

Chairperson's Welcome.

I'm delighted to be able to welcome you to the first Independent Children's Homes Association newsletter.

As our association has grown in size and influence it has become ever more important to inform members of the wide range of activities going on within ICHA, and this newsletter is just one of the tools that we'd like to use to communicate with existing and potential members, and with anyone interested in the sector. The range of activities that ICHA is now involved in is vast. As this newsletter shows, the list of bodies we meet with includes Government Ministers, Parliamentary Groups, Special Advisors, CWDC, Options for Excellence, CSCI, Ofsted, CSIW, NCERCC, AGMA, WM Consortium, NASS, the Welsh Assembly and CRB to name but a few. That we have managed to engage in such a wide range of activities is testament to the voluntary effort provided by members, to the secretariat and to our political guru. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank everyone who commits time to ICHA matters.

The role of a strong, representative, trade association will be of increasing importance this autumn, as we expect publication of a Green Paper on Looked After Children in October. The focus of government on social exclusion is especially topical at the moment, and the perceived failure of looked after children to achieve the same education outcomes and GCSE results as their peer group has prompted the government to focus on our sector as never before.

We will therefore be looking to further strengthen ICHA as we move forward and engage with the government's agenda. The committee will be looking at creative

PWC report highlights concerns of the independent children's homes sector.

PWC have produced a report for the DFES into the current state of the Children's Homes and Fostering sectors (31 August 2006) that should be an important influence on the Green Paper due this autumn.

In a comprehensive and powerful report PWC draw some conclusions that accord with what ICHA members have been recognising for the last 18 months. Specifically: PWC have clearly found that accessing and interpreting information in the sector can be difficult. This is particularly so in the most critical area, measurement of meaningful outcomes. I'm delighted that I know of a number of projects involving ICHA members where groundbreaking work is going on to evidence meaningful outcomes. The marketplace is often acting ineffectively and inefficiently due to a combination of factors including: oversupply of services, lack of a level playing field, lack of openness and trust between public and private sector, and underdeveloped commissioning practice, but the report believes there is some evidence that when these barriers are overcome a more effective out-turn is gained.

On a positive note, these two broad conclusions offer the whole sector some clear opportunities to invest in fresh approaches that can produce measurable

options to build on the resources of ICHA, including investment in recruitment of an ICHA officer and partnership working with other organisations.

My final thank you is to Andrew Rome

improvements in outcomes for children, at the same time via a more economically efficient system.


However we have some words of concern and caution:

ICHA members are currently very concerned that the current operation of the sector could lead to good quality children's homes providers going to the wall (PWC also report this), primarily as a result of poor commissioning practice. Given the time it takes to build the expertise required to provide good quality children's homes services this is a serious threat to the ability of the sector to continue to invest to improve outcomes.

There are several areas that should now be researched and examined more extensively and deeply than was possible in this broad report. ICHA represents a majority of the independent sector and looks forward to working more closely with those developments.

The full report can be accessed online via <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RW74.pdf>

Andrew Rome

 PWC have agreed to speak at the ICHA conference this month.

who has collated and edited this first edition. We hope you find it interesting and informative and we would welcome suggestions for the next issue.

Vivien Snape, Chairperson.

ICHA 2006/7 Priorities Progress report.

At an ICHA Committee meeting in June this year three core issues were identified. The below summarises progress.

Core Issue	Progress
Commissioning targets which are not meeting the needs of our Looked after Children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very active political programme has engaged with Minister, special advisor and informed House of Lords debate. • Work continues with follow up meetings in the autumn (see Political Report) • Representations made to AGMA. • Representations made to NCERCC. • PWC report into sector published end August. • Green Paper due in October.
Problems around Planning consent, Registration and Inspection in respect of new children's homes/change of use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICHA invited to Ofsted stakeholder consultation Sept 2006. • PWC report highlights slow-down of registrations and proposes "overarching registrations" to address the issue. • Consultation on changes to NMS is current. • CSCI and Ofsted combine in April 2007.
Recruitment and Retention – Raising standards through effective staff recruitment, retention and continuous professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICHA has a seat on the Children's Workforce Development Council. • ICHA engages with Skills for Care, accessing potential national funding. • Working with NCERCC programme.

News on the Children's National Residential Contract.

At the last full ICHA meeting in July concern was expressed by members present that providers were generally unaware of this initiative.

We are therefore delighted that Tracy Bowers, CSF Commissioning Officer – Regional Strategic Commissioning Team, who is coordinating work in the critical area of service specification, has invited ICHA to contribute to that work.

Tracy has also agreed to attend the ICHA conference and give members a first hand update of the background to the work and to how they see the process moving forward.

