

Gwenda Thomas AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Plant a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref GT/05257/12
Eich cyf/Your ref: P-03-236

William Powell AM
Committee Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

4 April 2012

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter dated 22 March relating to petition P-03-236, calling for a Charter for Grandchildren.

Since my last correspondence with the Petitions Committee on this issue in 2009, Social Services has faced a series of challenges changing public expectation, increasing demand for services, demographic change and reduced Welsh Government budgets mean that change in how we deliver these services is inevitable.

In February 2011 through Sustainable Social Services: A Framework for Action, we set out how the Welsh Government will take forward social services and social care to develop the high quality, responsive, citizen-centred social services that are essential to a successful Wales. At the heart of this is the need to ensure that citizens have a stronger voice and real control over services. Our forthcoming Social Services (Wales) Bill once enacted will give people a strong voice and real control. It will cover social care services for both children and adults, and will, as far as it is possible and appropriate, integrate the arrangement for both of these groups so that social care services are provided on the basis of need and not of age.

Supporting carers is a key element of the Welsh Government's health and social care agenda. Work to refresh the Carers Strategy for Wales and to implement fully the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010 is included within the Programme for Government as a priority for action.

The Family Justice Review, which was jointly commissioned by Welsh and UK Governments to fundamentally review the family justice system in England and Wales, has also published its final report (2011).

The UK Government response to the Review sets out major reforms to tackle delays and reform the system to strengthen parenting, as well as reinforcing the vital importance to children of relationships with their grandparents by fully reflecting this in supporting arrangements for separating parents in coming to an agreement about the future care of their children.

To support the work of the Family Justice Board for England and Wales in delivering these major reforms, I am establishing a new Family Justice Network in Wales to bring together the key players within the family justice system at an all-Wales level, to drive and deliver specific actions from the Review to achieve significant improvements in the system to deliver best possible outcomes for children and families in Wales.

Older people make significant social and economic contributions in their roles as grandparents and also as carers for their partners, family members or friends. In April 2011 the Welsh Government introduced a National Minimum Maintenance Allowance for foster carers. The policy approach was to promote family and friends carers (where this is consistent with childrens' best interests), and to ensure that such carers are supported by the local authority. The minimum allowance applies to all foster carers to meet the costs of bringing up a fostered child and ensure clarity in what constitutes the minimum allowance and to ensure that family and friends carers are not disadvantaged.

Since 1 April 2012, our Families First programme will be operating in every local authority. It is designed to support the development of effective multi-agency systems of support for families, particularly those living in poverty, with a clear emphasis on prevention and early intervention. The programme has 5 key elements including the requirement for a Team around the Family; a Joint Assessment Family Framework; the strategic commissioning of services; a commitment to shared learning and a disability focus. However, beyond that it is a non prescriptive programme and the local Action Plans have been developed in partnership. We have been clear that all types of family should be able to access support, and this extends to those not always included within the immediate family unit, such as grandparents and carers.

*Yours sincerely,
Gwenda.*

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