

Jane Hutt MS  
Deputy Minister and Chief Whip  
Welsh Government

29 May 2020

### **Follow up from evidence session on 14 May**

Dear Jane,

Thank you to you and your official for participating in our virtual committee meeting on 14 May to discuss the impact of Covid-19. We found it very useful and it will help inform our on-going work.

We welcome the measures that the Welsh Government has taken to mitigate the unequal and specific effects of the pandemic on some groups of people, and to ensure everyone has access to critical information, including:

- Swiftly convening the BAME advisory group to rapidly assess both the health and social care workforce risks and socio-economic issues;
- Providing a sign language interpreter at daily press briefings;
- Amending the lockdown restrictions to allow people with particular health conditions or disabilities to leave their houses more than once a day to exercise;
- Ensuring that people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) who are fleeing domestic abuse have access to temporary shelters;
- Doubling the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) to £22 million and treating applications with greater discretion and flexibility;
- Providing £3 million to ensure that children have access to laptops and the internet while schools are closed;



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- Providing social care workers with an extra payment of £500, and
- Engaging with specific communities through stakeholder groups, and the positive impact this has had on policy decisions.

There are some issues which we would welcome further information on, which I detail below:

### **Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence**

Thank you for the information provided during the evidence session and for agreeing to share with the Committee your response to correspondence received from Welsh Women's Aid in relation to funding for VAWDASV in response to Covid-19. **This is a particular area of concern for the Committee and it is important that clarity is provided around the various funding announcements for VAWDASV provision and whether this funding is reaching frontline services.**

We will be holding an evidence session focussing on VAWDASV at our meeting on 2 June, and I would expect to write to you again with recommendations following that session.

### **Sustainable funding group for VAWDASV**

During the session you explained that the work of the sustainable funding group is ongoing throughout the pandemic and that it is preparing proposals for what will be needed in the sector as it emerges from the lockdown. **You agreed to provide an update on the group's work, and in particular, we would be grateful for an updated timescale for the development of a sustainable funding model for the sector.**

### **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities**

As we discussed, the risk of death involving the coronavirus among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than those of white ethnicity. There is also evidence that BAME groups will be hardest hit economically. We therefore welcome the Welsh Government's swift action to convene the BAME advisory group, and the news that a self risk assessment will be published very soon. **However, we believe there is merit in publishing the minutes and outputs of this group, and ask that you give consideration to doing so.**

### **Elder abuse**

You will be aware that we have received evidence from Hourglass Cymru about rises in calls to their helpline, and concerns about older people who are shielding and reliant on abusive partners or relatives during this period.



As you noted during the evidence session, hard copy advice material is more likely to reach older people, and we welcome initiatives such as the Hourglass information line being promoted through Welsh Government food parcels. We also welcome the Welsh Government's training with community pharmacies on how to detect domestic abuse, however we remain concerned that more needs to be done to ensure help and support is available to this vulnerable group, who are more likely to be digitally excluded and unaware of campaigns being run through social media channels.

We would be grateful for **further information as to how the Welsh Government will be reaching out to digitally excluded groups at risk of abuse**, including whether it has plans to work with supermarkets and other delivery companies across Wales to ensure that hard copy information about the 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' and 'Don't be a bystander' campaigns are included in shopping orders.

### **Data**

During the session you agreed to provide links to data published by the Office of National Statistics on mortality figures linked to Covid-19 by sex, ethnicity and occupation, however as you explained, this data is not disaggregated for Wales. This is a particular concern to the Committee and we would be grateful for an **update on progress by the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to capture more detailed data on deaths linked to Covid-19, including information on ethnicity and on health and social care workers.**

You may be aware that the Committee has previously recommended that the Welsh Government publishes employment data required by the Welsh public sector equality duties to a single location on its website, in a format that allow the data to be analysed easily. **We believe that enacting this recommendation would assist in collecting vital data on the ethnicity of the public sector workforce, particularly in the NHS, to better understand how many people are in this higher risk category.**

### **Voluntary sector**

We had a brief discussion on the mobilisation of volunteers through Volunteering Wales and you agreed to provide data on the response across Wales. Additionally, it would be helpful if you could **provide information as to whether emergency funding is being prioritised for charities providing certain services (such as advice services or domestic abuse services) and how quickly emergency third sector funds are reaching frontline services.**

### **Advice services**



Thank you for answers you gave in relation to the support that has been provided to advice services since the lockdown began, and we welcome your commitments to providing information in different formats and languages, and ensuring digitally excluded people can access information. It will be crucial for the Welsh Government to continue to work with advice services to try to prevent people falling into financial crisis, including ensuring people can access the benefits they are entitled to. We therefore wish to reiterate the importance of the **recommendation we previously made as part of our work on [Benefits in Wales](#), that the Welsh Government takes action to improve take up of all benefits in Wales.**

### Human rights

There were a number of issues relating to human rights which we were unable to pursue during the meeting due to time constraints:

- Whether the Welsh Government will conduct its own human rights analysis of any contact tracing apps introduced;
- Whether the proportionality of emergency measures and their impact on human rights is being monitored;
- If international human rights good practice and guidance is being used to inform the Welsh Government's approach, including whether the Welsh Government uses the WHO human rights guidance to promote and protect the fundamental rights of people in Wales, and, if so, how this is being done in practice;

### Other matters

You will also recall that during the session, one Member raised concerns around barriers encountered by blind and partially sighted people in accessing priority shopping and asked for an update on the Welsh Government's plans to ensure such arrangements are in place. The Member also raised concerns around autistic pupils accessing school hubs. You agreed to give further consideration to both of these issues and the Committee would be grateful for an update on these.

We believe that the Welsh Government should ensure that equality and human rights issues are deeply embedded in its response to the Covid-19 emergency and the recovery from it, and we will continue to pursue these issues with stakeholders as our inquiry progresses.

Yours sincerely,



John

John Griffiths MS

Chair

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

