

Note of last Children & Young People Board meeting

Title: Children & Young People Board
Date: Friday 13 January 2017
Venue: Rooms A&B, Ground Floor, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street,
London, EC1M 5LG

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Declarations of Interest The Chairman welcomed the Board and those observing. There were no declarations of interest.	
2	Regional adoption agencies The Chair introduced Mark Owers, Professional Advisor to the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB.) Mark Owers gave a presentation on the work the ALB has undertaken in working with central government, local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in establishing Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs.) During his presentation he raised the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To date 19 RAAs were in place involving 132 local authorities.• Of the 20 Local Authorities that had not agreed an RAA to be a part of, 13 were already engaged with the Department for Education to either join an existing RAA or establish a new one.• That there would be a phased roll out with some going live in 2017.• He brought the Board's attention to 5 RAAs being established that he was working closely with as Demonstration Projects. This is helping ascertain the features of an effective RAA.• That going forward the aim should not be to create a bigger service but a better service.• There could be significant gains around cost performance, but the picture of possible savings was currently unclear.• That all projects now consider RAA Funding Principles and RAA Funding Options.• In regards to costs there would be some areas that benefit and some that do not.	
	In the discussion that followed, Members raised the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The progress in establishing the Adopt Thames Valley RAA was	

given as a very positive example. There had already been joint working between the Unitary Authorities involved. A Member stated that engagement with the local authorities involved had also been very good. Mark Owers expressed to the Board that he was grateful for the feedback and to hear very positive progression in establishing RAAs in some areas.

- A view was expressed by Members that there will be risks to the quality of the service should RAAs have to grow even larger.
- A Member explained there had been a very positive outcome for a family of 6 who had been adopted in Nottingham. The complexity of this case meant it took considerably longer than the recommended timescales, which could cause the LA difficulties with regard to government scorecards. This must be acknowledged in further conversations with the Department for Education, to ensure that RAAs are not discouraged from seeking the best possible outcomes for all children due to the partial picture presented in timescales-based scorecards
- In regards to the ALB data available to local authorities Mark Owers reassured Members that the ALB data returns were published quarterly and that they were looking on improving the way in which this information was shared
- A concern was raised that delays in a child being adopted were often due to family courts as opposed to local authorities. The Chair shared Members' concerns and stated that this would need to be looked at in more depth.
- In regards to accountability it was confirmed by a Member that in his local authority information from their RAA feeds back into Scrutiny Committees. The Chair expressed a view that it will be important to have clarity on the legal and accountability structures around RAAs.
- The Chair expressed a view that the notion RAAs are a permanent revolution is unhelpful and that the results will need to be seen before determining how to go forward. The main test will be whether regionalising the adoption system does make it easier to permanently house difficult cases.

Decision

The Board noted the current activity taking place to regionalise the adoption system.

Action

Mark Owers to report back the LGA's views to the Adoption Leadership Board.

3 Children and Social Work Bill: Power to test different ways of working

The Chair introduced the report which updated Members on the recent amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill, which have been the subject of national debate, and asked for the Board's input to confirm the LGA's future position on this.

Ian Dean, Senior Adviser, explained that provisions had changed since the Board last discussed the Children and Social Work Bill, partly as a result of LGA lobbying. In particular, the powers were now entirely LA-led, with no power for the Secretary of the State to enforce changes upon a local authority area without their consent. He stated that it is important to ensure changes to the Bill were used to help children receive better outcomes and that the powers needed to achieve this lie with local councils. He also confirmed that the government have since proposed the creation of an expert panel to oversee any applications for these legislative exemptions. He informed the Board that a number of organisations, including Barnardo's and the Children's Society, are now supportive of the amended provisions.

In the discussion that followed, members of the Board raised the following points:

- Several members expressed the view that this was a good opportunity for local government to tailor provision around local children and young people, and that they were therefore supportive.
- There was also a view this would enable greater innovation in service design, in particular in joint work between Local Authorities.
- A Member expressed a view that current legislation has not stopped innovation, and that they are cautious in regards to the freedoms proposed through the Children and Social Work Bill.

The Chair concluded that the LGA collectively welcome changes that could enable greater flexibility for local authorities, but with a degree of caution. He expressed a view that flexibility given to local authorities, although welcome, will not be used much in practice. He also emphasised that every effort should be made to ensure that local authorities have a strong voice in considering applications to do things differently and that the focus must remain achieving the best outcome for children.

Decision

The Board noted the report.

Action

Officers to incorporate the Board's views in the LGA's future position in relation to the power to test different ways of working.

4 Education funding announcements

Clive Harris, Senior Adviser, introduced the item informing the Board on the second stage of the Department for Education consultation on a schools national funding formula which had been announced just before Christmas. The Board's attention was brought to the fact schools would be expected to move from a soft formula to a hard formula in on year (a two year soft formula was proposed in the first national funding formula consultation) and that under new proposals, councils would be able to seek top-slice funding from schools to pay for statutory duties previously funded through ESG. He welcomed the views of the Board to inform the

LGA response to the consultation.

