

Carl Sargeant AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau  
Minister for Local Government and Communities



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref CS/1448/12  
Ann Jones AM  
Chair  
Communities Equality and Local Government Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

29<sup>th</sup> April 2012

**Communities Equality and Local Government Committee meeting 29 March – Update on action points and unasked questions**

Thank you for inviting me to the recent Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee meeting held on 29 March. As you are aware, I agreed to provide the Committee with a note on the following action points:

- The structure of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG)
- Write to those local authorities who have not completed the Equal Pay Settlement process and update the Committee with the predicted timescales
- Provide a progress update on the new role of the Partnership Council for Wales
- Provide an update, as appropriate, on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters
- Update on the progression with the Tier 4 planned proposals and the dual diagnostics issues.

Please find this enclosed at Annex 1.

Also enclosed, at Annex 2, are responses to the nine questions that were not reached during the meeting.

I will write to you again shortly when I have received further advice and information from my officials in relation to the timescale for completion of the Equal Pay Settlement process across local authorities.

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*Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)*

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I will send you an update on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters in October.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Carl'.

**Carl Sargeant AC / AM**

Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau  
Minister for Local Government and Communities

**Update from the Minister for Local Government and Communities on action points from the Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee held on 29 March 2012**

Action Point	Update
<p><b>The Structure of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG)</b></p>	<p>The membership of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG) is based primarily on senior public service leaders either leading national programmes of work (Asset Management and Procurement; Organisational Development and Simpson Implementation and Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups), or acting as a regional leader of collaboration in one of six specific areas: North Wales; Mid &amp; West Wales; Gwent; Cardiff &amp; Vale; Cwm Taf; and Western Bay.</p> <p>Key partners in the public service reform agenda – trade unions, the third sector, Wales Audit Office (WAO), Welsh Local Government Association, and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives also contribute through membership of the PSLG.</p> <p>The Terms of Reference of the PSLG, which includes the full membership, together with information on the National Work Programmes and meetings of the PSLG are available on the Welsh Government website via the following link: <a href="http://www.wales.gov.uk/improvingpublicservices">www.wales.gov.uk/improvingpublicservices</a></p> <p>The PSLG also provides oversight of the implementation of the Compact for Change agreed between Welsh Government and Local Government. In addition to political endorsement through the Partnership Council for Wales, individual local authorities have been ensuring formal local agreement. At the</p>

	<p>time of producing the evidence paper for the Committee Paper, indications received were that all authorities had completed this process ;m y latest information is that in fact one authority has not yet done so and now expect s this to take place after the local authority elections In May I thought it might also be worth noting that progress on implementing this Compact is well underway and I expect to report on this to the Assembly in the Autumn.</p>
<p><b>The Minister agreed to write to the local authorities who hadn't completed the Equal Pay Settlement process and update the Committee with their predicted timescales</b></p>	<p>Advice to the Minister for Local Government and Communities is in hand and will be submitted shortly. Letters to these authorities will issue shortly.</p>
<p><b>Progress update on the new role of the Partnership Council for Wales</b></p>	<p>The Welsh Government secured the agreement of the PCfW that its operation and membership should be reviewed, and an approach to the review was agreed at the PCfW meeting on 21 July 2011. The results of the review were reported back to the PCfW on 5 December 2011, with the proposals endorsed by the PCfW.</p> <p>The key proposals for the Partnership Council for Wales include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ creation of an expanded Partnership Council which represents the public service as a whole – membership will include health representation and observers from Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA); WAO and Trade Unions</li> <li>○ formalised Ministerial bilateral arrangements with representative organisations of the local government</li> </ul>

<p>family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the inclusion of Deputy Ministers as formal members</li> <li>○ streamlining of the finance structures whilst recognising the need for expert technical input</li> <li>○ creation of a Reform Delivery Group which will be responsible in particular for scrutinising and ensuring progress on the Compact.</li> </ul> <p>The Partnership Council for Wales (Local Health Boards and National Health Service Trusts) Order 2012 was laid on 9 March 2012, and came into force on 3 April 2012. The Order will enable the membership of the PCfW to be amended, specifying Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales as local authorities for the purpose of membership of the PCfW.</p> <p>Following the local government elections, new members for the PCfW will need to be appointed and refreshed terms of reference agreed.</p>	
<p>The first applications are now being received for proposals to form Communities First Clusters. These will be assessed internally over the next few months, including taking them to meetings of an internal Assessment Panel with representatives from many Welsh Government Divisions. As well as commenting on individual applications, the panel will be asked to advise on appropriate Performance Measures relating to their various areas of expertise. This process should therefore help substantially with the development of the overall monitoring framework.</p>	<p><b>When appropriate an update on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters</b></p>

