



Eich cyf/Your ref: MA-P-JJ-3394-19  
Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-P-JJ-3394-19

29 November 2019

Dear John

Thank you for your letter of 4<sup>th</sup> November following my appearance at the Equalities and Local Government Committee. I am pleased the Committee recognises the pace and urgency around our work on homelessness prevention, particularly implementation of the short term recommendations of the Homelessness Action Group.

The Welsh Government's strategic approach to homelessness prevention was published on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019 and sets out the whole system approach required across public services to tackle homelessness in all its forms; with prevention and rapid re-housing at its core. Whilst the majority of answers to homelessness will be the same for everyone, I recognise the need for different approaches for specific groups of people. Our strategic framework allows for this, with one of the key policy principles being that all services should place the individual at the centre. However, fundamentally, addressing this issue is about getting the system right so that it works for everyone.

As I set out in my evidence to the Committee, we recognise the complex relationship between substance misuse, mental health and housing needs. To support our cross government approach to this we have agreed shared actions in the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019 to 2022 and the Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019 to 2022, both of which have been subject to public consultation during the summer. Both plans identify actions with housing as a priority and the need to support individuals with co-occurring and/or complex needs.

I mentioned during the evidence session specific additional funding for those with complex needs. This is funding, from the health budget, which has been made available across 2019-20 and 2020-21 to support this priority, including supporting the Housing First approach. Following a bidding process, funding has been agreed in the Health Board areas of Betsi Cadwaladr, Powys, Cardiff and the Vale, and Aneurin Bevan, totalling £1.3m. My officials and health officials are also undertaking discussions in the Swansea Bay area, given the high level of drug related deaths reported in official UK statistics.

As you acknowledge in your letter, we are embarking on an ambitious programme of change to implement our strategic approach. I agree that it is vital to evaluate and assess the impact of that change, particularly taking account of the views of those receiving support

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and services. Another of the key policy principles outlined in our strategic approach is that policy, service delivery and practice should be informed and shaped in a co-productive manner and by those with lived experience. As such, implementation of our approach will involve evaluating the impact on service users through engagement with them. We are already building evaluation into programmes we have commenced, for example we are undertaking independent evaluation of the Housing First programme and of the projects undertaken under the Youth Homelessness Innovation Fund.

I recognise the demand on all our public services, which is why it is vital we invest in the earliest interventions that are recognised to be the most effective and also to be the most cost effective. As I set out in my evidence to Committee, it is important to acknowledge that the Welsh Government has significantly increased funding since the introduction of the 2014 legislation to prevent and relieve homelessness. As well as additional funding through the Revenue Support Grant, we are providing over £20m this financial year alone specifically for homelessness prevention and relief, including rough sleeping.

We are also ensuring wider funding on housing support is used to best effect to prevent and relieve homelessness. The development of the Housing Support Grant has provided an opportunity for greater alignment of Supporting People and Homelessness Prevention Grant and guidance to ensure the most effective use of resources and join-up of services. This work has been developing at pace during the year and in close collaboration with stakeholders, we are currently consulting on revised guidance for the Housing Support Grant.

I thank the Committee once again for your continued interest in this vital area, which requires the collective effort of everyone across Public Services in Wales if we are to achieve our shared goal of ending homelessness.

Yours sincerely



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