



EVERY CHILD MATTERS

SOLACE RESPONSE

Will the government's proposals save a child's life, improve a child's educational prospects or change a child's social circumstances for the better? This is the acid test against which we have evaluated the government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*.

The overarching aims of the Green Paper have commanded a broad consensus across stakeholder groups committed to a better future for children and young people. Furthermore, the government's proposals have been a catalyst, creating a huge amount of energy for change in the future of children's services. This has been extremely valuable and the government should be commended for its initiative and commitment. However, we have serious reservations with some of the ways in which the government is proposing to achieve those aims and we believe that if implemented without amendment that the government will be in danger of undermining its own aims.

We therefore make our own proposals which we believe would be more likely to achieve the outcomes we all agree are necessary.

Introduction

SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) is the representative body for senior strategic managers working in the public sector. Through its policy and professional development activities, the Society promotes excellence in public service. Its commercial arm, SOLACE Enterprises, provides high quality, customer-focused and practical support to local government and the public and voluntary sectors, both in the UK and internationally. The SOLACE Foundation carries out educational and other work which falls within the charitable aspects of the Society's objectives.



Over the last year SOLACE has been demonstrating leadership by working in close partnership with the leaders of the professions, and leaders of children and young people's charities and representative organisations to make sense of the extremely difficult and complex changes that collectively we need to make. In particular, we published with ADSS a ***Statement on the Accountabilities of Chief Executives and Directors of Social Services in England*** which is a benchmark against which new arrangements must be measured. We have also been a committed member of the Inter Agency Group (IAG) working to produce consensus between the voluntary, community and statutory sectors on the way forward.

As the representative body of Chief Executives and senior strategic managers in UK local government, SOLACE is committed to providing leadership in the area of children's services. It is a fundamental responsibility of local government to improve the quality of life of local people of all ages. The quality of life that children experience is not only a matter of "services to children". It is much more holistic than that. It is the sum total of a community's dynamism, a locality's human relations, it's social capital.

Outcomes for children, therefore, are created by many different forces. This tells us two essential things in relation to the Green Paper. Firstly, that improving the lives of children depends on every single part of public service. It is not just a matter for authorities with education and social service responsibilities. The agenda for the Green Paper depends on all local authorities and all parts of the public sector working together towards the same goals.

Secondly, the preceding analysis also tells us that the lives children will lead also depend on dynamics for which it is more difficult to regulate and legislate. This includes the behaviour of adults in the family. In 99.5% of cases children are nurtured by their parent or parents and the role of public services is to empower parents not to take away their responsibilities. In the wider community it also involves the way in which the private sector (e.g. shopping centres, cinemas etc) manage their spaces and plan for children and young people's welfare.

The way forward, therefore, must be to find a way of aligning the objectives, values and behaviour of many different actors.

We welcome the publication of the Green Paper which seeks to address the complex and difficult issues faced by children in modern



society. We are disappointed, however, that in reality the government's proposals only partially address the wider context and are too narrowly focused on local government alone. These proposals are incomplete in scope and therefore will be insufficient in impact.

Directors of Children's Services

The most contentious of the government's proposals is the requirement to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS).

The government proposes "as a first step" the requirement of all local authorities with social services and education responsibilities to appoint a DCS accountable for overseeing services to children. It proposes the elimination of the posts of Chief Education Officer (CEO) and Director of Social Services (DSS) and envisages the likely creation of children's departments. The key, it says, "is that there should be one person in charge of children's services and clarity at all times as to who that person is."

There are several weaknesses in this proposal:

1. On the government's own admission, the DCS position imagined in the Green Paper is insufficient to deliver the expectations that the Green Paper creates. The DCS is envisaged as leading education and children's social work services, but not the range of acute mental health and primary health services, not local GPs and not police services. In addition, the DCS will not directly manage schools, or youth justice, and may not manage directly Connexions or early years services. In other words the DCS is not a sufficient condition for the kind of joined up service that we and the government want to create. We agree entirely that the boundary between education and social services needs to be tackled, but all the evidence suggests that appointing a director alone will not achieve the crucial changes in values, culture and behaviour that are required. We do not dispute the value of leadership in achieving this change, but neither do we think that the proposal for the DCS as currently planned will always be the best way to provide leadership in this context.
2. The government says it is only a first step, but does not set out the second and third steps. Chief Executives are concerned by this on a number of counts. Firstly, that it creates unrealistic expectations and secondly that the DCS potentially has limited scope but unlimited accountability for children. Together this will create recruitment and retention difficulties with 150 local



- authorities competing for the services of a very few individuals who will be willing and able to take on a job which is built on such a contradiction. Organisations can either make or buy future leaders and the scope and resources for “making” the first generation of DCSs are not accommodated for within the Green Paper.
3. The model of leadership in the Green Paper is also unhelpful. The best local authorities have moved towards a model of community leadership where steering is just as important as rowing. The government’s proposals on the DCS seem to suggest that leaders have to manage directly, have to command and control, in order to be accountable. We dispute this model of leadership and think it is bound to fail in complex inter-organisational settings. As we have argued, the quality of life of children depends on the whole of the community. No one can command and control all of the dynamics involved and to try would be counter-productive. Leadership has to exist across and within organisations. To reduce leadership to one person is a wholly unwelcome change of direction from the government. The model of Corporate Governance advocated by the Audit Commission recently is far more useful and reflects our own work on accountability. Corporate Governance models reflect the reality of joined up and partnership working. It does not pretend that one person commands all aspects of all services to children.
 4. The proposals assume one size fits all. It is vital the government understands the importance of local circumstances and their impact on how local service users want their services delivered. It is important we acknowledge that designing an organisation to deliver is not the same as designing policy. The proposals ignore the vast variation in size of authority – both geographical spread and in terms of population – or how characteristics such as size, geography or socio-economic context affect what would be the best management and delivery of services. We also believe that performance and the level of risk should determine the pace and scale of change. To suggest that an area where services are currently performing well and organisations are working effectively together should disrupt those arrangements will clearly unnecessarily heighten risks to children and is not a credible proposition.

Towards a resolution

The Green Paper is explicit that it wants to focus on outcomes rather than “intervening at points of crisis or failure.” As explained



in our earlier remarks, any other approach is bound to fail. We need to improve life outcomes, not inputs, processes and structures. We regret the government's failure to pursue this logic throughout the Green Paper. As a result the government falls into the trap of proposing structural change initiatives as pre-requisites for success. By focusing on structures instead of outcomes the government is in danger of undermining its own efforts to address the big picture.

We would therefore like to make some proposals. The key to achieving inter-organisational change is to provide incentives. At the moment the most forceful organisational incentives – statutory duties, funding streams, performance targets – incentivise organisations in different directions. While this remains the case, the realities of management will mean that organisations will be driven to prioritise and to behave in different ways. This is clearly incompatible with the major change the Green Paper sets out and which we all agree is required. Our first proposal, therefore, relates to how real and strong incentives are provided for different organisations. The first is to apply an equivalent duty on NHS acute and mental health trusts, PCTs, GPs, Schools, Police, YOTs, LSC, Early Years, Connexions to jointly analyse need, plan, resource and deliver services to children young people and families. As the Inter Agency Group (IAG) has suggested, the vehicle for this joined up commissioning is through a statutory Children's and Young People Partnership (CYPP).

The second proposal is to strengthen significantly the outcome focus of the second round of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSA2). In this round the Local Government Association (LGA) is rightly arguing that LPSA2 should focus more on shared strategic priorities, that they should be more joined up across government and that they should embrace the major players in a locality to ensure joint objectives. Following the direction of the LPSA2, it is the role of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to set the strategic overview of its area. In turn, the LSP will provide leadership for the significantly strengthened, statutory Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership outlined above. This is a logical and coherent structure which incentivises joint working (from needs analysis through policy planning to resourcing and delivery) on all rungs of the strategic planning ladder. It ensures high national standards, which can be built into the LPSA2, but it also gives local flexibility on how these standards are achieved in partnership with local partners.



Our third proposal is that management arrangements should be modernised and that there should be enabling legislation withdrawing the requirement to appoint a CEO and a DSS, and that Chief Executives should have a stronger and more formal role in the appointment of the DCS than they would have under current arrangements.

Fourthly, we support the Inter Agency Group's proposal that the person designated DCS would be responsible for certain strategic functions.

- To ensure the strategic partnership is convened and that it produces a plan according to whatever timescales are set.
- To ensure that partners deliver against their commitments in the plan.
- To ensure that the safeguarding board is established and operates effectively and independently, whilst reporting to the strategic body. While the DCS may often chair the safeguarding board we do not think this should be a requirement, since it would be unhelpful to rule out other effective arrangements. For example, some Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) with independent chairs are currently working well.
- To ensure that the whole children's services system in the area carries out its role in relation to safeguarding effectively.
- To put in place arrangements for integrated commissioning.
- To ensure that information sharing and referral protocols are put in place.
- To be the post, with the Chief Executive, to which the integrated inspection regime reports its findings and who is responsible for the preparation of follow-up action plans.

This does not preclude that person holding a line management responsibility for some services but neither does it require it – although in reality it is difficult to see how someone without a service and budget responsibility would be able to fulfil this role.

Implementation, risk and performance

A key flaw in the government's proposals for structural reform is that they are based on assertion rather than fact. Around the country many Chief Executives are leading change, assessing the organisational design challenges that these structural proposals will create. The government should make use of these frontrunners. It is in the interests of government, local authorities and most



importantly of children and young people that an evidence base is created to evaluate what works - this also matters.

However, in addition to evaluating the frontrunners, change has to be focused on areas where it is most required. As we have said we do not see it as credible that an area where services are currently performing well and organisations are working effectively together should be required to disrupt those arrangements unnecessarily. Instead we believe that the relevant organisations in an area should work towards a joint risk profile which is shared between local authorities, their partners and regulators. This would allow a more strategic approach, proportionate with performance and risk. Another advantage of this approach would be to maintain momentum. Rather than set a timescale of some years, which would risk losing the energy that currently exists, creating a shared understanding of performance and risk would be help retain momentum towards change.

Other matters:

Service Leadership and the Leadership Academy

In paragraphs 6.37, the Green Paper says that the Children's Workforce Unit will develop a programme to foster leadership in children's services. While we welcome any commitment to resource leadership development, we believe strongly that leadership initiatives need to become more integrated and that establishing another separate programme is not in anyone's best interests. As the DfES may know, SOLACE is working with the Prime Minister's Office for Public Service Reform (OPSR) to create a Leadership Academy for the public service which will join up initiatives across the sector. We would suggest that DfES links closely with SOLACE and OPSR to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

Lead Member

We strongly support the proposal to have a lead elected member for children. This role will be a local children's champion and an essential counterpoint to the lead executive DCS and will provide accountability through the ballot box.

Children's Trusts

We strongly support the closer integration of the planning, resourcing and delivery of services to children but are unclear that Children's Trusts will always be the best solution in each locality. The shape of Children's Trusts depends on the outcome of the



evaluation of pathfinders and the nature of the DCS post prescribed in legislation. We will continue the dialogue with our partners and with government on this issue.

Conclusion

The Green Paper has served a useful purpose in stimulating so much thought and energy on how best to improve services to children, young people and families. There is however a serious risk that having significantly raised expectations, the government will pursue these measures which will leave many needs and expectations unmet. There are many, SOLACE among them, who are committed to achieving the outcomes outlined in the Green Paper. Because every child does matter, we hope the government does not ignore the views of those who want it to succeed. This means agreeing to work with us constructively to produce solutions that are rooted in evidence, prioritised on the basis of actual risk and tailored to differing local needs to give effective outcomes for children and young people around the country.

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