



Department
for Education

Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation

Children's Social Care Reform 2023

February 2023



Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of His Majesty

February 2023



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Foreword by the Secretary of State for Education



The very first visit I did in this job was to a children's home in Hampshire. Many of the children I met were full of excitement and enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead. One wanted to be a hairdresser, another to join the navy - they all wanted the same opportunities as their friends. I was also struck by how much their experience of the system lacked a consistent, loving presence. This strategy is about how we offer those children, and the many others who need children's social care services, the opportunities they deserve.

Most of us have benefitted from growing up in a family who have provided us with the love, support, friends and community we all know that children need to thrive throughout childhood and beyond. However, we know this is not the case for all children and some families need more intensive help to ensure the same solid foundation. This is what children's social care provides and, therefore, I believe it is one of the state's most important responsibilities.

In the last year, 3 reviews have been published which together call for fundamental reform to children's social care. The Independent Review of Children's Social care set out how we can put love and the overriding importance of relationships back at the centre of what children's social care does. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson reminded us of the absolute priority we must all give to protecting children and keeping them safe. And the Competition and Markets Authority review was unapologetic in highlighting that we are not doing a good enough job of ensuring the right homes are in the right places for children who come into care. On the back of these 3 important reviews, we have a once in a generation opportunity to reset children's social care. It is an opportunity we must not waste.

Children's social care has the potential to transform lives for the better. I want to pay tribute to the phenomenal work of our social workers, family support workers, kinship carers, foster carers, Directors of Children's Services and so many others across the country. It is with thanks to them, as well as children's talent, resilience and determination to succeed, that many who have had a tough start in life go on to thrive. We do not do enough to celebrate the good work that happens.

We must also be clear eyed about the problems with the current system. We know that children's social care has faced long-standing challenges spanning many decades. While there is much that has improved in recent years - for example a 61% increase in local authorities receiving a Good or Outstanding rating - there is much more still to do.

Despite the sterling efforts of all those in children's social care and other services helping children and families, too often the system is not succeeding in providing the right help at the right point. Resources have become trapped at the crisis end of the system, with not enough early support available. Costs are escalating without leading to any improvement in outcomes. We have lost sight of social care as a supportive service to help families when they need it. We have not succeeded in making sure the right homes are available for children who need to come into care, meaning too many end up far from home and far from the people who are important to them. We have allowed too much ambiguity and inconsistency to come into our child protection practice.

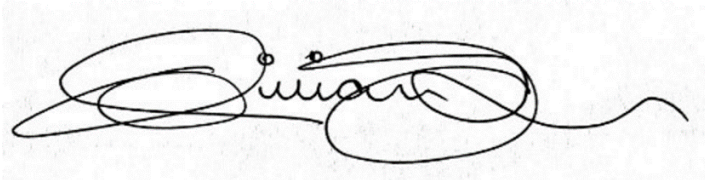
This strategy is about focusing on what really matters to children - family, love and a safe, stable and reliable place to call home. These are the things that ultimately make a difference to children's happiness and success. These are the things children and people who have experienced care tell us are most important and they are what social care professionals say makes them join the profession.

Sadly, we know there is no simple fix. Public and political interest in children's social care often increases when tragic events, such as the premature deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, come to public attention, but too often that focus is not sustained. If we are to truly learn lessons and honour their memories then we must take a determined, focused and long-term approach to change. And that is what we are committing to in this strategy.

This strategy is the first step towards achieving once in a generation reform. Through it we will provide more and better support to families as soon as difficulties emerge, in order to stop problems escalating and enable more families to stay together. We will strengthen our child protection response by getting agencies working together in a fully integrated way, led by social workers with specialist expertise and knowledge. We will unlock the potential of kinship care, so wherever possible, children who cannot stay with their parents are cared for by people who know and love them already. We will reform the care system, to make sure we have enough of the right homes for children who need them in the right places. We must also be ambitious for children in care and care leavers - providing the right support to help them thrive and achieve their potential into adulthood.

Our strategy, supported by £200 million additional investment over the next two years, is laying the groundwork for long-term, future reform. We will use this initial investment to address urgent issues in children's social care which will get us ready to spread new ways of working nationally once this Spending Review period concludes, and to legislate at the first opportunity.

