

Policy Position Paper

~ Orchestrating the System for the
Benefit of Children,
Young People and Families ~

ADCS Policy Position Paper

Orchestrating the System for the Benefit of Children, Young People and Families (March 2015)

Executive summary

In an increasingly autonomous and diverse education and children's services sector, strong local leadership is required to ensure that strategy for the commissioning, delivery, quality assurance and oversight of services for children and young people is coherent and effective.

There is a moral imperative to ensure all services improve opportunities and outcomes for our children; protect and keep them safe; and celebrate and promote their success. There is a clear case to ensure that between central and local government the joint responsibility for children is properly and effectively calibrated, and that it is clear to all where these critical responsibilities and overall accountability are held, at both local and national level.

Over time we have seen new structures, with more leaders and an army of checkers and watchers, a proliferation of local commissioners – schools, CCGs, LSCBs - resulting in new demands and requirements on direct service providers including school nurses, teachers, social workers, police officers, youth workers, family support workers and so on. This impacts upon the time they have to work directly with children. All of these local professionals operate in a context of austerity coupled with rising demand for services across the panoply of early help and statutory safeguarding and child protection services. They operate in a complex local ecology in which the interactions between local agencies and commissioners and the impact of actions by those agencies on individual children and families are highly interdependent.

The dynamic for autonomy of schools, the drive to create a greater diversity of providers in children's social care, the proliferation of local commissioners is here to stay; but, with it comes the real possibility for discordant, unconnected actions creating an imbalance in the performance and effectiveness of local education and safeguarding systems.

In these increasingly complex local ecologies it is perhaps more important than ever that there is a single, clear point of professional accountability, enacted through visible local leadership, relentlessly orchestrating, advocating and carrying statutory responsibility for securing the provision of services which address the needs of all children and young people, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and their families and carers.

To work effectively, local systems within which the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are met, must be considered together. Local systems must combine the resources of skilled

professionals, with a forensic focus on designing and commissioning services that drive improvement in outcomes for children and young people, with the ability to adjust the pace, tempo and focus of delivery in response to the needs of the local community and the specific risks that children and young people may face in the local area where they live.

In order to rebalance local systems to respond more effectively to the needs of children, ADCS has identified three things the new government could do quickly and with which our members stand ready to assist:

1. Look again at accountability arrangements for the local school system to ensure a coherent and equitable approach to the provision of sufficient good quality places for all statutory school-aged pupils.
2. Look again at local accountability arrangements for safeguarding children to ensure there is a coherent multi-agency contribution to the protection and safeguarding of children and young people.
3. Work with local government, police and health partners to create the right environment for and the capacity to intervene early, quickly and sustainably in areas not doing well enough.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Effective public services can only be delivered in partnership across agencies – the local authority, schools and colleges, police and the health economy engaging strategically with business leaders, voluntary and private sector providers in a locality. The local authority leads these partnerships on behalf of the citizens its elected members represent. It is not only the democratic legitimacy of the local authority that makes it best placed to lead local partnerships but it also has a fundamental role in co-ordinating services that impact upon the lives of its citizens. The local authority can best fulfil this leadership role because of its wide reach across almost all aspects of local public services (education, social care, leisure, housing, environment, public health, economic regeneration and so on) and its flexible approach to resourcing.

1.2 It follows therefore that effective children's services can only be delivered in partnership – between the local authority, schools, police and the health economy in particular. The local authority not only leads this aspect of the local partnership, it carries 200 or more statutory duties and responsibilities with respect to promoting the safety, health, wellbeing and educational attainment of its children and young people. The Children Act 2004 and the statutory guidance on the role and responsibilities of the director of children's services (DCS), invest the single point of professional accountability in the role of the DCS. It is this single point of professional accountability that marks out the difference between the DCS and other leaders in the local partnership.

1.3 November 2014 marked the tenth anniversary of the Children Act 2004 - which enshrined in statute the requirement for every top tier local authority in England to appoint a director of children's services. The last half of that decade has been characterised by profound austerity coupled with rising demand for the full panoply of public services, and for children's social care services in particular. This short paper reflects on the continued importance of the construct of a single, clear professional point of accountability for the design, commissioning and delivery of children's services.

2.0 What are the challenges?

2.1 The leadership role of the DCS is designed to orchestrate the local, often complex, system in which the interactions between agencies and the impact of actions by those agencies on individual children and families are highly interdependent.

