

## Children and Young People

### Background

1. At its meeting in September, the Board considered its priorities for 2022/23 and agreed the following overarching themes:
  - 1.1 Education and SEND
  - 1.2 Children's social care
  - 1.3 Early years
  - 1.4 Children's mental health and wellbeing
  - 1.5 Youth services
  - 1.6 Youth justice
  - 1.7 Supporting disadvantaged families and children
  - 1.8 Children's health
2. Within these themes, the following were agreed as priorities:
  - 2.1 Cost-of-living crisis (linking in with cross-LGA work)
  - 2.2 Independent review of children's social care
  - 2.3 SEND Green Paper
  - 2.4 Healthy development review
  - 2.5 Funding
3. This paper provides an overview of the achievements delivered against these themes.

### SEND and Education

4. Our work in response to proposals set out in the SEND Green paper and subsequent SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan, led by the LGA Chairman, has focussed on three broad themes; structures, including clarity on responsibility for delivering various aspects of SEND support; levers, specifically ensuring that councils, as leaders of local SEND systems, have the powers to hold partners to account for the work and; sufficiency of funding to meet the needs of children with SEND. Given that implementing the proposals set out in the improvement plan will take a number of years, we have continued to call for additional high needs funding to be made available in the interim and for the Department for Education (DfE) to bring forward proposals to manage down and eliminate Dedicated Schools Grant deficits.
5. We secured an additional £970 million (10.6 per cent) in additional high needs funding for councils for the 2023-24 financial year, as well as securing an extension of the statutory override on treatment of Dedicated Schools Grant deficits to March 2026 from March 2023.
6. We submitted a response to the Ofsted/CQC consultation on the introduction of a new SEND area inspection framework. We welcomed the new focus on the impact that local area partnership SEND support is having on the lives of children and young people with special needs. We are however concerned that neither Ofsted or the CQC have the

capacity or expertise to deliver against the proposed framework. We did however raise concerns about the timing of the introduction of a new framework in the context of the SEND Green paper and subsequent improvement plan and also questioned the limited references to the role of schools in supporting children and young people with special needs. We also called for the inspectorates to place a greater focus on how school inspection should place a greater focus on supporting pupils with SEND and inclusion and how that should feed into area SEND inspections.

7. Our work on the now-abandoned Schools Bill focussed on ensuring that powers to direct all schools to admit pupils without a place sat with councils, reflecting the fact that in many areas the majority of schools are already academies. We also worked to ensure that all councils will have the opportunity to set up their own Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs).
8. The abandonment of the Bill meant that we continue to wait for the introduction of a register for home-educated children is supported by powers for councils to check that those children are receiving a suitable education. We submitted evidence to the Education Committee inquiry on persistent absence from schools, including the rise in number of children being educated at home, highlighting the fragmented accountability arrangements in place and how these, alongside reductions in education funding, prevent councils from playing a stronger role in this space. Cllr Lucy Nethsingha subsequently gave oral evidence to the same inquiry.
9. We highlighted the cost-of-living funding pressures facing schools, specifically increasing fuel and food costs, as well as the need to fund an increase in school staff pay.
10. In our work on the move to a National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools we have continued to call for the flexibility for Multi-Academy Trusts to move away from their NFF allocations, via the General Annual Grant, to be available to all schools.
11. We have also commissioned analysis of the performance of maintained schools when compared to free schools and academies, which we expect to highlight the value of a continued strong council role in school improvement.

## Children's social care

12. The LGA has engaged extensively with the Department for Education on its *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy, which was the formal Government response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. This has resulted in the response addressing some of the LGA's long-standing asks, including in relation to oversight of the children's social care placements 'market' and a far stronger focus on early help. The Board's policy lines were used in evidence for the House of Lords Public Services Committee inquiry into the children's social care implementation strategy, with many of

the LGA's lines including around Regional Care Cooperatives being reflected in the [Committee's final report](#).

