

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

The council role in school place planning

1. On 14 March we launched a collection of case studies: '*The Council role in school place planning*'. It features some of the measures taken by councils to meet the recent surge in demand for school places and outlines a five-point plan which the LGA believes is necessary to ensure councils have the funding and power to create the further new places needed. It received widespread coverage in newspapers and the BBC highlighting our analysis of Department for Education figures, which suggests a third of local authority areas will need to provide a total of 80,716 new secondary places by 2019/2020. While nationally the picture varies, locally some areas could face a significant squeeze and the number facing difficulties is set to increase over the next five years.

Our ambition for children

2. March also saw the launch of a new consultation paper: *Our ambition for children and young people*, which seeks the views of councils and their partners in the voluntary and private sectors on drawing up a clear set of shared ambitions for children. The consultation process seeks to take forward our proposal for rewiring public services for children and young people so they are built and integrated around the needs of children and their families, not around buildings, institutions and wasteful bureaucracy. It asks how all parts of the public, private and voluntary sectors can work together with children and young people, families and the wider community to achieve our shared ambitions. We are also working with the British Youth Council to seek the views of children and young people. Our aim is to influence debate now and the party manifestos being written for the next General election in 2015. To achieve this we intend to launch a shared ambition at the LGA Annual Conference in July.

Education Forum

3. I attended the Education Forum on 27 March, which is a meeting between the DfE, teaching unions and teachers' employers (including the LGA representing local government employers). We discussed the Government announcement on 13 March that a national schools funding formula will not now be introduced in April 2015 as proposed in the Comprehensive Spending Review in June 2013. Instead, an additional £350m of funding will be distributed among the 62 'least well-funded' authorities to bring them up to a minimum funding level for a variety of pupil characteristics. All schools will be protected with a minimum funding guarantee to limit any losses to schools as a result of formula changes to 1.5% per pupil. All councils will be funded to at least at the same cash level per pupil in 2015-16.
4. We also discussed the recent DfE guidance and funding of the introduction of universal infant free school meals from September this year. In the 2014 to 2015 academic year, schools will be paid funding at a flat rate of £2.30 for each meal taken by newly eligible pupils. Initial provisional allocations will be based on an estimate of national take-up and then adjusted once the department has details of the actual number of meals taken in individual schools. Additional one-off funding will be provided in the 2014/15 financial year to small schools (those with up to 150 pupils in total) to help with transitional costs. Targeted advice and support will be provided to schools and local authorities through the UIFSM implementation support service.

5. In a recent letter to Schools Minister David Laws MP, I asked for greater clarity as to whether schools would be required to provide hot meals to infants. In reply, the Minister pointed to the DfE guidance, which is non-statutory, and which says: "The legal requirement on schools will be to provide a lunchtime meal that meets the School Food Standards, where they apply. We expect that pupils will routinely be offered a hot meal option." However, the draft new regulations and the legislation itself do not specify that hot cooked meals should be provided.

Children and Families Bill receives Royal Assent

6. The Children and Families Bill received Royal Assent on 13 March. The various parts of the Children and Families Act 2014 (the Act) take effect at different stages between April 2014 and April 2015. The Bill, first introduced to the House of Commons just over a year ago, was subjected to rigorous scrutiny, with Peers tabling and debating amendments at Committee Stage over 12 sittings. During this time, the LGA lobbied Peers for changes to the Bill and, in doing so, had some notable achievements, including curtailing a power in the Bill to remove all local authorities from adopter recruitment and clarifying the consequences of a clause relating to the Secretary of State's powers of intervention in children's services. The LGA also lobbied successfully for changes to the SEN provisions.
7. The parts of the Act relating to adoption and contact, family justice, welfare and children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities are of importance to local authorities. Councils retain the pivotal role of identifying, assessing and securing education provision for children and young people with SEN but several key reforms have been introduced. These include the replacement of the SEN statement with an integrated Education, Health and Social Care (EHC) Plan and clear duties on health bodies for the health provision in EHC plans. We aim to publish an LGA guide to the new legislation shortly.

Children missing education and child protection conferences

8. I chaired a Capita Conference on Children Missing Education on 19 March and spoke at an NSPCC conference *How safe are our children?* on 1 April.

Pupils with medical conditions

9. I met Baroness Barbara Young, the Chief Executive of Diabetes UK to discuss the new duty on schools to make arrangements to support pupils with medical conditions, including those with diabetes. The new duty comes into force in September 2014 and will apply to all types of school (except for nursery schools) but it will not apply to Further Education or other colleges. Diabetes UK is going to run a campaign to raise awareness about the new duties. We agreed at the meeting to include information about the campaign in our bulletins to help to promote the need for schools and their health partners to make sure that children with medical conditions receive the right support during the school day and when taking part in school activities.

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