

Local Government Association

House of Commons Opposition day debate on education and social mobility

Tuesday 22 November 2016



Key messages

- All children deserve access to the best possible education. Data shows that council-maintained schools receive better Ofsted ratings, and improve more quickly, than academy schools.¹ The LGA has called on the Government to take advantage of councils' unique position in the community and give them a clear and strategic role in school improvement and holding schools to account for education standards.
- Councils have wide-ranging duties and responsibilities to all children in their areas. Any changes to the system should improve the educational progress, attainment and life chances of all children and young people. Any proposed reform of the education system should be accompanied by a strong evidence base which shows how the reforms will benefit all children and young people.
- We want every resident to have a good quality of life and to aspire to improve their circumstances regardless of their background or where they live. It can be far harder for people to take advantage of opportunities if they are in poverty, where energy is spent trying to make ends meet rather than looking out for the next step up. Those in poverty are also more likely to experience poor health and wellbeing.
- To tackle poverty and promote social mobility, policies cutting across a wide range of areas need to be considered together, including employment support, welfare, housing, early years provision and education, public health and family support. The current funding system too often acts as a disincentive to joined up working and early intervention.
- The right balance between targeted and universal provision needs to be found, making the most effective use of very limited financial resources. This balance may need to vary from place to place, and give local partners the freedom and flexibility to prioritise funding and commissioning in a way that best meets their local circumstances.

Background

Schools that Work for Everyone Green Paper

All children deserve access to the best possible education. Data shows that council-maintained schools receive better Ofsted ratings, and improve more quickly, than academy schools.² The LGA has called on the Government to take advantage of councils' unique position in the community and give them a clear and strategic role in overseeing local schools systems, accompanied by appropriate resources, powers and flexibilities, so that they can support local school improvement and hold schools to account for education standards.

One of the primary concerns for councils, who have wide-ranging duties and

¹ http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7799763/NEWS

² http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7799763/NEWS

Briefing

responsibilities to all children in their areas, is that any change should improve the educational progress, attainment and life chances of all children and young people. Any proposed reform of the education system should be accompanied by a strong evidence base which shows how the reforms will benefit all children and young people.

The LGA is clear that any decision on the creation of new selective schools should not be decided by a single school, Multi-Academy Trust, or civil servants in the DfE in isolation. A new selective school in any area will have an impact on education provision for children across the whole locality and it is therefore vital that councils, as democratically elected leaders, can engage with their communities to seek a place-based agreement on whether academic selection should be introduced. Councils have a central role to play in ensuring that decisions about introducing greater selection are subject to democratic scrutiny.

Councils have raised concerns with us regarding the impact that 100 per cent faith schools could have on community cohesion within a locality and we urge the DfE to reconsider this proposal.

Social mobility

Every resident has the right to a good quality of life, and to aspire to improve their circumstances regardless of their background or where they live. However, there is clear evidence that where people are born into or experience poverty, it significantly impacts on their life chances, depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society.³ As the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission highlighted, “in our view, poverty and mobility are two sides of the same coin.”⁴

Nearly a quarter of households do not have enough money to live on and this has been increasing.⁵ Families and children in the most deprived areas need a whole system approach to tackling poverty. Health and wellbeing go hand in hand with poverty and challenging housing arrangements which affect parenting, relationships and children’s wellbeing.

Councils are best-placed to understand the range of needs faced by their residents, but their scope to provide integrated support is constrained by falling funding and a lack of influence over key partners, for example in education and employment. There also needs to be consideration of how best to balance universal and targeted services in a time of reduced public spending.

Early years

Childcare and early education settings play a crucial role in supporting young children and, particularly in some more deprived areas, their parents. The Government’s extended childcare offer will provide welcome support for many working parents. However, provision in many deprived areas too often offers less choice and quality to families. Families and children in these areas would benefit if the ability to monitor and intervene on quality was returned to local councils.

