

Discussion with Edward Timpson MP, Children and Families Minister

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This report provides background information for the discussion with Minister Edward Timpson.

Edward Timpson was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families in September 2012. He is the Conservative MP for Crewe and Nantwich.

Edward Timpson sat on the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights. He was also Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Adoption and Fostering, Looked-after Children and Care Leavers, as well as Vice Chairman for the Run-away and Missing Children Group. Between 2010 and 2012 he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Secretary.

Recommendation

This report is for information.

Action

Officers to take action arising out the discussion, as directed by members.

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Edward Timpson's ministerial responsibilities

1. The minister is responsible for children and families in the Department for Education. Responsibilities include:
 - 1.1 adoption, fostering and residential care home reform
 - 1.2 child protection
 - 1.3 special educational needs and disability
 - 1.4 family law and justice
 - 1.5 children's and young people's services
 - 1.6 school sport
 - 1.7 Cafcass
 - 1.8 Office of Children's Commissioner

Innovation Fund

2. Edward Timpson announced the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme in October 2013. The programme will be for £30 million in 2014/15, and potentially more in 2015/16, to support the development, testing and sharing of more effective ways of supporting children who need help from children's social care services. The intention is to provide some small allocations of £10k for working up ideas and providing back fill for those, alongside a number of bigger and more wide reaching projects.
3. The government has since confirmed two particular areas of interest to the programme:
 - 3.1 Rethinking Children's Social Work, restating some of the Munro Review recommendations on reducing bureaucracy and reorganising social work teams.
 - 3.2 Rethinking Support for Adolescents, highlighting a perceived over-reliance on short term placements and residential care.

Adoption

4. Adoption has become an increasingly high profile issue in recent years, with a number of initiatives now underway aimed at improving the adoption system and making it easier to find permanent, loving homes for children who need them. This includes the establishment of a national Adoption Leadership Board, chaired by Sir Martin Narey and with membership from DfE, LGA, ADCS and Solace alongside a number of third sector providers.
5. Councils have already made significant progress in this area, leading a 15% rise in the number of children adopted and a 34% increase in the number of approved adopters in the last year alone, but it is clear that there is still more work to do. For example, a significant issue is the growing gap between the number of prospective adopters and

the number of children who are waiting to be adopted. At the end of March 2013, there were 6,000 children cleared by the courts for adoption but waiting to be placed with a permanent family. DfE estimated that around 3,100 more adopters were needed than were approved as at 31 March 2013 to meet the needs of those children.

6. The Adoption Leadership Board has agreed to establish a series of Regional Adoption Boards with a focus on removing unnecessary delays, increasing the number of prospective adopters and improving adoption support.

Le Grand review of children's services improvement capacity

7. In March 2014, Edward Timpson MP announced that Professor Julian Le Grand would oversee the commissioning of a piece of work to "explore developing capacity for delivering children's services, including outside of local authorities". It is intended that the review will report to Ministers at the end of October 2014.
8. The review will examine the existing market and consider the potential for developing additional capacity / increasing diversity of provision. Its stated aim is to widen the options available to local authorities voluntarily seeking new partnerships to improve delivery and to Ministers seeking to intervene to address severe or longstanding failure.
9. The review is separate from the ongoing consultation on delegating children's social care functions, which are enabling regulations to allow councils greater flexibility in commissioning external providers to support service delivery. These regulations are not concerned with government intervention, which is a key area of focus for the Le Grand Review.
10. Sir Merrick Cockell wrote to Edward Timpson MP when the review was first announced, urging government to ensure that the review considers all possible models of improvement support. LGA officers have met with the review team and the LGA will want to engage further with the review as it progresses.