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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Ann Jones AM,
Chair, Communities, Equality and
Local Government Committee

25th January 2012

Thank you for your letter highlighting the recommendations made by the Committee with regards to Community Safety. As I said in the debate on Community Safety in Plenary on 18 January, it is very important that the people of Wales feel safe in their homes and their communities. We have made great strides in recent years towards achieving our goal of making Wales a safer country – giving people that sense of security.

The cuts in public sector funding are concerning, but we are working hard with our partner agencies to try to minimise the impact on community safety. I will address the specific recommendations in turn in the attached Annex.

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Minister for Local Government and Communities

Written Response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government Inquiry on Community Safety

January 2012

Recommendation 1

The Committee intends to keep a close eye on these developments and will hold a further evidence session this time next year to consider their implications for Wales.

Response: Accept

I too am concerned about the impact of the Home Office spending cuts on frontline policing. As the Committee is no doubt aware, I meet regularly with the four Chief Constables of Wales, as well as the Chief Executives and Chairs of the Police Authorities of Wales. At these meetings, they keep me informed of the key issues affecting them. Funding cuts and potential job losses have been on the agenda for some time and will continue to be so. I have urged the police to think carefully about how they can work collaboratively in order to save money and I am receiving information which indicates that they are doing so. I will continue to monitor the situation.

Financial Implications: None. Any associated staff costs can be drawn from divisional budgets.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government should work closely with the four police forces to ensure communities are engaged in a continuous process of consultation in order to maintain their confidence in policing.

Response: Accept

As set out above, the Welsh Government already has close working relationships with the police and we are committed to doing everything we can to promote closer links between the police and the public. Our commitment to introduce an additional 500 CSOs in Wales reflects this. The four police forces each hold neighbourhood policing activities and events, such as Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, that encourage engagement with the public. I will continue to monitor this situation at my regular meeting with senior police officials.

Financial Implications: None. Any associated staff costs can be drawn from divisional budgets.

Recommendation 3

It is important the Welsh Government works with the Police forces to monitor the impact of police station closures, as this, coupled with the proposed closures of local courts could have consequences for victims and offenders.

Response: Accept

Once again I will monitor this situation through my regular meetings with senior police officials. I would expect that where police stations have closed, police would still make every effort to ensure a visible presence in the affected communities. The presence of an additional 500 CSOs across Wales will help ensure a reassuring presence in our communities.

Financial Implications: None. Any associated staff costs can be drawn from divisional budgets.

Recommendation 4

In our view, the Welsh Government should provide detailed information about how it intends to ensure sufficient funding is available in the longer term for these types of services and posts. The Welsh Government should also publish plans on how it intends to cover these issues remain priorities for the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Panels.

Response: Reject

I accept that the complex nature of funding arrangements where posts are jointly funded by the Welsh Government and Home Office can make future planning difficult for partners in Community Safety Partnerships. However, I am not able to give commitments for the Welsh Government to ensure sufficient funding in these circumstances as we are not able to 'plug the gap' where funding is withdrawn from other sources. I can however, give assurances over Welsh Government funding and have set these out below.

Youth Justice

The Safer Communities Fund (SCF) is the main vehicle for implementation of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy delivery plan 2009-11. It distributes funding on an established formula basis to the 22 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Wales, to enable local youth justice projects and initiatives aimed at preventing children and young people from offending. The level of the fund in 2011-12 is £4.5m.

An increase of 5% has been agreed for the Youth Justice Budget lines for 2012-13 and officials are currently examining the way forward to utilise this increase effectively. The indication for 2013-14 is for a further 5% rise.

Officials are in the process of engaging with partners across Wales to consider the need for a 'Prevention of Youth Offending (Wales) Bill'. This Bill would seek to strengthen the devolved services that support young people who have offended, or are at risk of offending. Additionally work is ongoing to tighten up the grant criteria to ensure that projects deliver results in line with the proposed bill, and that the fund is distributed in line with the Regional Footprint boundaries in 2013-14.

Substance Misuse

The vast majority of funding allocated to Community Safety Partnerships is for frontline services and any cut to the budget would almost certainly impact on them and could potentially result in a decreased level of service provision.

The budget also enables the Welsh Government to deliver on its Programme for Government commitments to reduce the harm associated with substance misuse and to reduce the level of crime and fear of crime. The Welsh Government recognises this and has protected substance misuse revenue budgets at existing levels until 2013-14.

There has been a reduction in substance misuse capital budgets in line with other Welsh Government capital budgets over the three-year period 2011-12 to 2013-14. However, by 2013-14 the capital funding will still be £1m more than the 2010-11 budgets, thereby allowing the programme of improvements to substance misuse facilities to continue.

