Dear Les

RE: CONSULTATION ON DRAFT STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: IMPROVING CHILDREN’S LIVES

Thank you for your response to the consultation on the joint Department of Health/Department of Education draft Strategy for Looked After Children. I welcome your positive comments on the draft Strategy, and the Departments will consider how the outcomes, commitments, goals and plans within the Strategy can be made as specific, measurable and time-bound as possible.

I note the Commission’s intention to undertake an examination of the human rights implications of looked after children who go missing from children’s homes. This remains an issue of particular focus for the Department of Health and the wider Health and Social Care (HSC) system, working together with partners in the PSNI. Looked after children are among some of the most vulnerable in our society and, as your letter notes, when they go missing they are potentially at greater risk of harm.

I have attached for your information the joint PSNI/HSC Strategic Action Plan on Children Missing from Residential Care, which builds on the key issues and priorities identified at a regional multi-agency workshop held in October last year. You attended on behalf of NIHRC.

The Action Plan incorporates actions under four key themes—interface working and operational arrangements; prevention measures and service models; training and raising awareness; and communication and information sharing. The majority of actions are due to be completed by March 2019.

I note the Commission’s intention to complete its own examination by early 2019. In light of the ongoing work being taken forward under the joint PSNI/HSC Strategic Action Plan, the Commission may wish to consider postponing its work until March
next year, when the bulk of the PSNI/ HSC Plan will have been completed. This would provide an opportunity for the Commission to consider the impact these measures have had and any further work which may be required.

This is, of course, ultimately a decision for the Commission and I look forward to seeing your report when completed. If I can assist or support the Commission in any way in undertaking its examination, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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