

Albert Heaney  
Director of Social Services  
Welsh Government

5 February 2019

Dear Mr Heaney

### **Care Experienced Children and Young People**

The Public Accounts Committee considered the Welsh Government's response to the Committee's Report on the costs and value for money of public services for care experienced children and young people at its meeting on 28 January 2019. Members have asked that I write to you to seek clarification on a number of issues:

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee notes that the response states that:

'...work is currently well advanced on the development of a Performance and Improvement Framework for Children which will require local authorities to gather data against a set of quality standards, qualitative measures and quantitative measures.'

We would welcome clarification of the relationship between the arrangements for the Performance Improvement Framework for Children and the indicators to provide an enhanced dataset of outcomes spanning a wider range of policy areas to be in place from April 2019 and which are in addition to those included in the Framework. The Committee is unclear why it will be possible to implement the latter from April 2019 but the former only from April 2020. Furthermore, one of the central tenets of our report was about ensuring that the voice of the Child is



heard at every stage, and it unclear to the Committee how the views of young people have been considered developing these approaches.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee notes that the response sets out that the approach to the Pupil Development Grant for looked after children (PDG-LAC) is currently being reviewed in conjunction with relevant partners and that this work will ensure that both impact and value for money of PDG-LAC are maximised. I note that this new approach will be taking effect from April 2019, and the Committee would therefore welcome further information on whether there will be any ongoing evaluation for those new arrangements, on the assumption that the independent evaluation mentioned in the response relates to the current arrangements.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee welcomes that the Welsh Government accepted the recommendation and has indicated how it intends to put more information in the public domain about the Improving Outcomes for Children Programme and the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group. However, we are disappointed with the Welsh Government's position that it does not intend to publish the minutes, because of the concern that this may impede free and frank debate. The Committee believes that there is a value in sharing more widely what has been discussed at each meeting to increase transparency and accountability. While appreciating your concerns, we do believe that there is value in at least summary minutes being published.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee welcomes the Welsh Government acceptance of this recommendation and the issuing of a new research tender. Your response sets out that the approach you are adopting for this, which does not appear to be entirely in line with what the Committee recommended and we would therefore welcome sight of the scope. Furthermore, the Committee would welcome clarification on the timescale for completing the research, as this was unclear in the response.

**Recommendation 5:** The Committee welcomes the Welsh Government's acceptance that the evidence we heard suggests that end of placement reviews do not happen as routinely as they should. We note that it is the Welsh Government's intention to ensure that this is specifically considered at future inspections of children's services by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). We would be grateful for some clarification as to what this means in practice for timescales and coverage



across Wales in the context of CIW's wider work programme. We note from the response that consideration will be given on the need to strengthen the Part 6 Code of Practice to include specific guidance on the steps to be followed when it is proposed to move a child to a new placement and we would welcome further information on how it is intended to do this.

**Recommendation 6:** The Committee included an ambitious timescale for analysing the delivery of placements, because we consider there to be an urgent need to understand this and develop a national strategy. The Committee considered the response to be lacking a clear timescale. We appreciate the response suggests that new national commissioning could come into force in 2021–22 but we are unclear whether that is a firm commitment. This links back to our concern in recommendation 4, about a lack of an expected delivery timetable.

**Recommendation 7:** The Committee fully accepts the complexities of disaggregating spend per looked after child across the whole range of public services, but we believe that this information is essential to ensuring that value for money has been achieved. We have concerns that the response appears to indicate limitations which may mean that it is not able to address fully the concerns that we set out in our report about the transparency of spending. We would expect the Welsh Government to at least attempt to take forward this recommendation or scope it out as a one-off rather than state it is unlikely to be implemented. I appreciate there are challenges but with more time and expertise it could be at least estimated e.g. in relation to education and mental health services. I would ask that you reconsider the response to this recommendation.

**Recommendation 8:** The Committee's comments on recommendations 4, 6 and 7 are applicable to this recommendation as well given that the response indicates that this will be discharged through the research for these recommendations. The Committee has a further concern with the response provided as it is not clear in relation to whether the Welsh Government is intending to gather the relevant information on a regular basis rather than simply through a one-off piece of research. We would be grateful if you could clarify this in your response.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee acknowledges the reasons provided by the Welsh Government as to why this recommendation was rejected and we note that the response emphasised the expectation that local authorities should be



focusing on reducing the need for care and providing effective support to families to enable them to remain together.

The basis for rejecting the recommendation appears to be that it is not possible to explicitly assess the impact of transferring the previously ring-fenced grant funding for edge of care services into the Revenue Support Grant. However, while accepting this reasoning, the Committee would like the Welsh Government to at least seek assurance on the level of ongoing spending on these services. This assurance may provide an indication of whether there has been any disinvestment from these services since the transfer into the RSG. We would therefore be grateful if you could confirm whether the Welsh Government will pro-actively monitor the level of spending on these services through its continued engagement with the local authority and children's services partners.

**Recommendation 10:** Members welcomed the additional allocation from the Welsh Government for children's services. This was the thrust of Committee focus - prevention is better than trying to deal with the outcome of children being removed. This is an area the Committee will maintain a keeping watch on and we would request regular updates on the outcomes for this funding together with how the additional funding is being monitored.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Ramsay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

**Nick Ramsay AM**  
Chair

