

Hannah Blythyn

**Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government**

16 December 2019

### **Benefits in Wales**

Dear Hannah,

Thank you for your letter dated 5 December, enclosing the Welsh Government's response to our report on the devolution of benefits.

We understand the need to await the WCPP report before responding in more detail to some of the Committee's recommendations. As a result, we have postponed our Plenary debate from 8 January until a point where we have the full response. It would be helpful if you could give us a timeframe as to when you will be providing the updated response.

We note in your response you state, "we have already begun to outline some core principles for change which include compassion, fairness, dignity and understanding, with the aim of taking a more citizen-centred, humane approach." Can you clarify whether this is within the context of the current devolution settlement, or that of further devolution? We believe that our recommendations all provide positive, concrete actions that could help to deliver this change.

We would also like to highlight some questions arising from your response.

### **Recommendation 1**

You highlight the on-going cross government review of programmes and services for children, young people and families living in poverty. Can you clarify if this review covers all those living in poverty (for example single households)? If not, how will you consider the

effectiveness of programmes and services for those living in poverty who are not covered by the review. When will the review be completed?

We note that this review, while potentially informing the development of a Welsh benefits system, is not in itself, addressing what this recommendation calls for. We will continue to monitor progress in implementing this recommendation, which the Welsh Government accepted.

## **Recommendation 2**

We welcome the information provided, and that it is already in the public domain. Following the evidence we heard from stakeholders about how it was difficult to track expenditure on devolved benefits and therefore effectiveness of policy decisions, we wanted to see all this information brought together in one easily accessible place. Will you consider doing this?

## **Recommendation 3**

As we noted in our report, it was unclear from the Welsh Government website that the DAF could be used to cover the five week waiting period for the first payment of Universal Credit. The criteria that is listed on the website, at the time of writing the report, and now this letter (12 December) does not specify that the DAF can be used to support people experiencing hardship as a result of the five week wait. We are concerned that a potential barrier to people accessing this fund is that there is no specific route for accessing the DAF if you are experiencing hardship as a result of the five week wait. Will you be amending the website, and any relevant guidance to ensure it is clear to both people who may need to access the DAF and those who are providing advice and support to them?

## **Recommendation 4**

Can you provide more specific information on how you intend to “continue to promote and increase the take-up of all devolved and non-devolved welfare benefits”? Other than the Strategic Advice Fund, what actions are the Welsh Government taking to address this.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,



John

John Griffiths

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

