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The Children's Minister Dawn Primarolo has announced that the initiative [Operation Staysafe](#) which operates in 69 pilot to target under age underage drinking in public places has successfully targeted more than 3500 young people in a summer crackdown on teenage binge drinking this year and in addition signposted 15,000 young people to positive activities. The Minister argues that feedback from local practitioners, police, youth offending teams and youth workers indicates that alcohol is a key driver of youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and Operation Staysafe is a proven effective way to target underage drinking in public places, with police getting parents to witness their children's drunken behaviour, and youth and social services identifying any issues with the young person and their family and making sure they receive appropriate support services. In addition, funding for *Operation Staysafe* was boosted by £1.4 million in June 2009 to deliver activity across the summer to tackle alcohol fuelled youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Figures indicate that this funding has helped the police, children's and health services work together to successfully tackle alcohol related, low level, youth crime and anti-social behaviour in 69 priority areas across the country this summer.

The BBC report that the House of Commons Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families, which examines the administration, expenditure and policy and of the DCSF, has challenged the suitability of Margaret Atkins to be the next [Children's Commissioner](#). Ms Atkinson, who was nominated by Secretary for State Ed Balls to be the next Children's Commissioner when Sir Al Aynsley-Green comes to the end of his five year appointment on 28 February 2010 is argued to be considered to be not suitable for the role by the members of the Select Committee Schools and Families (DCSF).

The Children's Commissioner for England, established through the Children's Act 2004, gives a voice to all children and young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and the vulnerable. The post is independent of government, and it is a critical means of raising the profile of the issues that affect children in England, by championing their interests and bringing their concerns and views into the national arena.

(See also:

[Letter from Ed Balls regarding appointment of Children's Commissioner](#) Challenge to Ed Balls as MPs reject children's commissioner appointment

Children's Minister Delyth Morgan has announced that [acoustic testing](#) will be a contractual requirement for all Building Schools for the Future (BSF) projects and that no funding will be signed off without a commitment to having the acoustic test. The announcement is part of a package, which includes the inclusion of the Minimum Design Standard into the BSF programme, in an effort to strengthen the design quality of builds and introduce measures to improve acoustics in schools and ensure that all children, particularly those with hearing difficulties, have access to a learning environment which enables them to reach their full potential.

Baroness Morgan said:

Good acoustics are essential to a successful learning environment for all children, particularly for those with special hearing requirements, and my Department works hard to achieve this, in partnership with other government departments such as Communities and Local Government (CLG) and with the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS). I should place on record my appreciation to the NDCS for their commitment to breaking down the barriers faced by deaf children.

(See also:

[Written Ministerial Statement: Auditory Standards for School Buildings](#)

Springer, the global scientific publisher has launched a free, multidimensional professional networking site called ['The NeuroNetwork'](#) which was established to allow students and researchers to interact with each other in a professional on-line environment. The NeuroNetwork is a multidimensional professional networking site dedicated to those working, studying, or simply interested in the science of the brain, and welcome those with personal and professional interests in neuroscience, neurology, psychology, and all related areas.

Experts argue that the screening technique [comparative genomic hybridisation or CGH](#), which screens embryos for genetic faults, can double the chance of IVF success and offer hope to tens of thousands of women struggling to have children. Doctors at an annual US fertility meeting heard for the second year running of the merits of the test, and believe that it will be particularly useful to older women who's embryos have a greater risk of carrying genetic errors that cause conditions like Downs syndrome. In addition, UK researchers say they are now able to back the method with 'great confidence', and hope the test, which currently is offered in a few private UK clinics, will eventually be widely available.

(See also:

[Comparative genomic hybridisation \(CGH\) screening](#)

The BBC report that scientists from The Scripps Research Institute have developed a new method that would hasten the process of [creating cells from human adult tissue](#), without the use of embryonic cells. Lead researcher Professor Ding argues that the new technique is a practical step forward in the method of producing large numbers of stem cells without using embryos, and the new technique is 200 times more efficient, twice as fast as conventional methods and a lot safer.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) have published the results of their 22nd annual employment survey, ['Past imperfect, future tense: nurses' employment and morale in 2009'](#) which indicates how pressures on workload and staffing levels can impact on patient care. The survey shows fewer nurses responding positively to views on workload than in 2007, particularly those working in the NHS. In addition, the TCN argue that over half of the respondents (55%) say that there aren't enough staff to meet patient needs and that nurses are looking after more patients on the ward.