The strategy and the draft National Framework for Children’s Social Care that sits alongside it aim to set out, for leaders and practitioners across the children’s social care system, where we are headed. You will see in this document how we plan to help local areas to introduce change. This should not get in the way of local areas making changes in the right direction now. There is much that can be done to put relationships at the centre of social care practice and together we can make sure that all children get the future they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education

About this consultation

This consultation is for all those who receive and provide children's social care services in England, and those who have an interest in it.

Questions are posed throughout this Implementation Strategy and consolidated at the end. You do not have to respond to every question; if you are only interested in one area of reform, then you are able to engage with only that aspect.

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 2 February 2023.

Responding to the Implementation Strategy consultation

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, you may download a Word document version of the form and email or post it.

By email: CSCStrategy2023.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

By post: CSC Implementation Strategy Consultation Team, Families Group, Department for Education, 6th Floor, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of this consultation, you can contact the team at: CSCStrategy2023.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the Department for Education's (DfE's) e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk; by telephone: 0370 000 2288; or via the DfE Contact us page: [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies and alternative formats are available and can be downloaded from GOV.UK DfE consultations.

Deadline

The consultation closes on 11 May 2023.

Response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) September 2023.

Executive Summary

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. Last year, 3 independent reviews looked at the changes that are needed to achieve this.¹ Between them they looked at the full breadth of children's social care and heard from thousands of people with lived experience of these services or who work in them.

We agree with their problem analysis and vision for change. This vision is underpinned by the fundamental principle of the Children Act 1989 that children's welfare is paramount. The best way of promoting children's welfare is very often by supporting children's families and the loving relationships around them. To achieve this vision, we need to rebalance children's social care away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective help for families, so that it achieves the outcomes children deserve. Achieving this will require a major reset that puts love and stable relationships at the heart of what children's social care does.

We will take ambitious action across six pillars to transform children's social care. These are set out below. We will reform in phases. Over the next two years, we will invest £200 million² addressing urgent issues facing children and families now, laying the foundations for whole system reform and setting national direction for change. After two years, we will refresh this strategy, scaling up the new approaches we have tested and developed, and bringing forward new legislation (subject to parliamentary time).

Pillar 1: Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families

Meaningful and effective help for families facing challenges is the foundation of children's social care. While many families do have good experiences of support, there is too much variation in the amount and quality of help families receive.

¹ The three reviews are: The Competition and Markets Authority's Children's Social Care market study 2022; Child Protection in England 2022; and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022.

² The £200 million investment is across this Spending Review period. A significant majority of that investment falls over the next two years in 22-23 and 24-25.

We want to see much more support available for families who need extra help. We want every area in England to provide families with supportive and welcoming Family Help services, delivered by a skilled multi-disciplinary workforce. Family Help services will provide effective and intensive support to any family facing significant challenges that make it harder to provide their children with a loving, stable and safe family life. They will work closely with wider support provided by universal, community and specialist services, such as health visiting, schools, children and young people's mental health services, and adult mental health teams. Family Help will bring in wider family networks at the earliest opportunity.

Over the next two years, we will take 4 main actions to work towards this:

- **Pathfind a new approach to Family Help.** We will invest over £45 million in our Families First for Children Pathfinder. The Pathfinders will start delivering our new model of Family Help in up to 12 local areas. This will help us learn how best to rollout reforms to Family Help nationally, alongside changes to child protection and how kinship care is supported (in pillars 2 and 3).
- **Support the Family Help workforce.** We want the right people with the right knowledge, skills and relationships to provide support to children and families. We will support Family Help Workers to build their knowledge and skills. We will consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be case-holders for children in need.
- **Join up funding and strategy.** We will work across government and inspectorates including Ofsted to ensure we have more systematic and strategic join up in how local areas are funded, supported and inspected to deliver effective services.
- **Ensure Family Help works for everyone.** We will work with the Law Commission to review the legislation on providing help to disabled children and their families. We will also change how children's social care works with families to help address ethnic disparities and material deprivation.

Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system

We owe it to every child to have strong and effective child protection arrangements that help keep them safe - inside and outside of their homes. While there is much strong and effective practice undertaken by practitioners from across agencies, too often there is a fragmented understanding of what life is like for children and an episodic approach to help and protection. We want agencies working together in a much more integrated way, and social workers with the highest levels of knowledge and skills leading child protection work.

