

LGA work on a New Model for Local Government – Children and Adult Social Care proposals

Purpose of the report

To introduce the LGA's work on 'A new model for local government' and to receive Members' feedback on the document **(Appendix A)**.

Summary

This paper introduces a draft paper on children's social care and safeguarding **(Appendix A)** that will feature as part of the LGA's wider work on 'A new model for local government'.

Recommendation

Members are asked to review and comment on the draft children's safeguarding and social care and safeguarding paper.

Action

LGA officers to amend the children's safeguarding and social care paper in line with Members' comments.

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Background

1. At its meeting on 9 January 2013, the LGA Leadership Board considered a proposal to develop a 'new model for local government'. There are three main objectives for this work:
 - 1.1. To develop a clear case for the future national role of local government in order to inform party manifestos in the run-up to the next General Election.
 - 1.2. To set out local government's offer in order to inform the expected 2015 Spending Review immediately after the election.
 - 1.3. To provide the LGA annual conference with a practical explanation of the above and inform its longer-term planning processes.
2. The Leadership Board agreed with the proposed work and the suggestion to focus on developing policy think pieces on the following subjects:
 - 2.1. Independent local government;
 - 2.2. Growth;
 - 2.3. Good adult social care;
 - 2.4. Future children's services;
 - 2.5. Welfare reform; and
 - 2.6. Sustainable future funding.

Next steps

3. The think piece papers will continue to be developed and Board Members' comments are sought on the 'children's safeguarding and social care' paper included at **Appendix A**. The key issues set out in the papers are being discussed at a series of regional roadshows taking place throughout March. They will then be explored in greater detail in a series of 'deep dive' sessions taking place in April.

Decisions

4. Members are asked to comment on the draft paper included at **Appendix A** 'children's safeguarding and social care'. Officers will incorporate these comments into the next iteration of the paper.

Finance and Policy Directorate

Manifesto: children's safeguarding and social care

Children's social care plays a crucial role in supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families to achieve positive outcomes and improve life chances. It is important not only for those who receive support from the services that councils and other organisations provide, but also for the wider benefits to society and there are significant issues for the reputation of councils. Local government is entrusted with the care of vulnerable children and young people, and we have a responsibility to keep them as safe as we can and give them the essential security that they need for the future.

Key requirements

Local government will have three main objectives for child safeguarding and care for the future: These are to:

- Secure the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and young people for a stable, supported transition to adulthood.
- Increase the flexibility to respond to needs on the ground within and across services, so that we can work together to focus on the interests of the child and young person.
- Invest sufficient resources in early intervention to reduce safeguarding pressures and demands in the longer term.

Key challenges

Safeguarding pressures

- There has been a very substantial increase in referrals and numbers of children coming into care over the last few years. There was a 51% increase between 2007/8 and 2011/12 in children becoming the subject of a child protection plan. Whilst this trend appears to be levelling out, the Secretary of State argued in December 2012 that still too many children are being allowed to remain in situations of neglect, with a strong message that we should not hesitate to bring children into the care system without delay.
- Increasing public and professional awareness of sexual exploitation of children and young people may also serve to increase referrals.
- The impact of welfare reform is not yet known, but there is a potential risk that it could put additional pressure on families who are struggling, exacerbating the risk of crisis or neglect, and increasing pressures on the system still further
- Domestic violence is a consistent feature of child protection cases and serious case reviews and it continues to be a priority.

Funding:

- Total spending on children and young people's services in the 2011-12 financial year was £8.6 billion (the second biggest area of spend after adults) and cost pressures are rising. Local authorities spent a total of £3.1 billion (gross) on Children Looked After, an increase of £94.9 million (3.2%) compared with the equivalent figure for 2010-1. Children's services have not been immune to effects of the 28% reduction in council budgets, even though councils have sought to protect frontline services from the impact. Cuts to the Early Intervention Grant have been very substantial over the last 2 years. The £150m topslice for 2013-14 is being re-badged to support adoption, of which £50m will be ring-fenced. The cuts make it more difficult for councils to plan for the longer term in the way they commission services and for children and families to experience consistent and secure support.
- Whilst increased adoption should over time help to reduce the number of children looked after by the local authority, this further restriction on funds will make it harder for councils to invest in early intervention to prevent problems within families from escalating, potentially increasing the pressures on safeguarding and care still further. In addition from a multi-agency perspective, there are other significant funding cuts to key partners, including the police service.

