

Date: 18/03/2020
From: NR

**MEETING WITH ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ADCS)
PRESIDENT RACHEL DICKINSON AND VICE PRESIDENT JENNY COLES**

Attendees: Rachel Dickinson, Jenny Coles, Graham Archer, NR

Purpose of meeting: Introductory meeting with key stakeholder ADCS

Annotated agenda

- **Corona Virus – Lines to take**
- This is clearly an unprecedented situation and the Department's highest priority. The government's action plan sets out current and possible future measures to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak that are proportionate and based on the latest scientific evidence. They will be continually kept under review and the impact of all measures will be carefully considered.
- We are working closely with colleagues across government to ensure that all appropriate arrangements, and support, are in place for all DfE sectors – from the early years and childcare, schools and children's social care, and for vulnerable groups including children with special educational needs.
- **Where necessary we will be taking powers in primary legislation, and where those are not needed we will look to amend existing secondary legislation or issue guidance.**
- Without making any specific commitments we recognise services may face additional costs.
- **We are aware of concerns about the position of early years providers in the event of any Covid-19-related closures. Funding for the government's early years entitlements will continue during any periods of nursery, preschool or childminder closures, or where children cannot attend due to coronavirus (COVID-19).**
- **Key priorities for children's social care include: making sure that local authorities are given the practical guidance and support needed to manage the arrival and accommodation of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This is a very difficult issue and we recognise the considerable amount of pressure that LAs are under in finding suitable accommodation for UASC in these circumstances. We are looking into ways of supporting LAs to find suitable accommodation for UASC, whether they are symptomatic or not, and will be communicating this as soon as possible.**
- And supporting the residential care and foster care system in light of potential pressures including should significant numbers of the workforce need to be absent from work. **Guidance is being produced for managing isolation in atypical "households" (such as residential schools and children's homes) in light of the further measures announced on Monday by the Prime Minister**
- **Understand that registration and inspection will also be important issues.** We and Ofsted are both aware of the pressure that a social care inspection places on an authority, particularly at a time when they are already under significant wider pressures. As the regulator, Ofsted will have to balance that against the need to ensure that services are safe. We are confident that there is enough flexibility within the inspection framework and regulations for Ofsted to pause inspections if that becomes necessary. Given the current PHE advice, we don't think we're at that point yet, but will keep in close discussion with Ofsted over the coming days as things develop.
- In relation to inspection of schools, given the current PHE advice, we don't currently think there is any need to suspend school inspections, but we are in close discussion with Ofsted as things develop.
- We are grateful for ADCS support – and committed to keeping dialogue going. If ADCS have any concerns or issues we would encourage them to contact officials.

Commented [GM1]: Current as of 9am 17/03 - likely to change ahead of the meeting. Will send through.

Commented [GM2]: We expect to be able to announce this later today that we will not be clawing back early years funding from local authorities.

Commented [GM3]: Likely to be updated ahead of the meeting.

- **Care Review**
- **Minister Donelan met with ADCS on 03/02, we have had ongoing engagement since then. Their main steers have been:**
 - ADCS position that Justice & health need to be embedded in the review.
 - ADCS are keen to understand best way to engage as the review develops.
- **Current position – lines to take:**
- We continue to develop the scope and TOR and will announce this soon. The scope will reflect the bold and broad ambition expressed by the Secretary of State.
- We are engaging with colleagues cross-Government (including at No.10, MOJ & DHSC).
- **We are hoping to announce an independent lead reviewer and launch the review soon.**
- There will be opportunities to engage throughout the review. How engagement is carried out during the review will be down to independent lead reviewer to decide.
- The voices of children and young people with lived experience of care will be at the heart of the review. **We anticipate the review will run for 18 months.**
- **Spending Review – lines to take**
- Work continues between my department, the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government, and the Treasury ahead of the 3 year Spending Review settlement that will conclude in July,
- We will be outlining, in the strongest possible way, the need for further funding to put the system on a stable footing.

