Graham Stuart MP  
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House of Commons  
London  
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23 May 2014

Thank you for your letter of 7th May. I, along with other non-Executives was grateful for the opportunity to present to the committee. The session closed on a rather scurrine note in relation to Children’s Services, which was regrettable.

With regard to the question on the £86 million underspend in 2012/13, I understand the Permanent Secretary will be writing to you with full details of this issue.

You asked us what is happening in Children’s Services from a Non-Executive point of view. The question was somewhat open-ended but deserves a considered response.

As Non-Executive Board Members (NEBM) we scrutinise the work of the department’s 18 delivery plans. This is primarily done through the Performance Committee which receives progress updates on all areas of the department’s work on a regular basis and is chaired by Non-Executive Board Member Theodore Agnew. Five of the department’s 18 delivery plans are in the Children’s Services area: these are Special Educational Needs, early years and childcare, children in care, adoption, and child protection and social work. The Performance Committee monitors several Key Performance Indicators in relation to each of these 5 areas.

Significant progress has been made. Amongst the most important achievements of the past 3-5 years:

- the percentage of looked after children (LAC) attaining 5+ good GCSEs has grown from 11% (2009) to 15% (2013);
- the percentage point gap between LAC and their peers gaining Level 4 at KS2 has fallen between 2010-2013 from 33 pts to 26 pts in Maths and 29 pts to 23 pts in reading;

- the proportion of children with SEN attaining 5 + 'good' GCSEs has grown as follows:
  - School Action from 21% (2009) to 29% (2013)
  - School Action Plus from 13% to 23%
  - Statemented SEN from 6% to 10%;

- in February this year, 103,000 two year olds were taking up early learning places;

- the number of children adopted each year has increased steadily from 3200 in 2010 to 3980 in 2013. The rising demand for adoption has meant that there is an increasing gap between adopters needed and adopters available but this is expected to start narrowing from 2015;

- the publication of the Munro review of Child Protection which put children’s needs at the heart of the process. Through an increased emphasis on transparency the number of Serious Case Reviews published has increased from 12 in 2011-12 to 72 in 2013-14.

The line of questioning pursued in particular by Alex Cunningham, MP, at the end of the meeting revolved around concern about adequate NEBM coverage of the Children’s Services portfolio. I am confident that the NEBM do provide this coverage, particularly through our work on the Performance Committee which gives effective and regular scrutiny to the work of the department on Children’s Services.

In addition, Clive Cowdery, who did not wish to take up a formal NEBM position, offers a significant contribution in his role as the government’s independent advisor to the (Children’s Social Care) Innovation Programme and Chair of the Innovation Programme’s Advisory Investment Board. Through this he performs many of the roles you would expect from an NEBM in terms of innovation and challenge to the status quo.

PAUL MARSHALL