

Top level briefing note on the final report of the *Independent review of children's social care*

The review and its final recommendations are presented as a once in a generation opportunity for radical change (as the *Children Act 1989* was). Calls on government to be ambitious for children and to play a more active role in creating the conditions for success (for the design and delivery of services and for children's rights, lives and outcomes).

Recognises the context within which children's services operate, the impact of poverty and wider policy decisions on families and consequently on social care e.g. welfare, immigration, drugs, CAMHS and domestic abuse, both on children's lives and the need for help and support in communities. Calls for access to strong universal services. The report follows a child's journey through the system and puts forward a series of recommendations for reform, these include:

Family help – Development of a clear family help definition replacing the enduring early help / intervention / section 17 muddle, the potential of which was never fully realised, plus consistent guidance for eligibility (although flex for local context). Calls for the creation of multidisciplinary family help teams rooted in the community, YOT model suggested as a strawman but not prescribed. Over £2bn over five years required to support 'double running,' this is the central reform to the current system, from year five and beyond dedicated, ring-fenced family support funding should be made available to sustain change. Other reforms should also help tip the balance of spending away from acute responses to family support. Pilots of 'family help practices,' which are non-stigmatising (like going to the doctor), suggested. Multi-agency family help teams to be supervised by an expert child protection practitioner (qualified social worker), with some delegated DCS powers and budgets. Family help reforms to be considered alongside actions and changes that will flow from the SEND green paper, much commonality and opportunity.

Workforce – In social work, introduction of the expert child protection practitioner (akin to AMHP in adult social care) and introduction of a 5-year early career framework for social workers alongside national pay scales and a shift from use of agencies to regional bank staff. Call to break out of 9-5 mentality for social work and act on recording and admin burdens. All registered social workers should have to do 100 hours direct practice per year. For the wider workforce, a new focus on leadership in resi care is needed, with SWE as regulator for registered children's home managers. To support family help revolution, a new KSS for this workforce is recommended. Continued investment in DCS leadership, with a crucial focus on diversity suggested, as is a review of the role of the DCS to make sure advocacy is maximised plus alignment with new and forthcoming duties and changes e.g. SEND green paper and the schools white paper.

Youth justice – Fully implement the recommendations of the 2016 Taylor Review. STCs and YOIs should be phased out and replaced with either SCHs, or secure schools, which should be either run or commissioned by regional care cooperatives (see below). DfE should lead on youth justice policy.

Family justice – Greater focus on problem solving responses e.g. FDAC, to make the court process less adversarial. DFJs should play an active rather than observer role in LFJBs and the national FJB should do annual learning reviews. Better data and greater transparency should be made available to help address variation in judicial decision making. Access to representation and/or advocacy for parents involved in public law proceedings called for.

A new legal right to an FGC before the PLO proposed and a new family network plan. Levelling access to funding and support for kinship carers regardless of legal order, access to training, peer support and legal aid for kinship carers. Modernising adoption contact, use tech in a planned and safe way.

Child protection and safeguarding – A new pathway for adolescents experiencing extra-familial harms, including a community safety plan, which takes in contextual and/or environmental risks. Integrate myriad funding cross-government pots and programmes for this cohort of adolescents and develop the partnership response to these risks (CSE, CCE, serious violence etc).

Care – Sets out five bold missions for the system e.g. building relationships and increasing life expectancy. Establishment of up to 20 new regional bodies aka Regional Care Cooperatives, to create / run / commission fostering, open and secure residential placements. A national campaign to recruit foster carers. New universal standards for care (replacing existing fostering, CH and unreg standards). Investment in support for foster carers (package of £82m), delegated PR for foster carers, expansion of Staying Put and Staying Close. Removal of IROs and reg 44 visits, replacement with a national advocacy service overseen by the OCC which will be opt-out.

Removal of the ability to profit from care and a windfall tax on the profit generated but the largest private providers of placements to pump prime reforms. Broaden corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider set of organisations (as in Scotland), make care experienced a protected characteristic, give CEP priority access to adult services, such as housing. Develop a life-long guardianship order to allow enduring relationships to be recognised in law.

On education, VSHs should be accountable for the educational outcomes of children in care via ILACS inspections, greater use of boarding school provision for children in care, a 'care leaver' kitemark for HE providers, 3,500 new apprenticeships per year for care leavers and a refresh of the care leavers covenant. Mental (and physical) health of children in care to be a priority, with ICSs/ICPs to report on this annually and publish plans, DCS to have levers to affect change in this regard with health partners.

