

Children and Young People Board – Report from Cllr Louise Gittins (Chair)

Board meeting

1. The Children and Young People Board met on the 29th June. Items discussed included early years education and childcare, the final report of the Children's Placements working group, the effectiveness of Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances and Ofsted's proposed inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies. Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Violence Commissioner, joined the meeting to discuss her current and future work in relation to children and families experiencing domestic abuse.

Children's social care

2. I spoke in a session at the LGA Annual Conference alongside Patrick Melia, Chief Executive at Sunderland City Council, about the important role that council leaders and chief executives play in supporting children's social care alongside the lead member for children's services and director of children's services.
3. Following the LGA Annual Conference, I wrote to the then-Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho, outlining the issues that members had raised across the conference in relation to children including challenges engaging local health services in support for children's health, especially mental health; high placement costs and a lack of sufficiency of suitable homes for children in care; and ongoing and growing challenges in the SEND system.
4. I was pleased to read the report of the Children's Placements Working Group, which was set up by the Children and Young People Board last September to consider how to address the significant challenges councils are facing in finding appropriate homes for children in care. The Group identified a range of options to support councils going forward and these will be taken forward in the coming year.
5. We briefed at each stage of the Illegal Migration Bill's passage through Parliament about tensions between the Bill and the Children Act 1989, in particular the challenges around acting in children's best interests and supporting their transition to adulthood. Now that the Act has received Royal Assent, we are working with the Government to identify how to mitigate tensions and challenges to ensure that children receive the support they are entitled to, and that risks are not exacerbated wherever possible.
6. The LGA has also written to the Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick, to highlight councils' significant concerns around hotels being stood up in their areas to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children without consultation with the local council, and without consideration of a council's capacity to support children in the hotel.

7. I wrote to Kent County Council in July to outline the LGA's views regarding the challenges in the implementation of the National Transfer Scheme, in relation to a High Court challenge brought against KCC and the Home Office by ECPAT UK, a children's rights organisation. In this letter, I outlined the work carried out by the LGA with the Government to try to improve the operation of the NTS, and those areas where improvements could be made with Government support to ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can be quickly found new homes around the country.
8. In August we submitted evidence to the Home Office in relation to its plans to introduce mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse. In our response, we supported a duty on organisations, but emphasised the importance of training and support for staff to ensure that they are able to spot signs of abuse and feel confident in reporting, and the urgent need for investment in specialist support for victims and survivors to ensure that where abuse is identified, appropriate support is available immediately.
9. We have submitted a response to the Department for Education's consultation on updates to the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children. We welcomed updates that provide clarification around partnership responsibilities, but noted that all partners need to be adequately resourced to ensure that they are able to fulfil their safeguarding duties effectively.

Mental health

10. We published a [report into children and young people's mental health policy progress](#). The report considers policy changes over the past ten years, the impact they have had and what is required going forward to ensure that the ongoing challenge of children's mental health is tackled.
11. We are publishing a [series of independent think pieces on children's mental health](#), this brings together the views of a range of stakeholders to consider what children and young people need to have good mental health.

Early years

12. We published a [report on research on 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. Furthermore, the rate may be escalating and many local authorities raised concerns about the future of early years provision, particularly given the recently announced expansion to early years entitlements.
13. A [press release was issued on 5 July](#) highlighting the concerns raised about the ability to deliver on the early years entitlements expansion based on the above report.

14. We published a policy paper on [early education and childcare: challenges and changes](#) for the future to highlight what the LGA believes needs to change to ensure children and their families can all have access to high quality education and childcare.
15. We responded to consultations on the [extension of the early years entitlements](#) and the changes to [requirements in the early years foundation stage](#). The responses highlighted the need for sufficient funding in the early years system and the need to ensure equity in provision between childminders and other provision.
16. We published a [series of case studies on the implementation of family hubs](#), looking at emerging models and what is working for areas that have both received government funding in this space and those that have not.

Youth Justice

17. On the 27 June I joined the Chairman to meet with Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation to discuss the youth justice system. We raised the need for early intervention and presentation support, concerns regarding the secure estate and the need for a whole system approach to support children at risk of and when involved in the justice system.
18. I wrote to the Secretary of State and the Executive Director for Youth Custody Service highlighting concerns following this meeting to reiterate concerns about the use of PAVA (pepper spray) and different tactics being used in the youth secure estate, highlighting the need to continue a child first approach. e
19. 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.

LGA annual conference

20. A number of children and young people-focussed sessions took place at the LGA annual conference, covering the crisis in children's social care, mental health and SEND, as well as the linkages between education and skills. The Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, also gave a keynote speech on her priorities.

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