

Shan Morgan
Permanent Secretary
Welsh Government

21 September 2020

Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Accounts and Annual Report

Dear Shan,

Thank you for your comprehensive letter of 27 August 2020 in follow up to our evidence session with you on the 6 July 2020 and also for your letter of 28 July 2020 in relation to the Welsh Government's new internal strategy for promoting the use of Welsh. I am also grateful for your detailed response to our report on our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Accounts 2018–19.

We considered all of this correspondence at our meeting on 14 September 2020 and there are a number of matters we will wish to follow up with you later this year during our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Accounts 2019–20. However, in the meantime, it would be useful to seek your views on the following points arising from your responses in preparation for our scrutiny.

In relation to the Welsh Government's response to Recommendation 1 of our report you agreed that, with the exception of papers containing official sensitive information and the personal details of staff, you would publish Board papers in addition to the agenda and minutes, which are currently available on the Welsh Government's website. Please could you confirm when the Welsh Government will start publishing these papers. Members noted at the meeting that the most recent agenda and minutes were published on 30 July 2020 for the Board meeting in June 2020.

You have also concluded, in consultation with the Chair of the Welsh Government's Audit and Risk Assurance (ARAC) Committee, that it would not be appropriate to publish associated minutes or papers for the ARAC Committee. Your letter cites a number of reasons for this, which we have noted.



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You also note the Welsh Government's approach is 'consistent with other UK Governments and many larger sector public bodies'. We compared your current practice with the expectations Welsh Government has set for NHS bodies in terms of transparency. Local health boards and NHS Trusts in Wales are required to publish the agenda, papers and minutes of their 'audit committee' meetings. Having accepted our recommendation in respect of the publication of Board papers, we would welcome further detail on why Welsh Government has decided not to do likewise in respect of the agenda and papers for ARAC.

Recommendation 7 of our report asked that you provide greater clarity, through detailed explanation, of your lines of accountability and any measures in place to address potential conflicts of interest. I appreciate there were detailed discussions during our evidence sessions with you around this issue that were perhaps not fully reflected in our recommendation.

However, in the body of our report (paragraphs 157 – 165 on pages 44 – 46) it is clear that our recommendation was made in the context of the need for more clarity on the your accountability to the Head of the UK Civil Service. Our concerns were around the potential for conflicts of interest or indeed the perception of such conflicts. The Committee felt your response referred to your role in relation to arms-length bodies and Welsh Public Bodies and not your lines of accountability to the First Minister and the Head of UK Civil Service. We would welcome clarity on the latter rather than the former.

My letter of 14 May 2020 also sought information about the results of the Crisis Survey Response. We welcome the information set out in your letter of 27 August 2020 in point 7, but your answer refers to 'Pulse Surveys', rather than 'Crisis Surveys'.

There appears to be some confusion on both sides arising from the references to various surveys during meetings and in written correspondence. In your written correspondence you have referred to both 'Pulse Surveys' and 'Crisis Surveys'. I would be grateful if you could clarify the nature of each, and summarise their findings.

In addition, during our private evidence session with you on 4 May 2020, we understood that the Welsh Government was undertaking 'Smart Surveys' in respect of the work of the Emergency Coordination Centre (Wales) (ECCW). I would also be grateful if you could clarify whether this is the case and, if so, the purpose of Smart Surveys and their findings.

Finally, you may recall during last year's scrutiny of the accounts you gave a commitment that you would share Board papers relating to the development of the Welsh Government's internal use of the Welsh Language Strategy. Unfortunately we have not been in receipt of these papers and ask for an update on this.



I look forward to receiving your response and would be grateful if we could receive this by 16 October 2020.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Ramsay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

Nick Ramsay MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

