

Jane Dodds

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Member of the Senedd for
Mid and West Wales

Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister of Wales
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Dyddiad | Date: 4th July 2022

Pwnc | Subject: Independent review of Children's Services in Wales.

Annwyl Prif Weinidog,

I am writing to you following my question to you in the Siambr on July 7th to request an independent review of Children's Services in Wales. You commented that if there was a need for the review – looking at the gaps around services that may not have been covered – I could be in contact with you.

My reasons for the request for an independent review is as follows:

1. From my research, Wales has not had an independent review of children's services in the last 5 years. This makes Wales an outlier. England had an independent review of children's services in 2022 (with the response being a national implementation plan), Scotland had an independent root and branch of the care system in 2016 and published their report in 2020 resulting in a Keep the Promise pledge and finally, Northern Ireland commissioned an independent review of Children's Social Services in 2021 (I understand this has not been published as yet).
2. These reports – from my reading – have provided a vision for the local services, and have identified the needs for the country's children's services.
3. I am aware that the Programme for Government sets out your commitment to:
 - Prevent families breaking up by funding advocacy services for parents whose children are at risk of coming into care.
 - Provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care.
 - Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.
 - Eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after.
 - Fund regional residential services for children with complex needs ensuring their needs are met as close to home as possible and in Wales wherever practicable.
 - Strengthen public bodies in their role as 'corporate parent.'

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I support this programme but remain concerned that the resources, support and workforce are not in place, and that a review would ensure that we listen to the views of those who work at the front line across Wales and care experienced children and young people.

4. The reviews carried out in Wales – as I understand them are:
- a) The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) has undertaken several pieces of research on children in care and children’s social services including the care rates. Articles have included multi-agency working and outcomes for children looked after.
 - b) The Welsh Government established an Improving Outcomes for Children Advisory Group with a focus on looked after children.
 - c) The Senedd’s Public Accounts Committee’s report on care experienced children was published in 2018.
 - d) In 2019, the Care Inspectorate Wales published its ‘National overview report in relation to care experienced children and young people in Wales’. This assessed ‘how well local authorities in Wales are supporting children and young people who are looked after to be safe and achieve positive outcomes’.

None of these reviews have been focused on child protection services and preventative services, how well local authorities are able to recruit and retain social work staff nor an overall performance review. Crucially, none of these have been independent reviews where the terms of reference have been independently set. In addition, my office has found that there are around 20 distinct areas that were considered by inquiries in the other nations that have not been addressed to date in a Welsh context.

I would therefore like to request an independent review – which listens to front line workers and other social work staff focusing on the following:

1. The workforce feels confident in their role of protecting children, with the resources they need, and what support is needed for them to do their utmost to protect children.
2. That the Welsh Government are confident that Local Authorities are performing well and are aware of those Local Authorities that have good practice and those that need support
3. That there is a workforce plan for Wales which means Local Authorities in Wales are working together to attract and retain staff

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yn gywir,



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