

Children and Young People Committee

Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc

To consultees on the attached list

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

May 2009

Dear Colleague,

Children and Young People Committee

The National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee is calling for evidence for its focussed inquiry on the placement of children into care in Wales.

In specifically examining the effectiveness of systems for placing children and young people in care, we recognise that that we will not be able to give detailed consideration to broader issues affecting the care of children and young people in Wales.

However, if consultees raise issues beyond the terms of reference for this specific inquiry, we may either consider them briefly, or draw them to the attention of another National Assembly for Wales committee. The Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee can, for example, consider a report of our inquiry, in subsequent investigation of broader issues affecting the care of children and young people in Wales.

Background

On 31 March 2008, 4,807 children in Wales were in looked after care, of which around 75 per cent were in foster care placements.¹

The largest category of need for children starting to be looked after in the year to 31 March 2008 was "abuse or neglect" at 52 per cent of the total. Of the total 4,633 looked after children, 11 per cent had three or more placements during the financial year 2007-08.

¹ Local Government Data Unit, *Social Services Statistics Wales 2007-08*: <http://www.dataunitwales.gov.uk/Publication.asp?id=SXE741-A77FCF99>

We recognise that placing children and young people with foster carers is a complex process. Many children and young people placed with foster carers are vulnerable, and have substantial needs that can make caring for them challenging. Matching a child or young person to a suitable foster carer will require awareness of the young person's needs, and will require an appropriately trained and experienced carer to be available. This inquiry will investigate the effectiveness of Wales' systems for placing children and young people with foster carers.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference for this inquiry are to inquire into the effectiveness of systems in Wales for placing children and young people in foster care, including:

- The process of planning, identifying and reviewing individual foster placements and accountability for the management of placements and the wellbeing of looked after children.
- The operation of the commissioning system for placing children with fostering agencies and its impact on the choice of placements and on the sharing of information about looked after children.
- The involvement of children and young people in decisions about their placements.
- The effectiveness of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) and the systems for sharing information between agencies
- The provision of timely and relevant information to foster carers and foster agencies on the background and history of the child or young person being placed and the reasons for the placement.
- The sharing of information on looked after children that is personal, confidential or that may be unsubstantiated or unproven
- The placement of disabled children, those from BME families and unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- The effectiveness of Welsh Assembly Government policy and guidance on the placement of looked after children with foster carers

Invitation to contribute to the inquiry

Interested parties are invited to submit written evidence to the Clerk of the Committee at the above address, to arrive no later than Friday 11 September 2009.

If possible, please supply an electronic version in MS Word or Rich Text format, either by e mail to Children&YoungPeopleCommittee@wales.gsi.gov.uk or on a disk.

Please begin your submission by providing some information about yourself, or your organisation, before setting out your views and experiences in relation to some or all of the following areas.

What we'd like from you - consultation questions

Gathering information about a child

1. In determining whether and where to place a child into care, a social worker will need an accurate picture of a child's needs and circumstances, which may require them to have information from a range of local services- health services, social services, etc. who may also have to consider their responsibilities towards confidentiality. To what extent is information about a child's needs effectively shared with decision makers, and do you have any examples of good practice in such inter-agency communications? Is there a clear understanding of who is ultimately accountable for decisions about a child's care?

Using that information

2. To what extent does the Children's Commissioning Support Resource Database provide sufficient information about child placements, and to what extent is the database currently utilised? How could the database be better utilised?
3. Information about a child's needs and circumstances will be needed by fostering agencies and foster carers in order to appropriately conduct risk assessments, provide for a child's needs, etc. To what extent is appropriate information normally provided to fostering agencies and foster carers, and how could such communication be improved? Does the commissioning system enable or inhibit the provision of information to prospective fostering agencies and carers, and do you have any examples of good practice in the provision of information to fostering agencies and/or foster carers?
4. To what extent are placements planned out? Is there clarity over whether placements will be for a short period of time, whether it may eventually lead to adoption, etc.? Can you provide any examples of good practice in the planning of foster placements?
5. To what extent are the risks of foster placements explained to foster carers?
6. To what extent do children and young people participate in their own placements' process?

Following a placement

7. To what extent do you consider that a child's social worker remain engaged in their care, once they have gone into a foster placement? For example, who is responsible for initially liaising with schools? Are foster carers given sufficient flexibility and autonomy to care for their children, without bureaucratic impediment?
8. To what extent are placements of children into care qualitatively reviewed? Can you provide any examples of placements being given a cost-benefit analysis for example?

General

9. Are there any further comments you'd like to make about the placement of children into care? Are there any specific recommendations you would suggest the Committee makes to the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Committee has invited submissions from those on the attached distribution list (Annex 1). However, **we would be grateful if you could forward a copy of the letter to any individuals or organisations that are not included but might like to contribute to the review.** A copy of this letter has been placed on the National Assembly's website with an open invitation to submit views.

