

Launch of the Association of Directors of Children's Services

This is a momentous day, and it seems to have been some while in coming. The publication of 'Every Child Matters' and the passage of the Children Act 2004 required us as professional associations to review and reconfigure our approach. Today marks the opening of a new chapter. The new Association will have the unequivocal professional leadership rôle for children's services in local authorities, in the public, professional and political arenas. The Association draws its *raison d'être* from the statutory rôles given to directors of children's services by the Children Act 2004.

The predecessors of the new Association have of course evolved very significantly over many years to meet new challenges. Confed, the Confederation of Education and Children's Services Managers, could trace its history, in an unbroken line, back to the almost unimaginable world of 1906, when, just over one hundred years ago, the Society of Directors and Secretaries of Education was created.

One of the key strategic rôles of the new Association is to secure effective progression and succession arrangements for the new professional alignments. For that reason I am particularly pleased that the new Association has membership that goes beyond statutory directors; and that we have both the Virtual Staff College and a close relationship with Research in Practice.

Our major immediate tasks are to make the new Association a reality, with the key Policy Committees and governance arrangements in place, so that the Interim Council can become the full Council as rapidly as possible. We expect the new arrangements to be fully in place by 1 April 2007, with both secure regional organisations and Policy Committees able to speak for the Association on the key issues. We have thought long and hard about the shape of the new Policy Committees

and have, so far as is possible, ensured that they align with national organisation both within and beyond the DfES and central government. At the same time we have taken the opportunity to ensure that the arrangements are aligned with the integrated children's services agenda rather than traditional specialisms. We concur strongly with the view that there can be no delivery of 'Every Child Matters' without high standards of school education, and that without effective delivery of 'Every Child Matters' we cannot deliver high standards of school education. The two are inextricably intertwined, and the new Association is structured around this.

We will have Policy Committees for:

- Resources and Sustainability
- Health, Care and Additional Needs
- Families, Community and Young People
- Educational Achievement
- Standards, Performance and Inspection
- Workforce Development
- Information Systems and Technology

There are of course key linkages between the Association and other groups. Perhaps the most obvious is the new Association of Adult Social Services; the need to secure effective transition between childhood and adulthood is highlighted in 'Care Matters' and we will work both locally and nationally to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in care as they become adults. Again the linkage between general outcomes and educational outcomes is vital, and we must ensure that all our partners work together effectively, including colleges and the Learning and Skills Council.

My metaphor for the present state of the new Association is the Big Bang and the rapid expansion of the universe. What we see around us today was determined, so cosmologists tell us, in the

first few milliseconds of the existence of the universe. (Perhaps you might detect that I am an ex-physics teacher.) John and I, the Interim Council and our staff, are determined to set the new Association into motion in a way that leads to effective working in the future.

We will work tirelessly to ensure that the new Association provides professional and powerful leadership for children's services. We will continue to work closely in partnership with central government (DfES, but also DH and other Departments, and non-Departmental bodies such as Ofsted and CSCI) on the development of policy and practice. We will be champions for children and young people and their families. We will be robust where we need to be, but aim always to be constructive and positive.

I must sincerely thank my own local authority, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, for their strong support to me in this new rôle. My Chief Executive, Andrew Sparke, and Cabinet Member, Cllr Liz Walker, are here today, and I thank them as well as my Assistant Directors back at the ranch. But I am sure that the children and young people in Dudley will benefit in at least an indirect way from this work.

When asked, I tell people that my job as a director of children's services is both exciting and scary; exciting because it I support fully the integrated children's agenda and making it work; and scary because I am so often operating out of my professional comfort zone. The same applies to the new Association, but I am hugely optimistic for the future because of the powerful support we have from all sides represented here today.

John Freeman
Joint President
Association of Directors of Children's Services

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