



5th September, 2018

**To the Chair and Members of the
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Report of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children: - 'Storing up Trouble' – a
postcode lottery of children's social care**

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Nuala Fennelly Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools	All	None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides the panel with the opportunity to review a significant major national report on the current state of social care in England and how the current pressures within the sector might be addressed and delivery improved.

EXEMPT INFORMATION

2. Not exempt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Panel is asked to:
 - i) Note and review the content of the report;
 - ii) Review the findings and recommendations contained within this report with the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive of the Doncaster Children's Services Trust;
 - iii) Make proposals which could be considered by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in its further work on this matter.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. The future sustainability of the social care function is critical to all councils and specifically Doncaster in at least maintaining its Ofsted rating of 'Good' and achieving a grading of 'Outstanding by October 2019 and more generally the future funding and operation of delivery across the children's system has profound implications for children and young people's outcomes.
5. The Scrutiny function has the potential to impact upon all of the Council's key objectives by holding decision makers to account, reviewing performance and

developing policy. This is achieved through making robust recommendations, monitoring performance of the Council and external partners and reviewing issues outside the remit of the Council that have an impact on the residents of the borough.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

6. The All-Party Parliamentary Group of MPs and Lords commissioned the report 'Storing up Trouble' from the National Children's Bureau to follow up its 2017 'No good options' report, where it found, was a children's social care system wrestling with increasing and complex demand and stretched resources and concluded that there was a variation in policy, practice and provision of support and interventions across the country, most of which could not be explained by genuine variation in the level of need between different areas.

'Storing up Trouble' seeks to further explore this variation in practice across the country and to gain a better understanding of the pressures facing social workers and social care leaders who make decisions about care and services for children.

The specific terms of reference for this report were:-

- The extent to which thresholds vary across England?
- Whether thresholds have risen over time?
- What might underlie these patterns and trends?
- What impact this is having on Children?

7. The report was compiled from evidence from a variety of contributors, comprising expert academic and children's sector witnesses, including the Association of Directors of Children's Services, a survey of Directors of Children's services (DCS) (97 respondents) a sample of social workers (1700 respondents) and more extensive contributions from an exclusive number of Local Authorities, (LAs) which included Doncaster MBC.

The report was published on 11th July, 2018 and. achieved high profile, positive recognition in the media

8. The report is substantial (60 pages) and is split into 5 sections:-

- Thresholds – consistency in and application nationally
- Access to services – how easy is it for children to get help?
- How we provide for a sustainable future for preventative and Early help services
- How resources are influencing shaping the response to intervention
- What key issues children leaving care think need to be addressed?

EDITED FINDINGS OF THE REPORT:

9. Thresholds across England are inconsistent: - whilst there is a consensus that thresholds (for intervention) need to be clear and consistent, the report identifies variation in formulation and particularly, application. This can mean significant implications for families moving between L.A. areas, as well as undermining the coherence of the overall system. The report identifies that this is a particular issue for Early help and Children in Need support. Whilst it is reasonable to expect some variation between LA areas to reflect differing local need, the report is concerned that

this inconsistency is resulting in inequity of access to care and support and therefore variation in outcomes for children.

