

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair of the Finance Committee

25 May 2023

Re. Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2023-24: Evidence provided by the Welsh Government

Dear Peredur,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 March requesting our views on what improvements we would like to see in the Welsh Government's Draft Budget documentation and subsequent ministerial written evidence. We considered the letter during our meeting on 3 May. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts in leading the Senedd's scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budgets.

We scrutinise in detail Draft Budget documentation and written evidence across two different Welsh Government departments: those of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Minister for Health and Social Services. We are therefore well-placed to offer views on the consistency of the written evidence across these Welsh Government departments.

I would like to preface the views of the Committee set out below by placing on record our thanks once again to the Ministers and to their officials for their ongoing support in relation to Draft Budget scrutiny. We ask for a very significant amount of detailed information in advance of Draft Budget scrutiny, at a very time-pressured period of the year. I am grateful for the efforts of everyone involved in preparing and approving that information.

As you will know, the Welsh Government has legislated to embed children's rights into its decision making process, which should include using the maximum extent of its available resources to implement the rights of children in Wales. The quality of and transparency within budget documentation is therefore critically important to our Committee's scrutiny of Welsh Government allocations in examining whether children and young people are getting their fair share.

In our [report on the 2023-24 Draft Budget](#), we conclude that:

"... the written information that we received from the Minister of Health and Social Services and her deputies was not as clear, transparent or as detailed as we had hoped. The relative lack of detail in the written evidence was particularly notable given that the Minister for Health and Social Services, her deputies and officials provided considerably more detail to us during oral scrutiny. We regret that this additional information was not provided to us in the written evidence. Had it been, more time during our discussions could have been focused on substantive issues of policy, rather than on clarifying budgetary details."

We made the following recommendation:

*"**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should set up a cross-departmental working group to improve the quality and consistency of written evidence that it provides to Senedd Committees to support the Draft Budget scrutiny process, drawing on the good practice that already exists across governmental departments."*

The Welsh Government [accepted this recommendation in principle](#).

Reflecting on our experience of Draft Budget scrutiny on 3 May, we agreed that the written evidence provided to us by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language fully and comprehensively responded to our written request. This enabled us to focus our time during oral scrutiny on important policy matters. As our report sets out, we do not believe that this was the case for the evidence we received from the Minister for Health and Social Services. The evidence did not always respond clearly to our questions, and it did not always provide the level of detail that we needed to understand where the Welsh Government was making substantive changes to the funding of key public services from one year to the next, and why.

Therefore, the key improvement that we would like to see is that all Welsh Government departments respond to our written requests fully and comprehensively, using the level of detail in the written evidence submitted to us by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language as a model of good practice.

We acknowledge that we have a role to play in supporting the Welsh Government to prepare that written information by requesting information in a clear and timely manner. If you identify any improvements that we could make to our approach to requesting written evidence that would support Welsh Government officials and Ministers to prepare and approve the detailed and robust written evidence that we expect, we would be very willing to consider them.

Yours sincerely,

Jayne Bryant

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

