

John Griffiths AM
Chair – Equalities, Local Government and Communities
Committee
National Assembly for Wales

19 February 2018

Auditor General for Wales Report: Local Government Homelessness 2017

Dear John,

I wrote to you recently highlighting that the findings of the Auditor General's report into Local Authority Homelessness may be of interest to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee given its interest in considering matters relating to homelessness and in the shorter term the matter of Rough Sleepers.

I also referred to inquiry currently being undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee into the Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme and that I would write again should there be any findings arising from our work that would be of relevance to your Committee. As such please find attached a letter sent from the Deputy Permanent Secretary to the Public Accounts Committee providing the Committee with additional information on actions to prevent homelessness.

I trust this information will be of interest to your Committee's work.

Yours sincerely,



Nick Ramsay AM
Chair



Tracey Burke

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol / Director General
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
Cardiff Bay
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8th February 2018

Dear Mr Ramsay

Public Accounts Committee Meeting – 22 January 2018 – Follow-up Actions

I am writing in relation to your request for additional information, following the Committee session on 22 January 2018 on the Supporting People Programme. Please find the additional information requested below.

A. Whether third sector organisations were invited to participate in the stakeholder engagement workshops during the development of the Pathfinder project

The Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and Cymorth Cymru were invited to, and have attended, all the pathfinder meetings to date. Third sector organisations also participated in the stakeholder engagement workshops as part of the alignment project, including Barnardos and Cymorth.

B. The grants which form the proposed single integrated grant

We are currently considering creating a new single Early Intervention and Prevention Support Grant in 2019-20 and are working to test new grant arrangements in seven local authorities in 2018-19. The Grants included for 2018-19 are:



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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

- Supporting People
- Flying Start
- Families First
- Legacy Fund
- Promoting Positive Engagement for Young People
- Childcare and Play (formerly Out of School Childcare)
- Homelessness Prevention
- Rent Smart Wales Enforcement (formerly part of Independent Living)
- St David's Day Fund
- Communities for Work Plus (formerly the Employability Grant).

C. Additional information on actions to prevent homelessness

***Q1.** What is the Welsh Government's overall perspective on the issues raised by the Auditor General's recent report on homelessness, and what it says about the response of local government and its partners both to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and to the Equality Act 2010 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?*

***Q1a.** Does the Welsh Government support the recommendations that the Auditor General has made, and will it be taking any action itself to reinforce them?*

The recently published report from the Auditor General was from our perspective a useful opportunity to use the implementation the Housing Act 2014 as a means by which to consider wider issues concerning how well local authorities are able to manage future demand. The report provides important information and feedback on the progress being made by local authorities and we welcome the findings and recommendations.

The report acknowledges the importance of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 in placing homelessness prevention at the centre of local authority duties, and the funding which Welsh Government has provided to support implementation. The recommendations are all for local authorities and we will work with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and local authorities to help secure their implementation.

The addition of £6 million to the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for homelessness from 2018-19 demonstrates that, in line with the Auditor General's recommendations, Ministers are keen to put these services on a firmer, longer-term footing.

***Q2.** What is the Welsh Government doing to address evidence of a decline in successful prevention work, the growing number of people in temporary accommodation and the risk of a postcode lottery in service provision?*

Our published statistics show an increase in the number of households receiving assistance and, therefore, we do not recognise that there is a decline in successful prevention. Against this increase in demand for services, the evidence suggests that local authorities are actually managing to maintain their rates of prevention. This means more people are being prevented from becoming homeless.

This significantly increased demand on statutory homeless services will have inevitably resulted in an increase to the numbers of people being placed in temporary



accommodation. However, there could be many more factors behind this increase including a more inclusive approach taken by local authorities to providing emergency accommodation, particularly to people who may previously have not been supported, as a result of refinements to guidance and Welsh Government progress visits.

The evaluation of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 will look at the impact of the legislation on the use of temporary accommodation and we will consider any recommendations arising from the report.

As the Auditor General noted in his recent report it is true that some authorities are further along than others in changing the culture and attitudes needed to become truly preventative. Our programme of engagement, networks and further planned training are there to support them in implementing the spirit and letter of the Act.

Q3. *How is the Welsh Government expecting local authorities to use the £6 million funding that it has proposed to add to the revenue support grant to support implementation of the Act?*

The additional £6 million is included in the local government revenue settlement from 2018-19. It is a matter for each local authority to determine how they spend this, but Ministers and officials have made clear that this is the secure long-term funding, for which the WAO recently called, and is intended to support delivery of front-line prevention services, as required under the legislation.

