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Dear Mr.Powell

Petition P-04-588 Charter for Children & Fathers

Thanks for your letter of 6th August and apologies for the delay in responding. I have also reviewed the recording of the Petitions Committee of 30th June.

CAWAC

The CAWAC tool is NOT used in England. It was a specialist tool developed specifically for the Welsh Government by Professor Gordon Harold. Cafcass in England use a different diagnostic tool to assess the damage to children of conflict between parents. That tool is available here: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/leaflets-resources/policies-and-templates-for-secs/forms,-templates-and-tools.aspx> under the title Impact of Parental Conflict Tool.

Our concerns about the CAWAC tool are that it has not been peer reviewed and there continues to be a 'cloak of secrecy' about what it is and how it is used and interpreted. We fear that it may be used to justify the exclusion of one parent from the life of their child because in doing so conflict might be reduced. This latter point was confirmed to me at a Children's Rights conference in Swansea in 2013 by Professor Harold, although he said that in doing so it would be a perverse use of the tool.

I do appreciate that there is a sense of frustration from Welsh Government that we continue to question them on the use of CAWAC. The reason that we do is because there seems to be a complete failure by Welsh Government to understand the grave concerns that parents have about the use of a 'secret' assessment that may be used to justify the removal of them from the lives of the children they love and care about.

We feel that the Welsh Government's refusal to allow Members of the Assembly to scrutinise the detail of the tool is indicative of a closed approach which reflects poorly on the tool and its use by practitioners. We draw the attention of the Committee to the recently published 'research' underpinning the use of CAWAC which appeared on the Cafcass Cymru website earlier this year <http://gov.wales/docs/cafcass/publications/310315CAWACResearchReviewEn.pdf>. Page 78 of the document is headed 'Dealing with requests for disclosure'. In relation to Court Orders

for disclosures around the use of the tool practitioners are instructed to resist the Court's decision.

*'On occasions, the Court may request that CAF/CASS CYMRU serve the questions to be put to the child under the CC-CAWAC assessment with the Court and the parties. In such circumstances, it is strongly advised that practitioners (supported by their Area Directors) write to the Court along the following lines: **"In normal circumstances, CAF/CASS CYMRU would wish to resist providing the parties with actual copies of the assessment toolkit, preferring instead for parties to view the toolkit in the company of the CAF/CASS CYMRU practitioner and/or at the CAF/CASS CYMRU offices. There are sensible copyright and policy reasons for not wanting to make the toolkit freely available, not least to ensure that the toolkit is protected from inappropriate use. In these circumstances, I would be most grateful if the Court would consider modifying the Order to suggest that the parties view the CC-CAWAC and its related questionnaires in the company of the CAF/CASS CYMRU practitioner."***

This is hardly conducive to a feeling by parents that Cafcass Cymru are prepared to engage with openness and transparency.

Gender Monitoring in relation to Parenting support and Children's services

I am attaching a letter from the First Minister to the question of gender monitoring of those accessing parenting support services funded by Welsh Government. The First Minister repeats the assertion made to the Children & Education Committee by the Minister, Lesley Griffiths that services do try to engage with fathers and that when she has attended Flying Start venues she has met some fathers there.

It would seem that the settled view of the Welsh Government is that there is no need for any form of monitoring of the effectiveness of services engagement with men. I would draw the Committee's attention to the statement by the First Minister in the attached letter that to ask services to do so would be **'a disproportionate administrative burden'**.

Please let me know whether we can assist the Committee in any further way.

Regards



Paul Apreda

National Manager