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Serving children and young people better

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The Children and Young People's Inter-Agency Group (CIAG) brings together the lead agencies in children and young people's services from across local government, health services, police and the voluntary sector. Members of CIAG work collectively to improve services for children and young people, and have helped steer the increasing integration and improvement of children's services since 2003.

The CIAG members listed below have contributed to, and endorse the overall content of, *Serving Children and Young People Better*. However, the paper should not be interpreted as a statement of the position of individual members as it does not represent in detail the policy of separate member organisations.

CIAG member organisations include: Action for Children, The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Barnardo's, Children England, Children's Society, Connaught Group, Local Government Association (LGA), The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), National Youth Agency (NYA), NCB, NHS Confederation, NSPCC, and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH).

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Children and Young People's Inter-agency Group

Members of the Children and Young People's Inter-Agency Group (CIAG) endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and share the following values in relation to working with children and young people.

Respect We respect the equality, dignity and personal integrity of every child and young person in society.

Responsibility While children and young people learn about and grow in personal responsibility, adults must take overall responsibility, both collectively and individually, for the safety and well-being of all children and young people in our society.

Voice The perspectives and views of children and young people should be sought and listened to, and given increasing weight in policies and decisions about them as they grow older.

Collaboration All organisations should work collaboratively across boundaries to achieve the best outcomes for each child, young person and family they serve.

Whole-system approaches Children and young people have the right to services that work together to prevent problems occurring, that intervene early to prevent problems from escalating and that achieve the best long-term outcomes.

Continuous improvement Services should learn together to implement best practice based on evidence, and create systems of improvement concentrated on changing the weakest points in the system.

Introduction

The member organisations of CIAG have worked closely together over the last six years to improve services for children and young people. Together, our organisations have implemented an ambitious programme of change that has improved outcomes for most children and young people. We share in the credit for our successes and we share in the responsibility for what has not yet been achieved.

Six years on from Every Child Matters, this report takes stock of where we are and where we still need to go. There is much still to be achieved but the next six years should build upon the progress we have made.

Background

Every Child Matters (ECM) is the central element of England's policy for children, young people and their families. It is the most radical change to children's services since the Children Act 1989, and it has transformed the quality and range of joint working between government, public services and the voluntary sector.

Whilst outcomes for most children and young people have been improving, there is much further to go for the most vulnerable children, young people and their families. It is still a major challenge to integrate the complex services that support children, young people and their families, to strengthen local communities and to create a better environment for children and young people, and ECM was always going to take time.

Meanwhile, the world is changing. We are facing further and growing challenges with declining resources. It is time to take a look at what we do, why and how we do it.

This paper sets out how CIAG thinks we could achieve more. If children and young people help us shape our services we are far more likely to meet their needs. If we strengthen universal services that enable most families to support their children, then we will be able to focus more on the most vulnerable. If we work with communities, those communities will help provide the support that families need. If we emphasise investment in the people in our workforce, we will get the best out of limited resources. If we simplify the way assessment and funding systems work, we will avoid complex and wasteful bureaucracy.

We do not need more structural change. The architecture is in place to allow ECM to be effective. ECM has always been seen as, at least, a 10-year programme. We should remain constant to the principles of ECM, but at the same time to accelerate the pace of improvement and achieve radical change in the outcomes of the most vulnerable.

Context

Since *Every Child Matters*¹ was published in 2003, there has been rapid change. The global recession is impacting on the lives of children, young people and families, and will seriously affect the resources available to achieve better outcomes.

Today we understand more clearly the central role that young people, families and communities play in making their communities safer.² The nature of the family and its role is changing and becoming more diverse. Concern for the environment is changing the nature of the debate about social responsibility, and concern about our lifestyles is changing our priorities for the future. Some children and young people's well-being is at threat from the poverty they live in and the economic disadvantages they face.³ Children and young people are increasingly exposed to new influences and pressures arising from the internet and advances in communication technology. There is a national commitment to children's rights in principle that is not always reflected in practice.

1 Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Every Child Matters*.

2 Social Justice Policy Group (2006) *Breakdown Britain: Interim report on the state of the nation*. London: Social Justice Policy Group.

3 New Economic Foundation (2009) *National Accounts of Well-being: Bringing real wealth onto the balance sheet*. London: New Economic Foundation.

How far have we come?

- Most children in England and Wales are happy, healthy and doing well. Outcomes are improving generally.⁴
- There is 'overwhelming support' (Laming 2009),⁵ across political parties and from professionals, for the philosophy underpinning the direction of travel across all children's services. Work done by the Narrowing the Gap programme in 2008⁶ demonstrated that the central components of ECM, which were expanded and built on in the Children's Plan, provide the right elements for improving outcomes.
- The most visible progress has been in the introduction of structures and processes to deliver ECM, arising from the legislative changes that were introduced in 2004.⁷ Major structural change has taken place in every local area over the last five years.
- Children's Trusts have been established, and new governance arrangements set up. The integration of services is under way, with integrated multiprofessional and multiagency teams sharing responsibility for delivering services together. Research has established that this is beginning to have an impact on processes, structures and cultures, and on the nature of the support that children and young people receive.⁸

4 NCB, Library and Information Service (2009) *Statistics on Children and Young People*. London: NCB.

5 Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A progress report*. HC 330. London: The Stationery Office.

6 NTG, C4EO, LGA and I&DEA (2008) *Narrowing the Gap: Final year 1*. London: LGA.

7 *Children Act 2004*. London: The Stationery Office.

8 Local Authorities Research Consortium (2008) *Evaluating the Early Impact of Integrated Children's Services*. Slough: NFER.

How far have we to go?

- Now in place in every area, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is beginning to influence local approaches to multi-agency collaboration in early intervention. The move to create locality-based, inter-agency working, through creating a team around the child (TAC), has been effectively introduced in some parts of the country.⁹
- Preventative and early intervention services have been strengthened.¹⁰ Evidence-based programmes and pilots are being implemented, and children, young people and families say that they are seeing benefits from these changes.
- There is growing evidence that children's centres and extended schools are making a real difference, to children and young people and to their parents, as well as to the communities in which the centres and schools are based.¹¹

9 NTG, C4EO, LGA and I&DEA (2008) *Narrowing the Gap: Final year 1*. London: Local Government Association.

10 Nurse-family partnerships, parenting services, school-based parent support advisors, multi-systemic therapy, etc.

11 OFSTED (2008) *How well are they doing? The impact of children's centres and extended schools*. London: Ofsted.

Outcomes

Although most children and young people are doing well there are still many children and young people whose life chances are poor, whose outcomes are not improving at the same rate as those of their peers, and who are not benefiting enough from the huge investment in ECM.

- Statistics¹² show that children and young people who have mental health problems, those who are involved in offending behaviour and those in care (often the same children and young people) are still least likely to do well.
- Children and young people at risk of harm primarily live in families where there is substance misuse (drugs and alcohol), domestic violence, homelessness, offending behaviour, absent parents or a series of carers. Child deaths, whilst among the lowest in Europe, are primarily of children living in such circumstances.¹³
- Many children and young people are still growing up in families that are poor economically, environmentally and socially, and in communities that lack aspiration, are socially fragmented, and which lack an identity. Those children and young people often miss out on good educational opportunities and have poor-quality lifestyles.¹⁴

12 NCB, Library and Information Service (2009) *Statistics on Children and Young People*. London: NCB.

13 Brandon, M and others (2009) *Analysing Serious Case Reviews: What can we learn?* Norwich: UEA.

14 Sodha, S and Margo, J (2008) *Thursday's Child*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Policy and governance

ECM was intended to provide a single unifying framework for all services for children and young people. It has succeeded in bringing a shared understanding of the five outcomes and in creating integrated services for children and young people, but the task is yet to be completed.

- Family policy has not always been integrated with policy for children and young people.
- Structures and priorities for child health have largely been driven by values, management systems and inspection arrangements that are not fully aligned with ECM.
- Whilst policies to regenerate communities and address the challenges of poverty and exclusion have been introduced, their impact on children and young people has so far been limited.
- Policy has not sufficiently differentiated between the needs of all children and those who are the most vulnerable. The drive to improve outcomes for all children has been crucial, especially for those who have needed a little extra support to enhance their own drive and aspirations. Yet those who are most vulnerable have not benefited to the same degree.
- Policy for youth justice services is still not clearly set within the ECM framework, despite Youth Offending Teams providing a model for successful integration of services in a multi-disciplinary way. For example, preventative programmes funded through youth justice are often not linked to prevention and early intervention initiatives funded through

children's services, leaving local areas to try to join the policy drivers and funding streams together. The current high rates of children being held in custody is incompatible with a policy based upon outcomes and the interests of the child.

Systems and processes

Some areas have found it hard to make coherent sense, at a local level, of the different policies and funding streams, requirements and guidance that can influence and improve outcomes for children. Delivery has been dependent upon a huge number of initiatives, pathfinders, pilots and other short-term funding sources for many of the new integrated services. There is a serious challenge ahead in maintaining these services as short-term funding ceases.

- ECM has not yet fundamentally changed all mainstream universal services.
- There has been a late recognition of the need for change to the workforce. Reforms to structures, systems and processes have had limited impact as there has not been a similar cultural change within the workforce.¹⁵ The pace of change in workforce development and training reform has not kept up with the changes in services.
- The introduction of new systems and processes has not been followed by the removal of old ones; and in places there has been a rapid increase in the complexity of various requirements and guidance.

¹⁵ Local Authorities Research Consortium (2008) *Evaluating the early impact of integrated children's services*. Slough: NFER.

The views of children and young people

- Many of the systems and processes introduced nationally have been highly specified rather than providing clear coherent frameworks for local application, for example the Integrated Children's System (ICS). National commitment to retaining local flexibility has sometimes been undermined by over-prescriptive guidance.
- There are still too many different assessment systems and processes in place, and they do not fit seamlessly together. The ICS only integrates social work processes, not children's services as a whole. The CAF does not seamlessly relate to the initial assessment of need. The initial assessment acts more as a barrier to access to services than as a signal of increasing need and a trigger for more specialist interventions. There is no common expectation that a CAF assessment normally precedes the provision of more intensive support.
- Key terms are understood inconsistently. The term 'in need' is used in many ways, and is often confused with the term 'vulnerable'. The allied but distinct concepts of 'safeguarding' and 'child protection' have been used interchangeably. 'Integration' and 'integrated services' are terms that risk becoming debased by misuse.

Children and young people have clear views about their experience of services.¹⁶ They want flexible, responsive, timely and individualised services that meet their own particular needs, and they want to be more actively involved in negotiating the help they get. Having strong and trusting relationships with staff is key to young people being open about their needs and willing to accept help to access other services.

Services are often hard to access unless a crisis point has been reached – in particular those for healthcare and mental health. Many children and young people tell us that they find services are not located in easily accessible places, and are often stigmatising to use, unreliable and inefficient. They identify some clear gaps in services, especially in mental health services and services to help them deal with the impact on their lives of stress, bereavement, separation or illness.

Children and young people are consistent about the sort of staff they want to see working with them. They want staff who respect them, who have the ability to listen and who respond to what they hear, and are sensitive to cultural issues. They want staff who are professional and knowledgeable, who can keep them safe, and who give them choices where possible. Children and young people want to be treated as responsible members of the communities they live in, and to have their responsibilities as well as their rights recognised by the adults who work with them.

Children and young people see the professionals they meet in their daily life as a vital source of help and advice, but want those professionals to be

¹⁶ Mainey, A, Ellis, A and Lewis, J (2009) *Children's Views of Services: A rapid review*. London: NCB. http://www.ncb.org.uk/resources/free_resources/childrens_views_of_services.aspx (accessed 20 August 2009).

friendly and non-judgemental, approachable and competent. They want to be able to build up a long-term relationship with someone they trust rather than deal with lots of different staff. They want consistent support as they move into adult life.

When choosing a person to talk to about their problems, children and young people look for confidentiality. They recognise that in certain situations confidentiality cannot be maintained but want as far as possible to consent to information about themselves being shared by professionals, and have control over what happens to the information they impart and what happens next. They want to be given space to explore the choices available to them with professionals before things happen.

Children and young people are clear about how services could work together to best meet their needs. They can identify when inter-agency working has helped them, and express frustration when services cannot get their act together collectively. They are clear that the services they receive need to be right for them individually; and not for them to be 'fitted into' a service just because it exists.

They don't want to have to tell their story repeatedly to new people. They want better communication between professionals, and more support with moving between services and using multiple services.

Children and young people say they are not routinely involved in deciding what services they receive, in what way and why. They are not involved more generally in the design of services, either for themselves and their families or for the wider community. Many express a view that the way services are provided would be more effective if children and young people could contribute to their design, development and delivery.

Taking stock

The five outcomes of ECM provide a clear focus for what we do and why. We need to hold onto our vision that every child will be able to achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

We recognise how the investment that has been made in early years services and schools has been crucial in helping to improve outcomes generally for all children, and that early intervention through children's centres and extended schools is having an impact. We know that the benefits from early intervention can take many years to become visible but we believe it to be crucial, that during a time of reduced resources, we continue to invest in this approach.

We believe that the underlying structure and policy framework for children and young people remains sound. Policy for children, young people and their families does not need a radical overhaul. We need sustainability and stability, not further new initiatives.