Public service reform

Against a backdrop of reform in public services, councils are coping with rapid and radical changes which have an impact on children's services, including:

- The changing role of councils with new responsibilities for public health, a shift to more commissioning of children's services and joint working with health and other partners. There are concerns that some NHS bodies may not be well equipped to deliver their own safeguarding responsibilities during this period of rapid change; and the reforms are fragmenting responsibility for commissioning children's health services which could make it even harder to join up;
- Adoption reform, improving residential care, and reforms of the system for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, (a relatively high proportion of whom will also be vulnerable or looked after) alongside changes to high needs funding will place new duties and expectations on councils ;
- New duties placed on councils to support the raising of the participation age, on top of existing duties to re-engage young people not in education, training or employment. Both are particularly challenging for vulnerable young people. Councils' ability to have an impact is being made more difficult as funding and levers are being increasingly centralised.
- In addition, the impact of welfare reform on families is not yet known but, if people get into debt and face other problems, there may be a further increase in the numbers of children who need protection or to be looked after by the local authority, particularly in those areas that currently have a high proportion of families on benefits.

What local government wants to see in the future

- **To secure the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and a stable, supported transition to adulthood.** This means:
 - improving adoption services and commissioning, and delivering a shift to effective early intervention and a care system which really delivers good long term outcomes for children
 - the education of looked after children to be a much higher priority, so that everyone involved in their care has the same high aspirations for them as they would their own children – and the same determination, as any other parent, to champion their needs
 - addressing the need for a more flexible and age-appropriate response to the needs of adolescents who enter the care system at the age of 11 or over and actively explore how best to provide support for a stable transition to adulthood
 - recognising the Munro view that we cannot predict with certainty what will happen to children; we can only make judgments and decisions that, on the evidence available, look the best.
- **To increase the flexibility to respond to needs on the ground within and across services, so that we can work together to focus on the interests of the child and young person.** This means:
 - More scope for professional and local autonomy to manage pressures effectively both within and across services, to have the skills and experience to take advantage of this flexibility, and to be able to assess, learn and respond to how well we are helping children and young people.
 - Striking the right balance between central and local government on any changes to the safeguarding and care system that allows councils to take advantage of their unique position and political leadership to ensure that services work together to focus on the interests of the child and young person.

What do we need to do?

- Articulate a vision for the future led by local government which is focused around the needs of children and young people, increasing the resilience in families and wider society's responsibility for vulnerable children. This would seek to build on the fact that everyone has a responsibility for safeguarding children and the wider benefits to society of successful outcomes for children and young people.
- Explore the role of councils as a stronger convenor of local agencies, learning from the community budget pilots, and consider the delivery (and funding) of services around the families that use them instead of organisational boundaries.
- Evidence, research and analysis will be a key factor in the context of Spending Review discussions if we are to achieve a workable funding approach which allows longer term planning and consistent and secure support for children and families.

- This may include, for example:
 - a robust cost-benefit analysis for interventions, apportioning benefits to agencies, identifying the most effective structures, plus what other levers government could help provide and address in order to use current public funding more effectively;
 - commissioning - and how well commissioners and the social care workforce are aligned, as well as the ability to define and commission for outcomes, while trying to minimise the impact of budget cuts;
 - review of statutory reporting requirements to Government to make sure that it is proportionate and focused on outcomes not process.
 - role of Ofsted in shift to multi-agency inspections and impact of rising expectations, and new duties against the backdrop of falling resources reduced flexibility and structural change, for example in education.

Immediate activity

- The spending review project on children's social care is underway and will articulate more clearly current pressures and to develop our understanding of the mitigations which authorities are putting in place;
- Joint project with Solace and ADCS to improve the pace of adoption, and adopter recruitment in particular;
- Lobbying on the Children and Families Bill which will introduce new duties for councils and implement many reforms in adoption, family justice and special educational needs for those aged 0 – 25;
- the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) is well respected and its work is well developed, giving us – with sector partners – a good understanding of what "good" looks like and how to improve safeguarding and care;
- the Early Intervention Foundation has recently been set up, based in Local Government House, to provide a strong evidence-based focus for guiding local investment in really effective early intervention. This can draw on learning from Community Budget pilots and the Early Years and Munro Demonstrator projects led by the Children's Improvement Board;
- we are conducting action research, led by OPM, into how to improve the commissioning of children's homes will provide an interim report later in the spring with a final report in the summer;
- The 3Rs awareness raising campaign on child exploitation, which links into everyone having a role in safeguarding, a focus on prevention and councils' wider role in communities.