2.2 The commissioning, delivery, quality assurance and oversight of services for children and young people has become increasingly fragmented, as the government has set up new structures in response to new challenges e.g. school performance, resulting in an army of checkers. The resulting action is discordant and unconnected and has led to the creation of new demands and requirements on direct service providers – school nurses, teachers, social workers, police officers, youth workers and so on – which in turn impact upon the time they have to work directly with children, young people and their families. In education and children's social care in particular there has been a proliferation of checkers and watchers – DfE Regional School Commissioners, Ofsted Regional Directors, Independent Chairs of LSCBs, Chief Social Workers, Principal Child and Family Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Directors of Public Health, Virtual School Headteachers, etc.

2.3 To local citizens it can sometimes look as if the first priority of the system is itself, particularly when they see schools built in places they are not needed while children travel miles in others; over provisions of specialist staff in some areas, and dire shortages of social workers in others; a reduction in early help services in areas alongside the accumulation of vast school balances.

2.4 There are other challenges, including the creation of a new diversity of providers for children's social care services, a proliferation of local commissioners for services to children and the signal failure of national inspectorates to agree upon the establishment and delivery of an inspection regime that adequately takes account of the effectiveness of the contributions made by all partners to the protection and safeguarding of children and young people.

2.5 These new commissioners for children are at local level – in particular CCGs and headteachers, whom collectively have more public money spending power than councils do. This dynamic for more autonomy, diversity and independence within the system is here to stay - the challenge is how best to get these new local commissioners to play a modernised role in the local partnership.

2.6 These systemic challenges within local public services, very clearly impact upon local citizens, who continue to see the local authority, rightly, as the source from which their help, support and information needs flow; the local authority holding the baton on behalf of its citizens; the DCS orchestrating the local system for the benefit of children and young people. To work properly in times of economic challenge, these systems require robust, cohesive, local accountability arrangements for the oversight of all schools, coherent local arrangements for safeguarding children and young people to ensure a clear line of sight between the local authority and the citizens its Members are elected to serve.

3.0 A leadership model for the 21st century

3.1 ADCS members are not concerned with protecting or securing the re-emergence of the pure DCS role as envisioned by Lord Laming and others in the wake of the Victoria Climbié tragedy. Local authorities are best placed to determine how to discharge their statutory functions and duties in respect of promoting the safety, health, wellbeing and educational attainment of its children and young people.

3.2 What is essential however is that local authorities must establish a clear single line of accountability for children's outcomes. The local authority must continue to hold the responsibility for ensuring that the arrangements made by itself and other local providers are designed to benefit children, young people and families and are not predicated on the needs of a single organisation, agency or provider alone.

3.3 A single point of professional accountability provides both a strategic and professional framework within which the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children, young people and their families are considered together. This requires an orchestrator, one:

- With visibly clear presence combining together the resources of skilled professionals to ensure a coherent and effective delivery of services;
- Organised to drive improvement in the outcomes for children, young people and families by shaping the totality of investment across public agencies, including schools, in a locality;
- Able to give emphasis at varying times to the focus of the collective expertise and fomenting a harmony of sometimes discordant parts;
- Adjusting the pace, tempo and focus of delivery in response to the needs of the local community.

3.4 The leaders of 21st century children's services must craft new models in which clarity of accountability and governance arrangements are fit for purpose. Models that:

- Centralise a common objective and cause for all service providers - better outcomes for children, young people and families;
- Ensure skilled, high quality, professional staff are supported to do their work with an expectation of continuous improvement;
- Allow skilled staff to take decisions that create opportunities and bring about meaningful change in families at the level of their intervention with them;
- Facilitate quick action to fix problems in areas that are not doing well enough by spotting early the antecedents of failure and acting decisively and meaningfully to address those signs, not waiting until failure has manifested itself and negatively impacted upon the outcomes or life chances of children and young people;

- Encourage innovation and new ways of working - especially in areas of entrenched difficulty, such as adolescents in or on the edges of care, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, underperformance in schools;
- Are flexible across resource streams in order to respond creatively in times of economic challenge.

3.5 ADCS has identified three things the new government could do quickly to ensure the system can be rebalanced to respond more effectively to the changing needs of children, young people and families.

1. Look again at accountability arrangements for the local school system to ensure a coherent and equitable approach to the provision of sufficient good quality places for all statutory school-aged pupils.
2. Look again at local accountability arrangements for safeguarding children to ensure there is a coherent multi-agency contribution to the protection and safeguarding of children and young people.
3. Work with local government, police and health partners to create the right environment for and the capacity to intervene early, quickly and sustainably in areas not doing well enough.