We should also thank Jonathan Stanley of NCERCC for his role in helping ICHA gain input to this work.

It is my belief that we should enter this process wholeheartedly with a view to helping to shape a balanced contract that all providers and purchasers can sign up to, a contract that puts outcomes for looked after children at the core of its purpose. We therefore welcome this opportunity to contribute to the development of the contract and believe that this offers the best route to helping it gain widespread acceptance.



Recent press headlines and editor's comments.

1

16th August 2006

Children Now magazine

Home inspection plans provoke row

Children Now reported initial reactions to DFES consultation on proposals to change frequency of inspection in some children's homes (see "Consultations" section of this newsletter). ICHA position stated as:

"We are concerned about a reduction in the frequency of inspections because our members value the input of inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspection. That said, our initial view is that we support the spirit of the consultation, which is trying to focus inspection where it is most needed."

2

Week commencing 16th August 2006

Community Care

Changes to inspection regime prompt fears of slipping standards at leading performers.

ICHA positions given here were:

At the other end of the scale, poor-performing children's homes could be inspected at least three times a year. Andrew Rome, spokesperson for the Independent Children's Homes Association, says his organisation supports this proposal and there may be cases where even more frequent inspection is needed. The government has also proposed that providers should carry out an annual quality assurance assessment.

ICHA's position is that most good providers should be monitoring their organisations as a matter of course on outcomes and how well they are achieving the minimum standards.

3

Week commencing 24th August 2006

Barnardo's

Barnardo's received national radio and press coverage for their call for major reforms to education services for looked after children. This came from surveys which showed 75% of Barnardo's children left school without any qualifications.

Access the full report "Failed by the System" on www.Barnardo's.org.uk.

4

28th August 2006

The Independent

Children in care to be given places in boarding schools. –

By Richard Garner, Education Editor

"Children in care will be given places in the country's top private boarding schools under a radical plan to improve exam performance.

The move is disclosed today by Andrew Adonis, the Schools minister, in an article for *The Independent*, and will be announced in a government Green Paper in the autumn."

This has been mooted before, but most ICHA members would probably agree that many of the most vulnerable looked after children who they deal with could not be safely placed in such environments. However, there could be fostered children where this suggestion could be of interest.

5

Week commencing 14th August 2006

Yorkshire Post

"The shame of a city council Wakefield's dereliction of responsibility"

The highly critical report for Roger Morgan, the Children's Rights Director, into Wakefield Council's investigation of complaints about mismanagement of children's homes is more than embarrassing for the authority...

This story had its roots in whistle-blowing by six members of staff who reported extremely poor standards of care in a Wakefield children's home. Whilst there was a lot of press coverage about subsequent investigations and tension between the press and the council, it is ultimately encouraging that residential staff in any children's home have access to systems that can bring poor practice out into the open. I'm sure that ICHA members would support the view that children's homes should always operate in a way where complaints and concerns can be raised by children and by staff without fear of reprisal.

6

7-13th September.

Community Care

"Councils' dual role distorts market and acts against need of children".

A spokesperson for the Independent Children's Homes Association, said "We are concerned that the current operation of the sector could cause good children's homes providers to go to the wall."



NCERCC News.

NCERCC is the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care. Operating within the National Children's Bureau, NCERCC aims to become a principal reference and coordinating point for all matters relating to residential child care in England. It is primarily concerned to develop and share good, evidence based practice.

ICHA is a member of the NCERCC programme board which steers the development of, prioritisation and delivery of a work programme that operates in 5 key areas:

- Improving compliance with National Minimum Standards
 - Supporting providers consistently to deliver the five outcomes
 - Children's Participation
 - Workforce Development
 - Improving Placement Planning, Commissioning and Cost Effectiveness.
- As part of the sharing process NCERCC produces a regular "NCERCC news" which can be accessed via the NCB website. ICHA would encourage members to review NCERCC news regularly as it contains a wealth of useful, often very operationally based, material. For example, a brief review of the last two issues (August and September) yields a wide range of topics including:

- International Attachment Network
- Interior Design and Residential Child Care
- "Starter for Ten" – Children's Rights Director has compiled a list of ten things care leavers are entitled to by law
- Websites for young people on sex and relationships
- Comprehensive report on the Associate Parliamentary Group for Children and Young People in and leaving care (14th June 2006)
- Lists of resources for working with children
- Forthcoming conferences/training
- What the government is producing – eg CSCI's "Safe and Sound" report which criticised the adequacy of some vetting and recruitment processes.

It is not the intention of this ICHA newsletter to replicate the NCERCC effort, but we recommend NCERCC News to members.

Editor note: Finally, I'd recommend downloading a copy of "What works in residential child care" from NCERCC.



Research.

SCIE are working with Queen's University Belfast, University of Bristol and NCB/NCERCC to carry out research under the following title: "Working with Challenging or

Disruptive Situations in Residential Child Care: Sharing Good Practice" ICHA members are encouraged to contact the ICHA office to participate in this work.

Political report.

The purpose of the ICHA is to make the views of its members known to those who shape policy. Our key message is that the independent sector has become the dominant provider of residential child care with specific sectoral needs and a contribution to make to providing quality care and raising educational attainment for looked after children whilst understanding the need for key measures that evidence outcomes and to husband public resources. We want to be seen as a strategic partner of central government and local authorities.

We submitted our views to the consultation on the Green Paper which is the basis of the government's "Every Child Matters" policy and the policy states that the private sector should be a partner.

After a discussion with a key Prime Ministerial aide, Andrew Rome and Gary Kent had a very useful meeting in Downing Street with the Prime Minister's Special Adviser on educational matters.

This meeting helped with organising a meeting with the then Children's Minister Maria Eagle MP and her key officials. Vivien Snape, Mike la Borde, and Gary Kent attended this meeting. We are scheduled to meet her successor Parmjit Dhanda MP in October.

Whilst we must influence government, we also seek to keep in touch with the Opposition as a non-party group. Two ICHA representatives attended the Conservative Family Summit last year. Vivien Snape, Mike la Borde, and Gary Kent had a useful meeting with the Shadow Children's Minister, Tim Loughton MP.

Members have also met Liberal Democrat Shadow Ministers and individual MPs with an interest in looked after children.

We are also a part of the wider network of non-governmental organisations, state bodies and voluntary organisations –

including looked after children and care leavers – and participate in meetings of the Associate Parliamentary Group on Children in Care, whose Chair is the Labour MP David Kidney with whom Vivien Snape, Mike la Borde, and Gary Kent have had talks.

Our lobbyist Gary Kent spoke at a meeting of the group in the Commons and he and the Chair Vivien Snape subsequently met the Deputy Chair of the group, Earl Listowel who used our representations in a substantial debate in the Lords before the summer recess.

Vivien Snape, Andrew Rome and Gary Kent will be seeing the Prime Minister's adviser on education at Downing Street in September.

This could be a very important meeting given the Prime Minister's recent summit at Chequers on social exclusion which discussed the educational attainment of looked after children and how to increase.

This issue is fast moving up the political agenda and will be a key feature of the DfES Green Paper expected in October. It is vital that ICHA has a decent input into this policy-making process.

Another important development is the release of a substantial examination of the looked after children sector by Price WaterhouseCooper (PWC) – details of which have been circulated to ICHA members. Andrew Rome has secured a speaker from PWC at the ICHA conference. Building a political profile and winning allies goes hand in hand with building a media profile in both the trade as well as the national press. We have responded to unwarranted criticisms of the independent sector in national newspapers though more needs to be done to convey our views to this wider audience.

Gary Kent

Current Tendering Activity.

It is intended that this section will include the most recent and currently open tender processes. This issue lists recent closed processes also for interest:

1 Sandwell MBC. 5 x 3 bedded children's homes, 1 x 3 bedded home for females, 6 linked family placements. Closed 21st July 2006.

2 Wiltshire County Council. 12 residential placements. Expressions of interest by 24th August 2006.

3 London Borough of Bromley. Emergency unit. 5 children. At pre-tender questionnaire stage.

4 Lincolnshire County Council. Leaving Care service and Children's Rights and Advocacy service. Closes 14/18th September 2006





Consultations

1

DFES – “Modernising the Regulatory Framework for Children’s Social Services” – Consultation on Proposals for the review of the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Social Services (Phase One). Launched 4 August 2006. Responses by 10 November 2006. Although the media coverage has been about the proposals included here to reduce the frequency of some inspections, the consultation is much wider than just that issue. ICHA members are encouraged to submit their individual responses, but to also share those responses with ICHA. The executive committee is discussing how to put together an ICHA response.

2

Treasury and DfES Joint Review on Children and Young People call for evidence The Treasury and DfES have recently issued a request for evidence to feed into the Comprehensive Spending

review next year. The focus is on disabled children. For more detail contact NCERCC or view the request on the Treasury website.

3

For any members with interests in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government is inviting comment and consultation in relation to its Social Services strategy for the next decade in Wales. The consultation is entitled “Fulfilled Lives, Supported Communities”. For more details contact the ICHA office or go directly to www.new.wales.gov.uk/consultations.

4

Green Paper in the autumn. This should be the most important document to ICHA members this year. ICHA will be looking to scrutinise it carefully and give comprehensive feedback to the Green Paper, including the opportunity to meet with Parliamentary Under Secretary of State - Parmjit Dhanda MP in October.

CSCI Latest

Three recent pieces of news from CSCI (all accessible on the CSCI website):

7 September 2006. CSCI have published a report about Children’s top 50 messages to Government. The report, launched by Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director for England, has been sent to government as a contribution to the forthcoming Green Paper. It also acts as the official input to the current review of the NMS for children’s services. Members are encouraged to download a version.

17 August 2006. CSCI launch children friendly inspection reports. See website for more details of this welcome development.

August 2006. CSCI launch new website, an extranet, aimed at social care professionals. The site has a quick and easy survey that takes 5 minutes to complete to comment upon this development.

...and Ofsted

In addition to the consultation about the CSCI/Ofsted merger mentioned on page 2, Ofsted currently have an open consultation re: “Arrangements for the inspection of non-association independent schools”. Responses are invited until the closing date of 13 October 2006.

Consortium News

ICHA learned this summer that the government has decided to grant the lead status for development of commissioning and procurement practice in the children's services sector to the West Midlands. (Confirmed by Andrew Hancox of the West Midlands Centre of Excellence). Given the high profile work done in the last year by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities ("AGMA") this comes as a surprise to many members who have also contributed to what has been a vigorous debate with AGMA. ICHA attended a West Midlands consultation event earlier this year, and we have now been invited to nominate four members to the West Midlands Consortium. The executive committee will discuss this at their next meeting this month. AGMA's role continues and an active member of the ICHA committee, Mark Thomas, has been elected chair of the

AGMA provider forum for the coming year. The forum will not meet again until March 2007. AGMA will continue to work on issues such as outcomes frameworks which it will do in association with a consultant, and possibly in partnership with Merseyside authorities. An early indication of fee rate increases of 2% in April 2007 has been given. Mark is inviting consultation on this via markt@folly16.freemove.co.uk. Other regional centres of excellence are also working on children's services commissioning projects in their respective areas of the country. The South West region held a meeting in Yeovil over the summer, and are sending a representative to the ICHA conference. Mark Thomas and other ICHA members attended meeting and would welcome questions from anyone interested in where the South West forum is heading.

Dates and next meetings

ICHA meetings for the autumn:

1

ICHA Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday 14th September.

Venue: Park Inn Telford. (Minutes to be posted on the ICHA website).

2

ICHA conference

Date: Tuesday 26th September.

Venue: Warwick University Conference Centre.

3

Full ICHA members meeting

Date: Tuesday 7th November.

Venue: Civic Hall, Bedworth.

Other meetings being attended by ICHA representatives:

- Conor Ryan, Prime Minister's Special Adviser on Education. 18th September.
- Options for Excellence Review Board. 20th September and 25th October.
- Children's Workforce Development Council. Board and AGM. 28 September.
- Ministerial meeting with DFES. 25th October.
- CSIW. 7th November.
- NCERCC. 14th November.
- Local Authority Children's Commissioners. 7th/8th November.

For details of any of these meeting please contact the ICHA office.

An autumn of other conferences

1

ADSS, LGA and Community Care:
National Children and Adult Services Conference 2006

Date: 18th to 20th October 2006

Venue: Brighton Hilton Metropole

2

NCB/NCERCC:

"Policy and Practice: What Works In Residential Childcare"

Date: 8 November 2006

Venue: Leofric Hotel and Conference Centre, Coventry

3

Community Care Live Children and Families:

Date: 12th October 2006

Venue: Business Design Centre, Islington

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/cclive/childrenandfamilies/programme.htm>

4

Children's Commissioners: National Conference

Date: 8th/9th November 2006.

Venue: Swanwick, Derbyshire.

ICHA exhibiting.

“The Future of Residential Child Care”

ICHA Conference

26th September 2006

Warwick University Conference Centre

Handbook

Copies of the 2006/7 ICHA members handbook are available from the office: Call on 01948 830008.

The handbook contains details of the services of many members and their contact details. It is a valuable tool for commissioners of services. Any members not already in the handbook can be added at any time.

Website

www.icha.org.uk is under review. The aim is to update the website on a regular basis with information, newsletters, minutes, consultations and discussions between members on key issues.

Statistics

ICHA is reviewing available information on the size of the provider sector to assess how representative the group is. The aim is to present this at the conference on 26th September. If available by that date, updated figures from CSCI will be used.

Coming in future editions

Tenders – what members think about them.

Who owns who in the sector.

If you have any ideas for the name of the newsletter please contact the office below.

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