

# No current plans for follow up review into how more than one billion PPE pandemic items were procured, says Audit Wales

Audit Wales says it currently has no plans to conduct a fresh investigation into spending on and the procurement of pandemic-related personal protection equipment (PPE) in Wales.

The independent public body, which examines how public money is spent, said it was content with its report "Procurement and Supply of PPE during the Covid-19 pandemic", published in April 2021. However, it stressed it will continue to monitor the situation.

The report was carried out by the auditor general for Wales, Adrian Crompton. Entirely independent of government, he has complete discretion to carry out value for money assessments of devolved public spending.

Audit Wales said: "In April 2021, we published a full value for money review on supplying and procuring PPE during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our report focused on the national efforts to supply health and social care in Wales and the scope of our work was broadly aligned with two National Audit Office reviews of the position in England."

Audit Wales added: "The Covid-19 response and recovery from the pandemic remains a key focus of our work at Audit Wales. We are continuing to consider public spending on Covid-19 in Wales and to track progress against the recommendations we

made in relation to PPE.

“At present we do not have plans for any new follow-up work on PPE, but if any significant concerns emerge from our routine monitoring we will consider the merits of further work.”

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The report investigated the procurement and supply of PPE between March 2020 and March 2021 by NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP) on behalf of the Welsh Government.

Audit Wales was able to quickly turnaround the report by April 2021 because it had been monitoring procurement in 2020, including evidence submitted to the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee in the spring and summer 2020, and, more concerningly, when reports of Westminster’s own procurement of PPE and ‘VIP lane’ were being scrutinised.

In England, the National Audit Office (NAO) undertook two investigations into the procurement of PPE which were published in November 2020.

This prompted the Westminster cross-party Public Accounts Committee to conduct its own investigation, which concluded that hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money on PPE had been wasted.

Earlier this month, the Department of Health and Social Care published accounts which revealed the UK Government had squandered almost £10bn on defective, unsuitable and overpriced PPE.

In Wales Audit Wales found no evidence of a similar situation with PPE procured being unfit for purpose, with the exception of an incident involving mis-labelled nitrile gloves. Nor did it find evidence of suppliers getting preferential treatment as in England.

Audit Wales said: “The NAO reviews identified issues in England with a twin-track approach to procuring PPE, the so-called ‘VIP lane’, and with the quality of some of the PPE purchased by the UK Government. We did not find similar issues in our review of the position in Wales.”

The 2021 audit report highlighted good arrangements overall in the procurement of PPE that “helped manage risks and avoid some of the issues reported on in England”.

However, the report did find that Shared Services did not publish contract award notices for all its PPE contracts within 30 days of them being let.

Audit Wales made eight recommendations in the April 2021 report which focused on covering preparedness for future pandemics, the procurement strategy for PPE and transparency, as well as highlighting opportunities for learning and improvement.

The Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee of the Senedd – made up of cross-party members and chaired by Tory MS Mark Isherwood – also considered the report from Audit Wales.

In a statement, the committee said: “The Senedd Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee has no plans to conduct its own inquiry into the Welsh Government’s procurement of PPE.

“The committee considered the report in September 2021 and agreed to take evidence from Welsh Government officials on the report’s findings during a general scrutiny session on health-related issues on 17 November 2021.

“The committee were broadly content with the findings of the auditor general’s report and following the meeting agreed to write to the director general for Health and Social Care and chief executive of NHS Wales on several points including one issue relating to PPE.”

The Welsh Government responded to the queries raised by the committee in January this year.

In terms of spending, the Welsh Government received a £880m Barnett consequential as a result of the huge amount of spending by the UK Government on PPE. It is for the Cardiff Bay administration to decide in what areas of government it spends any consequential.

However, Audit Wales estimated that over £300m was spent on PPE by the Welsh Government from March 2020-21.

The Welsh Government declined to give a current expenditure figure on the PPE. A Welsh Government spokesperson said that it would require a Freedom of Information request.

Monthly data on PPE published by the Welsh Government reveals that from March 9 2020 to January 23 2022, Shared Services issued over 1.2 billion items of PPE in Wales.

Around 523 million of these were issued to the social care sector.

The 1.2bn plus items include:

- 1,651,800 Type I and Type II masks.
- 229,700,607 Type IIR masks.

- 4,140,037 FFP3 masks (3M).
- 191,100 FFP3 masks (other).
- 7,110,969 Face visors.
- 688,898,350 gloves (based on the unit size of a pack).
- 182,864,325 aprons.
- 12,230 body bags.

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