13. This year we commissioned the Isos Partnership to conduct research into [structural change in children's social care](#) to ensure councils have access to clear advice when undergoing such change to ensure continuity of service for children and families. This research has been particularly helpful in informing our discussions with the Department for Education with regard to proposed changes to children's social care arising from its response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.
14. The Isos Partnership has also updated our popular "action research into improvement in local children's services" guidance to recognise the current landscape including recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing budget challenges. This will be published shortly and will inform our lobbying around children's social care reform.
15. We commissioned Alma Economics to carry out a literature review, supplemented by a small number of interviews, to consider how social care support for people with lifelong disabilities is working and how this could be improved, with a particular consideration around how some children transition from children to adults' services. The [resulting report](#) has enabled us to provide detailed input into the Department for Education's work around how to better support disabled children.
16. The Board set up a task and finish group to look into challenges around placement sufficiency for children in care, recognising the significant challenges this was causing for councils across the country. This group presented its findings to the final Board meeting of the year on 27 June and its recommended policy positions and further work will be taken forward in the 2023-24 Board cycle.
17. Lead Members on the Board have been closely involved in negotiations all year around support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This has led to two rounds of additional funding (firstly an additional £6,000 per child, then an additional £15,000 per child) to support councils in providing placements for children.
18. Lobbying by the LGA on challenges with the children's social care workforce has contributed to action by the Department for Education, in particular a consultation on new rules around the use of agency social workers which reflect recommendations put forward by the LGA. We expect a response to this consultation imminently. The Board has also fed into the ongoing cross-LGA work on workforce capacity.
19. We have submitted clear evidence to the Government on the significant financial challenges facing children's services, both at "set piece" financial events and through ongoing engagement with the Government, including meetings between Councillor Louise Gittins and Claire Coutinho MP, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing. Additional funding for children's social care was announced in the Autumn Statement. £1.3 billion in 2023-24 and £1.9 billion in 2024-25 will be distributed to councils through the Social Care Grant for adult and children's social care.

## Early years

20. We were pleased to see the announcement of an expansion into early years entitlements to all eligible children of working parents from 9 months to school-aged by 2025. There is also investment into wraparound childcare to ensure families have access to childcare from 8am to 6pm. Alongside these announcements we were particularly pleased to see reforms to the universal credit element of childcare which has meant an increase in the amount paid to families and upfront payments, something the LGA has long called for. The LGA calls for increased funding were somewhat recognised in the entitlement expansion £204 million of additional funding to local authorities in 2023 to 2024, rising to £288 million in 2024 to 2025. We continue to work with government officials to ensure this funding is sufficient to deliver a high-quality early years education and childcare system.
21. We have engaged closely with the Department for Education since this announcement to ensure the implementation of the expansion can be as effective as possible. This has enabled us to outline the needs of councils in coping with this significant expansion and the need for an early year's recruitment campaign which the government has announced. However, we continue to call for a more whole-sale review of the early years workforce to fully support the expansions and make sure children have access to high quality provision.
22. We commissioned the Isos Partnership to undertake [research](#) into the nature, impact and drivers of nursery closures in England. This report surveys local authorities and explores published data to identify the trends in nursery provision closures. The report finds that while there hasn't been a significant increase in the rate of closures in the past year, this varies between local areas. This research has enabled us to outline the concerns and needs of councils to central government such as greater levers to manage early years provision locally.
23. We also commissioned a literature review to examine and evaluate [what works in relation to the delivery of good quality early years provision for all children](#). The report found that there is a majority consensus (with some degree of debate about the impact of certain structural elements) about how high, quality childcare can lead to enhanced outcomes for children. The report introduces several other factors and themes that were explored, including the need to enhance affordability of childcare and support for children with special educational needs.

## Children's mental health and wellbeing

24. The LGA has [published research into children and young people's](#) mental health policy progress over the past ten years. This will enable us to be clear on what more is needed to ensure the system works for children, young people and families.

25. We worked hard to influence the now-abandoned mental health 10-year plan to highlight the needs of children and young people. We have ensured this messaging is central in the Major Conditions Strategy.
26. In light of the abandonment of the 10-year mental health plan, the LGA is conducting a range of work on children and young people's mental health to promote new policy thinking in this area. This has started with a series of think pieces on what can be done to improve and respond to children's mental health issues which will inform thinking during the 2023-24 Board cycle.
27. We have continued to raise the importance of the local authority's role in supporting good mental health and wellbeing. This is through ensuring access to green space, good quality housing, local communities, education, and reducing poverty. The LGA has long called for more community provision to support children's mental health and are pleased the government have commissioned a review into the evidence surrounding early support hubs.
28. The LGA has engaged closely with NHS England and government officials to raise concerns regarding the increasing number of children that have a mental health need but not a diagnosable mental health condition. These children often find themselves without the appropriate support and sitting between different services. We continue to engage with officials to ensure these children get the support they need.

