

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwaith dilynol ar Ymchwiliad y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i Wasanaethau Mabwysiadu yng Nghymru | Follow-up to Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales

AS 18

Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru

Response from : Welsh Local Government Association

I welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to inform the Children, Young People and Education Committee's (the Committee) Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales.

Since the Committee published the Adoption report in November 2012, significant developments have taken place which the Committee will wish to be aware of. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act has received Royal Assent and is to be implemented from April 2016. The Act provides future direction for how services can and should be delivered. It is intended to transform the way social services, social care/wellbeing and community health services are delivered through an approach that is focused on achieving the outcomes necessary to promote a person's well-being - as an individual, as part of a family and as part of their community. It looks to drive the development of new models of service to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of people. As such, there will be a stronger focus on preventative and early intervention services. The aim is this will be achieved through greater partnership working and integration of services.

Significantly, in relation to adoption, the National Adoption Service launched in November 2014 as an initiative developed in response to the Act (and evidence around the need to improve adoption services). This unique service brings together local government with partners in the voluntary sector to deliver the best possible service to those children in Wales who need adoptive families, adults who are or may become, adoptive parents, as well as other children and adults affected by adoption.

The National Adoption Service have submitted evidence to the Inquiry and the WLGA would wish to endorse their submission. The evidence presented by the NAS clearly highlights the current issues, the actions being taken and the progress that has been made by the Service since it became fully operational in January 2015. It also identifies areas of concern and those for further development. The evidence provided should provide the Committee with some assurance that the recommendations from the original Inquiry has led to significant changes and that local government are committed to improving services for all those affected by adoption in Wales, through the National Adoption Service.

The development and implementation of the National Adoption Service has demonstrated the leadership role that local councils are providing in developing new, innovative forms of service delivery that directly meet the needs of our communities. The service is local authority led and funded and elected member input has been a key element, both at the regional and national level. This has helped to ensure political buy in and leadership throughout the model. The governance arrangements in place are based on partnership and inclusivity and this has added real value to the way the National Adoption Service has developed. The forums established as part of the service have enabled strategic issues and concerns, for example, around education and CAMHS to be debated and discussed and

actions taken to address them. This has also allowed us to bring all the key partners together to be able to discuss performance and how to address issues strategically.

It has been very pleasing to see early signs of improvement with more children being placed more quickly and increased numbers of adopters being approved in the first year of the National Adoption Service's operation. Unfortunately however we cannot ignore the very real financial challenges facing local government. There is an expectation that local government ensures that the Governance Board, the Advisory Group and the central team are resourced sufficiently to perform their functions and achieve the aims of the National Adoption Service, with funding for the central elements of the service being provided as a top slice of the Revenue Support Grant.

However, it is clear that local authorities cannot keep bearing the brunt of austerity and significantly reducing finances are having a major impact on their ability to maintain and deliver services, including services vital to economic growth and the general well-being of communities, such as transport, housing, libraries, cultural services, planning and regulatory services. It is anticipated that there will be a cumulative budget shortfall of £941m by 2019-20 and this is a significant challenge to local authorities as they continue to try to deliver services to meet the needs of their communities, including a range of adoption support.

WLGA would welcome the opportunity to discuss our views in more detail in oral evidence to the Committee should you find that helpful.

Cllr Mel Nott

Chair of the National Adoption Service Governance Board, WLGA Presiding Officer and Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council