

## Final Summary of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers meeting about the Children and Social Work Bill

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2017  
6.00pm – 7.00pm  
Macmillan Room, Portcullis House

Chair: Steve McCabe MP, Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Panel: Jasmine Ali, co-chair of the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers  
Alan Clifton, chair, The National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH)  
Karen Hughes, representing the Royal College of Nursing

Present: Tim Loughton MP, Co-Vice-Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers  
Lord McNally, Chairman of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales  
Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England

Apologies: Lord Listowel, Co-Vice-Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers  
Kit Malthouse MP

### The meeting opened with a welcome from the chair.

#### Panel comments:

- **Jasmine Ali** said that the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers welcomes the spotlight that the proposed legislation puts on children in care and young people leaving care, specifically the renewed emphasis on corporate parenting, the extension of a personal adviser for care leavers up to the age of 25 and the publishing of a local offer.
- Jasmine said that the Alliance has, however, proposed a new clause that will require local authorities to help provide sufficient suitable accommodation to *'former relevant children'* for care leavers up to the age of 21. She said the Bill does not contain even one provision on care leaver accommodation. She added that this is not acceptable, considering the evidence that a safe and stable place to live can have a positive impact on mental health, obtaining qualifications and access to employment.
- Jasmine said that a good example in the sector of securing accommodation for care leavers is via the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework. This framework draws together expertise from local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and young people across England on how to provide appropriate accommodation for care leavers.
- Jasmine went on to discuss the peer landlord scheme where houses are occupied by three or four young people, one of whom is assigned the role of 'peer landlord'. The peer landlord has the responsibility of providing support to other tenants as well as overseeing the smooth functioning of the house on a day to day basis. She said that many young care leavers like the set up as they feel like they are living independently but in a familial environment with their housemates so this example can serve as a model for local authorities to commission better accommodation for care leavers.
- Regarding the section of the Bill outlining the local offer to care leavers, Jasmine said the Bill wants local authorities to consult on and publish details of their local offer yet the Lords felt that the introduction of a sufficiency duty might be over prescriptive on local authorities. She

said that the Alliance's amendment does not try to tell local authorities how they should provide suitable accommodation but asks them to meet the needs of its population.

- Jasmine concluded by discussing further amendments and proposals from individual members of the Alliance. For example, university tuition fee and council tax exemption for care leavers, more support given to care leavers to access apprenticeships and more support to make a success of their work experience.
- **Alan Clifton** said that his role as a virtual school head is a statutory role and he is also Chair of The National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH), where 128 local authorities are represented. Alan said that NAVSH endorses the aspects of the Bill regarding corporate parenting principles, home life, education planning and extension of the personal adviser (PA) role.
- When considering the role of the PA, he said that this should be a full-time role, not a part-time role. He went on to say that NAVSH are cautiously in agreement with the adoption clause regarding local authority services being stopped once a child or young person is adopted as there is an expectation of adoptive parents to be able to support the child or young person as a corporate parent would.
- With regard to designated teachers, he said this role should be updated as a designated teacher should be qualified and able to influence the management and structure of a school to make a difference to the experience of a looked after child during their time in education. He said that NAVSH are advocating to make designated teacher roles statutory in FE institutions. He went on to say that NAVSH would be happy to work with the Department for Education to discuss this.
- Alan said that work with unaccompanied asylum seekers should be continued and strengthened. He also said that the pupil premium is a big asset but it should be there to support children until they are 18 rather than 16.
- **Karen Hughes** said that health remains low on the agenda with regard to looked after children and unmet health needs impact on a child or young person's education and other aspects of their life and without good health they are unable to achieve.
- Karen discussed the role of Designated Nurse for Looked After Children. She said that compared to the role of Designated Nurse for Safeguarding, the former role lacks clarity and parity. She said currently in some areas the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children often is taken on in addition to other roles, such as Designated Safeguarding Nurse and in some cases Youth Offending or Infection Control nurses. Karen said that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) survey of Looked After Children Nurses showed a lack of significance placed on the role of the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children and doesn't allow for development of expertise or enable good advocacy for looked after children's health needs. She added that there is a perception that the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children role is inferior to the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding which, impacts on the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children's being seen as the expert and able to effectively advocate on the health needs of looked after children.
- Karen said there is a lack of clarity regarding the Looked After Children's Nurse specialist role. She said their large caseloads and cuts in many areas of the looked after children's health service has contributed to this.
- Karen said health assessments should be holistic and physical/mental health assessments should not be seen as separate as has been suggested in the Children and Social Work Bill. She said that physical and mental health needs should be assessed together by a Looked After Children's Nurse specialist who has developed this expertise. She also said that the statutory guidance currently states that the initial health assessment is conducted by a qualified medical practitioner and that RCN and Looked After Children's Nurses were advocating for change and

want consideration to be given to Looked After Children's Nurse specialists who have the right qualifications to conduct these initial health assessments as this would result in a whole systems approach. She added that Looked After Children's Nurses act as a conduit for health for the child.

