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Dear Ms Davies,

DfES/Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People

The London Child Poverty Commission was launched in February 2006. An independent body, the Commission was established by the Mayor of London and the Association of London Government to monitor progress in London against the Government's target to halve the number of children in poverty by 2010. The Commission is at an early stage in formulating its policy and delivery solutions so will not be making a full submission to the Review. However, the Commission would like to highlight a number of key issues and draw the Government's attention to some examples of good practice (please see Appendix 1 for details of case studies). The Commission would also welcome a future dialogue with the Government on tackling both the causes and impact of child poverty in the capital.

In London for the three year period 2002-2005, two out of five, or 39 per cent, of children were living in poverty. Compared to other regions, Greater London had the highest rates of children living in poverty in 2004/05 after housing costs: 41 per cent. London children with very high risk of living in poverty include those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups (69 per cent), those from black ethnic groups (51 per cent), and those living in lone parent families (60 per cent). Children in families where nobody is working are the most likely to be in poverty – 79 per cent of children in workless lone parent families and 88 per cent of those living in workless couple families live in poverty¹. Rates of poverty are not only high in the capital, they are also entrenched with no consistent improvement in poverty rates since 2000. The task ahead is challenging but given time and the political will, the Commission is hopeful that real and lasting practical policy solutions can be delivered in London. The Commission is particularly interested in the high costs of services including childcare and housing, as well as issues around overcrowding, mental health, access to the labour market and incapacity benefits.

Prevention and early intervention initiatives for children and their families are a priority practice area for frontline provision. London's children's voluntary sector agencies in particular have a successful track record in identifying families who have been considered 'hard to reach' and then maintaining positive relationships with them. One area of key concern is around housing and homelessness. In March 2006, Barnardo's launched '[Do My Kids Have to Live Like This Forever?](#)', a report which detailed how children in London families living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation struggle to achieve any of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. The report makes a number of recommendations at both a local and national level including the need for seamless and accessible support for children and their parents alongside improved and more stable housing.

¹ London Child Poverty Commission, *Monitoring Child Poverty in London* (September 2006)

Poverty can deny children and young people the opportunity to participate in many of the activities offered by living in London and can result in them becoming socially excluded and disaffected. For example, high levels of exclusion and low levels of participation in formal education and other activities (culture, sport, volunteering) in the earlier teenage years can contribute to young people becoming 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training) aged 16-18. In March 2006 there were nearly 14,700 young people aged 16 to 18 in London who were NEET. Indications are that the rates have been decreasing in London faster than in England although the percentage remains higher than in England as a whole.

Pupil mobility and its impact on children's outcomes is a key issue for London, with 20 out of 33 boroughs identified by the Office of National Statistics as having high mobility in terms of 'frequent movers', ie children and young people who move home frequently, alone or with their families, within and between boroughs. Frequent moving particularly affects homeless families, asylum seekers and refugees, gypsy and traveller children, young runaways and families experiencing domestic violence. Because frequent movers can find it difficult to access the services they need, for those already socially excluded, moving frequently can worsen the effects of their exclusion. Mobility can also act as a barrier to work or training, make it more difficult to access key services, disrupt education and affect physical and mental health.

A quarter of all children living in poverty have a disabled parent and research suggests that over half of all families with disabled children live in or at the margins of poverty. Despite acknowledged links between poverty and disability, the precise number of children affected by disability who live in poverty in London is not known. Although a number of small scale, qualitative studies suggest that families living in London who are affected by disability span a range of 'at risk' groups, including large families², statistics do not show how many disabled children live in larger families, have a disabled parent, come from black and minority ethnic groups or live in lone parent households. For services to be sensitive to family needs, statistics about families with disabled children living in London need to be much more robust. More developed data collection and analysis is needed on the composition, location and needs of households affected by disability.

The Commission's current 'call for evidence' for good practice examples of projects and initiatives that tackle both the impact and causes of child poverty in London will close on the 29 September. Already the Commission has received some innovative and exciting submissions from across the private, voluntary and statutory sector and is keen to share these with the Government at a future date.

On behalf of the Commission, I look forward to engaging with the Government in the future and helping to develop policy and practical solutions for reducing child poverty in the capital and improving outcomes for every London child.

Appendix 1 – examples of relevant case studies in London.

² See for example, G.Preston, *At Greatest Risk: the children most likely to be poor* (CPAG, 2005)

Appendix 1

Prevention

The ASKK (Advancing Services for Kingston Kids) Plus initiative of the Royal Borough of Kingston is an extension of the ASKK programme, an approach to developing information sharing and assessment (ISA) within the Borough and the co-ordination of support for vulnerable children and families. On a pilot basis (November 2005 – June 2006), vulnerable children identified across the six school clusters in Kingston were prioritised for additional help and support (including of a Lead Worker) via ASKK Plus. Independent evaluation highlights the potential advantages for children in this approach, including avoiding statutory involvement, being aware of vulnerable children, who the Borough otherwise may not know about, and financial savings. There are clear indications that this preventative approach is having a good impact on reducing risk and improving a range of outcomes for individual children. The Borough believes that already they have avoided the need for more intense support in a number of cases, and that further investment would enable them to sustain and further expand the service beyond ASKK Plus Service's support to 89 children over the last year, to an aim of having supported over 400 by the end of 2007³.

The From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation (FBMF) was founded in 1996 to address growing concerns within Southwark communities about the number of young black boys being excluded from school and becoming involved with gangs, drugs and violence. The project aims to break the cycle of disaffection and disruptive behaviour by tackling the self-development issues which underlie this. The core FBMF programme is the 12 week 'day support programme' attended by boys aged 11-19. The FBMF works in close partnership with a range of local and regional agencies including schools, the police and the Damilola Taylor Trust and Outward Bound.

