



Janet Finch-Saunders AM

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- 300 Diolch, Dirprwy Lywydd. Care-experienced children and young people in care are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Nearly two thirds of those individuals are in care, sadly, because of abuse or neglect. Now, there is a declared interest already across the floor here in supporting looked-after children, whilst also, too, looking at safely reducing those numbers.
- 301 Even the First Minister of Wales did make a pledge in his leadership manifesto to ensure that the problem is gripped and resolved. Unfortunately, however, the situation in Wales currently is slipping out of control. There are currently 6,845 children aged between 0 and 18 looked after by local authorities. This is a 2.1 per cent—21 per cent, sorry—increase since the end of the last Assembly term, in March 2016, and there has been a 34 per cent rise in the last 15 years. Wales had 109 looked-after children per 10,000 by the end of March last year, compared with 65 per 10,000 in England. Similarly, Northern Ireland and Scotland have recorded less serious rates, and the Commission on Justice in Wales has noted that what is striking is the marked and continual increase in the rate in Wales, and the widening gap with England.
- 302 I fear that Siân Gwenllïan, our colleague Assembly Member, is right—the policy of local authority reduction targets is a superficial solution. In fact, evidence points to that Wales is not getting to grips with the root causes of children ending up in care. The strategy does not seem to be working, so we need to urgently review the plans and programmes of assistance for children and their families.

Diolch, Ddirprwy Lywydd. Mae plant sydd wedi cael profiad o ofal a phobl ifanc sy'n derbyn gofal yn rhai o'r bobl fwyaf agored i niwed yn ein cymdeithas. Mae bron i ddwy ran o dair o'r unigolion hynny mewn gofal, yn anffodus, oherwydd camdriniaeth neu esgeulustod. Nawr, mae diddordeb wedi'i ddatgan eisoes ar draws y llawr yma mewn cefnogi plant sy'n derbyn gofal gan edrych hefyd ar leihau'r niferoedd hynny'n ddiogel.

Gwnaeth hyd yn oed Prif Weinidog Cymru addewid yn ei fanifesto arweinyddiaeth i sicrhau bod y broblem yn cael sylw ac yn cael ei datrys. Yn anffodus, fodd bynnag, ar hyn o bryd, mae'r sefyllfa yng Nghymru yn llithro allan o reolaeth. Ar hyn o bryd, mae 6,845 o blant rhwng 0 a 18 oed yn derbyn gofal gan awdurdodau lleol. Dyna gynnydd o 2.1 y cant—21 y cant, mae'n ddrwg gennyf—ers diwedd tymor diwethaf y Cynulliad, ym mis Mawrth 2016, a bu cynnydd o 34 y cant yn y 15 mlynedd diwethaf. Roedd gan Cymru 109 o blant sy'n derbyn gofal ym mhob 10,000 o'r boblogaeth erbyn diwedd mis Mawrth y llynedd, o gymharu â 65 ym mhob 10,000 o'r boblogaeth yn Lloegr. Yn yr un modd, mae Gogledd Iwerddon a'r Alban wedi cofnodi cyfraddau llai difrifol, ac mae'r Comisiwn ar Gyfiawnder yng Nghymru wedi nodi mai'r hyn sy'n drawiadol yw'r cynnydd amlwg a pharhaus yn y gyfradd yng Nghymru, a'r bwch sy'n lledu rhyngom ni â Lloegr.

Mae arnaf ofn fod Siân Gwenllïan, ein cyd-Aelod Cynulliad, yn iawn—mae polisi o dargedau lleihau i awdurdodau lleol yn ateb arwynebol. Mewn gwirionedd, mae'r dystiolaeth yn dangos nad yw Cymru'n mynd i'r afael â'r rhesymau sylfaenol pam fod plant yn cael eu rhoi mewn gofal. Ymddengys nad yw'r strategaeth yn gweithio, felly mae angen inni adolygu'r cynlluniau a'r rhaglenni cymorth i blant a'u teuluoedd ar frys.

303 Now, I'm all for prevention and early intervention, and appreciate that many of you are too, such as the ministerial advisory group, which has reinforced moves towards prevention. Importantly, the Public Accounts Committee's report highlighted that there is an opportunity to better use preventative spending to secure better long-term outcomes for our children. However, there is still room for improvement. For example, whilst £5 million was given to 22 local authorities to provide edge-of-care services in 2017-18, the justice commission in Wales has been sceptical about the success of the expenditure to date. Concern has also been raised by the Association of Directors of Social Services, they say the limited moneys councils have available is increasingly being taken up with the provision of the urgent help for children and families already at crisis point, leaving very little to invest in early intervention. Personally, I commend the success of the Troubled Families programme launched by the UK Government in 2012. It has seen a 32 per cent difference in the proportion of looked-after children. As Professor Jonathan Portes of King's College London stated, the

304 'most...significant impact of the programme is to reduce the number of children going into care'.

305 For those children who do enter the care system, the Welsh Government has a long way to go on improving life chances for these children. In terms of education, at key stage 2, just 58.3 per cent of looked-after children achieve the core subject indicator, compared with an 87.8 per cent average across Wales. At key stage 4, just 10.9 per cent achieve the core subject indicator, compared with roughly 60 per cent overall. Those facts come despite our current First Minister having co-published the 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: Strategy' in 2016. Progress may be achieved by considering the Skolfam initiative in Sweden and introducing a looked-after children premium.

Nawr, rwy'n llwyr o blaid atal ac ymyrryd yn gynnar, ac rwy'n derbyn bod llawer ohonoch chi hefyd, fel grŵp cynghori'r Gweinidog, sydd wedi atgyfnerthu symudiadau tuag at atal. Yn bwysig, tanlinellodd adroddiad y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus fod cyfle i ddefnyddio gwariant ataliol yn well i sicrhau canlyniadau hirdymor gwell i'n plant. Fodd bynnag, mae lle i wella o hyd. Er enghraifft, er bod £5 miliwn wedi'i roi i 22 awdurdod lleol i ddarparu gwasanaethau ar ffiniau gofal yn 2017-18, mae'r comisiwn cyfiawnder yng Nghymru wedi bod yn amheus ynglŷn â llwyddiant y gwariant hyd yma. Mynegwyd pryder hefyd gan Gymdeithas Cyfarwyddwyr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol, sy'n dweud bod yr arian cyfyngedig sydd ar gael yn mynd yn gynyddol ar ddarparu cymorth brys i blant a theuluoedd sydd eisoes mewn argyfwng, gan adael fawr ddim i'w fuddsoddi mewn ymyrraeth gynnar. Yn bersonol, rwy'n cymeradwyo llwyddiant y rhaglen Troubled Families a lansiwyd gan Lywodraeth y DU yn 2012. Mae wedi gweld gwahaniaeth o 32 y cant yng nghyfran y plant sy'n derbyn gofal. Fel y dywedodd yr Athro Jonathan Portes o Goleg y Brenin, Llundain,

effaith fwyaf sylweddol y rhaglen yw lleihau nifer y plant sy'n cael eu rhoi mewn gofal.

Mae gan Lywodraeth Cymru ffordd bell i fynd i wella cyfleoedd bywyd y plant sy'n mynd i mewn i'r system ofal. Mewn perthynas ag addysg, yng nghyfnod allweddol 2, dim ond 58.3 y cant o blant sy'n derbyn gofal sy'n cyflawni'r dangosydd pynciau craidd, o'i gymharu â chyfartaledd o 87.8 y cant ledled Cymru. Yng nghyfnod allweddol 4, dim ond 10.9 y cant sy'n cyflawni'r dangosydd pynciau craidd, o'i gymharu â thua 60 y cant yn gyffredinol. Daw'r ffeithiau hynny er i'n Prif Weinidog presennol gyd-gyhoeddi 'Codi uchelgais a chyrhaeddiad addysgol plant sy'n derbyn gofal yng Nghymru: Strategaeth' yn 2016. Gellir cyflawni cynnydd drwy ystyried menter Skolfam yn Sweden a chyflwyno premiwm plant sy'n derbyn gofal.

306 Now, in terms of mental health, NSPCC found that looked-after children are five times more likely to suffer from any mental health disorder, and nine times more likely to have a behavioural disorder. And, a recent study by Cardiff University showed some truly shocking facts about young people in residential care, such as: they have the lowest mental well-being score; 56 per cent have been exposed to bullying; and a greater percentage of them have been found to be drunk and used cannabis in the last month than children not in care. Now, whilst the Welsh Government has committed further investment into the emotional and mental health of all children and young people, I cannot overlook the fact that we in the CYPE Committee felt it was unclear. We need to know how much exactly is being targeted at looked-after children specifically. How is this being monitored in terms of its impact on delivering the 'Mind over matter' recommendations? In terms of a brighter future, findings by the National Audit Office and the Children's Society highlight that care leavers are at increased risk of homelessness and poverty.

307 Wales can and should facilitate better futures for our children than this, and there are steps that we can take. For example, again, the Public Accounts Committee's report recommended that all care-experienced children are routinely made aware of their right to an advocate and provided with clear information about how to access the range of available advocacy services. These are not big asks, but they need to be in place. However, TGP Cymru recently found that only 5 per cent to 10 per cent of children's homes run by the private sector have residential visiting advocacy arrangements in place. So, we should also act on the calls made by the Children's Society to help ensure that Welsh local authorities are identifying European national young children in and who have left their care, so that they can be supported with securing their status or citizenship if required. Similarly, we need to support placements. The Fostering Network has reported that Wales needs another 550 foster families to ensure that children get to the right home first. If we do not achieve this, some children face being split up from their own siblings. Local authorities have started joining the recruiting challenge, but your Government needs to be doing more to assist them.

Nawr, o ran iechyd meddwl, canfu NSPCC fod plant sy'n derbyn gofal bum gwaith yn fwy tebygol o ddioddef anhwylder iechyd meddwl o ryw fath, a naw gwaith yn fwy tebygol o gael anhwylder ymddygiadol. Ac mewn astudiaeth ddiweddar gan Brifysgol Caerdydd, dangoswyd ffeithiau gwirioneddol frawychus am bobl ifanc mewn gofal preswyl, er enghraifft: hwy sy'n sgorio leiaf o ran lles meddyliol; mae 56 y cant wedi cael eu bwlio; a gwelwyd bod canran uwch ohonynt wedi bod yn feddw ac wedi defnyddio cannabis yn ystod y mis diwethaf na phlant nad ydynt mewn gofal. Nawr, er bod Llywodraeth Cymru wedi addo rhagor o fuddsoddiad ar gyfer iechyd emosiynol a meddyliol pob plentyn a pherson ifanc, ni allaf anwybyddu'r ffaith ein bod ni yn y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg, yn teimlo ei fod yn aneglur. Mae angen inni wybod faint yn union sy'n cael ei dargedu at blant sy'n derbyn gofal yn benodol. Sut y caiff ei fonitro o ran ei effaith ar gyflawni argymhellion 'Cadernid meddwl'? O ran dyfodol mwy disglair, mae canfyddiadau gan y Swyddfa Archwilio Genedlaethol a Chymdeithas y Plant yn dangos bod y rhai sy'n gadael gofal yn wynebu mwy o risg o fod yn ddigartref ac o fod yn dlawd.

Fe allai ac fe ddylai Cymru sicrhau dyfodol gwell na hyn i'n plant, ac mae yna gamau y gallwn eu cymryd. Er enghraifft, unwaith eto, argymhellodd adroddiad y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus y dylai pob plentyn sydd wedi cael profiad o ofal gael gwybod fel mater o drefn am eu hawl i eiriolwr a chael gwybodaeth glir ynglŷn â sut i gael gafael ar yr ystod o wasanaethau eiriolaeth sydd ar gael. Nid yw'r rhain yn ofynion mawr, ond mae angen iddynt fod ar waith. Fodd bynnag, canfu TGP Cymru yn ddiweddar mai dim ond 5 y cant i 10 y cant o gartrefi plant yn y sector preifat sydd â threfniadau eiriolaeth ymweliadau preswyl ar waith. Felly, dylem weithredu hefyd ar alwadau gan Gymdeithas y Plant i helpu i sicrhau bod awdurdodau lleol Cymru yn nodi plant ifanc sy'n wladolion Ewropeaidd yn eu gofal, ac sydd wedi gadael eu gofal, fel y gellir eu cynorthwyo i sicrhau eu statws neu eu dinasyddiaeth os oes angen. Yn yr un modd, mae angen i ni gefnogi trefniadau lleoli plant. Mae'r Rhwydwaith Maethu wedi adrodd bod Cymru angen 550 o deuluoedd maeth ychwanegol i sicrhau bod plant yn cyrraedd y cartref cywir yn gyntaf. Os na lwyddwn i gyflawni hyn, bydd rhai plant yn wynebu cael eu gwahanu oddi wrth eu brodyr a'u chwiorydd eu hunain. Mae awdurdodau lleol wedi dechrau ymuno â'r her recriwtio, ond mae angen i'ch Llywodraeth wneud mwy i'w cynorthwyo.

308 The same is true in relation to adoptive parents, which does bring me to my final point. I have a constituent who has one foster child and one adopted child. She desperately, passionately wants to incorporate the foster child into the family and become an adopted parent. Upon asking her whether this was going to happen she said 'no', and this was simply due to the significant decrease in support that would follow. Quite often, when people move from the fostering model to the adoptive model, you're very much on your own to get on with it, and it doesn't work like that. The support should still be there for adoptive parents to keep those families together, and I've actually dealt with two other cases where siblings have potentially faced being separated because adopting siblings can be quite intensive in terms of support requirements. There is no duty on anybody to support adoptive parents. So, I ask you, Deputy Minister, to really look at this and let's try and get more of our children, where needed, into adoptive parent situations.

309 The situation for looked-after children in Wales can be quite depressing, but I have hope for the future, and I have hope for these children. Working together cross-party here and elsewhere, I actually believe that our motion today speaks common sense, it is what is required, and it would be really refreshing if the Welsh Government could support our motion today. Thank you. Diolch.

Mae'r un peth yn wir am rieni sy'n mabwysiadu, sy'n dod â mi at fy mhwynt olaf. Mae gennyf etholwraig sydd ag un plentyn maeth ac un plentyn wedi'i fabwysiadu. Mae hi'n daer, yn angerddol, eisiau cynnwys y plentyn maeth yn y teulu a dod yn rhiant sy'n mabwysiadu. Ar ôl gofyn iddi a oedd hyn yn mynd i ddigwydd, dywedodd 'na', a'r rheswm am hynny yn syml oedd y gostyngiad sylweddol yn y cymorth a fyddai'n dilyn. Yn aml iawn, pan fydd pobl yn symud o'r model maethu i'r model mabwysiadu, rydych ar eich pen eich hun i raddau helaeth iawn, ac nid yw'n gweithio fel hynny. Dylai'r cymorth ddal i fod ar gael i rieni sy'n mabwysiadu er mwyn cadw'r teuluoedd hyn gyda'i gilydd, ac rwyf wedi ymdrin â dau achos arall lle mae brodyr a chwiorydd wedi wynebu cael eu gwahanu o bosibl oherwydd gall y gofynion cymorth sydd ynghlwm wrth fabwysiadu brodyr a chwiorydd fod yn eithaf dwys. Nid oes dyletswydd ar unrhyw un i gefnogi rhieni sy'n mabwysiadu. Felly, Ddirprwy Weinidog, rwy'n gofyn i chi edrych o ddifrif ar hyn a cheisio cael mwy o'n plant, lle bo angen, i mewn i sefyllfaoedd lle mae rhieni'n mabwysiadu.

Gall sefyllfa plant sy'n derbyn gofal yng Nghymru fod yn eithaf digalon, ond mae gennyf obaith ar gyfer y dyfodol, ac mae gennyf obaith i'r plant hyn. Gan weithio gyda'n gilydd yn drawsbleidiol yma ac mewn mannau eraill, credaf mai synnwyr cyffredin yw ein cynnig heddiw, dyma sydd ei angen, a byddai'n braf iawn pe gallai Llywodraeth Cymru gefnogi ein cynnig heddiw. Diolch.