

**Transcription of speech by Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Children , Schools and Families**

*Given at The Smart Money Event, Portcullis House, June 16<sup>th</sup> 2010. Hosted by Action for Children, Family Action and Children England.*

I'm particularly pleased to be here, and I'm particularly pleased, as Clare [Tickell – CEO Action for Children] mentioned earlier, about being in this role, having shadowed Children's Minister for over seven years it was something of a relief then to be able to get the job for real in government, and government is much better than being in opposition I have to say. And we worked in opposition a lot with Action for Children in particular, and Action for Children has a reputation for producing some very well-researched, very pertinent and insightful reports. And this one jointly with Family Action and Children England is another example of that so many congratulations on doing that.

And Action for Children in particular runs a lot of projects I've visited around the country for families and children and individuals at crisis point. I've seen some good examples of some of the family crisis centres you have in Merton, some of the schemes around intensive fostering for those young people on the edge of the youth justice system. But how much better to be visiting those projects, and to be witnessing and promoting and praising those projects that prevent all that happening in the first place. And what a false economy not to be doing that as well. So I'm absolutely signed up to the early intervention agenda. It's a buzz phrase that's been doing the rounds for quite a while. But what does it actually mean – and I think what we desperately need to do now is to put the flesh on the bones of what that phrase means in practice and start enacting it as well.

A lot of good work has been done in this area by Centre for Social Justice, by Graham Allen – who is here – working with Iain Duncan-Smith when we were in opposition. And some really far-reaching research on the benefits that early intervention can actually bring, and how it's a false economy not to be doing that.

And we see so many symptoms of the failure to intervene in the homelessness figures, in the poor educational achievement, in the addiction figures, in the youth justice figures, in the state of children's mental health, which is a particular problem that I've been involved with.

And it's going to be tough in this economic climate. The former chief secretary to the Treasury has told us "there is no money". So it's vital that we think smarter, which is why I think this report is particularly well titled. Because if we don't we are just building up huge costs, huge personal costs to the lives and outcomes and careers of those individuals who we fail to help. But we're also building up huge financial bills for the health service, for the justice system, for homelessness and everything else.

Now I spent some time, and some of you may have seen it, living in a tower block in the middle of Birmingham last year for a television programme. And I spent some time with one family in particular where a dad had been out of work for 18 months with mental health problems on benefits; mum out of work; a six-year-old and a four-year-old child, living in a one-bedroom flat on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of a tower block. Now that was a huge pressure for that family, huge problems had built up as a result of that. One of the biggest problems was

never being listened to, never being able to get action on some basic stuff – safety things for their flat, which was absolutely a fire trap.

But there was also some quite simple stuff. The fact that they never had any money and yet they were getting 218 pounds a week in benefits. On the ninth floor of a tower block and there's no food in the house. They didn't cook, there's no cooking utensils, it was a day-to-day existence. They had no idea about budgeting and using that money more intelligently. Some simple little interventions there could actually have made their life quite a lot easier. Not rocket science, and not particularly costly, but it is another example of early intervention. That's the sort of stuff that Iain Duncan-Smith and the Centre for Social Justice have been working on and I hope we'll now see evidence of through his role in the DWP.

Proper childcare at the appropriate time to help parents to go and get work rather than be on the benefits system. Special support at school, some intervention around children's mental health for example. All things that are early intervention examples that can be a life-changing experience if we get in appropriately and in a timely manner for those families, very dysfunctional families in many cases, that we need to.

There are 140,000 families with multiple problems in this country. And one thing that always strikes me, and there's a good case today with the Shannon Matthews serious case review that has come out that I've read. There was a deeply, deeply dysfunctional family and set of families. And there were little bits of intervention here and there for a child; their problem was supposedly addressed, the child was put back in the family, everything was fine. Another problem came along, the same thing happened. Underneath that there was a deeply dysfunctional system that should have taken the whole family and given multi-agency support to that family and it might actually have started to address the underlying problems rather than just address individual symptoms. So early intervention is about a holistic approach as well. And when it gets to the extreme we can see the real problems that it throws up.

So I think we're all signed up to early intervention. We know the benefits that it can bring. We've seen some of those already. Some of the things that we've echoed in our coalition manifesto around early intervention, our programme on health visitors. Early entry into houses for professionals to work closely with families and being able to see where there are shortcomings on those families being able to bring up children, to see when there's early signs of safeguarding problems to be able to pass that on.

And also around social workers. I launched last week a review by Professor Eileen Munro into making social workers be able to be social workers again. Spending more time at the sharp end rather than in front of computer screens. That's also about early intervention, detecting signs and problems earlier.

But finally just to say it's not all down to government. And it can't be all down to government. And I think sometimes the pendulum has swung too far. It relies on everybody to be vigilant. It relies on extended family members to be taking an interest, to have the confidence to take an interest and to know where to go for help when that's required. The intergenerational point that Clare made earlier is absolutely vital. The generations are not working together and talking nearly as much as we need them to and they used to do. So everyone has to be vigilant. Local communities need to rally round ,

and I think that's the point of a Big Society as well, where everyone has a role to play, not just the government.

And crucial to all of that is a new relationship with the voluntary sector. It always amazes me where we have huge expertise in the voluntary sector. Your specialisms in tackling difficult to reach groups of people with very specialist technical problems. We have great expertise in the voluntary sector. They should be on an absolutely level playing field with the other public agencies in order to deliver the services where we need those services to be delivered, regardless of ownership. And I think that new compact that we'll see through the Big Society agenda in the cabinet office I think is very exciting, and many people in this room I hope will be part of that.

So it's about the expertise, and as Kathy [Evans – CEO Children England] said, partnership and coalition, which we absolutely in this new government are up for. We weren't expecting a coalition government either – Clare [Tickell] started off by saying – I think it's really rather exciting. In my department Sarah Teather and I, who've never worked together before, working really very closely and finding really an enormous amount of things that we can move ahead with jointly and agree on. We've worn her out so much she got ill and can't be here today, because we've hit the ground running and we've been able to move forward with that agenda. And that is what it's all about – it's about doing the right thing, at the right time, with the right people intervening. And many of the people in this room are the right people. Lots of learning from best practice...I want to promote some of the best early intervention schemes that I see and make sure everyone else is aware of them and we're not all just working in silos. So thinking smarter is probably one of the few upsides of our economic plight and the recession, and that's why Smart Money and this report – another excellent report – is such a timely and relevant report and I congratulate you on producing it, and I hope many, many people – particularly new colleagues in parliament – will take the trouble to read it and act on it in their constituencies, and I wish you all the very best of luck.

ENDS