Q3a. *What sort of changes is the Welsh Government expecting local authorities to make in reviewing and reorganising services with the support of this funding?*

It is for each local authority to decide how it utilises the new funding in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). We will continue to monitor prevention rates and to work closely with local authorities, directly and through the WLGA, to identify and share best practice.

Further funding of £2.8 million is also being channelled to local authorities as a revenue grant to help them build on their statutory prevention work. This will enable local authorities to intensify their efforts to achieve successful outcomes for individuals and families at risk of homelessness or without a home.

Local authority plans for this funding are expected to focus on improving access to the private-rented sector; application of trauma informed practice; strengthening services for people with mental health and/or substance misuse problems (including improved joint working between housing and mental health/substance misuse services); and action to prevent youth homelessness and reduce rough sleeping.

Q3b. *How will the Welsh Government be ensuring that the additional funding is used as intended and not to offset other pressures on core local authority funding?*

We will continue to monitor the number of households being supported to prevent or relieve homelessness through our collection of management data and publication of national statistics.

Officials will work with local government to ensure delivery of effective front-line prevention services, as required under the legislation. We will ensure there are the necessary and appropriate arrangements for monitoring the outputs and outcomes, including via the grant terms and conditions for the additional £2.8m, as well as regular engagement with local authorities through the homelessness networks, working groups and programme of visits to individual local authorities.

Q3c. *How does the Welsh Government expect local authorities to join up wider work on homelessness prevention with the Supporting People Programme?*

How local authorities organise their services to ensure alignment and joint working is a matter for them. However, the importance of support is reflected in our homelessness legislation, which requires local authorities to undertake homelessness reviews and prepare strategies to reduce homelessness by the end of 2018. The reviews and strategies must address the need for support to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The role of Supporting People grant funding in helping the prevention of homelessness is highlighted in the interim report by Salford University and the Auditor General's recent report includes a number of recommendations aimed at improving outcomes in this area, including the advantages of closer integration between Supporting People and homelessness teams.

We will be revising our statutory homelessness guidance in 2018, and will strengthen the advice regarding the need for close collaboration between Supporting People and homelessness teams with shared objectives and planning. The benefits of integration of services and reduction of 'silo funding' underpins the work to increase funding flexibility which may, subject to Ministerial decision on future grant structures, offer further opportunities to join up services more effectively.

Q4. *In the context of the report's findings about collaboration, is the issue of the classification of housing associations - which the Committee has explored previously - presenting any particular challenges in securing their buy in to wider work on homelessness prevention?*

In the course of preparing the legislation for classification of housing associations, officials have explored the duty to co-operate on homelessness prevention and this was not considered to be relevant for classification. The duty to cooperate contained within the 2014 Act therefore remains unchanged and we are satisfied that this will not impact on the future status of RSLs as private organisations.

D. An update on the coding elements of the Hwb programme (website and collection of online tools provided to all schools in Wales by the Welsh Government) and include information on activities on teaching coding in schools more generally not just specifically to the Hwb programme.

We launched *Cracking the Code* our plan to improve coding skills last June. With £1.3 million this Assembly term, we are working with education consortia, businesses, third sector partners, and universities, so more learners develop these skills in advance of the new curriculum. The ability to 'code' is a fundamental skill that all young people need to succeed in the economy, now and in the future.

We have also invested £930k with Technocamps to deliver computer coding workshops to pupils and teachers in our schools. We have committed to support their ESF application so they can deliver an enhanced programme for young people, while our new curriculum is being developed.

Link to the statement and plan:

<http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/crackingcode/?lang=en>

BBC news item following Estyn annual report: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-42791009>

Our Minecraft for Education pilot aims to inspire first-time coders with Minecraft Code Builder and to use Minecraft for Education to support key priorities in Wales including literacy, numeracy and the Digital Competence Framework. Ten schools in Wales with infrastructure readiness and a desire to participate were identified in conjunction with regional education consortia. Key objectives of this pilot include:

- Raising awareness and highlighting the benefits of coding to headteachers, teachers, learners and parents
- Breaking down the barriers to participation in coding
- Facilitating coding experiences
- Exploring the impact in the classroom.

I hope this information answers the additional questions and is of use to the Committee. If you require further information, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely

Tracey Burke