



Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-624
Ein cyf/Our ref MD/00792/15

William Powell AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
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Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 26 February, seeking my views about the petition raised by John Watkins.

I agree with the petitioners that we need to increase the number of potential foster placements available to each local authority in Wales, and to ensure that the fostering services run by local authorities operate at the optimum level. Foster care accounts for more than three-quarters of placements of looked after children in Wales, and the rise in demand for placements is growing at a faster rate than the increase in foster carers.

There are particular problems in finding suitable matches for children in those authorities with high numbers of looked after children. A focus on prevention, early intervention and family support services should help ease the pressure in the longer term, enabling more children and young people to remain with their families or in kinship care arrangements. However, there is a recognisable need to do things differently and to explore more collaborative approaches between local authorities, as well as with the voluntary and private sectors.

Our Sustainable Social Services programme, launched in 2011, set out a vision for transforming the way social services are delivered in Wales. It acknowledged that delivering all aspects of social services on a local authority basis – doing everything 22 times – was no longer sustainable. This has led to the development of regional improvement collaboratives, to explore options for strategic planning, commissioning and procurement of services.

The legislation we have introduced as part of Sustainable Social Services will also put in place a new legislative framework for fostering services. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act will come into force in April 2016, and over the summer we will be consulting on draft regulations and a code of practice on Part 6 of the Act. This deals with looked after and accommodated children, including foster placements. In February, we published a Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Bill, which will introduce changes to reform the regulatory regime for care and support services, including fostering agencies.

It is within this context that we are exploring, with the Association of Directors of Social Services Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the Fostering Network, what changes might be needed to the way fostering services are provided in Wales to deliver better outcomes for looked after children and foster carers. Some regions are already exploring how to deliver some aspects of fostering services on a regional basis (for example, around recruitment). Also, some neighbouring authorities already talk to each other about fostering vacancies. We want to build on this work and develop a more strategic and integrated approach to fostering across Wales.

The suggestion made by the petitioners, that foster carers be permitted to be registered with more than one local authority, is an interesting one, and certainly worth exploring as we take this work forward. There are practical issues that we would need to consider, such as the management oversight and supervision of foster carers who are registered with more than one local authority, and I would need to take advice from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales on this. However, these are the kinds of issues we can discuss further as we develop our new approach.

Best wishes,
Mark.

Mark Drakeford AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services