Dear Colleague,

I am writing to draw your attention to our Framework for Action on Independent Living for disabled people, which was published in September 2013, and to outline its relevance to the role of Local Service Boards.

The Framework sets out a strategic approach to disability in Wales, pulling together the key enablers of independent living including employment, transport, housing, social care, person-centred-technology and access to buildings and facilities. It goes to the heart of the preventative agenda, setting out the changes needed to create an enabling and inclusive environment in which people are supported to maximise their independence.

The Framework has been produced through extensive engagement with disabled people in Wales. It seeks to tackle barriers to equality, but goes beyond that in identifying proactive measures to promote the rights and inclusion of disabled people. Such an approach will support public sector organisations in meeting their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Chapter 3 of the document sets out the actions that the Welsh Government is taking while also highlighting the crucial role of local service delivery. It calls for a strategic approach, at national and local level and identifies the Single Integrated Plans and Strategic Equality Plans as the vehicles for delivering this, across the range of public sector responsibilities.

In particular, I invite you to consider the following key themes which link to the work of Local Service Boards and their constituent organisations:

- working collaboratively to achieve the outcomes that disabled people want;
- considering how you support and work with local disabled people’s organisations to identify issues and come to workable solutions;
- increasing the role of social enterprises in local service delivery;
- considering how disabled people can be involved in delivering training to staff; and
- developing the role of Centres for Independent Living.

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Chapter 4 of the document sets out the issues and evidence that came out of the engagement we had with disabled people prior to development of the Framework. It is vital that we communicate and address the messages we heard during this process and continue to present a positive vision for disabled people in Wales. The key message is that it is not impairment that prevents people from achieving a reasonable lifestyle, but restrictive environments and disabling barriers.

Chapter 4 also highlights examples of good practice where local authorities and their partners are taking a joined up approach to securing better outcomes for disabled people - linking social care, employment and regeneration programmes. I am sure there are many similar examples, and it is important that these links are strengthened further as we take forward the Framework.

Economic recession, spending cuts and welfare reform are affecting many disabled people in Wales and this makes it more important than ever that we continue to drive forward this agenda to give people choice and control over their everyday lives and reduce or remove barriers to inclusion. There is a limit to what we can do to make life better for those individuals who will feel the impact of the cuts. However, our Tackling Poverty Action Plan recognises the importance of supporting those households that are particularly at risk of living in poverty – including families with a disabled family member or members. The Framework for Action on Independent Living further supports these aims by encouraging the development of person-centred policies and programmes.

I would encourage you to include the Framework, which has clear links to the work championed by the Public Service Leadership Group and its Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups programme, as an agenda item at a meeting of the Local Service Board. I should also welcome responses from the LSB setting out how you are responding to the themes I have highlighted. These will inform consideration of progress by the all-Wales Disability Equality Forum when it meets this summer and enable further sharing of good practice in supporting disabled people to live their lives in the way that they choose.

I have included a link to the document here. http://wales.gov.uk/topics/equality/rightsequality/disability/framework-for-action/?lang=en

If you would like a hard copy of the document or would like to discuss it further please contact Jacqueline Davies on 02920 825707 or e-mail Jacqueline.davies37@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,

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Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty