

Vaughan Gething, First Minister

Via e-mail

Dyddiad | Date:

Pwnc | Subject: Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister meeting

Dear Vaughan

Thank you for attending the scrutiny of the First Minister Committee on 26 April 2024 and providing updates on some of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitments relating to care experienced children. It was a useful and informative session. It was also very positive to see the public gallery full of care experienced children and young people who are following the Senedd's scrutiny work in this area with interest.

We discussed with you during the meeting that the challenges of the corporate parent role are clear, as is their reach across the range of cabinet portfolios. A key concern, which you share, is the continuing rise in the numbers of children in care and what the evidence tells us about their long term outcomes. The Committee would therefore welcome some further information to aid our understanding about your future plans in respect of some of the particular challenges we discussed. These areas are set out in an annex to this letter.

To aid your preparation for the next meeting of the Committee, it is scheduled for 12 July 2024 in Carmarthenshire or the Carmarthen area and the theme will be Rural Communities.

Yours sincerely



David Rees MS

Chair, Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Annex: Additional information on care experienced children

We would welcome some additional information on the following:

The rise in the numbers of children in care

What *additional steps* your government intends to take to safely reduce the number of children going into care, given existing investment and approaches have not yet reversed the increase.

The Welsh Government's role as the corporate parent and grandparent

The timescale for strengthening the Welsh Government's Code of Practice for looked after and accommodated children as it refers to corporate parenting. We would also welcome information on any additional steps the Welsh Government can take to support Kinship Carers in recognition of the important role they play.

Homelessness

An update on how the next iteration of the Welsh Government's White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales will address the needs of care experienced children, including care experienced birth parents. You will be aware that Welsh Government data shows that 315 care leavers were homeless in Wales in 2022-23, a significant rise since 2020-21. As you will also be aware, these figures refer to young people up to the age of 25 being actively supported by their local authority as care leavers at the time their homelessness was reported. We note that both the Welsh Government's Expert Group Review has made a specific recommendation and the Children, Young People and Education Committee has said that a "sixth category entitled to 'reasonable preference' should be created for people who are care experienced regardless of homelessness status, in order to avoid them entering the homeless system to access social housing". Can you confirm this will be taken forward?

Delivering the outcomes of strategies to support care experienced children

What steps your Government intends to take to strengthen the mechanisms to *deliver* existing strategies affecting care experienced children. For example the national target in the 2016 strategy, Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after was to raise the attainment of looked after 15 year-olds at Key Stage 4 of the Level 2 inclusive threshold from 17% in 2014 to 25% in 2016. Latest published figures from 2019 show the percentage remained at 17% at that time.

Children's social care workforce

What additional steps your Government will take to ensure there is a children's social care workforce that's fit for purpose and your expectations of the role of local authorities and Social Care Wales in this regard. You will be aware that in 2022 there were 639 vacancies in children's social work teams across Wales and that in September 2023, 17.5% of children's services social workers were employed by an agency.