



Ein cyf/Our ref: SF/FM/0599/13

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

David Melding AM
Chair
Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister
National Assembly for Wales

16th April 2013

Dear David

Committee Meeting on 27 February 2013 - The First Minister's Delivery Unit

The Committee has requested further information and clarification on a number of issues that arose during the above scrutiny session. I will be responding separately on the points relating to Child Poverty.

Measures of success of the Delivery Unit

I note that the Committee would like better to understand how the Delivery Unit operates and considers that there should be ongoing monitoring of its performance. I do not believe it would be appropriate or meaningful to attempt to apply an objective performance framework to its work or to hold the Delivery Unit to account for the activities of others. The Unit works alongside Ministers and their departments to help ensure that key policies are delivered in a way that is effective and timely. Any effort to measure the impact of specific interventions that have been made, or improvements introduced by the Unit, would be entirely subjective.

As I said during the Committee meeting, delivery is a collective responsibility that all Welsh Ministers and their departments share but as First Minister I have overarching responsibility. In support of this function, I require a mechanism through which I can receive free and frank opinion, advice and information within a private discussion space. The Delivery Unit provides this, giving me an impartial perspective on departments so that I can judge how policies are being taken forward and how delivery is progressing. This enables me to monitor performance and to hold my Ministers and their departments to account, particularly where there appear to be barriers to delivery. On this aspect of the Delivery Unit's work, it is for me to determine whether it is fulfilling the role I have set for it.

Programme for Government Delivery Group

The Programme for Government Delivery Group is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and core membership consists of the Directors General, the Director of Governance, the Director of Legal Services, the Head of Strategic Budgeting and the Head of the Delivery Unit. The group meets on a monthly basis.

Directors General are accountable for delivering those Programme for Government outcomes and commitments that fall within their own commands. However, the Permanent Secretary recognised that there was need to improve the alignment of the 'heavy lifting' on cross-departmental delivery in support of the Delivery Unit.

The Delivery Group will therefore make a difference by:

- Supporting progress on issues where departments need to work together to deliver coherently against the Programme for Government;
- Supporting the budget and planning process at key fiscal moments by providing a vehicle for joint consideration of resource allocation for the Programme for Government in a way that ensures plans are linked to outcomes;
- Providing high-level scrutiny of progress against the Programme for Government overall; and
- Considering specific one-off pieces of analysis as commissioned by the Group or by me via the Delivery Unit.

Experience of the staff working in the Delivery Unit

Staff working in the Delivery Unit have a broad mix of skills and backgrounds but they are not auditors. As the Permanent Secretary said during the scrutiny session, the Welsh Government is already comprehensively audited and a Delivery Unit that performed an additional audit function would not add value. Where the Delivery Unit does add value, is by offering a fresh perspective and ensuring that departments take a rounded approach to delivering policy and by providing objective challenge and rigour. I particularly look to the Delivery Unit to identify practices or processes that are, or could, frustrate delivery.

Whilst each member of the Unit has expertise in policy making, and experience of evaluation, they have also successfully delivered in an environment where the application of sound judgement and analytical skills was required. They were selected on the strength of their experience, individual performance and understanding of the delivery challenges. It is also worth pointing out that each has a track record of establishing credibility and influencing senior officials. They work alongside departments in a constructive and positive manner, not in conflict with them.

Programme for Government annual report

The role of the Delivery Unit is to analyse the performance information contained within the annual report and identify areas that require scrutiny, support and challenge to help ensure that all parts of Welsh Government are delivering in a timely and effective manner.

The Delivery Unit does not edit the annual report nor identify the indicators and measures that should be included within it – that responsibility appropriately rests with departments. The annual report is a snapshot at a moment in time of our progress in delivering the key actions and outcomes across the Programme for Government as a whole. Whilst having a smaller number of indicators sounds attractive, it would undermine our commitment to openness and transparency. The more pressing issue, therefore, has been to improve the functionality of the report and this is something we intend to do.

We recognise that the Programme for Government annual report contains a wealth of information that can be challenging to digest. We are therefore changing the format of this year's annual report to a simpler web-based version that will:

Enable users to filter the information more effectively by chapter, policy area or action;

Allow similar indicators to be grouped and reported on together, such as headline measures of poverty. This will reduce the size of the report without compromising on the level of information contained within it; and

Signpost users to information on related indicators. For example, if you were to view the headline measures of poverty you would be prompted to look at the data for our key anti-poverty programmes, such as Flying Start.

These changes will make the information far easier to navigate so that it can be more readily interrogated and digested.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carwyn Jones', written in a cursive style.

CARWYN JONES