

# Policy Position Papers

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

~ Education ~

~ Early Years ~

## Contents

- 3 Foreword - Alan Wood, ADCS President**

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

- 5 Executive summary**

- 7 Position paper**

### **Education**

- 11 Executive summary**

- 13 Position paper**

### **Early Years**

- 17 Executive summary**

- 19 Position paper**

## Foreword

### **Alan Wood, CBE, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd, (ADCS) is the professional association for directors of children's services and their senior management teams. Under the Children Act 2004, the DCS is the chief officer responsible for the discharge of local authority functions for children's education and social care. The DCS provides a clear and unambiguous line of professional accountability for children's services as well as being professionally responsible for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services.



Whatever the outcome of the general election, there are big challenges for the new government on a wide range of issues affecting children and young people, their families and carers and the professionals who work with them. Preventing and disrupting the sexual exploitation of children and young people, and prosecuting the perpetrators of this vile crime is arguably one of the most complex tasks facing us all currently. Changing the attitudes of some males towards women, as well as the casual acceptance of degrading and over sexualised representations of children and young people in the media and in our society is required, in the same way we have sought to challenge attitudes, misconceptions and untruths surrounding HIV, racism and homophobia in the recent past. It is clear that local authorities cannot tackle this issue alone; the engagement, fully of all child protection agencies, voluntary organisations, the wider community and the government is necessary.

As President of ADCS I was a participant in the summit held by the Prime Minister at Downing Street in early March. Our members and the Association will continue to play a leading role in combatting Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) through and well beyond the election to ensure all services step up to this challenge to decency and morality.

ADCS has produced this short suite of policy position papers, the purpose of which is to offer ADCS members' professional advice to policy-makers and influencers on a small number of key issues that members consider are facing the sector in the coming year. Our aim in publishing these papers now is to contribute to the debate in the run up to the general election.

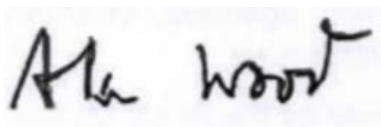
We have chosen the following three aspects of policy: orchestrating the system for the benefit of children and young people; education; and, early years.

In the papers that follow, ADCS has identified a number of things the new government could do quickly and with which our members stand ready to assist. These cover:

- 1. Leadership for children** – responsibility and accountability for key systems such as child protection and safeguarding, protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse, schooling and co-operation of health, police and local government are confused and confusing. We need clarity at central government level and a clear calibration of responsibility between it and local government. Only in this way can we ensure accountability and effective governance for the services our children thrive by. We believe this is best achieved by having a leader who is the single point of accountability for children covering all areas of service.
- 2. Education** – the need to ensure we have a school system which is better planned; ensures fairer admission; ensures the highest standards are achieved in all schools; and ensures parents know who is accountable when concerns arise.

Approaching a million additional children will enter the school system in the next decade. We must have sufficient places for them. We also face a problem with teacher supply, especially for core subjects.

- 3. Early years** – the need for better, more flexible and targeted high quality provision – with a focus on quality and not places alone. The extension of the pupil premium to early years and the upcoming transfer of 0-5 public health services should act as a catalyst to improve the commissioning of services which meet the needs of a child in the context of their wider family, including promoting a positive, healthy home-learning environment.



Alan Wood

## **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.

## **ADCS Policy Position Paper**

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

#### **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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

## ADCS Policy Position Paper

### *Education (March 2015)*

#### **Executive summary**

Education is a vital service for children, young people and the wider community. School leaders, governors and parents lead the drive for improvement in standards to ensure all learners thrive at school. To do this they need to be assured that the local education system is working in the best interests of all learners, and supported and challenged to develop our school system to become the best in the world.

Over the next decade we can anticipate severe pressures in several key areas of education:

- Ensuring a sufficiency of high-quality school places meet the needs of a growing school-age population;
- The supply of high quality teachers, especially in the core subjects of science and maths;
- The successful transition of young people aged 16-19 years, through school to training, further and higher education and work.

Unless there is a coordinated and coherent approach to dealing with these stresses inherent in the education system today, too many children will be at risk of falling between the cracks tomorrow and the nation will not be as competitive or productive as a result.

Local authorities play a critical role in ensuring the education system works effectively and the fragmented accountability arrangements that currently characterise the oversight of our schools system is getting in the way of establishing:

- Effective planning for school places, including the quality and quantity of post-16 provision;
- A transparent process for school admissions;
- A framework to provide more support for those with additional learning needs in school;
- The reliable supply of high quality teachers;
- The championing of the success of schools and pupils;
- Rapid, early action to prevent failure in individual schools;
- The capacity to deliver a broad, balanced and challenging curriculum in each school;
- The resources to ensure all children in all schools are safeguarded;
- Clear pathways into higher education, training or work.

Amongst providers and policy makers alike there is a general agreement that the education system is becoming increasingly incoherent and that more must be done



to simplify it and provide greater transparency. Achieving this goal will ensure schools are more effectively supported to work with each other to drive further improvement and increase pupil achievement.

To deliver a system that meets the needs of every learner, the incoming government must act swiftly to ensure national educational objectives can be delivered effectively at local level. This will require clear, unambiguous guidance on the role of the local authority in relation to all schools (academy, faith, community, foundation, free and voluntary). The system will experience further difficulties if the support and guidance that comes from a range of organisations and agencies continues to vary in relation to core policies about school places, teacher recruitment and pathways to employment, training and higher education.

Local residents, parents and guardians tell us that they want a clear accountability system that is local so they know instantly who to go to if they have a complaint, concern or issue which cannot be resolved directly by the school. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) believes a local authority, working on behalf of all pupils and all schools, is uniquely placed to undertake that vital role for the benefit of children, young people and their families.

## ADCS Policy Position Paper

*Education (March 2015)*

### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Local authorities have direct and specific duties with regard to school standards, school place planning, admissions, special educational needs, safeguarding, and children in care; these duties apply to all children in all schools. While these functions are given statutory force by legislation set out in the Education Act (1996), local authorities also have a democratic mandate and a moral purpose to act as champions for the citizens they serve.

1.2 The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) believes in both principle and practice that the development of effective and sustainable education services in a locality are best delivered via genuine partnership working to ensure that all children and young people receive a good education, and that they, and their families, are treated fairly and equitably.

1.3 The characteristics of an effective education system are as follows:

- It offers high quality educational opportunities, available locally for all children and young people including: effective early years provision, good or outstanding full time education for all learners of statutory school age and a varied and flexible post-16 offer so that young people are fully prepared for employment or further study;
- There is a sufficient supply of high quality teachers across all subject areas;
- There is an equitable distribution of resources in line with needs and that the system is financially sustainable;
- A system that is sustainable, without either excessive surplus or a deficit of places in a locality;
- School-to-school collaboration is supported to ensure excellence is shared throughout the local education system, local leaders also work collaboratively to tackle issues that cut across more than one school;
- There is a clearly defined framework of accountability so that the performance of all schools can be monitored and the early signs of poor performance tackled in a timely and decisive way;
- Fair access to local school places is encouraged through admissions policies that are clear, straightforward and consistently applied, with rapid redress for parents where there are problems;
- Schools are engaged with partners to support the development of a broad and balanced curriculum that meets local and national skills and employment needs.

1.4 The most successful local authorities have always worked hard to build and maintain relationships with all schools in their area, providing important links between central government and the frontline, and have been willing to intervene robustly when things go wrong. This ADCS policy position paper concerns local

authorities' responsibilities to promote educational excellence, ensure fair access for all and to champion the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. It does not seek to address all areas and aspects of education policy; instead it focuses on three key areas that ADCS members believe urgently require the attention of government in 2015 and beyond.

**2.0 There should be clear and unambiguous guidance on the role of a local authority in school education to enable them to fulfil their statutory duties regarding safeguarding and education standards and to ensure effective forms of local support and intervention are available to enable all education providers to thrive.**

2.1 Schools should work in partnership with their local communities and the local authority in order for a single conversation about educational standards and attainment for a local area to take place. The local authority is the constant in a system of disparate arrangements and as a consequence seeks to ensure whole system accountability. At present concerns about the performance of school governance or safeguarding arrangements must be raised with different individuals and agencies. This is confusing and ultimately it is the learners who are at the greatest risk of being left at a disadvantage.