Background Briefing

- **Unregulated and Unregistered Provision**
- The vast majority (80%) of children in care are placed in foster care or children's homes that are registered and inspected by Ofsted. A growing number of children (from 3,330 in 2010 to 6,090 in 2019) are placed in independent and semi-independent settings (unregulated) that are not registered and inspected because they deliver accommodation only and not care. This provision can be the right choice for some older children as a stepping stone to leaving care. However, we are concerned about its quality, and are particularly concerned about u16s being placed in these settings, given they either do not deliver care or deliver care illegally (unregistered). We launched a consultation in January with proposed reforms to ban the placements of u16s in this provision and introduce new national mandatory standards.
- ADCS think the proposals set out in the consultation will break the system. We realise there will potentially be an impact. That is why we are consulting. We are though talking about ensuring that the needs of circa 100 children (u16s), out of 78,000 children in care are being met. Some local authorities are already doing this well and coming forward offering to share with us what they are doing. Research we commissioned last year showed that some local authorities have invested in other types of provision to accommodate children needing to be placed quickly under emergency situations, for example, following a placement breakdown or a child first coming into care. This includes 'on duty' foster carers and retaining a budget for providing additional staff to children's homes to maintain placements during difficult times. This is about ensuring all LAs are meeting the needs of these children.
- **Unregulated Provision – Lines to take**
- ADCSs main concern is that the unregulated provision work (see background) should be conducted as part of the Care Review.
- We recognise the link to the care review, but are clear that we need to move at pace in this area given what we already know about the provision. We do not think it is acceptable that u16s are placed in settings that are not registered to deliver care.

- **Regional Improvement**

- Improvement activity is carried out in partnership with Local Authorities and regions.
- We fund a £20m improvement programme, including 14 Partners in Practice (PiPs) covering 18 LAs that are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted in all areas.
- We also fund Regional Improvement Alliances in each region and support them to conduct sector-led improvement, self-evaluate and peer-review performance, identify improvement needs, and coordinate the right support.
- Regions have agreed to share unpublished quarterly data so we can understand performance trends more quickly. We use information from LAs, regions and Ofsted to identify struggling LAs that need help to improve.
- As a result, performance has improved sharply since 2017: the number of 'outstanding' LAs has gone up from 3 to 15, and the number of 'inadequate' fallen from 30 to 20.

- **Workforce**

- Local Authority Children's Services Leadership

- We are procuring a support programme for both aspirant DCSs and those new to the role. We have had strong interest from bidders and aim to launch the programme in spring.
- You could say you are keen to ensure the programme meets the needs of participants and local authorities, and are grateful for ADCSs involvement in evaluating bids in helping ensure this.

- **National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)**

- Overview:

- NAAS provides a bespoke assessment of child and family social workers, designed to test their knowledge and skills against the Knowledge and Skills Statements (the post qualifying standards), and help support them to specialise in their chosen career.

- Latest data:

- By March 2020 68 local authorities will be involved in the delivery of NAAS (nearly a half of all local authorities in England).
- Over 520 child and family practitioners and practice supervisors have booked NAAS assessment days, with more booked in for the coming months.
- Over 1,600 social workers have been now been assessed (our minimum target was to achieve 1,050 by end of March 2020)

Next steps:

- There remains a firm commitment to NAAS both in the DfE and the sector.
- Next steps will be led by the data and independent evaluation.
- Evaluation gathered in Phase 1 and 2. A report on the evaluation will be published in late summer 2020.
- NAAS will remain informed by what the sector wants and needs, as it has been during development and these early stages

NAAS – Lines to take

- **To note:** Barnsley, Rachel Dickinson's authority, has successfully assessed over 50% of social workers – more than any other authority; we hear from her colleagues that NAAS has been received positively in the authority.
- **The ADCS position on NAAS is that they prefer it to be mandatory in future, and fully funded.** This position is based on policies introduced in the past which were felt to put funding

pressure on LAs.

- We are exploring whether NAAS would be a burden if rolled out further with Rachel Wardell, chair of the ADCS workforce committee, to inform future roll out planning.
- We are aware of ADCS concerns of NAAS introducing a two-tier system between accredited and non-accredited social workers – they are concerned that social workers who haven’t had the opportunity to be assessed yet will be thought to be of a lower quality.
- NAAS is currently available in 68 sites and in addition, we have recently introduced the ASYE pathway to NAAS, which is open to all non-NAAS local authorities. This is designed to provide continued support to ASYE completers to achieve accreditation and is supported by DfE funding. Should we move to national rollout every social worker will have an opportunity to be assessed and accredited in time, removing the current situation where some social workers do not have access to it.
- To note that a decision on national rollout of NAAS, including whether it remains voluntary or becomes mandatory, will be made in the summer

Annex A: Biographies

Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS): the membership organisation for leaders of children’s services in local authorities in England.

Works closely with ministers and government officials on designing and delivering integrated services for children and young people.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Rachel Dickinson, 2019/20 President, ADCS</u> • Executive Director of People – Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. • Due to retire in April. Mel John-Ross to become DCS of Barnsley and Jenny Coles President of ADCS • Qualified social worker (experience in adult and children’s services). • Supports learning and development in the sector and advocate of regional co-operation among children’s services departments.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Jenny Coles, 2019/20 Vice President, ADCS</u> • Director of Children’s Services for Hertfordshire County Council • President elect for ADCS (April 2020) • Qualified social worker and senior manager in LA Children’s Services since 1997. • Is the lead Director for sector-led improvement in the Eastern Region.