To-date, from the criminal justice aspect of the substance misuse policy, cuts have not materially affected services either within custody suites or related services provided by the Police and funded by Welsh Government.

In relation to the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP), the budget settlement for 2012/13 has now been set; a further cut of 8% has been administered. Every effort is being made to ensure that service provision continues to be fully supported. Due to this substantial cut, officials who manage DIP are presently considering how best to reduce management costs across all areas, including a review of staffing levels.

'Front line' practitioners (ie. drug workers etc) are not yet materially affected given they are funded via commissioned contracts but again, were further cuts to be delivered, then this will affect services. However, as I have already stated above, although I recognise the benefits of programmes such as the Drug Intervention Programme, the Welsh Government is not able to pick up the funding gaps left by Home Office cuts.

Domestic Abuse

The Welsh Government remains firmly committed to delivering its Programme for Government commitments to reduce the rates of domestic abuse and violence against women. This is fully evidenced by our ongoing funding for

tackling domestic abuse and violence against women which remain at previous levels during an extremely difficult economic climate. With specific regard to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Domestic Abuse Coordinators and the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors in Wales, there has been no reduction in financial support which remains at the same level as 2010-11. The capital funding for improving much needed services in this area was initially set at £700,000 as per previous years. However, additional capital funds have been provided through under spends in my wider capital budget in order to complete the roll out of 'One Stop Shop' domestic abuse facilities across Wales by March 2012. This further investment has seen the overall capital funding for domestic abuse services exceed £1.2 million since 2010-11.

The cuts to CSP funding identified in your letter relate to Home Office crime reduction funds and are not within our control - anti social behaviour coordinators, for example, are a Home Office responsibility. I have previously written to the UK Government expressing my concern over the significant reductions in local crime reduction funding and the impact they are having on the wider community safety agenda in Wales.

Priorities for Police and Crime Commissioners

The incoming Police and Crime Commissioners will determine priorities for their force areas upon appointment, through the development of a Police and Crime Plan. Under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, Police and Crime Commissioners are under a duty, when exercising all their functions, including the development of plans, to have regard to the priorities of other authorities such as councils, providers of probation services, chief officers of police, fire and rescue authorities and local health boards.

I am taking steps to help partner agencies make sure they are in the best possible place to make the case to Commissioners for continuation of funding. I have written to Nick Herbert MP, the UK Government Minister for Policing, to inform him of my intention to write to local authorities in Wales and encourage them to make appropriate nominations to Police and Crime Panels. I have received a favourable response to this letter and will be writing to local authorities shortly.

My officials are working with Home Office officials to ensure that Welsh Government colleagues, who work with partner agencies with an interest in community safety issues, are kept fully up to speed on the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners. They will disseminate information to partners.

In addition, officials from the Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Police Authorities of Wales, Association of Chief Police Officers Cymru and the Police Federation are represented on a group that meets monthly and considers the impact of Police and Crime Commissioners and Panels on Welsh communities. This means that any issues can be acted upon quickly.

Committee will be aware that I am not in favour of the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, but they are a reality and I am concerned that we now need to get the best possible outcome for Wales. I currently enjoy a productive working relationship with the four police authorities in Wales and would hope to build a similar professional relationship with the Commissioners when they are elected in order to continue to make sure that Wales' best interests are recognised.

Financial Implications: None. Any associated staff costs can be drawn from divisional budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should seek assurances from ACPO Cymru that domestic abuse will remain a key priority for the four police forces in line with the Welsh Government's Strategy for tackling domestic abuse and violence against women.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is already working closely with ACPO Cymru and enjoys strong and positive relations in tackling domestic abuse in Wales. The Head of the Community Safety Division routinely meets the Chief Constable for Gwent who has the UK lead for domestic violence on behalf of the police service. The Welsh Government has also funded the appointment of Wales' first Anti Human Trafficking co-ordinator, Mr Bob Tooby, who took up post on 4 April 2011.

Financial Implications: None. Any associated staff costs can be drawn from divisional budgets.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should provide information on how it intends to monitor and evaluate how effectively this funding has been used and its impact on local communities, including how the CSOs will be designated and used and how effective they are and what they deal with.

Response: Accept

My officials are currently developing a programme of work to monitor and evaluate the use of the funding provided for the new Community Support Officers. I am not able to provide further information at this stage as details are still being finalised.

Decisions on the deployment of the CSOs are a matter for individual police forces. We have indicated where we would like these additional officers to be

assigned – for example, we have said we would like to see a close alignment with Communities First areas which would mean they would be assigned to areas where there is greater need. Ultimately this is an operational police matter and not something in which we can be involved.

Financial Implications: Provision for the costs of evaluation is included in the budget for this programme: this sits within the Local Government and Communities MEG. Any staff costs associated with monitoring and evaluation can be drawn from divisional budgets.