	<p>The assessment process is likely to take about six months, by which time the framework should also be substantially further advanced. I will provide a further update in October 2012.</p>
<p><b>Update on the progression with the Tier 4 planned proposals and the dual diagnostics issues</b></p>	<p>The Minister for Local Government and Communities wrote to Commissioners and Providers of Residential Rehabilitation and Detoxification Services (Tier 4) in March 2012, reminding them of the significant capital funding on Welsh Tier 4 services provided by the Welsh Government over the last 5 years and the importance of maximising these services wherever possible.</p> <p>The Minister also commissioned the Substance Misuse Strategy Implementation Branch to undertake a thorough evaluation of current assessment and referrals procedures by both Commissioners and Providers in order to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o develop an overview of area pathways into Tier 4</li> <li>o develop an understanding of why clients are being referred outside of Wales</li> <li>o establish whether value for money is being achieved.</li> </ul> <p>Following the transfer of responsibilities to Health in April 2012, progress on this work will be reported to the Minister for Health and Social Services in September 2012.</p> <p>In terms of the issue of dual diagnosis when individual have co morbid problems with both substance misuse and mental health problems, a Service Framework to meet the needs of this group of people was re issued in 2010. This matter is of significant</p>

<p>importance and is also being addressed in the Draft Mental Health Strategy Together for Mental Health, which has identified this as a key area that requires further work. Cross agency working is particularly important and it is anticipated that services will work closely to improve outcomes in this area.</p>	
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**Communities Equality and Local Government Committee Meeting -  
29 March 2012**

**Responses to unasked questions from the Minister for Local  
Government and Communities**

**1. What he believes the introduction of Single Integrated Plans will achieve and how will they improve public services at local level.**

- Single integrated plans will mean a significant reduction in bureaucracy that makes it easier for partners to focus on outcomes not processes, and ensure that they are making a real difference for local people and communities.
- The single integrated plan will replace four existing plans and strategies, an overall reduction from 88 to 22 by April 2013.
- There will also be a reduction in unnecessary partnerships by at least a half. This means real and substantial resource savings for our partners.
- There is widespread welcome for this approach and partners are already reporting significant progress
- This policy has been developed with our partners. It builds on good practice in Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, Powys, Denbighshire and elsewhere.
- This approach will enable local service boards to focus on strategic issues. They need to make sure the public is getting effective services and value for money in difficult financial circumstances.

**2. How the Single Integrated Plans will tie in with the work local authorities and others are undertaking as part of the Welsh Government's collaboration agenda.**

- The strategic needs assessment which underpins all integrated plans will provide a robust evidence base for informing the commissioning of services on the collaborative footprint, as well as the benchmark for scrutinising those services for effective local delivery.

**3. What is his preferred delivery method for crisis loans and Community Care Grants when they are devolved**

- I am currently considering a range of delivery options.
- The delivery method will be informed by the responses we have received to our consultation on the successor arrangements. The closing date for consultations was 30 March 2012.

**4. Progress made by the Welsh Government implementing the *Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales* and the contribution of the Expert Group on the needs of the Armed Forces community in Wales.**

- One of my key actions to raise awareness of priorities given to veterans was the publication of the Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales which I launched in a meeting with the Royal British Legion last November.
- It is also an issue that I have discussed with the armed forces community through my Expert Group. Actions have included:-
  - Articles in the Family Federations magazines.
  - Further promotion of the Package of Support during the Armed Forces Community Conference held in February 2012.
  - A planned meeting of interested parties in North Wales, to be hosted by my officials.
  - A dedicated section on the Welsh Government website which not only promotes the Package of Support but also has contact details for the Families Federations and dedicated charities in Wales.
- I am now considering, advised by my Expert Group on the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales, ways of monitoring the impact of Package of Support on the Armed Forces Community.
- We have already delivered on many of the commitments in the Package of Support including:
  - £485,000 each year to fund the All-Wales Mental Health and Well-being Service for Veterans.
  - Since 1 October 2011, seriously injured service personnel and seriously injured veterans resident in Wales have been eligible to apply to their local authority for a bus pass entitling them to free travel on local bus services throughout Wales.
  - Regulations to extend eligibility in Wales for the Blue Badge Scheme came into force on 1 August 2011. The regulations extended eligibility criteria to include injured war veterans and injured armed forces personnel.

- Introduced changes to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) exempting both War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Payments from the means test for DFGs.

**What work has been undertaken to raise awareness of the priority given to veterans and of the specialist services available to them, both amongst service providers and veterans themselves.**

- An Armed Forces Community Conference was held on the 8 February following a commitment made by the Expert Group to promote the community covenants across Local Authorities and to discuss wider issues across the Armed Forces community.
- My Armed Forces Community Expert Group consists of representatives of the three Services, along with representatives of the Army, Naval and RAF Families Federations, and of third-sector organisations who are active in supporting the Armed Forces community in Wales.
- Activity through the Group has also resulted in a review by Health Inspectorate Wales of the adequacy, availability and accessibility of healthcare for our Armed Forces community in Wales. It is due to report to Ministers in April, will draw primarily on the experiences of the community itself and contribute to an assessment of whether existing services are meeting their needs effectively.
- I am extending membership on the Group to include representation from local government to encourage and support developments locally throughout Wales.

