

Questions for the Minister

Purpose of Report

To provide a few suggested questions for Members to ask the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, David Johnston OBE MP at the closed Q&A session on Thursday 30 November 2023 at NCASC at 12.45pm in the Bayview Suite

Questions

1. The cost of placements for children in care is spiralling and means children's social care budgets are increasingly spent on these costs at the expense of earlier support. Outside of the Regional Care Cooperative pathfinders, can the Minister outline how councils will be supported to expand placement capacity?
2. Children and young people, and their families would benefit from a joined-up approach from central government to ensure that all needs are being met and that no policy has an inadvertent negative impact on children. Can the Government commit to developing a cross Whitehall strategy that puts children and young people at the centre?
3. The government has placed a significant investment into early years education and childcare which is welcome. However, local authorities and providers are facing significant challenges with this expansion. Can the Minister ensure that local authorities have the levers and resources they need to effectively support providers and ensure there is sufficient provision available?
4. LGA commissioned research shows that whilst the Government has made a series of welcome commitments and ambitions to improve children's mental health, that has not had a sufficient impact on improving the support available for children with poor mental health. How is the minister proposing to tackle the increasing demand among children's mental health that councils and their partners are seeing?
5. Early intervention and prevention are essential to supporting children and young people to thrive. How is the Department for Education working with other government departments to provide long term investment into these services, such as youth services?
6. Children and young people in the justice system are some of the most vulnerable in society and encounter a range of services. How is the Department for Education working with the Ministry of Justice to ensure they are seen as children and a child-first approach is properly implemented across the judicial system, including in custodial settings?

7. Councils welcome many of the reforms set out in the SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan but are concerned that they are 'nice to have' and do not address the fundamental demand and funding pressures that councils are facing in meeting the needs of children and young people with special needs. Can you set out how those reforms will drive down demand for Education, Health and Care Plans, reduce pressure on high needs budgets and improve outcomes for children and young people with special needs.
8. Can you commit to working with your ministerial colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities to extend the statutory override on the treatment of DSG deficits beyond March 2026 if reforms to the SEND system do not reduce demand for support and the associated costs.
9. Has the Department for Education made any progress in identifying a legislative opportunity to introduce a register for electively home educated children, accompanied by powers for councils to ensure those children are receiving a suitable education (not in his brief, but clear links with safeguarding and a priority for councils).
10. In a recent LGA survey, over 9 in 10 councils highlighted that a key driver of high placement costs for children in care was the need to support children with significant mental health needs. We know that the number of children's inpatient mental health beds has fallen by 20% in five years, despite increasing demand, leaving councils to pick up the pieces. How will the Minister work with DHSC and NHS England to make sure children with the most significant mental health needs get the help they need?