

Board Work Programme and Priorities Report for 2023/24

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out proposals for the Children and Young People Board's (CYP) priorities and work programme for 2023/24. Subject to the Board's views, officers will develop a work programme to deliver these priorities.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Board discusses and agrees the priorities and work programme for 2023/24.

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Background

1. LGA Boards are asked to consider their priorities for the coming year at their first meeting of the new cycle. Set out below are a list of priorities for discussion, based on the priorities identified last year, and adapted to reflect work that has been completed, recent developments in Government policy and issues raised by member councils.
2. The following are recommended as immediate priorities, with the remaining work outlined in this paper taking place over the 2023/24 Board year:
 - 2.1.1. Input into the development of the LGA White Paper
 - 2.1.2. Cost-of-living crisis, including impact on organisations and widening inequalities (Board to link with cross-LGA work on this)
 - 2.1.3. Placements for children in care
 - 2.1.4. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
 - 2.1.5. SEND improvement plan, demand and funding pressures
 - 2.1.6. Children's health
 - 2.1.7. Funding
 - 2.1.8. Early years education and childcare expansion
 - 2.1.9. Children's mental health – refreshing the Board's approach

Proposed priorities

Education and SEND

3. Our work in response to proposals set out in the SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan will be based 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. We will continue to highlight that the proposals set out in the Improvement Plan do not go far enough in giving councils the powers to tackle the fundamental demand and funding pressures in the SEND system, or powers to hold health and education partners to account for their contributions to local SEND systems. We will continue to work with a broad range of partners, including central government departments, third sector and parent-carer groups to ensure there is a shared understanding of and confidence in detailed proposals as they are developed.
4. With the abandonment of the Schools Bill the existing fragmented education system, within which councils do not have the powers to fulfil their remaining statutory duties, will continue for the foreseeable future. We will therefore focus on ensuring that councils have powers to direct all schools to admit pupils without a place and that a register for home-educated children is introduced and accompanied by powers for councils to check that those children are receiving a suitable education.

Children's social care

5. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in May 2022. The Government has now published its subsequent children's social care strategy, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, along with a range of consultations over the last year including on the social work workforce and updates to the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* statutory guidance. Further consultations are expected over the coming year on other elements of the strategy, including around kinship care. The LGA is engaged in discussions with the Department for Education around the strategy and the Board will continue to influence emerging policy.
6. Children's social care is increasingly recognised as a key driver of financial challenges for councils, and we are working with the Government, partners and member councils to illustrate the scale of this pressure and potential solutions. The Government has announced that the Autumn Statement will be delivered on 22 November 2023, and it is recommended that funding issues are prioritised in the Board's work programme ahead of that event.
7. Councils continue to report significant challenges with placement sufficiency for children in care, particularly in relation to placements for children with complex and challenging needs, and the significant and increasing costs of placements. 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, including taking forward the recommendations of last year's children's placements task and finish group. As this issue is both putting significant pressure on children's social care budgets and resulting in poorer outcomes for children in care, it is recommended that this issue is prioritised.
8. Asylum and immigration issues are increasingly placing pressure on children's services, including rapidly rising numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in the UK and related changes to the National Transfer Scheme; the introduction of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the family visa scheme for those fleeing the war in Ukraine; and the challenge of finding suitable homes for all Afghan families previously accommodated by the Home Office in hotels. The LGA is engaged in regular discussions with the Home Office and the DfE about these issues and will work with the Board to develop solutions to try to ensure that all children seeking safety in the UK can receive the help they need. This will include seeking full funding to support children, speeding up asylum claims, ensuring access to support including health and education, and improving placement sufficiency. Recent and ongoing High Court cases around unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the National Transfer Scheme have

put additional pressure on councils to find homes quickly for these children and as such it is recommended that this issue is prioritised.

