Welsh Headlines — 18 Nov 2026

??????? Welsh Headlines — 18 November 2026

Compiled 18 November 2026, 09:00 GMT. Sources: BBC Wales/Cymru Fyw/Sport, Nation.Cymru, GOV.WALES.

? Top Story: Firefighters link 1980 toxic lagoon blaze to cancers and lost babies

Eleven firefighters or their families have told a BBC Wales investigation they believe the 1980 fire at the Llwyneinion toxic waste lagoon near Wrexham wrecked their health — and they want surviving crew blood-tested for the carcinogens they fear they were exposed to. Sixty firefighters tackled the August 1980 blaze, as barrels of chemical waste exploded into the air and thick black smoke drifted over a nearby village; it took around 18 hours to bring under control. Steve Williams, then in his 20s, slipped into the lagoon and was pulled out. He was checked at hospital, given a tetanus injection and sent home. In 1994 he was diagnosed with stage four small cell carcinoma and died aged 39, leaving two children aged six and 10.

His widow Jilska, 71, a retired nurse, called the link "a definite probability". "They're firemen and they're always running into fires, so you don't know what the long-term effects are going to be — but actually falling into the lake and drinking that fluid, which is full of chemicals. He had a double-whammy, didn't he?" Andy Moore, 70, who saw Steve fall in, said the crew fought the fire "in our normal tunics, drips and helmets" — "I was walking around that fire ground in a shirt and tie" — and was diagnosed with skin cancer a year ago. Jim MacGrane, 71, recalled six firemen's wives miscarrying within 12 to 15 months. Mark Jones, 68, whose father Ken also attended and died of lymph and brain cancer in 2011, said "out of the 60 people that attended that fire a significant number had cancers".

Prof Anna Stec of the University of Leicester, a leading expert on fire toxicity, warned that tying specific chemicals to later illness is "very difficult" — but said the

Firefighters' Cancer and Disease Registry shows a pattern of major incidents followed by clusters of similar cancers, and Llwyneinion is "definitely worth looking at". The Fire Brigades' Union's Gareth Tovey said the union was "taking this really seriously", is consulting scientists and will write to Wales' fire and rescue services about protections at sites linked to historic dumping. Wrexham council, which owns the site, says the lagoon does not meet the legal definition of contaminated land and that it monitors regularly; it is "sorry to hear of the illnesses". Eastman Chemical Company, responsible for Monsanto's legacy UK production, did not respond. The Welsh Government's draft budget this week put £2m towards "a new approach to managing contaminated land".

?? Politics: Reform's empty benches, and a clean sheet for Dan Thomas

Reform UK boycotted the Senedd chamber for a second sitting, staying away from First Minister's Questions and the budget statement in protest at the Llywydd's ban on Joe Martin speaking until he apologises for remarks about the "demographic replacement of white British people". Leader Helen Jenner met Huw Irranca-Davies on Monday and said afterwards the group was "not satisfied with the progress that has been made"; the presiding officer's position is unchanged. Rhun ap Iorwerth called the no-show "a dereliction of duty", and the Conservatives' Darren Millar drew laughter by congratulating Reform on "doing all they can to fulfil their manifesto commitment to reduce the size of the Senedd". Plaid's Sarah Cooper-Lesadd said the hours skipped had "cost over £7,000 in salaries collectively". Reform withdrew all its submitted questions and its 33 MSs keep their salaries.

Gwent Police has dropped its investigation into Dan Thomas, the former Reform leader in Wales, who was arrested two months ago on suspicion of assault and controlling or coercive behaviour. The MS for Casnewydd Islwyn resigned the leadership after the arrest, triggering the contest that made Helen Jenner leader; she stays in post. Thomas said he had been "vindicated" and had faced "false allegations"; Nigel Farage said he was "very pleased that Dan Thomas has been cleared" and had "stood by him throughout".

Elsewhere, Restore Britain leader Rupert Lowe was mocked after saying recent Senedd rows showed "beyond any doubt" that Wales should not have a parliament, and pledging to "roll back devolution". Metro architect Prof Mark Barry replied "Love England hate Westminster/Whitehall…". And former Labour MS Alun Davies told Jenner — who posted that Wales had been left "deindustrialised, impoverished and invaded" — to "come with me to Ukraine next week to see what a real invasion is like".

? Budget: the winners, the losers and a £150m bargaining pot

The detail behind Tuesday's draft budget shows the NHS and care portfolio rising £504m to £12.43bn — a 4.2% cash increase, about 2.1% in real terms, against a historical average of 3.6% — with almost £695m of capital including new elective care hubs. Councils get £176m more on average (2.8% cash, roughly 0.7% real, with the weakest settlement at 0.4%). Families with young children get £75m next year rising to £186m in 2028-29 to build towards 20 funded hours a week for nine-month-olds to four-year-olds over 48 weeks, plus £9.2m over two years for the Cynnal pilot and £10m more for free secondary school meals.

