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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay AM
Public Accounts Committee Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Welsh Government's Supporting People Programme

Dear Nick

I am responding to your letter of 30 July and am grateful for the opportunity to clarify matters you raise. For ease of reference, I will follow the format of your letter to order my response.

On Recommendation 1 – you sought further clarification regarding the delay to publishing guidance and its impact, as well as the timetable for fresh guidance should there be an integrated grant.

Our original timeline for this work aimed for publication of the guidance in Spring 2018. A consultation exercise seeking comment on a draft of the guidance closed in August 2017 and a report of the key responses to the consultation questions and points raised at an associated workshop was published in March 2018. One particular issue raised during the consultation process required detailed consideration as to whether the issue could be addressed within the guidance.

I accept that the revised guidance could have been produced and published more quickly. However, the consultation exercise and subsequent work to revise the draft guidance coincided with work to establish the Flexible Funding Pathfinders. We felt at the time that the sector would be assisted by receiving clear messages about the significant structural change which was being tested through the Funding Flexibility Pathfinders before they received updated guidance which might be understood as a 'business as usual' approach to Supporting People. In order to avoid confusion we



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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

prioritised the provision of guidance for Funding Flexibilities, given that this was a new approach and most stakeholders' questions were about how those changes affected them. As soon as pathfinders were established, our attention reverted to the Supporting People guidance which has now been finalised and published. We have remained in regular contact with Supporting People providers and commissioners to minimise the impact of this delay and ensure, in particular, that delivery was focused on the priority to prevent homelessness.

For the Committee's information, the revised guidance can be found below:

<https://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/supporting-people/publications/sppguide/?lang=en>

<https://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/supporting-people/publications/sppguide/?lang=cy>

Going forward, Ministerial decisions have not yet been taken in relation to a potential single grant and, consequently, we have not mapped out the timetable for publishing any related guidance. However, I understand the Committee's desire for reassurance, given the delay mentioned above. What I can say at this stage is that the grant integration work has been about delivering more of the aims and objectives of the 10 programmes that are within scope of the proposed Early Intervention, Prevention and Support (EIPS) Grant. What we are seeking to deliver will continue irrespective of any possible changes to the funding mechanism. As a result, the fundamentals of the existing programme guidance would largely remain unchanged if a single grant were to go ahead.

It may also provide some reassurance to the Committee if I outline the approach followed for 2018-19 for the pathfinders. Guidance relating to the single grant was developed with input from the pathfinder local authorities and other stakeholders during November and December. This guidance was issued to the relevant local authorities in January alongside their indicative grant offer letters. The specific guidance to support the EIPS grant in 2018-19 included a preliminary outcomes framework to help steer pathfinder local authorities in the development of their plans. Guidance relating to each of the programmes encompassed by the grant was not amended.

Should the decision be taken to develop a new single grant, it would continue to be a collaborative process with any new guidance being developed in conjunction with stakeholders.

On Recommendation 2 – you sought an explanation of how we are engaging with stakeholders to make their views known in an open environment.

I was concerned to read your comments regarding the informal feedback received by Members of the Committee that some stakeholders have not felt able to raise their views with Welsh Government Officials. It is one thing for some stakeholders to hold differing views than us on policy or delivery approaches. It is quite another thing for some stakeholders to say they feel unable to raise those views.

As the Committee has noted, our approach to engagement has been extensive. We have heard from a diverse range of organisations with a wide range of views. These encompass stakeholders who would like to see all grants de-hypothecated and

transferred into the Revenue Support Grant, through to those stakeholders who view separate grants as an important safeguard to ensure that the priority attached to the related policy is not diminished.

Stakeholders have raised a number of concerns with us about the proposals for a single grant and I believe that we have responded to these in a constructive manner during this pathfinder phase. For example, we have considered and discussed potential safeguards that could be built into the arrangements for a single grant to address some of the potential risks posed. We are also considering the merits of alternative grant arrangements which might involve distinguishing between housing and non-housing programmes which has also been raised with us.

