Summary of key points from the Wales Committee discussion on the social care inquiry options

**2 December 2020**

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**Attendees:**

Martyn Jones (Interim Chair)
Alison Parken
Geraint Hopkins
Grace Quantock
Mark Sykes

Comments received from Faith Walker

Apologies received from: Beth Thomas, Faith Walker and Rocio Cifuentes

# **Social Care inquiry options**

There was a general consensus amongst Committee members that option 2 was the practical and strategic option. A number of members commented on the potential reputational risks of choosing this option with the absence of a focus on care homes, which has received so much coverage during the pandemic.

There were some specific comments in support of option 1. It provides the opportunity to ensure the seldom heard voices of some older and extremely vulnerable people, particularly those that lack of capacity. Option 1 may build and strengthen the case for a shift to a community setting of care and highlight failures in some care settings that occurs with a lack of resources, inadequate expertise in mental health and specialist care for people with complex needs.

Members made the point that option 1 was a crowded space with a number of people working in that area.

Members highlighted some risks and concerns around focusing the inquiry on a sector that is particularly strained and faced significant pressures over the last year. To mitigate against that it would be important to maintain good relationships with key figures in the sector including the Welsh Local Government Association and key Welsh Government officials with responsibility for the Social Services and Wellbeing Act. In the devolved context this may assist in mitigating the way this will be received in local government and help create a supportive narrative in respect of reviewing the equality and human rights achievements of the SSWB Act.

We will need to be clear in messaging that the inquiry was being forward focussed to empower Local Authorities to work differently and improve practice.

Members agreed that it would be important to be clear about what unique remit and role we would bring to this agenda in comparison with other regulators working in this space (including in Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Social Care Wales, the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales and the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales). Critical that we retain our unique focus on embedding equality and human rights into the social care system.

Members agreed that from a Wales perspective the inquiry would need to look through the lens of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. The act is aspirational built on the principles of achieving wellbeing, people centred, partnership and co-production and prevention. It would be important to look at the reality of whether that has been translated into the lived experience of people receiving care.

Given the devolved nature of social care it would be vital that there be Welsh expertise on the external reference group, the inquiry team and in any commissioned products.

One suggestion was to look at the overlap between care assessments and DWP/welfare assessments and to look at synergies between this proposed work and the paused DWP work.

A member commented that the integration agenda (between health and social care) was more advanced in Wales, prior to the pandemic, with pockets of innovative practice. That integration has not been so evident during the pandemic.

Given the presence of the Older People’s Commissioner in Wales and the current joint work with them on care homes, members asked for feedback on the their response to the inquiry options. Officers informed members that in broad terms the Older People’s Commissioner had been positive about the options being scoped.