

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol/  
Prif Weithredwr GIG Cymru  
Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Director General Health and Social Services/  
NHS Wales Chief Executive  
Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Adrian Crompton  
Auditor General for Wales  
24 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff  
CF11 9LJ

Our Ref: AG/SB

30 November 2020

Dear Adrian

### **Betsi Cadwaladr UHB Tripartite Discussions**

Thank you for your letter dated 26 November 2020.

The support for the tripartite process from both Audit Wales and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales has been welcome alongside Welsh Government officials. As you outline, I think this has represented a real strength of the way in which the escalation process has been discharged in Wales since its inception. I agree that the open exchange of intelligence and views from all participants is hugely valuable both to the process and other considerations.

Whilst we have different system roles, I have personally tried to ensure that the tripartite mechanism operates in an open and challenging manner. I have led and chaired all the tripartite meetings from the establishment of the escalation process to date and, with this consistency, I hope I have facilitated an appropriate and honest environment for all representatives to contribute their views. I believe the framework has genuinely improved our oversight and assessment of health organisations across Wales and allowed for concerns on the performance and response of organisations to be identified and then to be subject to appropriate support and monitoring. Clearly the monitoring and contact with organisations is more significant at the targeted intervention and special measures levels. It is also important to register that the escalation framework is intended to allow organisations to move up and down the framework appropriately according to their circumstances and evidence of concerns or progress. Those of us involved in the escalation process know it is intended to be a supportive mechanism for organisations, whatever the escalation level allocated.

I am very clear that neither yourself as Auditor General, nor Audit Wales staff acting on your behalf can directly advise Ministers and that Audit Wales must discharge an independent

role. You are correct that the process of review and advice does not mean that decisions are taken by the tripartite group. This has been a point of discussion in previous tripartite meetings and as you have referenced, the draft notes of our last meeting properly recognise that Welsh Government officials make the specific recommendation, further to the tone and content of the respective tripartite meetings. I have always respected the discussions and would hope that any recommendation that follows is appropriate in the context of the review.

Whilst it would not be appropriate to share the content of draft Ministerial statements, as they are matters for Welsh Government, you will be aware we did ask for views on language and terminology from both Audit Wales and HIW that fed into the Ministerial Advice. We were grateful for and accepted all these points and I hope this would have provided some assurance of appropriately reflecting the tripartite process. For clarity, of course this did not mean any contribution from Audit Wales in respect of the recommendation.

Noting responses to questions, and the subtle but important difference you make in respect of roles, I will of course highlight the point further to the Minister in terms of ensuring that the involvement of HIW and Audit Wales in the tripartite process is seen to be different from the specific recommendation that emerges from officials following the process.

We are a number of years into the use of the escalation framework and there are a range of organisations who have been escalated and de-escalated in its application. We have already this year undertaken a helpful review of the escalation framework across Welsh Government, Audit Wales and HIW, with views as always openly shared on how we can make this important process work better in the future. We intend to update the escalation framework in 2021-22, informed by the development of the NHS executive proposals, whether as a separate organisation as originally planned or adapted to account for the experience of overseeing the NHS during the pandemic response. I am very happy that the concerns you have set out would be accommodated in any revised framework, including the clarity of respective roles of those who participate.

I would like to reiterate that it is the trust and relationships we have established through this process that has ensured the review process is based on appropriate tone and content. I am very grateful for Audit Wales involvement, noting the importance of its independent role, and from my perspective the process is more considered and effective with this involvement than without. I am grateful for all the Audit Wales staff who have supported the tripartite process from the start, led by Mike and Dave, and I hope that all members would feel that the process has been important in the oversight of NHS Wales.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Andrew Goodall CBE**