However, we also recognise that we have got some of it wrong and that as a consequence we have not made the greatest difference to those children and young people and their families who most need the help. In the coming years we need to ensure that the public money we invest and our efforts are directed to where they can have the greatest impact on children's lives.

A picture of tomorrow – six themes for serving children and young people better

The views of children and young people should shape our services

We should share responsibility with children and young people for the design and development of services, the investments we make, the changes we create and the quality we seek – giving young people more of a stake in their communities, more responsibility for their own lives, and more experience in decision-making.

We should value and respect children and young people for the contribution they make to our society, listen to their views and experiences, and involve them in designing, planning and delivering the services they receive. This way we are more likely to create better services, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes. Policy that is based on listening and responding to the voice of children is more likely to meet what children and young people say they need.

If we can recognise and support the positive aspects of all children and young people, including those within the youth justice sector, rather than focusing solely on the negatives, then we are more likely to create stronger communities. Young people who have been given more responsibility show more responsibility.

Families are the vehicle for children's futures

We should build an expectation that 'Families create good outcomes'. We should design services on the basis that the majority of families are supported to give their children and young people better outcomes through accessing the best possible universal services, with the least possible need for extra statutory support.

We need government policy to address the whole family, based on the understanding that the family is the 'first provider', the most important and the only service provider that most children and young people need other than universal services – early years and education, play and youth services, community safety and healthcare. Empowered families create better outcomes. We need to help families to take greater responsibility for meeting the needs of their children, and to be clearer about the circumstances in which families should seek extra support or in which statutory services will intervene to protect or remove children.

Most parents, carers and families will, with access to good quality universal services, provide good parenting, manage their parental responsibilities well and cope with the challenges and difficulties of bringing up children without state intervention. Policy should concentrate on building and enhancing the capacity of children and young people, their families and the communities they live in to improve their own outcomes. We should increase the provision of more universally available parenting support – in the early days of parenthood and during times of greatest stress – aimed at strengthening parenting capacity, and strengthening parental ability to secure support from within their communities.

Every community matters

We should support local communities to fulfil their responsibility for ensuring good outcomes for children and young people, contribute to the work of children's trusts, make local neighbourhoods good places for children and young people to be in, share in the resources necessary to promote well-being, contribute to the design and development of services for children and young people in their communities, and know their responsibilities for the protection of children and young people.

Outside the family, local communities provide the first setting where children and young people interact with the world. A supportive community is a source of great strength to any family; a hostile one is a fundamental barrier to good outcomes.

We need to increase the involvement of local communities in the process of improving outcomes, utilising the community's capacity for building social capital, and recognising the contribution that improving the lives of children and young people will make to improved community cohesion and reduced disorder. Local communities need to know what is expected of them, and when they should involve statutory agencies in the lives of children, young people and their families. Community policy needs to become more closely aligned with the policy for children and young people.

Effective community regeneration policy concentrates on meeting the personal and emotional needs of children, young people and families, enabling them to advance and regenerate their own lives, improve the environment they live in, and increase the access they have to meaningful employment, leisure and social activities.

Strong communities make a powerful contribution to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and reduce the impact of crime, drugs and violence on them. Strong communities create better environments, with safe places to play and explore, and positive activities for young people to engage in. Harnessing the energy of communities to support vulnerable families is a crucial way to support efforts by children's services to meet individual need.

We need to help the local community to understand what services are available, when and to whom, what can be expected of statutory services, and at what level it is up to local communities themselves to meet needs that they identify. Crucially, we need them to know what is not acceptable in terms of the protection of children and young people, how to take action if they are concerned, and at what point they can expect statutory services to intervene.

Greater focus on the vulnerable few

Whilst children's trusts must work towards improving outcomes for every child or young person, there should be greater focus on developing and delivering services to children, young people and families who are vulnerable and at risk, including youth justice services.

We should simplify systems, reduce the number of assessments, remove old processes, and establish a clear public understanding of when services are provided and when additional support is available. The CAF should be the basis of every assessment, and become the passport to extra support, and intervention.

ECM has been right to build into all services a focus on outcomes; to strengthen the ability of universal services to reach every family and to build early intervention services upon this universal platform. But now we need to create an efficient and effective way of targeting services to those families that need it most, and to increase the emphasis of children's trusts on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. We need to both sharpen the ability of staff in universal services to identify those in greatest needs, and to remove the barriers to rapid delivery of services to them.

The individual services covering youth justice, child and adolescent mental health, safeguarding and child protection, disabled children, children in care, and others such as health visiting for very vulnerable families – all need greater attention. These individual services need more investment and better integration into, connection with, and access to mainstream ECM services. Adult mental health and substance misuse services that support vulnerable families need to work to and promote ECM outcomes.

