



Children England response to the consultation on statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services.

Introduction

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families' voluntary sector. With member organisations working in all parts of the country ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.

Children England welcomes the opportunity to respond to this key document. The Department for Children, Schools and Families' ambition to bring clarity over the roles and responsibilities of both the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services is welcome. The advantages of having a greater understanding as to how these roles are both complimentary and distinct should go some way in helping local voluntary and community organisations on the ground access and engage with officers and elected members in their localities. The consultation offers the children, young people and families' voluntary sector the opportunity to emphasise the need for engagement with the sector at a local strategic decision-making level.

Key comments

- Lead members are elected by the local community, for the local community. It is essential that they engage with, accurately represent and voice the opinions of their local community, not just those within the local authority. Thus, the Guidance should highlight the role that the Lead Member has in leading on behalf of the local community, not just the local authority.
- The guidance emphasises the role that both Lead Member and Director of Children's Services have in leading and developing partnerships at a local level. It is welcome that the guidance explicitly acknowledges the importance of working with the local voluntary and community sector in building and maintaining these partnerships. The next step is for the DCSF to provide additional practical guidance demonstrating how the Lead Member should build and ensure effective long-term strategic partnerships

specifically with the voluntary sector at a political level and how the Director of Children's Services works with the sector on a professional and operational basis.

- The guidance mentions the need for the voluntary sector to play a part as a local stakeholder in developing the local vision for children and young people in the local community. However, the guidance should include a greater emphasis on the need for the Director of Children's Services to ensure that the voluntary sector is well engaged with development of local Children and Young People's Plans.
- The guidance should acknowledge the importance of schools in engaging with the voluntary sector to improve outcomes for children and young people and to work collaboratively in delivering on key cross-cutting agendas. To encourage this joint working with schools, it would be helpful for the guidance to include how the roles of the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services can actively encourage schools to collaborate and engage with other sectors at a practical level.
- Often good intentions of working with the voluntary and community sector are thwarted through complex contracting and commissioning processes, which many voluntary organisations find difficult to navigate. The guidance makes clear the leadership role that Director of Children's Services has in building partnerships across local organisations. The guidance could better support this role by referencing the need for Directors of Children's Services to ensure that local commissioning arrangements and monitoring processes are negotiated in advance of formalising contracts with organisations.

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