

## **Local Government Association – supplementary written evidence (CSC0009)**

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence on behalf of the Local Government Association to the Committee's inquiry into the Children's Social Care Implementation Plan. During the session, I committed to write to the Committee with further information on several issues, which I have outlined below. Our full response to the Children's Social Care Implementation Plan [can also be read on our website](#). A range of LGA reports analysing individual areas' children's social care services can also be found on LG Inform

### **Family Hubs**

There are three particular areas of concern with regard to ensuring that programmes work well together and ensure appropriate support for families.

The first is regarding workforce. Many councils face significant challenges in recruiting to all areas of children's services, including early help. This is becoming more challenging as private sector pay rates increase and local government salaries become less competitive. Our members describe difficulties with losing staff to supermarkets or warehouses where work is better paid and less stressful. This challenge is exacerbated where time-limited, short-term funding is provided for specific projects and therefore jobs are being recruited to on a fixed-term basis, which can be seen as less attractive than a permanent role. There is also a wide range of reforms currently taking place across children's social care, Special Educational Needs and Disability services and early education and childcare, all of which will be drawing staff from the same 'pool'. Ensuring all schemes are aligned will be vital to make best possible use of staff skills and availability.

The second is around reporting requirements. Where a range of programmes are being implemented with different reporting requirements (often aligned to funding), it can make it difficult to ensure that different programmes work effectively alongside each other, as they may be being pulled in slightly different directions, rather than there being flexibility to ensure that services respond to where local need is greatest.

Finally, the funding of different reforms is important. Funding is often time-limited, making it difficult to establish and maintain services particularly with regard to workforce. Where multiple reforms are taking place, funding may run across different time periods, making it more difficult to align provision. Funding for reforms is also linked to specific

areas of work, and as with issues around reporting requirements, this can result in a lack of flexibility to join up provision, avoid duplication and meet local need.

### **Assessing the cumulative impact of interventions**

As I outlined in the session, opposed to assessing the impact of specific interventions – such as the Family Hubs programme – in isolation, there is a need for Government to consider the cumulative impact of different policies and interventions on children’s outcomes.

Councils collect a lot of data about their services to evaluate how effective they are and will work with government to consider the best metrics to evaluate the impact of new interventions. However, we strongly believe that any new programme or pilot should also include independent evaluation, recognising the limited capacity of council teams for this work and the importance of ensuring robust, independent assessments.

Where multiple pilots are running at once and aim to address similar issues (for example, family hubs and Families First for Children pathfinders) it is difficult to unpick which programme has led to which outcome. On the other hand, it would be unwise to trial all pilots separately and then try to merge them together afterwards, without testing how they can work together more effectively. For this reason, it is helpful that the Department for Education (DfE) intends to run pilots of Family Network Support Packages alone in 7 areas as well as part of the Families First for Children pathfinders, to understand the interactions between the two and to assess the effectiveness of each.

We encourage the Government to consider which pilots and pathfinders are running in different areas and work with independent evaluators to consider how best to understand the cumulative impact of different programmes. It would also be helpful to look at what flexibility can be provided within pathfinders to enable councils to ensure programmes work effectively together wherever possible.

### **Identifying/ sharing best practice**

The LGA plays an important role in sharing best practice with councils, using a variety of mechanisms through our Children’s Sector-Led Improvement programme, including:

- Work by our regional Children’s Improvement Advisers who share good practice within and between regions
- Working closely with Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances to share practice within regions with both officers and politicians;

- Supporting regional Lead Member networks to enable councillors to share expertise;
- Peer mentoring – linking experienced officers and councillors (particularly lead councillors) with those who are less experienced or working through particularly difficult issues;
- Peer challenges – taking teams of peers from different councils to spend time in an area to assess, diagnose and share practice, which supports both the 'host' area and the reviewers themselves;
- Learning development events and resources – often using existing best practice and innovative/effective approaches in councils to illustrate and support learning;
- Collecting and disseminating [case studies](#).

A key aim of our sector-led improvement offer is ensuring local authorities can benefit from the experience and expertise of other local authorities that are facing similar challenges or priorities.

[An independent evaluation of our children's sector-led improvement programme](#) in 2020 found that "the support programme has had a significantly positive impact on improvements in council children's services".

In addition to the approaches outlined above, we work with the DfE to influence activity by [Sector Led Improvement Partners](#) (SLIPs) and with organisations such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Staff College.

### **Measuring outcomes**

As part of the development of [Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances](#), each region was asked to share the data sets they were using for benchmarking. From these, the Children's Services National Performance and Information Management Group (CS-NPIMG) and ADCS identified the 18 most common datasets that were being used, which formed the 'base-set' which is now used to measure performance across the county.

The regions first piloted collecting these [18 measures in 2018/19](#) to support the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances and sector led improvement. Each region has a data-sharing agreement with DfE and shares the measures with DfE on a quarterly basis. Subsequently, the CS-NPIMG has expanded the list of measures, to include the following:

- Initial contacts
- Referrals total, and referrals by source

- Repeat referrals
- Assessments started in the period
- Assessments completed in the period
- Assessments completed in 45 days of the period
- Current children in need
- S47 enquiries
- Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) completed within 15 days of S47
- New Child Protection Plans (CPP)
- Current CPP
- CPP ceasing
- Repeat CPP (ever)
- Repeat CPP (2 years)
- Current Children Looked After (CLA)
- New CLA
- CLA ceasing
- Current CLA Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Care leavers
- UASC care leavers
- Electively Home Educated (EHE) children
- Requests for Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments
- EHCP assessments
- EHCPs issued
- Social worker FTE establishment at quarter end
- vacancies at quarter end
- leavers in quarter
- agency rate

The LGA's sector led improvement programme also conducts extensive audits of individual children's cases, which give a good indication of the practice that is in place and outcomes. Ofsted reports are another source of information.

### **Levelling up and structural change**

We believe that levelling up is equally important for children as for adults, and have argued that plans for levelling up should take account of the need for investment in children's services as well as in other public services, and should pay attention to the stark inequalities in children's health and life chances between different areas.

In terms of structural change, the LGA commissioned research to look at the issues which need to be considered in relation to [how to ensure](#)

[children's social care](#) is able to continue to deliver effectively for families amidst structural reform.

I hope the information outlined above is useful. If we can assist the Committee's work with anything else on these issues, please do not hesitate to get in touch with my colleagues.

*11 May 2023*