The losers are concentrated: Business Wales loses £7.3m of day-to-day funding, from £18.5m to £11.2m — a cash cut of nearly 40% — as the new Welsh Innovation and Development Agency gets £22m. Natural Resources Wales drops £5m to £101.2m (down 4.7%) while its capital rises to £34.4m; the Arts Council of Wales gets a 0.4% cash rise, a real-terms cut of about 1.7%. Medr, which funds universities and colleges, faces a below-inflation settlement on its £850m. Four departments — local government, education, economy and rural resilience — spend less next year. Elin Jones says she still holds a "sizeable pot" worth nearly £150m to buy votes; a Green deal on electric car clubs and a climate resilience fund is already done, and the final vote is on 23 February.

Marking six months in office, Rhun ap Iorwerth said the government's record was "just the beginning", citing funded childcare for two-year-olds in 19 of 22 councils (up from three in May), £1 bus fares held to March, a 30% business rates cut for hospitality and leisure from April, the £1bn three-year farming settlement, £145m extra for the NHS this year and £2bn over three years for NHS buildings and kit.

? Education: UCU warns a flat settlement means "job losses, industrial action and national decay"

The University and College Union has urged the government to instruct Medr to hand out an extra £45m of revenue "based on current need" and £30m to fund 5,100 extra further education places, warning that a two-year cash freeze is a real-terms cut through to 2029. Gareth Lewis, UCU Cymru's national official, said the draft budget "represents more of the same pain for universities and colleges" and that Aberystwyth's planned 150 job losses showed courses and departments are "at very real risk". He noted that around 29% of young people domiciled in Wales enrol at a UK university, against about 40% in Northern Ireland and over 50% in Greater London, and that the funding formula lags behind enrolment growth in colleges.

? Health: a Conwy man's 28-hour wait, 11 hours of it on the floor

The family of Iolo Edwards, from Llanrwst, say he waited 28 hours for treatment for meningitis at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd — including "11 hours on the floor" of the waiting room — after his GP sent him to A&E with a letter saying he needed to be seen urgently. His wife Mari Hughes said people were "stepping over" him as he got "worse and worse". Betsi Cadwaladr health board apologised in a letter that he had to be treated in the waiting room but maintains an investigation found no failure of its duty of care. The story lands as the Welsh Government's £23m five-year plan promises to end corridor care by 2029, with new performance measures from the spring.

? Environment: a £13m race to buy Nannau, and River Action takes NRW to court

Coed Cadw, the Woodland Trust in Wales, has launched a £13m appeal to buy the 1,531-hectare Nannau estate in Eryri before the end of 2026, including 317 hectares of ancient woodland and the Parc Nannau SSSI. The estate sits in Wales' temperate rainforest zone and supports marsh fritillary, hawfinch, dormouse and pine marten; 25 ancient and veteran trees have been mapped so far, among them an oak more than nine metres in girth of a size thought to number only about 200 in Europe. It is also the setting of the Owain Glyndŵr legend of Ceubren yr Ellyll, the Haunted Oak. Director Kylie Jones Mattock said Nannau is "a remarkable part of Wales's natural and cultural heritage" and that the trust wants to keep farming it, with tenants and communities shaping a 100-year vision. A successful purchase would increase the charity's landholding in Wales by 50%.

River Action has taken Natural Resources Wales to the High Court over its approval of the expansion of three poultry farms in Powys, arguing the regulator wrongly concluded it had no legal power to assess pollution risks once manure leaves the farm. The case, heard at Llandrindod Wells on Tuesday, centres on tens of thousands of extra birds and on what happens to their litter when it is exported rather than spread locally. Leigh Day's Julia Eriksen, for the campaigners, said the decision would "significantly increase" manure produced locally; River Action's Emma Dearnaley said "pollution doesn't stop at the farm gate, and neither do NRW's powers". NRW said it would not comment while proceedings are live but would "take a full part in the legal process".

? Children and screens: Wales joins the under-16 ban study

More than 300,000 young people across Wales, England and Scotland will take part in ten research projects backed by £9.3m from Wellcome, tracking how the planned under-16 social media ban affects mental health, sleep and friendships. The UK Government announced the ban in June and aims to lay regulations before Parliament by the end of the year, with restrictions from spring 2027 on platforms including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. In Wales, the government's consultation on draft school phone guidance closes on 2 December, with final guidance expected in early 2027 and Education Minister Anna Brychan backing restrictions up to a whole-site ban. The Senedd rejected a Reform motion for a nationwide school phone ban by 50 votes to 38 earlier this month.

