

Tracey Burke

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol / Director General

Y Grŵp Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Education and Public Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay MS
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

28 May 2020

Dear Mr Ramsay,

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE – HOUSING ADAPTATIONS UPDATE – MAY 2020

Thank you for your letter of 29 April. I am pleased to provide an update on the implementation of outstanding recommendations 3 and 5, including clarification as to how the work has evolved since the last update in July 2019.

Recommendation 3

The Housing Adaptations Steering Group (HASG) has proposed that means testing should not be applied to less complex (small and medium) adaptations or individuals receiving palliative/end of life care. Prior to consulting on this option however, the HASG believe there is a need to provide evidence on the potential cost of removing the means test for small and medium adaptations and the potential impact on demand. Whilst the baseline cost of removing the means test can be calculated from local authority data on existing client contributions to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funded adaptations (for 2018/19), it is not known what impact removing the means test would have on increasing demand for DFGs. An increase in demand could result in longer waiting times for DFGs and additional financial burdens on local authorities.

As a consequence, we commissioned the Welsh Centre for Public Policy to provide such evidence, including exploring the feasibility of removing the means test for larger adaptations. This would have necessarily involved significant engagement with local authorities. However, due to the refocussing of our and local authority resources to tackle the current Covid-19 pandemic, the work of the HASG has been paused and this research has not been able to progress as planned. We will, of course, review this position as a matter of urgency as soon as it is feasible to do so.



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Parc Cathays • Cathays Park
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Ffôn • Tel 0300 0258047
tracey.burke@gov.wales
Gwefan • website: www.wales.gov.uk

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Recommendation 5

One of the proposals agreed by the Minister for Housing and Local Government was for officials to undertake a programme of work through the HASG to provide an overarching strategic framework for the planning and provision of housing adaptations by all providers in the seven Local Health Board areas of Wales. The Framework is intended to implement an integrated multi-agency approach, with a focus on prevention, equity, and clear pathways into services. The Guidance to accompany such a Framework would provide direction for all service providers and funding streams, including Enable. For this reason, we decided not to issue separate guidance for Enable at this time, but to incorporate a requirement to integrate with other service providers in their Terms and Conditions of grant.

The HASG set up a Task and Finish Group to take this work forward. The Group met three times and was due to present an outline Framework to the HASG at its meeting in June. However, this work has also been paused due to the Covid-19 emergency.

In relation to changes in local authority practice on means testing, the initial work consisted of a workshop session with stakeholders in July 2019 which concluded more evidence was needed, as noted above under Recommendation 3. The lack of historical data has been a barrier to understanding trends in changing practice. The *High-level analysis of data on housing adaptations 2018-19* which we published in December 2019 shows that local authorities delivered over 16,000 adaptations, of which just over 4,000 were DFGs. Administrative data provided to the Welsh Government by local authorities shows that half of these (2,138) were subject to a means test. Over 12,000 local authority adaptations were provided under discretionary powers. The data analysis is published on the Welsh Government website:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-01/housing-adaptations-analysis-2018-2019.pdf>

Turning to the wider review of adaptations (or 'systems review' as we have referred to it previously), this now consists of three connected pieces of work. The first has been to establish service standards which apply to all adaptations, irrespective of tenure, provider or source of funding. This has been in force since April 2019. The second is to review the policy on means testing and implement changes, which I have dealt with under Recommendation 3 above. The third is to establish a Strategic Planning Framework to integrate planning and delivery of adaptations at a regional level, as noted under Recommendation 5. Taken together, and underpinned by much improved annual reporting, this will significantly improve the consistency, equity and quality of adaptations services.

It is unfortunate that the present public health emergency has had an impact on our continuing review of adaptations. However, it is important to note the valuable work undertaken by adaptations providers in recent weeks, helping to facilitate early discharges from hospital and relieving pressures on the health and care system. Providers have responded positively to guidance we issued, often working in very difficult and sensitive circumstances: [Guidance to care and repair agencies, local authorities and registered social landlords providing housing adaptations: coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

I would be happy to provide the Committee with a further update on developments as matters progress or to provide clarification on any of the above.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you, your fellow Committee Members and the Committee Secretariat well during this most difficult time for us all.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracey Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and a long, sweeping underline.

Tracey Burke