10. Whilst thresholds have their advantages in promoting a shared understanding and definition of intervention, there is criticism that they over - simplify decision making, providing a false sense of assurance, based on limited rule assessments and are susceptible to manipulation by tailoring interventions according to resources. The report identifies that some LAs (e.g. Leeds) have rethought the need for thresholds and the process for assessing need, risk and providing support, to one which relies on a more child centred approach, stronger partnership working and 'conversations'
11. The report finds that services are getting harder to access, in part, because thresholds are rising to accommodate rising demand. There is a divergence of views on this point, with Children's Service Directors, perhaps on the grounds of policy, believing that thresholds are not rising, whilst social workers, probably on the grounds of practice, are of the view that they are. Given this state of affairs, there is therefore a risk that children will not receive the interventions they need at the most appropriate time.
12. The report also identifies the challenge of meeting the need for early help support and support for children in need in that this area of preventative work has tended to suffer, whilst resources are concentrated on (more expensive) child protection intervention. To that end, social work practice has become 'crisis management, where escalation of need is driving intervention. Partly for this reason, the report identifies a mismatch between the help which families wish to see, such as good housing, fuel and food (essentially, mitigating the impact of poverty) which are relegated in favour of a social care focus on risk and statutory intervention, which in itself promotes a mistrust between families and practitioners. The report finds a 'perfect storm' in relation to early help and children in need services in that there is a wide variation in thresholds for these services nationally, which combined with a reduction in funding support, means that fewer children and families are able to access the support which they need. Evidence suggests that children's services departments are finding it harder to fulfil their duties in relation to preventative services and support for children in need, such that problems escalate and become 'stored up' for the future. Partly for that reason, DCSs have called for early help services to be afforded a statutory basis.
12. The position is not helped by the gaps in data collection which the DfE facilitates which makes it difficult to fully understand the needs and risk factors for families and any variation in intervention and outcomes; this not only compromises the State's ability to accurately allocate resources, it also denies Children's authorities the comprehensive knowledge as to whether they are appropriately supporting families from all backgrounds.
13. Finally, the report stresses the importance of the child's 'voice' where it finds inconsistent practice, in that not all children are given sufficient support to understand their stories and to play a part in their own care.
14. At the launch event speakers summarised their conclusions from the report as follows:-
 - Children are being seen to 'fit the system', rather than vice versa;
 - The system is essentially 'risk based', rather than one focused upon 'help' for children and families;

- There is a mismatch between the care which children want and that with which they are provided;
- There may need to be additional financial support for a statutory commitment for early help – but this would be cost effective;
- Children in Need cases are more complex than formerly was the case, which requires additional resource;
- Financial pressure on decision making, whilst not explicit, is implicit;
- To obtain support, too often a child and its family will need to be in need of protection or care;
- Thresholds should be de-emphasised;
- A core funded social care model from Government is needed;
- There needs to be modelling of the impact of poverty on children's services.

THE REPORT'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

15. A representative of the Chief Executive of the DCST and the Council's Director of Children's Services have agreed to attend this meeting in order to respond to any questions or queries contained within this report. It should be stressed that neither the Trust nor the Council, is being held to account for their performance against this report. However, the performance monitoring reports to this panel have for some time highlighted the ever increasing levels of 'Need' in the community and the impact this is having on the response the Trust is able to provide and its operational and financial sustainability. The Trust and Council will, however, be able to advise members of its perspective on the report's findings and recommendations and whether and to what extent these reflect the Trust's own experience and practice.
16. There are Five principal findings (sub paragraphs) and twelve recommendations (bullet points) arising from the report which are contained within the Executive summary at Appendix 1.

Members may ask questions arising from any of the findings and recommendations in the report, but the following are seen to be particularly salient:-

16.1 protecting children has become a postcode lottery:-

- The Department for Education (DfE) should urgently respond to emerging evidence about variation in thresholds and their application across children's social care departments and the implications for children and families;
- The DfE should work with the 'What Works centre' for Children's Social Care and sector partners to evaluate new and developing alternative approaches to assessing and meeting the needs of children and families in partnership with other local agencies. This should include work with the Local Government Association and LAs to ensure that learning is shared more widely;
- The DfE should put in place arrangements for the systematic analysis of data on the demographics of children and collect data on the circumstances of parents and carers whose children are accessing social care services;

16.2 Children and Families often have to reach crisis before they can get help:-

- The DfE should urgently review and report on the causes of diverging perceptions between frontline practitioners and DCSs in relation to thresholds for children's

social care interventions, the DfE should also set out measures to ensure DCSs Lead Members for children’s services are more closely engaged with frontline social work practice;

16.3 Urgent action is needed to protect preventative and Early help services:-

- The DfE should consult on how to introduce Munro’s proposal for a legal duty on LAs to provide early help to children young people and their families, including putting a definition of early help in statute;
- The Government should use the Autumn budget to put in place an interim funding arrangement in order to stabilise the crisis in early intervention services and prevent more children reaching breaking point;
- The Government should set out plans to extend the ‘troubled families’ funding beyond 2020, in light of LAs reliance on these resources to maintain family support services.
- The review of children in need should be expanded to gather evidence on thresholds for accessing ‘Children in Need’ support under s17 of the Children Act and what underlies variation in the proportion of children designated ‘in need’ across the country.

