

Children & Young People Board – End of Year Report

Background

1. The purpose of the Children and Young People Board is to engage with and develop a thorough understanding of the issues within its brief and how legislation does or could affect councils and their communities. The Board's brief is to provide strategic oversight of all the LGA's policy and improvement activity in relation to the wellbeing of children and young people, including education and social care.
2. Members are asked to note the possible areas of work for 2021/22.

Education and SEND

3. The Government has appointed Sir Kevan Collins, former Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation and Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets councils, has been appointed to "oversee a comprehensive programme of catch-up aimed at young people who have lost out on learning due to the pandemic".
4. It is clear that education recovery must be a long-term endeavour and go beyond academic achievement to include measures to support children and young people's socialisation, communication and mental health and well-being. While recovery support should be made available to all children and young people, it is vital that vulnerable children, who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, are the focus of this programme of work. Councils are ideally placed to act as convenors of local education systems, bringing education providers and other partners together to implement a national education recovery programme.
5. The Government's on-going review of the SEND system must ensure that councils have the powers and funding to act as local leaders of SEND systems, allowing them to hold partners to account for the support they provide to children and young people with SEND. This should include the opportunity to consider new ways of working that have been emerged as a result of the lockdown and that have benefited children and young people with special needs.

Children's social care

6. The Government has now launched its Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The LGA is represented on the Design Group which is advising the review, and will continue to influence through that group and responses to calls for evidence. We have called for the review to consider early help for children and families alongside how we support children in care, and to look at the funding available to provide the services that children, young people and their families need to thrive.

7. We anticipate an ongoing focus on placement sufficiency and the 'market' in the coming year. The Competition and Markets Authority is undertaking a "market study" on children's placements, while a consultation was launched in May 2021 on new national standards for unregulated provision. The LGA will continue to work with the Government and the wider sector to consider how we can ensure sufficient, high quality homes for children in care that fully meet their needs.

Child-centred recovery

8. We will develop work in the coming year to support councils to put children and young people at the heart of recovery, in particular through sharing existing good practice where councils are already taking child-centred approaches and ensuring the voice of children and young people features in local policy development and decision-making.
9. We will also seek to identify opportunities for working across the LGA policy team to ensure that the needs of children and young people are considered holistically in the LGA's work.

Early years

10. We will continue to lobby for appropriate early years funding, especially given the impact of Covid-19 on provider sustainability and the need for support in the early years to mitigate the long term impact of Covid-19 on children's development.
11. We will respond to and work closely on the plans for implementation on the Early Years Healthy Development Review led by Andrea Leadsom, understanding and joining up the approach between different aspects of the local system.

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing (activities sit across both this Board and the Community Wellbeing Board)

12. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We will continue to work with government to prioritise the wellbeing of children and young people in their return to school.
13. The roll out of mental health support teams in schools (MHSTs), as set up in the 2017 Green Paper, has been progressed with an intention to reach more of the country within the next few years. Although this is a positive step forward, there is still more that can be done. We will continue to look to the evidence base around community support services and the role of councils in supporting good emotional wellbeing in their local areas.
14. We are working closely with government on the implementation of training for senior leads for mental health in schools.

15. There has been a range of commissioned research over the past year, looking at whole household approaches to mental health, transitions from children's to adults mental health services, and the evidence around early intervention and prevention. We will continue to share this good practice with councils.

Youth Services

16. We have submitted a response to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)'s youth services review. We will respond to the output of this to ensure that the vital role of councils in the provision and coordination of youth services is recognised, and will continue to champion the importance of youth services, particularly given the evidence around the importance of these services during the pandemic and to support recovery.
17. We are anticipating the refresh of the consultation on statutory guidance on youth service provision and will work with partners to respond to this.

Youth justice

18. The Board supported a position on an increase to the minimum age of criminal responsibility and we will continue to lobby for this.
19. We will also continue to look into what works for effective practice in the youth justice system and continue to lobby for the protection of the Youth Justice Grant.

Supporting disadvantaged families and children

20. The Board has agreed to review and inform the national and local approach to food and nutrition, including the Holiday Activities and Food Fund, Healthy Start Vouchers, the Department for Work and Pensions' Covid Local Support Grant and local welfare funding more widely. There has been a focus on children's food throughout the pandemic, and this is also reflected in Part One of the national food strategy. Many organisations are calling for a review of school food. The Board will also work jointly with the Community Wellbeing on cross-cutting issues such as childhood obesity, nutrition and maternity support.
21. We will continue to consider the impact of national and local welfare policy and support on families with children, and will work jointly with the Resources Board to ensure that the role of councils in supporting low income and disadvantaged households is both properly recognised and adequately resourced.
22. The current and future impact of the pandemic on children's health, social and economic wellbeing - particularly those from the most affected places, groups and communities - will be a core strand within the LGA's strengthened cross-cutting approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Financial implications

23. It is expected that the work programme arising from the priorities set will be covered within existing budgets.

Implications for Wales

24. Education and children's services are devolved matters. The LGA will liaise with WLGA on issues of common interest and concern.

Next Steps

25. Officers to progress as directed.