

Children and Young People– report from Cllr Judith Blake CBE (Chair)

Children's services

Adoption and Special Guardianship

1. Councillor Susie Charles attended a meeting of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board on 15 October, where a range of issues were discussed including kinship care, improving adopter recruitment especially among BAME communities and the modernising permanence programme.

Children going missing

2. In September, the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults published its report into children going missing from out-of-area care placements. I have written to the Chair of the APPG, Ann Coffey MP, to raise my concerns over the language used in the report publicity, which described councils as "recruiting sergeants" for county lines gangs and implied children in out-of-area placements would inevitably have poor outcomes. Ann has agreed to meet with me to discuss how we might work together going forward to address the findings of the report.

Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Steering Group

3. The Board, alongside the Community Wellbeing and Safer & Stronger Communities Boards have set up a cross-board steering group on children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing, which has now met twice. Their role will help to shape and develop a strong position for the LGA on how councils can improve the mental health of our younger generations. ISOS Partnerships have been commissioned to undertake the research, including carrying out field visits to councils up and down the country. We hope to see the findings launched at this year's National Children and Adult Services Conference.

Special Educational Needs and Disability

4. I have spoken to the press in response to a range of reports over the last three months on SEND, including the announcement of £700 million in additional funding for council high needs budgets, as well as the failed judicial review of SEND funding and the Local Government Ombudsman's report on the provision of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
5. I have emphasised that while the additional funding is welcome, both the judicial review and findings of the LGO's report show that the SEND system continues to be under significant pressure and that the forthcoming review of the SEND system, also announced as part of the spending round, must be used to get a clear picture of what is driving the increased demand for support and what can be done to address it.

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Children's Health

6. In July, the LGA held their annual conference on childhood obesity, showcasing innovative whole council approaches to tackling childhood obesity and sharing the latest research and findings from experts. Over 90 delegates attended.
7. In July, Councillor Cook attended the national *Youth Voice* event and spoke on the theme of 'Moving to Independence', outlining the support councils offer to young people and the importance of increase young people's independence and helping them access meaningful employment and good quality housing.
8. In October we briefed MPs ahead of a debate on the reduction of health visitor numbers (that is due to take place on Wednesday 23 October). Our briefing highlighted the need for a properly resourced, integrated workforce plan for the Healthy Child Programme and the LGA's commitment to working with the NHS and Health Education England to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified health visitors. We highlighted the impact of reductions to the public health grant since 2015 on delivery of the Healthy Child Programme and the positive work councils have done to ensure children receive the help they need despite financial challenges.

Parliamentary Work

9. We have submitted evidence to the Justice Committee's inquiry into children and young people in custody. We highlighted the success of Youth Offending Teams in reducing youth offending, and flagged the significant reductions to the central government grant for YOTs that could threaten this success. We also called improvements in the safety of young offender institutions and secure training centres, and better coordination between the secure estate and councils to make sure young people were well supported when leaving custody.
10. A debate was held in Parliament on 24 July looking at the role and sufficiency of youth services. We briefed MPs ahead of this debate, highlighting the need for sufficient funding to provide young people with the services that they needed, and pointed out that a wide range of services impacted on outcomes for young people, including housing and health and wellbeing services. We also called for some of the existing funding for the National Citizen Service to be devolved to councils to provide year round youth services.
11. We briefed parliamentarians on issues around unregulated accommodation for a debate in Parliament on 15 October. We highlighted reasons for a rise in the use of unregulated provision, including a shortfall in suitable places in registered children's homes, and outlined the ways in which councils assured themselves that placements were suitable for young people. We also emphasised that councils, providers and partners including the police all needed to work together to ensure the safety of young people in all accommodation, especially where these young people may be vulnerable to exploitation.

Key Points

12. We will be issuing an updated position paper for the Bright Futures children's social care campaign at NCASC in November. This will build on the work that we've already done

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through the campaign and outline where we will be concentrating our efforts for the next year. We will particularly be looking at early help and making sure children are at the centre of policy making.

13. There has been a lot of coverage recently over councils' use of unregulated accommodation and out-of-area placements for children in care. We are working with Ofsted, the Department for Education and the Association of Directors of Children's Services to identify ways forward. This includes a piece of work to develop a nationwide sufficiency statement for children's social care placements so that we can spot the gaps and understand what provision needs to be developed in the coming years, so that we can support councils to develop this.

Press Releases

14. Since the last forum, I have commented in the following LGA press releases on behalf of the Board:
 - 14.1 [LGA responds to Children's Commissioner's manifesto](#)
 - 14.2 [LGA responds to National Audit Office's SEND report](#)
 - 14.3 [LGA responds to YMCA Report on youth services spending](#)
 - 14.4 [LGA responds to Local Government Ombudsman report on education, health and care plans](#)
 - 14.5 [LGA responds to Grandparents Plus report on kinship carers](#)
 - 14.6 [LGA responds to HMI Prohibition report on children leaving custody](#)
 - 14.7 [LGA responds to Education Policy Institute report on unexplained pupil exits](#)
 - 14.8 [LGA responds to Ofsted report on home education](#)
 - 14.9 [LGA responds to Secretary of State for Education announcement on adoption](#)

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