

Ein cyf/Our ref: HB 72 19

John Griffiths AM
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

13 January 2020

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 16 December regarding my response to the Equality, Local Government and Communities (ELGC) Committee's report *Benefits in Wales*.

I anticipate that the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) will be publishing its rapid evidence review on potential reforms to administering social security in Wales on 14 January 2020. I will be considering the findings of the WCPP's review in detail, alongside the Committee's very helpful report into *Benefits in Wales*. I will provide a more detailed response to the Committee's recommendations 10-17 before the commencement of the Easter 2020 recess.

Where we have begun to outline some core principles, which include compassion, fairness, dignity and understanding, these remain principles of this Welsh Government across the development of policy and can be seen consistently in our approach. This approach and principles would be what we are asking the UK Government to apply within the existing devolution settlement, and ones which we would look to implement if there was any further devolution at any point in the future.

In respect of some of your specific questions relating to my response I have set these out below.

Recommendation 1

The cross-government review of our existing programmes and services to ensure that they have maximum impact on the lives of children, young people and families living in poverty will report in Spring 2020. The review will seek to identify those policies and programmes that are working well, and those areas where we should be doing more. The scope of the review is broad, reflecting the range of funded programmes and services that potentially contribute to tackling child poverty, and will be looking across themes and gathering views on areas where investment is making or could make the most difference. Children, young people and families in need remain a high priority for this Welsh Government and we will continue to focus on what further can be done for this significant proportion of the people in Wales.

Recommendation 2

Officials are currently updating the single site which provides information on eligibility to Welsh Government programmes and schemes. I confirm that we will investigate how we might include within this information regarding expenditure on devolved benefits, where this is possible and practicable to do so.

Recommendation 3

In respect of the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) we are updating guidance for the Emergency Assistance Payment (EAP) to further ensure that claimants, or support agencies, are aware that it is a grant to help with essential costs after an emergency, following a disaster such as a flood or fire in the home, or extreme financial hardship for reasons including delays in benefit payments. I will provide links to the revised guidance once this is completed.

Recommendation 4

The Single Advice Fund remains a significant pan-Wales approach to promoting and increasing the take-up of all devolved and non-devolved welfare benefits, and in support of this we have a strong record of grant funding advice providers and increasing funding to meet demand. A range of partners work seamlessly within a consortium, ensuring advice services reach deep into communities and are delivered from the places where people most in need go.

Aligned with the work supported by the Single Advice Fund, individual schemes also promote take-up through their bespoke networks and stakeholders. For example, for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) there is a national awareness-raising campaign and we have commissioned research from Policy in Practice to investigate the link between Universal Credit and CTRS, as CTRS is a passported form of support. The Policy in Practice interim report was published on 9 January 2020.

<https://gov.wales/universal-credit-council-tax-reduction-scheme-and-rent-arrears-wales-interim-report>

Officials are also working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to see what more can be done to specifically promote the take-up of Pension Credit, in view of the changes this year to be made by the UK Government to entitlement to free TV licences for those people aged over 75.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hannah Blythyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small mark at the end.

Hannah Blythyn AC/AM

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government