Published at the same time, the RCN's Labour Market Review ['Difficult times, difficult choices: the UK nursing labour market review, 2009'](#) findings warn of a shortfall in the number of nurses in the near future. Approximately 200,000 nurses are expected to retire in the next ten years, and there are predicted to be fewer newly qualified nurses. In addition, as a result of restrictions on migration fewer nurses will be moving to the UK. The RCN expects the impact to be felt in community settings earlier and harder as nurses working in nursing homes, general practice and NHS community nursing tend to be older than other registered nurses.

(See:

[RCN survey highlights health care staffing pressures](#)
[Nurses calling for safer staffing](#)

The [King's Fund inquiry into the quality of general practice in England](#) now has Sir Ian Kennedy, former Chairman of the Healthcare Commission, as Chair, replacing King's Fund chief executive Niall Dickson. The inquiry panel, established in April 2009 is working to build up a perspective of high-quality care by establishing the role of GPs in delivering services, exploring how GPs can be supported to improve care, and examining a number of key areas, including patients'

access to care, the quality of diagnosis and referral, and the care offered to patients with long-term conditions.

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) website is host to the ['Database of Cancer Uncertainties' \(DoCU\)](#) which aims to collate details of the major gaps in evidence which are identified during guidance development. Such evidence gaps can then be promoted as research priorities to prospective research funders

The *DoCu* database has been developed as a pilot project by NICE, as part of the [CoCanCPG](#) (Coordination of Cancer Clinical Practice Guidelines in Europe), a consortium of 16 institutional partners from 11 countries, funded by the European Commission through the ERA-NET Scheme under FP6 framework. The network will provide access to European research funders, ensure the priority research is undertaken and avoid duplication.

(See:

[CoCanCPG Database of Cancer Uncertainties \(DoCU\)](#)
[New database to inform prioritisation of European cancer research](#)

Professor Martin Wiseman, medical and scientific adviser at the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) warns that [high-dose vitamin and mineral supplements may do more harm than good](#), because while low-dose supplements are recommended for some people, the effect of higher doses on cancer risk is difficult to predict. For this reason, the WCRF advises people to get the vitamins and minerals they need by eating a healthy, balanced diet rather than taking high-dose supplements if they want to reduce their risk of cancer.

Dr. Wiseman argues 'Many people think they can reduce their cancer risk by taking supplements, but the evidence does not support this'.

As part of the investment to implement the Government Action Plan, Better Communication and following the Bercow review of speech, language and communication needs, where communication was highlighted as a key skill, Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and Michael Palin have launched a new programme ['Stammering Information Programme'](#). In addition, an extra £500,000 has been made available to expand into schools the specialist speech and language therapy services available at the Michael Palin Centre in London, to aim to reduce the impact that stammering can have on children's psychological development and their ability to form friendships by equipping professional already working in schools with skills to support children who stammer.

The first ever analysis of the impact of recession on local communities over the past 30 years, conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), reveals that many deprived communities struggle before, during and after recessions, and even during periods of economic growth.

["Communities in recession: the impact on deprived neighbourhoods"](#) was released on Wednesday, and draws on JRF's research on communities, as well as data on [unemployment at neighbourhood level](#) from 1985-2009. It illustrates how the poorest communities are worst affected by recession, and shows how they remain disadvantaged long after recessions have hit.

The report finds:

- In recessions the number of unemployed people increases most in neighbourhoods where there are already high levels of unemployment
- Communities with high proportions of manufacturing workers and rented homes are hit hardest by recession - places with many public sector workers have been more resilient
- Unemployment may continue to rise one, two or more years after growth returns to the economy
- 5% of deprived communities have remained in the top 10% for number of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants even during periods of growth

The report suggests ways in which local authorities, community and voluntary organisations can help maintain gains and 'recession-proof' the poorest communities. These include:

- Monitoring of job and service cuts for their impact on vulnerable groups and neighbourhoods
- Maintaining and expanding local jobs, employment and training advice and public transport information
- Creating more services for young people
- Increasing crime prevention activities

A report on regenerating large housing estates has highlighted the importance of tackling the multiple sources of deprivation over the long term.

