

Mark Isherwood MS

Chair of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

22 June 2023

Civil service capacity

Dear Mark,

We have recently carried out a series of pieces of work that fall under the portfolio of the Minister for Health and Social Services and her deputies. Each of those pieces of work has highlighted concerns about the capacity of the civil service within that particularly Welsh Government department, as set out below.

Scrutiny of the Welsh Government 2023-24 Draft Budget

We believe that civil service capacity within the Minister for Health and Social Services' department may be making it challenging for the Minister and her deputies to provide us with the detail and quality of written evidence that we need to undertake effective scrutiny within tight budget timetables. We set out our concerns in more detail in our [letter to the Finance Committee dated 25 May 2023](#).

Inquiry into radical reform of services for care experienced children and young people

In its Programme for Government, the Welsh Government has committed to "Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers." However, we launched our inquiry in July 2022 because at that point in the Senedd term there was very little clarity from the Welsh Government about what exploring radical reform meant in practice.

Over the course of our inquiry we found no shortage of commitment to radical reform from the Deputy Minister and indeed from the First Minister (who has made personal commitments to reducing the numbers of children in care). We also found widespread support from stakeholders and children and young people themselves for radical reform, and many ambitious, evidenced-based and convincing ideas for what that radical reform might look like. Those ideas fed into our [report](#), which

sets out proposals for 12 radical reforms and a series of other potential improvements to services for care experienced children and young people.

What we have heard from some stakeholders during our inquiry indicates that the political commitment at ministerial level to radical reform is not being matched by the pace of policy development and implementation at civil-service level. Some of the policy examples we have received evidence about has suggested that this is at least partly due to insufficient capacity. Looking to the future, we are concerned that the Welsh Government's willingness and ability to take-forward our proposals for radical reform may be hindered by a lack of civil service capacity.

Our inquiries about the creation of national children's counselling service

On 29 January I and the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee wrote to the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. We received a response on 5 April, which we considered on 3 May.

We were concerned by the Deputy Minister's admission in that response that a high volume of correspondence is causing delays to their response times. As you know, it is agreed practice for the Welsh Government to respond to our correspondence within 6 weeks. Timely responses to Committee requests for information are crucial for us to carry out our scrutiny work effectively, as they are for all Committees. We recognise that responding to Committee correspondence takes time and is only one small part of Welsh Government officials' duties. Nevertheless, we are concerned that limitations in civil service capacity may be negatively impacting our ability to scrutinise properly across governmental departments.

I understand that the Public Accounts And Public Administration Committee scrutinises the Welsh Government annual accounts, and that this scrutiny includes consideration of the Welsh Government's workforce capacity. I very hope that the information can feed into that scrutiny process, and that it supports you in that important work.

If you would like further information about any of the issues above please don't hesitate to contact the Committee clerks. Otherwise, I would be very grateful if you could keep my Committee updated on any conclusions or recommendations you come to that relate to the issues raised in this letter.

I have copied this letter to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.