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Audit Committee  
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**JEREMY COLMAN, AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES / ARCHWILYDD CYFFREDINOL CYMRU**

David Melding AM  
Chair of the Audit Committee  
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**Date** 14<sup>th</sup> September 2007  
**Our reference** JC/0546/fgb  
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*Dec Chair*

**AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT, *AMBULANCE SERVICES IN WALES***

I write in response to the Clerk's letter of 13 July requesting my advice on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Audit Committee's recommendations in its report, *Ambulance Services in Wales*.

My overall advice to the Committee is that the Assembly Government's response, which includes input from the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (the Trust), is comprehensive, specific, and supported by clear timescales. The Assembly Government has accepted all eight recommendations and has clearly reflected carefully and positively on the content of the Committee's very critical report on the failings it identified. Recent performance information suggests that improvements are happening, but the response clearly shows the extent of the remaining challenges that face the Trust and Assembly Government in delivering sustainable improvements in the failings identified in the Committee's report. The response describes in detail how the Assembly Government and the Trust plans to progress each recommendation in line with its modernisation plan, *Time to Make a Difference*.

My specific comments on the content of the response are as follows:

1. The response to recommendation (ii) does not provide clear detail about how the Assembly Government will comply with the Committee's recommendation to take more decisive action when an organization is clearly failing. While the response describes continuing development of the Assembly Government's intervention and performance management arrangements, particularly in relation to poor performance, it is not clear how such development might manifest itself if the circumstances of the Trust were repeated elsewhere in the NHS.
2. The response to recommendation (iv) refers to the Assembly Government will review its procedures in respect of short-term appointments of Chief Executives and that it will, 'if needed' provide the NHS in Wales with further guidance. The Committee may feel, in the light of the turmoil that resulted from the turnover of Chief Executives in the Trust in 2006, that guidance should be provided to Boards on making interim Chief Executive appointments regardless of the outcome of the review.
3. The Committee will be interested to note that in response to recommendation (v) the Assembly Government confirmed that the proposal to sell surplus hours of paramedic cover to LHBs to provide additional unscheduled care services has been removed from the Trust's Service Change and Efficiency Plan (SCEP) for 2007/08. The Committee's report expressed concern about the financial viability of this proposal given the financial pressures affected the NHS in Wales.
4. The Committee will welcome the response to recommendation (vii) which confirms that new rosters have been developed to match supply and demand much more effectively, although one fifth of these remained to be implemented at the time of the Government response. The response also provides welcome information about improving performance in the South East Wales region which was specifically highlighted in the Committee's recommendation. The South East Wales region has the heaviest workload and has traditionally performed less well against the Assembly Government's targets, so it is pleasing that new rosters and deployment plans have now been implemented.

Your reference:

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2007

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In respect of follow-up action, I have recently initiated a consultation about potential national studies in health and social care. This includes a proposal to undertake a study of unscheduled care services which would enable me to follow-up both my own and the Committee's reports on ambulance services in Wales in the broader context of implementation of the Assembly Government's strategy, *Delivering Emergency Care Services*. Consistent with the tenth recommendation in my own report, *Ambulance Services in Wales*, I have sought to provide the Trust with the space to implement its modernization plan with a minimum of distraction but now judge that it would be appropriate for me to follow-up on progress in the 2008/09 financial year.

Yours sincerely,



**JEREMY COLMAN**  
**AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES**