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*Dear Nick*

**Welsh Government response: the Supporting People Programme**

The clerks have requested my advice on the Welsh Government's response to the Committee's report on the Supporting People Programme. The Welsh Government has accepted 11 of the Committee's 13 recommendations. Welsh Government proposals for a new integrated Early Intervention, Prevention and Support grant from 2019-20 and the potential impact on the Supporting People Programme provided the context for many of the recommendations.

Where the Welsh Government has accepted the Committee's recommendations then, in most cases, I consider its response satisfactory and a lot now hinges on the quality of the evidence base and engagement that underpins any future decision-making. However, I would highlight the following:

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee expressed concern about a delay in the production of refreshed guidance for the Supporting People Programme. The Welsh Government had indicated that the guidance would be published in spring 2018 but this is still not yet the case. The Welsh Government has put the further delay down to a desire to avoid undue confusion as it moved forward with its flexible funding pathfinders. However, I would have expected the guidance to have helped clarify expectations and the point at which the risk of confusion might have been greatest now seems to have past.

If the Welsh Government moves forward with its plans to introduce the new integrated grant from April 2019, the delay in the publication of the Supporting People guidance may diminish its value. The Committee might wish to seek further clarity on the reasons for the delay and its impact. The Committee might also wish to seek assurances about the timetable that the Welsh Government would expect to work to in publishing fresh guidance for any new integrated grant.

**Recommendation 3:** The Welsh Government has rejected this recommendation. The Welsh Government appears confident in the evaluation approach that it has set out and is not proposing any changes. The response provides some

assurance that there is real-time feedback and intelligence emerging from the evaluation of the flexible funding pilots and from its wider engagement work. I note that while the Welsh Government does not feel at this stage that it needs to extend the timescale for the flexible funding pilots, it has given a commitment that will revisit that position if it considers that the evidence it is gathering proves insufficient to support its decision-making based on the current timeframe.

**Recommendation 7:** The Welsh Government has rejected this recommendation, indicating that it cannot discharge the work required on its own. Nevertheless, there is clearly a role here for the Welsh Government in its oversight of the flexible funding pilots, and to support its decision-making, to gather together the sort of evidence that the Committee was describing. To that end, the response confirms that there is work underway to assess opportunities for efficiency gains as part of the formal evaluation and that it is also looking to the Society of Welsh Treasurers to provide relevant evidence. The response also indicates that the Welsh Government will review the funding allocation for any new grant as part of the planning for the 2019-20 budget. The Committee can take assurance that relevant work is underway, but it may wish to clarify with the Welsh Government the reasons for rejecting the recommendation and the extent of the evidence about potential efficiencies that the Welsh Government believes it will have available to support its decision-making.

**Recommendation 8:** The response refers to discussions that have taken place about the role of Regional Collaborative Committees (RCCs) in the context of the flexible funding pilots. It also outlines work underway that could inform future regional working arrangements. However, the response could usefully have articulated exactly how the Welsh Government expects the RCCs to engage with the flexible funding pilots.

**Recommendation 10:** The Welsh Government has clarified its position on the funding formula. In response to my own recommendations the Welsh Government had indicated an April 2020 timetable for introducing a new Supporting People formula. That is no longer the ambition even though the Welsh Government remains committed to the ambition of achieving a distribution which more accurately reflects needs. The reasons for delay are understandable, but need to be seen in the context of this being an issue that dates back at least as far as the recommendations of the 2010 Aylward Review.

**Recommendation 13:** The response recognises the importance of getting the outcomes framework for Supporting People or any new integrated grant right. While it outlines the work underway, it does not confirm any timescales. It is unclear whether the Welsh Government expects that such work would be completed in time for a new framework to be properly established at the outset of any new integrated grant.

The Committee could return to this topic later in the calendar year once the proposals for grant funding arrangements in 2019-20 are confirmed (which I would

expect to feature in the draft budget). The Welsh Government has indicated that it will share with the Committee the interim evaluation report and that certain other work in response to the recommendations should also be completed by the autumn. However, the Committee will need to consider how any scrutiny of its own would fit alongside the budget scrutiny work of other Assembly committees in the autumn term.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Huw', followed by a stylized flourish.

**HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS CBE**  
**AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES**