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Audit Committee

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David Melding AM
Chair of the Audit Committee
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Date 10th October 2007
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Dear Mr Melding

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT: *THE NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY*

I write in response to the Clerk's letter of 13th September requesting my advice on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Audit Committee's recommendations in its report, *The National Homelessness Strategy*.

The Assembly Government accepts all of the Audit Committee's recommendations and its response to them is comprehensive. A number of actions are already underway. I am slightly concerned by the lack of timescales and timetables and suggest that these be provided. I am providing specific comments on the content of the response to each recommendation.

Recommendation 1

The Housing Division has agreed to issue a revised code of guidance for local authorities on homelessness and allocations. This is to be produced for consultation by December 2007. It is also funding projects to support local authorities and advice agencies to interpret and implement the legislation correctly and to provide enquirers with an advice leaflet on their rights. There is no timescale for completion of these projects

Recommendation 2

The Housing Division has organised joint meetings with colleagues in other divisions to discuss the National Homelessness Strategy in the context of Making the Connections. The first meeting was held in June 2007 with health and social care officials. The Housing Division has not provided a timetable for the other meetings.

Recommendation 3

The Housing Division has issued guidance on the temporary accommodation legislation, which will be incorporated into the statutory code of guidance on allocations and homelessness. It will include a clear expectation that local authorities should carry out spot checks based on risk. There was an intention to start discussions in July 2007 with the WAO, WLGA and the voluntary sector to assess whether this guidance should be strengthened, including the need for risk-based inspections and spot-checks. It is not clear whether these meetings have commenced.

The Welsh Assembly Government in partnership with Shelter Cymru completed an assessment of all local authority allocation policies in Wales to check compliance with statutory requirements. A report entitled '*Review of Local Authority Allocation Schemes*' was issued in March 2007 to local authorities on the key findings, with recommendations on how they should review and revise their policies. As a result of this work the Housing Division has commissioned a number of toolkits and good practice publications to help local authorities discharge their statutory homelessness duties in line with legal requirements. There is no timescale for this work.

Recommendation 4

The Housing Division, in liaison with the Planning Division, intend to use information collected from the 22 local authority local housing market needs assessment to develop a national baseline of housing need and supply within all tenures.

Other research evidence has been commissioned, including a study undertaken on the relationship between the housing market, homelessness and social housing lettings. Shelter Cymru have produced a report for the Welsh Assembly Government which investigated the factors that can influence access to the private rented sector for homeless people. The Housing division will draw together a national picture from this work and the local housing needs assessments to inform the development of policy on the private rented sector. There is no timescale for this work.

Recommendation 5


The Housing division has reviewed grant funding processes and improved the monitoring and evaluation of projects, placing a greater emphasis on evidencing that the needs of service users are met. They state that they will continue to invest most of the homelessness grant on long term projects which continue to demonstrate their strategic value and effectiveness.

Recommendation 6

You recommended that the Housing division develop clear plans to monitor and evaluate initiatives and projects to prevent homelessness. A number of actions have been taken that will contribute to this evaluation including an expectation that local authorities will involve service users in strategic planning and the introduction of a prevention performance indicator. Progress is reported against the ten objectives of the National Homelessness Strategy to the Homelessness Strategy working group and the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor the progress made by the Housing division in providing support to local authorities and their partners to prevent homelessness and to provide a variety of housing options.

Yours sincerely



JEREMY COLMAN
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

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