The Family Welfare Association (FWA) provides support to families that are headed by a parent who has severe and enduring mental health problems through the Building Bridges programme in Greenwich, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets. The programme works with the family as a whole as well as with individual family members to support adults in their role as parents and to promote their child's social and emotional development. By working in this way the service bridges the gap between adult mental health services, which often overlook the parenting responsibilities of their clients, and children's services, which focus almost exclusively on the well-being of the child. The FWA's Newpin services in Greenwich, Southwark and Wandsworth works with parents and children under five where there is a significant difficulty in the parent/child relationship and/or identified mental health problem. Newpin provides an intensive, evidence-based model and can provide a successful intervention for some of the most troubled families that come into contact with statutory services.

At the regional level of influencing decision making, the Mayor and GOL, with other partners such as the ALG, have established a Young Londoners Network, which includes a peer outreach capability and together with a dedicated Young London website forms the foundation of a regional infrastructure for London government bodies to consult with young Londoners on such issues as safety or bullying. See www.london.gov.uk/young-london. The Network was the result of wide consultations that were held with children and young people and with children's consultation projects, and links local and issue-based children and young people's networks and groups in London, and acts in liaison with London Borough initiatives on school and youth councils.

³ Correspondence with Director of Learning and Children's Services, Royal Borough of Kingston; Social Information Systems Ltd., ASKK PLUS Advancing Services for Kingston Kids. Pilot Phase – Final Report, November 2005 - June 2006. Unpublished.

The Breaking Barriers Changing Lives Project is recruiting 90 beneficiaries from black and minority ethnic communities to become volunteer Reading helpers. The project will provide eight hours of training to these beneficiaries prior to them going into schools twice a week to read with children. These activities will improve self-confidence and broaden beneficiary skills, thus providing a progression path towards employment or further qualifications.

Mobility

Following the publication of a report by the DfES and GOL commissioned research by PriceWaterHouseCoopers – the ‘London Child Mobility Project’ - a Londonwide ‘Child Mobility Steering Group’ has been established by GOL to oversee a detailed study of the current patterns of mobility in each Borough and pan-London. This should help to develop a clearer picture of what the trends will look like in the next five years to support better planning. The report states that the GLA’s Data Management and Analysis Group may be well positioned, with appropriate resourcing, to carry out this role. Government resourcing in this area will enable progress to be made on this major, cross-cutting issue and support multi-agency, preventative measures to tackle the adverse effects of children’s frequent moving.

The Association of London Directors of Children’s Services (ALDCS) has convened a sub group to work on the mobility issues identified in the project’s report and is considering a ‘mobility checklist’ based on some of the findings of the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report. The checklist is intended to assist Directors of Children’s Services to map the impact of mobility on their Authorities’ services and assess the ability of their services to meet the needs of mobile children and families.

NEET

In relation to young people NEET (not in employment, education or training), a Mayor’s Office meeting with DfES and HMT officials from the Review team identified that the Government is keen to explore approaches to prevention of young people NEET. The GLA, in conjunction with agencies including the London Development Agency, London Connexions Partnerships, ALG, London Central LSC and GOL, is commissioning research during early autumn 2006 to bring together best/emerging practice and evaluation in London on “what works” in preventing NEET status, or addressing young people’s needs effectively when they have become NEET. The research findings will be sent to the Review team, and used to inform the work of the above agencies, multi-agency Londonwide strategic groups, the Life Chances work stream of the London Child Poverty Commission and the interface of young people/young adults within the work of the Mayor’s new ‘London Skills and Employment Board’.

Family Welfare Association (FWA) Hackney Young Families Project works with young mums mainly aged 13 – 18, younger on occasions. It seeks to broker conversations between pregnant woman and parents and with the father. The service also provides counselling on options such as termination, keeping the child and adoption. Support such as help with Housing Benefits is also offered if the young woman has been evicted from the parents’ home. The service also provides support on everything related to the care of the child once it is born from how to change a nappy, bath a child to what weaning means and eating healthily. Most young women are placed in hostels and are often very frightened. The project also tries to ensure that the young woman’s education is continued.

Disability

The London Regional Partnership has submitted a proposal to DfES for a Regional Centre of Expertise to create a web-based directory of (initially voluntary sector) services in London for children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and their families. This will expand to include other sectors and low-incidence needs groups.

This will provide supply side intelligence related to building local capacity, changing cultures and reducing demand for out-borough and residential placements.

Barnardo's Hamara Family Project, in addition to working directly with children and families, offers parenting programmes, courses for professionals, and joint training for parents and professionals, on working with and supporting the growing numbers of children presenting with the so called 'hidden disabilities' such as ASD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). These young people present different challenges, and will require high levels of on going support and understanding. Early identification and intervention is essential. The consequences of this early support not being available impacts negatively on both the child and their families' lives. Hamara's aim is to minimise the risk of this happening.

Portage is an education home visiting service for very young disabled children and their families. The service in Barking and Dagenham works with children who are delayed in two or more areas of development and aims to visit the families following identification or diagnosis. Barking and Dagenham Portage Service has been a Pathfinder for Early Support since 2004. During 2005 the service visited a total of 54 children and families with an additional three children visited by a community nursery nurse with Portage support. A speech and language therapist visits jointly with the Portage home visitor every two to three months and sets a programme for the family to work on. She then supports the child as they move into pre-school or school nursery. Joint visits are also made regularly with other professionals working with the child and family. The service has a twice weekly parent group. One group is held in a local children's centre and the other at the service base. As part of the Early Support programme, Portage has established itself as a central resource for professionals working with families who have very young disabled children. Strong working links with the children centres in the borough are in existence.