

Increasingly complex system of services and providers means Directors of Children's Services must be champions for children and families

- **New ADCS President**
- **New ADCS Policy priorities**

Directors of Children's Services in local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that the needs and voices of children are not lost in the structural changes to education and health, the incoming president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said today.

Matt Dunkley was speaking at the reception to mark his inauguration as ADCS President, attended by Children's minister Sarah Teather and representatives of local authorities and voluntary sector organisations.

He identified the risk of an increasingly fragmented system of providers of services for children and the need for local authorities to act as champions for children and families as they navigate this complex system as challenges for his presidential year.

"More providers means more diversity, but also the possible creation of more gaps for the vulnerable to fall through – it is our responsibility not to let that happen. Articulating that role in respect of school provision and school improvement; changes to the health service; of SEN services and in respect of child protection will be the focus of my presidential year. In the face of a rapidly changing landscape it is our responsibility to make sure the needs of all children and young people are understood and met and their voice is heard in these changes."

Outlining the challenges faced by directors of children's services, Mr Dunkley emphasised the extent of reform and turbulence in almost every aspect of services for children as both a challenge for those managing staff and services with an uncertain future and as an opportunity in the longer term to redesign services around local need and individual circumstances.

Mr Dunkley also called for greater freedom and flexibility in how local authorities provide services for children in order to make the most of this opportunity.

"DCSs would like the professional freedoms and respect offered to social workers and teachers in order to be able to support these staff as they explore their new freedom in a local context. You can't create learning organisations from Whitehall, nor should each Director be left to work out the answers to these challenges alone. That is why ADCS is committed to developing a robust model of sector-led improvement that will help us to help each other as we try to sustain and improve service quality and to maintain partnerships and multi-agency approaches in tough times."

Notes to editors:

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services is the professional leadership organisation for Directors of Children's Services and their senior management teams.

2. Mr Matt Dunkley, DCS in East Sussex, took over the ADCS Presidency on 1st April and the occasion was marked by a drinks reception on Monday 4th April at the Foundling Museum, Islington. He succeeds Marion Davis, DCS Warwickshire as ADCS President.
3. Each year the Association sets policy priorities for the year ahead. These priorities guide the work of the Association through its policy committee structure. In the coming year, ADCS will seek to:
 - establish and articulate a distinct, coherent and clear role for the local authority in relation to:
 - a) Special Educational Needs
 - b) School provision and school improvement
 - c) Child protection;
 - champion the needs and voice of children and young people in the reorganization of the NHS and the provision of local health services and local government services;
 - deliver a rigorous model for sector-led improvement and support in children's services.
4. In addition to Matt's appointment as president, Debbie Jones, DCS Lambeth, has been elected as ADCS Vice President for 2011-12. New chairs of ADCS Policy Committees have also been elected and take up their positions from 1st April – Alan Wood, DCS Hackney becomes chair of the Resources & Sustainability Committee while Sonia Sharp, DCS Sheffield, becomes chair of the Workforce Development committee.
5. Biography of Matt Dunkley: Matt Dunkley has been Director of Children's Services in East Sussex since August 2005. He is an American Studies graduate from Sussex University. In 1983 he joined the Greater London Council / Inner London Education Authority as a graduate management trainee. During his career in GLC / ILEA, Matt survived the abolition of both authorities and held a number of managerial roles in Special Education and Schools Branches, as well as a period as a Policy Adviser. In 1990 Matt was appointed as a Senior Education Officer for Pupils & Families with the new education department in London Borough of Greenwich. In 1992 he joined East Sussex County Council as Education Officer (Primary) and held a variety of Assistant Director roles before becoming Assistant Director (Strategy & Resources) in 2003. He became the County's first Director of Children's Services in 2005. Matt was awarded a Harkness Fellowship in Public Policy in 1995-96 when he was a visiting Fellow at University of California at Berkeley, and part of an education 'think tank' there. Matt divides his leisure time between watching old punk bands from his youth re-form and following West Ham United, both of which involve a triumph of hope over expectation. He is married with three children, aged 18, 14, and 6.

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