2.2 Parents and carers continue to look to their local authority to address concerns and complaints regarding their child's education. Remote commissioning (whether regional or national) cannot adequately hope to replace this long-standing local relationship and accountability structures should reflect this reality. Similarly, national agencies are too remote to deal with such vital matters as safeguarding.

2.3 School-to-school collaboration is an effective means of challenge and improvement. Ofsted should expect and inspect schools' and local authorities' success in this regard. All schools in a locality should be expected to develop a common set of sector-led improvement arrangements that drive up achievement by drawing on the strengths within and between local systems and reflect the needs of local communities.

2.4 Our education system is fragmented, and as a consequence, no longer fully transparent nor publically accountable. This is concerning for directors of children's services and for parents too. A national data-sharing protocol between all schools and their local authority will enable any decline in performance to be identified and addressed before more intrusive intervention is required.

**3.0 The DfE's planned expenditure in 2014/15 is £50.9 billion, £42.6 billion of which will be spent on schools. ADCS would like to engage in a balanced, evidence-led debate, to ensure that there is effective and equitable deployment of resources, and that best value is being achieved with public funds.**

3.1 The rising birth rate is putting real pressure on the ability of a growing number of local authorities to ensure a sufficiency of school places in a locality. In London an



additional 118,000<sup>1</sup> places are needed by 2016 while recently released data from the DfE predicts<sup>2</sup> an additional 900,000 children will enter the education system by 2023. If significant capital investment is not forthcoming to rebuild, improve or extend existing schools then local and national government must work together, as a matter of urgency, to ensure new institutions open only in the areas of greatest need. This issue also brings with it the pressing requirement to train and recruit a substantial number of additional teachers.

**3.2** The establishment of free schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) in areas with a surplus of school places is compounding this problem and, moreover, is a poor use of scarce public funds. Policy makers must seek innovative solutions as a matter of urgency to prevent a crisis of pupil places.

**3.3** Local authorities must also be involved in the strategic planning of, and decision making about, post-16 provision. The increasing fragmentation of this offer is narrowing the range of options available to young people in many areas of the country and institutions must work together to strengthen and broaden the local offer instead, of restricting or duplicating it. This issue is particularly acute in rural areas.

**3.4** Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve as well as their peers - over two thirds fail to meet the accepted measures of success. The ADCS supports the continued drive to close the attainment gap so that those children living in economically deprived households have the opportunity to achieve as well as any child. However, a strong body of research shows that high parental aspirations and a good quality home learning environment has the strongest impact on a child's development and can even counteract the negative effects of social deprivation. A more adaptable approach to use of the pupil premium, and all other funds currently targeted at educational outcomes, should be considered in order to provide holistic support for all children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable or disadvantaged, enabling them to thrive now and in the future.

#### **4.0 Young people need a post-16 offer that is relevant to their needs and takes account of the national priorities, so that they are fully equipped for further study and the world of work.**

**4.1** The raising of the participation age brings a clear and pressing need to ensure that young people are fully informed of the various education, training and employment opportunities available to them. This requires access to high quality and impartial careers guidance at school. According to a recent Ofsted survey<sup>3</sup> only one in five schools have well-developed careers advice, while three quarters of schools were found to have guidance services which were less than good. Education should prepare young people to make the successful transition from adolescence to adulthood and in a fiercely competitive employment market it is more important than ever that they can access suitable careers advice and guidance to allow them to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Do The Maths*, London Councils, April 2013

<sup>2</sup> *National pupil projections: trends in pupil numbers*, Department for Education, July 2014

<sup>3</sup> *Going in the right direction? Careers advice in schools from September 2012*, Ofsted, September 2013



continue learning, evolve their skills and to ensure continued employment success in the future.

**4.2** The government should require each local authority to ensure a systematic careers education programme exists for 11 – 18 year olds, supported by the Local Enterprise Partnership. Partnerships of local schools, colleges and employers should plan, commission and publicise the local offer in conjunction with the local authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership to reduce skills shortages and promote entrepreneurship. More employers also need to be encouraged to recruit more apprentices, particularly those aged 16 – 18 years, including higher level apprenticeships.