? Culture: a haunted farmhouse, a lockdown farewell and the best croissant in Wales

BBC One's four-part drama *The Witch Farm*, filmed in Wales and starring Port Talbot-born Gabrielle Creevy, tells the story of Liz and Bill Rich, who left London in 1989 for a remote farmhouse in the foothills of Bannau Brycheiniog and claimed seven years of poltergeist activity, apparitions and physical injury. Writer Danny Robins, of the *Uncanny* podcast, said he wanted viewers to "feel scared" but also to be moved and to "reach their own conclusions" about whether ghosts exist. It starts on BBC One and iPlayer on Sunday 22 November.

Gai Toms is releasing an album written during lockdown as a tribute to his parents, after losing his mother Gwenda Thomas to Covid-19 when pandemic rules meant no proper farewell or funeral. Nearly seven years on, the songs — a departure from his usual sound — are about loss and love for his parents, his childhood and his own children. **And Petit Four Patisserie on Penarth Road, Cardiff, has won Wales' first ever Best Croissant Competition**, beating 12 rivals at Treberfydd House with croissants judged "faultless", buttery and beautiful by a panel including Angela Gray and Naomi Griffiths. Separately, BBC Cymru Fyw has followed Gwyndaf Hughes and Georgina Rannard a month after they left Cardiff to farm on Ynys Enlli — and found island social life busier than Barry.

? Sport

Football: Wales lost 3-2 to Portugal in Cardiff, finishing bottom of Nations League Group A4 despite leading 2-1 through David Brooks and Sorba Thomas after Bruno Fernandes' 11th-minute opener; Pedro Neto equalised, Carlos Forbs scored the 70th-minute winner and Neto was sent off four minutes later. Craig Bellamy's side face a two-leg relegation play-off in March and will learn on Friday whether they play Slovenia, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland or Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the home leg second. "Belief's the biggest one," Bellamy said. "We are beyond close to this level."

Rugby: Wales are still digesting the 35-28 win over New Zealand as Australia arrive in Cardiff on Saturday, with victory offering only their second autumn clean sweep. **Football, off the pitch:** Vitor Matos is on the brink of leaving Swansea City for Strasbourg, who are ready to pay around £5m, taking four coaching staff with him and leaving Leon Britton and Kristian O'Leary as the senior survivors before Saturday's game against West Brom.

?? Weather

No weather warnings are in force for the UK. BBC Weather has Cardiff on light rain showers and a gentle breeze today, 12°C with a low of 6°C; Thursday is wetter and colder at 9°C, Friday and Saturday are dry with light cloud and highs of 8°C, and rain returns from Sunday. Sunrise in Cardiff was 07:36, sunset 16:19.

? In brief

- **Dan Thomas** cleared: "released with no further action" after a "thorough investigation", Gwent Police said.
- **Budget vote** 23 February; Plaid holds 43 of the Senedd's 96 seats.
- **Nannau appeal** must hit roughly £13m by the end of 2026.
- **School phone guidance** consultation closes 2 December.
- **Croissant champions:** Petit Four Patisserie, Penarth Road, Cardiff.
- **Carew Castle** reported "three nights of escalating anti-social behaviour" in July, plus a visitor who put his finger in a shop worker's ear while wearing a paper bag on his head; Pembrokeshire Coast national park's report says there was "no evidence of any intended harm".
- **Jury discharged** in the trial of five people over a pistol fired in a drug feud in Pyle, Bridgend; a retrial may follow in the new year.

Method: SearXNG leads (mixed — index pages plus two stale hits, the 4 November Metro tram-train story and a 2022 boundary-commission page, both dropped on their own datelines), then indexes and article bodies fetched via the Playwright service on MacBach (.100:8090): BBC Wales, BBC Wales Politics, BBC Cymru Fyw, BBC Sport Wales, Nation.Cymru (news and home), the GOV.WALES news index, Guardian Wales RSS and BBC Weather. Everything written up published after yesterday's 09:00 compile — the budget detail, Dan Thomas, the Reform boycott, Nannau, the poultry High Court case, UCU, the Conwy hospital wait, the under-16 study and the Witch Farm drama. Not repeated: the budget's publication itself, the corridor-care plan, the All Blacks win, Wales v Portugal's build-up, David Chadwick, the Newport LDP, the Cardiff mural row and the St Mellons misconduct hearing (its overnight evidence is folded in nowhere, as the case continues). Llwyneinion was last covered on 15 November via the campaigners' demand for testing; today's is the firefighters' own account. No UK roundup file existed for today. Nitter, Phice, Flaresolverr and Reddit skipped as instructed.

Revision #2
Created 2026-11-18 09:06:45 UTC by Admin
Updated 2026-11-18 09:06:46 UTC by Admin