9. Workforce challenges are posing a significant risk to the delivery of children's social care services in many councils, both in relation to ensuring posts are staffed and in relation to budgets. In particular, councils are reporting that the changing behaviour of agencies is proving exceptionally difficult, while the cost-of-living crisis is anecdotally driving in-house staff to join agencies where pay rates are higher. The LGA is working with the DfE in relation to the children's social care workforce in particular, and with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on wider workforce pressures in local government. The LGA's Executive Advisory Board, of which the Children and Young People Board Chair is a member, are overseeing an LGA-wide programme of work around workforce challenges to ensure join-up.
10. The rising cost-of-living continues to be an issue of concern for education, family support and children's services. Child poverty is impacting on children's mental and physical health, educational attainment and participation in school, sports, cultural activities and community. There are well-established links between deprivation, household poverty and involvement with children's social care. The LGA has established a range of workstreams addressing the cost-of-living crisis and will work with the Board to monitor the impact of the crisis on children and families. A member of the Board also participates in a cost of living member advisory group that draws together key priorities across all the LGA Boards.
11. The Government has published its response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and the LGA is working with the Government on the implementation of that response. This includes the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, and consideration of a redress scheme for victims and survivors.
12. The Chair of the LGA, Councillor Shaun Davies, has specified that corporate parenting, and in particular support for care leavers, is one of his key priorities for the coming year. A separate paper has been provided in this agenda on this issue, and the Board will receive updates on this work at future meetings.

Early years

13. The Spring Budget 2023 saw a significant announcement into early years entitlements focused at the children of working parents. By September 2025, 30 hours of funded childcare for working parents of nine months to primary school age will be available. We [commissioned research into early years provision closures](#) which highlighted the challenges that local authorities are seeing with provision of early years education and childcare. Ability to roll out this significant

expansion of funded childcare is a large concern for councils.

14. Following a series of roundtables with local authority leads and key stakeholders, we developed a [policy paper looking at what councils need](#) to ensure an effective early years education and childcare system. This includes greater powers for councils to manage the market effectively; stopping providers setting up in areas of excess and supporting the development of provision in more disadvantaged areas. Local authority early years teams do a lot on a small budget and need additional investment to support them to deliver this expansion. We will continue to work with government on this expansion, share good practice with councils and raise the areas of concern from the above policy paper.
15. The Spring Budget also announced an intention to ensure that all children have access to 8am to 6pm wraparound provision in primary school by September 2026. We continue to work with government to ensure the effective implementation of this programme. We have commissioned a rapid review into wraparound provision including exploring good practice to support councils as they develop their offer. We have also made clear the challenges facing councils with the range of different expectations being placed on them with this range of change programmes.
16. Long term challenges within the early years system due to underfunding of the system has been exacerbated by the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. Recruitment and retention of high-quality staff has always been challenging for the sector but is now heightened with staff leaving the sector completely for better paying roles elsewhere. The Government has put in place a workforce team and we are feeding into their review.

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing

(activities sit across both this Board and the Community Wellbeing Board)

17. Covid-19, the rising cost of living and limited education recovery has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We know there is a rising number of children seeking support from councils for their mental health. This can be both at the earlier stage of poor wellbeing and with an increasing number of children requiring acute support for their mental health. We will continue to work with government to prioritise the wellbeing of children and young people.
18. The roll out of mental health support teams in schools (MHSTs), as set out in the 2017 Green Paper, has been slow but in spring 2023, 35 per cent of pupils and further education learners in England were covered by a team, with 44 per cent

expected to be covered by April 2024 and at least 50 per cent by spring 2025. Although this is a positive step forward, there is still more that can be done.

19. We commissioned research into [policy progress over the past ten years](#) on children's mental health and the research found that many of the ambitions laid out by the Government to date have been a step in the right direction, but they have been continuously criticised for not being ambitious enough in creating the scale of change that is needed. As a result, the policies implemented to date have not had sufficient impact in ensuring children and young people get the mental health support they need.
20. We are looking at the support that could be available in the community, such as through early support hubs, and will continue to work with government to ensure that they recognise the role that councils can play in ensuring early intervention and prevention in mental health and the specialist roles that are required in children's services to support vulnerable children's mental health.
21. The government chose not to develop a 10 year cross departmental plan on mental health for all ages, instead publishing a major conditions strategy of which children, and mental health, is one small part. It was disappointing that this change was made given the increasing pressures across the system in children's mental health.
22. In response to the national vacuum, the LGA is [developing a series of think piece on children's mental health](#). We have asked a series of stakeholders to share how they think the system could be improved. Using this insight, alongside research, officers are exploring with the CYP Board how they wish to prioritise, refine and build on existing policy asks on children's mental health to most effectively ensure change in this area.

