

Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Plant, Pobl Hŷn a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-859
Ein cyf/Our ref HID/00917/18

David J Rowlands AM
Chair Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

|| December 2018

Dear *David,*

I am responding to your correspondence of 26 November. Your correspondence relates to Petition P-05-859 – Provide Child Houses in Wales for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse.

The petition refers to a model developed in Iceland. The current two Child Houses in London are part of a pilot project. The service aims to increase prosecutions for child sexual abuse/assault while promoting a better victim support experience and better therapeutic support for children. An evaluation of these services has a start date of November 2018. The evaluation will establish a learning strategy/toolkit to support scaling of the Child House model in the UK.

While Social Services refer children into the services and form part of a multi-agency response funding in England is from the Home Office with the project led by the Police and NHS England. These are similar to the funding arrangements for Sexual Assault Referral Centres in Wales. While I am the Minister with lead responsibility for the safeguarding of children, including sexually abused children, I do not have the policy lead for Sexual Assault Referral Centres.

The petitioner suggests that Child Houses provide a place for children to run to when escaping abuse. This is not the case. Children who are identified by services as potential victims of sexual abuse are referred into the Child Houses where forensic medical evidence is gathered and the police work with children to gather information to submit to the Crown Prosecution Service. Children also receive therapeutic support. While I am the Minister for lead responsibility for the safeguarding of children, including sexually abused children, evidence gathering in relation to the prosecution process is, as you will be aware, a largely reserved matter.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I would like to offer the Petitions Committee my assurance that we have robust safeguarding arrangements in place for children.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 introduced strengthened and robust safeguarding arrangements for children and adults. Each of the six Safeguarding Children Boards in Wales has arrangements in place to support practice and the implementation of procedures aimed at safeguarding children from abuse and exploitation.

The Welsh Government has also provided funding to Cardiff and the Vale Safeguarding Board who are developing updated multi-agency Wales Safeguarding Procedures for children (up to the age of 18 years) and adults on behalf of the six Safeguarding Boards. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures will be supplemented by a number of Practice Guides on safeguarding children in specific circumstances.

The Welsh Government is currently updating statutory guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation that was issued in 2011, this work is supported by a multi-agency group and updated statutory guidance will be issued for consultation in early 2019. The Welsh Government has committed to developing a National Action Plan on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse – including Child Sexual Exploitation and Harmful Sexual Behaviour in the spring of 2019.

The Welsh Government has commissioned Stop it Now to develop resources for practitioners and for parent/carers on spotting the signs of child sexual abuse, keeping children safe and responding to children who disclose abuse. The Welsh Government has also commissioned the NSPCC to develop resources for practitioners on handling disclosures of abuse by children and to provide implementation sessions.

We are also working with Social Care Wales, a body established through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to promote knowledge and learning to support robust safeguarding practice.

My view is that while the issues raised through the petition are of great importance, the petitioner appears to have not wholly appreciated the role and purpose of Child Houses. Further, the evaluation of the Child Houses in London has only just been initiated and it would be prudent to wait for evidence on the operation of these pilot services. It is also the case that the clear link between the operation of Child Houses and evidence gathering in support of the prosecution process means that the development of Child Houses is largely a reserved matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM

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