16.4 Young people want more support to understand their histories:-

- The LGA and Ofsted should work with LAs to ensure that children and young people’s voices are listened to consistently, so that they always have an opportunity to have a say in decisions about their own care.

NEXT STEPS

17. At the launch event, the Chair of the APPG, Tim Loughton M.P. described what he saw as the next steps. The Chair reported that he has gained a commitment from the Children’s Minister to feedback on the report and the Chair has timetabled Parliamentary time for a debate in the House of Commons in October 2018. The APPG is committed to engaging with the Treasury in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2019, with a view to influencing spending decisions. Going forward, the National Children’s bureau has asked its leading contributors to carry out further work arising from this report and Doncaster Council is pleased to be one of those asked to continue to support this work.

18. IMPACT ON COUNCIL’S KEY OBJECTIVES

Outcomes	Implications
<p>All people in Doncaster benefit from a thriving and resilient economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayoral priority – creating jobs and Housing • Mayoral priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans • Mayoral priority: protecting Doncaster’s vital services 	<p>The Council and the Trust as major partners in the Children and Families Partnership Board share the Children’s plan outcome that all children should achieve their potential – in removing barriers and developing good quality service delivery children will be able to access the benefits of a thriving economy and will themselves be participants in creating and sustaining the strength of the economy.</p>

<p>People live safe, healthy, active and independent lives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayoral priority: Safeguarding our Communities • Mayoral priority: Bringing down the cost of living 	<p>Ensuring children and young people are free and feel from harm are key ambitions of both the Council and the Trust.</p>
<p>People in Doncaster benefit from a high quality built and natural environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayoral priority: creating jobs and Housing • Mayoral priority: Safeguarding our communities • Mayoral priority: bringing down the cost of living 	<p>Delivering against the service delivery contract between the Council and the Trust has clear implications for safeguarding communities, in reducing risk and exposure of risk to children; improved early help and thus better outcomes for families.</p>
<p>Working with our partners we will provide strong leadership and governance</p>	<p>Ofsted, in its inspection report commented favourably on the relationship and governance arrangements between the Council and the Trust, recognising that formal arrangements for monitoring and challenge exceed the requirements set out in the contract between the two organisations.</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS [officer initials PT ; date 14/08/18]

19. There are no risks directly arising from this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [officer initials KDW date 16/08/18]

20. Although DCST are appointed to provide Children's Services in Doncaster, the Council retains the statutory duties itself; and the Council through its Statutory Officer the Director of Children's Services (Damian Allen) must ensure itself that satisfactory services are provided accordingly.

The Council's contract with the Trust contains various monitoring powers to assist the Council to assure itself that services are being delivered correctly.

The work of the Overview & Scrutiny panel will assist the Council with this assurance work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [officer initials AB Date 17/08/18]

21. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. The report from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children does highlight the budgetary pressures facing all Local Authorities from increased and more complex demand in Children's Social Care.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...MLV Date...16/08/18]

22. While there are no specific HR implications resulting from the contents of this report at this time, there may be implications in the future depending on any decisions taken

and changes made resulting from the Storing Up Trouble report and subsequent discussions by politicians.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials PW Date 21/08/18]

23. There are no specific technology implications for the council resulting from the contents of this report.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials CW... .Date 16/08/18]

24. Health and social care services are inextricably linked and should be working in robust partnership to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and families. The move towards integrated health and social care delivery models supports these partnerships and create shared outcome objectives. Health colleagues are keen to support Doncaster Children's Trust to achieve the quality and performance levels they aspire to as this will impact on the wider health and wellbeing outcomes for Doncaster families.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials P.T .Date 15/0818]

25. There are no equality implications directly arising from this report.

CONSULTATION

26. The Chief Executive of the Trust has been consulted on the content of this report.

ATTACHMENTS

- 'Storing Up trouble' All Party Parliamentary Group for Children report – Executive summary – appendix 1

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Background Papers

'Storing up Trouble' – full report of the All Party Parliamentary Group for children

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