We should aim to reduce the number of thresholds, eligibility criteria, assessments and additional processes that presently govern access to different types of service. We should develop our trust in each other's ability to assess need and to know when to seek specialist professional help.

People

We should focus our effort and investment on the children's workforce and on transforming their aspirations, expectations, understanding and ability to deliver high quality integrated services with and through children and young people, their families and their communities. We should ensure that they are equipped with a sense of moral purpose, and the will to serve children and young people better. We should support them to work together with confidence, to respect and understand each other's professional contribution, and to recognise that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts'.

From amongst the existing workforce, we should create the role of 'family facilitators', to ensure families who need support or intervention have the chance to build a relationship with someone

they trust. This new role should use the emerging experience of 'key workers' and lead professionals, and work on the principle of a single key adult who, as far as is practical, stays alongside the vulnerable child, young person and family for 'as long as it takes' and whose job it is to get the best out of services.

Children and young people need support from staff who are committed to ECM and its vision; are child centred; outcomes focused; highly motivated; and respected and trusted by the children, young people, families and communities they work with.

The next chapter in children's services should avoid further changes in service structure. We need to focus on the way front-line practice is delivered: through strengthening the confidence, knowledge and skills of the workforce to deliver support to the most vulnerable; and by ensuring that there is the will across the workforce to make every child matter.

Specifically, we need to identify how best we can develop the principle of a single key adult who supports the child, young person and family for months, years or until the child grows up and leaves home. This person's role would be much more than the 'lead professional' and would take from the best learning we have gained – from family support, school-based parent support advisors, family nurse partnerships and similar models – to act as advocate, support, and service coordinator. This role would mean getting involved more when the need arises, withdrawing when not needed, and ensuring that the child, young person or family's need is properly identified. Responsibilities of this role would include ensuring that the necessary funding has been agreed, helping services to respond to the need, and brokering relationships with a range of other professionals as necessary.

Funding for simplicity

We should establish the principle that wherever possible funding follows the child or young person, developing a universal ‘entitlement’ for all children and young people, and creating personalised funding for individual children and young people who need additional support and intervention based on assessed need and a clear case pathway.

If the gains achieved by ECM are not to be lost as the total amount of resource available reduces, we need to identify what care and support services every child or young person is entitled to receive by right and then what the most vulnerable might need in addition. We must aim to reduce the need for complex threshold judgements to control supply and demand for services.

A universal entitlement will provide a baseline for what every child, young person and family can expect to receive. The structures, systems and processes for ECM should stay the same, but access to additional services designed to provide additional help should be available only to those identified as needing that help, to ensure limited resources are targeted and used to best effect.

Children, young people and their families, communities and the public will all need to understand the local threshold of need at which they will be assessed to determine whether they should receive more than their universal entitlement – and this understanding should come via clearly published criteria. Families will need to know when they will be required to have more support and state intervention in their lives in order to

safeguard their children. Other eligibility criteria will need to be simplified, although assessment for appropriateness will still be needed for access to very specific specialist services.

Budgets can then be realigned so that, for every vulnerable child, young person or family, there is an agreed, collectively provided and owned funding package – over and above the standard entitlement of every child or young person – based on assessed need. This funding can be used flexibly with the involvement of the child or young person and their parents or carers to arrange the services that are most likely to benefit them.

This will sharpen the focus of practitioners on the assessed needs of children, young people and their families and simplify the way in which services are commissioned – relating what is needed to what is used more closely. This approach will help create the concept of a case pathway.

Conclusion

ECM has made a real difference to the way the state interacts with children, young people and families, and has guided significant structural and system change. It has benefited most children significantly, but has not fully addressed the complex problems encountered by about 20 per cent of the population of children and young people.

This paper has set out six themes for action which CIAG believe could help to ensure that in the next five years we can build on what is good, recognise the changing context and the financial constraints ahead, and support those least helped by ECM to do better, bringing them better outcomes and building a stronger society as a result.

It proposes focusing on the family as the source of improving outcomes for most children and young people, strengthening the voice of children and young people in designing and improving what we do, and creating strong active communities that support the most vulnerable.

It proposes we work in a more focused way with the few children and young people who most need external support to achieve good outcomes. It proposes we develop a workforce with the knowledge, skill and will to make a difference and to improve children and young people's outcomes. And it proposes a funding system that creates simplicity and coherence in complex situations and supports more effective practice.