



2023-0001484CCPO

Claire Coutinho MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

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Harry Catherall
Chief Executive, Oldham Council
By email: harry.catherall@oldham.gov.uk

8 February 2023

Dear Mr Catherall,

Thank you for your letter of 3 January, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the resolution passed by Oldham Council on 14 December on Investing in Children's Social Workers. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

I appreciate Oldham Council outlining its concerns regarding a shortage of qualified social workers and the role of agency within the social care sector and recognise many of the concerns raised.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was clear that current agency rates in children's social care are too high, and I support the case made by the Review for urgent and extensive system-wide reform.

On 2 February we published our 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' consultation, setting out our implementation strategy for children's social care and available at: tinyurl.com/56CK6TS7. This strategy is backed by investing £200 million by 2024-25 to address urgent issues facing children and families now, to lay the foundations for whole system reform, and set national direction for change. This is in addition to the £50 million funding each year for recruiting and developing child and family social workers to have the capacity, skills, and knowledge to support and protect vulnerable children.

Alongside our implementation strategy we have also launched a consultation on a range of proposals intended to increase social worker workforce stability and reduce agency use. This consultation invites views on a set of national rules on the engagement of agency social work resource and we would encourage your participation. Further information on the consultation is available at: tinyurl.com/44APY9V7.

With regard to the other points raised, departmental officials have spoken to their Northern Ireland counterparts to understand their plans in this space. We are keen to continue discussion and share learning while appreciating that Northern Ireland has a different reliance on agency resource and different scale to England.

With regard to staff banks, we are currently seed funding local approaches such as the North West staff bank to learn more about the model, and we will keep this recommendation under review.

Thank you for writing on this important matter. I hope you will find this reply useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Claire Coutinho MP
Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing