

Carl Sargeant AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Minister for Local Government and Communities



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Mr William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee
National Assembly
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

23rd February 2012

Dear Bill

At the Petitions Committee on 7 February I agreed to share with you details of the impact and benefits experienced by those local authorities that are already publishing details of their expenditure over £500.

It has been left to each local authority to decide how it deploys its resources to provide the best value for money for its citizens and to be accountable to its local electorate for the decisions it makes. To demonstrate their values of openness and promote accountability, there are 3 authorities in Wales that currently publish details of expenditure over £500: they are Monmouthshire, Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan. I have sought views from these authorities which have been summarised below.

In each case the authorities have highlighted the considerable amount of work involved in setting up the process, particularly for extracting, checking and validating the data from their general ledger systems. The process for exclusions and redactions has also been cited as a complex area that requires ongoing resources. In one authority however this has increased the focus on coding transactions correctly and improved the quality of data held.

There were some suggestions that further resources would be required to deal with additional queries from suppliers and others arising from the publication of this data. However there is no evidence from these responses to suggest that this has been the case. By the same token from the information provided, there is no evidence to suggest that the number of FOI requests has decreased.

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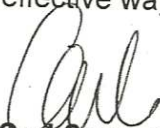
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Despite the regular reviews carried out by the authorities to protect against fraud there are still concerns about the potential for this information to be used fraudulently.

There is a resource commitment involved in this process for all the authorities involved, for one authority this is done centrally which reduces the pressure on the service managers. For another authority this is generally 2 days per month but they are continuing to seek ways to make this more efficient.

I continue to support the principles of openness and transparency but maintain that making it a statutory requirement for local authorities to publish expenditure details would not be an effective way to achieve transparency.



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