Multi-agency working – Schools to be the fourth statutory MASA partner, DCS to lead for the LA rather than CEX, greater transparency over joint funding. Promote pooled budgets and shared funding to facilitate closer integration between health and children's social care (as in adult services). Information sharing to be prioritised, with a clear plan for reform to be enacted by 2025 drawn up (interoperability across systems, single identifier, NHS number suggested).

System conditions – Calls for the development of a national children's social care framework, to be updated regularly (once per parliamentary term). The framework would cover outcomes, objectives, indicators of success... On funding, a new funding formula for social care which is linked to contextual factors impacting on need e.g. deprivation, suggested. Build on the success of sector-led improvement (RIAs), government and national bodies to coordinate to better harness learning

from WWCs and the national panel, merge WWCs where there is overlap (EIF, WWC CSC, YEF as starter for 10) plus rationalisation of legislation and guidance. DfE to lead on family policy and create a cross-government mechanism for better coordination. Supporting Families to be migrated over to DfE and funds mainstreamed.

Better use of collected data in the centre to inform policy and debate. The DfE's bar for intervention is high, DfE should intervene in LA social care after x2 RI inspection outcomes. Improvement advisors / commissioners should be brought in-house as Regional Improvement Commissioners. Ofsted to be more family / child focused, supportive of different ways of working (inspection of family support called for) and transparent about how judgements are made plus more LA secondees in inspection teams.

National reform board and a national data and technology taskforce are both recommended to oversee the overall reform programme plus the technical specifics of national data and case management reforms. A comprehensive financial analysis and case for new investment is put forward in the report, with £2.3bn of new funding called for to support the proposed transformation. In time, focus on family support should result in savings and shift the profile of spend from reactive, acute services to early help and support (care population could be reduced by 30,000 over the coming years).

Links

- [Final report](#)
- [Executive summary](#)
- [Reset children's social care](#)
- [A revolution in Family Help](#)
- [A just and decisive child protection system](#)
- [Unlocking the potential of family networks](#)
- [Transforming care](#)
- [The care experience](#)
- [Realising the potential of the workforce](#)
- [A system that is relentlessly focused on children and families](#)
- [Implementation](#)

- [Recommendations annexes](#) – also see [appendix 1](#)
- [Children and young people's summary](#)

Recommendations: These have been taken from the [Children and young people's summary](#) (so that we can respond to each point that's applicable).

See [Recommendations annexes](#) for additional detail on all of the review recommendations.

Recommendations:			
Helping families		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
1.	Support that is given to families at “targeted early help” and child in need will be combined into a single category called Family Help , so that families keep a consistent relationship when they need help.		
2.	Which families should get Family Help should be more clearly defined and families should be able to ask for help without fear of judgement.		
3.	Family Help Teams should be made up of people with different expertise so families and children can directly get the help they need.		
4.	Family Help Teams should be based in places in local communities, like schools and family hubs, and respond to the needs of the community.		
5.	Government should ask the Law Commission to review the legislation that supports disabled children and their families so that getting support in the future is clearer.		
6.	Government should invest £2 billion to make Family Help a reality for families now and to keep supporting families in the future.		
7.	Government should guide the way that Family Help works as part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, and set outcomes that are about supporting the whole family.		
Keeping children safe		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
8.	When there are cases of significant harm an Expert Child Protection Practitioner should work with a Family Help worker so that important decisions are made by workers who have enough experience and skills.		
9.	Instructions from government should be clear about how different professionals - like police, health services, social care and schools - work together for child protection.		

10.	To help protect children and young people from harms outside the home, for example violence in neighbourhoods, organised crime gangs or online risks, there should be a different type of plan that responds to worries that are outside the home , is more joined up and when they turn 18 help shouldn't necessarily end.		
11.	Government should make it easier for children who are supported by both children's social care and youth justice to have one assessment and one plan.		
12.	Government should give clearer instructions about how services share information to protect children, and help improve their ability to share information between their computer systems.		
13.	Government should give more advice to local authorities about how to work with families in a fair way. Parents should be offered representatives who help them understand and contribute to child protection situations. Parents and children should be able to understand what is happening when the courts are involved in decisions about them.		
Making good use of family networks		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
14.	Each family should have a right to a decision making process to identify alternative carers before a child is taken into care.		
15.	A new Family Network Plan should be created which will support and give control to family led alternatives to care e.g. children staying with a family member or someone moving into the family home to support the parents and child.		
16.	Family and friends who look after children permanently and full time, are sometimes called special guardians or kinship carers . All local authorities should make a financial allowance for these carers when they are stepping in to care for a child who might otherwise go into care.		
17.	Legal aid is the use of public money to help pay for legal advice for family members who cannot afford to pay. This should be provided where special guardians and kinship carers have to go to the family courts.		

