

Minutes of last Children & Young People Board meeting

Children & Young People Board

Tuesday, 14 March 2023

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A**

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed members of the Children and Young People Board to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Fiona Venner and Cllr Antony Mullen. Cllr Garry Bridges and Cllr Robert Flatley were in attendance as substitutes.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Note of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

3 Early Years Education and Childcare

The Chair invited Flora Wilkie, Policy Adviser to introduce the item which detailed the challenges with the early education and childcare system in England in relation to cost for parents, access to local provision and support for more vulnerable children. Members were advised that two roundtables which had taken place included approximately 30 local authorities from different areas to gain a diversity of views, which further emphasised the continuing need for local oversight because the challenges and provision varied in different places.

Members raised the following points:

- The difficulties related to the different but overlapping issues between childcare and education and what the priorities should be. Government policy should make clear the distinctions. Funding and tools would be needed to address this.
- Councils' role in quality assurance was highlighted.
- Short and long-term issues needed to be addressed separately, particularly in dealing with the fallout from COVID.
- Ability to support children in more deprived areas, despite the

shortfall in provision of children's support in these areas.

- Concerns were raised about parental take up of provision.
- Increased complexity of children needed to be catered for. Members commented on the reduction in likelihood of SEND issues being picked up if children were not in education or childcare, which would lead to increased costs long-term and poorer outcomes for children.

The Chair commented on the role of local authorities working alongside maintained schools, that have taken on early years provision and direct delivery, which highlighted the disjointed nature of the system. This raised questions concerning quality assurance and how this could be measured fairly across the country.

Following queries, Clive Harris commented that the SEND improvement plan identified the need for early identification and support to help reduce the pressure on Council budgets.

Decision

The Board agreed that Members views provided above in response to questions posed in paragraph 11 will inform LGA policy lines for early years education and childcare.

Action

- Officers to feedback at the Children and Young People Board in June.

4 Claire Coutinho MP

The Chair welcomed Claire Coutinho MP, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, to the meeting of the Children and Young People Board.

The Minister emphasised that the government wanted to strengthen loving relationships between families and outlined that the £200 million funding for children's services would be spent to focus on:

- Families in crisis - by first addressing early intervention/help for families suffering from drug abuse, mental health challenges and domestic violence.
- Use of Kinship carers – to maintain connection to family where possible.
- Social workforce – reduce turnover of staff to reduce instability in relationships.
- Care leavers – focus on providing better access to opportunities.
- Market for placements – children's homes and supported accommodation.

Members comments:

- Funding for children's homes and the fostering sector was urgently

needed due to the increasing costs of placements which was unsustainable.

- A member asked how regional care cooperatives would be rolled out.
- Concern was raised around local government's role in quality assurance as local authorities provided a link between education and care.
- Education for parents was needed to prevent the over reliance on Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). EHCPs can be seen as a magic bullet but other measures can and should be explored to ensure the best outcomes for children.

The Minister's response:

- A review of funding for children's homes and fostering was needed to ensure specialist provision could be provided to those in real need.
- In order to improve placement stability, security, safety and permanence for children, significant work was being undertaken to improve the fostering system including an uplift to the national minimum allowance, the roll out of the Mockingbird Programme and work to help recruit new foster carers (only 4% of those interested in foster care become foster carers).
- There would be two pilots of regional care cooperatives to test integrated commissioning of services. This would include secure accommodation to match need regionally and reduce issues such as bidding wars. Members were pleased with this 'test and learn' approach.
- A system strategy would be worked on with the NHS to provide a joint specialist health workforce.
- A new inspection framework would ensure local authorities would be at the heart of quality assurance, however each partner would have a social care inspector. Local inclusion plans and partnership working, would put local authorities at the centre of assessing strategic need in SEND – which would allow councils to drive partners in quality assurance.
- Ambitions and funding to train 5000 early years practitioners to become SENCOs.
- Need for further teacher training was noted and practice guides on national standards on good intervention in SEND would be

distributed. [Nuffield Early Language Intervention \(NELI\)](#) had produced promising results. Increased provision and mental health support teams would be explored in schools.

- Agreed that it was important to increase knowledge across the mainstream system which would provide parents with understanding of EHCPs.

The Chair thanked the Minister and emphasised the enthusiasm of the Board to continue the dialogue.

Decision

The Board agreed to note the update on the Implementation Strategy and SEND.

Action

- Children Social Care Placements Task group to share final report in June with the Board and the Minister.

5 Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy

The Chair invited Louise Smith, Senior Adviser to introduce the item on 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' which the Minister had referred to in item 4, and invited views on the children's social care implementation strategy to shape the LGA's consultation response.

Members comments:

- Consensus of disappointment in the lack of funding.
- Information requested on the pathfinder and pilot areas.
- Members agreed that capital-intensive specialist provision should be rolled out regionally, as there is not the need on an individual local authority basis.
- Consensus there was a lack of clarity around what a Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) was, including whether these would use large or the desired smaller children's homes. The Chair emphasised the importance of flexibility around the footprint of RCCs including having regard to the footprint of ICSs.

