



Moira Gibb
Chief Executive
Camden Borough Council
Town Hall
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5 December 2008

Dear Moira

SOCIAL WORK TASKFORCE

Thank you for agreeing to chair the new Social Work Taskforce that we are bringing forward next week as part of the Children's Plan: One Year On package and the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy. This letter sets out the background to the establishment of the Taskforce and what we would like it to achieve.

The job social workers do is critical for the nation. They play an essential role in protecting children and young people from harm and in supporting people of every age. The work they do can be difficult and very demanding, requiring careful professional judgements that can make all the difference to those they serve.

Social workers are committed to their work and to the people they support. Thanks to that commitment, there have been some improvements in recent years in the quality of the services social workers provide.

But advice from the Expert Group on the Children and Young People's Workforce is clear that we now need to go much further. Their view is that significant change is needed to drive further improvements in the quality of professional social work practice and training, the status of the profession as a whole and its ability to attract and retain excellent and well-motivated people.

Action the Government has taken with its partners over the past ten years has resulted in substantial improvements in the quality of professional practice in teaching, as well as in the status of the teaching profession and its ability to recruit excellent graduates. We now need to take similar steps on social work.

The 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy and the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy will set out the need for a long-term programme of reform

to support improvements to children, young people and adult social work. The objectives of the programme will be to:

- reform initial social work training;
- drive improvements in the quality of professional practice;
- attract and retain the brightest and best people to social work;
- strengthen the delivery system which supports and challenges professional social workers.

To inform this long-term programme, we would like the Social Work Taskforce to focus specifically on frontline social work practice and to recommend how in the light of their conclusions improvements should be made in social worker training, recruitment and leadership.

Specifically we want the Taskforce to look at:

- how professional social workers are deploying their time now;
- why they prioritise their time in the way they do;
- what support and supervision they receive and whether it is effective and fit for purpose;
- what actions and behaviours by professional social workers make the most difference to vulnerable children and adults;
- how to ensure there are the right number of social workers on the frontline to secure high quality services and support;
- what changes are needed to drive improvements in front-line practice.

We would like the Taskforce to begin work immediately in the New Year. The first step should be to establish a clear evidence base on these issues. It will be important to engage front-line social workers, their managers and clients as well as academics and training providers closely in this work. The Task Force's conclusions should be published and we would expect this to be done by the summer of next year.

The Taskforce will be established as a joint unit across the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families to take forward work to support improvements in social work in the longer term. The unit will be staffed by professional practitioners and external experts, as well as policy officials.

The work of the Taskforce will need to take account in particular of the findings of the forthcoming report on Safeguarding being led by Lord Laming.

We also recognise that more needs to be done to support Directors of Children's Services to lead an integrated workforce to deliver our important agenda. For that reason, we have also asked the National College of School Leadership to work with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Children's Workforce Development Council to develop and deliver a programme to support and strengthen the leadership of Directors of Children's Services.

We are copying this letter to Andrew Webb, Director of Children's Services, Stockport and Bob Reitemeier, Chief Executive of the Children's Society who have kindly agreed to act as deputy chairs. I am also copying this letter to Maggie Atkinson, who chaired the Expert Group on the Children's Workforce.

Handwritten signature of Ed Balls, consisting of a stylized 'E' followed by 'Balls,'.

ED BALLS MP

Handwritten signature of Alan Johnson, written in a cursive style.

ALAN JOHNSON MP