

Dyddiad /Date:
Gofynnwch am/Please ask for:
Llinell uniongyrchol/Direct line:
Ebost/Email:

8th November 2019
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Mr Nick Ramsay AM
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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By e-mail only

Dear Nick,

Thank you for your letter in relation to care experienced children and young people and the work to develop 'bespoke reduction expectation plans' for each local authority in Wales to reduce the number of looked after children in its care. The response below is based on on-going discussions with local authorities, including WLGA Spokespeople, Cabinet Members and Leaders and with Welsh Government officials and the Deputy Minister.

Like many others, including Welsh Government, local government is concerned at the significant rise in the number of looked after children in the care of local authorities. While there are many factors that have led to this rise and increased numbers of looked after children are reflected across all parts of the UK, the recent report from Care Inspectorate Wales reflected that those children who are in care are there appropriately. This finding provides some assurance that authorities are making the right decisions about the children who need to be looked after, although we also fully appreciate the current situation is unsustainable and appropriate focus and serious efforts need to be made to reduce the number of children that need to be looked after by a local authority.

The submission of a reduction expectation plan by each local authority demonstrates local governments' commitment to tackle this issue and increase our efforts on preventative work with families, and other programmes of work with the aim of reducing the number of children who need to be taken into care. While reducing the number of children in care may reduce some costs for local authorities over time, in order to achieve this ambition we need to recognise the need for additional investment from Welsh Government to support the development and provision of appropriate preventative and early intervention services, for example, increased access to therapeutic support and trauma-informed models of care, as well as increased family support services. The support and involvement of other public services, such as health and education, is also required to ensure a holistic approach to supporting children and young people and their families is provided.

Dr Chris Llewelyn
Prif Weithredwr
Chief Executive

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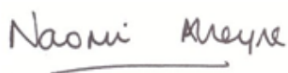
@WelshLGA

Throughout the discussions about this approach with Welsh Government you will be aware that there has been a strength of feeling about setting 'reduction expectation' numbers and concern that this approach could inadvertently negatively impact on operational decisions about whether a child should be brought into the care system or not. We have welcomed and support the 'safety first' approach that has been clearly set out by the Deputy Minister and all are clear that the safety and best interest of the child should override any other consideration. The WLGA and local authorities continue to have regular discussions with both the Deputy Minister and Welsh Government Officials, working closely with them, to help shape the approach being taken and ensure a collaborative approach is adopted that will provide a useful new frame for authorities to think about their services around vulnerable children and families in the most holistic way. Local authorities are also considering what peer support and peer challenge can be provided to help authorities improve their work in this area.

Welsh Government will monitor progress being made by authorities in reducing the number of children in care and those coming into care in the first place, and this will help ensure the necessary focus on working towards this ambition and provides an opportunity to review performance on a regular basis. We believe that a collaborative approach with the shared aim of working towards the reduction of children in the care system, safely, rather than a punitive one, is the most appropriate approach on this issue as there are many factors, some of which are outside of local authority control, that can impact on whether children and young people need to be in the care of local authorities.

The WLGA and local authorities will continue to work with Welsh Government and other partners in aiming to reduce the number of children in the looked after system and it is hoped that over the coming years progress can be made in reducing the number of children coming into care, whilst ensuring that the priority remains on keeping children and young people safe from harm, abuse and neglect.

Yours sincerely



Naomi Alleyne
Director, Social Services and Housing

**Croesawn ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg a byddwn yn ymateb i ohebiaeth yn yr un iaith.
Ni fydd defnyddio'r naill iaith na'r llall yn arwain at oedi.**

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English and will respond to correspondence in the same language.
Use of either language will not lead to a delay.