

Coalition Changes - Update from Department for Children and Education

We now have the Department for Education (DfE) but its core business remains the same as the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). There have been no machinery of government changes and ministers have made it clear that, whilst education is the first priority, they are fully committed to building more effective children's services.

Headlines have been dominated by:

- The Queen's Speech with its commitment to education reform
- Academies – letters to all headteachers inviting them to consider academy status and those with an “outstanding” judgement from OfSTED to receive automatic entitlement to become an academy, probably from September
- Parents being able to request and set up schools in their local areas where they perceive the need – the Swedish “free school” model
- Letters from the Secretary of State to Lead Members with positive messages about working in partnership with local authorities (LAs)
- Children's trust arrangements encouraged where they add value locally but the statutory framework to be repealed
- £670m reductions from DfE budget as contribution to £6.2bn – made up of a mixture of Area Based Grant (ABG), field forces and DfE reserve funding, hitting DfE elements of the ABG heavily (£311m) - £2.1m in Wiltshire
- The inspection programme continues for now with 6 unannounced safeguarding inspections in the South West since the election – Wiltshire still waiting for inspection to take place
- Professor Eileen Munro has been commissioned to lead a review of children's social care practice with the explicit aim of reducing bureaucracy
- Children and Families task force announced by Deputy Prime Minister to develop proposals that will make the biggest positive difference to family life (PM will chair)
- National Citizen Service (NCS) to be flagship policy for youth, delivered by charities, social enterprises and businesses

n.b. There *will* be a summative judgement of the effectiveness of children's services for each LA 2009/10 as this remains on the statute books, even though the Common Area Assessment (CAA) has been abolished. This will be published in November/December 2010, assuming these arrangements remain in place.

Next steps likely to include

- Major reduction in the Government Officer for the South West (GOSW) field force support to local authorities – starting in autumn 2010 and with most impact from April 2011
- The Joint Improvement Support Programmes (JISPs) from field forces and the DfE offered to local authorities and their children's trust partners to end
- Review of the role of the GOSW Children and Learners team in autumn 2010. Detailed work on policy strands already underway as Government Office London to be abolished from April 2011

Issues for Chief Executives

Overall, LAs and their local partners will have much greater autonomy with less central direction, control and regulation. The Department for Education is moving rapidly to implement the Coalition's policies of decentralisation and localism. However, the combination of a reduction in resources from central government and the potential loss to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as schools adopt academy status poses a severe financial challenge.

Immediate Implications

Safeguarding - Chief Executives will retain responsibility for children's safeguarding as determined by the previous government following Lord Laming's second report in 2009 unless/until there is a change in legislation and regulation. This may arise from the Munro Review and/or a review of OfSTED's role.

Safeguarding inspections continue. The first cycle of annual unannounced inspections should be completed by the end of August. There are no indications that the triennial inspection cycle of safeguarding and children in care has been reviewed yet, so it has to be assumed that they will continue. They are extremely demanding and we have had the full range of outcomes in the South West.

Academies and Free Schools – each new academy/free school will take its share of the DSG plus around 8–10% drawn from the amount of non-schools DSG and core funding. This will have major implications for the LA services provided to schools from the non-schools DSG. Conversations are required at schools forum and with headteacher executive groups to assess how academies, schools (including “free schools”) and the LA will work together in the future and what services academies may wish to purchase. A “ready reckoner” has now been published which enables calculation of the amount of additional funding each school would receive from the LA budgets if the school becomes an academy.

It is proposed that planning regulations will be simplified and that a wide range of sites could be used for Free Schools e.g. shops or other large buildings on the high street or in local communities, without the need for ‘change of use’

consent. Guidelines expected before summer recess highlighting a clear presumption in favour of setting up new schools. Planning teams likely to need to work with local groups, transport and local communities where there is clearly an appetite for this style of school. (New School Network has been set up – a charity supporting groups through the simplified application process).

Children’s Trust arrangements – it will be for local authorities and partners to determine what kind of partnership arrangements exist in the future. In a climate of financial restraint and looser structures generally, there are strong arguments to keep the key partners engaged on delivering the agendas that require their engagement. Children’s services elements of total place approaches, for example, require radical multi-agency decision making that can both improve outcomes and achieve significant savings.

The Big Society agenda, in particular relationship to the provision of youth services and NCS, will require both capacity building and greater partnership with the local voluntary and community sectors.

Universal and preventative services – given overall budgetary pressures and the growth in demand for tier 3 children’s social care provision, there will be considerable pressure on: a. universal services (schools, children’s centres, primary health care) to make sure they contribute to the preventative agenda; and, b. preventative services themselves as they are non-statutory but contribute to keeping children and families away from needing the more expensive tier 3 services. Vital that preventative services are maintained or LAs will find themselves with greater cost pressures overall.

Play – funding levels are affected this year. Revenue grants will not be paid to the Playbuilder authorities and revenue support for Play Pathfinder authorities will be reduced to 50% although this funding remains ring-fenced. Ring-fences have been removed from all play capital grants as set out in the Secretary of State letter to Directors of Children’s Services on 16 June. Conversations are required to ensure funds for builds in progress are maintained and clear handling strategies are agreed between all partners where consultations have taken place and community expectations are high. In Wiltshire, we are continuing with the Playbuilders projects already in development.

School Capital

Many Building Schools for the Future (BSF) projects across the country have been cancelled. Capital funding for Sarum Academy in Salisbury has been put on hold pending assessment by the DfE on a case by case basis.

(Largely taken from GOSW update June 2010)

Report author: Lynda Cox, Head of Performance Management & Co-ordination

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