

Other Business Report

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This section provides reports on other business relevant to the Board.

Recommendation

That the Board note the updates on:

- i. Early years
- ii. Children and families Bill
- iii. Improvement and inspection
- iv. Schools
- v. *Our ambition for children*
- vi. Social worker recruitment and retention

Action

LGA officers to action as necessary.

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Other Business Report

Early Years

1. Minister for Education and Childcare, Elizabeth Truss MP, wrote to English Local Authorities in February, on how they can encourage more high quality affordable childcare provision in their area. In the letter the minister highlighted possible ways childcare providers can deliver a more flexible offer and encouraged lead members to challenge local schools and other childcare providers about what they provide and how it could be extended. Please see link for more information:
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278433/Letter to LAs - FINAL.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278433/Letter_to_LAs_-_FINAL.pdf)
2. The Minister has also announced changes to childcare and the school day that will:
 - 2.1 Make it easier for schools to offer out-of-hours care from 8am to 6pm;
 - 2.2 Help parents to make more informal childcare arrangements with friends;
 - 2.3 Allow providers to register multiple premises in a single registration process and enable childminders to operate in non-domestic premises for part of the working week; and
 - 2.4 Streamline and strengthen measures and accountability to keep children safe by introducing a new Child Safety Register, replacing the General Childcare Register, to work alongside the Early Years Register.
3. The government will produce an updated version of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, to which the relevant legislative changes apply. The revised EYFS will be published in April 2014 for implementation in September 2014.

Children and Families Bill

4. The Bill has now completed its Parliamentary process and is awaiting Royal Assent before it becomes law. This is expected to be in mid-March when commencement dates for implementing the provisions of this wide ranging new law will be confirmed. The Bill takes forward a range of Government commitments which are intended to improve services for key groups of vulnerable children and to support families.
5. During the course of the Bill, the LGA achieved significant success when the Government curtailed a power in the Bill to remove all local authorities from adopter recruitment. An amendment requiring an active debate and vote in both Houses before its use was accepted by Government. The LGA also sought clarification about the consequences of a clause relating to the Secretary of State's powers of intervention in children's services. The Minister allayed the concerns and set out the procedure on intervention.
6. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provisions form a major part of the Bill and there is an agenda item on the reform of SEND for discussion at the joint meeting with the Community Wellbeing Board. The Bill also includes provisions on family justice,

with time limits for completing care and supervision proceedings, extends rights for young carers, makes provision for child-minding agencies, and places a duty on councils to appoint a virtual school head for looked after children. The Bill requires maintained schools and Academies to provide free school lunches on request for all pupils in reception, year one and year two. Schools will also have a new duty to support pupils with medical conditions. During its final stages, the Bill was also amended to include a new provision on extending foster care to the age of 21 – known as the ‘staying put’ provisions. During the final Parliamentary debate on the Bill, an amendment was agreed to ban smoking in cars with child passengers.

7. The LGA is planning to publish a guide to the new law as one of the series of ‘Get in on the Act’ publications to explain the key provisions which are of relevance to local government and the new duties being placed on councils.

Improvement and inspection

8. The final two day leadership academy for this financial year was held on 29-30 January and received very good feedback. In addition, a pilot scenario planning day was held on 13 February in partnership with the Virtual Staff College (VSC) and SOLACE. This was attended by a number of lead members for children, DCSs and chief executives, including Cllr David Simmonds. Further discussions will be held with the VSC and SOLACE about the potential follow up to this pilot.
9. Ofsted began inspecting children’s services in authorities in November using its new single inspection framework. So far the following councils have been inspected: Essex, Bolton, East Sussex, Coventry, Staffordshire, Hounslow, Hillingdon, Hartlepool, Derbyshire and Slough.
10. LGA, ADCS and SOLACE are in touch with lead members, chief executives and directors of children’s services of the inspected councils to gather intelligence on the process, and we are planning a joint event to share learning.

Schools

11. Following the discussion at the last Board meeting, Cllr Simmonds wrote to Schools Minister David Laws MP, about the proposed new Regional Schools Commissioners. He raised the Board’s concerns about the lack of consultation on the new posts; how the new Commissioners could be held to account by councils; and concerns over the size and coverage of the new regions.
12. The Minister replied that he did not think consultation was necessary, as the changes related to DfE’s own capacity and structures to manage the growing numbers of academies. He said that the new commissioners would have a remit covering academies only and do not impact on the role of local authorities, so the suggestion that they should be held to account by councils goes “somewhat beyond the intent of the RSC model”. On the regional structures, he argued that “given the wealth of expertise in London” the structure is intended “to help spread that education leadership across the country”. Copies of the letters are attached at **Annex A**.

13. Cllr Simmonds also wrote to the Minister raising the concerns expressed by councils on the challenges faced in implementing the Government's commitment to free school meals for infants. He highlighted the difficulties caused by the shortfalls in capital funding in some areas and the practical difficulties of tendering for, and procuring the works and services needed by the beginning of September this year. He asked for greater clarity from the Government about what the expectations were in relation to nutritional standards and whether a hot meal will be required. He called for guidance to schools forums about how the capital resources should be allocated between schools. A copy of the letter is attached at **Annex B**.

Our ambition for children

14. At the meeting at the National Children and Adults Conference in October last year the Board discussed how to take forward the LGA's 'Rewiring public services' campaign in the context of children's services. As a result of that discussion and informal discussions with Lead Members in the East of England and the South West, an LGA consultation paper has been launched on 'Our ambition for children and young people'. Copies of the consultation paper will be available at the meeting.
15. The aim is to consult councils and partners in the voluntary and community sector on developing a shared set of ambitions for children and young people that would be delivered in the context of 'rewired' public services. We are also working with the British Youth Council to consult children and young people directly, through an online questionnaire and a conference at Local Government House in early April. Following the outcome of the consultation, the launch of a final publication setting out our shared ambition for children and young people is planned at the LGA Annual Conference in July.

Social worker recruitment and retention

16. The last Children and Young People Board considered a paper about social worker recruitment and retention, which was then discussed at the Workforce Board on 21 January. Cllr Simmonds attended the Workforce Board meeting to feedback comments about the need for national efforts to improve the image of the profession and for the LGA to take a lead on behalf of the sector. It was proposed that the LGA should bid for innovation funding from the DfE to provide support on social work. It was agreed that a task and finish group with Members from each board be established to take forward this work.