

Tracey Burke
Director General – Education and Public Services
Group
Welsh Government

13 December 2018

Dear Ms Burke

Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme

Thank you for giving evidence to the Committee alongside your colleagues on 3 December. The purpose of this letter is to pick up on several issues raised by Members after considering your evidence. The Committee would welcome a response from you on these matters, in addition to the notes that you agreed to provide during the evidence session.

In its report on the Supporting People Programme, the Committee expressed some doubt about whether there would be sufficient information available by autumn 2018 to support a well-evidenced decision on progressing with the Welsh Government's original plans for a new early intervention, prevention and support grant from 2019-20. You had already acknowledged previously that there might not be a 'big-bang' approach after all. The Committee notes that the Welsh Government has listened to the views of those involved in delivering key programmes before arriving at its decision to implement a two-grant structure and to preserve budget allocations, at least in the short to medium term.

In your evidence, you emphasised that the evaluation of the flexible funding programme is a 'process evaluation' that is adopting an 'action research' approach. While recognising the points that you made when describing the evaluation in this way, Members were still left in some doubt about the impact that the Welsh Government's decision to adopt a two-grant structure will now have on the scope of the evaluation work beyond the interim phase. In that context, Members also raised a concern about the overall value-for-money of the evaluation exercise. It would be helpful if you could set out some further details



about the scope of the second phase of the evaluation and, in particular, how this is adapting in response to new two-grant structure. The Committee would also welcome confirmation of the overall cost of the evaluation work.

The Committee noted during the evidence session, that the interim evaluation did not name individual authorities. While we acknowledge the reasoning that you put forward, we consider that it would be helpful if the final evaluation could highlight examples of good practice more clearly. The Committee will consider whether it wishes to take any further evidence once the final evaluation report is published.

It is also clear that further work will be required after April 2019 to consider how effectively the new two-grant arrangements are being delivered. This includes taking advantage of integration opportunities where they arise and driving through further efficiencies in administration wherever possible even though budget allocations have not been reduced in the short-term. The Committee would therefore encourage you to give that further consideration, including any further work that can be undertaken by the Society of Welsh Treasurers. You suggested that progress with the Society's work had, to date, been 'a little disappointing'.

In its report, the Committee noted that the proposals announced by the Welsh Government in autumn 2017 had created uncertainty about how the Welsh Government planned to progress the actions that it had set out in its response to the Auditor General's recommendations on the Supporting People Programme. At their heart, many of the issues covered by those recommendations remain relevant regardless of the structure of any future grant arrangements. With the decision to create a new Housing Support Grant, within which Supporting People funding will be by far the largest component, we urge the Welsh Government to take forward remaining actions in response to the Auditor General's recommendations as swiftly as possible, working closely with those involved in the delivery of the programme. Similarly, where there are still relevant actions to be discharged in response to the Committee's recommendations, I would ask that you set out clearly an updated timetable for these actions including, for example, the now long overdue issue of the funding formula.

We also noted your comments about the regional governance structures for the Supporting People Programme in the context of the emergence of Regional Partnership Boards. The complex landscape of partnership working arrangements at a local and regional level is something the Committee has touched on recently in different contexts and appears in need of urgent attention, not just in the



context of the new Housing Support Grant, but more generally. We understand that the Welsh Government may be undertaking some wider work in this regard to map arrangements and would welcome any further details that you can provide about how any work to rationalise partnership working structures is being progressed.

We questioned during the evidence session whether changes to the Supporting People Programme guidance had fully addressed the concerns raised in the Auditor General's report about the scope for misinterpretation on the circumstances in which local authorities should re-tender for services. You committed to taking forward further discussions with the Auditor General's study team about this matter and we would be grateful for an update in due course if those discussions lead to any further clarification in the guidance for the new Housing Support Grant.

Finally, we touched on the preparations that are now being made for the introduction of the new Housing Support Grant and some of the associated timings. It would be helpful if you could confirm in writing key milestones between now and April 2019 including, for example, for the publication of guidance and preparation/review of spending plans.

Yours sincerely,



Adam Price AM (temporary Chair) on behalf of Nick Ramsay AM, Chair

