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Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-588
Ein cyf/Our ref MD/05272/14

William Powell AM
Assembly Member for Mid & West Wales
Chair Petitions Committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

18 November 2014

Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 30 September concerning the petition from Families Need Fathers: Both Parents Matter Cymru (FNF:BPM) asking the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to adopt all six points in the *Charter for Action for Children and Fathers in Wales*. While I acknowledge the several important themes raised by the charter and the useful contribution this makes, I believe Welsh Government policies already encompass key points contained in the Charter as I outline below.

To begin with, supporting children and their families is the fundamental purpose of the *Families First* and *Flying Start* Welsh Government programmes. The Welsh Government works to encourage the participation and engagement of all family members regardless of gender and age. For example, *Flying Start* recognises the need to support fathers, mothers and carers in their parenting by providing them with access to parenting support at a level that is meaningful to them.

The Welsh Government is fully committed to supporting families, and recognises the importance of a positive relationship between parents and their child because it will help shape positive outcomes for children as they progress through to adulthood. As you will know, we promote parenting programmes that focus on early intervention to support vulnerable parents. Positive parenting aims to support and develop stronger relationships between parents and their children and helps them to address any issues as they arise, so that they do not lead to family relationship breakdown.

Parenting in Wales: Guidance on Engagement and Support was published September 2014. It sets out the Welsh Government's expectations on how parenting support should be provided; encourages the use of evidence based interventions and gives good practice approaches to delivery. The guidance is intended to inform the decisions made by those delivering and commissioning parenting services. It provides specific and practical guidance on engaging fathers, including those who are non-resident parents. We were keen to get the views of key stakeholders on the guidance and FNF:BPM was given an opportunity to provide comments to the guidance when it was being drafted.

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Please note also revised *Flying Start* parenting support guidance has also been published. It complements the above Guidance and is for those who have responsibility for providing parenting support for *Flying Start*. This contains an expectation the father-child relationship will be taken into account when considering what parenting support should be provided to a family.

The FNF:BPM Charter raises the important matter of shared care and access to employment and training. On this, the Welsh Government's approach is an inclusive one in that we do not target specific groups in relation to the programmes we offer. We provide additional resource within our contracts to enable those who require specific additional support, such as childcare costs, to allow them to participate in our schemes.

The FNF:BPM have written previously regarding representation on the Family Justice Network (FJN) in Wales and the possibility of joining a sub-group to the FJN. While their offer of engagement is appreciated it is unfortunately not appropriate for the following reason. The purpose of the FJN is to support the Family Justice Board for England and Wales to implement the system changes detailed in the Family Justice Review. In this respect, the FJN brings together the agencies in Wales with a statutory responsibility within the family justice system to support the implementation of the changes. It is not a forum for the many non-statutory stakeholder groups who will have an interest in this field.

Please note, however, the FNF:BPM was invited and accepted an invitation to attend a meeting of the Family Justice Network (FJN) in order to make a presentation on the matter of 'parental alienation' as a form of emotional abuse, as outlined in their Charter. This led to a full paper and a constructive discussion on the subject by the FJN members. Subsequent correspondence from Albert Heaney, the chair of the FJN, to FNF:BPM explained the reasons why the FJN were unable to adopt the term. In brief, the current definition of emotional abuse (as identified by CAF/CASS Cymru through the *Wales Children and Adolescent Welfare Assessment Checklist*) is deemed still appropriate in enabling both parents and professionals to recognise the multiple adversities that children may face when families have problems.

Given the above background I do hope you will agree Welsh Government policies already encompass and move beyond many of the important issues and concerns raised by FNF:BPM. For that reason, Welsh Government do not feel it necessary to adopt the *Charter for Action for Children and Fathers in Wales* but, nonetheless, acknowledge the contribution the Charter has made to our ongoing policy deliberations in this field.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Drakeford AC / AM

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