**4.3** Increasingly schools and colleges are working together to ensure level 3 students make the best progress. This should be further incentivised by ensuring provision available at local FE colleges is more routinely part of the school based offer and that vocational options become more commonly available in schools. Likewise, early links between schools and universities should be fostered to ensure students from low income backgrounds are more effectively and routinely supported and encouraged to apply to good universities.

**4.4** Young people are less likely to achieve excellent outcomes or continue with further studies if they are disengaged from the education process, to this end the curriculum must not continue to foster an increasingly rigid and narrowly defined view of success. Low attainment as a young person is a key risk factor for poverty as an adult<sup>4</sup>.

**4.5** Too many young people, their parents and teachers still perceive vocational routes as a second-class option next to academic routes<sup>5</sup>. The introduction of the 'EBacc' and the 'Achievement 8' progress measures have resulted in academic subjects receiving precedence over the arts, sport and vocational study options in schools. This in turn undermines the wider agenda of government to promote vocational and work-based options, such as apprenticeships. We must therefore develop a vocational route of excellence that is of equal value to the traditional academic pathway in such a way that a 'gold standard' applies equally to each path.

---

<sup>4</sup> *State of the nation*, The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, October 2014

<sup>5</sup> *Going in the right direction? Careers advice in schools from September 2012*, Ofsted, September 2013

## ADCS Policy Position Paper

*Early Years (March 2015)*

### Executive summary

Early years policy, particularly relating to childcare, has been a focus for all recent governments, with twin policy objectives - to give all children a better start in life and to support and increase the number of working families. Despite this, opportunities to make a real difference for our most vulnerable children can be overlooked. This paper focusses on targeting early years support to address the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families

High quality early education is important but will not on its own close the gap in outcomes between the most and least disadvantaged families. A positive home-learning environment, parental health and employment, and integration with local communities can make as much difference<sup>1</sup>. These elements are closely interlinked, childcare can support work, which can be a route out of poverty and have a significant impact on children's outcomes, but only when this work pays sufficiently. The benefits to child, benefits to family and benefits to community of support for young families should not be artificially separated by policy makers or practitioners.

As such, the lack of high quality, affordable and suitable childcare in many of the most disadvantaged communities, and for families with particular needs, is an economic as well as a social inequalities issue. And the same trends are seen in primary health and community services.

Local authorities are best placed to oversee local needs and use the various local and national levers to lead in this complex system, particularly with the recent addition of commissioning responsibilities for public health. This includes a clear role in shaping the childcare market but also the flexibility to invest, with partners, in the home learning environment and family support<sup>2</sup>, to complement childcare, so we don't miss the opportunity to improve things for the most vulnerable children.

Whilst early intervention can happen at any age, evidence shows how effective support in the early years is in mitigating the risks of longer term challenges and inequalities. Even so, policy and funding approaches do not currently support creative investment in early intervention, in early years or beyond. The pressure to make savings across public services requires a re-balancing of investment between universal and targeted services. ADCS supports the principles which underpinned SureStart; prioritising investment in the early years, coordinating support for young families in local areas and providing high quality early education and childcare where there are gaps. These principles are now being applied more creatively and sustainably than the 'buildings-focused' model of

---

<sup>1</sup> Burger, K. (2009). How does early childhood care and education affect cognitive development? An international review of the effects of early interventions for children from different social backgrounds, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 25(2), 140-165.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, K. & Gambaro, L. (2014). *World Class: What does international evidence tell us about improving quality, access and affordability in the English childcare market?* London: Resolution Foundation

children's centres which had emerged. In January 2015, ADCS informally surveyed its membership to ask about children's centre provision in local areas. 78 authorities responded and the results show that children's centre provision is experiencing high levels of change and a multiplicity of models are developing, for example clusters, hub and spoke arrangements utilising a variety of venues including libraries and health clinics, integrating services with other services such as health visiting, employment advice, housing services, and so on.

ADCS has identified the following things the new government could do quickly and with which our members stand ready to assist:

1. Coordinate cross government policy development and investment for young families to ensure:
  - a) Help with childcare is targeted on the most vulnerable children.
  - b) There is investment in parenting and wider family support alongside the free childcare offer.
  - c) The level of the Early Years Pupil Premium is increased.
  - d) Savings from other parts of the system, including criminal justice and welfare, are reinvested into early years provision.
2. Support flexible models of children's centre services and urgently review the current framework for inspecting children's centres to ensure it is proportionate and responsive to emerging service models.

