

Pre-appointment hearing report

The preferred candidate for the post
of Children's Commissioner for Wales

December 2021



1. Introduction

Pre-appointment hearings

- 1.** Pre-appointment hearings can be carried out for high profile public appointments that have a significant impact on public services. They are held after a recruitment panel has identified a preferred candidate for a post, but before the appointment is formalised. The hearings provide an opportunity for a committee to scrutinise the preferred candidate for a post, then to support an appointment or raise concerns about it before the preferred candidate is appointed. In the Senedd, they are carried out in public by a committee whose remit includes the work of the post-holder.
- 2.** There are a number of public appointments that may¹ be subject to Senedd pre-appointment hearings. Of those, the Senedd makes the final appointment to some, the Queen to some (usually following a Senedd-led recruitment process), and the Welsh Government to others. Public appointments made by the Welsh Government are known as 'ministerial appointments'.
- 3.** A list of ministerial appointments that may be subject to pre-appointment hearings has been approved by the Welsh Government, and will be reviewed regularly. The Children's Commissioner for Wales ("the Commissioner") is included on that list, although this will be the first time a Senedd Committee has undertaken a pre-appointment hearing for that particular role.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales

- 4.** The office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales was established by the Care Standards Act 2000, an Act of the UK Parliament.² The principal aim of the Commissioner is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. The Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in carrying out their role.
- 5.** The Commissioner's remit covers the devolved powers of the Senedd relating to children and young people up to the age of 18 who live (or normally live) in Wales, young people up to the age of 21 if they have previously been in care, and young people up to the age of 25 if they have previously been in care and are still in education.

¹ It is for the relevant Senedd Committee to determine whether it wishes to carry out a pre-recruitment hearing.

² Legislation.gov.uk, '[Care Standards Act 2000](#)', viewed on 29/11/21

6. The Commissioner's powers are set out below.

"1) The power to review the effect on children of exercise of functions or proposed exercise of functions of defined public bodies including Welsh Government.

2) The power to review and monitor how effective are the arrangements for complaints, whistleblowing and advocacy of defined public bodies in safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of children.

3) The power to examine cases in respect of individual children in certain circumstances.

4) The power to provide assistance to a child in certain circumstances.

5) The power to make representations to the Welsh Government about any matters affecting the rights and welfare of children which concern her and for which she does not have the power to act.

6) The Commissioner does not have the power to act in a number of defined circumstances: - Matters that have not been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales which include immigration and asylum, child poverty, justice and policing, and children in the military. - Where CAF/CASS (the Children and Court Advisory Service) is able to act. - Where Welsh Ministers have functions in respect of family proceedings. - From enquiring about or reporting on any matter that is or has been the subject of legal proceedings."³

7. The Commissioner's office employs 26 people as of 31 March 2021.⁴ The office's total expenditure for the 2020-21 financial year was £1.7m.⁵

8. The appointment process for the Children's Commissioner for Wales is set out in The Children's Commissioner for Wales (Appointment) Regulations 2000 as amended.⁶ The Commissioner is appointed by the First Minister after taking into account the views of "relevant children as to any candidates interviewed for the appointment" and "the advice of any selection

³ Children's Commissioner for Wales, '[CCfW Powers Paper](#)', viewed on 01/12/21

⁴ Children's Commissioner for Wales, '[Annual Report 2020-21](#)', page 118, viewed on 01/12/21

⁵ Children's Commissioner for Wales, '[Accounts 2020-21](#)', page 39, viewed on 01/12/21

⁶ Legislation.gov.uk, '[The Children's Commissioner for Wales \(Appointment\) Regulations 2000](#)', amended by '[The Children's Commissioner for Wales \(Appointment\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2007](#)', both viewed on 29/11/21

panel, established for the purpose of interviewing candidates" (referred to as the "cross party panel" in the following section). The Commissioner's term of office is seven years.

9. Sally Holland is the current postholder. She was appointed in April 2015, and her seven-year tenure ends in April 2022.

2. The recruitment process

10. Before the post was advertised, the Welsh Government held two workshops with children and young people to seek their views on the three most important characteristics of the next Children's Commissioner for Wales. They identified the following:

1. An understanding nature
2. The ability to represent all children and young people in Wales and stand up for their rights
3. Excellent communication and listening skills

11. The post was advertised for three weeks, from 7 to 28 June 2021. Candidates were provided with an information pack, which contained guidance on how to apply, the recruitment timetable, information about the recruitment process (including that there may be a pre-appointment hearing), background to the role, a role description (see Annex A), a person specification (see Annex B) and other information relevant to the role.

12. The vacancy was advertised through marketing agency Golley Slater. It was advertised online in the following publications:

- The Guardian
- Children and Young People Now
- Community Care
- Fish4Jobs
- The online platform for The Western Mail and Daily Post
- Diversity Jobsite Network
- Golwg

- Y Cymro Banner

13. Additional targeted advertisement was undertaken:

- with children's sector organisations;
- with equality and diversity organisations;
- through the Children's Commissioner's Office and Children in Wales newsletters;
- through Dysg, the Welsh Government's education and training newsletter; and
- through Children's Rights Wales social media channels.

14. Candidates applied via the Welsh Government's public appointment website. They were asked to complete an application form and upload two personal statements (one written for children and young people, and one written for adults) and a CV. 27 applications were received. The recruitment process proceeded as follows.

First sift: A panel of Welsh Government officials⁷ considered the 27 applications and recommended that 11 candidates were taken forward to the next stage of recruitment.

Ranking by children and young people: A group of children and young people ranked the 11 candidates' personal statements.

Second sift: The Minister for Social Justice chaired a cross party panel to sift applications from the 11 candidates. The panel recommended that six candidates were taken forward to the next stage of recruitment. The panel comprised the Minister for Social Justice (Chair); Sian Gwenllian, MS; LauraAnn Jones, MS; Jane Dodds, MS; Ruth Marks, Senior Independent Panel Member; and Claire Bennett, Director of Communities and Tackling Poverty (in an observer capacity).

Presentations to school children: The six shortlisted candidates delivered a presentation to, and answered questions from, a year six class of school children. The presentations and question and answer sessions were filmed, and provided to the young persons' panel and to the cross party panel. One candidate withdrew at this stage.

⁷ The panel comprised: Claire Bennett, Director of Communities and Tackling Poverty Division (Chair); Owain Lloyd, Director of Education; Karen Cornish, Deputy Director Children and Families Division; Rhys Davies, Head of Children's Branch; and Ruth Marks, Senior Independent Panel Member.

Interview with the young persons' panel: The five remaining candidates were interviewed by a young persons' panel, which submitted scores and feedback on the candidates' performance to the cross party panel. The young persons' panel agreed that there were three appointable candidates.

Interview with the cross party panel: The five remaining candidates were interviewed by the cross party panel. They considered the range of feedback from children and young people, the school presentations and the feedback from the young person's panel before making their recommendation for the final candidate. The cross party panel agreed that there were three appointable candidates (the same three as the young persons' panel). On behalf of the panel, the Minister for Social Justice recommended to the First Minister that one of those candidates, Rocio Cifuentes, be appointed subject to a successful pre-appointment hearing with the Committee.

3. The Welsh Government's preferred candidate: Rocio Cifuentes

15. Rocio Cifuentes is currently the chief executive of the Ethnic Youth Support Team, a role that she has held since September 2007. She is a member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Wales Committee, the Chair of the Welsh Refugee Coalition, a trustee of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), and a trustee of Mixtup Swansea (a youth club for 11-25 year olds). Her previous professional experience includes positions at the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, and Swansea University.

16. Ms Cifuentes' and her family came to Wales from Chile as political refugees when she was a baby. She was brought up in Swansea and went on to attend Cambridge University, where she read social and political science.

4. The pre-appointment hearing

Before the hearing

17. The Welsh Government's Public Bodies Unit provided the Committee with the following in advance of the hearing:

- Ms Cifuentes' application form, CV, a personal statement for adults, and a personal statement for children.

- A briefing summarising the recruitment process and setting out diversity data of the 27 candidates at the application stage, the 11 who passed through the first sift, and the 6 who passed through the second sift.
- A copy of the information pack that was provided to candidates when the post was advertised.

18. These documents were circulated to Committee members as private papers before the hearing.

19. The Committee also asked Ms Cifuentes to complete a short questionnaire in advance of the pre-appointment hearing to provide a framework for Committee members' questioning. These questions, and Ms Cifuentes' responses, are set out in Annex C.

20. Laura Ann Jones MS and Sian Gwenllian MS, members of this Committee, were also part of the Welsh Government's cross-party recruitment panel. The Chair and the members agreed that it was not appropriate for them to attend the pre-appointment hearing, receive meeting papers relating to the hearing, or take part in any private Committee discussion about the hearing. Sioned Williams MS substituted for Sian Gwenllian MS for all agenda items relating to the hearing.

The hearing

21. During the hearing, which lasted around an hour, we asked Ms Cifuentes a range of questions about how she intends to fulfil the role of Children's Commissioner for Wales. These were intended to explore further the responses that Ms Cifuentes provided to the Committee in her written questionnaire response. Some areas of discussion are summarised below. A full transcript of the hearing is available online.⁸

Children's rights

22. Ms Cifuentes told us that children's rights would "absolutely be fundamental to everything that I would do, everything that I would stand for, everything that I would be speaking about".⁹ She suggested that the language of children's rights has become part of our vocabulary in

⁸ Welsh Parliament, 'Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021', viewed on 14/12/21

⁹ Welsh Parliament, 'Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021', paragraph 142, viewed on 14/12/21

Wales. She aims to build on her predecessor’s work in ensuring that children from a range of backgrounds understand their rights, and that their rights are upheld.¹⁰

Working across the whole of Wales

23. We asked Ms Cifuentes about the challenges she might face when fulfilling her role across the diverse geographical areas of Wales. She explained that, in her current role, she has had the opportunity to meet children, young people, community organisations and work with local authorities across the country. She has also carried out, or commissioned, evidence-based research to develop an understanding of the realities of life for children and young people in those different locations. She acknowledged that her previous work with refugees and asylum seekers has been mainly concentrated in urban areas. If appointed as Children’s Commissioner, she would want to travel to rural areas, towns and smaller cities to get to know those areas better.¹¹

Measuring the impact of her work

24. Ms Cifuentes set out the three priorities for her tenure in her written questionnaire response, set out in Annex C. We asked her how she would measure her impact in these areas. For her first priority, reducing inequalities and discrimination, she explained that she could use existing data (such as health outcomes data, rates of entering higher/further education, etc.). She would need to take advice on how to measure the impact of her work in relation to her second priority, to protect and enhance children’s natural environment. However, children and young people would be central to that process. Ms Cifuentes said she would measure the impact of her work in her third priority area - to improve children and young people’s physical and mental wellbeing – by using existing data and by consulting directly with children and young people.¹²

Engaging hard-to-reach children and young people

25. When we asked her about how she would engage with hard-to-reach children, Ms Cifuentes drew on her experience working with refugees and asylum seekers and on a volunteer role working directly with children and young people. She explained she would reach out and identify groups of young people through the “flourishing third sector” in Wales, through

¹⁰ Welsh Parliament, ‘[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)’, paragraphs 139-140, viewed on 14/12/21

¹¹ Welsh Parliament, ‘[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)’, paragraphs 145-147, viewed on 14/12/21

¹² Welsh Parliament, ‘[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)’, paragraphs 156-158, viewed on 14/12/21

schools, and through other formal education settings. But, she added that "to really reach the most marginalised there's nothing like getting out there, getting on a train, and getting into those communities, spending time listening to [children and young people], just having a chat." She added that:

"I think it's really important to have the integrity and commitment to actually act on what they tell you, because there's nothing worse than engaging with anyone [...] there's nothing worse than then going away and doing nothing with that"¹³

The day-to-day issues facing children and young people

26. We asked Ms Cifuentes about how she would tackle issues that can affect some children and young people on a day-to-day basis, such as the sexualisation of children, a lack of job opportunities, drug misuse and the impact of social media. Ms Cifuentes explained that aside from her professional experience, she had lived experience of growing up in Wales. She noted that Wales has significantly higher poverty and unemployment rates than other parts of the UK. She stressed the positive work of the third sector and statutory organisations to support children and young people. However, she felt that "more could be done to join up those services" and that "there is often a very disjointed approach" to provision. She stressed that she would empower children and young people to develop their own solutions to some of these problems, and that "working together we can join up all the dots".¹⁴

Independence from the Welsh Government

27. The Commissioner is accountable to, and funded by, the Welsh Government. We asked Ms Cifuentes how she would stay truly independent from the Welsh Government. She noted that, despite the current accountability arrangements, the Commissioner's Office had worked independently over the last 20 years. Although it may be time to review the accountability arrangements again, Ms Cifuentes explained that she is driven by her own values, principles of social justice, so her first line of accountability would be to children and young people, not to the government. She stressed the importance of the Commissioner's office's "soft powers", as

¹³ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)', paragraphs 164-165, viewed on 14/12/21

¹⁴ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)', paragraphs 178-180, viewed on 14/12/21

well as its legal powers, to exert "moral authority" to influence the Welsh Government and other public bodies. Doing so, she stated, was her "primary motivation and statutory duty".¹⁵

The Welsh language

28. Ms Cifuentes is not currently a fluent Welsh speaker. We asked her about the requirement of the role to learn Welsh within a year, and her understanding of the specific needs and rights of Welsh-speaking children. Ms Cifuentes explained that she was brought up bilingually, and understands the importance of multi-lingualism:

"Learning a language and being able to speak one's own mother tongue and expressing yourself in that language is crucial to maintaining and celebrating the culture, heritage and identity of a country."¹⁶

Ms Cifuentes added that the Welsh language should be celebrated, protected, invested in, and actively promoted. She would welcome discussions with the Welsh Language Commissioner to see how their different areas of could work align.¹⁷

5. Committee view

The candidate

29. The Committee sees no reason not to endorse Rocio Cifuentes' appointment to the role of Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Conclusion 1. The Committee sees no reason not to endorse the Welsh Government's preferred candidate for the post of Children's Commissioner for Wales.

30. However, we urge Ms Cifuentes and her office to reflect on the following as they plan and deliver their work over the next seven years.

¹⁵ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)', paragraphs 183-186, viewed on 14/12/21

¹⁶ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)', paragraph 201, viewed on 14/12/21

¹⁷ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 13/12/2021](#)', paragraph 202, viewed on 14/12/21

- How the Commissioner and her office can effectively engage with children and young people across the whole of the country, including in those geographical areas in which the Commissioner may need to build new professional networks.
- How the impact of the Commissioner's Office's work can be measured and evaluated, particularly when that work relates to problems that are as complex and multi-faceted as climate change.
- How the Commissioner can translate her high-level ambitions into tangible, concrete action that will make a real difference to the day-to-day lives of children and young people.
- The value of listening to children and young people, even if the Commissioner is not always able to take action based on what she has heard.
- How the Commissioner's Office can ensure that its work recognises that all of Wales is Welsh-speaking, and the particular challenges that face Welsh-speaking children and young people.

We will build these areas into our future scrutiny of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and her office.

The recruitment process

31. We recognise that the Senedd currently has no formal role in the recruitment process to the post of Children's Commissioner for Wales. We also recognise that the purpose of a pre-appointment hearing is to scrutinise a candidate for reasons of public transparency, and not to repeat the interview process.

32. However, the pre-appointment scrutiny process *does* require us to make a judgement about the suitability of the preferred candidate for this post. We have found it challenging to do that meaningfully without more involvement in the recruitment process and more information about the field of applicants.

33. We urge the Welsh Government to reflect on how it can support Senedd committees more fully to ensure effective pre-appointment scrutiny of ministerial appointments.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should involve Senedd committees more meaningfully in the recruitment process associated with ministerial appointments. This will require the Government to engage with the relevant Committee at the start of the recruitment process. Depending on the post and the views of the relevant Committee, this could include:

- Providing Committee members with the application forms, CVs, etc. of any shortlisted candidates.
- A representative of the recruitment panel briefing the Committee before the pre-appointment hearing to give an overview of the recruitment process, discuss the field of applicants and respond to any questions from Committee members.
- Involving the Committee more formally in the recruitment (e.g. by Committee representatives being observer-members of the recruitment panel).

34. The Children's Commissioner for Wales is a critical role with a significant impact on children, young people and public services in Wales. The Senedd should have real influence over the recruitment process. We note the views of our predecessor Committee on this issue:

*"Recommendation 16. That the Welsh Government, at the earliest legislative opportunity, transfer responsibility for the appointment, accountability, and funding of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to the Senedd."*¹⁸

And the views of the current Children's Commissioner for Wales:

*"This has been a call that I've made consistently during my time as commissioner, as did my predecessor, and I suspect my successor will as well. For me, it's just a fundamental principle, as much as anything [...] I'm currently appointed and funded by a body that I have a statutory remit to scrutinise and to review [...] I think that the appointment by the Senedd and funding by the Senedd would be a much more appropriate place for the commissioner to be."*¹⁹

Whilst we have not done any specific work on this issue, based on the Commissioner's remit and responsibilities and on our experience of this pre-appointment hearing process, we agree that the Children's Commissioner for Wales should be a Senedd appointment.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should transfer responsibility for the appointment to the position of Children's Commissioner for Wales to the Senedd.

¹⁸ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: Children's rights in Wales](#)', August 2020, page 121, viewed on 14/12/21

¹⁹ Welsh Parliament, '[Children, Young People and Education Committee: 18/11/2021](#)', paragraph 69, viewed on 14/12/21

Annex A: Children's Commissioner for Wales Role description

You will safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of all children and young people up to the age of 18 (and in some cases to 25) in Wales. This is the principle aim of the Commissioner as set out in legislation.

You will inspire people to achieve better outcomes for all children and young people in Wales under all areas of policy, legislation, decision-making and practice that affect their lives directly or indirectly.

You will continue to stimulate national discussion and debate about achieving a society that respects children and young people and places a real value on offering them the opportunities they need to fulfil their individual potential.

You will provide national leadership and make a positive difference to children and young people's lives by establishing and maintaining strong partnerships and powerful relationships with people and organisations.

You will have regard to and champion the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – an international charter which sets out the minimum standards for children and young people wherever they live. The UNCRC underpins all of the Commissioner's work.

You will lead on the engagement with and scrutiny of Government and other organisations to deliver responsive services shaped by evidence and the thinking and opinions of children and young people.

You will fulfil the role of Corporation Sole and Accounting Officer for the organisation, ensuring ongoing transparent financial accounting, monitoring and review mechanisms are maintained.

You will lead and manage the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and will ensure it continues to be a strong, confident, inspiring and resilient all-Wales organisation that works effectively as a team, with robust governance and business structures, to ensure that children and young people are a national priority.

Key areas of responsibility for the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales

The effectiveness of the Commissioner's Office

- To develop and share as appropriate the Commissioner's long term, evidence based, strategic vision and operational work plans, including ensuring the organisation maintains and develops an effective work plan to fulfil their legal remit.
- To act with significant autonomy and integrity in engaging with, challenging and advising regulated bodies and organisations.
- To ensure that there is independent scrutiny for the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales which includes a group of diverse critical friends to advise, support and challenge the Commissioner to discharge their duties; and working with relevant Senedd Committees to maintain a sound governance structure.
- To foster and maintain a culture of high performance and quality outcomes within the Children's Commissioner's Team, taking account of new ways of working and evidence of what works including supporting dispersed teams and those engaged in case work.
- To maintain high standards of outputs from the organisation from consultation responses to reports.
- To fulfil the legal requirements of the Commissioner's Office as a public body, for example requirements under the Equality Act and Welsh Language Act.
- To build and maintain an effective working relationship with the sponsor team within Welsh Government.

Developing best practice policy and response

- To review the way the Senedd Cymru, Welsh Government and other public bodies exercise their functions in relation to children and young people.
 - To undertake examinations, make reports on particular matters and to report annually to the Welsh Government on the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales on relevant matters affecting children and young people.
 - To ensure that Government and organisations in Wales seek to continually improve services for children and young people and where challenges are identified work with those organisations to find solutions.
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- To influence the development of national policy relating to children and young people and monitor the framework and effectiveness of implementation.
- To consider and make representations to the Senedd Cymru, the Welsh Youth Parliament and the Welsh Government about any matter affecting the rights or welfare of children and young people in Wales.

Communicating and collaboratively raising the profile of children's rights

- To continue to increase the awareness of children's rights and of the Office of the Children's Commissioner through a range of means including proactive engagement with children and young people across Wales.
- To have an ongoing visible presence online using social media platforms; to promote positive images of children and young people in Wales and challenge negative images should they arise.
- To develop and maintain an effective relationship with the media.

