

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

Safeguarding Children

1. On 1 August I appeared on a BBC Newsnight panel discussion to speak about what was being done to improve the way children are protected from abuse and neglect. Following on from tragic cases including Daniel Pelka, I explained the system in some areas needed to be better. Councils throughout the county are seeking to have a balance of staff with both the quality and experience to pick up these issues whilst having social services that responds quickly to matters brought to their attention. Councils are striving to improve coordination between departments with schools, health and social services communicating concerns between each other, effective safeguarding of children can only be achieved by understanding that the needs of children are paramount and every individual and agency need to play their part, working together and fully understanding their responsibilities.

Joint CYP/CWB Meeting on Children's Health

2. Since the last report we have held a joint CYP/CWB meeting where there was a discussion on transfer of Public Health Commissioning for 0-5 year olds to local government in 2015. Office holders agreed that the transfer needed to focus on the outcomes, looking at what we want to achieve instead of the bureaucracy of the process; make sure all sides including NHS England, the government, councils and the LGA are working together and sharing information in an open manner; stress the need to get this topic put on Health and Wellbeing agendas across the country; emphasise to councils how they can best help prepare the ground for the transition, including sharing best practice examples; demonstrate to NHS England that there is real enthusiasm from councils to make this process run smoothly using open communication, best practice examples and outcomes focused planning.

Action research into more effective commissioning of children's homes

3. In July we launched the final report on the LGA commissioned Office of Public Management's (OPM) work with ten local authorities in action research into more effective strategic commissioning of children's residential care homes. The report summarises the findings and some recommendations for the sector. Given the high profile recently placed on children's homes and the recent Government proposals affecting them, we hope this report will be a helpful resource to explore some of the issues affecting councils' commissioning of children's homes.

Population Increases putting pressure on local government finances

4. On 9 August I gave an interview to BBC Radio 4's The World Tonight about the news of a population increase in the UK and the impact these demographic pressures had on local government finance. I explained it was clear that with a growing population and people living to an older age we would need a fundamental rewiring of the way public services are provided and paid for in this country though taking financial distribution out of ministers' hands and replacing it with agreement across English local government.

Youth Unemployment

5. Over the summer we have pushed the case for local authorities to have a greater levers over services to help young people into work and learning. This has included publishing a poll of unemployed young people which found services too complicated and poorly targeted to their personal needs, a press release on how some councils are putting the Government's Youth Contract to shame in areas where local authorities are leading it rather than national

agencies, and recently a report highlighting a drop in the number of young people receiving support on national skills and employment programmes over the last three years.

6. Most recently, I spoke to the press regarding the reduction in the number of 16 to 24-year-olds on training or employment programmes from 605,354 in 2009-10 to 559,183 in 2012-13. It is clear that while there are a number of good initiatives, the Government has side-lined councils and incentivised a complicated series of 35 services and schemes to work in isolation of each other, with no clarity on who is responsible for leading the offer to young people on the ground. We have been using this evidence to make a case to the Deputy Prime Minister's Review of national schemes and services to 16-24 year olds, due to report in mid- September. Further information is available at www.local.gov.uk/hidden-talents.

Schools Urged to help parents keep uniform costs down

7. With many schools up and down the country becoming academies or free schools it is understandable that many will want to mark this with changes to their uniforms however this is leading to mounting costs for parents. This month I spoke to the press outlining that Head teachers have a responsibility to minimise any additional costs that occur because they change their school's name or status, for whatever reason. The LGA would like to see schools sticking close to an existing colour scheme, changing one item only such as a tie, or allowing parents to sew new badges and logos onto clothes. Offering uniforms from a number of retailers also brings in the necessary competition to keep costs down.

Workshop on Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation

8. I chaired a well-attended workshop on the sensitive and high profile issue of tackling child sexual exploitation at the LGA's Annual Conference. At the session, the LGA launched an online resource to support councils raise awareness with their wider communities, which attracted over 1,500 unique visitors during the remainder of July.

Rising Demand for Primary School Places

9. On 3 September I spoke to the media regarding the dramatic rise in demand for primary school places, which could see some parts of the country with nearly twice as many pupils as school places in just two years. I explained that while parents quite rightly expect their child to have access to a place in a good school, councils are facing unprecedented pressures in tackling the desperate shortage of new school places.
10. Councils across the country have been increasing places by expanding schools where possible through additional classes or new buildings. However, without enough resource to provide places we are seeing some schools having to take extreme measures including converting non-classroom space and reducing playground space. This seriously risks prioritising quantity of places at the expense of the quality of education we are providing. The process of opening up much-needed schools is being impaired by a one-size-fits-all approach and in some cases by the presumption in favour of free schools and academies. I warned that this could result in parents scrambling for places that just don't exist and threaten to seriously impact on our children's education.

Meeting with Edward Timpson MP

11. On 16 July Councillor Rita Krishna attended the first of four meetings with Edward Timpson MP about adoption reform with a particular focus on the challenge of adopter recruitment. This brought together central and local government with the voluntary sector to explore how we can work together to secure a sufficient number of adoptive families for the children waiting.

Visits to Council

12. During August, I have taken advantage of the lighter diary commitments to visit councils including Herefordshire, North Yorkshire and Kirklees, and hosted a visit from the Children's Commissioner, Maggie Atkinson, to discuss issues surrounding unaccompanied children.

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