

Kirsty Williams AM

Cabinet Secretary for Education

Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

14th November 2017

Dear _____,

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON ASBESTOS: ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

You may be aware that I chair the CPG on Asbestos and have therefore followed with interest your correspondence with Mike Hedges AM dated 16th June 2017 (your ref KW/00885/17), 16th October to Rebecca Evans AM (your ref KW/01628/17) and to David Rowlands AM on 3rd November 2017 (your ref KW/10886/17).

1. Working Group

The CPG has an interest in learning far more about the “Working Group” that is referenced in these letters: the membership, remit and work programmes. The CPG is very keen to ensure that appropriate voices (e.g. the trade unions and other expert advice) are available to the Working Group based on our standard practice of social partnership work in Wales. This very matter has been referred by the CPG for the attention of the Trade Union members of the Workforce Partnership Council.

Clearly if your Working Group is meeting imminently then there is a need for **early clarification** on this matter so I can seek to satisfy the members of the CPG about the actions being taken here in Wales.

Can you please assist me with further information on the Working Group?

2. CPG – January 17th 2018

The CPG next meets on 17th January and I wondered whether at that point you could arrange to have us updated on the work of the Working Group, indeed whether there is someone available to address the CPG on that date?

3. PAC report

My attention has been drawn to the report of the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts report – Capital funding for schools – published on 26th April 2017. In particular Recommendation 5, and the response of the UK Government as contained in appendix one to this letter.

I hope this letter can receive your early attention and we can provide members of this CPG with further clarity around the important issue of tackling asbestos in schools in Wales.

Yours sincerely

Dawn Bowden AM

Appendix One

“5.The Department still does not know enough about the state of the school estate, meaning that it cannot make well-informed decisions about how best to use its limited resources. The Department now has a better understanding of the condition of school buildings after completing a survey of the estate in 2014. This property data survey estimated that it would cost £6.7 billion to return all school buildings to satisfactory or better condition, and a further £7.1 billion to bring parts of school buildings from satisfactory to good condition. Much of the school estate is over 40 years old, with 60% built before 1976. The Department estimates that the cost of Capital funding for schools dealing with major defects will double between 2015-16 and 2020-21, even with current levels of investment, as many buildings near the end of their useful lives.

The property data survey did not assess the safety or suitability of school buildings or the extent of asbestos. Over 80% of schools responding to a separate survey by the Department had asbestos, with 19% reporting that they were not complying with asbestos management guidance. However, only a quarter of schools responded to the survey, meaning that the Department does not have a complete picture. The Department estimates that it would cost at least £100 billion to replace the entire school estate which it believes would be the only way to eradicate asbestos from school buildings. The Department is undertaking a second property data survey but, until this is complete, it cannot assess reliably how the school estate is

changing and does not know the extent to which its funding is helping to improve the condition of school buildings.

Recommendation: The Department should set out a plan by December 2017 for how it will fill gaps in its knowledge about the school estate in areas not covered by the property data survey. Specifically it needs to understand the prevalence, condition and management of asbestos, and know more about the general suitability and safety of school buildings.

UK Government Response October 2017

“5 : Committee of Public Accounts conclusions : The Department still does not know enough about the state of the school estate, meaning that it cannot make well – informed decisions about how best to use its limited resources .

Recommendation: The Department should set out a plan by December 2017 for how it will fill gaps in its knowledge about the school estate in areas not covered by the property data survey. Specifically it needs to understand the prevalence, condition and management of asbestos, and know more about the general suitability and safety of school buildings.

5.1 The Government agrees with the Committee’s recommendation.”