Participation and engagement

- To develop and maintain creative and engaging means of ensuring that the voices and opinions of children and young people inform the working of the Commissioner's Office, the Children's Commissioner's corporate and annual work plans and Annual Report to the Welsh Government.
- To be committed to listening to children and young people using their experiences, evidence and opinions to drive action and change, building on existing good practice.
- To create and provide innovative opportunities for children and young people to have their voices and opinions heard by the Commissioner's Office as well as other people and organisations.

Investigations and advice

- To act as a source of help and support for children and young people, (or those who care for them) who feel that they have been, or perceive themselves to have been, treated in a prejudicial manner, including when there is a broader principle at stake.

- To use information gathered from investigations, case work and helpline statistics positively in order to influence systemic change.

Partnership working

- To advise and work in partnership with statutory, private and non-statutory organisations.
- To work with similar bodies in areas of mutual interest, to ensure effective access to their services for particular children and young people.
- To develop and maintain co-operative working relationships with Children's Commissioners and Ombudsmen in other countries in the UK and abroad, including sharing information where appropriate and supporting the development of contacts among child and youth led organisations.
- To proactively engage with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on its work to monitor implementation of the UNCRC.

Annex B: Children's Commissioner for Wales Person specification

To be considered, you must be able to demonstrate that you have the qualities, skills and experience to meet all the essential criteria for appointment.

Essential criteria

The First Minister is seeking to appoint an individual who can demonstrate the following:

- the ability to demonstrate experience of engaging with and representing the views of others, in particular leading diversity and inclusion for marginalised or under-represented groups, and standing up for their rights;
- an understanding nature alongside an understanding of the particular challenges of representing the views of children and young people;
- a sound knowledge base of and a commitment to furthering children's human rights;
- exceptional influencing skills, including the ability to listen, communicate and inspire confidence with a diverse range of stakeholders from children and young people to decision makers at the most senior level;
- the ability to express complex issues simply and articulately and present evidence in a clear and compelling way;
- independence of judgement and the ability to quickly analyse complex problems and identify potential solutions;
- the confidence and competence to speak out on issues affecting children and young people in Wales, including to the media, Government and Senedd Cymru;
- experience of effective leadership of an organisation or distinct unit within a larger organisation, including financial and people management;
- self-motivation and the ability to be pro-active, determined, positive and resilient;
- the enthusiasm to be an effective ambassador to improve outcomes for all children and young people;

- professional integrity, credibility and sensitivity to maintain confidence and trust; and
- proven knowledge of the political landscape in Wales and legislative position in respect of children's rights and an understanding of how the Children's Commissioner can operate effectively in this context.

Annex C: Completed questionnaire returned by Ms Cifuentes before the pre-appointment hearing

Question 1: What is your motivation for applying to be the Children's Commissioner for Wales?

My main motivation for applying for the role is my desire and drive to make Wales a more equal and fairer place, in particular for children growing up in Wales. I have been driven by a quest for social justice all my life, rooted in my own experience as someone who came to Wales as a baby with my parents seeking refuge from the brutal Pinochet dictatorship in Chile in the 1970's.

As a direct beneficiary of a benevolent human rights framework which was actually implemented in Wales, through its policies, its institutions and most importantly its people, I am firmly committed to making human rights a reality for everyone living in Wales. In particular for children, who have lost so much during the pandemic, and whose early life experiences are so pivotal to the rest of their lives.

My motivation also comes from the firm belief that I would be able to do the job well and deliver real changes for children and young people in Wales, based on my suitability as outlined below.

Question 2: Why do you think you are well-suited for the role?

I believe my suitability for the role comes from the significant experience, knowledge and skills which I have acquired during my 20 year career working with a diverse range of children and young people in Wales, as well as from my unique leadership style which combines a humanitarian kindness and empathy with a real can-do and get-things-done pragmatism.

For the last 20 years, I have devoted my career to supporting the most marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people working in a range of roles in Wales's third sector, including working with young people at risk of homeless, children with disabilities, and children from ethnic minority including refugee backgrounds. As such, I have seen up close the devastating impact that issues such as poor housing, poor access to services, poor health, and other factors have on children and young people living in Wales.

