

Extracts from an LGA Children and Young People Programme Board Briefing on the Board's priorities for 2011/12

Achieving greater devolution for local government	Helping councils tackle their challenges through:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • education reforms – lobbying for the powers and funding that councils need to support their strong strategic role in education as proposed in the schools White Paper • ensuring that children's 'health' is a priority in the planned change to the health service • working with the Youth Justice Board to support the council role in reducing youth offending and the use of custody for young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a sector-led improvement and support programme, supported by £10.5m of funding won from DfE • influencing the implementation of the Munro Review of child protection to free up front-line staff from unnecessary bureaucracy to allow them to spend more time with children and their families • supporting councils to take on a more strategic role in education • supporting councils to achieve increased productivity.

[Taken from *Your Local Government Group*
(<http://www.local.gov.uk/services>)]

1. Children's Safeguarding peer challenge programme

The LGA's Children's Safeguarding peer challenge programme has been developed over the past two years.

Our current position

The key purpose of the peer challenge programme is to help local councils fulfill their safeguarding responsibilities. Twenty six challenges have been delivered so far this year and there are 13 more booked for autumn 2011. The programme is delivered by LGG in partnership with ADCS, the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). It is complementary to initiatives by SOLACE to support chief executives in this area and the work of the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services to support Directors of Children's Services. LGA lead on the recruitment, training and accreditation of officer and member peers. Currently there are 153 officer peers and 25 member peers with two further accreditation centres for 32 peers planned for the autumn.

Next steps for the LGA

The Children's Safeguarding peer challenge programme will now form part of the wider CIB sector-led offer. Councils are entitled to a free Children's Safeguarding Challenge every three years.

2. The Munro Review of Child Protection

Last year the Government asked Professor Munro to conduct an independent review of child protection. The final report was published in May 2011, with a series of recommendations designed to reform the system. The Government response largely accepted the recommendations, although with some caveats on timing, resource and certain details still to be worked through.

Our current position

The Review has a welcome emphasis on increasing the scope for professional judgment and reducing overly burdensome central prescription and bureaucracy so that social workers can spend more time with children and families. This is something councils have long argued for. It also recognises that other services e.g. health and schools have a role to play.

Next steps for the LGA

Local government had significant input to the Review and this is expected to continue through implementation. This will be a long-term reform and there is much work to be done to ensure its success. It will be particularly important for LGA to influence the Government's consideration of early help provision and to ensure safeguarding is a central consideration in health reform.

3. The Family Justice Review

The interim report of the Family Justice Review, published for consultation in March identified that the system is under huge strain; the average case took 53 weeks in 2010 and this is likely to rise significantly. Lengthy delays are not only financially costly, but also detrimental to children's well-being. Numbers of cases have risen in recent years, but this is not the sole reason for delays. The way the system operates also has an impact and the interim report makes recommendations designed to address this. A challenge for local authorities to improve care planning and court skills of social workers has been raised by the Review.

Our current position

LGA wrote to the Review endorsing the consultation response submitted by ADCS. The letter specifically welcomed the focus on the needs of children in the system and proposals to reduce delays and their associated harm. It highlighted that the courts have an essential role to play in safeguarding and that it is vital to get reform right for children, young people and families.

Next steps for the LGA

The proposals are likely to be resisted and lobbied against by the judiciary and other stakeholders. The final report is due in the autumn and it is likely that LGA would need to lobby Government if the recommendations are to be implemented. We will also work with the Social Work Reform Board on addressing the concerns raised about social workers' skills.

4. Youth remand proposals in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill

The Bill, published in June, paves the way for the transfer of funding responsibility to councils for young people held on remand and will give this group of young people 'looked after' status. Related provisions aim to reduce the number of young people remanded to custody.

Our current position

LGA supports the devolution of youth custody budgets in order that councils have an incentive to invest in prevention. It will be essential, however, to ensure that the full, true costs are transferred to local authority budgets. We agree that children in custody should be effectively supported, but have concerns that automatically giving them all full 'looked after' status may not be the most appropriate or proportionate route to achieve this. It would also have significant financial implications for councils. Cllr David Simmonds gave evidence to the Bill Committee on this issue, highlighting our concerns.