Louise Smith addressed members comments:

- Lead Members had recently sent a letter to the Minister which highlighted the difficulty of driving forward significant reform when funding was limited, as well as funding being directed to pathfinders rather than the wider system.
- Pathfinders and pilots would be worked out by the Government,

officers would share when known. LGA would push for a variety of councils to be involved in this scheme to ensure that regional care cooperatives would not be rolled out unless proven to work for everyone.

- Lack of information shared on the definition of Regional Care Cooperatives. [Josh MacAlister's report contained flowcharts](#) which described the process of child placement. The LGA would be involved in the ongoing process to co-develop this, there should be an Advisory Board working closely with the DfE to address what this should look like and how it would work in different areas.
- The creation of large children's homes would be unlikely - the aim would be to pool council budgets to develop the provision that children need within that region.

Louise Smith explained that this will be a long process (beyond the next general election), with many DfE working groups feeding back on various parts, and thus feedback from this Board would continue to be sought.

Decision

The Board agreed that Members views provided above on the children's social care implementation strategy should inform the LGA's response to the consultation.

Actions

- Louise Smith would put together the LGA response to the consultation that would be shared with Lead Members for sign off.
- Members to share any further information coming out of council's own reviews with Louise Smith by the end of April – LGA consultation response is due 11 May.
- A member to share information on the Pan-London Secure Unit with Officers.
- Officers to share pilot/ pathfinder events when known.
- The Chair suggested officers set up a spreadsheet with all the DfE pilots once announced.

6 SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

Clive Harris, Senior Adviser, introduced the item on SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. The Department for Education (DfE) published their response to the SEND Green paper, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan, right support, right place, right time](#), which contains a significant number of proposals that seek to improve outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) via a reformed SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) system.

Members comments:

- A member highlighted the importance of early identification of need as even if not met with specialist help, parents and school teachers could then help to manage issues and highlighted the need for SEND training for mainstream classroom teachers.
- A member suggested that system-wide capacity issues make it hard to identify need and deliver support in a timely manner. The lack of clarity as to who is responsible for quality assurance in local SEND systems was also raised, particularly with regards to education.
- A member highlighted that Local Authorities had already been funding children before the EHCP process and emphasised the use of this money in schools was not monitored.
- Accountability for care provision had become difficult due to the complexity of differing footprints of councils, ICSs and MATs.

Clive Harris explained this discussion with Members would inform the LGA's on-going policy work regarding the SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan, and this is the start of a long process, particularly in regard to test and learn, the setup of local inclusion partnerships and how councils and partners could work together. Clive Harris responded to members' comments:

- The Government had been working on the Academies Regulatory and Commissioning review which would be crucial to mainstream inclusion and providing the strong performance of MATs.
- The LGA commissioned and published work in 2018 on high needs funding pressures for councils, this research will be refreshed this year – a variety of councils would be explored, some councils in the Delivering Better Value in SEND programmes and others in the safety valve process.

Gail Tolley, Director for Children's Services Sector Led Improvement at the LGA referenced Alternative Provision and the need to ensure SEND and Alternative Provision are distinguished between.

Decision

The Board agreed the LGA's policy position with regards to the proposals set out in the SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan.

7 Children's Social Care Placements Working Group Update

The Chair introduced Councillor Lucy Nethsingha to provide the update on

the Children's Social Care Placements Working Group which had met twice this year. Cllr Nethsingha outlined these discussions:

- The MacAlister report did not convey the real sense of impending crisis and urgency in local government about social care placements and this had not been reflected in the Government response – leaving more pressure on local government to respond.
- Discussion surrounding the work being done in Leeds which looked at small children's homes which could provide care for children with severe needs.
- Lack of capacity of all levels of placement including the need for more foster care.

Decision

- The Board noted the Children's Social Care Placements Working Group update.

Action

- Officers to speak with the Children's Society about their research on children's placements.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Patricia Bradwell OBE	Lincolnshire County Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Lucy Nethsingha	Cambridgeshire County Council
	Cllr Julie Fallon	Conwy County Borough Council
Members	Cllr Roger Gough	Kent County Council
	Cllr Kam Kaur	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Laura Mayes	Wiltshire Council
	Cllr Mark Sutton	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Adrian Hardman	Worcestershire County Council
	Cllr Beverley Momenabadi	Wolverhampton City
	Cllr Adam Ellison	South Tyneside Council
	Cllr Mili Patel	Brent Council
	Cllr Tim Roca	Westminster City Council
Apologies	Cllr Judy Jennings	Epping Forest District Council
	Cllr Fiona Venner	Leeds City Council
	Cllr Antony Mullen	Sunderland City Council
In Attendance	Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Robert Flatley	Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr Daniel Francis	Bexley Council
	Cllr Edward Maxfield	Norfolk County Council
		Claire Coutinho MP