



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

Y Pwyllgor Iechyd, Lles a
Llywodraeth Leol

Health, Wellbeing and Local
Government Committee

David Melding AM
Chair
Audit Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

Our ref: HWLG(3)02-07

8 October 2007

Dear David

Response to the Audit Committee's Report on Ambulance Services in Wales

At its meeting on 19 September, the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government (HWLG) Committee considered the Welsh Ministers' response to the Audit Committee's report on the Ambulance Service in Wales.

This particular review came about in a somewhat unusual way in that it was requested through a minority party debate. Following this, the then Health and Social Services Committee recommended terms of reference for the review and that the Auditor General should be invited to undertake it. In the light of this, the HWLG Committee agreed that it would be appropriate, on this occasion, to give some early consideration to the Government's response in the hope that it would assist the Audit Committee's consideration. I understand the Audit Committee is likely to consider the matter on 18 October.

I attach a summary of the main issues that arose from our discussion and that the Audit Committee may wish to consider. A full report of the discussion is of course also available through the Record of Proceedings.

I would be grateful if you could let me know in due course the conclusions the Audit Committee reached on the Government's response.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Morgan
Chair

Assembly Government Response to Audit Committee Report on Ambulance Service:

Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee Views

<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Matters the Audit Committee may wish to Consider</u>
i. Internal Governance	<p>The Committee was generally content with progress made in this area.</p>
ii. External Governance	<p>Committee Members were concerned that March 2008 might be too long a time to wait to appoint a Director of Service Delivery and Performance Management.</p> <p>Members felt that it is important that high level posts such as this are filled quickly so that the people appointed can begin to make the other changes needed to modernise the service's working relationships.</p> <p>More generally, Committee Members queried whether enough has been done to ensure that, in future, appropriately skilled and experienced staff are put in place.</p>
iii. Management and Leadership	<p>No specific comments at this stage.</p>
iv. Appointment Procedures	<p>Committee Members expressed concern that there appeared to be little information available on the changes to the appointments procedure. Improved procedures were considered to be key to improving the calibre of and confidence in key staff.</p> <p>Committee Members also expressed concern that, in their response, the Assembly Government appeared to be ducking some of its responsibility for staffing issues. Although appointments were formally made by the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust, it was clear that the Trust had consulted the Assembly Government on appointments and that the Assembly Government were fully aware of them.</p>

v. Financial Management/ DECS

There is mention of the role of the Delivery of Emergency Care Services (DECS) strategy. We accept that some improvements are being made in this area. However, Committee Members felt that the strategy is important in helping resolve, for example, the problems of communication that can arise between hospitals, NHS trusts and the ambulance service and looked forward to further progress.

vi. Use of Capital

Committee Members were concerned that progress on proposals for the Ambulance Service to share buildings with the Fire Service needed to be clearer.

Committee Members also wanted reassurance on whether the additional capital resources that would be needed to implement the trust modernisation plan would be made available. The amount of capital funding required to implement the plan is very considerable and would represent a very large slice of the overall NHS capital programme. Additional resources would be required if other areas of need were not to suffer.

vii. Matching Resources with Demand

Committee Members felt that this was primarily an operational matter. Although the response raised issues that the Committee may wish to raise with Ministers, no particular issues arose that they wished to draw to the attention of the Audit Committee.

viii. Focus on Routine Patient Services

Committee Members expressed concern that cases had continue to arise of people waiting excessively long times for ambulances to arrive. The need to focus on making improvements in this area was a key part of the original report and the need for speedy progress was considered to be very important.

Committee Members were also concerned that examples of problems with the use of volunteer ambulance drivers had also arisen lately. Among issues of concern were the payment of different mileage rates in different parts of the country and examples of a lack of respect being shown for the valuable role volunteers play in providing ambulance services.