

Declaration of interdependence in children's services

“ We share the vision and commitment to create a society where all children and young people are valued, protected and listened to, their rights are realised and their families are supported.

We believe that the reliance on price-driven competition in children's service commissioning is eroding, rather than building, our collective capacity and sense of common cause in achieving this vision.

We declare our mutual respect for the importance of public service, charitable mission, professionalism and voluntary action in a more creative and collaborative future for children's services.”

4 Children	Children's Links	The Who Cares? Trust
Action for Children	Civil Exchange	Together Trust
Adfam	Family and Childcare Trust	TUC
Advice UK	Foundation	UNISON
Barnardo's	NAVCA	Unite
Bromley Y	NCIA	West Mercia Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre
Care Leavers Foundation	NCVYS	Women's Resource Centre
Childhood First	NYAS	Working with Men
Children England	Reading Matters	

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

There is a longstanding cross-party consensus that society generally, and the state more specifically, has a unique and unconditional responsibility for all children, encompassing duties to ensure their education, health and protection and to uphold their rights and freedoms as citizens. Global economic crises and austerity do not weaken this public duty, they only make it more urgent. Children's public services are among the most important manifestations of this duty. Their funding, design, delivery and workforces are crucial to the wellbeing of children.

Similarly, a sense of personal mission and moral duty to take practical action to help protect, nurture, and care for children has been the driving force in the creation and growth of many thousands of charities and community organisations dating back for many centuries, as well as the motivation for their many millions of volunteers and donors. Even today, more than half of all registered charities have the support of children, young people and families as their primary focus.

Both the public service ethos and the voluntary sector spirit embody the principle that we have a responsibility to take action whenever a child is in need, and to put their interests first in all that we do with and for them. It could be called a sense of civic duty towards children.

This Declaration is being made by a diverse group of organisations that have come together because we believe that the sense of public service and civic duty at the heart of children's services is under threat from the mechanisms of the market and the financial climate. 'Marketplace Competition' has been elevated to become an end in itself rather than just one useful tool that may sometimes help to improve service provision. While not intentional, the emphasis on managerial concerns and financial models resulting from this 'marketisation' of children's services has meant that many have lost sight of what remains most important in

any service for children: the professional and personal commitment to put children first. We want to reframe the relationships between public servants and the voluntary sector, based on a mutual respect for the unique roles and capacities of each, and a rediscovery of what we have in common. This Declaration begins that reframing by calling for reforms in the commissioning and funding relationships that have become so focussed on our sectors and organisations competing with each other, rather than collaborating together.

In addition to their shared civic duty towards children, public services and charities and community groups both have unique accountability mechanisms and community relationships that differentiate them from the private sector. For the public sector, regular elections locally and nationally ensure that those overseeing service delivery are answerable for their decisions to the voting public. Similarly, the distinctive role of Trusteeship and charitable purpose, the development of charities in response to community need and their distinctive ability to build and harness local voluntary action ties all charities, large or small, into accountable relationships with their service users, communities and the volunteers who support and govern them. Children's services have always been a 'mixed economy' that includes a range of private sector services too, for example in education and early years. We know that there are highly skilled and dedicated professionals working with children's interest at heart in all three sectors, and this Declaration is open to any individuals and organisations who share our vision to put children first in a more collaborative future for children's services. In competitive tendering for public service contracts, however, we have concerns that price-driven competition with outsourcing companies has had a negative impact on service quality, employee terms and conditions, and can encourage behaviours such as corner cutting and 'creaming and parking' cases.

Government austerity has had a damaging impact on the local statutory and voluntary sector, with severe cuts to local authority budgets reflected in serious repercussions for local community and voluntary organisations. With a long tradition of collaboration between the public and voluntary sector, particularly in the provision of early and preventative interventions, the children and young people's service sector and those it supports have been particularly badly hit.

Ultimately, it is the life-changing effect of safe, trusting and supportive relationships with the adults in their lives that enable children to grow, learn, survive, heal, to speak out when frightened or angry, and to explore their huge potential. That is just as true of the relationships with volunteers and professional figures who enter their lives, as it is of their families and friendships. No service specification or pricing mechanism can adequately capture or create such relationships.

This Declaration calls for a new deal for children's services with a focus on:

- 1) collaborative and supportive relationships between the statutory and voluntary sector
- 2) social value commissioning and intelligent procurement that invest in the achievement of broader, long term, social, environmental and economic goals
- 3) funding that is fair, sustainable and enables the development and delivery of quality services that meet the needs of children, young people and their families
- 4) standards of employment, pay, conditions and training that support a world class workforce and a culture of social partnership, with effective dialogue between commissioners, employers, trade unions and the workforce
- 5) flexible and sustainable services that provide the best possible value and impact for the community and taxpayer
- 6) supporting a strong, vibrant and independent civil society.

Building a new relationship through intelligent commissioning

We declare that:

A 'New Deal' should be struck between public and voluntary sectors that sees creative pooling of taxpayers' and charities' mutual resources for maximum impact for children and families.

Neither the public sector nor the voluntary sector can or should be reduced to merely being 'service providers' in a commercially framed marketplace.

There are unique and vital functions in a democratic society that can only be delivered at their best by skilled people and bodies with a sense of pride in, and democratic responsibility for, public service.

These distinct public service functions include the increasingly important public service duty of commissioning services and investing taxpayers' money in ways that offer maximum benefit for local communities and economies in the long term - not just conducting 'spending and purchasing' decisions in the short term.

The vast majority of voluntary organisations for children, young people and families in England cannot, and do not aim to, compete for public service contracts. The volunteering and gift exchange at the heart of what they do are unique and valuable assets to a community that are eroded if viewed as 'cheap' alternatives to well-resourced public services. Government efforts to nurture and develop a thriving voluntary and community sector cannot be reduced to competitive tendering and market solutions.

Acting as a critical friend to statutory bodies is one of the key roles of the community and voluntary sector. Public services will be more responsive to the needs of people if charities amplify their voices and are actively involved in scrutiny.

Nationally, we call for:

- 1) Government to legislate to ensure quality not price drives contracting decisions in children's services. Use the flexibility of the EU Public Procurement Directive to place a duty on local authorities to ensure that all children's services contracts are awarded on the basis of quality and social value (the additional economic, social and environmental benefits to a community) combined accounting for at least 50 per cent of any weighted scoring system.
- 2) The introduction of five-year spending plans that set out the funding to be made available for children's services in line with the fixed term parliament, supporting collaborative planning and longer term investment.

Locally, we call for:

- 1) An end to the 'contracting out' of commissioning or procurement functions. It is far too important a democratic accountability and public duty of any tax-spending public authority, especially as increasing amounts of tax-payer-funded public services are set to be delivered by private or third sector providers without such democratic accountabilities.
- 2) Intelligent commissioning that is conducted (a) by appropriately skilled people with relevant sector expertise and (b) through effective partnership with practitioners, children and families in the design and delivery of services. Commissioning of services should utilise a full range of tools, of which procurement may be one element.

- 3) Recognition of the value of using discretionary public sector grants as low-bureaucracy creative investment tools for genuine partnership that nurture non-statutory community activities and support promising local social entrepreneurialism.
- 4) Services to be commissioned and procured in a way that acknowledges and appropriately shares risks between commissioning authorities and providers, and that does not prevent local community and voluntary groups and in-house services from being able to participate.
- 5) Children's service contracts to be issued on the maximum timescale possible, with a minimum of three years, in order to minimise transfer and re-commissioning costs (both to the state and to bidders) and to maximise service stability for staff and service users.
- 6) Contracts to be designed to prevent voluntary organisations having to subsidise services, including temporarily due to payment in arrears.
- 7) The scale and intensity of the tendering process, contract management and quality assurance procedures involved in any given contract to be proportionate to the contract value and function.
- 8) Commissioners and providers of services to work collaboratively to ensure that:
 - a) the cost of evaluating services delivered by voluntary organisations are fairly reflected in contract value and learning from practice is shared to inform service redesign and improvement
 - b) local assets, including public space, community assets and human capital are deployed to maximum effect to support children, families and communities in their area.
- 9) Contracted providers of children's services to be subject to the same transparency and equalities requirements as public sector bodies.
- 10) Voluntary and community sector organisations to sit as a matter of course on strategic planning and scrutiny bodies such as health and wellbeing boards, providing a voice for children, young people and families.

Valuing people and their skills in quality service delivery

We declare that:

Family, business and economic policy development must be better integrated, so that supporting families, and paying their working members fairly, is viewed as being an investment in the heart of the economy, not a cost to it.

Treating and paying staff well is not a courtesy or a luxury but a core requirement for delivering any good quality 'helping' service to the public, requiring standards of employment, pay, conditions and training that support a world class workforce.

Low-wage employment (salaries on which people cannot afford to live without state top-up) in any sector is a 'false economy' that keeps welfare bills high and embeds unsustainable business models into our economy, reliant on 'invisible' state subsidy.

Income and job uncertainty have a devastating effect on families' emotional well-being, as well as their contribution to the economy. Attempts to 'relax' employment protections, make hiring and firing at will easier, and trends towards increasingly temporary, insecure contracting arrangements, are wreaking havoc on life at home for millions of low-income working families, and work against attempts to boost consumer confidence and growth.

Training, skills development and qualifications for those who work with children, young people and families are essential if good quality services are to be ensured. While individuals and employers both have a need to invest in skills and careers, any government that makes commitments to its citizens about good quality services will have to share in the responsibility to invest in an appropriately qualified, skilled, confident workforce to deliver their vision for public services.

Reforming and re-configuring services to improve quality, efficiency and productivity is not a means to short term cost cutting, and can only be achieved through investment in empowering workers, children, families and local communities, giving them a real say in the design and delivery of services, rather than top down 'managerial' restructuring.

Trade unions and civil society organisations have a key role to play in representing the voice and interests of the children's service workforce, service users and communities and should form an integral part of a culture of social partnership with effective dialogue between commissioners, employers, trade unions and the workforce

We call for:

- 1) Commissioners, employers and unions to work together to ensure that the children's services workforce is employed on the best possible terms, providing security to those delivering the service and enhancing the quality of provision.
- 2) An end to the exploitative and enforced use of atypical forms of employment (such as zero-hours contracts, agency and casual work) and a guarantee of living wage minimums for all employees delivering children's public services.
- 3) Children's service providers to promote worker voice and trade union partnership as a vital way of ensuring productive and effective services for children.
- 4) Commissioners, employers and unions to work together to promote family friendly employment practices that enhance work and life balance for the benefit of workers and their children.

- 5) Funding for delivering public services to be given on a full cost recovery basis that recognises the vital roles of 'core' staffing in any organisation.
- 6) Children's service providers to manage volunteers in line with the best practice identified in the joint TUC and Volunteer England charter, ensuring that volunteers are valued and respected and that relations between volunteers and paid staff are mutually rewarding, based on good procedures, clarity of respective roles, mutual trust and support.
- 7) Local and national levels of government to work in close partnership with children's sector employers, to quality assure and jointly fund strategies for ensuring well-qualified professionals. They should offer the ongoing training that everyone, including volunteers, need to do their best for children, young people and families.
- 8) Contracts to be designed and funded in a way that facilitates the provision of training and development to the children's service workforce.
- 9) Compassionate, safe and effective children's services and care underpinned by adequate staffing levels, based on the compelling evidence of a link between staffing levels and the quality of service across a range of settings.

Time to take stock of the impact of outsourcing

This Declaration is focussed on the children, young people and families service sector. We recognise, however, that the market mechanisms, sector relationships and considerable impacts of tendering and outsourcing public functions and services is a far more widespread phenomenon, of which children's services is only one part. We share widespread concerns that the introduction of major shareholder companies in public service delivery, and the fact that their shareholders take a cut of the income generated by serving those in need are fundamentally changing the relationships between public services and the public they serve.

We believe that the actions and reforms called for in the Declaration of Interdependence should be implemented as soon as possible. However, we also support the call first made in May 2014 for an independent inquiry on the evidence, learning and impact of public service outsourcing. The inquiry should consider the benefits and disbenefits of public service outsourcing in a wide range of nationally and locally defined service areas, and in particular should explore:

- 1) The impact of outsourcing and changing service arrangements on all public service users, including children.
- 2) The financial and operational results including a holistic cost benefit analysis and examination of the net public value of outsourcing in different services.
- 3) The impact of different models of outsourcing, including prime supplier models and payment by results, on the sustainability and structure of public service markets and the way that services are delivered.
- 4) The role, opportunities and limitations of the market and competition in public service delivery and innovation; and examining the differences more between services and/or areas of the public sector.
- 5) Building on recent national audit office studies to question how competitive the supply 'markets' actually are.
- 6) How much service users are involved in every aspect of the process from pre-procurement to service monitoring.
- 7) The implications for staff.
- 8) The implications of different ownership models of providers and the benefits of the charity and social sectors compared to the business sector.
- 9) Accountability and transparency.
- 10) Public confidence in outsourcing scenarios.
- 11) The opportunities and costs of both contract terminations and major change.
- 12) The nature of probity and lobbying in respect of public service outsourcing including the relationship between politicians and senior public officials (and those recently retired) and providers.



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