	Name of Meeting Board **Date of Meeting** September 2026 **Agenda item:** 5.2

Review of the Board Assurance Framework

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Approval/Scrutiny route:	Business Executive Team 16 September 2026 Board for Adoption on 24 September 2026

Purpose

To present the revised Board Assurance Framework and associated Board-level governance documents for Board approval.

Recommendation:

APPROVE	CONSIDER	RECOMMEND	ADOPT	ASSURANCE
☒	☒	☐	☐	☐

The Board is asked to **approve** the revised:

- Board Assurance Framework
- Protocol for Meetings in Private
- Board Etiquette

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.
This report contributes to the following:

Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective	All Strategic Priorities/Well-being Objectives

Summary impact analysis

Equality and Health Impact Assessment	An Equality and Health Impact Assessment is not required for this paper
Risk and Assurance	The Board Assurance Framework supports clear Board-level oversight by setting out how assurance is generated, scrutinised and escalated through the organisation's governance arrangements.

Health and Care Standards	This report supports and/or takes into account the Health and Care Standards for NHS Wales Quality Themes Governance, Leadership and Accountability Choose an item. Choose an item.
Financial implications	N/A
People implications	N/A

1. Purpose

This paper presents the revised Board Assurance Framework and associated Board-level governance documents for approval.

2. Background

The Board Assurance Framework was developed in response to a recommendation arising from Audit Wales' 2022 Structured Assessment. The Framework was adopted by the Board in November 2023, with a commitment that it would be reviewed annually.

To align with the wider review of Standing Orders and Committee Terms of Reference, the annual review was undertaken in August 2026. The review identified a number of proposed amendments to strengthen clarity, consistency and ease of use.

The following associated Board-level governance documents have also been reviewed:

- Board Etiquette
- Protocol for Meetings in Private

3. Summary of changes

This section summarises the key proposed amendments to the Board Assurance Framework and associated Board-level governance documents. The changes are intended to improve clarity, consistency, structure and ease of use, while retaining the existing approach and strengthening the documents' usefulness for Board and Committee governance.

The revised draft documents are attached for approval as follows:

- Appendix 1 – Board Assurance Framework
- Appendix 2 – Protocol for Meetings in Private
- Appendix 3 – Board Etiquette

3.1 Board Assurance Framework

The Board Assurance Framework has been reviewed and strengthened to improve clarity, flow and Board-level assurance. The most substantive changes relate to Committee-level assurance, including how assurance is generated, scrutinised and escalated to the Board where required.

Key proposed changes and benefits:

- **Strengthened assurance narrative,** setting out a clearer line of sight from strategic priorities, risks and operational evidence through executive oversight, Committee scrutiny and Board judgement.

- **Clarified the distinction between reassurance and assurance,** emphasising that assurance requires sufficient, relevant and reliable evidence, rather than confirmation that activity is taking place.
- **Added practical examples and assurance-flow diagrams** to support a shared understanding of evidence quality, assurance inputs, escalation triggers and cross-Committee escalation.
- **Expanded the Committee Assurance section,** clarifying how Committees scrutinise, test and triangulate evidence, identify assurance gaps and determine whether escalation to the Board is required.
- **Added cross-Committee escalation arrangements,** explaining how matters spanning more than one Committee remit should be referred, tracked and escalated where necessary.
- **Introduced a Board and Committee Assurance Coverage Map,** improving visibility of assurance coverage across key areas of Board and Committee business.
- **Improved consistency, readability and usability,** including formatting, headings, spacing, grammar, UK English usage and Board-ready wording.

Benefits of the proposed improvements:

Taken together, the proposed improvements will support more effective Board and Committee oversight by making the assurance process clearer, more consistent and easier to apply in practice.

They will help strengthen the quality of assurance presented, improve the identification and escalation of assurance gaps, and support more informed scrutiny, decision making and governance improvement.

- clearer understanding of how assurance flows from operational evidence to executive oversight, Committee scrutiny and Board judgement;
- greater consistency in the way assurance is presented, tested and escalated across Board and Committee business;
- improved visibility of assurance coverage, helping to identify gaps, duplication or areas requiring further scrutiny;
- stronger support for effective workplan planning, risk oversight and continuous governance improvement.

3.2 Private meetings protocol

The Protocol for Meetings in Private has been reviewed and updated to improve clarity, flow and readability. The revised wording reinforces the principle that Board business should be conducted in public wherever possible, with private consideration reserved for clearly defined circumstances where this is justified.

Key proposed changes:

- **Improved clarity and readability** throughout the Protocol by tightening wording, shortening longer sentences and removing unnecessary repetition.

- **Strengthened the emphasis on openness and transparency**, making clear that public consideration remains the default position and that private consideration should be the exception.
- **Clarified the rationale for reserving matters to private session**, including clearer reference to the legal basis and the circumstances in which private consideration may be appropriate.
- **Reframed the decision-making factors** into a consistent question-based format to support more structured and transparent assessment of whether an item should be considered in private.
- **Standardised the categories used to record private-session rationales**, including commercially sensitive, confidential, legally privileged, public harm or undue concern, and draft report categories.
- **Clarified decision-making responsibilities**, confirming that the Chair, with support from the Chief Executive, makes the final decision, informed by advice from the Board Secretary and Head of the Board Business Unit, the lead Executive Officer and relevant professional advisers.
- **Updated wording on reporting arrangements**, confirming that summaries of items considered in private session will be reported to the next Board meeting held in public.
- **Strengthened the annual review process**, including reference to maintaining a log of private-session items to inform future review and assurance.

3.3 Board Etiquette

The protocol has been substantially revised to strengthen its focus on Board etiquette, conduct and positive governance behaviours.

Key proposed changes:

- The updated version now places greater emphasis on respectful, constructive and transparent ways of working, including collective responsibility, mutual respect, confidentiality, evidence-informed discussion, receiving challenge constructively, avoiding groupthink and supporting a Speak Up Safely culture.
- The structure has been improved to make the document clearer and easier to use. The previous content has been reorganised into more coherent sections covering **Purpose**, **Board Role and Governance Context**, **Core Behavioural Principles**, **Governance responsibilities across the meeting cycle**, and **Supporting effective and inclusive participation**. The principles section has also been grouped under themed headings to improve readability and navigation.
- The practical meeting guidance has been refined to better support effective and inclusive participation. This includes clearer expectations around meeting formats, in-person, hybrid and virtual participation, committee arrangements, supporting visitors, site and facility visits, and appropriate use of meeting chat. The revised wording reduces duplication, lifts operational detail to a more Board-level tone, and better links practical arrangements to good governance, transparency, inclusion and effective decision making.

4. Well-being of Future Generations

This work has been developed in accordance with the five ways of working set out in the sustainable development principle of the Act, as follows:

Hirdymor  Long Term

The BAF supports long-term governance by providing a sustained framework for Board-level oversight and assurance.

Atal  Prevention

The BAF supports prevention by helping the Board to identify gaps in assurance, areas of non-compliance and risks requiring further scrutiny or escalation.

Integreiddio  Integration

The BAF supports integration by linking strategic priorities, risk, performance, quality, finance and governance through the Board and Committee assurance structure.

Cydweithio  Collaboration

The review has been undertaken collaboratively, drawing on governance learning and feedback from Board and Committee processes.

Cynnwys  Involvement

The BAF supports involvement by clarifying how assurance is provided, scrutinised and escalated across relevant governance forums.

5. Recommendation

The Board is asked to **approve** the revised:

- Board Assurance Framework
- Protocol for Meetings in Private
- Board Etiquette