## ADCS Policy Position Paper

### Early Years (March 2015)

#### 1.0 Introduction

**1.1** Early years policy, particularly relating to childcare, has been a focus for all recent governments, with twin policy objectives - to give all children a better start in life and to support and increase the number of working families. Despite this, opportunities to make a real difference for our most vulnerable children can be overlooked. This paper focusses on targeting early years support to address the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families

**1.2** High quality early education has a direct and sustained impact on children's development but so does their home learning environment, parental health, education and employment and the family's integration with local communities<sup>3</sup>. Outcomes for vulnerable children will not be improved by focusing on one aspect of their needs in isolation. This presents a challenge for practitioners and families.

**1.3** Addressing the range of factors that help build families' resilience and support children's development requires alignment of services. However, understanding the balance needed between universal and targeted services and how to invest most effectively, across health, childcare, early education, schools and the community, is a fundamental challenge to system leaders. To have any chance of achieving this in times of such limited public resource, policies on early years and childcare need to complement and be aligned with health policy and population-level evidence (especially relating to public health and prevention), as well as strategies to build (and regenerate) communities and the local economy.

**1.4** The lack of high quality, affordable, accessible and suitable childcare in certain communities, and for families with particular requirements, is the result of risks inherent in the current mixed childcare and early education 'market'. This 'market' requires much more robust management and clearer accountability. In particular, strategies are needed at a local and national level to improve quality in areas that need it most. In most cases, childcare is also not effectively complemented with family support<sup>4</sup> so opportunities to improve things for the most vulnerable children are missed.

**1.5** The importance of employment, as a contributor to the economy and as a way out of poverty for families is well understood, as is the negative impact of poverty on children<sup>5</sup>. The inter-relationships between benefits to child, benefits to family and benefits to community of good early years provision should not be overlooked by policy makers, local leaders or practitioners. Integrating employment support into the work of children's

---

<sup>3</sup> Burger, K. (2009). How does early childhood care and education affect cognitive development? An international review of the effects of early interventions for children from different social backgrounds, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 25(2), 140-165.

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, K. & Gambaro, L. (2014). *World Class: What does international evidence tell us about improving quality, access and affordability in the English childcare market?* London: Resolution Foundation

<sup>5</sup> Field, F. (2010). *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*. London: Cabinet Office

services is at an early stage but as the Troubled Families Programme and many children's centre programmes show us, this is possible.

**1.6** ADCS supports the core principles that underpinned the development of SureStart centres; giving priority to the early years, coordinating support and services for young families in local areas and providing high quality early education and childcare where there are gaps. These principles are now being applied more creatively and flexibly than through what became a 'buildings-focused' model. As the latest 4Children census of children's centres<sup>6</sup>, and the informal survey conducted by ADCS in January 2015 show, local authorities and centre staff are developing different models to reflect the improvements that have been made in joining up work with partners and understanding whole family needs. Some are enhancing children's centre services to support older children as well as the traditional cohort and others are focused on maximising the resources and engagement opportunities of the many good early years providers, antenatal and post-natal health care and more flexible forms of family support which build on community resources.

**1.7** The 4Children census also highlights that the pressure to make savings is a significant challenge now and in future, which we must recognise openly. The sector - and politicians - need to change the rhetoric and urgently develop an understanding of the best of these emerging new models. Equally, the increasingly outdated regulatory systems must adapt too.

**1.8** Getting early years support right is an economic as well as a social inequalities challenge. Local authorities are best placed to lead on aligning all relevant levers and prioritising investment to manage this complex local landscape.

**1.9** Local arrangements will rightly vary. ADCS proposes that local areas test how far their local arrangements support the four outcome aims set in the sections that follow. Each section also identifies some of the challenges that local areas need to overcome.

**1.10** ADCS suggests that local areas test how far their early years arrangements support the following four outcome aims:

- Young children develop well and are ready for school;
- Parents have high aspirations for their children, good self-esteem and the skills to help their children grow and develop;
- Families are healthy and have good emotional and mental wellbeing;
- Families who are identified as being in 'greatest need' can access appropriate longer term support for both child and family members.

