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Mr Jonathan Morgan AM
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Chair

ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT RESPONSE ON SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

The Clerk's letter of 22 March requested my advice on a letter dated 5 March from the Permanent Secretary to the Assembly Government, Dame Gill Morgan. The Permanent Secretary's letter was in reply to your letter of 3 February about Paul Williams' oral evidence to the Committee on 13 January in respect of *Services for Children and Young People with Emotional and Mental Health Needs*.

Your letter had raised some concerns over the preparedness of Paul Williams for his appearance as Accounting Officer before the Public Accounts Committee, as well as requesting some additional information in relation to the issue that was discussed. In her reply, the Permanent Secretary expresses her regret that the Committee found some aspects of the session unhelpful, and describes a protocol she has introduced to ensure that, in future, the Accounting Officer or Accounting Officers put forward by the Assembly Government to answer the Committee's questions on a particular subject should be able to do so. The Permanent Secretary goes on to suggest that advance indication of the prospective lines of questioning the Committee may take would help the Assembly Government to identify the appropriate Accounting Officer(s) to give evidence.

In my opinion, the new protocol will help to ensure that the experience of 13 January is not repeated, and that Accounting Officers giving evidence to the Committee are able to answer questions that are pertinent to the subject of the Committee's examination. If the protocol had been applied to the 13 January Committee session, it is quite likely that David Hawker (Director General, Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills), as well as Paul Williams, would have attended to give evidence. The Committee has put Paul Williams on standby to appear again on 10 June, to enable the Committee to assess the progress that is being made in addressing the issues raised in the Wales Audit Office / Healthcare Inspectorate Wales report on *Services for Children and Young People with Emotional and Mental Health Needs*. If the Committee's line of questioning is again likely to embrace education services then, in accordance with the new protocol, David Hawker should also be invited to attend.

Although it is for the Committee to decide, I think it unlikely that the Committee would wish to take up the Permanent Secretary's suggestion about giving the Assembly Government advance warning of likely lines of questions the Committee might take, particularly as the warning would need to be given some time in advance if it is for the purpose of identifying who should be the appropriate Accounting Officer(s) to give evidence. Instead, on the basis that lines of questioning are usually within the scope of the Auditor General's report that is being considered by the Committee, and mindful of the new protocol that has been introduced by the Permanent Secretary, I should be quite happy to advise the Committee, case-by-case, on who should be the appropriate Accounting Officer(s) to give evidence.

In this particular instance, we did engage with the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, as had been suggested by Paul Williams, in finalising the draft report. However, when subsequently seeking from Paul Williams formal Accounting Officer confirmation that the facts in the draft report were materially accurate and presented fairly, with no material facts omitted, he replied to say that he was 'happy with the report'.

Your letter of 3 February to the Permanent Secretary also noted that the Accounting Officer had agreed to provide details of plans the Assembly Government has to:

- include consideration of child and young adult emotional and mental health issues within the initial teacher training course; and
- introduce confidence and wellbeing lessons as part of the curriculum in Wales.

The Permanent Secretary addresses these issues in her response, but in a way that suggests that the Assembly Government has no specific plans in respect of them. However, inviting the Director General, Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills to attend the Committee meeting on 10 June would provide the Committee with an opportunity to explore the issues further.

Yours sincerely



GILLIAN BODY
Auditor General for Wales