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Minister for Health and Social Services
Welsh Government
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The Fostering Network
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Tuesday 15 December 2020

Dear Minister

I hope this finds you and your family well at this challenging time and thank you for all you are doing to manage the impact of coronavirus in Wales.

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. In Wales we have a strong membership base with over 5,400 foster carers, all 22 local authority fostering services and the majority of independent fostering agencies. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research, in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

I am contacting you to ask you to ensure that foster carers in Wales are prioritised in the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme alongside other social care professionals such as children's residential home workers and social workers.

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has taken steps to ensure foster carers can continue to care for children, such as giving foster carers access to priority testing and recognising their essential work by offering them social care worker cards which granted them concessions such as priority access to supermarkets during the height of the pandemic.

There are three fundamental reasons why we wish you to consider this request as a matter of priority:

- Foster carers are required to meet social workers and other professionals as part of the care they offer to young people. Most fostered children also meet with birth families on a regular basis to ensure contact is maintained. As a result, many foster carers and their families are exposed to multiple households in their fostering role which increases the risk of contracting the virus.
- The foster care workforce is an older population. The latest Ofsted data in England, which shows that, as of 31 March 2020, 65 per cent of foster carers



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were over 50 years old and 25 per cent were over 60. As the risk from coronavirus increases with age, foster carers are at a raised risk and should be protected as far as is possible to ensure it is safe for them to continue to foster.

- As part of the social care workforce, foster carers care for the vast majority of children in care. The numbers of children entering the care system has increased dramatically in the last few years. It is vital to recruit and retain foster carers across Wales to ensure we provide loving and stable homes for children and young people who can no longer live with their own families. We are very concerned about the many pressures that foster carers face. This has undoubtedly increased as a result of the pandemic and we cannot afford to see a further drop in the number of foster carers who are willing to provide a home for our most vulnerable children.

There is no doubt that prioritising foster carers alongside other social care workers for the coronavirus vaccine would ensure we protect the health of one of the most critical groups in society. Foster carers perform a vital role we simply cannot do without. Awarding priority status would also represent a huge morale boost to foster families across the country who have put their own lives on hold – and at risk – to provide loving and stable homes to nearly 5,000 children in care.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Colin Turner

Director of Wales

The Fostering Network

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