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Dirprwy Ysgrifennydd Parhaol / Deputy Permanent Secretary

Y Grŵp Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus  
Education and Public Services Group



**Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government**

Mr Nick Ramsay AM  
Chair,  
Public Accounts Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
c/o committeebusiness@wales.gsi.gov.uk

25 November 2016

Dear Chair

**COMMUNITY SAFETY IN WALES**

The Auditor General for Wales recently published his report on Community Safety in Wales. The Welsh Government provided significant commentary on the report as it was drafted and we have now given detailed consideration to the report and its recommendations.

The report recognises the significant challenge of defining Community Safety as a single policy area in Wales. Responsibilities for setting strategic direction, formulating detailed policy proposals and implementing them, is dispersed across four democratically independent bodies. Implementing and delivering those policies operationally on a day to day basis is also complex, cutting across devolved and non-devolved services and accountabilities. As a starting point, the current situation may not offer a sufficiently clear strategic direction for those involved, understandable accountabilities and, moreover, in some instances a simple, effective and lean governance system which enables all organisations to work collaboratively within a common set of objectives.

For the Welsh Government, this highly complex picture is not a sustainable position. However, key levers to make change in this area are not devolved, for example, policing and wider aspects of the criminal justice system. The report rightly acknowledges this and that the Welsh Government undertakes considerable work across the range of community safety activities, and in particular, maintains close and productive relationships with the police and other non-devolved organisations.

The report further acknowledges the complexity of Community Safety and that it is sometimes difficult for organisations in Wales to take a strategic approach. This does not mean there is an absence of strategy or leadership. For example, in many areas in relation to safer communities, the Welsh Government has well established and effective structures setting strategy and supporting effective delivery such as the Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel.



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Panel brings together senior leaders from local government, health, probation, the police and third sector, under a group jointly chaired by the Welsh Government and Youth Justice Board Cymru. It provides coordinated leadership and strategic direction across policy areas set by the UK government and the Welsh Government in relation to the joint Youth Offending Strategy for Wales. The impact of the collaborative work led by the Board over the past 5 years has resulted in a significant decline in first time entrants to the youth justice systems, a reduction in the number of young people in the secure estate and an effective, evidence based approach to early intervention.

The report also correctly recognises the implementation challenges of policies that straddle devolved and non devolved areas and, naturally, over the last 17 years devolution has created differences in the policy approaches of the UK and Welsh Governments. We agree this presents challenges for us, but our aim has been to understand and manage these in a way that does not affect front line services. We are pleased the report acknowledges we work closely with non devolved agencies – this is a mark of the positive collaborative approach we take in Wales.

During the last administration, within a year of the election, we recruited and trained 500 additional Community Support Officers across Wales. That was only possible because of the close co-operation with the four Police Forces in Wales. We recognise the contribution Police and Crime Commissioners make to setting local strategy for their forces but agree there is more we can do to develop a shared understanding of national priorities for community safety, while recognising the inevitable variation of those at a local level. While agreed policy objectives are important for effective collaboration, other factors can also have an impact and as we look forward, there is always room for partners to work better jointly.

The report suggests that there should be a single strategy and single over arching lead body for Community Safety in Wales. In itself, and without wider consideration of all the organisations and governance involved, this approach may not reduce the existing complexity or improve the delivery of services that ensure people feel safe in their communities. Our approach, as the report explains, has been to focus on the areas of priority identified by the previous and current Programmes for Government. Cabinet Secretaries believe this to be the right approach which has enabled us to focus on a smaller number of areas where we can ensure there is effective leadership, governance and a focus on improving the way that public services are delivered; and that outcomes for people are improved.

The Welsh Government lead in relation to tackling Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) is a good example of such a focus and has been considered to be ‘trail blazing’ by some commentators. The National Advisory Group on VAWDASV, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, brings together a multi agency group from across the statutory and third sectors, along with leading academics, it provides strategic leadership on the implementation of the VAWDASV Act; implementation of the National Training Framework; and will oversee the preparation and delivery of a new National Strategy for VAWDASV. This approach also, crucially, involves the voices of survivors of VAWDASV.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges the additional funding the Welsh Government has allocated to community safety budgets. This reflects the priority Cabinet Secretaries attach to this area, even more so given the very difficult fiscal conditions in which we are operating. With this extra resource, we have sought to drive forward innovation. For example, we have worked closely with the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales on its diversification agenda where Cabinet Secretaries took a very strong lead to drive cross-agency collaboration to reduce deliberate grass fires. They have also encouraged diversification of the service towards working with young people and perpetrators to reduce the levels of arson; make the elderly and vulnerable safer in their homes by providing home safety equipment; as well as working with others to help tackle domestic abuse.

While there is significant evidence that the Welsh Government and other partner organisations are fully engaged in a range of activities across the community safety agenda, the report makes a much more fundamental observation which goes beyond a discussion of leadership or strategy. It highlights how the policy area has developed since devolution; and continues to develop at pace and how the different layers of government – and governance – have developed; and the numerous organisational changes which have taken place. We agree that there is a need to address these issues and our response to the report provides the opportunity to review and refresh the arrangements for community safety in Wales, taking into account not just the context of today, but possible developments in the future.

We suggest that such a refresh could, among other things, take account of:

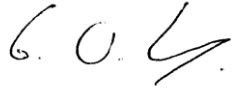
- the need for a shared understanding of Community Safety;
- developments in UK and Welsh legislation and whether there is a need for further reform, including the opportunities offered by the Wales Bill;
- developments at the UK policy level, for example prison reform;
- developments in single planning processes through Public Service Boards;
- recognising interdependencies between the activities of UK and Welsh Government and Police and Crime Commissioners and the potential for aligning these better;
- developing streamlined planning, governance, assurance and performance mechanisms in a structure which will include all partners and recognise the opportunities offered by our proposed reforms in local government; ; and
- that those mechanisms will be efficient and effective, accountabilities will be transparent and duplication of effort will be minimised.

On this basis, we believe that in the interests of quality, efficiency and effectiveness we will address the recommendations as part of this wider review and reform to move the Community Safety agenda forward. We believe there is an opportunity to take stock of the issues highlighted by the report and to ensure that we are delivering services effectively in those priority areas that will ensure our communities are safer. Taking stock will also allow us to engage with the UK Government in areas where the complexity of devolved/non-devolved policies may continue to cause challenges for public services in Wales in a way that we have not done previously.

Our aim will be to establish arrangements to support community safety in Wales that are robust, relevant and responsive. We have already discussed this with a number of the Police and Crime Commissioners and, Local Authorities and there is general agreement to move forward on this basis.

I am copying this this letter to the Police and Crime Commissioners given they have been identified in the recommendations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'O. Evans', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Owen Evans