

Children and Young People Board – report from Cllr David Simmonds (Chair)

Leadership Academy

1. On 29 and 30 January, I helped facilitate a leadership academy on political leadership in Children's Services. The event was a huge success with lead members from councils across the country coming to learn more about the key challenges they face in the changing policy landscape whilst developing their leadership capacity, sharing learning and networking with other members. These academies are invaluable opportunities for members to debate the current policy issues as well as learn from others experiences and we hope to organise more over the coming year.

Academies and Accountability

2. This month *First* magazine featured an article by me on the concerns over monitoring the performance of academies. The LGA has long expressed concern that as the number of academies increases, it will become impossible for the Department for Education (DfE) in London to monitor their performance effectively and to intervene in cases of failure. It is especially worrying that the new Ofsted school improvement inspection regime sets out to hold councils to account for their performance whilst giving councils no powers to intervene in academies.
3. The Department for Education has proposed Regional Schools Commissioners to oversee the performance of academies; take decisions on new applications by schools to become academies; and choose and appoint academy sponsors. This is of major concern to the LGA and there was a distinct lack of consultation with councils about this new role - the first councils knew about the plans was when the posts were advertised in December. Particular concerns have been raised about the 'regions' the commissioners will cover, which do not necessarily follow the standard planning regions or Ofsted's regional structure and which split London into three. I believe councils are best placed to be the local champions of children and young people, their families and their communities and to provide the local oversight needed to continue to drive up standards ensuring that all children and young people have fair access to a good local school. I will be meeting with ministers to discuss the issues and we will continue to fight for more transparency over these plans.

Social Worker Recruitment

4. I attended the LGA Workforce Board in January to discuss the issue of social worker recruitment and retention. There is a national shortfall in the number of children's social workers and many councils are struggling to recruit and retain experienced staff, with councils increasingly reliant on agency staff to plug the gaps. There is a need to make social work a more attractive career and reduce the number of social workers leaving the profession because of a lack of career progression, pressures of the job and criticism from the media. The LGA will draw up ideas to invigorate social work careers and help employers to retain good staff within the wider context of needing to enhance the image and standing of social work.

Design Council meeting

5. On 21 January, I joined colleagues from the Improvement and Innovation Board in a joint meeting with the Design Council to explore possibilities for joint work on new approaches to delivering different aspects of children's social care.

Government adoption announcement

6. Since the last report, the Department for Education has announced the introduction of new interactive adoption maps and funding. I released a statement on the plans explaining that whilst increased focus on improving adoption services is a positive move, the announcement does not represent new money. There is in fact a net reduction in funding for local authorities and this could impact on services for vulnerable children, including early intervention services which can help councils identify children that could benefit from adoption at an early stage. There has been a significant increase in the number of children placed in adoptive homes and councils have achieved a 32 per cent increase in the number of adopters approved in the last year. However, the fact remains that we still need thousands more potential adopters to come forward to offer loving homes.

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