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Children and Young People End of Year Report 2021/22 and 2022/23 work plan

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out the Children and Young People end of year report, including initial proposals for the 2022/23 work plan.

Recommendation

That members of the Children and Young People Board note the end of year report and consider the Board's work priorities for 2021/22.

Action

Officers to prepare a paper setting out the proposed work plan for 2022/23 in line with the Board's feedback, for consideration at the September meeting of the Children and Young People Board.

Contact officer: Ian Keating
Position: Principal Policy Adviser
Phone no: 07917 234827
Email: Ian.Keating@local.gov.uk

Children and Young People End of Year Report 2021/22 and 2022/23 work plan

Background

1. At its meeting in September the Board considered its priorities for 2021/22 and agreed nine overarching themes:
 - 1.1. Education and SEND
 - 1.2. Children's social care
 - 1.3. Child-centred recovery
 - 1.4. Early years
 - 1.5. Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing
 - 1.6. Youth Services
 - 1.7. Youth justice
 - 1.8. Supporting disadvantaged families and children
 - 1.9. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugees
2. This paper provides an overview of the achievements delivered against these themes and seeks an initial steer from the Board on its priorities for 2022/23. Feedback from members on their priorities for next year will subsequently be developed into a full paper for consideration at the first meeting of the 2022/23 Board cycle in September.

Education and SEND

3. We have continued to lobby for councils to have a meaningful role in local education systems, acting as the 'middle tier' between schools and the Department for Education (DfE). The Department's Schools White paper, '[Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#)', in March, acknowledged that councils have an important role to play in education and that they will need additional powers to fulfil their remaining statutory duties, specifically a power to direct schools to admit 'hard to place' pupils. The White paper (and Schools Bill) includes a proposal for councils to be able to set up and lead their own Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), something the LGA has been calling for over a number of years. Our briefings on the Schools White paper and Schools Bill are available [here](#) and [here](#).
4. LGA-commissioned research also highlighted the strong role that councils play in maintaining high educational standards. The analysis of [Ofsted inspection outcomes by school type](#) found that 92 per cent of council-maintained schools were rated outstanding or good by Ofsted as of 31 January 2022, compared to 85 per cent of academies that were graded since they converted.

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5. During the last year we have continued to highlight the rising demand and funding pressures that councils are dealing with as they provide support to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We have engaged in the development of the proposals set out in the SEND Green paper, '[SEND Review: sight support, right place, right time](#)' via the SEND Review steering group, as well as regular meetings with the Minister for Children and Families. [In our response to the Green paper](#) we welcomed the acknowledgment that councils are ideally placed to act as convenors of local SEND systems, bringing together health and education partners to develop local inclusion plans, and that getting the accountabilities, accompanied by the right levers will be crucial. We also stressed the important of parental confidence in a reformed SEND system, that it will take several years for any reforms to be implemented and that in the meantime the DfE should develop a plan that eliminates every council's Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
6. Separately we published [research on the effectiveness of SEND dispute resolution and tribunal arrangements](#). The research found that the reforms to the SEND system introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014 have failed to prevent a significant rise in legal disputes and tribunal hearings over the support children and young people with special needs receive, highlighting the fundamental imbalances in the SEND system.

Children's Social Care

7. We have engaged throughout this year on the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) and the [Competition and Markets Authority study](#) on children's social care placements, through meetings with review teams, submitting written evidence and facilitating meetings with councils. We were pleased to see that many of our long-standing calls were reflected in the recommendations made by these reviews, including in relation to investment in early help and oversight of children's social care placements providers.
8. We have been working with the Department for Education on reforms to unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers. We have continued to emphasise the importance of good quality provision for these young people while noting ongoing challenges around placement sufficiency. We have also called for more flexibility in the regulatory system to ensure that young people receive the care and support they need, when they need it.
9. In relation to placement sufficiency, we worked with Alma Economics to develop sufficiency statements for councils across the country and have published a [template sufficiency statement](#) for ongoing use by councils. This work was referenced by the

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Competition and Markets Authority in its [review of the children's social care placements 'market'](#) as addressing a need identified by councils and providers throughout its review.

10. Work has taken place throughout the year on support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and children who have had to leave Afghanistan and Ukraine. We have been engaged in a wide range of discussions around issues including the National Transfer Scheme, support for UASC leaving care and the availability of suitable homes for these children, along with challenges around ensuring children receive the right support including in education and for mental wellbeing.
11. We have continued to update our work on [profit-making and financial risk in the largest children's social care placement providers](#). We have been publishing this research periodically since January 2020 so were pleased to see many of our findings and recommendations reflected in the final CMA report and independent review of children's social care.
12. We have published research looking at the [response of local education and children's services departments to the Covid-19 pandemic](#). The research looked at council's initial response to the lockdown, adapting to the lockdown, the 'new normal' and; the return to lockdown, before identifying a number of opportunities that have arisen from the pandemic period. This research is being used to inform discussions around how children's social care and schools can best work together in the longer term.
13. Two webinars have been held specifically on children's social care. A webinar on corporate parenting for care leavers was attended by 200 councillors and officer, while nearly 300 people joined a webinar on contextual safeguarding in October.
14. To support councils to engage young people effectively in policy-making, we commissioned a [set of case studies](#) highlighting existing good practice in this area.

