



Ein cyf/Our ref: MA(P)/LA/0435/16

Christine Chapman AM  
Chair  
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay

02 February 2016

Dear Christine,

Following my attendance at the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee on 13 January you wrote to me on 22 January requesting additional information. This is included below and is supplementary to the information that I provided in my letter of 27 January.

### **Welsh Government Priorities**

As a Government, we allocated additional funding for social services and schools within the overall budget. The funding for social services will focus on supporting and accelerating transformational change across the healthcare system, while that for schools will be spent directly on frontline services. I will account for the allocations through the normal financial processes of monitoring local Government spending.

### **Reserves held by Local Authorities**

Each Local Authority is responsible for making decisions on the level and application of its Reserves. I have written to all Authority members with guidance on the scrutiny of reserves. This is also published on the Welsh Government website. See attached link:

<http://gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/publications/guidance-elected-members/?lang=en>

I will continue to take an interest in the levels of reserves and raise this with individual Authorities as necessary.

### **Impact of the funding reductions**

I welcome the Committee's interest in the role which alternative delivery models can play in enabling services to continue in the face of budget pressures. As you note, I have recently consulted on an Action Plan for Alternative Delivery Models in public services. My officials

are currently analysing the responses to the consultation and considering any changes which may be required to the Action Plan. I would be pleased to provide an update to the Committee as soon as I have considered the outcomes of the consultation.

## **Local Government Reform**

At a time of financial challenge and growing service demand, I have made my expectations of Local Government absolutely clear and will continue to do so. While Local Authority mergers are an important mechanism to enable reform, they are not an end in themselves. My message to the Public Service Summit and the Public Service Board Conference in November last year was very clear, we have to work as one public service to improve outcomes for citizens. The importance of effective collaboration and working across boundaries has never been greater and local government is ideally placed to do so.

This approach reflects the ways of working that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act requires from us and our partners in Local Government and across the public service. We have to collaborate in order to consider the long term and the wider implications of our decisions if we are to fully to work towards a common set of well-being goals.

Working as one public service is at the heart of the leadership values and behaviours I launched at the Summit, which are now being promoted as the core of Academi Wales' work. It is also at the heart of the work of the Resource Efficiency Group and the Public Service Leadership Panel both of which offer opportunities to support specific collaborations and joint working, as well as scope to learn from the experience of others.

Our Local Government (Wales) Act 2015 will provide the practical basis for the establishment of Transition Committees by merging Authorities. These Committees will play a vital role in making sure Authorities work collaboratively to create new, transformed organisations in the lead up to merger.

## **Youth Justice**

In recent years there has been a significant reduction in the number of young people coming into the youth justice system. Much of this can be attributed to the funding of projects that support restorative approaches to dealing with children who have offended for the first time, such as Triage in Cardiff and Bureau in other parts of Wales. What we are also seeing is a reduction of young people in the reoffending cohort as well as less reoffenders and reoffences.

I am not complacent about the reoffending rates and we will continue to support those at risk of reoffending through the jointly funded Welsh Government and Youth Justice Board (YJB) Case Management project. This project was established following the YJBs study of young people with prolific offending histories, which identified a smaller cohort of young people with numerous problems and a high level of need. This approach has been piloted in a small number of Youth Offending Teams over the last two years and we are already identifying some individual positive outcomes from the work. A formal evaluation is ongoing.

We have seen a positive response through supporting projects aimed at diverting young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour and while I have had to reduce the funding available for youth justice projects, this is in line with the reduced numbers of young people in the system. All areas produce regional business cases and already collaborate on a number of youth justice projects and there is an opportunity to collaborate further on projects such as Bureau, as this includes the police and could therefore be run across police force areas.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of projects as we have done to date to ensure that they still meet the needs of young people at risk of entering or who already in the youth justice system.

### **Equality impact assessments**

Local Authorities are each under a statutory requirement to undertake their own Equality Impact Assessments. As the Committee recognises, it is neither reasonable nor practical to collect and assess this information across all Local Authorities. The adequacy and robustness of assessments in relation to the impact on particular groups will be taken into account by the relevant statutory body, such as the Older People's Commissioner, in considering whether Authorities meet their obligations in terms of impact assessment on their particular communities of interest. As the regulator of the public sector equality duty, the Equality and Human Right Commission works with public authorities to encourage, guide, monitor and regulate activity on the duty.

### **Welsh Language**

The Welsh Language Standards imposed on Local Authorities will require them to assess the impact of their policy decision on the language. The Welsh Language Commissioner is responsible for considering whether Authorities are meeting their Welsh language obligations.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leighton Andrews". The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a long horizontal line that ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

**Leighton Andrews AC / AM**  
Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus  
Minister for Public Services