Next steps for the LGA

We are liaising with the Youth Justice Board and ADCS on the details of the transfer; financial modelling to ensure the responsibilities are fully funded; and support for councils to prepare for these new responsibilities. We are exploring options for effective and proportionate local authority support for young people remanded to custody.

5. Young Offender Education

From September 2010, councils have had a duty to secure education for young offenders. The contracts for these services, which end in July, are held by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and are due to transfer to councils from April 2012. The Ministry of Justice is again considering interim and long term solutions for funding and commissioning.

Our current position

A YPLA (or other central body) role in allocating funding represents an unnecessary layer of administration. Councils already have the responsibility to secure education provision for young people in custody and are well placed to commission these services, building on relationships with local education providers. Moreover, they have committed resources in preparing for the transfer of contracts. Councils will need time and resources to pursue the option of commissioning new providers; a long-term solution therefore needs to be agreed as soon as possible.

Next steps for the LGA

LGA will continue to work with the relevant local authorities and to make the case for councils to be given this commissioning role.

6. Children's Health

Children's health services have traditionally been viewed as one of the Cinderellas of the health service¹ and there is a danger that children's health issues will be overlooked in the new public health proposals [contained in the Health and Social Care Bill](#).

Our current position

Councils and their partners need to work together at a local level to address issues such as safeguarding; commissioning services for children; meeting the particular needs of vulnerable children and young people; and integrating health and social care. So the LGA has been working with stakeholders to identify shared priorities and to share ideas for a support programme for councils and local partners. The Association has also been lobbying during the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill to seek clarity on how each component part of the NHS architecture, and in particular the NHS Commissioning Board and Clinical Commissioning Groups, will be held accountable for safeguarding issues.

Next steps for the LGA

This piece of work is in its early stages of development but it will remain a key priority for the Board for the remainder of the year.

¹ *Getting it right for children and young people*, Kennedy Review, September 2010:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_119446.pdf

7. Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

The DfE Green Paper *Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability*² proposes earlier intervention and support for those with SEND; a single assessment and 'Education, Health and Care Plan'; and devolving resources to create 'personalised budgets'. To explore the proposals in the Green Paper further, DfE and the Department for Health have launched a 'Pathfinder project', offering up to £150,000 per council applying in partnership and with PCTs and voluntary and community organisations.

Our current position

In our response to the Green Paper we supported the proposals for a single assessment and Education, Health and Care Plan and for extending personalised budgets to some aspects of SEND. However, we have stressed that many councils are already working to achieve the aims described in the Green Paper, but find their ability to do so is restricted by bureaucracy, legal impediments and lack of clarity about responsibility and funding.

Next steps for the LGA

We are seeking to influence the development of the Pathfinder projects to reflect a sector-led approach to improvement, so they can make a meaningful contribution to helping local government improve the delivery of its services, as well as providing information to Government. We are negotiating our involvement in awarding the bids, the evaluation of the projects and how their good practice will be shared.

8. Young people's participation in education, employment and training

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2010 raised the age of compulsory participation by young people in some form of education or training to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. This means that by 2015 even young people that have left full-time education and are employed will have to be in a job with training up to the age of 18. The Act gave councils the statutory duty to 'secure that enough suitable education and training is provided' for young people over compulsory school age but under 19 and gave councils powers to enforce the raising of the participation age.

Our current position

Following the General Election, the new government made a number of changes that have significantly changed councils' direct powers and access to funds to deliver on this new duty. Changes to 16 – 19 funding mean that funds to FE and sixth form colleges now flow via the YPLA directly to colleges (rather than via councils), reducing the ability of councils to influence the patterns of post-16 provision. The current Education Bill will end councils' responsibility for providing universal careers advice to all young people through Connexions, which was seen as a key tool in encouraging wider

² <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208027>

participation – schools and sixth form colleges will now have this duty. And the commencement of councils' powers to enforce compulsory participation has been delayed.

The implications of these changes is still being worked through, but LGA is working with DfE to ease the transition to the new arrangements, including a careers summit for councils in July and work with the Department on pilots with 16 councils to explore the council role in delivering the rise in the participation age.

Next steps for the LGA

The raising of the participation age will coincide with a period of increasing youth unemployment and the Children and Young People Programme Board is working with the Economy and Transport Board to develop a new programme of work to support councils in both these areas. This will build on the Association's *Hidden Talents* work³, adapting it to the new policy landscape.

³ <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=2109543> (login required)