

The Queen's Speech: 27 May 2015

Briefing from the National Children's Bureau

On 27 May 2015, the Queen presented the government's proposed legislative programme for the 2015-16 parliamentary session. This briefing sets out legislation affecting children and young people, on which the National Children's Bureau (NCB) will seek to engage Parliament.

Childcare Bill

This Bill will introduce an entitlement to 30 hours per week of free childcare for three and four-year-olds of working parents by September 2017. It will also place a duty on local authorities to publish information about the provision of childcare and related services in their local area.

The Free Entitlement to Early Education and Childcare has been a key policy priority for government since its introduction in 1998. Research studies, including the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE), have shown how high quality early education can significantly improve learning and development outcomes for young children. Good quality early education is particularly effective in narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers¹. High quality pre-school provision has also been shown to have a lasting impact on children's attainment, as demonstrated by improved test results at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (GCSE).

However, more than one in four children aged two (28%) are attending settings that have not been judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.² This means that many children, particularly those living in areas of deprivation, are attending early years and childcare settings that are of poor quality and which are facing challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of well-qualified and experienced staff.³

Given the extensive impact of free early education on children's outcomes, NCB does *in principle* welcome an expansion of free early education and childcare to 30 hours per week for three and four-year old children of working parents. However, in order to ensure that all children and parents are able to access *high quality provision*, NCB recommends that the following measures are taken by the government prior to introducing an entitlement to 30 hours:

¹ Sylva K, Melhuish E, Sammons P, Siraj I, Taggart B (2014) The Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project: [Students' Educational and Developmental Outcomes at Age 16](#) by for (EPPSE 3-16+)

² House of Lords (2015) [Select Committee on Affordable Childcare](#): report of session 2014-15

³ Ibid.

- **Conduct a comprehensive review of free entitlement funding to address the funding challenges faced by both local authorities and early years providers in delivering the current free entitlement to early education and childcare.** These challenges are impacting on the ability of local authorities to meet their childcare sufficiency duty, and are leading to a shortage of high quality places for disadvantaged two year olds and children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Develop a strategy for the early years workforce to improve training and qualifications and increase capacity through recruitment and retention.** Evidence has shown that a well-qualified, confident, and experienced early years workforce is the key driver of quality in early years services.

Policing and Criminal Justice Bill

This Bill will prohibit children and young people under 18 from being detained in police custody under the Mental Health Act 1983. It will also ensure that 17 year olds are treated as children in all aspects of police practice.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Children’s inquiry into children and the police, coordinated by NCB, heard about the challenges and anxieties facing children and young people when placed in police custody, which are most acute for those experiencing mental health needs. We therefore welcome government proposals to be set out in the Policing and Criminal Justice Bill preventing children and young people under the age of 18 from being detained in police custody under the Mental Health Act 1983, as it is clearly evident that police cells are not an appropriate place of safety for children and young people.

However, any measures to restrict the use of police custody must be implemented carefully to ensure that age-appropriate alternative places of safety are available, near to children's homes and families. We recommend that a clear plan of action be put in place to improve immediate access to acute Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and in-patient facilities, as set out in the Department of Health’s Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Well-being Taskforce report.⁴ Otherwise, children and young people with acute mental health needs risk being left without any immediate care or protection once legislation is amended, if in-patient beds are not readily available.

Consequently, we welcome the Home Secretary’s commitment to provide £15m to fund health-based places of safety in England; although it remains unclear

⁴ Department of Health (2015) [Future in Mind: Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing](#)

how this will support children and young people who would currently be placed in police custody during acute mental health crisis.

It is also, of course, vital that early intervention is supported so that fewer children and young people experience a mental health crisis. For this to happen it will be important that the report of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce is implemented and that the £1.25bn investment in children's mental health services, announced in the final budget of the coalition government, is protected (see Commitments on Health, below).

NCB will use the passage of the Bill to raise a number of issues arising from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children's inquiry, including:

- **Improving transfer arrangements to local authority accommodation post-charge for children and young people under 18:** Section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 is not being applied correctly by all police forces and local authorities, resulting in some children and young people remaining in custody over-night instead of being transferred to local authority accommodation.
- **Reducing the prosecution of looked after children and young people:** NCB and APPGC will seek an amendment to the National Crime Recording Standards and Home Office Rules to ensure that minor incidents committed by looked after children and young people in residential care are no longer recorded as crimes by police forces.

Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill

This Bill will freeze the main rates of a number of working-age benefits, Tax Credits and Child Benefit, and reduce the level of working cap benefit to £23,000.

NCB is greatly concerned by the government's proposal to freeze working age benefits, Tax Credits and Child Benefit, which will push more families into poverty. New research published by the End Child Poverty coalition, ['Short Changed: The true cost of cuts to children's benefits'](#), shows that over two million children are in families that are cutting back on food or heating their homes as a result of the government's decision not to raise children's benefits in line with the cost of living. Proposed freezes to Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit will affect 7.7 million children across Britain.

As a member of the End Child Poverty coalition, NCB is calling for a 'triple lock' guarantee on child benefits, giving the same protection for children's benefits as is provided for the state pension. Under a 'triple lock' – which would make sure that key children's benefits either rise in line with

prices, earnings or by 2.5%, whichever is the highest – 310,000 fewer children would be living in absolute poverty by 2020 than under the government’s current policy.

Commitments on Health

The Queen set out welcomed aspirations to improve NHS services including seven-day services and improved access to GP and mental health services. Special attention will need to be paid to the needs of children and young people to ensure that these improvements work for them.

NCB’s 2013 report on General Practice for children and young people makes clear how important access to GP services is for young children and how the provision of such services needs to be improved for all children and young people. It highlighted how the voice of children, young people and the parents is not heard in the process for commissioning primary care services and the continued lack of mandatory child health experience for training GPs.⁵

The Children and Young People’s Health Outcomes Forum, appointed by the coalition government, has consistently shown in its reports that such problems are also often found in many other parts of the health service.⁶ Meanwhile health inequalities amongst children persist and mortality rates are higher than most of our European neighbours.⁷ **This is why NCB and other leading charities are calling for a cross-government strategy for improving the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of children and young people.**⁸

The Health Select Committee’s 2014 report on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services highlighted concerns about children’s access to support at all levels of need and the extent to which services are effectively planned locally. The Department of Health’s Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Well-being Taskforce report, published in the last parliament sets out a range of steps that can be taken to improve this situation.⁹ The final budget of the coalition government included an extra £1.25 billion in mental health services for children and young people over this parliament. It is vital that this funding and full implementation of the report’s proposals is confirmed by the new administration.

⁵ NCB (2013) Opening the Door to Better Healthcare: Improving General Practice for Children and Young People http://ncb.org.uk/media/972611/130603_ncb_opening_the_door_gp_finalweb2.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/children-and-young-peoples-health-outcomes-forum>

⁷ NCB and RCPCH (2014) *Why Children Die: Death in infant children and young people in the UK* http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1130496/rcpch_ncb_may_2014_-_why_children_die_part_a.pdf

⁸ Children and Young People’s Health Policy Influencing Group (2015) Statement calling for a child health strategy http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1179874/health_policy_influencing_group_statement.pdf

⁹ Department of Health (2015) *Future in Mind: Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing*

If you would like further information, or to discuss any of these issues further, please contact:

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