

Efa Gruffudd Jones

Welsh Language Commissioner

5 December 2023

Annual scrutiny follow-up

Dear Efa

Thank you for attending the Committee meeting on Wednesday 8 November 2023 for annual scrutiny. We are grateful to you for engaging with our questions. Following our discussion, we would like to ask a series of questions arising from the evidence you provided.

Case Management System

We were concerned to hear about progress with the implementation of the new Case Management System for the office. Your annual report notes that the new system will be operational during this current financial year, but your response in the meeting indicated that it would not be fully operational. You told us that:

This system originally was to be introduced in October 2022 for testing. That was knocked back to February 2023, and I'm sorry to tell you that we're still in a position where we can't use the system...There are elements of the system that we can use, but the system as a whole is not yet ready for us to use.

We would be grateful if you could outline what aspects are currently operational and when you expect the other elements of the system to be ready.

We are sure you can appreciate that given that your office has spent £243,000 on this project to date, that we are keen to ascertain how it provides value for money (especially given the pressures on your budgets) and how it will support the functions of your office. We would welcome a summary of the benefits the new system will provide.



We were also concerned to hear that there may be unknown additional costs that will arise due to the nature of the contract. Given the amount already spent, and the financial envelope you have to operate within, we would welcome assurances from you that the cost of this project won't spiral, and that there is plan for getting it operational.

Independence of government

During the meeting, we also discussed how you intend to maintain your independence from the Welsh Government.

You have previously announced that you will no longer be maintaining the number of offices you had (four in total). As part of this office space reorganisation, you will be leasing office space within the Welsh Government's offices in Cathays Park. With regards to Cathays Park, you told us:

We are on a separate floor to Welsh Government officials and have a pass system that means that we can't wander into the Welsh Government offices, and they can't come into ours.

We were grateful to you for clarifying that position. There is, however, and as discussed in our session, some uneasiness amongst some Committee Members about this arrangement. You told us that:

I do think that we can put the necessary steps in place to secure our independence.

We would be grateful if you could outline the further steps you will take to show how you'll be able to maintain, as well as display, this independence.

In addition, we have concerns over any future budget shortfalls you may experience, and your independence in approaching such a scenario. You told us that:

...we have a letter on file from Welsh Government, which says that, if we were in a situation where we reached the end of the financial year and we needed additional funding, they would give full consideration to providing that...

Should such a situation arise again, in a situation where funding was required to challenge the Welsh Government itself, there is a concern that that might be seen to compromise your independence. We would be grateful if you could please outline what consideration you've given to such a scenario, and provide any assurances that your independence wouldn't be compromised.

Funding challenges for 2024-25

We noted that your staffing costs represent around 75 per cent of annual expenditure, and that you state in your annual report that the trade unions "have been campaigning for wage increases" in response to inflationary pressures. With inflation remaining high, we were worried to hear that the consequence of meeting this pay request could result in redundancies. We would be grateful to receive information as to what assessment you have made of the impact such redundancies could

have on the ability of your office to deliver on its work, both in terms of your regulatory functions and promoting and facilitating the language in the private and third sectors.

In view of the short reporting timeline for parliamentary scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2024-25, we would be grateful if you could outline to us any further issues you think we should consider during that scrutiny by **no later than Friday 15 December 2023**.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

