

## **Children and Young People Board – report from Councillor David Simmonds (Chairman)**

### **Meeting with Minister Elizabeth Truss MP**

1. I attended a meeting with Elizabeth Truss MP, Minister for Childcare on 30 February to discuss the Government's proposals on childcare reform. There was a focus on changes to the regulatory regime, improving transparency of funding for providers, creation of child minder agencies and encouraging schools to open up their premises for wrap around childcare provision. I emphasised to the Minister that councils do not duplicate Ofsted inspections at present but provide invaluable improvement support to providers to improve the quality on offer. As part of this many councils currently deliver support and training to local child minders similar to the role of the new proposed child minder hubs and so may be interested in setting up child-minder hubs offering services at a minimum cost. We also discussed how councils can play a greater role in influencing schools to open up their premises for childcare.

### **LGA tackling child sexual exploitation conference**

2. On 13 February, I chaired the LGA's national tackling child sexual exploitation conference, which brought together delegates not only from councils, but also other partner agencies with a crucial role to play such as police, health and the voluntary sector. The high quality programme included the Children's Minister, Edward Timpson MP, All-Party Parliamentary Group Chair Ann Coffey MP and the Deputy Children's Commissioner Sue Berelowitz., along with several local areas who shared their experiences and learning. In addition, we launched the LGA's National Conversation, part of our campaign to support councils in raising awareness of this type of abuse, which is vital to preventing and stopping it. The event was hugely popular and over-subscribed; demonstrating how much interest there is in tackling this terrible crime.

### **£4 billion for school capital funding**

3. I spoke to journalists on 1 March about the announcement by Michael Gove MP to put £4 billion into school capital funding. Whilst it is a step in the right direction that the government has acknowledged the huge pressures councils are facing in providing new and good quality school places we need to be clear that this announcement doesn't represent new money. Delays to already promised school funding means local government is working to address the basic repairs needed to keep schools open, such as fixing leaky roofs. However, we need to deliver much more quickly however this is difficult with funds currently tied up in government red tape. It's now vital that this funding flows quickly to ensure local authorities can work with schools to get on with the job of providing more school places where they are urgently needed.

### **Commissioning of Children's Residential Homes**

4. A number of concerns about the effectiveness of the system of residential children's care have been raised in the last year and it has become clear that some areas need improvement. The LGA has commissioned the office of Public Management (OPM) to work with a select group of local authorities to look into how to better support councils in the effective commissioning of residential children's homes. An advisory group has been established chaired by Councillor Robert Light from the Children and Young People

Board which also includes representation from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Department for Education, the Children's improvement Board and the Who Cares Trust, to oversee the research.

### **Shortage of Childcare**

5. I continued to represent the LGA in the media this month including various interviews about daycare in response to a report by the Daycare Trust and on schools' capital. On 3 March I responded to the news story from the Daycare Trust that said councils were failing to provide sufficient childcare for parents who wanted to work. I made it clear that councils do not have a responsibility to provide childcare and our responsibility is to work with voluntary organisations, private providers and schools to increase supply. The LGA is working with the government to see how a big expansion in provision can be achieved. However, lack of funding in the system is making this task very difficult.

### **Corporate Parenting**

6. On 5 March I met Enver Solomon, who leads on work around corporate parenting as the National Children's Bureau Delivery Partner with the Department for Education (DfE). We discussed DfE work in this area and how councilors can best fulfill their role as corporate parents.

### **Meeting with Andy Sawford MP**

7. On 6 March I met Andy Sawford MP to discuss the provisions of the Children and Families Bill in detail and the LGA's proposed amendments in particular. The Children and Families Bill received its second reading on 25 February; whilst we welcome many of the provisions in the Bill, we still have a number of concerns about measures including the proposal which could allow the Secretary of State for Education to remove councils from the recruitment and assessment of adopters and that the Bill may not maximise the opportunity to reform the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

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