## Youth services

29. The LGA was provided grant funding to conduct three pilots of youth services peer reviews alongside the National Youth Agency, which were well received by the pilot authorities. The LGA is considering next steps for this pilot.
30. We are anticipating a refresh of the statutory guidance for local authorities on youth services to update and clarify the expectations in relation to the duty. We have worked alongside the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport regarding statutory guidance for youth services, recognising the essential role of youth services for young people locally but highlighting the additional burden this would place on councils if revised guidance enhanced expectations regarding levels of provision.
31. The anti-social behaviour action plan announced £11m investment into youth services to tackle the root causes of anti-social behaviour.

## Youth justice

32. The implementation of the £60m Turnaround programme has been successful, particularly given its focus on early intervention and prevention in the youth justice system. We have called on government to continue to recognise the need for dedicated funding in this space.

33. We have [produced a range of case studies](#) on supporting young people involved in the justice system. These case studies explore preventative activities but also what good support looks like for children in the justice system and the setting up of a community provision for children on remand.

## Supporting disadvantaged families and children

34. The LGA has been working closely with Government on issues surrounding the rising cost of living and the impact on children's health and wellbeing. This has included calling for the Government to urgently review the Healthy Start scheme and Free School Meals (FSM), and making long-term increases to local public health funding, which can go to support children and young people in communities who need it most.
35. As part of this, we have organised two webinars with councils and leading food campaigning organisations (Feeding Britain, the Food Foundation) showcasing ways in which councils have been addressing food insecurity affecting children and building local partnerships to improve health and wellbeing.
36. We have engaged closely with the Healthy Start scheme team at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and continue to call for the scheme to be expanded to all families receiving Universal Credit and for the scheme to shift from an "opt in" to an "opt out" registration system through an automated process, to help remove any barriers families face when applying online.
37. We ran a plenary event at the LGA's annual Public Health conference in March 2023 where a number of experts (from the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health, Barnardo's, Action for Children and the Director of Public Health for Liverpool) discussed the impact of the cost-of-living crisis upon children's health.

## Children's health

38. We are pleased to see the development from policy into practice of the Early Years Healthy Development Review into the Start for Life and Family Hubs programme, where 75 councils were given a share of £300m over three years to establish and develop a network of family hubs in their local areas.
39. We have engaged closely with government officials throughout the policy development and implementation of the Start for Life and Family Hubs programme. We have worked with councils to understand the challenges and benefits they are experiencing on the programme and worked with officials to address these, while also emphasising to the Government the challenges around providing funding to only half of councils.
40. We commissioned a series of case studies exploring various elements of Family Hubs delivery within councils. Three of the councils featured have received additional funding

as part of the Family Hubs programme, whilst three councils have not. The case studies will be published in July.

41. We have extensively made the case that funding and capacity are mission critical issues affecting local public health teams' ability to deliver essential health promoting services for children and young people in their local areas.
42. In March, DHSC wrote to councils to explain that they would be expected to use existing budgets to pay for NHS pay increases for commissioned community services (e.g. health visiting, school nursing). We argued that this could push stretched budgets to the limit and put services at risk. In response to our lobbying, it was agreed that councils should not expect additional in-year costs related to the NHS pay award to be passed on to them. This is a win for the LGA, but clarity on non-NHS staff commissioned to deliver public health activity needs to be resolved.
43. We have successfully called for more enforcement to halt the rise of youth vaping, including government announcing fines for shops selling illicit vapes and £3m funding for Trading Standards to support enforcement. This follows successful LGA lobbying for government to close a loophole that allows the vaping industry to give free samples to children. Through a cross-board approach, the LGA is currently considering several options on its future policy direction on youth vaping and disposable vapes.
44. We were disappointed that the Government announced that they would be abandoning the long-awaited Health Disparities White Paper. We have continued to push for much-needed action to tackle entrenched and growing child health inequalities, particularly within the upcoming Major Conditions Strategy.
45. In our response to the call for evidence for the Major Conditions Strategy, we emphasised that the strategy should have an equal focus on children and adults, calling for a greater focus on prevention than treatment.
46. We have continued to work with partners across the system to strengthen the position of children's health in Integrated Care Boards/Partnerships. This has included jointly inputting on the [recently published guidance around executive lead roles](#) within integrated care boards, including the executive lead role for children and young people.
47. On 16 February, the government announced that councils across England will receive an additional £421 million funding through to 2025 to improve drug and alcohol addiction treatment and recovery. This includes support for children and young people affected by substance misuse. This additional funding was announced as part of the Government's drug strategy, '[From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives](#)' (2022).