



Jenny Rathbone MS
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Dear Jenny Rathbone MS

Thank you for your letter of 22 July 2022.

I welcomed the opportunity to provide evidence in support of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's Inquiry into Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence on 27 June 2022. Whilst Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) sits within the portfolio of my colleague, the Minister for Social Justice, there are clear connections to the provision of social services which sit within my portfolio. I am therefore pleased to be able to provide further information regarding the ongoing work of social services in Wales to support this cohort of people.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (the 2014 Act) establishes a consistent approach to prevent and protect people at risk of or experiencing abuse including where violence or harm is an issue. The Act was very much designed to enable services to work in a joined up way to ensure the safety of all people, wherever they are in Wales.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures and All Wales Practice Guides are owned by the Safeguarding Boards and were issued in 2019 and are accessible to everyone via an app and a website. They promote consistent, evidence-based safeguarding practice across agencies and across Wales and further demonstrates the duties of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Training has been provided on the Procedures and guides, facilitated by the six Regional Safeguarding Boards of Wales.

In December 2018, Welsh Government published guidance 'Health and wellbeing provision for refugees and asylum seekers'. https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/health-and-wellbeing-provision-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers_0.pdf

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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.

This guidance sets out that safeguarding is about protecting children and adults from abuse, neglect and harm and sets out the purpose and commitment of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This guidance also sets out the role of the National Independent Safeguarding Board and the Regional Safeguarding Boards of Wales.

I meet with the National Independent Safeguarding Board on a bi-annual basis and this provides a valuable opportunity for a mutual discussion to ensure that any safeguarding issues within Wales are raised. My officials also meet with the Chairs and Business Managers of the Regional Safeguarding Board regularly and this too presents an opportunity to raise and discuss any issues surrounding safeguarding commitments. To date, there have been no issues raised via the National or Regional Boards with regard to any concerns by migrant women with regard to interacting with or accessing social services and concerns that their children may be at risk of being removed, however, I have asked my officials to raise this with the Boards to enquire as to whether any experiences or challenges have been identified and, if so, to address these as swiftly as possible. Similarly, should any particular examples of such instances be known by the Committee or partners, I would be grateful if these can be shared in order that my officials can make appropriate enquiries and if necessary take further action to offer greater clarity to remove the risk of such concerns arising.

The nature of the 2014 Act is to prevent and protect people at risk of abuse and hence we would wish to ensure that people in Wales are supported to access the services designed to support them with confidence and not apprehension.

In 2020, in order to ensure transparency of the commitments and intentions of the Act regarding those seeking asylum in Wales, Welsh Government published guidance co-produced with the Welsh Refugee Coalition about access to social services and other care and support for destitute asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds. That Advice Note highlights some common issues regarding eligibility for Local Authority support in Wales for individuals who are destitute asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/access-to-social-services-and-other-care-and-support-for-destitute-asylum-seekers-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds.pdf>

This Advice Note explains the current legal position in respect of some common misperceptions in this complex area, building on related advice elsewhere in the UK. It is intended to support social workers and others across Wales in their practice by providing clear factual advice on what can be done in terms of the 2014 Act to support destitute asylum seekers and relevant local authority duties and powers.

Whilst this guidance was produced with the intention of addressing the misperceptions as set out above, the document also served as a further opportunity to set out a summary of the sections of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and the relevant codes of practice and statutory guidance.

My officials convene and chair the Cross Departmental Safeguarding, VAWDASV and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) meeting which brings together policy leads from across Welsh Government to discuss cross-cutting commitments, share developments and ensure a joined up way of developing and implementing our policies. This Group provides a further opportunity to explore the issues raised in your letter and this will feature in the agenda at the next available meeting. My officials will update me should any additional information be presented as part of these discussions.

We remain committed to empowering and enhancing rights, as demonstrated in our 2014 Act, by securing well-being for people who need care and support and carers who need support.

In January 2021 we published our White Paper “Rebalancing Care and Support” <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-01/consutation-document.pdf> which outlined ambitious and transformative proposals for social care to progress this vision.

In November 2021, the Cooperation Agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, set out our commitments including the ambition to create a National Care Service, free at the point of need, continuing as a public service.

Within this Senedd term, we are undertaking a great deal of work to further enhance our support and duties in relation to children and to offer further support to the social care workforce in delivering their services to both children and adults;

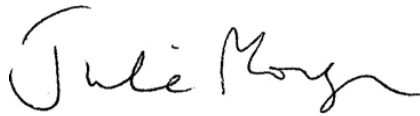
- Our Programme for Government commitments include the focus on eliminating profit from the care of looked after children and strengthen parenting responsibilities. Over the summer period, we will be holding a Summit to directly hear from young people about the issues that matter most to them. We hope this will provide us with valuable feedback that we will act upon in developing and delivering our Programme for Government Commitments.
- These commitments will be closely considered by the Oversight Board, independently chaired by Anthony Douglas through which we are delivering a new vision and ambition for children’s services, based on consistent practice, improved support for families and adopting national restorative approaches to care. This will include preventative interventions for families with children on the edge of care including parental advocacy services, family group conferencing, Family Justice reform and a national practice framework.
- Funding arrangements to support the delivery of parental advocacy services in each of the seven regions in Wales has been agreed from April 2022. These services will support parents whose children are on the edge of care, helping to avoid statutory social services involvement, escalation of needs and reducing the risk of children entering the care system.
- The establishment of a National Care Framework for Social Care and a National Office provides the vehicle for transformation with nationally commissioned services.
- Social Care Wales are developing National Standards for Safeguarding Training in Wales and a Framework to support training relevant to the role of each practitioner. This is in addition to the programme of training delivered by regional Safeguarding Boards in Wales. The consultation exercise for the Framework is due to commence next month.
- Social Care Wales are planning to publish its Social Work Workforce Plan shortly. This will provide the focus to further enhance and support the social care workforce across Wales.
- Funding has been secured via the Social Care Reform Fund to explore the radical reform for looked after children and young people. Areas to be covered by this funding include:

- o Foster Wales – harmonisation of local authority fees and allowance for foster carers and levelling up for kinship carers (to dovetail with Eliminate work).
- o Driving Family Justice Reform – including revocation of Placement With Parents care orders and promoting supervision orders.
- o Development and roll-out of the National Practice Framework

In addition, officials continue to liaise with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and will take into account its recommendations in relation to mandatory reporting of safeguarding concerns when these are published later in the year.

I hope that you and the Committee find the information provided to be helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Morgan', with a stylized, cursive script.

Julie Morgan AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services