
Press Officer	Redacted – Section 40
Brief summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morning Ireland would like to interview you about women in politics and the rise in online abuse, during your trip to Dublin to strengthen the Ireland-Wales Statement and mark St David's Day• It will be an opportunity to talk about your experiences as the longest serving Labour Minister in UK history, the importance of the representation of women in politics and the dangers of those in elected positions facing online abuse.
Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We believe the representation of women in politics needs to be improved and are committed to gender equality in Wales.• The Welsh Government is committed to removing barriers to equality and to building a gender-equal Wales. A Wales in which we share power, influence and resources equally. As Minister for Social Justice, I am doing all I can to fulfil that vision.• Violence against women and girls is far too common. Harassment, abuse and violence are daily occurrences for women and have conditioned their lives for far too long. We must unite to end violence on our streets, we must unite for change, and we must unite to allow everyone to live fear free.
Hot Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Farming protests / Sustainable Farming Scheme• Covid inquiry / why no Wales inquiry• Tata• Doctors' pay deal negotiations

Women in politics

- Women are an under-represented majority in Wales. More women in the Senedd will be good for our politics, ensuring a wider range of views and experiences to enable better decision-making.
- We have a track record as a global leader in the representation of women in the Senedd, but over the last 15 years, the proportion of women represented in the Senedd has gradually declined.

- In 2003, there was a 50/50 split of Senedd Members, but currently, 26 (43%) of the 60 Senedd Members are women and just 31% of candidates in the last election (2021) were women.

Gender equality

- Equality between genders has been enshrined in law for some time but we know that equality alone is not enough. It isn't enough for governments and organisations to say that we all have equal opportunities now, so everything is fine.
- The Welsh Government is committed to removing those barriers and to building a gender-equal Wales. A Wales in which we share power, influences and resources equally. As Minister for Social Justice I am doing all I can to fulfil that vision.
- And this is not just empty rhetoric. In the last three years we have published the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, established the disability rights taskforce and launched the Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan.

International Women's Day 8 March 2024

- International Women's Day is marked around the globe on 8 March each year. It a day to both celebrate the achievements of women and girls and to focus on the challenges we still face as we work towards gender equality. The theme for International Women's Day this year is 'Inspire Inclusion'.
- The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership will be giving an oral statement to outline the action Welsh Government is taking to advance gender equality on the 12 March.
- Welsh Government is hosting a seminar to celebrate Women in Exports on 8 March in the Wales Millennium Centre.
- The Welsh Government's women's network, Women Together, will run an International Women's Day event open to all staff. This year's event on 13 March will include a range of internal and external speakers highlighting how they 'Inspire Inclusion' in their respective fields.
- As in previous years, we will also be publicising the day through our social media channels and by lighting up the Cathays Park building in purple on the evening of 8 March.

Equal Power Equal Voice (EPEV)

- The EPEV mentoring programme is led by WEN Wales in partnership with Disability Wales, Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team (EYST) Wales and Stonewall. The scheme aims to increase diversity of representation in public and political life in Wales and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and the Welsh Government.
- Equal Power Equal Voice Mentoring Programme aims to increase diversity of representation in public and political life in Wales. Across Wales there exists massive social and intellectual capital that is untapped and excluded from our public and political systems. This includes Black, Asian or ethnic minority people, people from the LGBTQ+ community, disabled people, women and people who are any combination of these identities. There are those who are seen to have “made it” in that they have got to the “top” in their chosen field or in politics.
- Yet a common theme on talking to many of them is that it was a harder journey than it should have been, took a longer period of time and required many barriers to be overcome. The Equal Power Equal Voice (EPEV) programme aims to help bridge that gap, to get more diverse representation in politics and public life by strengthening the knowledge and skills of those that aspire to be there, whilst learning from and being supported by those who have achieved positions of power, influence and authority in the face of these challenges.

Online Safety Act

- Keeping people safe whilst they are online is incredibly important. The UK Government Online Safety Act is a key step in helping to achieve this.
- Whilst online safety is a non-devolved matter there are some aspects of the Act which impact Wales.
- This is particularly the case for Education and Childcare and I know officials have worked with UK Government to ensure relevant exemptions and appropriate powers are devolved to Welsh Ministers.
- Officials are in dialogue with Ofcom Wales in terms of their expanded role as regulator for online safety.
- Ofcom have published two consultations in respect of the Online Safety Act.

Protecting Women and Girls from Violence

- Violence against women and girls is far too common. Harassment, abuse and violence are daily occurrences for women and have conditioned their lives for far too long. We must unite to end violence on our streets, we must unite for change, and we must unite to allow everyone to live fear free.
- Welsh Government has always been clear about its ambition to end violence against women and girls. Violence against women and girls is a societal problem which requires a societal response. We must challenge attitudes and change behaviours of those who behave abusively. It is not for women to modify their behaviour; it is for abusers to change theirs.
- That is why the Welsh Government Programme for Government commits to strengthening the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Strategy to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home in order to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman. The strategy was published in May 2022 and can be found here: [Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: strategy 2022 to 2026 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#).
- We will continue to work in partnership with specialist services to raise awareness of the inequality and safety issues faced by women and girls, and to end all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and will continue to work with Welsh police forces, Police and Crime Commissioners, public safety boards and the Crown Prosecution Service to instil confidence in victims to report incidents of abuse and violence when they occur and to hold those who abuse to account.
- Wales will not be bystander to abuse.

Safety of Women – Street Lighting

- Planning Policy Wales recognises the importance of providing appropriate lighting to enhance safety and security to help in the prevention of crime and to allow recreational activities to take place at night. However, there is also the need to balance this against other considerations such as the need to protect the natural and historic environment, retaining dark skies (where appropriate), protecting local amenities, and reducing carbon emissions. Lighting to provide security is important, especially in rural areas, and where necessary planning authorities should adopt policies for lighting in their development plans.
- In July last year, the UK Government's Safer Streets fund awarded over £4.1 million to the four Welsh police forces, with a focus on preventing violence against women and girls in public spaces. This included priorities to reduce these crimes and increase women and girls' feelings of safety in these spaces, as well as building an evidence base for prevention. Gwent police

have used this funding to carry out security improvements, including additional CCTV cameras and covert tactics, and to change attitudes towards inappropriate behaviour and actions.

- While it is right that, as part of our response, we look at options available to enhance women's safety in public places, often these initiatives or schemes can place the burden on women to protect themselves or alter their behaviour. It is therefore vital that we also address the root causes of male violence against women, focusing on changing negative attitudes and cultures that allow violence and abuse to persist. Prevention and early intervention need to take centre stage, rather than solely focussing our attention on remedial measures.

Misogyny as a hate crime

- As we said back in December 2021, the Law Commission's decision not to recommend that sex or gender be added as a protected characteristic for the purposes of aggravated offences and enhanced sentencing was a disappointing development.
- We are fully aware of the considerations and reasons for caution, but this is an issue which should have been explored further, rather than written off at the first hurdle.
- The UK Government's response to the Law Commission's report is predictable, given the number of times it has pushed back on misogyny becoming a hate crime.
- We continue to wait for the UK Government's response to the other 33 recommendations made by the Law Commission. It has now been 16 months since the report was published.

Background

Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk

Farming protests / Sustainable Farming Scheme

- Farming is very important to Wales and our economy and we want a successful future for Welsh farming.
- We have had a seven-year conversation with farmers to design future farming support and we are committed to continuing to working with farmers to develop the Sustainable Farming Scheme.
- The scheme is currently out for consultation and we would like to thank the thousands of farmers who have already responded and attended the 10 Welsh Government Roadshow sessions across Wales. This is a genuine

consultation and no decisions will be taken on any element of the proposal, including how we achieve the requirement for habitat and trees, until we have conducted a full analysis of the consultation responses.

- We fully expect to make changes to the proposals as a result of the consultation. We are listening and we will consider all responses. We encourage everyone to reply with their views by 7 March.

If needed on the meetings yesterday [Monday, 26th] with farming representatives in Welshpool and Carmarthen:

- The First Minister and Minister for Rural Affairs would like to thank the farmers for their time. It was an opportunity for the First Minister and Minister to hear directly from the farmers about their concerns but also about their suggestions for change in a range of areas. There was a commitment to continue talking and listening.

Covid inquiry / why no Wales inquiry

- Our thoughts and sympathies are with everyone who lost loved ones during the pandemic.
- **We continue to engage fully with the inquiry to ensure all actions and decisions are fully and properly scrutinised.**
- Full scrutiny of the decisions made by Welsh Ministers and Welsh public services, together with their interconnected nature with those taken by other UK governments, can only be achieved by a comprehensive UK-wide inquiry.
- Welsh Ministers and government officials will be giving detailed evidence to the UK Covid Inquiry in Cardiff over the coming weeks.

