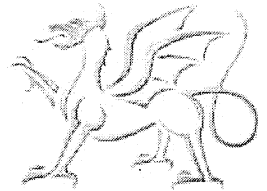


Q5 OIA 36056 14 June 2004

DP 629/03 - 07

Jane Hutt AM
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Our Ref: MB/JH/0891/04

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Alun Ffred Jones AM
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

29th July 2004

Dear Alun Ffred,

During the Assembly Plenary session on 16th June you asked a supplementary question to OAQ36056 about what steps the Government are taking to reduce the shortfall of 700 fostering families in Wales. I agreed to report back to you.

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the responsibility of local authorities. They are also responsible for deciding the levels of allowances to be paid to foster carers. The Assembly Government is working with them to address these issues.

Local authorities can use Assembly Government funding from the Children First programme to support fostering. The programme aims to ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care and that local authorities maintain a pool of foster care sufficient to provide quality placements to meet local need. The Children First programme is backed by substantial resources. £72 million has been made available to local authorities since 1999, with £31 million more available this year.

Additionally, a sum of £60,000 has been made available in 2004-05 to each local authority to improve placement services by, for example, developing a range of support services for foster carers.

In August 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government established an Implementation Group to assist in taking forward the recommendations in its draft Strategic Framework for Improving Placement Choice and Stability for Looked After Children. The overall aim is to promote joint working and collaboration, best practice and effective intervention based on knowledge of what works for children and their families.

One of the action points from the Strategic Framework document was for the Assembly to review fostering services in Wales. That review is in hand and is expected to be completed later this year. The aim is to support policy development and to help local authorities develop a strategic approach locally to providing a choice of placements for looked after children.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Research has been commissioned to assist the review process. The Fostering Network also undertook a survey of fostering services in Wales on behalf of the Assembly and have produced a report "Fit to Foster" (which is available on the Assembly website) that indicates a rise in foster carers with 155 extra families being recruited in 2003. The research and survey information has been published on The Children First website <http://www.childrenfirst.wales.gov.uk/content/placement/index-e.htm>

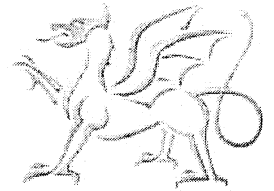
We will continue to support local authorities in developing their work in this area.

Yorwe,

Jane

Q5 OIA 36056 16 June 2004

Jane Hutt AM
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Our Ref: MB/JH/0891/04

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Lorraine Barrett AM
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

28th July 2004

Dear Lorraine,

During the Assembly Plenary session on 16th June you asked a supplementary question to OAQ36056 on the issue of allowances for relative foster carers. I agreed to report back to you.

Fostering services and payment of allowances is the responsibility of local authorities. We are aware that, in some areas, relative carers were paid at a lower rate than other foster carers.

A court judgement in 2003 on rates paid to relative foster carers in a specific case (known as the Munby judgement) led to Manchester City Council reviewing their policy on relative and friends fostering allowances. The impact of the judgement was that payments to relative and friends foster carers should be paid on the same basis as to other foster carers. Local Authorities across the country are now reviewing their rates in the light of this judgement.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services are also in force. These standards apply equally to all foster carers. A differential rate undermines the application of the standards to relative and friends carers. Bringing rates in line with non-relative rates will not only be consistent with the Munby judgement but will also support efforts to ensure all our fostering placements meet the highest standards whether the carers are relatives or non-relatives.

Additionally, local authorities can use Assembly Government funding from the Children First programme to support fostering. The programme aims to ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care and that local authorities maintain a pool of foster care sufficient to provide quality placements to meet local need. The Children First programme is backed by



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INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

substantial resources. £72 million has been made available to local authorities since 1999, with £31 million more available this year.

Thank you for raising this important issue.

Best wishes,

Jane