

This briefing is a fortnightly update on important policy developments relevant to family support and the drug and alcohol sector. It includes comment, data, reports, parliamentary news, policy directions and debate.

POLICY BRIEFING

28 May – 8 June 2012

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Editorial

Much debate currently focuses on how important resilience is for children affected by parental substance use. Many of us in the sector want to better understand the characteristics which define the resilience of children affected by parental substance use, or are trying to instil resilience in children to ensure their safety and promote better outcomes for the future. We know that resilience is important; however, there is still a lot of work to be done to understand how to harness it or indeed how it plays out in practice.

One definition of resilience is *“the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy”*. Many children affected by substance use employ coping strategies and tools to keep themselves safe and to attempt to understand the behaviour of their families. For some, the only outcome is that they are removed from that family and kept safe in alternative care, and quite rightly this is the focus for many professionals involved.

For other families, where perhaps the children are not at risk of immediate harm, children are encouraged to develop skills and strategies to support their growth and development when Mum or Dad use substances. For these children, there is sometimes an expectation that the resilience that has given them the ability to recover readily from the impacts of parental substance use will no longer be needed later in life, and will drop from their toolbox of skills as they move on with their lives. However, at a recent Adfam seminar, many of the delegates expressed a concern that the very factors that kept those children strong in the midst of parental addiction may actually lead to less positive outcomes in later life, for example through detachment. Children who have learned to cope with family relationships characterised by addiction may struggle later in life as they try to form positive adult relationships, and they need to be supported to really understand what recovery and positive family relationships actually mean.

At the seminar, Joy Barlow from [STRADA](#) shared her thoughts on what recovery might mean for children. She suggested that children may struggle to trust the idea of recovery, mutual aid or the new boundaries or roles Mum and Dad may adopt; what if, for example, they see again in recovery figures from their past who they associate with drugs, threatening behaviour or lack of parental availability? It is also during recovery when many of the services for children fall away as the immediate risk is removed. However, we would suggest that it is exactly this moment when children need real support to understand what the changes mean for them and how they might best use the real, positive resilience they developed during their parents' addiction to sustain their recovery and future outcomes.



Joss Smith

Head of Policy and Regional Development

Parliamentary Roundup

Parliament is currently in the Whitsun recess.

Consultations

[Tell Us about Your Experiences of Home Care Services](#) – CQC

This survey from the [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\)](#) is aimed at relatives or carers of someone who has received home care services. The survey is being used to help inspectors of home care services assess individual agencies and as information for the national report that will set out themes around quality and safety of home care services.

The survey is running until the end of **August 2012**.

[Register of Charities: a review of information collected from charities](#) – Charity Commission

This survey is aimed at charities and anyone who uses the online Register of Charities. The survey is asking for views on the information that is collected at the point of registration, and the information that is submitted by charities through the Annual Update and Annual Return. It is also asking if the Charity Commission should collect and publish more or less information from charities; how the information on the Register of Charities is used; how useful the information is; and if updating the information should remain an annual requirement or be made possible at any time during the year.

The survey is running until **24 July 2012**.

[Red Tape Challenge: Running a Voluntary or Community Organisation](#) - Cabinet Office

This consultation seeks views on the unnecessary administrative and bureaucratic barriers which get in the way of setting up and operating an organisation in the voluntary sector. The consultation is very open-ended but centres around a few key questions of what unnecessary regulation respondents have encountered when setting up, running or growing their organisation, or when engaging volunteers; which rules have prevented them from doing what they want to do; and how barriers could be reduced or removed. The webpage also provides a rundown of responses received so far and what has already been done to address concerns.

[Increasing Parental and Community Involvement in Sure Start Children's Centres](#) (pdf) – Department for Education

This paper is aimed at anyone who would like to become more involved in running their local children's centre, including community groups, schools, existing staff, parents and carers. The key questions posed include how it can be made easier for parents and communities to increase their involvement in running Sure Start centres, what support they would need to do so, where the key

differences in opinion are between parents and ‘professionals’ and how to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable families are reflected in any new arrangements.

The consultation is open to comments until **19 July**.

Other open consultations:

Ministry of Justice Punishment and Reform consultations: [effective probation services](#) and [effective community sentences](#). These are open until **22 June 2012**.

NICE: [Social and emotional wellbeing – early years draft guidance](#). This is open to **registered stakeholders** until 18 June.

Reports and announcements

Click on the report titles to access the documents.

Drugs, alcohol & families

[What is the optimal level of population alcohol consumption for chronic disease prevention in England? Modelling the impact of changes in average consumption levels](#) – Nichols *et al*, British Medical Journal

This report estimates the impact of lower average alcohol consumption levels on chronic disease mortality in England. The results suggest that the optimum level of alcohol consumption to minimise chronic disease mortality is 5g of alcohol (approximately half a unit) per day, which is much lower than the current recommended amounts of 3-5 units per day for men and 2-3 units for women. Therefore, the report suggests that the Government must significantly reduce the recommended amount to minimise the chronic disease burden associated with alcohol consumption in England.

