

Children & Young People Board – report from Cllr David Simmonds (Chairman)

Communities and Local Government Select Committee

1. On Monday 13 October, Carolyn Downs and I appeared in front of the Communities and Local Government Committee as part of their ongoing inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.
2. I was questioned on the extent of child sexual exploitation across the country, and made clear that it is likely to be taking place in all council areas – and is an issue that all councils, together with partners, are working hard to address. I also clarified the arrangements for calling officers to account for past conduct, particularly when they have since left the council's employment, and highlighted the potential pitfalls of failing to follow due process when making decisions about current or future employment.

Leadership Essentials: Political Leadership in Children's Services

3. I chaired the Leadership Essentials programme for lead members for children's services at Warwick conference centre on the 9 and 10 October. Delegates from a range of councils attended, including Liverpool, Calderdale, Devon and Sutton. The group posed challenging questions and were keen to discuss the local demands of delivering high quality services for children and families with substantially reduced budgets.
4. During the two days we heard from Sally Hodges, DCS of Solihull Council and Steve Ashley, Independent Chair of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board, who offered thought provoking presentations which informed lively discussions. Delegates made the most of the networking opportunity and were able to share and debate their local challenges.

Fostering Network

5. I responded to claims that foster parents are not being told the whole truth about children they take in on Sky News. A survey by the Fostering Network said that 23 per cent of foster parents said they were rarely given the information needed. I made the point that councils will always try and share as much information as possible but that, in some situations, that isn't going to be straightforward, simply because the child may be involved in criminal proceedings or in a medical situation that the council may not know about or may not have the full story on.

Children's improvement meeting

6. I attended the LGA's Children's Improvement meeting that took place on the 2 October, alongside colleagues from SOLACE and the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The focus of the meeting was to discuss how the three organisations could work together to provide a strategic steer to councils who have asked for support in taking the children's agenda forward.
7. We discussed a number of key issues, including; how we can support councils in intervention to lead their own change and improvement programmes; how good practise and learning from tackling CSE cases could be shared; the confused situation regarding the council role in education and; feedback from the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework. We also raised concerns about Ofsted's proposed Integrated Inspection Framework and the inspectorate's ability to examine the child protection system beyond the role of local authorities.



Councillors' Forum

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