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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant, MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

15 February 2024

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter of 19 December which sought clarity on steps leading to the closure of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) pilot in November last year.

I have attached at **Annex A**, a response to the questions included within your letter. When we launched the two-year pilot programme for the FDAC in November 2021, it was always with the intention to test how the approach could work in Wales. The Committee will appreciate before committing to any long-term service we will need to carefully consider the results of the pilot. Once we have done this analysis, we can decide on whether rolling out Family, Drug and Alcohol Courts is the most suitable, cost-effective model to provide sustainable support for families where there are concerns of substance misuse.

I will write again to the Committee about our future plans for the FDAC pilot following our detailed consideration of the pilot evaluation with key stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie', written in a cursive style.

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services

Question 1

Can you confirm that Welsh Government officials regularly attended FDAC Strategic Steering Group meetings and, therefore, knew before the evidence session on 14 September that the FDAC pilot would (or was very likely to) end in November 2023 given the absence of Welsh Government funds to extend the pilot until the evaluation could be completed?

I can confirm that Welsh Government officials did regularly attend FDAC Strategic Steering Group meetings. When the Pilot programme was launched in November 2021, we did from the outset say that the pilot would be for two years and subsequently would finish in November 2023.

At the time of the scrutiny evidence session on 14 September 2023, we were still actively trying to identify funding to extend the pilot until the evaluation was completed. We were only made aware of Cardiff local authority's decision to close the pilot after it had been communicated to members of staff.

Question 2

Why was the request for funding to extend the pilot, and the possibility of that request being refused, and the implications of that refusal not raised with us during the evidence session on 14 September?

It was not raised during the evidence session on the 14 September because as outlined above we were still working to identify funding and were hopeful that it could be found.

Question 3

Prior to the evidence session on 14 September, what discussions - if any - did you have with members of the judiciary and other key staff involved in the delivery of the FDAC pilot about your decision to refuse the councils' funding request and close the pilot in November 2023?

Prior to the evidence session on 14 September, the council's funding request had not been refused and as outlined above we were still considering the funding request and trying to identify possible funding within our budgets. This request for additional funding came late in the day.

Question 4

Do you believe that the manner by which the Welsh Government and council leaders communicated with stakeholders about the closure of the pilot has affected the goodwill of professionals associated with FDAC, including members of the judiciary, and consequently negatively impacted its chance of future success?

As outlined in the response to question 1, we were only made aware of Cardiff local authority's decision to close the pilot after it had been communicated to members of staff. We agree the handling of this could have been better.

Questions 5 – 7 – the Future of FDAC in Wales

Our response to the Committee's recommendation 9 remains unchanged "*The Welsh Government will review the evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot to consider sustainable delivery models for a National Rollout. We will work with local authorities, members of the judiciary and other relevant stakeholder to ensure key partners are involved in advising and scoping future FDACs in Wales*".

The Committee will appreciate before committing to any long-term service we will need to carefully consider the results of the evaluation of the pilot. Once we have done this analysis, we can decide on whether rolling out Family, Drug and Alcohol Courts is the most suitable, cost-effective model to provide sustainable support for families where there are concerns of substance misuse. Sustainability is vital when considering future roll out of this and any service and that is why it was one of the key requirements when we invited expressions of interest to take forward the pilot. As per our response any next steps will be taken forward working together with our partners not least the Local Family Justice Board.

A key consideration for future service delivery will be the role of Integrated Family Support Teams (IFSTs). The IFST service is a provision unique to Wales which aims to support the needs of vulnerable families in crisis where parental substance misuse is having an impact on the welfare of children.