

Presentation by Dr Maggie Atkinson, Children's Commissioner for England

Purpose of report

To provide background information for the session with Dr Maggie Atkinson, the Children's Commissioner for England, who will address the board followed by questions and a discussion.

Summary

Maggie Atkinson is the Children's Commissioner for England, a post established by the Children Act 2004. She is the second post holder in this role, which enables her to promote and protect the rights of the child, and to encourage children and young people, families, opinion shapers, policy makers and practitioners to do the same. The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) is England's only statutory independent champion for children and young people.

Recommendation

This report is for information.

Action

Officers to take action arising out any discussion, as directed by members.

Contact officers:

Ian Keating

Position:

Senior Adviser, Children and Young People

Phone no:

0207 664 3032

E-mail:

ian.keating@local.gov.uk

Dr Maggie Atkinson speaking to the Board

Background

1. Dr Maggie Atkinson has been Children's Commissioner for England since March 2010. As Children's Commissioner she has a duty to promote the views and interests of all children in England, in particular those whose voices are least likely to be heard, to the people who make decisions about their lives. She also has a duty to speak on behalf of all children in the UK on non-devolved issues which include immigration, for the whole of the UK, and youth justice, for England and Wales.
2. Her office's team has helped to prompt policy and practice changes for asylum seeking and refugee children, children in contact with social care, the family courts and other vital services, those excluded from school, in conflict with the law, or struggling with mental and emotional health difficulties.
3. She is now leading the Office of the Children's Commissioner through the strengthening of its role and remit that will follow from legislative change being made during 2013-14. The proposed legislation brings together the current Office of the Children's Commissioner and Office of the Children's Rights Director into a new single body. This will build on the strengths and impact of the work of both organisations to ensure all children - particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised - are treated in accordance with domestic law, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international instruments and conventions.

Key Functions of the Children's Commissioner

4. Maggie has led the Office of the Children's Commissioner in a period when its influence has continued to increase, leading to positive changes in the life chances of England's children and young people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised among them.
5. One of the Children's Commissioner's key functions is encouraging organisations that provide services for children always to operate from the child's perspective. Under the Children Act 2004, the Children's Commissioner is required both to publish what she finds from talking and listening to children and young people, and to draw national policymakers' and agencies' attention to the particular circumstances of a child or small group of children which should inform both policy and practice.
6. The Children's Commissioner has a statutory duty to highlight where she believes vulnerable children are not being treated appropriately and in line with duties established under international and domestic legislation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) underpins and frames all of her work.

Current Inquiries of the Office of the Children's Commissioner

7. The Office of the Children's Commissioner is currently leading two national inquiries:

The School Exclusions Inquiry

- 7.1 The School Exclusions Inquiry has now published three reports on: the entirety of the exclusions system and how it can be improved; reducing inequalities in exclusions; and on illegal school exclusions. It has also produced a film explaining children's rights around exclusions to them and their families. This is available on the front page of the Children's Commissioner website:
<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/>

The Inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children and young people in gangs and groups

- 7.2 The Inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children and young people in gangs and groups has published four reports: an accelerated report for the Secretary of State for Education on emerging findings from the Inquiry with a focus on children in care; the interim report of the Inquiry which provided the most accurate and up-to-date figures on the number of children being sexually exploited in groups and gangs and those at risk of sexual exploitation; interim findings from research being undertaken for the Inquiry into what it is like for children being raised in gang involved neighbourhoods; and also research on the impact on young people of viewing pornography. The final report of the Inquiry is scheduled for publication in November.
8. In addition to the above Inquiries, over the past year the Office of the Children's Commissioner has worked and reported on: children in the asylum and immigration system; children in the youth justice and mental health systems; children in care; safeguarding issues; children's complaints systems; more general children's rights issues and in particular children's rights impact assessments of key government Bills.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for the LGA arising from this report