



Government response to LaingBuisson's report on the potential for developing the capacity and diversity of children's social care services in England

Following a review in 2014 of Birmingham City Council's children's services, led by Professor Julian Le Grand, the Department for Education commissioned a study to analyse the existing market in the provision of children's social care services in England. The purpose of this independent study was to explore ideas to further develop capacity in the system, expanding the options available to local authorities wishing to improve services and to the government when intervening to address service failure.

The Department commissioned LaingBuisson to carry out this study with oversight from an Advisory Panel of Professor Le Grand, Alan Wood and Isabelle Trowler.

We would like to thank LaingBuisson and their partners for carrying out the study and setting out some options for consideration. We would also like to thank the Advisory Panel for their helpful contributions. We hope that the LaingBuisson report will:

- assist in public and professional understanding of the existing mixed market in children's services provision;
- usefully contribute to the debate about how best to deliver these services efficiently and effectively;
- assist local authorities and others in considering options for expanding capacity and diversity in the delivery of children's social care services.

The LaingBuisson report sets out seven options to increase capacity and diversity in the system. Our work to date is consistent with a number of the options. For example:

- a. We have set up new governance structures which can be used as a template by other authorities, including partnering with another local authority (Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) and establishing the first children's social care organisations to be set up independent of the local authority (Doncaster and Slough Children's Services Trusts).
- b. We have strengthened our approach to local authority intervention through the engagement of experts from the children's services sector to drive and support improvement in failing authorities
- c. We have created a Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to act as a catalyst for developing more effective ways of supporting vulnerable children, harnessing the expertise of the voluntary and community, private and academic sectors to work in partnership with local authorities. The programme has

resulted in new entrants to the sector as well as existing providers expanding their services and in April this year a further £200 million investment to extend the programme was announced

- d. Legislation introduced in November 2013 allows local authorities to delegate their children in care and care leaver functions to third party providers. In September 2014 we extended the legislation to cover the whole range of local authority children's social care functions – but restricted the provider type to not-for-profit organisations. The Innovation Programme has supported several local authorities to use these new powers.

However this is an independent report and, in a number of areas, it goes beyond government policy. For instance, it sets out an option for how regulation might compel all local authorities to outsource all or a proportion of services. We will not be implementing this option. The Government's position was set out in July 2016 in "[Putting Children First – Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care](#)". We want to support improvement by freeing up good local authorities to be innovative with the solutions they put in place, not by compelling them to outsource. We therefore reject those options which would either centralise the delivery of children's social care services, such as the option to establish a National Children's Social Care Commissioning Board, or allow profit-making organisations to deliver them.

We will however continue to take robust enforcement action, as we have in Doncaster and Slough, when we have concerns about performance, and where problems are particularly severe or entrenched. Increasingly, though, we are working with local authorities collaboratively to develop alternative delivery models for children's social care services as we strive for continuous improvement in the help, protection and care of vulnerable children.