### **Discussion (the floor was opened to questions).**

#### **Key themes:**

##### ***Adoption***

- A care leaver said that they, and other friends, had experienced a break down in their adoption and said no support was offered with regard to this.
- Jasmine responded by saying that when she adopted her children it took two years to try and make a match. She said she understands the need to speed up the adoption process but social services need to make sure secure processes are in place. She added that once the Bill goes through, people can campaign to fill in the gaps it has left.

##### ***Local offer for care leavers***

- A care experienced professional said that the local offer doesn't have any legal remedies so when a looked after child or care leaver doesn't get what they are entitled to, something needs to be in place to support them.
- The Chair asked Alan if he thought the local offer is progressive. Alan said there needs to be safeguards and trials in local authorities. Alan said he welcomes the local offer as it is trying to strengthen the support that was there previously.
- On behalf of RCN, Karen raised concerns about the move to a potential local offer rather than a national offer as this would provide no national format for services and Karen said that this would potentially increase unmet needs for looked after children, particularly out of county/borough children who are already at a disadvantage due to health commissioning arrangements.

##### ***Mental health assessments/PSHE***

- A care leaver said that before they started their apprenticeship, they had bad mental health and work experience has helped them. They said that as a care leaver, employees see them as a risk and that local authorities should give more jobs to care leavers as it may in turn improve their mental health. They said that all children in care should receive a mental health assessment when they reach 16 because it has come to light that lots of looked after children have Emotionally Unstable (Borderline) Personality Disorder and more specific support should be there for them. They added that their PA has supported them since leaving care at 18 and they helped them to reach independence.
- A professional responded by saying that a care leaver can have a PA until they are 25 but isolation and loneliness is still on the rise. They said that PAs won't be there forever and that care leavers should be connected with young adults in their communities.
- A professional said that during her previous role, lots of girls at risk of CSE went to secure homes and returned to local authorities without the skills to protect themselves from potential risks. They then asked the panel why care leavers are not being taught the difference between coping and actually leading fulfilled lives.
- Karen responded by saying that from a practitioner point of view, lots of mental health needs go unnoticed and these services need to be strengthened. She said looked after children won't

be given therapeutic services unless the local authority says they are in a 'stable placement'. She said there is a growing population of looked after children who need to access mental health services. She added that some young people don't see the benefit of mental health assessments until a mental health problem has been experienced. Karen said that she informally supports a care leaver by advising them around health because they have limited links with other adults in their community and she has been a consistent adult link. Karen said that when someone is under 16, they may not see the importance of understanding their physical and mental health history or current state of health. She added that non-looked after children are not asked to go out and fend for themselves without support so why should looked after children and care leavers be expected to?

- Jasmine responded to the comment regarding CSE and secure accommodation by saying that CSE is such a high priority for local authorities, which means that they may find it difficult to create more innovative ways of working on it and ensuring those at risk are still supported to become independent. She said that lots of looked after children don't want to undergo mental health assessments because of the stigma attached to mental health problems so the pilots that the government have asked for will be vital. Jasmine said that there should be more work going into prevention of mental health problems and this would be a lot cheaper for local authorities.
- A care experienced professional asked what happens when a care leaver has mental health problems but they don't get on with their PA and won't be able to access services or receive advice.
- Jasmine responded by saying that there should be flexibility, as previous foster carers could be approached to provide this kind of support.
- A child in care said their PSHE lessons were cut down and only taught during form time by their tutor.
- Alan responded by saying that PSHE should be taught by experts and not form tutors.
- Karen said that the RCN are advocating for mandatory PSHE for all as part of the Bill and stated that lots of looked after children miss out on the opportunity to have PSHE lessons and this impacts on an already high risk group of children and young people who are subject to CSE and going missing. She said that they have an increased vulnerability if they are not receiving PSHE and that it is vital for all children to have education around healthy relationships and lifestyles.

### ***Other issues raised***

- A professional said that looked after children and care leavers were not consulted about the Bill and their charity will be conducting an online survey to ask children and young people about their views.
- A care leaver suggested that politicians who own businesses should give apprenticeships to care leavers.
- In response to this, Alan said that local authorities should provide programmes of work for care leavers and key members of the local authority should be able to use their mentoring skills to support them. He said that schemes of work experience should be promoted more. Alan added that lots of young people might not think they need support at 21 but come back later and feel that they do.

### **Thanks from Chair**

The Chair said there is still scope for the APPG meeting to have an impact on the Bill before it moves into the next stage.