[Evaluation of the Street Talk Programme: Final Report](#) (pdf) – Addaction/Mentor

This report constitutes the final assessment and evaluation of the [Street Talk project](#), which set out to identify and engage young people who could be at risk of problematic substance abuse and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Overall, the evaluation found that the project was productive in supporting young people to increase their knowledge and confidence about finding support and making informed decisions. In terms of families, 43% of the people eligible for intervention from Street Talk said their family and friends were concerned about their substance use, and there was a marked increase in the reported importance and influence of family and community networks after involvement with the project. The report also notes some areas of wider policy relevance for the results of Street Talk, including the effectiveness of prevention over punishment and intervening with ‘troubled families’ to tackle intergenerational issues.

[Measuring child poverty: New league tables of child poverty in the world’s rich countries](#) (pdf) – UNICEF

This report sets out the latest international data to offer the best currently available picture of child poverty and deprivation across the world’s wealthiest nations. The report argues that nations must protect children from poverty for economic reasons as child poverty reduces skills and productivity, lowers levels of health and educational achievement, increases the likelihood of unemployment and welfare dependence, raises judicial costs and diminishes social cohesion. But more importantly, nations must protect children out of principle. The report states that the child poverty rate in the UK

is 12.1%, which puts the UK in the middle of pack of the wealthiest nations.

[Out of trouble: Families with complex problems](#) (pdf) – New Philanthropy Capital

This report is intended as a guide for private funders on troubled families. It discusses how troubled families face problems such as anti-social behavior (ASB), involvement in crime, mental and physical ill-health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, isolation and relationship breakdown. It goes on to discuss what is being done by the Government to help these troubled families and the potential that private funders have to make a difference: the three priorities it identifies are providing support in the earliest years; funding intensive, long-term support for the most challenging families; and funding additional mental health support for parents.

Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services: [Cumbria City Council](#) and [London Borough of Sutton](#) (pdf) – CQC/Ofsted

These two inspections graded their respective local areas as ‘inadequate’ for the overall effectiveness of their safeguarding services. Judgements are based on factors such as quality of provision, capacity for improvement, management and leadership, partnership working, political prioritisation and outcomes for looked after children, care leavers and young people in general. Key criticisms across the two reports include ineffective risk assessments, insufficient oversight from management and Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards, and the failure to use children’s voices in service improvement.

Though the overall grade in the two areas is inadequate, there are positive notes made relating to smaller parts of the whole local response, for example multi-agency responses to cases involving substance use or domestic violence and the services provided by the voluntary sector.

[Statistics on Alcohol: England, 2012](#) (pdf) – NHS Information Centre

This statistical report is to be used as a reference point for health issues relating to alcohol use and misuse. It covers topics such as the drinking habits of adults and school children, drinking-related health and mortality, the affordability of alcohol, alcohol-related hospital admissions and alcohol-related costs. It also contains up to date information on the latest Government policies and information on prescription drugs used for the treatment of alcohol dependencies.

[Internet influences on Adolescent Attitudes to Alcohol](#) (pdf) – Institute for Alcohol Studies

This report looks at three different, related studies with the objectives of exploring the ways in which young people respond to alcohol references in internet media; examining the prevalence and nature of alcohol content in internet use; and researching the association between alcohol references, alcohol consumption and implicit attitudes towards drinking. The studies' findings included that drunkenness was generally seen as a bad thing, but there was also a clear association between drinking and having a good time; people often claimed that alcohol content on the internet would influence other people, but not them; and that alcohol was often presented 'passively' and not the explicit focus of content, for example Facebook photos showing people having fun at parties with alcohol in the background.

[Strengthening Powers of Possession for Anti-Social Behaviour: Summary of responses to consultation and next steps](#) (pdf) – Department for Communities and Local Government

This is a summary of a consultation that sought views on a new mandatory power of possession being proposed that would enable landlords to take swifter action to evict their most anti-social tenants, including those involved in the August 2011 riots. The consultation received some very strong responses which were roughly equally divided between supporting the new power and opposing it: whilst some supported the principle that eviction was a suitable punishment for rioting and looting offences and sends a clear message, others argued that there is no legal connection between tenancy and the criminal act, it would constitute a 'double punishment' when the criminal justice system should suffice, and that repossession can therefore not be justified.

[Responding to domestic abuse: Guidance for general practices](#) (pdf) – Royal College of General Practitioners

This guide has been produced by the [Royal College of General Practitioners \(RCGP\)](#) along with [Identification & Referral to Improve Safety \(IRIS\)](#), and [Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse \(CAADA\)](#), and provides information on how GPs can respond effectively to patients experiencing domestic abuse. It advises management to appoint a senior person to clarify the practice's response; details how to establish a domestic abuse care pathway, for example by completing proper documentation and risk assessment; and explores training requirements and practical implementation. It concludes with a flowchart of how to enquire about, process and take action when presented with a possible domestic abuse case and an example of a local service directory.

[The Local Authority Children's Social Care Services Workforce report, December 2011, England](#) (pdf) – Department for Education

This report provides a breakdown of the workforce in children's social care departments, based on

results from 71 local authorities. Findings include that 82% of staff are female; 19% were aged 55 or over and therefore likely to retire in the next decade; direct care roles accounted for 40% of positions, compared with 26% in 'professional' roles; the turnover rate for all workers was 11% (i.e. 1 in 9 left their post during the year); and the vacancy rate for children's local authority workers was 7.4%. Turnover and vacancy rates can be seen as important to the quality of social work as individual practitioners try to build productive, trusting relationships with children and families, and compare unfavourably with other public service professions such as teachers (0.4% vacancy rate in 2010) and nurses (0.5%).

[Letter to Local Authorities on kinship care strategies](#) (pdf) – Tim Loughton MP

Based on research by the Family Rights Group, which found that [45% of local authorities had not yet published a family and friends care policy](#) 5 months beyond the deadline required by the Government's own [statutory guidance](#), the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Children and Families has written to local authorities to express his 'disappointment' in those lagging behind. Mr. Loughton reaffirms the Government's commitment to kinship carers and stresses the importance of clear policies for working with them in order to reduce the possibilities of uncertainty or disagreement, for example over whether a child in the care of their grandparents is officially 'looked after' or not.

[Position paper: Addressing fetal alcohol spectrum disorder](#) – National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (Australia)

This paper calls on the Australian Government and health services to implement several recommendations to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and support families suffering with it. The recommendations are split into several sections, including social marketing measures to discourage harmful drinking and raise awareness; new national policy, practice and clinical guidelines; workforce development and training measures, for example screening pregnant women for alcohol use during their first antenatal visit with health professionals; and recognising FASD as a disability.

Your organisation

[Providing drug and alcohol recovery through payment by results: Pilot sites presentations](#)

– Department of Health

This is a link to the [Department of Health's](#) website that has links to the PowerPoints used by seven pilot sites which introduced their models of providing drug and alcohol recovery through Payment by Results (PbR). The slides show an overview of the different models in use, including the funding, tariff and assessment frameworks and payment structures. Enfield, for example, illustrated how they split achievement targets based on the type of drug used; Stockport introduced a 70-30 split between upfront payment to services and rewards for outcomes; and Wigan showed how they

planned to address 'gaming' in the system, for example by using rolling 12-month assessment of results rather than at a given point.

[When the going gets tough: Charities' experiences of public service commissioning](#) (pdf) – NPC

This report provides insight into how changes in Government funding are affecting the voluntary sector, and how charities are responding. Of the charities surveyed, 90% believe there is more risk in the current commissioning environment, which appears to be driven by three elements: new funding mechanisms, including payment by results; delivery of services in partnership and the increasingly complex delivery arrangements that this brings; and overall cuts to charity sector income. The report goes on to detail how different groups should respond to these changes: charities, for example, should develop partnership arrangements prior to bidding for contracts; commissioners should recognise that opening up bids to charities is unlikely to result in a level playing field; and private funders can help smooth the transition by helping charities with core costs.

Featured issue

[The Munro Review of Child Protection Progress report: Moving towards a child centred system](#) (pdf) – Professor Eileen Munro

In May 2011, Professor Eileen Munro presented her final report on child protection in England and this year, she has made an updated progress report on the Government's response to her ideas. Munro hoped her recommendations would take the system from being an "over-bureaucratized" one overly concerned with compliance, to one that truly focuses on children's needs. This shift would require those who work in child protection to be given more scope to exercise professional judgment in deciding how to best help children, young people and families.

Munro said that in the past, the child protection system had been shaped by four driving forces:

- The importance of the safety and welfare of children and young people
- The belief that the complexity and uncertainty of child protection can be eradicated
- In high profile inquiries into the death of a child, a readiness to focus on professional error without looking deeply into its underlying causes
- The importance given to performance indicators and targets which only provide part of the picture and, as a result, have skewed the attention to the process over the quality and effectiveness of the help.

She said those forces created a defensive system that put too much emphasis on procedures, so the report recommended a refocusing on valuing and developing professional expertise, sharing responsibility for the provision of early help, supporting effective social work policies, clarifying accountabilities and creating a learning system. The report then set out 15 recommendations for the Government to improve long-term child protection, which were geared towards creating a better balance between essential rules, principles, and professional expertise: these included updating the statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children*; higher education institutions should work together to ensure social work practice placements are of high quality; and Local Authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager still actively involved in frontline practice.

In her progress report, Munro states that the progress is moving in the right direction but it needs to move faster. There are promising signs that some of the reforms are encouraging new ways of thinking and working and therefore improving the services for the children. There are, however, a number of reforms that still need to be implemented. She also said there needs to be a fundamental change in expectations of how well professionals can protect children and young people: too often, they have been unrealistic, demanding that professionals 'ensure' children's safety, strengthening a belief that if something bad happens 'some professional must be to blame'. Having realistic expectations of professionals will make it easier for them to have the confidence they need to use judgement instead of applying rules that do not match a specific child's needs, and the humility to reflect on weaknesses in their practice so that they can learn.