

## **Children's Social Care**

### **Purpose of report**

To seek member views on three potential areas of future work in children's social care, covering adoption, corporate parenting and local safeguarding children boards.

### **Summary**

This report updates members on the work of the Adoption Leadership Board, and asks members to consider a proposal to run a nationwide Corporate Parenting week in October 2014. It also provides an update on work to examine whether current arrangements for the funding and operation of LSCB's are fit for purpose.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to consider proposals for the LGA to:

- Identify Members Champions in each region for adoption
- Hold a national Corporate Parenting week in October 2014
- Examine whether current arrangements for the funding and operation of LSCBs are fit for purpose.

### **Action**

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

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## **Adoption**

- 1 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.
- 2 Councils have already made significant progress in this area, leading to a 15% rise in the number of children adopted in the last year and a 34% increase in the number of approved adopters, but it is clear that there is still more work to do. DfE estimates that around 3,100 more adopters are needed to meet the needs of 6,000 children who had been cleared by the courts for adoption but were still waiting to be adopted at the end of March 2013.
- 3 In recognition that improvement is most effective when driven locally, the national Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) has agreed to establish a series of Regional Adoption Boards. These Boards will mirror the objectives of the ALB, with a particular focus on supporting and challenging the adoption system to maximise the likelihood that:
  - 3.1 Children for whom adoption is the best way of achieving permanence are adopted without unnecessary delay;
  - 3.2 there are enough prospective adopters to provide homes for all the children approved to be adopted; and
  - 3.3 adoptions do not breakdown through the right adoption support being readily available to all people who need it.
- 4 Regional Adoption Boards will be led by a designated Director of Children's Services for the region, and will include representation from local voluntary adoption agencies. Each board will be sponsored by a member of the national Adoption Leadership Board, and supported by a designated council Chief Executive from the region.
- 5 **Members are asked to consider whether the LGA should establish a system of regional "Member Champions" to support these arrangements, and to advise on how best to identify them.** The LGA could identify volunteers for these posts in a number of ways:
  - 5.1 Through existing regional networks of lead members for children's services
  - 5.2 Through a call for volunteers in future CYP bulletins
  - 5.3 By designating leads for each region to members of the CYP Board.

## **Corporate Parenting week**

- 6 The LGA organised the UK's first ever Corporate Parenting week in June 2012, with councils across the country running events to highlight some of their local initiatives to improve outcomes for children in care.

- 7 We would welcome Members' views on repeating this event in October 2014, with potential for tie in with the National Children and Adult Services conference (week commencing 27 October).
- 8 The 2012 event was successful on a number of levels, with several councils taking the opportunity to raise the profile of corporate parenting locally and the LGA producing and disseminating a good practice toolkit to councils across the country.
- 9 However, the initiative lacked a strong national profile, with Ministerial involvement largely absent. Initial conversations with DfE officials have indicated that Ministers may be keen to have a greater role in a 2014 event, with corporate parenting an area of particular interest to the current Children's Minister, Edward Timpson MP.
- 10 This would be a valuable opportunity to highlight the importance of this work, and promote the excellent work that councils already do to support the children in their care.
- 11 **Members are asked to consider whether the LGA should arrange a Corporate Parenting Week in October 2014, and to advise on the best way to encourage strong buy-in from councils across the country.**

#### **Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)**

- 12 The expectations placed on LSCBs have increased substantially in recent years, largely as a result of their regular identification as the lead body for virtually any child protection initiative that carries a partnership element.
- 13 Funding for local boards has generally not increased in line with these expectations. LGA analysis of 127 LSCB annual reports from across the country found significant variation in overall budgets, ranging from £53,554 to £663,332. Councils currently provide 55% of the average LSCB budget, but this figure was as high as 95% in one area. On average, the police contributed just 7% while health partners made up just under 24%.
- 14 Financial constraints have left many LSCBs reliant on a single Business Manager to run the Board and progress its workplan, raising the question of whether the current arrangements are fit for purpose. LSCB Chairs are generally contracted for around 28 days per year to fulfil an oversight and challenge role, so it is difficult to see how an LSCB can be expected to fulfil the increasingly demanding expectations placed upon it by policy makers.
- 15 With Ofsted now inspecting LSCBs as part of its new Single Inspection Framework, it is likely that their performance will come under increased scrutiny over the coming months. Sixteen reports had been published by the end of May 2014, with six LSCBs judged to "require improvement" and four rated "inadequate". Just over a third had been rated good, and none were outstanding.

- 16 Although the LSCB grading is not designated as a limiting judgement under the new framework, it will be of concern to councils that inspections in this area may reflect poorly on the overall performance of the child protection system.
- 17 **Members are asked to consider whether the LGA should commission further research into the current operation of LSCBs. This would explore funding, capacity, workload and the potential for joint boards, which some areas have considered.**