**5. What further information can he provide on the *Prevention of Youth Offending Bill* and the proposed timetable for its introduction, and whether the Minister is confident that Community Safety partnerships will be sufficiently well resourced to contribute to its implementation.**

The youth justice system in Wales has achieved a great deal in recent years, with reductions in the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system and in the number of young people in custody.

However we believe the best way to reduce re-offending and keep children and young people out of the youth justice system is to stop them offending in the first place; this can only be achieved by devolved and non-devolved services working together.

The youth justice system is one of the few key areas of policy relating to children and young people which is not devolved in Wales. Responsibility

for policies in relation to education, housing, substance misuse, health, and social services and the needs of looked after children are all devolved to Welsh Ministers. Strengthening these arrangements would ensure greater accountability of all partners for children and young people in the youth justice system so they can access a range of welfare, educational and other services.

We will be consulting on a Prevention of Youth Offending (Wales) Bill which aims to:

- Reduce the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system.
- Provide better support for children and young people in the youth justice system.
- Strengthen the accountability and co-operation of local and regional partnerships in their support for young people while they are in the youth justice system.
- Provide better support, aftercare and re-integration services for children and young people after a community or custodial sentence.

These policy options will be consulted upon in the summer of 2012 and the response will determine our final approach to increase influence over the youth justice system in Wales which may be through the introduction of a 'Prevention of Youth Offending (Wales) Bill'. The Bill, if required, is expected to be introduced in 2014.

Any potential changes will be fully assessed for their impact as any proposals are developed. The current Safer Communities Fund, which provides funding to Community Safety Partnerships to support projects that are aimed at preventing young people from offending, will be directed to support any potential changes.

#### **6. The key priorities of the Welsh Government's *Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012* and how these will be achieved in the context of budget constraints on Fire and Rescue Services.**

- I published the Fire and Rescue National Framework on 27 March. It sets out my vision and priorities for FRAs in Wales and describes what the Welsh Government expects of the FRAs and their role in the context of the wider public sector. The focus continues to be on improving outcomes for citizens.
- Budgets are constrained and FRAs are of course funded through the council tax precept. FRAs will have to therefore collaborate and focus on measuring results (and prioritising on those activities which are shown to have results).

## Annex 2

- FRAs will need to ensure that services are targeted and that they become better at identifying those most at risk in our society. To do this priorities for the FRAs will be:
  - to actively implement opportunities to work together, and with other emergency services, wider public sector and third sector;
  - to identify and implement opportunities for shared services;
  - to review their existing and new collaborations and partnerships to ensure that they are achieving the required outcomes, improved service delivery and/or increased value for money;
  - to ensure service levels meet local needs, striving for greater improvements at a time when budgets will come under even greater pressure;
  - to clearly identify outcomes and actively manage performance;
  - to seek innovation and new ways of working to make the most of the talents, expertise and resources that the FRAs possess.
- Ultimately however we might at some point moving forward need to consider the shape and structure of our FRAs in Wales.

### **7. Whether he can provide further details on the development of the anti-poverty action plan, including details of consultations with external stakeholders.**

- A Written Statement on tackling poverty was issued on 7 March, in the name of all Welsh Ministers and Deputy Ministers, which reinforces the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling poverty.
- The content of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan is being developed with input and dialogue from key stakeholders as the Welsh Government recognises we can only tackle poverty in a collaborative approach.
- The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services regularly holds meetings with the End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) to discuss Welsh Government priorities to tackling child poverty.
- Officials are also in the process of establishing an independent External Advisory Group that reports to the Minister for Local Government and Communities and will comprise a panel of experts in the field of poverty. The Public Appointments process is currently underway and a formal announcement, confirming appointed members, will be made following the completion of the appointments exercise.
- It is anticipated that the External Advisory Group will provide expert, evidence based advice on the implementation and further

policy requirements necessary to deliver the Tackling Poverty Action Plan in Wales.

**8. What discussions the Minister and his officials have had with the UK Government on welfare reform and legal aid reform.**

**Welfare Reform**

- The Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews is lead Minister for Welfare Reform and there is a Ministerial Task and Finish Group in place to ensure cross-portfolio issues can be taken considered.
- Ministers and officials are now working through a number of DWP fora to identify the impact of the changes for Wales and to represent Welsh Government views and concerns. I understand that the Minister for Education and Skills met with Lord Freud, the UK Government Minister for Welfare Reform, as recent as recently as 21 March 2012.
- The Welsh Government has repeatedly raised concerns about the impact of the Welfare Reform Act on Wales both directly with the Department of Work and Pensions and publically within the Assembly.
- My officials are having ongoing discussions with the UK Government at official level as we determine a successor scheme for the Social Fund and new arrangements for a replacement Council Tax benefit scheme. Both schemes have recently been the subject of consultation exercised seeking views on a range of delivery options here in Wales.

**Legal Aid Reform**

- In the early stages of the proposals on legal aid reform I wrote to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice expressing concerns about the changes.
- The Welsh Government issued a formal response, at official level, in February 2012 on the detail set out in the consultation document on the proposals for change and specifically highlighted the impact on advice services in relation to debt and welfare benefits; domestic abuse; housing and children and families.