In addition to the engagement processes being undertaken by officials, Ministers have had extensive engagement with many organisations and delivery partners and there are frequent opportunities to discuss the possible new grant. In particular, Ministers are sensitive to the concerns of the housing sector. The Minister for Housing & Regeneration has attended the Supporting People National Advisory Board on two separate occasions, she has also visited a wide range of SP supported services across Wales talking to service users as well as providers and a number of Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers have had representations from the housing sector.

Supporting People providers also take part in the pathfinder group through a representative of Regional Collaborative Committees and take the opportunity to make their views known through the group.

So it is disappointing and concerning to hear you have received this informal feedback. As I hope you can see from the above examples, I can assure you that we welcome all contributions to the debate on the best way to support our most vulnerable citizens and we will continue to make that known.

On Recommendation 7 – you sought clarification of the reasons for our rejection of the recommendation and details of the extent of evidence about potential efficiencies available to support decision making

I need to make clear that the ‘rejection’ of the initial recommendation should not be read to mean that we are not interested in evidence of savings that might be achieved through an integrated grant. Rather we believe that the work to develop that evidence is best led by local authorities and not Welsh Government. We will gather that evidence together through the mechanisms of our formal evaluation.

Local authorities have made the case to us that fewer grants would mean less bureaucracy. It is important to note, however, the driver behind funding flexibilities is to enable local authorities to work more innovatively to deliver better service outcomes. We are seeking to test a number of the assertions made by local authorities as we go through the pathfinder year and the financial aspect is just one.

We are keen to understand the evidence base around this area and have asked the Society of Welsh Treasurers to provide an evidence of potential efficiency gains. To understand the levels of potential efficiencies that might be made through a different way of working requires a level of detail about the inner workings of local government

that is not available to Welsh Government. However, we will continue to work with local government and the Society of Welsh Treasurers to establish the evidence base we are all seeking.

Additionally, we are also using the independent evaluation to establish an indication of the efficiencies that may be available for potential changes in ways of working.

On Recommendation 8 – you sought further detail on how we expect the Regional Collaborative Committees (RCCs) to engage with the flexible funding pathfinders.

As you know from our previous response, we are keen to learn from and build on progress to date in regional working by RCCs or indeed other regional working arrangements in place across other grants within the scope of the flexible funding pathfinder programme.

The guidance relating to the single grant that was issued to the pathfinder local authorities states that local authorities should “continue to engage with Regional Collaborative Committees in the same way as at present”. We expect that local authorities should continue to submit their assessments and plans to the RCCs and take part in the joint arrangements with other authorities as they have been doing to date.

We can also confirm the independent evaluation includes RCCs in the survey work to ensure their views are captured. We will continue to work with RCCs to ensure we identify best practice that can contribute positively within any new grant arrangements.

On Recommendation 13 – you sought an indication of the relevant timescales for the actions and whether we expect an outcomes framework to be developed from the outset for any new integrated grant.

An initial outcomes framework was developed to support the work of the local authority pathfinders and to guide their planning for 2018-19. This largely mirrors the individual outcome frameworks for the programmes that make up the single grant.

I acknowledge that this is very much a ‘work in progress’ and more needs to be done to develop an outcomes framework that could support the move to a single grant should that decision be taken.

The development of an outcomes framework should be an iterative process and depending on Ministerial decisions as to the future grant arrangements, we would look to consult more widely on a draft framework in order to seek views, and this engagement will include more detailed timescales.

We are undertaking a piece of work to build on the initial outcomes framework to understand the key outcomes for a single grant, and the indicators to support them. Wavehill who are evaluating the pathfinder local authorities are, as part of their evidence gathering, looking to provide us with information to assist with this. We anticipate that guidance and training will be in place to support consistent implementation of any new outcomes framework or monitoring arrangements from the outset.

I hope that my responses to your points have provided the additional clarification you and the Members of the Committee have sought. If additional information would be helpful, then please do let me know.

Yours sincerely



Tracey Burke