



The Association of Directors of Children's Services is pleased to submit this consultation response. ADCS is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services appointed under the provisions of the *Children Act 2004* and for other children's services professional in leadership roles. The Association provides a national voice as a champion for children, with local and central government, and with the public.

The Association corporately, and our members individually are deeply committed to the principles and values of the ECM agenda to improve outcomes for all children, young people, their families and carers. The 5 outcomes themselves are of paramount importance; they are the crucial link between schools and other services to children, be they universal or targeted, and whether they are delivered by local authorities or other public services, the voluntary, community or private sectors.

The Association welcomes the initiative and would urge government to be bold in drafting the Children's Plan. It needs to set out a clear vision for how children should be and how they are regarded. There is both a need and an opportunity for profound societal change. *Every child matters* has begun that process of change and should be built upon.

The Association notes the implications of the recent UNICEF report and its comparative analysis of the childhood experience between developed countries. We know there are limitations to that analysis but those limitations do not dilute the core message – this country can do much better by its children.

The Association welcomes the recent 'Ditchley Declaration'. As that declaration indicates, reinforcing the centrality of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child would substantially assist services and outcomes. We believe that the Children's Plan must be informed by the UNICEF report, the Ditchley Declaration and the UNCRC.

(1) What have been your best experiences of support for children, young people and their families?

- The concepts of 'the team around the child' and the budget holding lead professional are powerful symbols of the best way to support children and young people. The lead professional acting as broker can facilitate access to the most personally appropriate services offered by a wide range of specialist professionals (education, social care, health)
- At a strategic level, the development of multi-agency children's trust arrangements has brought key local stakeholders together to work to improve outcomes for children and young people in a locality. These arrangements work best when all of the strategic partners (outlined in

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section 10 of the *Children Act 2004*) play their role, including committing an appropriate level of funding

- Recent 'think family' messages (from Prime Minister and Social Exclusion Unit)
- Children in Care Green, White Papers and Bill (soon to be published). In particular we strongly support the proposals within the Bill for Children in Care Councils, the pledges, extension of respite, developing commissioning, school admissions priority and incentives, education improvements and workforce
- Affordable, accessible and flexible high quality child care provision delivered through flexible and mixed mode settings where the quality of the provision and of the workforce is high e.g. a Quality Standard (or similar quality assurance strategies and mechanisms), across all settings covering all workers
- Effective engagement of all partners, particularly health, in a robust whole system multi agency framework of childcare and early years provision
- Childcare strategies that identify and effectively engage with 'hard to reach' families including flexibility within such strategies that recognise cultural differences e.g. BME communities often prefer a mixture of formal and informal childcare settings where the latter includes the wider family network
- Sure Start Children's Centres will increasingly play a central role in a child's performance at Foundation Stage
- Take up rates of formal childcare are highest and most successful where innovative outreach strategies are employed that include informal and pre-formal childcare
- Sure Start Children's Centres are increasing the volume of childcare settings and encouraging a multi agency approach to childcare and early years provision. When seen as a supportive network of childcare and early years professionals and services, rather than a physical building, Children's Centres can play a crucial strategic role in improving outcomes and narrowing achievement gaps across early years cohorts.

(2) What would you stop or improve about support for children, young people and families?

- *The Children Act 2004* established children's services departments in local authorities in England bringing together education and children's social care functions under one statutory chief officer. Local authorities have worked hard and will continue to do so in order to achieve real integration (at operational, strategic and cultural levels).
- If a similarly clear line of accountability for improving children's health outcomes existed within the health service (locally at PCT level, regionally at SHA level and nationally at DoH level) this would significantly improve holistic well-being services for children and young people. This could be done by embedding the priority accorded to

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children's health within the performance management frameworks in the health service at every level

- Central departments are working together more closely to prioritise children and young people, but this needs to be implemented throughout policy and guidance. A single commissioning framework would be useful, with clear links to practice based commissioning, informed by the local Children and Young People's Plan and needs assessment
- The re-structuring of health visitor services, from a universal service where a health visitor sees every child, to a service that is more targeted, reduces opportunities to identify children or families that may need particular support at an early stage
- Childcare services based on community needs analysis help LAs to ensure they are providing the right range and mix of early years services. However, doing so requires robust up to date data on the fast changing nature and demographic of early years populations. The currency of such data is essential in individual localities where general early years population trends may not reflect community needs e.g. in localities with highly mobile early years cohorts or localities with significant increases in non-English speaking populations
- Placing high importance on personalising support for individual children so that they make the best possible progress while at the same time considering the needs of vulnerable groups
- The quality of the early years workforce across all settings and all providers (including the private sector) is a key lever in improving achievement and gap narrowing. Achieving and sustaining sufficient high quality childcare provision relies in significant measure on the recruitment but also the retention of experienced, high quality and highly motivated staff. The status of the early years workforce is also important
- Strategy to ensure greater consistency in the quality of early years provision
- Continued emphasis on multi agency services for early years with a concomitant expectation of budget pooling
- Increased involvement of employers in supporting childcare settings
- The management of the capital programme for Children's Centres is complex and time consuming. In some localities, securing planning permission is a barrier to delivering the Children's Centre programme
- The costs of childcare vary significantly in relation to the maturity of the childcare market in a locality. In localities with well-established childcare markets costs can be kept down. High cost of provision is a significant barrier to parents on low incomes. In adjoining localities where there is significant disparity in the costs of childcare provision there is a significant amount of 'cross border childcare traffic' which can result in significant budget pressures for those LAs with affordable childcare provision
- Improved support to LAs in measuring preventative and early intervention outcomes – the DCSF LGA *Narrowing the Gap* project will help significantly in this regard

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- Ensure that all young people are supported and challenged to achieve at the highest level in schools and colleges through appropriate personal support and the development of a curriculum that meets their needs and the needs of the economy
- We need to better integrate preventative services particularly around youth crime
- Court processes for care proceedings remain highly complex and demanding. Any further steps to support the on-going work to streamline these processes and reduce delay should be welcomed
- Workforce - Children's Service Authorities have made great strides since 2004 in promoting integrated working and this remains a key priority for Directors. It is very important that the initial training of key children's professionals such as teachers, EYPs, social workers, connexions workers, youth workers and health visitors promotes a good understanding of the importance of all ECM outcomes for children's development. Each new professional needs to understand the key role they play in regard of all the outcomes and, as importantly, the role of all the other professionals. Post qualification training has an even more important part to play. For example, programmes for PQ1 for social workers, NPQH and "Leading from the Middle" for teachers and qualifications for health visitors need to incorporate elements about multi-professional leadership and working in multidisciplinary teams and particularly in direct work with children.

(3) What needs to happen so that support is tailored to meet the needs of individual children and young people?

- Engaging children and young people in needs analysis, evaluation of services and the commissioning and development of support services helps to ensure that support is tailored to meet local needs.
- The concept of a personalised learning offer to young people (14-19) is important. There are some very practical difficulties in offering the full range of 14-19 provision (transportation in rural areas for example) in some areas of the country.

4 What do you think your role is and what more could you do for children to be happy, healthy and safe?

- The role of the leaders of children's services is to act as champion for children and young people with local and central government and with the public. We are accountable for improving outcomes for children through all public sector commissioned services
- It is vitally important that the children's workforce in its broadest possible sense is a high status, well-motivated, well-trained workforce. The workforce must be held to account by robust inspection and assessment regimes for how they contribute to improving outcomes for children and young people in their locality. Inspection and assessment regimes must not place burdens on the deliverers and commissioners of services for children and young people such that the legitimate

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business of inspection and assessment interferes with the equally legitimate business of providing services to improve outcomes for children and young people in a locality

- Local authorities collectively have a role in ensuring LSCBs work well to safeguard children and young people
- Local authorities collectively have a role in ensuring the success of ContactPoint which will facilitate the sharing of information between local strategic partner agencies
- We believe increasing emphasis should be placed on the common core competencies and training and accreditation which prioritises the skills required to work directly with children, young people and families.

(5) What is the role of parents – mums, dads, carers - and what more support do they need?

- Parents and carers are extremely diverse and it is dangerous to over simplify the needs of such a diverse group. Broadly speaking however, parents and carers like children and young people themselves need access to accurate, complete and timely information about services that are available to them, thus facilitating informed choice
- There is no evidence to suggest that an increased range of choice for parents and carers e.g. in the type of school they might send their child to, is helpful or desirable
- For new parents, the role of midwife/health visitor in the period after Mum goes home is an important support role
- The role of extended families and grandparents in particular should not be under-estimated when considering what more support parents and carers need
- Grandparent carers are a group who have particular needs. Much thought needs to be given to how they can be better supported, both practically and financially, in caring for children who have often experienced very difficult circumstances
- We need also to think about the specific needs of foster carers. They form a vital resource in caring for some of our most vulnerable children. Their training, support and reward needs to be a priority
- Particular attention needs to be paid in supporting and building the capacity of parents with special needs of their own, when those needs may impact upon outcomes for children. This is especially with regard to issues around mental health, disability and substance misuse
- Where children are looked after, corporate parents need to provide all that natural parents would; there needs to be both support and challenge to Councils to ensure that they deliver on this entitlement.

(6) What is the role of the local community and what more could they do?

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- The involvement of children and young people in community projects has many advantages, not least of which is bringing together people of different generations
- It is dangerous to over simplify the notion of 'the local community'. All local communities have complex and overlapping patterns of social groupings within them (schools, religious and cultural groups, sports teams, major employers etc). It is important that universal services in every locality are inclusive and for example in the case of schools it is important that the pupil cohort reflects the diversity of the broader community and that members of the local community can participate in the governance of universal services (e.g. on school governing bodies)
- The voluntary and community sectors are important providers of direct services to children, young people and their families. However, these sectors are not equally well developed in all areas of the country or in all aspects of services to children and young people.

(7) What is the role of Government and what more could they do?

- The recent changes to the machinery of government and in particular the creation of the DCSF reflects at national level what local authorities have been doing at local levels – that is bringing together 'standards' with ECM. This is a welcome recognition of the importance of joined up working
- The local authority is the commissioner of services for children and young people. The statutory DCS is held to account for improving outcomes for children and young people. DCSs in every LA in England are obliged to engage with a myriad of field forces. These field forces should be reviewed against the evidence that they improve outcomes for children and young people. If local authorities are commissioners of services they should be able to commission the 'challenge and support services' offered by field forces that they feel are appropriate for their locality. Challenge and support is not a one-size-fits-all offer
- Central government must ensure that departmental policies are part of a coherent whole and that the performance management regimes of different public services do not result in unintended consequences and policy clashes e.g. different guidance issued by DCSF and DoH on the processes of joint commissioning of services for children and young people. There are other policy tensions e.g. between a number of performance indicators on policing practice, specifically Offences Brought To Justice measures and the statutory duty of the DCS to improve outcomes for children and young people; outcomes cannot be improved by the early criminalisation of children and young people. To this end we were particularly pleased to see the role of the Youth Justice Board coming closer to other policy settings for children and young people in general. There may be a role for Government Offices in bringing together cross-governmental policies and practices and acting on behalf of local authorities collectively to improve policy co-ordination across the full range of the government's activities and responsibilities

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- The new National Indicator Set (NIS) represents progress but needs continued review. And all government departments and regulators should honour the intention that NIS should be the sole framework for measuring progress
- Enthuse young people to become public servants working to improve public services for the next generation.

(8) What more needs to happen to keep children and young people out of trouble?

- Low-level anti-social behaviour is often the cause of inter-generational friction in local communities e.g. groups of young people hanging around together, littering, damage to bus shelters etc. The quality of the environment we give our young people is critical. As we redevelop our secondary and primary schools (through BSF), children's centres and colleges the evidence is clear that young people respond well to a high quality environment and respect and maintain it. This applies to the urban streetscape and to youth centres too. It is clear that poverty is a major risk factor for children and young people and the role played by housing, planning, economic regeneration and leisure should not be under-estimated. The environment in which children and young people live, learn and play is crucially important to their well being and that of their families
- Young people themselves consistently say that they need more things to do and places to go. But young people collectively in any locality must develop these 'things' and 'places'. The active engagement of young people in the production of the LA CYPP is a valuable way of showing that we are listening; local authorities have worked hard and will continue to do so to engage young people in a formative way. The creation of the Directorate for Young People and Families within DCSF was also an important signal in this regard
- In many respects the fear of crime by young people is an issue of perception. More can be done by government and partners to celebrate and promote young people and their legitimate role in society.

(9) Further comments

We welcome the government's intention to produce a Children's Plan. The Association urges government to be ambitious. The Association of Directors of Children's Services looks forward to continuing to work with government on children's services issues.

Any queries regarding the Association of Directors of Children's Services' response to this consultation should be addressed in the first instance to:

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