18.	All new special guardians and kinship carers with an order from court should be given ' kinship leave ' from work, the same as maternity or adoption leave.		
19.	Local authorities or councils should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers so that they get help and support from other people in the same situation as them.		
20.	Government should develop a new legal definition of kinship care, taking a broad range of situations into account.		
Adoption		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
21.	Contact arrangements between adopted children and birth parents should always be allowed (where it is safe) and be done using up to date technology.		
Transforming care		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
22.	New rules for care should be introduced, that apply to all homes for children, so that every child in care is cared for. This includes residential children's homes, secure homes, and semi independent homes.		
23.	New ' Regional Care Cooperatives ' should be created to run and set up residential care, fostering and secure care within a specific region of England. This will mean that local authorities have a better understanding of the type of homes that children need and will be able to make sure they are there for children when they need them.		
24.	The government should take a one-off payment from the following people to cover the cost of changing the care system: the largest private children's home providers and large independent fostering agencies . This payment will be based on the profit they have made from children's social care.		
25.	Ofsted should be given new powers to oversee the people who provide homes for children to make sure they have enough money in the bank for the future. If they do not, action can be taken to make sure children do not have to move at short notice.		

26.	The Department for Education should launch a <i>national foster carer recruitment programme</i> to recruit 9,000 new foster carers.		
27.	Foster carers should be given automatic ability to <i>make decisions</i> which affect the day to day lives of children in their care e.g. having a haircut, going to friends houses.		
Listening to children's voices		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
28.	Independent, opt-out, high quality advocacy for children in care should replace Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 Visitors.		
29.	Advocacy services should be overseen by the Children's Commissioner , who should have powers to refer children's complaints and concerns back to the court if needed.		
Protecting care experienced people from stigma and discrimination		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
30.	New laws should be passed which increases the <i>corporate parenting responsibilities</i> to a wider set of public bodies, for example schools, colleges, universities, the NHS and the police.		
31.	Government should make care experience a protected characteristic ; this means it will be against the law to discriminate against someone because they are or have been in care, and will mean that those with care experience will have the same protections from discrimination as the other nine protected characteristics (<i>age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.</i>) This should be done after talking with care experienced people and the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments.		
32.	National government should also write to every local authority and be clear about the priorities they should give to care experienced adults when accessing services, such as social housing.		
Helping the workforce be the best it can be		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?
33.	New laws should be passed which increases the corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider set of public bodies, for example schools, colleges, universities, the NHS and the police – <i>this is same as no. 30</i>		

34.	<p>Social workers will get back to spending more time working with children and families by having access to better technology and reducing paperwork that distracts from focusing on children. It is expected that all registered social workers, even if they are managers, will spend time working directly with children and families. There should be funding to try different kinds of flexible working so that social work fits with children and families lives and social workers are available when they are needed.</p>		
35.	<p>Social workers gain specific experience from a five year programme of training and support, so that when they start in the job they are developing skills to help children and families. Progress through this learning should be linked to how much social workers get paid so that social workers keep getting better at their jobs and want to stay in their jobs for longer.</p>		
36.	<p>The government should introduce new rules for local authorities on how they recruit and use agency social workers who work temporarily in teams. This costs a lot of money and doesn't help to provide stable professional relationships for children and families. Instead government should set rules about how agency workers can be used, and there should be regional staff banks where local authorities work together to fill urgent gaps in their workforce, rather than trying to fix workforce problems on their own.</p>		
37.	<p>Other people who work in children's social care, for example family support workers, children's homes managers and staff, should be given more training and skills. We should start putting children's home staff on a professional register.</p>		
38.	<p>The Department for Education should strengthen existing <i>leadership programmes</i> for senior managers in local authorities so that they are able to support their social workers and help them deliver help and support that works better for the children and young people they are there to look after.</p>		
Making sure the system is focused on children and families		What do we do already?	What do we need to do?

