

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

### **Meeting with Schools Minister, David Laws MP**

1. On 1 May I met with David Laws, together with representatives from ADCS and SOLACE, and we discussed the implementation of free school meals for infants in September and the proposed cuts to the Education Services Grant. The Minister expressed his gratitude for the input and efforts of councils in supporting the free school meals policy and the steps they have been taking to assess and prepare schools. He said the Department for Education was working to identify and prioritise the local authority areas which are at risk of non-delivery in September and channel support and guidance to them. He reported that early results from a DfE survey of readiness showed that overall the picture is looking good, but there are some areas where school food infrastructure has been run down. I raised the issue of the link between free school meals and Pupil Premium funding and the worry that schools have that their funding will decrease because parents who are eligible because of low incomes will no longer register for Free School Meals. He said the DfE is intending to write to councils and schools about how to encourage parents to continue to register to allow their child to benefit from pupil premium funding.
2. The Government is consulting on £200 million (20%) cuts in 2015/16 to the Education Services Grant, which supports the council role in education. The Minister stressed how important it was that councils engaged in the consultation, because there is a risk that failure to do so could result in deeper cuts. I suggested that the debate should be policy-led rather than finance-led, and greater clarity from Government on what they would expect councils to stop doing if funding is significantly cut would be helpful. This consultation represents an opportunity to redefine roles in the education system to take account of greater school autonomy and significantly reduced funding for councils and the LGA and SOLACE will be submitting a joint response.

### **Adoption Leadership Board**

3. The Adoption Leadership Board met in April for the first time under its new chair, Sir Martin Narey, and agreed to establish a series of regional adoption boards to help drive improvement locally. The LGA has agreed to support these structures through the identification of regional "Member Champions" for adoption, who will provide additional support and oversight to local arrangements.

### **Social Work task and finish group**

4. The Children and Young People and Workforce Boards agreed in January to establish a joint task and finish group to consider the issues of children's social worker recruitment and retention. The group met on 1st May and agreed to map existing good practice across the sector, and in the longer term develop a bid for funding from the DfE's Innovation Programme to support new ways of working.

### **Neglect – response to NSPCC release on rise of emotional abuse**

5. I responded to statistics showing a 50 per cent increase in emotional abuse referrals from the NSPCC: "No child should have to grow up in an unsafe or neglectful environment and councils will not hesitate to intervene when children are thought to be at risk.

“These new figures highlight the extent to which emotional abuse and neglect continues to impact upon children and young people and the extent to which this impacts on the increasing demand for child protection services, with a 50 per cent increase in emotional abuse referrals from the NSPCC alone.

“Social workers still too often hear about children at risk when it is too late, and it is vital that agencies like the police, schools and health come together locally to review and improve the way we all work together to deal with emotional abuse and neglect. The whole community has a crucial role to play in identifying and responding to child abuse, and it is vital that everyone has the support they need to play their part.”

### **Fostering – response to Fostering Network press release**

6. I responded to a poll in early May- revealing that less than a third of the UK adult population (28 per cent) think they would be likely to be accepted as foster carers were they to apply within the next two years, according to the results of a new poll published today by the Fostering Network. The YouGov poll of 4,818 adults, published to coincide with the start of Foster Care Fortnight, found that a number of groups, including single people, those with no children, under 25s and over 55s were even less optimistic about the likelihood of being accepted to foster.
7. I said: “This is a timely survey, and highlights some of the misconceptions that still exist around fostering. The truth is that we desperately need more foster carers to come forward and provide loving homes for some of our most vulnerable children, and councils are already working hard to recruit more people to this hugely rewarding role.

### **Pressure on School places**

8. The Times, Guardian, Mail, Telegraph Online and Independent on Sunday referenced the LGA’s recent school places analysis ahead of schools admissions day. About one in 10 children were expected to miss their first choice primary school on national offer day next week as pressure from a baby boom adds to an existing squeeze on places. Families who fail to get children into a preferred school are likely to face an anxious wait until the following week to launch a formal appeals process. I responded that: “It is going to cause concern for parents who have to wait.” The LGA said that more primary places were desperately needed across England by 2017 and some schools have resorted to turning libraries and music rooms into classrooms or reduced playground space in a bid to meet the growing demand for places.

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