



Nick Ramsay AM,
Chair, Public Accounts Committee

31st May 2018

Dear Nick,

Following my attendance at the Public Accounts Committee with Albert Heaney on 30 April I agreed to write to the Committee on the following two areas:

1. To provide clarity as to whether there are any children waiting to be taken into care in any of the local authority areas and if so how many?

There are no children waiting to be taken into care in Wales. All children and young people who need to be looked after by a local authority will be found a placement, and local authorities will try their best to find the most appropriate placement for a particular child, in line with their statutory duties. There are a variety of placement options open to a local authority, including placement with a local authority foster carer, kinship care arrangements including special guardianship orders, placement with an independent fostering agency carer, or residential care. The most appropriate placement for a child will be identified as part of the care planning process, which makes an holistic assessment of the child's needs and personal outcomes.

Sometimes a child will need to be placed in a temporary or emergency arrangement while a more suitable longer-term placement is found. For example, a child may need to be placed in a children's home until a suitable foster placement becomes available, or a child to be placed for adoption may need to be placed with foster parents until a suitable adopter is found.

Local authorities try to minimise the number of placement moves a child experiences whilst looked after. They have a duty under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to take steps to ensure that they have sufficient provision to meet the needs of their looked after population. Local authorities are currently drawing up placement commissioning strategies to enable them to fulfil this 'sufficiency' duty. They are also being encouraged to develop more specialist provision on a regional basis.

Although we collect data nationally on the number of placement moves a child experiences, we do not collect information on the suitability of placement for each child or whether a placement fully meets a child's needs. This is detailed information which will form part of the care planning and review process for each child, and will be held at local authority level. Care Inspectorate Wales is currently undertaking a thematic review of looked after children's services across Wales, which will focus upon children and young people's outcomes, including placement suitability. It is due to report in March 2019.

2. Confirm how spending on the Pupil Development Grant compares for Looked after Children and those who have been adopted in England with a comparison with Wales.

A comparison between the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) in Wales and the Pupil Premium in England is not possible. We are investing unprecedented amounts in the PDG and it totals £93 million this financial year, with around £4 million of that specifically targeted at supporting looked after and adopted children. Funding for Pupil Premium in England is around £2.4 billion. The difference in the size of the budgets alone means that we need to be more creative and smart with its use in Wales.

The looked after and adopted children element of the PDG is managed and administered by the regional education consortia. The grant was extended in 2015 to specifically include adopted children within its scope. This is in recognition that many adopted children will experience similar challenges in education as looked after children; and that an adoption order does not mean that they are no longer subject to the consequences of early trauma they may have experienced.

The grant is used at a strategic level to support universal or whole-school strategies that build capacity in the system and benefit a wider cohort of learners; and is also used for more targeted interventions to support the particular identified needs of individual learners. Whilst the strategic, whole-school approaches benefit a wider cohort, all the evidence points to these having a disproportionately positive impact on vulnerable groups, including looked after and adopted learners.

A specific example of a regional, strategic project is the Attachment Aware project in Education through Regional Working (ERW), which up-skilled education professionals so that they were better equipped to support looked after and adopted children as well as a wider group of vulnerable learners. A similar approach has been taken in Central South Consortium around ACEs. More bespoke, individual interventions can also be funded through the grant; however this relies on education services being aware of who their adopted learners are.

Consortia allocations are calculated on the basis of numbers of looked after children within their area. Numbers of adopted children do not feature in the calculation because the social services data that is collected nationally on adopted children would not provide the specific information required, in particular the age of children and where they reside or go to school.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education gave evidence on the PDG to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in March. How the grant supported

adopted children was specifically discussed and she confirmed that consideration was being given to collecting data on adopted children through the pupil level annual school census (PLASC). The Cabinet Secretary was clear that any future collection of such data would be based entirely on the choice of adoptive parents to disclose the adopted status of their children. However, it would provide a national picture of not only the number of adopted children in our schools but perhaps more importantly their educational attainment and progress so that services are better able to assess and meet their educational needs.

In addition to the information provided above for the Committee, you may also wish to be aware of the recent research undertaken as part of the Ministerial Advisory Group's work programme. An *Analysis of Outcomes for children and young people 4 to 5 years after a final Care Order* was carried out by the Institute of Public Care and published on 15 May. I attach links to English and Welsh language versions of the main report and summary on the Welsh Government website which highlights positive findings about the care of looked after children in Wales.

<https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/analysis-outcomes-children-young-people-4-5-years-after-final-care-order/?lang=en>

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Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alistair Davey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alistair Davey MA Chartered FCIPD
Deputy Director, Enabling People
Directorate of Social Services and Integration