

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

Communications with Schools Minister David Laws MP

1. Following the discussion at the February Board meeting, I wrote to Schools Minister David Laws MP about the proposed new Regional Schools Commissioners. I raised the Board's concerns about the lack of consultation on the new posts; how the new Commissioners could be held to account by councils; and concerns over the size and coverage of the new regions.
2. The Minister replied that he did not think consultation was necessary, as the changes related to Department for Education's (DfE) own capacity and structures to manage the growing numbers of academies. He said that the new commissioners would have a remit covering academies only and would not impact on the role of local authorities, so the suggestion that they should be held to account by councils goes "somewhat beyond the intent of the RSC model". On the regional structures, he argued that "given the wealth of expertise in London" the structure is intended "to help spread that education leadership across the country". I will continue to raise our concerns through my regular meetings with the Minister.
3. Since the last report I have also written to the Minister about the challenges faced in implementing the Government's commitment to free school meals for infants. I highlighted shortfalls in capital funding in some areas and the practical difficulties of tendering for, and procuring the services needed by the beginning of September this year. I have asked for greater clarity from the Government about what the expectations are in relation to nutritional standards and whether a hot meal will be required, and I have asked for guidance to schools forums about how the capital resources should be allocated between schools.

Post-16 UCAS style application websites for young people not going to university

4. On 11 March I wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister regarding his announcement on 27 February that local authorities would run post-16 UCAS style application websites for young people not going to university. I am seeking greater clarity on the proposal and potential implications for councils, and making it clear that any national commitments be fully funded by Government following a new burdens assessment. We were not consulted in advance of the announcement, but will be working with the DfE which is tasked with developing options.

National Youth Agency annual conference

5. I recently chaired the National Youth Agency's annual conference '*Delivering better for less – councils and the youth offer in the current climate*', at which we heard from key sector leaders on the current situation facing youth services and the national and local level; including from the Minister Nick Hurd MP, and the Shadow Minister for Education Rushanara Ali MP.

Joint Children and Young People and Community Wellbeing Board

6. In March, we held a joint meeting between the Children and Young People Board and the Community Well Being Board to discuss children's health. The transfer of public health commissioning to councils, and in particular for 0-5 year olds, was a lively discussion between members which will help direct the work of the LGA ahead of the transfer in October 2015. There were also discussions on children's mental health and the wide ranging reforms to the provision of services for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Education employers for Europe

7. I chaired a meeting of the education employers for Europe in Brussels as part of an ongoing programme of work engaging with European work to improve prospects for young people in the context of the Single Market.

Visits to councils

8. I continued to visit councils around the country including Bradford while attending as a guest presenter at the 'BLAST' project against sexual exploitation of boys and young men, and Cheshire West and Chester.

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