# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Appointment of the next Children’s Commissioner for Wales** |
| **DATE**  | **10 January 2022**  |
| **BY** | **Mark Drakeford, MS, First Minister** |

The tenure of our current Children's Commissioner, Professor Sally Holland, will come to an end on 19 April 2022.

I am delighted to accept the cross-party selection panel’s recommendation, and announce the next Children’s Commissioner for Wales will be Rocio Cifuentes.

The process for appointing a new Commissioner involved joint working between a cross-party selection panel and a diverse panel of young people. This rigorous recruitment campaign included the involvement of children and young people at many points throughout the process and their involvement has been an integral part of the recruitment exercise.

Children and young people were involved in four significant stages of the recruitment process, including:

* Workshops were held with children and young people to seek their views about the top three things which are important to them in the role of Children’s Commissioner, which were reflected in the preparation of the candidate pack.
* The personal statements written for children and young people by the longlisted candidates were considered by a group of children and young people who made a recommendation about their preferred candidates to the Minister for Social Justice and the cross-party and young person’s appointment panels.
* Candidates made a presentation to a class of school children on the topic “If you were successful, what would be your top five priorities as Children’s Commissioner for Wales? What difference would you hope to have made after your first year, and by the end of your time as commissioner?” Shortlisted candidates were asked a series of questions by the children who then provided written feedback to the cross-party and young person’s appointment panels on the performance of each candidate. These questions were developed and asked by the children and the session was filmed and shown to both interview panels.
* The successful candidates were formally interviewed by a young person’s appointment panel. The young people’s panel made a recommendation of their preferred candidate to the cross-party appointment panel, which considered this recommendation in determining their preferred candidate. This panel was made up of a diverse group of young people and chaired by a young person.

I would like to extend my thanks to all those involved, particularly the children and young people who took part at various stages of the process.

Ms Cifuentes will take up the post on 20 April 2022.

Ms Cifuentes brings with her a wealth of experience. She is the chief executive of EYST and has led and developed EYST since its inception in 2005 to its current status as one of Wales’ leading organisations supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, with a staff team of 50. She previously worked for CEMVO (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations), SYSHP (Swansea Young Single Homelessness Project), Gower College and Swansea University.

Ms Cifuentes was born in Chile, arriving in Wales as a one-year-old with her parents as political refugees from Chile. She attended Cambridge University, where she read Social and Political Science, before undertaking a Masters in Social Research at Swansea University.

She has served on several Welsh Government ministerial advisory boards including the Wales Race Forum Youth Advisory Board and Welsh Refugee Taskforce. She is a board member of the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), chair of the Welsh Refugee Coalition and a Wales committee member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. She is a school governor and board member of two local charity organisations – Mixtup in Swansea for young people with mixed abilities and Cardiff Friends of Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia. She is also patron for Swansea Stand Up to Racism.

Ms Cifuentes has received several awards in recognition of her contribution, including Ethnic Minority Welsh Women’s Association Social and Humanitarian Award, Muslim Council of Wales’ contribution to ethnic minority communities and she was made an honorary life fellow of the Institute for Welsh Affairs for her contribution to making Wales a better place.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Professor Sally Holland for her enthusiasm and commitment to being an independent champion of children’s rights. I am particularly grateful to Professor Holland and her team for her prioritisation of the needs of all children and young people in Wales throughout the pandemic. Using her role to champion the rights of children and young people during this difficult time, she has consistently ensured their voices are heard and their rights respected.

I look forward to continuing to work with Professor Holland during the last few months of her term and wish her the best for the future.