



Ein cyf/Our ref SF/LA_/2126/15

Christine Chapman AC / AM
Chair, Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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30 July 2015

Dear Christine,

Thank you for your letter of 15 June regarding the legacy work of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. I apologise for the delay in responding.

You requested an update on progress in two of the Committee's inquiries within my portfolio - Community Safety in Wales and Progress with Local Government Collaboration, along with information on the implementation of Welsh legislation. You have asked the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty for an update in relation to the Inquiry into Human Trafficking. Matters relating to your inquiry into Human Trafficking also fall to my portfolio, and I have included an update on those recommendations.

The inquiry into Community Safety in Wales, was undertaken in 2011 and responded to by my colleague, the then Minister for Local Government. At that time we accepted five of the six recommendations, and rejected one. Since that time significant progress has been made.

As part of its Programme for Government, the Welsh Government committed to fund 500 Community Support Officers. These Officers have been in place since October 2013. In February the report of the Universities Police Science Institute (U PSI) into the role and effectiveness of the additional 500 Community Support Officers on the streets of Wales was published. The research suggests our additional officers are visible on our streets and that they are meeting the public's expectations by dealing with low-level crime and anti-social behaviour.

Domestic Abuse remains a priority for this Government, with continued engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioners, the Chief Constables, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and others. ACPO is represented on my Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisory Group. We will be working closely with ACPO in developing our National Strategy, in line with the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Regular meetings are held with the four Police and Crime Commissioners for the Welsh forces and the four Chief Constables. The four Chief Constables also attended Cabinet on 23 March. The Police Liaison Unit within the Welsh Government has been strengthened and now comprises five officers and staff, who have regular contact with Welsh Government officials on a range of policy matters.

The matter of police station closures is now the responsibility of the Police and Crime Commissioners.

The rejected recommendation related to services and posts jointly funded by the Welsh Government and the Home Office. As my predecessor stated, it is not for the Welsh Government to meet reductions in funding from other sources. The latest information on police budgets for 2015-16 was published on 17 June.

With regard to the inquiry into Progress with Local Government Collaboration, this made six recommendations, of which the Government accepted five and accepted one in principle. The response, issued by my colleague, the then Minister for Local Government and Government Business, was published alongside the Commission on Public Service Governance and Reform. The position on public services in Wales, and specifically on Local Government in Wales, has moved significantly since that time.

One of the 20 high level actions outlined in the document *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: Improving Public Services for People in Wales* reiterated the need to ensure collaborations and partnerships are well aligned to ensure clarity, reduce complexity and avoid duplication. In the context of Local Government reform it is particularly relevant that we ensure, wherever possible, that existing and future collaborations align with the boundaries of the new merged Local Authorities.

On 17 June the Welsh Government's preference for the future configuration of Local Authorities in Wales was announced. Co-terminosity between Local Authorities and other public services such as Health has been a key consideration in thinking about the future map of Local Government in Wales. Work is already underway to identify the most strategically important regional collaborations, and shows they are broadly well aligned with proposals and consistent with the Welsh Government's Regional Collaborative Footprint.

The *Power to Local People* White Paper set out the future relationship between Welsh Government and Local Government, as well as considering scrutiny of regional collaborative working. Overview and scrutiny committees have also been given powers to review and scrutinise Public Services Boards through the Well-being for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Resourcing issues will be considered within the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the draft Bill on mergers and reform to be published in the autumn.

In the meantime I and my officials will continue with our programme of engagement with Local Government. I have established the Public Service Leadership Panel, which most recently met on 16 July, and includes representation from across the public sector. I spoke at the Welsh Local Government Association Conference in June and a programme of official level meetings will be taking place over the summer.

With regard to the Inquiry into Human Trafficking, your letter to my colleague, the then Minister for Local Government and Government Business, contained a number of recommendations which we have considered very carefully. Raising awareness and building the evidence base are an integral part of the Anti-Slavery Delivery Plan for 2015-16 and the Anti-Slavery Coordinator continues to work with colleagues across the public sector. One example of this is the Wales Anti-Slavery Conference hosted on 14 July. There has also been a focus on strengthening relationships with Law Enforcement Agencies, and the Committee will be aware of the number of high profile investigations and prosecutions which have taken place across Wales and the UK.

In the context of the UK Government's Modern Slavery Act 2015, we have seen Local Authority engagement strengthened. Dr Gwynne Jones, Chief Executive of Anglesey County Council, represents Local Authorities on the Anti-Slavery Leadership Group and there is good representation from the sector across our regional fora. I published the second Anti-Slavery Coordinators Annual Report in November 2014 and we held a national conference in January 2015. We are currently redeveloping the Live Fear Free website, which will go live later this year. The website will contain a section dedicated to the anti-slavery agenda, further raising the profile.

You have also asked for an update on implementation of the provisions contained in Welsh legislation falling to my portfolio. Both the Local Government (Bylaws) (Wales) Act 2012 and the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 have been implemented. Implementation arrangements for the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 are in hand, with the appointment of the first National Advisor, Rhian Bowen-Davies, announced on 15 July. Ms Bowen-Davies will take up the role from 28 September and I look forward to working with her.

I would be happy to provide you with more information on these matters at the Committee session scheduled for 24 September.

Best wishes,

Leighton Andrews

Leighton Andrews AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Minister for Public Services

