



24 Cathedral Road / Heol y Gadeirlan
Cardiff / Caerdydd
CF11 9LJ
Tel / Ffôn: 029 20 320500
Fax / Ffacs: 029 20 320600
Email / Epost: wales@wao.gov.uk
www.wao.gov.uk

Mr Darren Millar AM
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Date: 27 November 2013
Our ref: HVT/2015/fgb
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Dear Darren

CONSULTANT CONTRACT IN WALES: PROGRESS WITH SECURING THE BENEFITS

The Clerk's letter of 25 October requested my advice on the Welsh Government's response to the Public Accounts Committee September 2013 report on the [NHS] *Consultant Contract in Wales*. The Committee's report contained nine recommendations and the Welsh Government has indicated that it accepts all eight of the recommendations that directly affect it.

Overall, I consider that the Welsh Government has responded satisfactorily to the recommendations. A Task and Finish Group has been convened to take forward important work on the development of revised job planning guidance and supporting training. The Welsh Government has provided the Committee with a timetable of the Task and Finish Group's work. This timetable clearly sets out the key milestones leading up to the implementation of the revised job planning guidance by NHS organisations from 1st April 2014.

I have asked Wales Audit Office staff to liaise with Welsh Government officials to maintain a watching brief on progress of the Task and Finish Group and, in particular, to provide assurance that the revised all-Wales job planning guidance addresses adequately issues of concern raised by my study findings and by the Committee. I will alert the Committee if our review of the emerging guidance identifies any major issues of concern.

It will, of course, be important to ensure that the revised guidance produced by the Task and Finish Group, and other associated actions to strengthen job planning, result in actual improvements within NHS organisations. I am aware, through local audit follow up work, that NHS organisations in Wales are taking action to improve consultant job planning. I will continue to use my programme of local audit work to monitor the progress that is being made, and in 2015 I will look to produce an update statement on the extent to which consultant job planning across Wales has been strengthened.

Finally, Recommendation 6 in the Committee's report requested that I conduct a value for money investigation into local health boards' processes and procedures for patients moving between private and NHS practices. I am happy to take forward some further work in this area and I will use the scoping work currently underway on a planned waiting list value for money study to identify the work that would need to be done to examine this issue. I will update the Committee further on this.

I hope that this advice is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of the Welsh Government's response.



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES