

## Digest of Meeting

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<b>Title:</b>	Councillors' Forum
<b>Date and time:</b>	13 June 2013, 12.30pm
<b>Venue:</b>	The Westminster Suite, Local Government House, Smith Square

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Item	Action by
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### Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell, LGA Chairman, welcomed Members to the meeting.

The Chairman introduced Louise Casey CB (Head of the Troubled Families programme, DCLG)

### 1 Troubled Families

Members received a presentation from Louise Casey in which she set out the rationale for Government's Troubled Families programme, its progress so far, and its continuing challenges.

Louise reminded Members that the Troubled Families scheme's purpose is to turn around the lives of 120,000 families who have and cause serious problems. It has been around 18 months old since the programme was initiated, and it is just into its second full year of work on the ground.

Louise felt that the programme should feel personal – an attempt to change children and adults' recurring patterns of behaviour and ways of interacting with local services which over generations have not been addressed by the many initiatives and programmes of the past.

From her experience in councils, she noted that the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence in such families is high, as is interactions with the care system. Where behavioural problems develop in children in these families, this can often develop into problems at school and exclusions.

Whilst the programme's eligibility criteria are deliberately set wide to allow for local discretion as to what constitutes a troubled family, she urged councils to focus on those families who are worst affected first.

Louise also thanked local government for supplying her team with the fiscal evidence to make the case for a preventative scheme to

address these issues. In this context family intervention workers represent a step change from previous ways of working. Each family is assigned a single dedicated officer, who is empowered to both support the families involved but also challenge them and make clear the consequences of bad behaviour.

Louise reiterated that continued success demands leadership from both the Chief Executives and senior political leadership of every council. A 'Business as usual' attitude will not succeed and a tick-box approach to safeguarding children will not improve their life-chances – a fundamental change in the way things are done at a local level is required.

The police force should aim to, and increasingly are, shifting resources from reactive measures to deal with callouts by troubled families, towards measures to manage demand down. Similarly local authorities have opportunities to improve children's life chances and save money by reducing the demand for pupil referral units if they intervene in the right way. Equally health services should be working in a more preventative and holistic way and need to engage with local authorities on this issue.

Louise acknowledged that the programme is ambitious and challenging, but noted that over half of the 120,000 target has been identified and local authorities are working with one-third of the total already. For a programme only one-year old this represents a real story of achievement for local government, but councils should not become complacent.

The upcoming opportunity for councils to claim for results in July 2013 is a milestone for the programme which Louise hoped that councils will use both to assess their progress and to push for a result which places them in the top group of achievers.

To conclude, Louise thanked a number of officers and councillors at the LGA for their support and input and for the LGA's support for the current evaluation project – support which indicates cross-sector support and gives the programme credibility in Whitehall.

She also reminded those present that the project's aims are similar to what will have inspired many of the audience into public service – to improve the lives of the next generation, and prevent them from living a type of life they did not choose, and don't deserve. In order to achieve success local government must maintain its commitment to the troubled families programme and redouble its efforts.

Key issues raised in the following discussion were as follows:

- The impact of Universal Credit;
- Tensions between target and universal approaches to transformational public sector reform;
- Scaling up and applicability of the scheme's way of working to other areas;
- Flexibility of what can be considered a troubled family;

- Sustainability of the approach;
- Troubled families and health;
- Influence on future spending reviews.

The Chairman thanked Louise and echoed her determination not to fail future generations. He noted that a clear evidence base was emerging which indicated the approach was beginning to work. Councils could now point to the programme as an example of the success that community budgeting-style approaches to public sector reform can have - provided that the Government is prepared to invest money upfront and acknowledges that the resultant savings will be released over a period of time.

## **2 Chairman's Update**

Members noted and accepted the Chairman's report.

## **3 Programme Board Chairs' Reports**

Members noted the updates from each of the LGA's Board Chairs.

**Date of next meeting:** Thursday 18 July 2013  
12:30pm – 1:30pm  
The Westminster Suite (8<sup>th</sup> Floor)  
Local Government House