



Julie James AM
Minister for Housing and Local Government
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Date/Dyddiad: 3rd June 2019

Please ask for/*Gofynnwch am*: Jayne Overbury
Direct Line/*Llinell Uniongyrchol*: 01685 725320
e-mail/*e-bost*: Jayne.overbury@merthyr.gov.uk

Dear Minister

You will have seen the letter that I have now received from Jane Holownia of the Wales Audit Office dated 31st May 2019. I note and understand the concerns that she raises, many of which are common to a number of other local authorities across Wales, but which are particularly marked here given the size of the Authority and our current political composition. In light of the concerns raised, I am writing to request that you consider providing us with support pursuant to section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to help us address these challenges.

Having considered our current position in detail, it seems to me that there are two main areas where we would particularly welcome your support.

Firstly, like many other authorities, we face enormous pressures around delivering social services provision to our most vulnerable citizens. As a small authority, our service requirements are particularly volatile and small variants in service user numbers can have a significant impact on our budget. I would therefore welcome support in the following specific areas:

- Expertise to ensure that we are making the best use of financial resources within Social Services.
- Review of processes to ensure we are maximising all available resources
- Review of impact of complex, high cost and challenging cases on such a small authority.

Cont.....

Secondly, we are experiencing difficulty in delivering change which requires difficult and challenging decisions because of our political balance. Whilst all members appreciate their duties under the Code of Conduct, and the need to act in the best interests of our citizens, we are also conscious that political differences can lead to deep division and conflicting views on how best to manage our situation and eventually that can hinder progress.


Accordingly, I would welcome help in the following areas:

- Support with member interaction given the current fractious position and financial challenge.
- The involvement of an experienced figure who could act as an honest broker between Lead administration, opposition and CMT.

In making these requests I am aware that during a previous intervention around education provision, support was offered in the form of a recovery board and whilst being helpful in identifying and targeting improvement, this was a significant drain on staff time and resources and the requirement to provide administrative support and make managers available to report to and attend that board. I would be very grateful if, in this instance, assistance could be provided by the provision of expert support to the corporate management team and political leaders to deliver the change needed.

I firmly believe that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is able to meet the challenges ahead and serve the people of Merthyr Tydfil effectively and efficiently and I would very much welcome your support to enable us to achieve this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin O'Neill', with a large, stylized circular flourish at the end.

COUNCILLOR KEVIN O'NEILL B.A. (Hon's)
Leader, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Cc: Jane Holownia, Reg Kilpatrick

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref: MA (P)/JJ/2116/19

Councillor Kevin O'Neill
Leader of Council
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
c/o Jayne.overbury@merthyr.gov.uk

10 June 2019

Dear Kevin,

I wanted to reply quickly to your letter of 3 June requesting Welsh Government provide statutory support to assist Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

The letter highlights the significant challenges your Council is currently facing. It is evident the current position is very serious and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Therefore, I can confirm that I intend to use my powers under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to provide support.

I have asked my officials to work with your Corporate Management Team to determine the precise nature of support to be provided to your Council. However, I can confirm the package of support will be scoped to help address the specific and current challenges you face and the areas you have indicated you would welcome support on.

I look forward to working with you to support the Council, and to ensure that you are able to fulfil your ambition to serve people of Merthyr Tydfil effectively and efficiently. I know that we are meeting for a broader discussion shortly but we will be able to consider progress on identifying and securing support then.

I trust you will be able to rely on full and effective commitment from all Members and officers of the Council in order to achieve a sustainable recovery for the Council.

Yours sincerely

Julie James AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.