Youth Services

23. The Government has released the refresh to the statutory guidance for youth services, refreshing the 2012 guidance. The LGA has highlighted to government the different situation facing councils and the pressure on services. We continue to lobby for long term direction and funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on youth services. We 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 children and young people to engage in education.

Youth justice

24. We've welcomed focus on early intervention and prevention in the youth justice system with funding such as the Turnaround Programme supporting local areas to invest in prevention programmes. We developed a [series of case studies](#) into the youth justice system to support councils. We are working with colleagues in the Community Safety Team to consider how the expectations association with the Serious Violence Duty can be considered for young people.
25. The situation in the secure estate continues to be a concern with closures of some settings, continued delays to the secure school and the potential use of damaging tools such as pepper spray. We will continue to lobby on the wider structural changes needed to improve the justice system, particularly the secure estate.
26. A priority continues to be over representation of black and ethnic minority children and children in care or care leavers in the youth justice system and working with stakeholders to tackle this. We are also engaged in the government's review of youth remand following a report in 2021 and will ensure the recommendations are actionable for councils.

Supporting disadvantaged families and children

27. The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme is being implemented across 75 local authorities. We have worked closely with councils to understand and support their experience of the start of the programme. We have [developed case studies to support](#) councils consider their approach with some emerging themes highlighted.
28. We will continue to work with DHSC, DfE and partners to ensure "Start for Life" is a collaborative and strength-based programme which empowers councils to improve services and ensure local flexibility and leadership rather than a one-size fits all approach. We are also working with the Government to show the importance of long-term funding available for the programme and for councils to have certainty after 2025.
29. The Board has agreed to review and inform the national and local approach to children's food and nutrition, including the Holiday Activities and Food Fund, the Healthy Start scheme, the Department for Work and Pensions' Household Support Fund and local welfare funding more widely. There was a focus on children's food throughout the pandemic, and this is also reflected in Part One and Part Two of the national food strategy (NFS). Many organisations are calling for a review of school food and we have pushed for increasing the eligibility criteria and introducing automatic enrolment for Free School Meals, we will continue to bring relevant proposals to the Board's attention and develop an LGA position as appropriate. The Board will also work jointly with the Community Wellbeing Board on cross-cutting issues such as childhood obesity, nutrition and maternity support. We are also engaging with councils and partners on the wider recommendations

of the NFS on local food strategies and partnerships, food security and resilience, local food economies and the environment.

30. 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. Our Reshaping Financial Support programme is directly addressing the ways in which councils are supporting low income families to alleviate financial hardship and promote financial inclusion and resilience.
31. 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.
32. We will continue to make the case for early intervention and prevention across services for socially and / or economically vulnerable families. The Board will lead the LGA's work with Government and the sector on the implementation and future funding of Supporting Families (formerly Troubled Families) and the development of Family Hubs, as well as targeted support such the Department for Work and Pensions' Reducing Parental Conflict programme.

Children's health

33. Covid-19 and the rising cost of living have had an impact on the health, wellbeing and development of children and young people. We will continue to work with Government and partners to ensure that children's health is prioritised and will continue to work jointly with the Community Wellbeing Board on cross-cutting issues such as childhood obesity, disposable vapes, Family Hubs and support for children, such as Free School Meals and Healthy Start.
34. We continue to make 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. We will continue to lobby to rebuild the Healthy Child Programme workforce to ensure children and families are supported, unmet need is identified and work begins to address the adverse impact of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis on child health inequalities.
35. We recently welcomed the announcement that the Government would commit to banning disposable vapes due to their disproportionate use among children and young people and their detrimental impact on the environment. We look forward to working with Government on these proposals as they develop.
36. We will continue to work with partners across the system to strengthen the position of children's health and public health in Integrated Care Boards/Partnerships.

37. We will continue our commitment to improve national and local level policy across all children's public health services, specifically: health visiting, school nursing, children's healthy weight and the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP).

38. We will continue to make the economic case for prevention. Evidence shows that early intervention and prevention represent good value for money and help reduce the growth in demand on public services.

Implications for Wales

33. There are no implications for Wales arising from this report.

Financial Implications

34. Priorities will be delivered within existing resources.

Equalities implications

35. The work programme seeks to reflect the council duty to promote the wellbeing of all children.

Next steps

36. Subject to the agreement of Members, the work programme will underpin the Board's work for the 2023-24 meeting cycle.