Local and national government, and the inspectorate, are increasingly recognising

³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, “UK Poverty: Causes, Costs and Solutions” 2016

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-causes-costs-and-solutions>

⁴ Social Mobility and Poverty Commission, “State of the Nation 2015”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2015>

⁵ Institute of Health Equity, Marmot Indicators 2014

<https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/marmot-indicators-2014/marmot-indicators-2014-a-preliminary-summary-with-graphs>

that the early years are vital to long-term educational attainment and outcomes.⁶ We have seen a shift in policy emphasis that reflects this, for example funding free places for disadvantaged two year-olds, and discussion of a life chances strategy that places particular emphasis on early education and childcare, and the announcement of six social mobility pilot areas.

It is crucial that support for parenting and relationships is viewed in the round, both in terms of funding and service integration. We need to ensure that support for parenting and relationships is integrated with other services, and that we are able to understand and mitigate the impact of potential stress factors such as losing a job, benefits, a home, or health.

Employment and skills

The current skills training system remains highly centralised, fragmented and complex which results in duplication and competing interventions. The national approach to commissioning mainstream and re-engagement employment and skills funding is worth £10.5 billion (2016/17) but this is scattered across 20 different national schemes.⁷

The LGA wants the Government to enable groups of councils to commission provision. Councils want to work in partnership with schools and colleges to collaborate and target public funds around the local skills needs of employers and young people and support social mobility.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is a key component of employment and skills provision, but the current offer is delivered through a range of initiatives and providers, making it patchy and fragmented. Councils want to play a vital role in coordinating and commissioning these services, and this is a major ask in devolution deals.

Welfare and housing

The Government's programme of welfare reform has significantly reduced mainstream welfare benefits for working age households. Lone parents and large families have seen some of the greatest reductions in income.⁸

The impact of policy and funding decisions on low income households must be monitored. There is growing evidence that reductions in housing benefit, combined with rising rents, are contributing to a rise in homelessness and inadequate housing.⁹ We need to do more to understand the impact of housing insecurity on children; however, we already know that regular moves between childcare and educational settings has a detrimental impact on attainment.

Stable social housing is needed to provide stability and affordability to some of our most vulnerable households, allowing them to take advantage of opportunities to improve their lives. However, the availability of social rented council housing has halved since 1994, from 3.6 million properties to 1.6 million properties in

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-notes-importance-of-teaching-and-learning-in-pre-school>

⁷ LGA Analysis; Autumn Statement 2016 Submission
<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7991192/LGA+submission+to+the+Autumn+Statement+2016.pdf/ae76f5e3-7a8a-49a1-aeb0-67c4fc61fef>

⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies 'Benefit Spending and reforms: the coalition Government's record'
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/BN160.pdf>

⁹ GLHS 'Homelessness policy and support options – a report to the LGA' August 2016

2016.¹⁰

The LGA's submission ahead of the Autumn Statement the LGA's Autumn Statement submission asks the Government to lift the freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates, and highlights that investment in affordable housing would more sustainably reduce the cost of housing benefit, by redressing the rising gap between housing costs and household income; and would generate savings, as weekly housing benefit payments are on average £20 lower in the social rented sector than in the private rented sector;¹¹ and help better meet the needs of vulnerable people in ways that both reduce costs and promote life chances.

Public health

Poverty and health outcomes are closely intertwined. Poor maternal health, and poor early years health and nutrition, are strongly associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. Reductions to public health funding for programmes targeted at disadvantaged families are therefore likely to have a detrimental impact on health outcomes for children from deprived backgrounds.

The Government has confirmed a £331 million reduction to public health budgets between 2016/17 and 2020/21. This is on top of £200 million in-year reductions announced in October 2015.¹²

¹⁰ DCLG Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales in social housing in England:
<https://core.communities.gov.uk/>

¹¹ DWP Housing Benefit caseload statistics weekly award by tenure:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-caseload-statistics>

¹² Public Health Grants to local authorities 2013 - 2016:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ring-fenced-public-health-grants-to-local-authorities-2013-14-and-2014-15>