Early years

15. We have worked closely with a range of government departments to support the implementation of the [Best Start for Life](#) and subsequent [Family Hubs programme](#). The programme recognises the importance of joined up services and funding has prioritised half of local authorities, in the more deprived areas. We are working with government to ensure that learning from this roll-out is captured, councils are well supported, and current good practice is retained.
16. There has been an increased focus on early years and the cost to parents in recent weeks, we stress to government that the most important aspects of early years provision are

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ensuring good outcomes for all children, prioritising their safety and closing the disadvantage gap. We will imminently be publishing research that looks to highlight what makes good early years provision and how best to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing

17. With children and young people's mental health needs growing before the pandemic, and even sharper increases as a result of the pandemic, we have continued to lobby on the importance of prioritising health and wellbeing in the recovery. We have raised the impact on councils, with an increasing number of children presenting to councils with mental health needs and called for further support to be put in place for children including early-support hubs.
18. Councils were given additional funding during the pandemic to provide support to schools to support young people, recognising the success of this model, we continue to highlight the importance of councils in their role as community facilitators. Further funding has been announced for increasing the number of [Designated Senior Leads in Schools for mental health](#), recognising our calls for an increase in speed of the implementation of the children's mental health green paper.
19. We welcomed the announcement of a [10-year cross government plan for mental health and wellbeing of all ages](#), as this will give priority to mental health and wellbeing. We have worked closely with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to ensure the consultation sets out the areas of most importance to local councils and their communities, including an increased priority around children and young people. The LGA consultation response will be submitted at the start of July.

Youth Services

20. We lobbied government on investment into youth services, particularly in response to the increase need to support children and young people following the pandemic. Although we welcomed the ambitions set out in the [youth review response](#), the announcement of the [youth investment fund](#) was a significant amount less than had been promised in 2019, and is targeted in only some areas. We will continue to raise the importance and profile of the youth sector, working alongside local councils.
21. We have continued discussions with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport regarding statutory guidance for youth services, highlighting the additional burden this would place on councils if it enhanced expectations regarding levels of provision. We have discussed the opportunities around an improvement support offer to councils and facilitating a programme of sharing good practice.

Youth justice

22. During the pandemic, the situation for children and young people in the youth justice system worsened with reports of limited time outside of cells, long waits for court hearings and increasing number of children on remand. With the Association for Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS) and the Association of Youth Offending Team (YOT) Managers (AYM) we published a [position paper on youth justice](#). The paper puts forward a series of recommendations to existing policy or practice to better align the current system with Child First principles, including closer working between the police and YOTs and routinely applying rules on vulnerable witnesses to all children appearing in youth courts.
23. We published a [report looking at support for the youngest children](#) in the criminal justice system, following the decision made by the CYP Board that the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be increased to 14 years old. The report recognises the lack of clear, evidence-based programmes for the youngest children but still found case studies exemplifying good examples from councils.
24. [Further funding has been announced](#) to intervene early where children may become involved in violence and crime. We will continue to meet with the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board to ensure that this funding is targeted at the most appropriate areas.

2021/22 Priorities

25. It is expected that the themes for the 2022/23 work priorities will remain broadly consistent with 2021/22, with a number of workstreams continuing into the new Board cycle.
26. The table below sets out some initial thinking on workstreams that will continue into the new Board cycle, subject to the Board's views:

Priority area	Proposed activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and SEND 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby for councils to have the powers to fulfil their remaining education statutory duties, including via the Schools Bill. • Continue to lobby for councils to have the powers and funding to lead local SEND systems as proposals set out in the SEND Green paper are developed further. Given the length of time it will take to implement reforms to the SEND system, we will also continue to lobby the Department for Education to develop a plan that eliminates every council's Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's social care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Government on the implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the independent review of children's social care, the competition and markets authority review of the children's social care market, and the national panel review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby the government for additional support for councils to tackle challenges in relation to placements for children in care with complex needs, and workforce challenges • Lobby for appropriate funding and policy frameworks to ensure councils are able to effectively support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugee children • Consider ways in which support for disabled children can be improved, including through more partnership working with the NHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby for support for more disadvantaged children, whilst recognising the current cost of the system requires change. Prioritising the role of councils who know their local areas best. • Continue to work with government and councils on the implementation of family hubs, share learning and inform future planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to highlight the need for quicker implementation of the green paper, alongside additional resource and reform in the system, and a clear plan for embedding the proposals set out by the 10-year plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the need for youth services, prioritise sharing good practice with councils, lobby on the potential reform to the statutory guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed the proposals set out in the position paper, share good practice, support effective implementation of the recently announced additional funding.

27. The Board's views on any other areas they would like us to focus on would be very helpful, but any new priority work areas will need to be balanced within the resources available to the Children and Young People's team.

Implications for Wales

28. Many of the issues covered by the Board, including education and children's services are devolved matters, but we work with the WLGA where appropriate.

Financial Implications

29. There are no financial implications associated with this report. The 2021/22 work priorities were delivered within existing staffing budgets and that will continue for 2022/23.

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Next steps

30. The Board are asked to reflect on the work delivered this year and consider and comment on their priorities for 2022-23.