39.	<p>We recommend that the government works with people with lived experience of services, practitioners, researchers, and other public services to develop a National Children’s Social Care Framework to set the direction and purpose for everyone who works in children’s social care.</p> <p>The Framework would apply to the whole of children’s social care - from Family Help through to supporting children in care and work with care experienced adults - and would help everyone, like social workers and managers, understand what they need to do.</p>		
40.	<p>The government should appoint a National Practice Group, to build practice guides which would offer information and advice to local authorities and people working in children’s social care so they can work in the best way possible. This will help children and families receive the best support possible and reduce differences between local areas. There should be clear ways of measuring how well services are doing, to help everyone learn how to get better - including a new measure of child and family satisfaction.</p>		
41.	<p>There should be clearer expectations for all organisations who are responsible for safeguarding so that they know how they should work together – this includes children’s social care, health, and the police. Schools should now be part of this work. There should be more support to help them do this well and more consequences if they don’t.</p>		
42.	<p>Government should work in a clearer and more linked up way when supporting children and their families. One way to do this is for youth justice work to move from the Ministry of Justice into the Department for Education so that all the support programmes are linked up and children have all their needs met.</p>		
43.	<p>The government should update how it gives money to children’s social care based on what each area needs.</p>		
44.	<p>Ofsted should focus more on what matters to children and families when it inspects local authority services and children’s homes.</p>		
45.	<p>The Department for Education should get involved more firmly in local authorities that are inadequate or have been underperforming for a long</p>		

	time. The Department should introduce Regional Improvement Commissioners to oversee progress in these areas so they improve how they work and deliver services for children and families.		
46.	<p>Children’s social care should make better use of data and technology through a <i>National Data and Technology Taskforce</i> - a group who would support three priority actions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) improving social work computer systems to reduce social worker time spent recording instead of with children and families, 2) enabling smooth sharing of information, and 3) improving what data or information is collected and how it is used to help decision making. <p><i>One example that young people told us about was information about if they are LGBTQ+, where they told us they don’t want to have to come out to different people and professionals can talk about them using the correct information.</i></p>		

Moving on - MISSIONS

Care review found moving on from care was often challenging and uncertain. The report sets out **five ambitious missions** needed so that more care experienced people have a strong network of loving relationships, live in a safe and suitable home, progress to university, have a well paid job and lead a happy and healthy life. Central government, local authorities, employers, the NHS, schools, colleges and universities must step up to make these five foundations for all care experienced people happen.

Mission 1: No young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027

- More children in care and care leavers will be able to have an independent visitor who will build a long term relationship with them.
- Children in care and care leavers will be supported to keep important relationships with their birth parents, wider family, siblings and friends through a new family finding service in every local authority.
- If care experienced people have built a relationship with an adult who loves them and wants to become a more formal part of the family they can get a lifelong guardianship order, a bit like adult adoption, to make their bond official and recognised.

Mission 2: Double the number of care experienced people going to university, with a particular focus on high tariff universities, by 2026

- Children in care will have access to mentoring or tutoring programmes so that they are able to achieve well in education.

- Some children in care may be able to attend state or independent day or boarding schools, this can help children do better in education and allow some children to have a shared care arrangement, living in school and visiting home.
- Young people will be able to see what support the university offers care experienced people through a new scheme that awards universities with a certificate for the level of support they give. Care experienced people will then receive the best support possible at university.

Mission 3: Create at least 3,500 well paid jobs and apprenticeships each year for care experienced people, by 2026

- In the future care leavers up to the age of 25 will be able to get an annual bursary of £1,000 for each year they are completing an apprenticeship. This is money that you can use to pay for things like clothing, books, equipment, transport and lunch.
- In the future if employers have any unspent apprenticeship funds, they should be able to use this to support people with care experience to get the skills and experience to gain employment.

Mission 4: Reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely

- Young people will be able to have a better choice whether they Stay Put with their foster carer, choose Staying Close with residential children's homes or move to supported lodgings.
- Care experienced young people will not be made homeless because they are living in a different local authority, not able to keep a tenancy, or do not have a rent guarantor.
- Young people will be able to afford to kit out their new home and the money will be reviewed each year to make sure it changes with the cost of living.

Mission 5: To increase the life expectancy of care experienced people, by narrowing health inequalities with the wider population

- Young people will be supported by professionals in children's social care who have had training to support them with their mental health if they need it.
- Young people leaving care across England will have better mental and physical health support because local authority teams have the skills to do this.