Disclosure of Information

Witnesses should be aware that once written evidence has been submitted to the Committee it is treated as the property of the Committee. It is the Committee's intention to place written papers on its website, and may subsequently be printed with the report. The National Assembly will not publish information which it considers to be personal data.

In the event of a request for information submitted under UK legislation, it may be necessary to disclose the information that you provide. This may include information which has previously been removed by the National Assembly for publication purposes.

If you are providing any information, other than personal data, which you feel is not suitable for public disclosure, it is up to you to stipulate which parts should not be published, and to provide a reasoned argument to support this. The National Assembly will take this into account when publishing information or responding to requests for information.

Further information about the Committee and its inquiry can be found at:

Yours sincerely



Helen Mary Jones
Chair, Children and Young People Committee

Annex 1

ABCD - Access for Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People with Disabilities
Top of Form

Action for Children

All Wales Ethnic Minority Association

All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers

Anti Poverty Network Cymru

Assistant Police Liaison Officer

Association of Directors of Education in Wales

Association of Directors of Social Services

Association of Teachers and Lecturers Cymru

Autism Cymru
Top of Form
Bottom of Form

BAAF

Bangladeshi Welfare Association

Bangladeshi Women's Group

Barnardos Cymru

Bevan Foundation

Black Association of Women Stepping Out

Black Environment Network

Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales

Blaenau Gwent County Council

Bridgend County Borough Council

Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust

Caerphilly County Borough Council

Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

Cardiff Council

Cardiff Humanists

Cardiff University (Assistant Dean, Dr. Heather Payne)

Care Council for Wales

Carers Wales

Carmarthenshire County Council

Carmarthenshire NHS Trust

Centre on budget and policy priorities

Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust

Ceredigion County Council

Children in Wales

Children's Commissioning Support Resource

Children's Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Church in Wales

Conwy and Denbighshire NHS Trust

Conwy County Borough Council

Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services

Cymru Yfory
Cytun – Churches Together in Wales
Denbighshire County Council
Disability Wales
Dyfed Powys Police Authority
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Evangelical Alliance Wales
Flintshire County Council
Foster Care Associates
Foster Care Co-operative
Fostering Network
Fostering Solutions
Funky Dragon
Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust
Gwent Police Authority
Gwynedd County Council
Home-Start
Human Sciences Research Council
Humanist Society of Mid Wales
Independent Foster Care Services
Independent Fostering Agencies steering group
Institute of Welsh Affairs
Isle of Anglesey County Council
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
MENCAP Cymru
Mental Health Wales
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
MEWN Cymru
Top of Form
Monmouthshire County Council
Mother's Union in Wales
Muslim Council of Wales
NASUWT
Top of Form
Bottom of Form
National Autistic Society in Wales
National Council of YMCA's of Wales
National Union of Teachers UT Cymru
National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Newport City Council
North East Wales NHS Trust
North Glamorgan NHS Trust
North Wales Police Authority
North West Wales NHS Trust
NSPCC Cymru
Pakistan Association of Newport & Gwent Welsh Asian Council
Pathway Care
Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust
Pembrokeshire County Council
Play Wales
Plymouth University

Polish Welsh Mutual Association
Pontypridd and Rhondda NHS Trust
Powys County Council
Refugee Voice Wales
Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
RNIB Cymru
RNID Cymru
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff
Salvation Army
Save the Children Cymru
SCOPE Cymru
Shelter Cymru
SNAP Cymru
South East Wales Racial Equality Council
South Wales Police Authority
Stonewall Cymru
Supported Fostering Services
Swansea County Council
Swansea NHS Trust
TACT
Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Paula Conway)
The Children's Society
The National Deaf Children's Society
The Prince's Trust – Cymru
Torfaen County Borough Council
Tros Gynnal
UK Disabled People's Council
UNICEF UK
UNISON Cymru
UNITE
University of Glamorgan (Professor Howard Williamson)
Vale of Glamorgan County Council
Velindre NHS Trust
Voices from Care (Cymru)
Wales Audit Office
Wales Carers Alliance
Wales Council for the Blind
Wales Council for the Deaf
Wales TUC Cymru
WCVA
Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust
Welsh Association of Child Psychotherapists
Welsh Consumer Council
Welsh Language Board
Welsh Local Government Association
Welsh NHS Confederation
West Glamorgan Humanist Group
Women Making a Difference Project

Wrexham County Borough Council
YMCA Welsh Council
Ynys Mon - Isle of Anglesey County Council
Youth Cymru
Youthlink Wales
YWCA