



ICHA Media release

Response to the 3 Children's Commissioner reports

“The Children Who No-One Knows What to Do With”, “The 2020 Stability Index” and “Private provision in children’s social care”

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The ICHA would like to make it clear that whilst we were invited to discuss the contents of “Private provision in social care”, any evidence contradicting the report or challenges to the presentation of the information in the final document, have not been reflected.

The ICHA believes that the ‘evidence’ provided in relation to the financial aspects of private providers in social care is hypothetical, alarmist and serves a divisive purpose. The level of assumption in the PPISC report is overwhelming and overshadows the actual findings that both private and public homes are meeting children’s needs and that the costs of providing in-house vis a vis independent sector provision are not dissimilar, according to this report, they are actually less in the independent sector.

Whilst there may be currently unsubstantiated but potentially legitimate concerns regarding leverage and the financial sustainability of a minority of companies, the historical collapse of local authority provision across the country suggests that the sector would be as, if not more, unstable if ownership were to return to them.

Focussing on the overall cost of placements without looking at the breakdown and reality across the sector is a disingenuous way of presenting information. As is rightly identified, these are our countries’ most vulnerable people. Our children deserve good care, but this does not come cheap-either through state or independent provision. Whilst the ICHA does not deny that some independent costs appear very high, in reality, the vast majority equate to or are less than those charged by Local Authority homes. Furthermore, no evidence was presented to substantiate the suggestion that bigger companies are cutting costs and services in order to increase their profits.

Nonetheless, the ICHA welcomes these reports and broadly supports the Children’s Commissioner’s aim to highlight the increasing use of unregulated accommodation and the instability of placements for children who are looked after. The ICHA agrees that regulation and oversight of all currently unregulated provision must be brought in as a matter of urgency and joins the Children’s Commissioner in calling on the government to act on this matter.

We do, however, call on the Commissioner to stop using unnecessary, alarmist language that not only does her department a disservice, but plays into the hands of those who seek to attack the sector and thereby the children within it. For example, most children’s homes are not the ‘institutions’ envisaged by her opening statement in “The children who no-one knows what to do with”, but are suburban

homes caring for two or three children. Instead, we urge the Commissioner to encourage open dialogue and joint initiatives that aim to ensure sufficiency and good provision for all our children, regardless of the provider.

To this end, for many years, the ICHA has been promoting co-working with local authorities in order to secure sufficiency in the sector. Whilst at the current time, there is an excellent example of this type of project in the South East, this continues to be the exception and not the rule.

Whilst the availability of suitable placements is an issue, our own research demonstrates that there is underutilised sufficiency in the sector, and the reasons for this are many. For example, homes are rightly required to match any new child with those already in placement. The result is that many children cannot be admitted to these beds because their needs and behaviours would disrupt stable placements. In addition, Ofsted's judgement of homes as 'Requiring Improvement' (a judgement that is still confirming that the Quality Standards are being met), instead of the previous 'Adequate' has led to many local authorities now refusing to place in these homes, despite the safeguarding offered by Ofsted and Regulation 44 visits which is unavailable in unregulated provisions.

The Stability report demonstrates that the majority of children in care do not experience multiple placement-moves although numbers are too high. Nonetheless, moving children is rarely an easy decision. Many moves are planned, and most are in the best interest of the child. Nonetheless, children are, in our experience, rarely 'dumped' as suggested by the report, with many providers and local authorities working hard to maintain the most challenging placements.

However, as a sector we recognise that the most glaring issue, ignored by these reports, is that intervention for many of these children is often too late. Our children often have traumatic and terrifying home lives, but early intervention is insufficient and inadequate, leading to children remaining in these situations until irreparable damage ensues. If the government and Children's Commissioner has a will to address this part of the equation, sufficiency and cost in later life will undoubtedly reduce.

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Notes to Editors

The Independent Children's Homes Association Ltd (ICHA) is the voice of independent providers of child care services and resources for children and young people. We are a Not for Profit Limited Company representing professionals who have chosen to work in the independent sector.

ICHA's Vision: 'Exemplary Residential Child Care.'

ICHA's Mission: 'A member-led organisation driving excellence in residential child care through innovation, collaboration and sector leadership'.

ICHA represents 75% of the private and voluntary sector. Some members have just one home whilst others have many separate homes across the country.

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