

Speech to the Daycare Trust Annual Conference (22nd November 2011) by Dave Munday, Professional Officer, Unite the Union (in the Health Sector)

Thank you to the Daycare Trust for the invitation to speak at your conference today.

I'm Dave Munday from Unite the Union which represents members from across the country in all sectors of the workforce. It includes our professional associations which the Community Practitioners' & Health Visitors' Association is one of them. This has the majority of health visitors and school nurses as its members.

I've been asked to speak about the future of Sure Start and wanted to briefly cover these four areas over the next 10 minutes.

- The changes CPHVA is seeing to Sure Start children's centres across the country;
- Views on the governments plans to recruit more health visitors;
- Progress towards better joint working between early years and health services;
- Views on effective outreach strategies

The changes CPHVA is seeing to Sure Start children's centres across the country

What's the picture nationally? On 15th November The Guardian reported on the confirmation from government that the number of children centres had dropped from 3,631 to 3,507. However this doesn't give the important narrative that's actually needed to answer this. I'm sure Ben will provide some of this from his members in the next presentation.

From our health visitors members they see a reverse of fortune where when sure starts centres and then children centres were seeing investment, their services were seeing harsh cuts (some areas lost more than 50% of their health visitors). They now see the opposite that children centres are being cut, and their services should be seeing some investment (more on this in a moment).

Our members in the local authority and voluntary sectors however have faced the wider attacks that impact on families. In one response to this our members are running the Unite for our Society campaign but more specifically to this conference, The Little Society campaign.

As Harriet said earlier, in a democracy, people should be able to get what they ask for and we know that parents want Children's Centres. Last year Netmums surveyed over 1,800 mothers and a key message back was parents support of the centres. Over 60% of mothers with a baby under 1 year old said they used the centres a lot or sometimes.

One of the results is that Netmums have been running a 'Save our Children's Centres' campaign where they're encouraging it's members to run their own campaigns locally. We could argue that it's great that parents are engaging in politics however what will be the effect when and if their campaigns are ignored.

Already today there's been much discussion about ring fencing. The government has doggedly kept to its stance of no ring fencing under (I would argue) a fig leaf of localism which is surprising as the coalition has such a good example of the damage that this can do.

Views on the governments plans to recruit more health visitors

All political parties before the election had positive things to say about health visitors. When the coalition was formed this was maintained and as a 'senior partner' the Conservatives maintained their pre-election policy to increase health visitor numbers by 4,200.

Although they had a few opportunities to drop or weaken this they actually made it stronger by changing from 4,200 more people to 4,200 whole time equivalent staff.

Why was this needed? Through the years of a Labour government there was never any central direction to decrease the numbers of health visitors and yet we saw by 2009 a near 20% drop from 2000 levels, even though there had been a 15 or so % growth in the birth rate.

We're obviously really pleased that our arguments throughout the noughties, other campaigning from organisations (for example the Family and Parenting Institute) and the shifts in policy around early intervention has had this impact. It was overdue!

This new emphasis has also gone hand in hand with an acknowledgement from the Department of Health that to allow local areas to lead on solving this problem hasn't worked, like I've already said no central direction to reduce but still the numbers reduced.

This is now what we see across all parts of the public sector (apart from health visiting). Therefore no central instruction to cut services but because the money has gone (by central decree) services are cut! So for example over the weekend the RCN reported on their data which shows over 56,000 reduction in NHS staff with over a third of these being nurses.

NOTES In its original policy paper pre government, the Conservatives said with 4,200 more HVs the offer to families would include Minimum guarantee of;

- 2 visits during the later weeks of pregnancy
- 6 hours in the first 2 weeks
- Fortnightly visits till 6 months
- Monthly visits between 6 months and 1 year
- 2 visits per year between 1 and 5.

Progress towards better joint working between early years and health services

It's difficult to give a sense today of the progress towards better joint working. I could introduce you to our members who could give excellent examples either showing amazing or terrible integration. However, the overwhelming feel at the moment is worry about what's to come. Our members know more investment is promised but the figures still show the opposite but they also see the cuts to support services in local authorities and are fearful of the impact of these in services to the families they serve. For example in one local area to me in Greater Manchester it is promised to have 17 new health visitors by 2015 but community nursery nurses are losing their jobs and their local Homestart has disappeared.

Views on effective outreach strategies

Again the picture is patchy across the country. Children's Centres had started to make some inroads and had managed to mask some of the destruction in the universal services in health visiting however with the cuts to budgets will these early green shoots be starved of water?

Finally I want to wish the Daycare Trust a very happy 25th anniversary. For health visitors 2012 is not just an Olympic year but also the 150th anniversary of the formation of the profession where it started as the Ladies Salford Sanitary Inspectors in Salford. As we've already heard from Professor Thane today, this formation was to tackle the public health issues of the Victorian age (1837-1901).

We are pleased that their importance today is in no doubt as we work on 21st century issues. As always however we must see the impact of wider government policy on families lives. Today has given us a stark reminder of this where the independent High Pay Commission today has reported the differential between FTSE 100 CEOs to be 145 times greater than the national median full-time wage. It's projected that this will return us to pay differentials at Victorian levels within 5 years.