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Tata

- The Welsh Government has worked closely with Tata and its workforce for many years to safeguard the long-term future of steel production in Wales and we have urged the UK Government to provide the investment needed to support the move to greener methods of steel production.
- Steel production underpins all of our manufacturing across the UK and it has an essential role to play in our future.
- We have a history of supporting our steel sector in Wales with capital investment and with support to develop people and skills for today and the future.
- Clearly the Welsh Government does not have the resources or indeed the powers that the UK Governments has but we have always made it clear that we would be prepared to do what we can to support.
- British Steel has also announced proposals to transition to green steelmaking for their UK operations. The eventual closure of their blast furnaces will result in the end of virgin steelmaking in the UK.

- The consequence of this means the UK would be the only G7 nation without primary steelmaking capability and exposes the UK to global market conditions on the import of steel.
- According to the Metals Processing Institute, today's scrap-based EAFs are not all capable of producing all grades of steel – a significant limitation, particularly for flat products for the automotive sectors and packaging:
 - the advanced high-grade steels for automotive exterior body panels and the range of high-quality steel substrate for packaging, a key product for the UK industry. Currently made in TSUK Trostre.
- However, the limitations associated with EAFs are rapidly being overcome, some of the high-quality steel for the automotive sector is now produced via electric arc furnaces in the USA.
- TSUK has confirmed that during transition, downstream supply will be protected through imported steel, and post transition, the Company has said it is confident they will have capability to supply the high-quality steel required via the new EAF to support the majority of their order book for Trostre.

On financial support for Tata Steel UK:

- We have been supporting Tata with substantial support from both capital and revenue for many years

Doctors' pay deal negotiations

- **I am disappointed that doctors have decided to take further industrial action, but I understand their strength of feeling about our 5% pay offer.**
- **We wish to address their pay restoration ambitions, but our offer is at the limits of the finances available to us and reflects the position reached with the other health unions for this year.**
- **We will continue to press the UK Government to pass on the funding necessary for full and fair pay rises for public sector workers.**
- **We remain committed to working in social partnership with the British Medical Association and NHS Employers to find a solution and are always ready to talk.**

IS this the worst pay offer in the UK? Junior Doctors now on lower pay in Wales than England.

- **The offer we have made – a 5% increase which has already been paid into junior doctor pay packets is equal to that made and accepted by, other NHS workers this is at the limits of the finances available to us.**
- **Whilst we have not been able to meet the recommendations of the pay review body this year, during the last financial year we offered a significantly higher sum than was offered in England and higher than that recommended by the pay review body.**
- **A new Junior Doctors contract was negotiated in social partnership with the BMA and NHS Wales Employers in 2022 with an additional investment of in**

the region of 3% of the contract costs (up to £8 million), unfortunately junior doctors voted to reject this contract, this has resulted in junior doctors pay in Wales falling behind that in England as any pay awards have been based on the 2002 contract.

- The new contract for junior doctors if accepted would have resulted in slightly higher pay for junior doctors in Wales compared to England and improved terms and conditions.

Consultants will go to ballot on 4 March on industrial and with now new money on the table, a strike there looks likely, how will the NHS cope with that?

- I hope a strike by consultants can be avoided and we are always open to more talks to try to find a way forward, but as I've said before there is no new money at the moment.
- A strike by consultants would cause even more disruption than the junior doctors strikes.
- Planned care would be significantly affected and we could expect more postponed operations than we did during the junior doctors strike.
- But we would work with the BMA and NHS Wales to ensure patient safety was protected during any industrial action.

But the Welsh Government announced extra money for the NHS in the second supplementary budget – why can't this be used to increase the pay of junior doctors?

- This isn't additional funds available to be spent and we can't use these allocations to deliver a pay-rise for doctors.
- The money announced today is an adjustment of the 2023/24 budget and reflects existing spending plans.. Most of it is for the recovery pay award announced last April; reflects current NHS deficits and , an increase in capital funding.

The Second Supplementary Budget contains two main sets of changes – those announced by the Finance Minister in October 2023 and some additional allocations and changes made during the 2023-24 financial year