

Majority of MPs favourable towards independently provided children's services if it best meets the needs of the child

A poll published today has revealed the majority of MPs (70 per cent) agree children should be placed with an independent provider rather than the local authority if the placement best suits the needs of the child.

The polling, commissioned by the Children's Services Development Group (CSDG) and conducted by the research agency ComRes, surveyed 150 MPs from different parties across the UK on pressures on local authority services and the independent care sector.

The polling found three quarters of MPs (73 per cent) agree all providers of children's services (independent and local authority) should be measured against performance indicators for cost, quality and outcomes. It also found the same proportion agree that commissioners should communicate to providers, including the independent sector, what services they require to meet gaps in demand.

The polling also found children's social care is the second highest concern for MPs when asked about the ability of local authorities to continue to provide services. After social care for elderly people, MPs are most concerned about local authorities' ability to provide children's services given cuts to local government funding (45 per cent say they are concerned).

CSDG Chairperson Andrew Isaac said: *"CSDG has long argued there should be a level playing field across the public, voluntary and independent sector in children's services to the benefit of young people. This should be done by ensuring commissioning is based on true performance indicators for cost, quality and outcomes.*

"This kind of national outcomes framework will help ensure children are in the right placement first time which will help increase placement stability and promote better outcomes for looked after children. It will also help to drive up standards through more competition.

"Today's polling reveals there is support for such a system from the majority of MPs and CSDG is calling on the government to enact legislation to make this reality.

"The lack of separation of local government commissioner and provider functions acts as a barrier to this level playing field in children's services. This is further exacerbated by the fact many local authorities are unaware of the true cost of their own in-house services.

"CSDG therefore strongly welcomes the commitment by the government in last month's budget to consult on new rules requiring local authorities to be transparent about the cost of the in-house services they provide, and whether there could be savings from using competitive external providers. CSDG will be responding to the consultation welcoming this change.

"CSDG is also calling for a more transparent, sustained dialogue between commissioners and providers to help facilitate joint working within the system and map out demand to ensure sufficient supply of places to vulnerable children. This view is shared by three quarters of MPs."

CSDG is calling for:

1. The introduction of a national outcomes framework to benchmark all providers of children's services and facilitate better commissioning;

2. Commissioning of children's services on a level playing field across the public, voluntary and independent sector based on true cost-value comparisons;
3. The separation of local commissioner and provider functions;
4. Central government assistance for local authorities to map demand and existing capacity for specialist services within the system;
5. Support for a transparent, sustained dialogue between commissioners and providers to help facilitate joint working within the system.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The polling was conducted between 13th January and 23rd February 2016 using a combination of paper and online surveys. The polling surveyed 150 MPs (56 Conservative, 68 Labour, 18 SNP and 8 other). Data were weighted by party and region to be representative of the House of Commons. Full data tables are available online at www.comres.co.uk.
2. The key aims of the research were to assess MPs' opinions of service priorities for local authorities and understand MPs' favourability towards the independent care sector.
3. For more information, please contact Jessica March at jessicamarch@westminsteradvisers.co.uk or on 0203 102 3626.
4. [CSDG](#) is an alliance of independent providers of care and specialist education services for children and young people with complex needs. Members include Acorn Care & Education, Foster Care Associates, National Fostering Agency, Options Group, SENAD Group and Witherslack Group.
5. To see CSDG's most recent report, which calls for the introduction of a national outcomes framework, *Collaborating for better outcomes: final report form the Children's Services Taskforce*, please use this link on CSDG's [website](#). This report was published jointly with the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).
6. Local authorities in England are responsible for children's social care services. These services are provided via a range of public, private and voluntary providers.
7. The polling found:
 - i. *A majority of MPs agree that providers should be measured against outcomes and value for money and that the independent sector should be used if it best meets the needs of the child.*
 - Three quarters of MPs (73 per cent) agree that all providers of children's services (including independent and local authority) should be measured against performance indicators for cost, quality and outcomes.
 - Seven in ten MPs (70 per cent) agree that, if the placement best suits the needs of the child, children should be placed with an independent provider rather than the local authority.
 - Three in five MPs (59 per cent) agree councils should draw on funding available in the independent sector for investment to improve how services are delivered.
 - Three quarters of MPs (73 per cent) agree that commissioners should communicate to providers (including the independent sector) what services they require to meet gaps in demand.

- ii. *Children's social care is the second highest concern of MPs when asked about the ability of local authorities to continue to provide services.*
 - After social care for older people, MPs are most concerned about local authorities' ability to provide children's services given cuts to local government funding (45 per cent say they are concerned).
 - The ability of local authorities to provide special educational needs support in school is the joint third highest concern of MPs – 38 per cent are concerned.

- iii. *A significant proportion of MPs are unaware of key facts about looked after children and children with special educational needs.*
 - Almost half of MPs (45 per cent) say that the figure of two thirds of looked after children having a special educational need is higher than they expected.
 - 38 per cent said the fact 75 per cent of looked after children were in foster care in 2015 is higher than they expected.
 - 42 per cent found the gap in the number of children with SEN progressing to higher education compared to those without SEN larger than expected.
 - 24 per cent of MPs think the figure of two in five (39 per cent) of children aged 19-21 who were previously looked after are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is higher than expected.