

Children and Young People Board – report from Cllr David Simmonds (Chairman)

Academies top-slice

1. The LGA Chairman and I met with the Department for Education (DfE) Minister Lord Hill on 18 January to discuss the LGA response to the latest academies top-slice consultation. We set out our view that while the latest proposals are an improvement on the July 2011 proposals, they are not yet the basis for a fair settlement of the academies funding issue. We pressed the Minister to agree to an independent exercise to establish the real savings to councils from no longer having to provide central services to academies. We argued that this issue could have been resolved by now if the Department had worked more closely with the LGA in getting a mutually acceptable estimate of the true costs. The Minister agreed that closer working was desirable and agreed to further official-level meetings to discuss a way forward.

Capital and Revenue Task and Finish Group

2. On 11 January I chaired the Capital and Revenue Task and Finish Group of the Ministerial Advisory Group. The key items discussed were:
 - 2.1. Under Fives; how local and national formulae interact; members made the point that it was right to give local Early Years Single Funding Formulae a chance to bed in and that any good practice sharing should be in line with the sector-led approach agreed with the DfE.
 - 2.2. Small Schools; members made the point that this was a sensitive issue locally and councils should continue to have flexibility to respond to local circumstances.
 - 2.3. Capital; the discussions focussed on how new local planning arrangements would be implemented. Members made the point that in most councils, basic need is currently the highest priority; councils are adding their own capital resources to that provided by the DfE.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education

3. I wrote to Sir Michael Wilshaw, the new Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to welcome him in post and to outline the key issues for local government. We have invited him to attend a future meeting of the Children and Young People Board to discuss the key issues around Ofsted's work and how this impacts on local government's services. In

particular the increase in sector-led improvement in children's services and how this relates to inspection.

LGA Admissions Seminar

4. I opened the successful LGA Admissions Seminar on 16 January, which was attended by representatives of 75 local authorities. The Seminar was well supported by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, and Elizabeth Passmore, the new Chief Schools Adjudicator, gave the keynote address. In setting the scene, I reminded colleagues that councils have a strong, strategic role in education and school admissions; this point was echoed throughout the day. This strategic role is set out clearly in both the Schools White Paper and the new Admissions Code. Making sure that every local child has fair access to local schools, including academies and free schools, is a key element of the new council role.
5. An important focus of the day was ensuring that council colleagues know their technical duties and the detail of the new Code. We also spent some time considering how councils can best work in partnership with schools and academies to make the new Code work well. The tone of the discussions throughout the Seminar was very positive, and I am confident that councils will be working hard with their partners to make the new arrangements work at a local level to the benefit of their communities. I have sent a copy of the Seminar Report to the Secretary of State, and it is also available on the LGA website.

Visits to councils

6. I have continued to visit a number of councils around the UK, in particular to discuss the potential of the Children's Improvement Board, and work is underway to improve the engagement of councillors in this important agenda.

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