

**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb
a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol**

**Equality and Social Justice
Committee**

Jane Hutt MS Cabinet Secretary for Social
Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

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Dear Jane,

2 October 2024

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), the summit, and the youth justice system

Thank you for your letter dated 30 August and for sharing a copy of the summit findings with us. As the only formal record of the summit, the document will be valued by all stakeholders who attended.¹ Although it was always our intention to respond, subsequent correspondence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) provided an added impetus due to the concerns highlighted.² For example, the RCSLT state that they have not received feedback from the summit nor had sight of the findings. We were also disappointed to learn that previous requests for a meeting were declined.

We would therefore urge you to meet with the RCSLT to ensure that they receive proper feedback and share a copy of the findings with them and the other summit attendees as quickly as possible. We would also like to request an update from you on progress with the action specified in the summit findings document.

In its briefing the RCSLT highlights the latest statistics which reaffirm the central finding of our report – that young people with SLCN (the eponymous 60% from the title of our report) are significantly

¹ Equality and Social Justice Committee, [Further information from the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip regarding Speech and Language Communication Needs Summit](#), 31 August 2024

² Paper to note 4.1 [Correspondence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to the Chair regarding the Committee's report: "60% giving them a voice"](#), 13 September 2024

overrepresented in the criminal justice system. In fact it suggests that our report understated the true extent. The RCSLT also confirm that speech and language needs are becoming an increasingly important consideration in inspections for youth justice services. We reiterate our calls for speech and language therapists to be embedded within youth justice services across Wales as per our recommendations.

Provision of SLCN therapists

With regards to the provision of SLCN therapists and the extent to which the youth justice system can access such provision we have continuing concerns. We welcome the small increase in the number of training places for speech and language therapists³ in Health Education and Improvement Wales's (HEIW) annual education and training for 2024-25. We hope that this increase could be sustained in future years and would welcome confirmation of this.

We were frustrated by the stance outlined in your predecessor's letter (dated 30 May 2024) that:

It is for Local Health Boards (LHBs) to determine their health needs and how best to meet them with the resources available, including for children in contact with the justice system or those at risk of coming into contact with it.

Your letter of 30 August 2024) restated that the Welsh Government is "encouraging local Youth Justice Services to discuss the options at their disposal with their respective Local Health Boards (LHBs)". However how can we be confident that LHBs will prioritise the investment required in SLCN when you consider the failure to provide adequate resources in some parts of Wales up until now. There is ample evidence of need but current arrangements which allow LHBs to determine how to meet these locally has created an unfair, postcode lottery which we fear will continue without action. As a result lives will continue to be blighted in ways that are ultimately counter productive, and damaging to society and the public purse in the long-term.

Public policy concerns in relation to the provision of speech and language therapy in Wales were first raised by a parliamentary committee in 2010. These issues are not new, and yet in many parts of Wales there has been a failure to respond. We therefore invite you and the Cabinet Secretary for Health to consider whether the current approach is fit-for-purpose and to look carefully at whether LHBs who are outliers need to be directed to take action by the Welsh Government.

Working with the Ministry of Justice

In addition, given that the Ministry of Justice retains responsibility for most of the criminal justice system, what conversations have taken place with the new Prisons Minister, Lord Timpson on

³ Health Education and Improvement Wales, Education and Training Plan (ETP) 2024-25, page 12

improving the availability of SLCT input into identifying the needs of offenders who may inappropriately otherwise get a custodial sentence.

In particular what is the future of the Turnaround Programme funding beyond its scheduled end in March 2025. Information from the RCSLT shows that several SLCN therapists have been employed across Wales due in part to Turnaround Programme funding, however no announcement has been made for funding arrangements post March 2025. We urge you to highlight the positive impact the funding has had and seek assurances from the Ministry of Justice that suitable arrangements will be made for successor funding, preferably with certainty as regards funding over a multi-annual timeframe.

We are grateful to you for continuing to engage with us on this important matter of social justice and would welcome a response from you by: 30 October 2024.

I will be copying this letter to Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee; and Pippa Cotterill, of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Rathbone'.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Welsh Parliament