

Andrew Slade

Director General – Economy, Skills & Natural Resources

Group

Welsh Government

13 October 2020

Dear Andrew,

Public Procurement

Thank you for attending the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 14 September when we returned to our long-standing inquiry on public procurement. The Committee felt it was a very informative session.

You agreed to provide further detail or to check on the following:

- Commentary on issues relating to the supply of fruit and vegetables and concerns regarding potential shortages and the need to stimulate production at a local level.
- A chronology of the progression of discussions with the provider that was considered to provide national support for those eligible for free school meals. Please also include a summary of the proposed scope of the contract and an overview of how the due diligence process was applied. As part of this, can you confirm how late in the process it was when the concerns about the supplier's delivery in England were identified and when the supplier brought to the Welsh Government's attention that it may not have been able to provide a pan-Wales service from day one. Please could you confirm whether concerns were proactively identified or simply arose as a matter of course? As Members enquired, was there any possibility that the contract could have been signed without these issues coming to light?
- Information on how you are managing the extension of employability support contracts in light of the failed Job Support Wales (JSW) procurements. As part of this, we would welcome additional information on your plans now for successor arrangements for different cohorts (including the timetables concerned).



Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN



SeneddArchwilio@senedd.cymru



0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN



SeneddPAC@senedd.wales



0300 200 6565

You also committed during the meeting to sharing findings from the review of cancelled procurement for Job Support Wales.. You noted during the meeting that you hoped, in due course, to be able to publish the findings of the review in full and if not you would consider means by which to share these findings with us. We also note the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales Written Statement of 8 October 2020 which provided an update on the review. We are pleased that the review made a number of recommendations to strengthen internal processes and these are now being taken forward by officials.

We would of course still wish to see the report and if the report has not been published by the end of 2020 for the reasons you outlined in the meeting, then the Committee clerking team will be in touch to discuss how it might otherwise be shared with the Committee.

There were also additional concerns raised by Members in our consideration of the evidence which I would welcome your views on. These are detailed below.

- We have reservations regarding the levels of engagement between the Welsh Government and the private sector in procuring PPE during the pandemic. We are interested in what the Welsh Government is doing to develop supply chains and respond to offers of assistance from the private sector, while at the same time applying appropriate due diligence to potential suppliers. However, we acknowledge that Audit Wales is currently taking forward work on the PPE supply with a view to providing us with initial commentary in the near future, and will await the findings of this work, before seeking further information from you.
- We request further information on what the Welsh Government is doing to ensure the resilience and effectiveness of the regional local authority arrangements in relation to procurement that you described during the meeting. We are particularly concerned about the challenges faced by smaller local authorities who may not have the capacity to managing more complex procurement activity, and would welcome clarity on how/whether the regional arrangements will provide support beyond the management of specific frameworks.

Finally, while we recognise the recent impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it appears that some of the work that had been planned on procurement was taking longer than expected beforehand. You noted that there is an opportunity for the new procurement policy statement to reflect the external environment that we now find ourselves in and to build on some of the issues raised in the Future Generations Commissioner's recent report. We look forward to sight of your consultation and would ask that it is shared with the Committee.



In the meantime, and taking account of some previous evidence, we would welcome clarification of whether the publication of the policy statement will cover off previous commitments around a new procurement strategy and a digital procurement strategy or whether there is still work planned to produce stand-alone documents of that nature. If so, then by when and, if not, then we would welcome an explanation of why these strategy documents will no longer be required.

You may also be aware that the Committee is about to start its inquiry into the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and I anticipate we will explore a number of matters relating to procurement during this work.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Ramsay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Nick Ramsay MS
Chair

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