[Transforming Estates](#), a research report from consultants ECOTEC and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), draws on experiences in four major estate transformation projects:

- Meden Valley in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coal field
- North Solihull
- Huyton in Knowsley
- Poplar HARCA, Tower Hamlets

The report suggests it can take decades to regenerate communities and bring lasting change. The findings indicate that it can be easier to make physical improvements to homes and the layout of an estate, than to tackle the underlying

The public do not want politicians to decide on spending cuts in their local areas, and would rather see hospital staff protected ahead of all other council services, a new poll reveals.

[The Local Government Association survey](#) found that:

- 65% want local councillors to make decisions about cuts in their area
- 11% want MPs to make those decisions
- 3% would prefer quangos to decide.

The top areas people want to see protected from cuts:

- Frontline hospital staff (33%)
- Fire service (32%)
- Police (32%)
- Care for the elderly by social services (30%)
- Schools (26%)

The top areas people want to see cut to save public money:

- Overseas aid (62%)
- NHS Managers (47%)
- Benefit payments (32%)
- Defence (25%)
- Sports parks and libraries (16%)

The survey also revealed strong support for rubbish collection and disposal, with 22% of respondents wanting protection and only 3% supporting cuts.

Hard-pressed council social services departments are reporting a surge in demand over the past year, with marked increases during the last six months.

[A new survey](#) of directors of adult social services highlights increases in referrals for safeguarding the vulnerable, welfare advice, and help for drug and alcohol problems. The research, conducted by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), finds:

- 60% of directors reporting extra demand for safeguarding related services since October last year
- 85% of those respondents citing a worsening of the situation since April.
- Nearly half of the 54 councils that responded to the ADASS survey said the picture of demand was similar for mental health, as well as for drug and alcohol services.

Exactly half of all respondents said that the current recession was responsible for some positive impact on the sector, such as rises in the number of people applying for jobs. However just under one

third of respondents said that the economic situation was having negative effects in ways such as hiring freezes or cuts in staff numbers.

The truancy rate in schools in England has reached its highest ever level, according to the latest figures, reports [the BBC](#).

The truancy statistics for the first two terms of the last school year show 1.03% of school sessions were missed without permission, up from 0.97%; this is the highest annual figure since 1994. A spokeswoman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families says the increase in unauthorised absences reflects a tougher line from schools in turning down parents' requests for time off for their children.

The number of persistent truants - missing at least one day a week - has fallen from 273,000 to 241,000 pupils.

Taking cross-agency action on children's services workforce issues leads to improved integrated working and better communication and therefore better services and outcomes for young people and their families, says a new report.

[Moving forward together: integrating workforce strategies in children's services](#) looks at what works best when all agencies involved in delivering children's services tackle their local shared workforce issues together.

Four factors were identified as key to successful joint local action on shared workforce issues:

- a clear strategic context – projects clearly linked to the strategic priorities of the council and its partners and are given top leadership backing, are more likely to succeed
- a strong practical focus – the initiatives that have progressed most successfully enable participants to see benefits for their work and measure progress in terms of achievable goals and improving outcomes for young people
- inclusivity and engagement – taking time to involve different teams and agencies, understand their situations and develop appropriate mechanisms for their input and for them to gain benefit has been core to most successful initiatives
- a championing resource – ensuring there is resource to promote capacity for an initiative and to 'champion' the project is important in a multi-agency context where finding 'time away from the day job' is a key constraint.

See: [The IDEA press release](#)

There was a debate in Westminster Hall on [Ofsted supervision of fostering services](#) following on from problems which had been experienced in parts of the country.

Ofsted has carried out a survey of independent faith schools looking at the how they prepare children for life in Britain.

[The report](#) finds that these schools give pupils a strong sense of personal worth, and help them to understand the importance of being a good citizen, and this was nurtured in their ethos and curriculum. Many of the schools also engendered respect for other cultures and faiths without compromising their own beliefs, but twelve of those visited raised concerns about the requirement to teach details about other faiths, and some used teaching materials which had a bias in favour of certain groups.

Ed Balls published a [written ministerial statement](#) on publication of the new report.

(Also see:

[Faith Schools shunning other Religions](#)

The National Children & Adult Services Conference has been staged at Harrogate this week, and some of the innovative work that local authorities are doing has been highlighted.

One of the programmes which has seen widespread praise is the development of sanctuary rooms in victims' homes where they can go in an emergency to seek help, an example from Sevenoaks was given showing how the District Council had responded to a particular case by installing protective measures in the home.

(See: [Councils praised for protecting Abuse Victims](#))

[Councils build Panic Rooms for Abuse Victims](#)

A survey of adult social workers, carried out by UNISON, has highlighted concerns over the roll out of [personalised budgets in social care](#) for the elderly.

Social workers are concerned that vulnerable adults may be put at risk and vital services lost to the elderly.

Abusers could target people on personal budgets, as they have a steady supply of ready cash and, with cuts in the number of social workers and increased bureaucracy, this abuse could go undetected. Social workers were also concerned that local authorities would hand over responsibility to individuals and stop providing services.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published advice on how to [ensure older people get the information, advice and advocacy services they need to remain independent](#).

The Solutions pamphlet is based on work in Newcastle by the Quality of Life Partnership that developed ways of working with existing systems to make them more 'older person friendly', efficient, and effective for all concerned.

Lessons learnt include:

- Invest in processes so that older people have a variety of ways of sharing their views and experiences.
- Persuade local partners that information and advice is not an add-on to the day job. It is the day job.
- Understand that partnership working is much more difficult, complex and time-consuming than working in isolation.
- Realise that some issues may need to be addressed across all age groups.

See advice document: [Creating a stronger information, advice and advocacy system for older people](#)

The use of [“telecare” products](#) is being considered as one method of delaying the onset of major health problems in later life.

A study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Centre for Usable Home Technology shows that possible emerging technologies could help the elderly stay in their own homes for longer.

Examples of technologies being considered are:

- Robopets that offer companionship whilst doubling up as fire, gas and flood alarms and as intruder detectors
- Clever coffee tables that can dispense medicines and give computerised reminders to people
- Kitchen worktop and fridge screens that monitor the larder contents, suggest recipes and produce automatic shopping lists
- Talking walking frames that remind people where they are going
- Worn exo-skeleton suits which help infirm people move around and climb stairs
- Smart beds that can help people to turn over and to get up, whilst alerting carers if they are unwell or need help
- Set-top boxes that can allow people to consult nurses, doctors, social workers or friends and relatives using 3-D video technology, surround-sound and virtual presence

The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has published [Tackling Pensioner Poverty: Government Response to the Fifth Report from the Committee, Session 2008–09](#)

A new report published this week provides insights into people’s attitudes to age by examining their assumptions and expectations about age and ageing in Britain between 2004 and 2008.

[These attitudes](#) have important implications for individual well-being, for age equality and for social cohesion. Understanding attitudes to age is essential if we are to develop appropriate strategies for an ageing population.

The key findings of [Attitudes to age in Britain 2004-08](#) were:

- There were very large age differences in perceptions of 'old age'

- Half of the respondents (48 per cent) viewed age discrimination as a serious issue.
- Across all age groups ageism (prejudice or discrimination against someone because of their age) is experienced more commonly than any other form of prejudice
- Age discrimination is expressed differently toward younger and older people.
- One in five (22 per cent) respondents perceived people over 70 as posing an economic threat
- The majority of respondents viewed older people in a positive light.
- There was significant social separation between older and younger people.
- Attitudes to old age were more positive in regions with a higher proportion of older people, suggesting the local context also makes a difference to attitudes to age.

The findings in this report are based on secondary analysis of data from five national surveys with a total of 6000 respondents

The Royal College of Nurses has published its [2009 Employment Survey](#).

The results of the survey include:

- 40% of nurses say that staff shortages compromise patient care at least once a week
- 55% say they are too busy to provide the level of care they would like
- 67% consider their workload is too heavy

Children in the Hildenborough area have been given [out of date vaccinations](#) after an error at a Kent medical practice. Parents of the children have been told Hildenborough Medical Practice gave more than 100 injections that were up to nine months out of date.

However West Kent NHS have responded by saying that the health of the children was not at risk, but the vaccinations would be less effective and boosters would be needed.

Folic acid should be added to bread on a mandatory basis, the Food Standards Agency has advised government.

[The FSA](#) says the move could cut the number of babies being born with spina bifida by nearly two thirds, as the vitamin plays a key role in foetal development. Women are advised to take supplements before becoming pregnant, but many do not do so, or take them too late.

The US and Canada started fortification of bread flour in the late 1990s, and some of the subsequent research has pointed to an increase in cases of bowel cancer. However the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, which advises the FSA, said this evidence was insubstantial and that any increase in cases could be down to improved screening.

(See:

[Folic acid and colorectal cancer risk update](#)

The first vaccinations in the UK-wide programme aimed at combating the spread of [swine flu](#) have begun.

Seriously ill hospital patients and the health staff caring for them will be the first of 14m people in the "priority group" to be given the jab.

From next week GPs will begin inviting people in the priority groups to have the vaccination. The under-65s with health problems and damaged immune systems, such as chemotherapy patients, will get the vaccine first. They will be followed by pregnant women, then people who live with individuals who have compromised immune systems and, finally, those over 65 with health problems.

The government has yet to decide whether the rest of population will be immunised, although enough doses have been ordered.

So far just over 100 people with swine flu have died in the UK out of the 500,000 who have been infected.

The Department of Health has published [new guidance](#) for people who are planning for a swine flu pandemic.

The latest evidence shows that the second-wave has started with fewer infections than in the first wave, but that the virus might mutate into something more aggressive.

(See also:

[Swine Flu vaccines start today](#)

A new Task Force will help England to grow and eat more fruit and vegetables and improve the nation's health, Environment Secretary Hilary Benn announced today.

Comprising growers, retailers, consumers and agricultural researchers, [the Fruit and Vegetables Task Force](#) will develop an action plan to increase the production and consumption of local, seasonal fruit and vegetables in this country.

Consumer demand also needs to increase, as most people still do not eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. In particular the group will focus on young people and low-income families, who are less likely to eat recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables.

The Local Health Services and Democratic Involvement Bill had its [first reading](#) in Parliament on Wednesday.

Sir Ian Carruthers and Jan Ormondroyd have published their review of age discrimination and equality in the health and social care sector and passed it to the Secretary of State. The government will respond to the report and issue a consultation in due course.

["Achieving Age Equality in Health & Social Care"](#) supports the age provisions in the Equality Bill banning age discrimination in the provision of services and looked at discrimination and equality in the light of personalisation where matching needs and preferences of individuals could help tackle these issues.

(Also see the [Annex](#) to the full report.

Michael Fallon has written about the bureaucracy in the NHS in an article in the Telegraph.

He raises the question of who actually runs the service locally with all the PCTs, NHS trusts and the SHA involved, with the latter having an under-spend of £40m. Mr Fallon says that the layers of management are getting in the way and diverting resources from people and services which need them.

(See:

[It's time to slay the Bureaucratic Monster](#)

The think-tank Reform has published a new report that suggests certain benefits should be cut for middle class families, such as maternity pay and child benefit, in order to keep the basic tax rate down and focus the resources on the most needy people.

["The End of Entitlement"](#) also suggests that pension contributions should be replaced by the formation of personal protection accounts, flexible savings accounts into which individuals would pay money.

The report suggests that the abolishment of the allowances, which would also include the winter fuel allowance and free television licences for the elderly, could save £14bn immediately.

The Coroners and Justice Bill was [debated in the House of Lords](#) on Wednesday, whilst the Welfare Reform Bill [was debated](#) in the House of Lords on Thursday.

Forthcoming Parliamentary Business

Monday 26th October

Commons:

Marine & Coastal Access Bill

Lords:

Questions –

Bullying of families subsequent to the Fiona Pilkington case

Coroners and Justice Bill – Report Stage, Day 2

Autism, social inclusion and disability discrimination legislation – short debate

Tuesday 27th October

Commons:

Marine & Coastal Access Bill

Westminster Hall:

Family finances in the recession

Wednesday 28th October

Commons:

PMQs

Opposition debates on local spending reports;

Lords:

Welfare Reform Bill – Report Stage, Day 3

Thursday 29th October

Commons:

Social Care Green Paper debate

Lords:

Welfare Reform Bill – Report Stage, Day 3

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