## **2.0 Young children develop well and are ready for school**

**2.1** Childcare and early education are complementary and, especially for very young children, need to be integrated. Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from

---

<sup>6</sup> 4Children (2014). SureStart Children's Centres Census 2014. [http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/6f907ff7-35fe-4c6f-a3a4-a3cb00e1a11c/Children\\_Centre\\_Census\\_2014.pdf](http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/6f907ff7-35fe-4c6f-a3a4-a3cb00e1a11c/Children_Centre_Census_2014.pdf)



starting education early, especially if they attend high quality provision that caters for children from mixed social backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

**2.2** Ofsted identified areas which are 'closing the gap' between the most and least disadvantaged children in terms of school readiness. Ofsted and researchers should focus on identifying what factors are making the difference in those areas.

**2.3** ADCS welcomes recent initiatives which allocate funding to childcare providers in a more targeted way, notably the Early Years Pupil Premium and the two year old childcare offer but the impact of these must be evaluated in the short and longer term. In particular, the current level of the Early Years Pupil Premium is insufficient and will therefore limit its impact.

**2.4** Support to guide providers in utilising this additional funding appropriately and effectively, to incentivise access and improve quality, will be severely limited given the reduction in local authority central capacity and urgent consideration needs to be given to how this will be overseen, in the interests of making best use of public funds and integrating support for these families.

**2.5** Government has given mixed messages over time about the preferred balance between private and public sector delivery of childcare places. This can destabilise long term strategies to develop the market and in some areas schools play a minor role in early years provision compared to the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Schools have a vested interest in ensuring high quality early years experiences, so that children are school-ready. It is also important to recognise other challenges facing schools such as rising primary pupil numbers. Local authorities, with local schools and providers, must work together to establish as wide a range of accessible, quality places to meet local needs as possible.

**2.6** The new SEND system presents new opportunities for the early years sector to improve the way that young children's needs are identified and supported earlier but these reforms also present capacity challenges for a fragmented early years sector.

### **3.0 Parents have high aspirations for their children, good self-esteem and the skills to help their children grow and develop**

**3.1** For pre-school and primary age children 'good parenting' and attachment has a significant effect on achievement and wellbeing and has a bigger impact than variations in the quality of early years provision.<sup>8</sup> All those working with families in the early years, including childcare providers, must consider the wider context all families live in and be able to promote the home learning environment, good parenting, attachment and understand the evidence about the positive impact on children of parents being in work. Close working with Jobcentre Plus or placing employment advisers with Troubled

---

<sup>7</sup> Sylva, K. et al (2004) The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report. A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004 DfES and Institute of Education.

<sup>8</sup> Desforges, C. & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. London: DfES

Families teams are examples of how some local areas are providing holistic packages of support for young families.

**3.2** Support for early parenting and the home learning environment (such as frequency of reading and playing with children and the availability of books and activities) would be a better investment than funding low or medium quality childcare places. These factors can play a protective role for children growing up in otherwise disadvantaged environments and have been more strongly associated with children's later wellbeing and attainment than either family income, parental education or the school environment alone<sup>9</sup>.

**3.3** Work – or training - is shown to improve parents' confidence, help make families self-sustaining and can improve the household environment for children. In that sense, childcare which supports work impacts on children's outcomes in another way, but only if parents are paid a living wage. Over the last decade, the expansion of the childcare market, and take-up, has not seen a large increase in the number of working mothers.<sup>10</sup>

## **4.0 Families are healthy and have good emotional and mental wellbeing**

**4.1** Health services lead the universal offer for very young children and, as such, opportunities for integrating assessments and provision, including targeted services and those provided by a range of commissioners or communities themselves, should be maximised. The recent report from the EIF<sup>11</sup> strongly encourages the development of integrated early years provision bringing professionals together to support families and this is endorsed by ADCS.

**4.2** The transfer of responsibilities for public health commissioning for 0-5s to local authorities in 2015 provides welcome opportunities to develop more effective commissioning strategies to utilise the whole early years workforce and support innovation and flexible provision to meet the whole needs of families.

**4.3** The importance of the midwifery service should not be underestimated and opportunities to link community midwifery into local service provision should be expected and encouraged.

