

## **Robert Goodwill MP - ADCS Speech**

Thank you for that introduction Alison, and for your warm welcome here today.

It's always a little nerve-wracking for a Yorkshireman to cross the Pennines, but I could not imagine a more worthwhile occasion – as I approach the end of my fourth week in this new role – to brave the treacherous journey into Lancashire. It is an honour to have the chance to speak to you, to meet with you, and most importantly to hear from you, as a community of leaders committed to improving the chances of vulnerable children across the country.

It is particularly poignant to be meeting together, as partners committed to this cause, in a city that just a few weeks ago saw some of its youngest and most innocent become victims of an horrific attack. Manchester is a warm and open city that has always been deeply proud of its people, and fiercely protective over them too. It lies in the heart of an exciting area of Children's Social Care reform and innovation – it's great to be meeting with you so close to Oldham which I was fortunate enough to visit earlier today, and to Salford about which I heard recently from Charlotte Ramsden on the excellent outcomes that her team are delivering.

Now As you might be able to tell, it's been a busy few weeks. Since the election I've done a lot of travelling – from Oldham right down to Merton – but I've done even more listening and learning. I've spoken to DCSs and social workers, to care leavers and to experts in Special Educational Needs. I've shadowed an Ofsted inspection – that was quite a shock for them in Merton to not only have Ofsted but a Minister – and I've been up to North Yorkshire to visit one of our Partners in Practice and see the excellent work being done across this area. I've met and talked to leaders across the sector including Alan Wood and Eileen Munro, Christine Lenehan from the Council for Disabled Children, and your President, Alison Michalska.

In our opportunity areas and beyond, I've learned from these conversations about the work you've been doing to double the free entitlements available to working parents from

September 2017, and for this I want to thank you. In our 12 early delivery areas, we are already seeing the positive benefits of 30 hours on working families, reducing the cost of childcare and allowing parents to spend more time with their children. I know this is a busy time for you and that you are working closely with our delivery contractor Childcare Works to ensure that national rollout is a success.

Until this month, what I knew about children's social care I learned from my constituents. What I had established from them has only been confirmed by these visits and conversations, and that is that social work is one of the most important and challenging jobs in the country.

In just a short amount of time I have seen and heard how relentless and all-consuming this work can be, and I am under no misapprehension about the level of skill and care that it demands. Just last week the *Guardian* ran an article on the jobs most at risk of automation in the future. Incidentally I've never read the *Guardian* more in my life, and it remains to be seen what long-term effect this has on my political views. They noted cashiers, taxi drivers, and dental technicians as being amongst the highest risk of being replaced one day in our robot-filled future. Indeed, in my industry, farming, we already have robotic milking machines and GPS-steered tractors. The one job this report saw as being safest? Social worker. No one in this room can be in any doubt of the reasons for this; it's hard to imagine a profession that requires such a high level of commitment, of responsiveness, of conscientiousness. I think it comes as no surprise to any of us here that this profession should be safe from the robot invasion.

Worryingly, I didn't get so far as to see where in the list 'politician' came in terms of job security, nor 'farmer', which is – as some of you may know – where my story began before I entered the House of Commons. I switched the fields of Ryedale for Westminster in 2005 - at least during the week - since which point I've been lucky enough to have a real array of Ministerial

responsibilities. Experience in the Whips Office, the Department for Transport, and the Home Office has now brought me to the Department for Education, and to this crucial area of work.

What is fair to say is that, while I know a lot about farming, and a fair amount about politics, my knowledge of Children's Services – in key areas like Social Care, and Special Educational Needs and Disability – is still in its infancy. What I do know, and what I am keen to convey to all of you today, is that I am fully committed to working hard to understand both the strengths, and the needs of your sector. I will do that with you, by listening to the great work that is already being done across the country, and the even greater work that will be done – that could be done – in the future. This will be an interesting journey for me, a journey that has already started, but it is one which I am thrilled to undertake.

As I commence my journey I am well aware that the journey of the reform agenda presented in *Putting Children First* is already well underway. I've spent the last few weeks getting to know this document, and I have to say – it makes sense. It is coherent, tackles different aspects of the issues we all face and has a real opportunity to make a transformational impact for children. That is why I am committed to this agenda, and to continuing the work of my predecessor Edward Timpson. I intend to build on the legislative foundation that he worked to establish which culminated earlier this year in the passing of the Children and Social Care Act. As such, I can promise you a few key things:

- We will continue to move forwards with our existing reform agenda. We have good plans in place, and I see my job as overseeing their completion in partnership with you, providing a clear direction of travel, and breaking down barriers as they arise.
- We will continue to look for meaningful collaboration with the sector. The Department is committed to deepening our partnership with ADCS and others

on Children's Social Care. It is of critical importance to me that we can work in dialogue with you, the experts, to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable.

- We will be moving forwards on the principle of continual improvement, *across the sector*. Just as I am on my own journey of learning, so too every excellent, tireless social worker and leader is constantly striving to learn and develop in order to do even better for the children in their care. You can only do this successfully if the systems and structures around and above you in local authorities are also responding, learning and developing. Therefore, I will work hard to understand how we at the Department for Education can support every professional and every authority to commit to their own strategic improvement journey.

Now, as I hope I have already made clear, there is no doubt in my mind that excellent children's social care is dependent on excellent social care workers. It's not just robots that couldn't do this job; I would say that the majority of *people* in this country couldn't do it either. I don't think I could certainly. It is a precious and extraordinary minority who can, and I truly believe that we need to be better at recognising the importance of their role and the exceptional level of knowledge and expertise that they require to do it well.

As such, I intend to be a champion for our social care profession. I promise to identify and celebrate where practice is excellent, finding ways to recognise the nation's most accomplished practitioners. I also promise to both support and challenge employers to provide the training and ongoing development that their staff need in order to do their job well. This is particularly crucial as across the country Children's Services face a range of new challenges that require specialist understanding and skill to deal with effectively. In their fight against child exploitation, modern slavery, radicalisation, and in their work with unaccompanied asylum-

seeking children, social work professionals must feel properly equipped to cater for the individual needs of the desperately vulnerable children affected by these challenges.

The next stage of workforce development begins with our plans to move forward on the National Assessment and Accreditation System. Earlier this year we consulted with you, the sector, on how this should be implemented, and we were pleased by the number of responses we received - the vast majority of these from social workers themselves. As promised, we have listened to you. We have heard you say that – for this work – we need to prioritise, not the number of individual social workers who are assessed, but the quality of the support that we give to Local authorities to help them prepare social workers to demonstrate their specialised child and family expertise through the assessment.

As such, I am excited to announce that, from mid-2018, the first phase of implementation will be rolled out with six Local Authorities in Leeds and the surrounding areas. Live evaluation will take place alongside the roll-out, identifying the level and nature of support required for each authority, and exploring the impact of the assessment on the workforce. A subsequent phase will follow swiftly, allowing us first to confirm that we have solved any issues that may have sprung up, and then to confirm new materials and support which have been developed in the first phase. We call it the alpha and beta phase. This system will be rolled out with practitioners and practice supervisors in the first instance.

As I have said, and I'm sure you agree, assessment and accreditation don't sit alone. Rather, this is only part of our plans to help drive up the quality of social work practice at all levels, through targeted support and development for social workers. Our support covers those new to the profession in their first role on the frontline, those in their first practice supervisor role, and developing the new generation of practice leaders. The next generation to sit in this room. The first cohort of the practice leader development programme is underway, and I would like

to thank those, maybe some in this room, who have given their time to support course participants. Hopefully, too, I'll see these participants at this event in future years.

Underpinning all of this, and – in my opinion – crucial to driving up the quality of social work, is the creation of the new regulator. I am committed to working with the profession and my colleagues from the Department of Health to see the establishment of Social Work England, which will ensure a relentless focus on social work practice – from initial education and training, to continued professional development. At every level we will be working to ensure that all practising social workers in England are properly trained, have the right knowledge and skills, and are fully confident in improving the outcomes for the children and adults with whom they work.

Beyond the individual social worker, it is my intention to see the development of a system where all local authorities are actively engaged in ongoing improvement, a system where all local authorities have available the support they need to get to good, and to go from good to great.

I know that in some areas this is happening already. In just a few short weeks I have, on repeat occasions, been impressed by the tales of steady but substantial improvement in local authorities across the country. I was delighted that among the first letters I sent as Minister of State for Children and Families were letters to the leaders of Knowsley and Coventry councils to confirm that they were no longer in intervention for their children's social care services. Both councils have – through the hard work and dedication of their staff and leadership, and with the support of Departmental advisors – successfully improved their Ofsted rating to 'requires improvement' and taken their first crucial step on the road to excellence. Elsewhere, Kent County Council has continued its swift improvement journey, building from its Ofsted rating of inadequate in 2010, to adequate in 2013, and has now just been rated as good. Well done.

Meanwhile, we are also beginning to understand how a Trust model, used in the most severe cases of local authority failure, can serve as a significant part of an local authority's improvement journey. Today the Department is pleased to publish an evaluation of the Doncaster Children's Service Trust, highlighting the Trust's impact on service improvement and outcomes for children. The Trust was set-up in September 2014 and – through the hard work of Colin, Paul and the team, with support and insight from the Council – has implemented a range of changes to systems and processes, in response to the systemic and persistent failure of children's services in the borough. The evaluation finds early but positive indications of improvements in: leadership; corporate communications; partnership working; and performance monitoring. Improvements, the evaluation indicates, the old structures and leadership would not have been able to make when services were first transferred to the Trust. I look forward to visiting Doncaster in the coming months and hearing from social workers how these changes have impacted the children and families with whom they work.

In looking even at just these few examples of local authority development, it appears to me overwhelmingly clear that improvement is place-specific. There is unfortunately – no 'one-size fits all' approach; no shortcut on the road to great. However, that does not mean that the Department's work starts and ends on the borders of intervention.

We will always strive for excellence in children's social care. We will be on top of falling standards, acting decisively in cases where children are put at risk, and looking at the range of options available to us to support rapid improvement. However, beyond this, I believe that we should be doing more earlier to support struggling authorities before they fail. That is why I'm working closely with officials in the DfE, and in conversation with our partners in the sector, to understand how we can build a system where improvement is continuous – where local authorities are able and willing to self-refer for improvement support, and where we can avert failure before it happens.

Our plans for this are in the initial stages, and – once again – we will be looking to you to understand what you need, and what will work. It's fantastic that improvement is one of the Conference's big themes, and that there are already such rich conversations going on about how we can work together. Already we know that there are two main elements to this strategy in which we are most interested:

- Firstly, how we can provide targeted and individualised packages of support to struggling local authorities to help them establish a base-level of good service provision.
- And secondly, how to build capacity within the system to enable secure local authorities with strengths in particular areas to support others to improve and develop. And I know that's happening already with great success.

It is my priority to ensure that the department's system-level approach to improvement is responsive, flexible, and – perhaps most crucially – bespoke.

The final key piece of this improvement puzzle is our continued commitment to support innovation, and to facilitate the sharing of learning between authorities. I am pleased to see the continued behind-the-scenes work that is going on to establish our own What Works Centre, a ground-breaking hub which will help to foster a culture of exemplary evidence-based practice across the sector. The Department is currently procuring for an incubator and research partner to set this up and we will release details as soon as this process is complete.

Meanwhile, we commit to supporting exciting work that improves outcomes for children and families. This includes building on the hard work of the adoption sector to establish more Regional Adoption Agencies, which bring together adoption services including matching, adopter recruitment and adoption support. "Adoption Counts", including Manchester, launched earlier this week. It joins "Aspire Adoption" and "One Adoption West" as our first Regional Adoption Agencies.



As well as this we continue to fund pioneering projects that look to shake-up our traditional approach to social work. Such as that of Barnados who – we are pleased to announce today – we are funding to work with the Local Government Association and local authorities to tackle Female Genital Mutilation and improve the handling of harmful traditional practices. Incidentally, my late father in law was brought up by Dr Barnados home in a home in the north east. Also at this time, we announce our support of Credo Care who will help bring young disabled people in out-of-area residential care back to their locality through specialist foster placements, and also of the continued work of Munro, Turnell and Murphy with 10 Local Authorities to deliver a strengths-based, safety-organised approach to child protection casework by completing their Signs of Safety implementation.

These are just 3 of a total 24 new projects which I am delighted to announce today are to receive between them a total of 30 million pounds of funding from the Innovation Programme. Together they proffer a broad and balanced portfolio which both test new innovations, and scale and spread those that have been successful in Round One of the programme.

All of the projects which receive funding through this Programme are fully committed to sharing their learning with the sector, and I am also pleased to be able to announce today the publication of some of the remaining Innovation Programme Round 1 evaluation reports. In these you can find:

- an evaluation of Leeds's restorative practice approach and expansion of Family Group Conferencing, with positive early signs of a reduction in the numbers of both Children Looked After and Child Protection Plans;
  - an assessment of Hertfordshire's multi-agency partnership working, its positive impact on both service quality and the length of time children spend in care;
- and

- an evaluation of the implementation and early impacts of Signs of Safety on social work, practice and families.

These reports represent an important contribution to an up-to-date, high-quality evidence base about what works in social work. They are from the sector, for the sector. I invite and encourage you to take a look, to talk to your colleagues in this room, and to work together to explore the exciting and innovative steps that you all are taking, or might wish to take, on your individual journeys of improvement.

I also invite you to discuss with your peers today the development of your local authority's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision, which is such an important area of all of our work. The changes that we introduced in 2014 – the biggest reforms to the system in a generation – reinvigorated the sector and opened up opportunities for local authorities to take a more joined-up approach to delivering support across education, health and social care. Much has been achieved in this and I am grateful for the way that so many authorities have embraced the reforms, and for all the hard work that you and your partners have put into making them a success.

There are two critical areas of activity on which we must all stay focussed. The first is the key local authority responsibility for maintaining strategic leadership in special educational leads. You must continue to build detailed local knowledge and strong relationships with school and parents in order to ensure that children and young people with SEN have a school or college place that meets their requirements. The second is the crucial transfer of all statements of special educational needs into Education, Health and Care Plans by 31st March 2018. The vast majority of local authorities are on track to achieve this, and this is excellent news. The Government is on hand to provide support to areas which are finding the deadline challenging.

It's critical that we do all that we can to ensure this deadline is met, but – as I hope you've noticed is becoming a trend in this speech – this will not be the end point for the reforms. It is

vitaly important that all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, get a good start in life and have an educational experience that allows them to reach their full potential, and lead a productive and fulfilling adult life. To make a reality of that vision, local areas will need to continue to work together with partners, parents and young people to ensure the full effect of the reforms bite in the long term. I urge you to continue to lead this change programme in your local area, and to challenge and support others to play their part.

So in conclusion, across all of this vital work, I look to you – as experienced leaders in this field – to show the way.

- It is to you, their leaders, that the sector will look to pioneer the exciting opportunities for assessment and accreditation.
- It is from you, their leaders, that they will hear how innovation can improve outcomes for children and families, and challenge established ways of working.
- It is towards you, their leaders, that they will turn to understand how an authority – and an individual – can forge a continuous journey of ongoing improvement.

And therefore I ask you to work with me to make our programme of reforms work; to invest in change, and in the better outcomes for children that it will unlock. In return, I will listen to you, I will learn from you, and I will be a champion for the work that you and your teams do on a daily basis.

For I know that this is a sector that is working – tirelessly – for all our children.