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Der Chi,

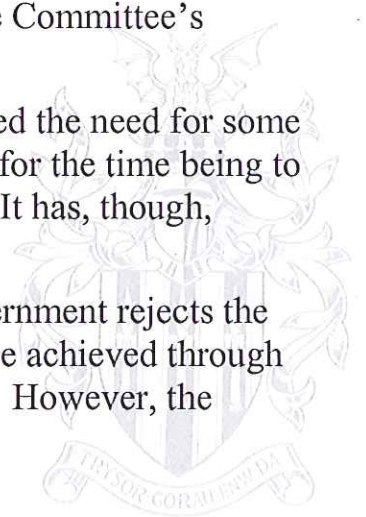
**WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT: *INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN WALES***

The Clerk's letter of 12 September requested my advice on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the recommendations made by the Audit Committee in its report *Increasing Physical Activity in Wales*.

The Committee's report is one of the most critical that I have witnessed in my time as Auditor General. Against that background, it is encouraging that the Minister, in his covering letter, pays tribute to the careful and considered way that the Committee undertook its investigation.

The Government has accepted, or partially accepted, all the Committee's recommendations. Those that it has partially accepted are:

- Recommendation i(e): the Government has considered the need for some sort of statutory duty on local authorities but prefers for the time being to see whether existing mechanisms will be sufficient. It has, though, undertaken to keep the matter under review.
- Recommendation iv, in relation to funding: the Government rejects the implication that increasing physical activity should be achieved through leisure centre provision, rather than lifestyle change. However, the



Committee's report contains no such thought; the Committee's point (at paragraph 47) was just that leisure centres continue to be an important resource, as my staff pointed out to the Assembly Government officials who were advising Ministers on their response. The key element of the Committee's recommendation, that the Government should look again at how it funds support for physical activity, including leisure centres, has been accepted.

- Recommendation v, where Ministers have not yet decided how to move forward on its Free Swimming initiative. It is encouraging to see that the working group considering the evaluation findings will also be looking at the value for money of the scheme, as that had been one of the major gaps in the Government's approach.

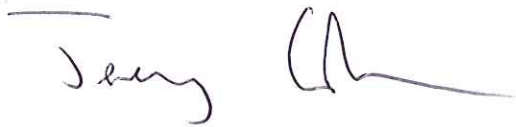
The Government reports that it has accepted all the other recommendations made by the Committee. The most important recommendations related to the leadership demonstrated by the Government (recommendation i), and the urgency with which it was progressing the action plan designed to give effect to the *Climbing Higher* aspirations (recommendation iii).

In terms of leadership, the Government response to recommendation i(a) explains that it remains the case that both the Heritage Department and the Department of Public Health and Health Professions (under the Chief Medical Officer) will have a role to play. However, the lead on developing a revised strategic action plan on physical activity, due to be published in the new year, will now be taken by health officials, rather than sport officials, although the latter will clearly have an important input. And the Government response to recommendation iii provides more detail on the development of the new action plan; while it will not be produced any more rapidly than the witnesses set out to the Committee in giving evidence, the view of the Government is that the time is needed to secure the necessary support of all the partner organisations involved.

It is not straightforward for me to offer the Committee unequivocal advice on the extent to which the actions set out by the Government fully meet the spirit of the Committee's recommendations. This is a wide-ranging, complex area, and one in which the Committee clearly concluded that the Government had a lot of work to do if it was to succeed; its recommendations reflected this situation and were challenging for the Government to implement. On the basis of the response, and the conversations that my staff have had with officials since the Committee's report was published, I am persuaded that the Government has recognised the need to rethink its whole approach to the challenges of increasing physical

activity across Wales. The update report that the Government is due to produce next year (recommendation vi) will give the Wales Audit Office an opportunity to take stock of the progress that the Government has made, and I intend to report back to the Committee on the outcome of this work.

Yours sincerely,



JEREMY COLMAN
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES