



**NATIONAL
CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES
CONFERENCE 2018**

MANCHESTER 14-16 NOVEMBER

"Check Against Delivery"

Introduction

Thank you Stuart, and I'd like to extend my own welcome to all of you, to this year's NCAS conference. As Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board it is a real pleasure to be here to share our reflections on the past year, our learning and the great work of councils in supporting our vulnerable residents. It is also important that we have this opportunity to look to the future and set out our vision for ensuring that councils can continue to support our children and young people.

Review of the year

Last year we launched our Bright Futures campaign to drive improvement in services for children and families.

We said at the time that we would not see that report left gathering dust on a shelf, and I'm proud of the way councils, the LGA and ADCS have worked together to take it forward. In the last year

- Councillors in all regions have been taking part in improvement work to make sure local services are the best they can be
- We've built a coalition of organisations to speak with one voice on the issues facing children and young people
- We've put the issue of under-funding in the national news more than 100 times
- We held an exhibition in Parliament, which was opened by the Children's Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, to raise awareness amongst peers and MPs
- And we've worked with councils to share best practice and guidance to support each other to do the best they can with the resources they have.

It is fair to say that a lot of this progress is down to local rather than national government. Councils have repeatedly shown that they are determined to make this country better for our children and young people. We've remodelled services, engaged residents, and supported each other to get better.

DfE has started to recognise this, and accepted our call for more investment in sector-led improvement, including £2 million for the LGA's peer review and leadership programmes. That's on top of funding for an early years peer review programme, to help councils improve their offer to our very youngest residents.

Over the next three days, you'll have the chance to hear about outstanding examples of councils taking innovative steps to improve the life chances of vulnerable children and families despite the huge financial challenges we're facing.

As demand for services has increased, however, the evidence from all sides for more children's social care funding is compelling. The number of children on a child protection plan has increased by 84 per cent in the last 10 years and we have record numbers of children in care. 123,000 children spent their summer holidays homeless this year. It feels like every week a new report emerges showing the financial pressures facing those services our children, young people and families need.

The recent improvements in Ofsted inspection results show that councils are still finding ways to step up to the challenge. Every day they go over and above to keep thousands of children safe all across the country. That isn't said enough, and we need to start shouting louder about just how good our teams are.

Bright Futures: children's funding

However, we can't get away from the fact that we're at a genuine tipping point, with councils spending £816 million more than they budgeted on children's social care last year.

Last month, after years without so much as a mention of children's services in successive Budgets, we finally saw some acknowledgement that the message is starting to get through. £84 million over five years may not be the long-term funding solution we so desperately need, but hearing the Chancellor announce new money specifically for children's social care does feel like a small step in the right direction. Similarly, £410 million for adult or children's social care next year falls well short of the amount that either service needs, but is a further sign that Ministers have heard our warnings.

But let me be clear: this will not tackle the immediate funding crisis facing children's services. And next year's Spending Review must deliver a long-term, sustainable funding solution that means we can keep our most vulnerable children safe from harm.

As Stuart highlighted, we regularly hear that government will not increase funding until we can explain or get rid of variation in spend between councils. How can one council spend £300 per child, while another can spend £800 and get more or less the same outcomes?

It's a fair question, so we commissioned an independent organisation to find out.

They found that more than half of that variation is down to factors that are largely outside of councils' control, in particular, deprivation, crime and the size of the population.

That report concluded that variation is inevitable; there can be no one-size-fits-all cost for services. Achieving the best outcomes for children in massively differing local contexts is incredibly complex. For government to expect or believe that we can put a neat, standard price on that work is, at best, naïve.

I would also highlight that there's inevitable variation in every public service. The NHS was recently awarded an extra £20 billion a year, which is hugely welcome, but this came despite big variations across the country. I'm delighted such a valuable service is receiving desperately needed funding – but like my ADCS colleagues, I would also like to know why spend in children's social care is held to such a higher standard of evidence, especially when the ones who suffer are our most vulnerable children.

Special Educational Needs

Children's social care isn't the only area under pressure. Councils have done a fantastic job of implementing the government's reforms to special educational needs and disabilities provision. But while the number of children needing support is rocketing, funding hasn't followed demand.

With the right help, children with SEND can flourish, but at the moment, too many children are going without, and that is simply not good enough. We've commissioned research to help make the argument for more funding, but in the short-term, the local government finance settlement must provide new funding.

Children's mental health

Up and down the country, we repeatedly hear from councillors that children's mental health services aren't delivering what they need to. A lot of money has been ear-marked for these services by the Government, but we've yet to see the results. We've been pushing for answers on where that money has gone,

and will continue to fight for the services so many of our young people are struggling without.

Conclusion

There are no easy solutions when it comes to solving the challenges facing our children and young people. We need to work together and with Government to continue making the case for what we do and the need for proper funding.

Our offer to government is simple: with new investment into councils, and by supporting the new ways of working we have put forward in Bright Futures, we can improve the lives of our children and young people.

In return, we are calling on the Government to ensure that every department across Whitehall speaks with one voice and works with local government to deliver the best outcomes in our communities. A clear ambition for children, young people and families, shared and owned across Whitehall, is crucial to ensuring that government is truly putting children first.

And of course we need Government to act urgently to close the funding gap facing children's services, and to reverse the cuts to early intervention funding.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with all of you to improve children's lives. Together we have achieved so much, and together we can make the compelling case for new investment into our children who are, after all, the future of our nation.