

By email only

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair, Children, Young
People and Education
Committee
National Assembly for
Wales
Cardiff Bay
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5th July 2019

Dear Lynne,

Many thanks for your letter in regards to the Welsh Government's work stream to safely reduce the numbers of children in local authority care and for sharing your concerns as a Committee at the potential expectation of reduction "targets". As an office, we have not had close involvement in this agenda and it is my understanding that this work is taking place between local authorities and government. However, I do attend the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on Improving Outcomes for Children.

I support the aim of safely decreasing the numbers of children who are looked after, particularly where it may lead to better quality and volume of family support and preventative work. As you are aware, the MAG has a specific focus on developing edge of care and preventative services, with Regional Partnership Boards and Local Authorities receiving funding from Welsh Government to invest in these areas.¹

I have been informed in recent meetings organised by the ADSS and the WLGA, that a number of local authorities are unhappy about the request to set targets in this area and that not all feel able to comply with this request. Reasons for this include the fact that they feel that a number of factors are beyond their control, such as the actions of the family courts and the impact of poverty - areas which will require cross-governmental action to address. It is important that this context, along with the individual needs of local authority populations are carefully considered, before developing and assessing each local authority's safe and realistic reduction strategies.

¹ http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s86361/PAC5-09-19%20PTN3%20-%20WG%20letter%20-%20CEC_e.pdf



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I would, however, expect local authorities, whose looked after population figures are significantly higher than those with similar socio-economic profiles, to carefully and critically examine whether its services and practices could be adjusted to enable more children to safely live with their birth families.

I have been informed by Welsh Government officials that the 22 visits to local authorities were generally informative and constructive. I hope that the visits will have been an opportunity to also inform how local authorities have used funding to further develop these edge of care and preventative services and how they hope to deliver improved outcomes for the children they support. Developing a consistent picture of these services will provide a strong starting point for developing individual strategies and what can be safely expected by each authority.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 performance measurement framework will be an important means of evaluating progress for local authorities. However, it is important that individual local authorities develop strategies that work to best support their local populations. Whilst sharing experience and best practice is important, comparing progress between local authorities will not always be appropriate, as the monitoring of progress will only be relevant to the safe and realistic plan developed by individual local authorities.

I welcome the opportunity the Committee has provided to explore this important policy change in further detail.

Yours sincerely,



Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales