

Leighton Andrews AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Minister for Public Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Christine Chapman AM
Chair, Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

23 October 2014

Dear Christine

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the Committee on 9th October. At the meeting I agreed to provide some further information on a couple of matters.

Allocation of resources in relation to sustainability and the Welsh language

We have begun to set out our ambitions for a more effective Local Government in Wales. Consultation on our first White Paper has closed and I will bring forward the first Local Government Bill in January 2015. I will publish a further White Paper early next year setting out my proposals for fundamental reform of Local Government.

We are committed to ensuring sustainable Social Services become a reality in Wales and that the services we provide meet the needs of the people of Wales in the most targeted and effective way possible. We are allocating additional funding of £10m to support the delivery of Social Services in Wales, which will make an important contribution to Health and Wellbeing and to Supporting Children, Families and Deprived Communities. This investment is also vital if we are to rebalance the provision of services to strengthen primary and community-based care and to support the integration of health and social services.

A full, integrated impact assessment of the draft budget is undertaken by the Welsh Government. This includes impacts on groups with protected characteristics, children and the Welsh Language. Each Department contributes to that assessment and this was published as part of the Draft Budget document.

The majority of funding in the Local Government MEG is allocated to authorities on a non-hypothecated basis. As we are not taking decisions as to how the resources are allocated at the local level, it is clearly not possible to undertake a detailed Welsh Language Impact Assessment on the funding. It is for each Authority to undertake its own Welsh Language Impact Assessment in considering and setting its budget. This is one of the matters that should be covered in their public consultations on budgets and I would encourage people to engage in those discussions.

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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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Authorities across Wales are subject to statutory duties in relation to the Welsh Language and need to ensure those duties are factored into their budget plans and any Welsh Language Impact Assessment. Police and Crime Commissioners, Police Forces and Fire Rescue Authorities undertake their own Welsh Language Impact Assessments, informing their budget plans.

My Department undertakes a number of Welsh Language Impact Assessment for both policy and smaller budget decisions. For example, we invest £445,000 in the provision of our All Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline. Usage figures suggest that while the service is available bilingually, only 7% of calls are handled in Welsh. We have considered this and, having mainstreamed the use of Welsh into the service, we are not reducing our investment in the Welsh Language provision for this helpline. However, we will look at how to encourage more callers to use the facilities where they wish to do so.

Targeting preventative measures on those most at risk of fire

The Welsh Government provides strategic direction to the Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), mainly through the Fire and Rescue National Framework. This Framework, which has statutory force, sets out the Welsh Government's vision and priorities for the FRAs in Wales. It requires the FRAs to target and prioritise their fire prevention and fire safety work on vulnerable groups and those who are most at risk of fire, and to work with other agencies such as the NHS and Social Services departments as part of that. This enables FRAs both to identify and to meet the needs of particular high-risk citizens or groups.

The Welsh Government has provided the FRAs with funding to assist with a range of community safety activities, each of which has a direct impact on reducing the risk of death and injury from fires. An example of this approach can be seen through the fire setters programme where children who play with fire are entered onto a programme to educate them in the dangers of fire setting and discourage their actions. Failure to effectively target and engage with these individuals could result in more deaths and injuries from fire.

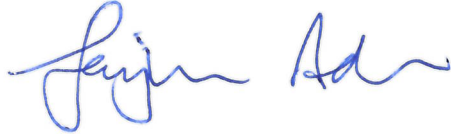
Whilst this budget will be reduced next year, the revised budget has been allocated in the context of a reduction in the overall incidence of accidental and deliberate fires. Over 90% of fire service expenditure on promoting fire safety is financed by the FRAs themselves through the funding they receive from local government. Our grant now makes up less than 8% and has been decreasing for some years already.

Prevention is not just delivered through grants to the FRAs. The Welsh Government amended Building Regulations (October 2013/4) require sprinklers in new and converted residences in Wales. For higher risk properties the requirement applied from April 2014, for new housing from 1 January 2016. Clearly, the Domestic Fire Safety (Wales) Measure 2011 will support the reduction of risk to individuals within domestic dwellings falling within scope. The benefits of domestic sprinklers are proven and the Welsh Government will continue to promote their installation in premises. The Welsh Government will be undertaking a £1m pilot programme to investigate installing fire sprinklers in social housing in Wales. There will be a comprehensive monitoring exercise to capture the experience and learning of designers, builders, water companies and building control bodies.

Work is also under way to produce all Wales Fire Safety Guidance. Much of this guidance relates to fire safety measures within premises (such as extra-care facilities and sheltered housing) which fall within the scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. This will help ensure such premises have the necessary fire safety measures in place to prevent fires occurring and where fires do occur, ensuring the safety of occupants is not compromised.

Finally, I would like to provide further clarification on the Community Fire Safety Grant funding allocations. The Community Fire Safety grant has never accounted for more than 11% of total community fire safety work on an all-Wales basis, and as of 2012-13 under 8%, whilst the grant only accounts for 1.1% of total FRA revenue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leighton Andrews'.

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