

Children in Trouble Project - Decisions and Actions Required

Decisions

- 1. Members are invited to:**
 - a. note the background to, and progress so far on, the Children in Trouble project.**
 - b. offer guidance as appropriate from a Safer Communities perspective to Cllr Domleo, as the SCB member of the task group.**
 - c. agree that LGA officers should draw on the Children in Trouble project in responding to the Criminal Justice Bill clauses on youth offending (See separate summary in Item 5)**
 - d. consider the scope for further joined-up working with the Children and Young People's Board as a backdrop and input to the September round of priority-setting Board meetings.**

Actions Required

- 2. LGA officers to action as necessary.**

Action by: LGA Safer Communities and Children and Young People Board teams

Children in Trouble Project

Summary

1. This report provides an update on the progress of the joint LGA and Howard League Children in Trouble project.

Background

2. Through this project the LGA is seeking to reduce the use of custody for most children and young people as it is costly, inefficient, increases offending, and creates more troubled young people. The use of community sentences target the root of children and young people's offending behaviour and evidence suggests that they reduce the seriousness and frequency of re-offending. A more detailed position was published in the summer of 2006.
3. In 2005 the LGA's Children and Young People's Board agreed to develop a campaign which aims to reduce youth offending and reduce custody as an option for most children and young people. A Member Task Group, led by Councillor Les Lawrence and a stakeholder group of key associations, government and charities, has been set up to help guide the project and lobby key influencers. The overall long-term objectives of the project are to:
 - reduce the number of children who are held in custody by promoting options for community sentences;
 - explore the opportunities for adjusting the financial incentives to managing children in the community as far as possible;
 - enable local authorities to respond better with their partners to reduce youth offending and the frequency and seriousness of re-offending; and
 - improve local government's reputation as a community leader, able to champion the interests of communities, children and young people.
4. The project is looking to demonstrate our case by working with a local area/authority and their key partners. We do not want to prescribe how any pilot should be taken forward, but we would like to see a number of core outcomes so we can evaluate the impact, and we hope that work will aim to:
 - reduce the number of children and young people in custody;
 - reduce the amount, frequency and seriousness of youth re/offending;
 - improve partnership arrangements with key partners including within the local authority;

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- show cost efficiencies through joined up working; and
- improving the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people.

Progress to Date

5. In September 2006 we wrote to all 150 children's services authorities explaining background and aims of the project and invited local authorities to put themselves forward to work with us in demonstrating our case. A number of councils expressed an interest in working with the project as pilots areas, and detailed proposals were submitted by each. The Task Group short listed proposals and consultants undertook site visits to each of those local authorities, which included meetings with leading officers and Members. At a meeting with Members in January 2007 consultants reported back their views on proposals in light of the information gleaned from site visits and discussions with Members and officers. The Task Group agreed to work with four pilot areas.
6. Each of the four pilot areas differs from the others in terms of approach to reducing the levels of offending/reoffending and reduce the level of custodial sentences as well as the target cohort of children and young people. The four areas are also distinct from each other in terms of geography, local political dynamics and administrative structures (i.e. there is a mixture of two-tier and unitary local authorities). Pilot areas are now moving ahead with their work.
7. The LGA has commissioned the NFER to undertake an evaluation of project. This evaluation will be tiered to capture the overall progress against national level objectives and the progress at the local level against each pilots own specific objectives. The local tier is being framed in a way that will, so far as possible, allow comparison between areas and will show the benefits in terms of reduced custody levels and offending/reoffending of the work that is being undertaken by each area even as a microcosm.
8. At present, the NFER is gathering bench marking data and developing, with local areas, questionnaires for use with young people and other stakeholders.
9. The LGA and Howard League have jointly produced a media and communications brief for each area so that any local media/public affairs work is undertaken from a shared understanding of how this work should be communicated externally. Given the sensitive and emotive nature of issues surrounding young offenders, it is important that the message we are promoting is delivered at the right time and in the right language. However, because of the emotive nature of the issue of how to deal with young offenders, each of the pilot areas has requested anonymity until such time as outcomes are available to support their case. We are hopeful that positive results will be seen in the next 6 months and will be working with the local areas to communicate that effectively when it is felt that time is right.
10. A Member from the Task Group has been aligned with each pilot area and meetings between that Member and the leading Member for each pilot (as well

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as the most senior officers available) are being arranged to take place over the summer. The intention is to continue to foster and promote local political engagement in the work that is happening locally and nationally.

- 11. The next meeting of the Task Group is taking place in September and the lead Member from each of the four pilot areas will be invited to attend.**

Contact Officer: Clive Grimshaw (telephone: 020 7664 3028 or email: clive.grimshaw@ga.gov.uk)