For the last 16 years I have been developing and leading the charity EYST Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team, starting it from scratch to now being the largest ethnic minority charity in Wales with a team of 70 staff working right across the country including Wrexham, Newport,

Cardiff and Swansea, as well as mid Wales. I am immensely proud of this achievement, which is not only mine, but that of the whole team around me. As a result, thousands more children in Wales have a safe place to go, a trusted support worker to talk to, an organisation to advocate for them and stand up for their rights around the highest tables in Wales.

As well as these roles, I have also held other public roles including Wales Committee member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission since 2017, which has equipped me for the high standards and requirements of public life. As an individual I am mentally and physically robust and resilient, and feel well prepared for the increased pressure and scrutiny that the Children's Commissioner role will inevitably bring.

Question 3: What are the three main outcomes that you want to achieve during your tenure?

The three main outcomes that I would want to achieve are:

- a. Child poverty, discrimination and inequality reduced
- b. Children and young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing improved
- c. Children and young people's natural environment protected and enhanced.

Question 4: How will you work with children and young people?

I will apply my experience, networks and skills to reach out to meet and listen to a wide range of children and young people right across Wales. I will make the time and effort to go to the places children and young people are in including schools and formal and informal youth settings. By utilising the diversity and reach of the voluntary sector in Wales, as well as the range of statutory organisations, I will ensure that I meet and engage with children and young people from diverse backgrounds and with a range of protected characteristics including those with disabilities, from different socio-economic backgrounds, English and Welsh speakers, and those who speak other community languages, in both urban and rural settings. I will make a special effort to reach and listen to those who have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic, for example those who have not been able to access education due to digital exclusion, or those who have experienced food poverty or mental ill health as a result of the pandemic.

When I meet children and young people, I will not seek to solve their problems for them, but rather will seek to help make them part of the solution, so they can be empowered to identify their own strengths and skills to forge their own successful paths to where they want to get to. I will also seek to connect them with the excellent range of community and statutory organisations in their localities, to further empower local communities and put children and young people at their hearts.

Working with my wider team, I will be responsive to requests for my offices' intervention, and will use the Children's Commissioner's powers appropriately to help children enjoy their rights.

Question 5: How will you work in a way that maintains independence from Welsh Government whilst also trying to influence the government to achieve significant change for children?

Firstly, I would retain utmost clarity on my first line of accountability being to the children of Wales, and that the most significant part of my job would be listening to their concerns and needs, secondly, my role is to feed this back to Welsh Government as well as to other public bodies in Wales and seek to influence them to achieve change. I would utilise the wishes and needs of children and young people to shape the changes I would be asking for, and would use the power of these voices and experiences to argue and press for change. I will remain open to challenge and scrutiny, particularly from children and young people, and will make full use of structures such as the Children and Young People's Advisory Commit

In order to maintain a relationship which can effectively challenge Welsh Government, I will seek to build strong support and allies outside of Welsh Government as well as within it. This will involve developing relationships of mutual trust and challenge with the range of stakeholders including Senedd Members, Senedd Committees, Voluntary sector organisations and other Commissioners in Wales.

I will also seek to maintain the strong links which the current Children's Commissioner has with legal advocates for children's rights in Wales, enabling proposals and challenges to be legally robust and coherently embedded within the existing Welsh and international children's and human rights' legislative frameworks.

Question 6: How will you work with Senedd Members, Senedd committees and other stakeholders?

I will endeavour to work with Senedd Members, Senedd Committees and other stakeholders in an open and constructive way, clearly articulating the values and principles I will stand for, and remaining true to the views and needs of children and young people and my proposed solutions.

I will also seek to listen to and learn from the vast experience of Senedd Members, committees and other stakeholders as much as I can, to understand their own experiences, challenges and priorities, as well as any assets, powers or resources they may have. I will do this by giving the necessary time to building these relationships, holding one-to-one meetings and discussions, as well as taking part in wider events and networks. It is my firm belief that solutions can be arrived

at once the position of all parties is well understood and areas of alignment identified so that will be my starting point. By doing this and showing the benefits of proposed ways forward I will seek to exert soft influence over strategic developments in Wales to bring out systematic improvements in the lives of children and young people.

I understand however, that there will be occasions when I will need to apply by powers more robustly as Children's Commissioner, especially when things have gone wrong for a child or young person, and an institution may have been responsible. In these circumstances, I will not hold back from making full use of the Commissioner's powers, as it will be my duty to do so.