**4.4** The new 'integrated review' at two years is an opportunity to identify children's needs in a more holistic way at an early stage. Aggregated information from these reviews must inform strategic planning and commissioning across children's services and public health, including support for children with SEND.

## **5.0 Families who are identified as being in 'greatest need' can access appropriate, longer term support for both child and family members**

---

<sup>9</sup> Mollin, S., Waldfogel, J. & Washbrook, E. (2014). *Baby Bonds: Parenting, attachment and a secure base for children*. The Sutton Trust. <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/baby-bonds-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Cory, G. & Alakeson, V. (2014). *Careers and carers: Childcare and maternal labour supply*. Resolution Foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Messenger, C. & Molloy, D. (2014). *Getting it right for families: A review of integrated systems and promising practice in the early years*. Early Intervention Foundation.



**5.1** ADCS believes that all agencies must prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable children. The greatest opportunities to intervene positively occur with very young children - there is a wealth of evidence about impact of early experiences on later development. It is essential therefore that early years policy is seen within the overall context of wider children's services.

**5.2** Good information sharing and early identification of those children most 'at risk' is vital to improving their outcomes. Universal services must understand their role in this, and be held to account for it, as well as how they contribute to the holistic support for families.

**5.3** Interventions may well need to be sustained into the school years and involve siblings and family members.

## **6.0 The investment challenge**

**6.1** The case for investment in early years has been eloquently made by politicians, leading researchers and thinkers. ADCS welcomes the work of, for example, The Marmot Review<sup>12</sup>, The Early Intervention Foundation, The Wave Trust<sup>13</sup> and Sutton Trust, in contributing to understanding which interventions are effective. As the face of public services continues to change, we will need to continue to evaluate what works in the current context and what the economic case is for these investments.

**6.2** Current national policy and funding approaches do not support investment in creative ways in early intervention, either in the early years or later. Spend nationally remains skewed towards late (or later) intervention and reactive services. A recent CIPFA analysis of local authorities' budgeted spend for 2014-15 suggests that the only area where budgeted spending has increased is in children's social care, by 16%. This is likely due to significant increases in numbers of children looked after and on child protection plans. ADCS members face this dilemma on a daily basis; protecting (let alone increasing) spend on early intervention – of which universal early years services are part – whilst meeting growing demand for statutory child protection services. Releasing the savings generated through early intervention and, crucially, reinvesting them in ways that will make a long term difference, is a holy grail that local government still seeks.

**6.3** ADCS urges the government, the Early Intervention Foundation and others to work with the sector to establish realistic business cases for investment of public money in early years and in older-age early intervention. We must recognise and then overcome the challenges of unpicking the benefits accrued to different agencies of early intervention. Government needs to consider mechanisms that will reinvest savings into early years services from all parts of the system including criminal justice and welfare.

**6.4** In addition to local areas testing how far their local arrangements support the achievement of the four outcome aims proposed above, ADCS has identified the

---

<sup>12</sup> Marmot, M. (2010). Fair Society, Healthy Lives: A Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010. <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Wave Trust (2013). Conception to age 2 – the age of opportunity. <http://www.wavetrust.org/our-work/publications/reports/conception-age-2-age-opportunity>

following things the new government could do quickly and with which our members stand ready to assist:

1. Coordinate cross government policy development and investment for young families to ensure:
  - a) Help with childcare is targeted on the most vulnerable children.
  - b) There is investment in parenting and wider family support alongside the free childcare offer.
  - c) The level of the Early Years Pupil Premium is increased.
  - d) Savings from other parts of the system, including criminal justice and welfare, are reinvested into early years provision.
2. Support flexible models of children's centre services and urgently review the current framework for inspecting children's centres to ensure it is proportionate and responsive to emerging service models

# ADCS

Leading Children's Services

By Post

**The Association of Directors  
of Children's Services Ltd**  
Piccadilly House  
49 Piccadilly  
Manchester  
M1 2AP

Registered in England and Wales  
Company Number: 06801922

By telephone

**0161 826 9484**

By email

**[info@adcs.org.uk](mailto:info@adcs.org.uk)**

On the web

**[www.adcs.org.uk](http://www.adcs.org.uk)**