In the discussion that followed, the Board raised the following points:

- Members expressed a view that they were sceptical top slicing funding from schools through the schools forum was a valid option for local authorities.
- A concern was raised in regards to the impact on smaller schools and, should a smaller school be forced to close, the financial issues it would cause the local authority, including increases in school transport costs. The Board had a clear consensus in regards to their concern to the impact of the new funding formula on smaller schools in particular. The Chair emphasised that the Board should continue to argue the case for further devolution and how important it will be for local authorities going forward.
- Members shared concerns in regards to schools moving to a new hard formula in just one year. It was suggested that a longer transitional period moving into the new formula would be welcome. The Chair shared Members' concerns as to the pace schools would have to adopt the new schools national funding formula.
- A concern was raised that as the current government is committed to increasing the housing stock there will be a significant pressure to open the schools required to accommodate new residential developments.
- A view was expressed that local authorities also would benefit from the same flexibility as multi academy trusts.
- The Chair expressed a view that there were exceptions where a local authority will be better informed than central government such as with new housing estates, traveller communities and armed forces housing. The Chair expressed a view that in these circumstances greater flexibility and devolution would benefit local authorities.

The Chair concluded that it was of crucial importance to have sustained funding towards school improvement. He echoed the Boards view that local authorities want the same flexibility as multi academy trusts. He also indicated that where there is a local demand to top slice funding from schools central government should not seek to overrule the will of the local area.

Decision

The Board noted the report and advised that as a general position on the LGA's response to the consultation is that the new schools national funding formula must be determined carefully and that the local knowledge of local authorities must be respected.

Action

Officers to incorporate the Board's view in the LGA's response to the consultation.

5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Ian Dean, Senior Adviser, introduced the item updating members on the settlement of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and providing further information on funding arrangements. He informed the Board that the Home Office acknowledged and appreciated the crucial role that local government had played in responding to the situation in Calais, often providing support and placements at extremely short notice, and that conversations with the LGA had been marked by an increasing openness from government. Further to this, the Home Office, LGA, ADCS and others were now considering the lessons learnt from the process, while acknowledging that Calais was a unique situation in terms of the lack of planning time at both national and local level. . He asked the Board to give their feedback to inform the LGA's ongoing dialogue with government.

In the discussion that followed, the Board raised the following points:

- That local authorities were glad their hard work in this area had been given recognition.
- A concern was raised that family reunification processes were not always robust, with insufficient time to assess the validity or suitability of the proposed placement.
- That, while communication with government may have improved as the process continued, the early weeks of resettlement were marked by a lack of openness and confused messaging from central government. The LGA had played a pivotal role in holding arrangements together during this period, and should be proud of its work in doing so.
- That the LGA should look to draft a document informing Ministers of the role local authorities have played and what they have learned from the sudden increase of UASC settlement.

The Chair concluded by giving his thanks to Cllr David Simmonds for his work on this issue as the previous Chairman of the Board and the current Chairman of the LGA's Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group. He also stated that it was important for local government to look at the lessons they have learned so that local authorities can be better prepared to manage the settlement of UASC in future. He endorsed the suggestion that the LGA draft a *Lessons Learned* document.

Decision

The Board noted the report.

Action

Officers to put together a draft *Lessons Learned* document and to incorporate the Board's feedback in the LGA's ongoing dialogue with government.

6 LGA Task Group: The Future of Children’s Social Care Improvement - Terms of Reference

The Chair introduced the item by thanking Cllr Dick Madden for agreeing to Chair the new LGA Task Group on the Future of Children’s Social Care Improvement, as well as all Members and Officers involved.

Cllr Dick Madden also gave thanks to policy officers from Essex County Council, Peter Fairley and Adam Boey, who had been of great assistance to him and will contribute to the Task Group’s work. He informed the Board that as a Task Group they will engage with local authorities across the country.

Decision

The Board noted and endorsed the proposed Terms of Reference for the group.

Action

The Future of Children’s Social Care Improvement LGA Task Group to report back to the Board on their progress.

7 Note of the Previous Meeting

The Board agreed the minutes of the previous meeting.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Richard Watts	Islington Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Roy Perry	Hampshire County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Gillian Ford	Havering London Borough Council
	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Members	Cllr Gareth Barnard	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
	Cllr Ian Hudspeth	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr Dick Madden	Essex County Council
	Cllr Bob Cook	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
	Cllr Anntoinette Bramble	Hackney London Borough Council
	Cllr David Mellen	Nottingham City Council
	Cllr Roz Gladden	Liverpool City Council
	Cllr Paul Cullen	Richmondshire District Council
	Cllr Christopher Coleman	Cheltenham Borough Council
Apologies	Cllr Liz Hacket Pain	Monmouthshire County Council
	Cllr Ian Parry	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Janet Walton	Borough of Poole

Cllr John Kent
Cllr Anne Burns

Thurrock Council
Cumbria County Council

In Attendance

Mark Owers

Professional Advisor to the Adoption
Leadership Board

LGA Officers

Ian Dean
Clive Harris

Senior Adviser
Senior Adviser