We will take 3 core actions over the next two years to work towards this:

- **Pathfind a new, more integrated and expert child protection response.** Our Families First for Children Pathfinder will test a new Child Protection Lead Practitioner role carrying out front-line child protection work and a dedicated multi-agency child protection response with responsibility for specific child protection functions. We will consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards in 2023 as part of an update to the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. We will also take action to improve information sharing and develop a new, more bespoke response to harms outside of the home.
- **Strengthen multi-agency leadership.** We will amend guidance to local authorities, police and health (the 3 statutory partners) to bring greater clarity to roles and responsibilities. This will ensure leaders with the right level of authority are making key decisions and effectively overseeing the system. There will be more robust and effective accountability and more support in place for partnerships. We will also explore how the role of education can be strengthened, including consulting on its role as a safeguarding partner.
- **Tackle court delays and improve parental engagement in the Family Courts.** This will mean that, when a child cannot live safely with their family, they receive appropriate and timely decisions.

Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks

Family networks can play an invaluable role in supporting families and enabling children to live safely at home with their parents. When a child cannot remain with their parents, wider family and friends can also offer a safe, stable and loving alternative to becoming looked after and moving in with strangers. At present not enough is done to bring wider friends and family members into decision-making for children, from the earliest stages of working with families through to providing a loving stable home for children.

We need to create a culture of “family first”. We must radically reshape how we identify, view and support family networks at all stages of children’s social care. We will take 3 major actions over the next two years to start to achieve this shift:

- **Test how to implement family group decision-making and Family Network Support Packages.**³ This will be through the Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 areas, as well as pilots testing Family Network Support Packages in 7 local areas starting from summer 2023.

³ The Care Review recommended the introduction of Family Network Plans as a mechanism for families to agree the support they need to keep more children safely living within their family networks. Since its publication, we have listened to concerns that a new “Plan” could create legal confusion and additional burdens, so we are renaming this support to “Family Network Support Packages”.

- **Publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023.** This will look at issues such as educational entitlements, training and improving local authority practice - as well as updating on reform activity such as exploring financial allowances.
- **Invest £9 million in a training and support offer for all kinship carers** (those with a legal order and informal kinship carers) by the end of this Parliament.

Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care

When care is the best choice for a child, it is critical that the care system provides stable, loving homes close to children's communities. Homes that provide consistency, stability and warmth. The way we currently plan, commission and provide homes for children in care is not working. This means too often children are living far from where they would call home or in the wrong type of home for what they need. When children leave care, they face barriers to having a stable home, a good job, strong relationships and good health.

We need to transform the way we provide homes for children, so they are the right homes in the right places. We must also be ambitious for children in care and care leavers - to help them recover, thrive and achieve their potential into adulthood.

To start changing the way we provide stable, loving homes for children in care, over the next two years we will:

- **Deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so foster care is available for more children who need it, investing over £27 million over the next two years.** This will boost approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage. This will include supporting foster carers better, so they want to continue fostering. We will test and develop a best practice regional model that can then be delivered more widely.
- **Develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector.** This will include exploring proposals for professional registration of the workforce and a leadership programme with a new Knowledge and Skills Statement with accompanying continued professional development.
- **Introduce a financial oversight regime.** This will cover the largest providers of children's homes and fostering agencies, to increase the transparency of their finances and reduce risks of sudden market exit.
- **Pathfind Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) to plan, commission and deliver care places.** We will be co-designing, testing and evaluating this approach in 2 regional Pathfinders.

- **Set up an expert group to review standards of care, regulations and guidance.** We will undertake a consultation with a view to updating legislation, when parliamentary time allows.

To be a more ambitious, supportive corporate parent for children in care and care leavers, we will:

- **Prioritise loving relationships.** We will fund practical interventions of well-evidenced family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes investing over £30 million over two years.
- **Strengthen corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.** This will mean more organisations consider the needs and views of children in care and care leavers in delivering their policies and services. We will consult on these plans as necessary in autumn 2023 and bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.
- **Create opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve their potential through education, employment and training.** To achieve this we will use Virtual School Heads (VSHs) and Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding. We will also boost the Care Leaver Covenant and the rate of the apprenticeships care leavers' bursary.
- **Have a universal offer of wrap around support and accommodation for all care leavers.** We will increase the leaving care allowance that is available and uphold and strengthen our offers for Staying Put and Staying Close.
- **Decrease mental health and physical health disparities and increase life expectancy for children in care and care leavers.** We will build social workers' and other practitioners' understanding and skills to respond to children's mental health needs. We will work with health partners to drive high expectations and service delivery for physical and mental health support.

Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly-skilled social worker for every child who needs one

When social workers have the tools and time to do their job well, it makes a huge difference to children's and families' lives. We want there to be an excellent social worker for every child and family who needs one. Currently the workforce is under pressure, with rising vacancy rates, increasing use of agency social workers and too few experienced social workers.

Improving workforce stability is crucial for practitioners' ability to build relationships with children and families. We want to make sure there is a strong social worker workforce and that social workers are supported and valued. Social workers should have access to high-quality training and continuous support throughout their career, and their wellbeing should be a priority for leaders and for government. We will take 4 major actions towards this over the next two years:

- **Prioritise high-quality career development for social workers.** We will Establish an Early Career Framework (ECF), so that social workers get the support they need early in their careers. Social Work England will also inspect all initial education routes for social workers by 2025 as part of their three-year cycle.
- **Improve retention.** We will support local authorities to retain their social workers, including improving working conditions and tackling workload pressures that do not lead to improved outcomes for children and families.
- **Reduce the cost and reliance on agency social workers.** Alongside this document, we have published a consultation on whether to set national rules on agency usage, including potential price caps.
- **Boost social worker recruitment.** We will explore ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally.

Every practitioner who works with vulnerable children and families, whether they are a Family Help Worker, children's homes worker, or work with children's social care in another organisation such as education, health or the police, should be valued, supported and have the skills they need. Our actions to support the wider children's social care workforce are set out across the strategy, but we also need a dedicated plan to support social workers who are central to improving the lives of children and families.

Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data

We will only achieve our vision if the system conditions - including accountability, inspection, funding and regulation - support this. At present there is no single framework for what the system should deliver. We recognise the need for government to provide clearer national direction.

We want a system that continuously learns and improves, supported by well aligned national direction and support for learning and accountability. We will take 5 related actions to achieve this:

- **Introduce a Children’s Social Care National Framework:** This will set out the outcomes children’s social care should deliver. Along with the Children's Social Care Dashboard, this will support learning by providing information on how outcomes are being achieved. Practice Guides will set out the best evidenced approaches for achieving the outcomes set out within the National Framework.
- **Improve use of technology and data:** We will publish a data strategy by the end of 2023. The strategy will set out our long-term plan for transforming data in children’s social care. A new children’s social care data and digital expert forum will bring together expertise from inside and outside government to ensure our reforms have maximum impact.
- **Aligned inspection:** As the system is reformed, we will work in partnership to ensure inspection is aligned with the National Framework, and so reflects policy aims. Ofsted will rebalance how it looks at practice, as it did with the Public Law Outline, to ensure it acts as a lever for improvement in line with the reforms.
- **Enhanced improvement and intervention:** We will improve our evidence base around what works to effectively support “drifting authorities” (those who have received consecutive Requires Improvement judgements). A clear interventions policy will set out our escalation pathway, how our regional teams will engage with authorities, changes to how we redeploy statutory directions and improvement notices, and how we will work with authorities who have received areas of priority action.
- **Funding for local authorities based on an up-to-date assessment of needs and resources:** Before the next Spending Review, the Department for Education (DfE) will aim to update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people’s services funding provided to local authorities. We will work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to identify opportunities for implementing the new formula.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. A strong society needs strong families. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families who need extra help. It should protect children and young people by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm. And it should provide care for those who need it, so that children grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Purpose of this report

2. This report is the Government's response and detailed plan to address the recommendations to reform children's social care as set out in 3 reviews:

- The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (The Care Review) 2022
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) review into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes (the National Review) 2022
- The Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) Children's Social Care market study 2022

3. This strategy addresses the whole journey through which a child or family might experience children's social care, acknowledging that children and families may enter, leave and re-enter the system at different points.

What is our vision

4. The 3 reviews acknowledge that they rest on strong foundations. Previous reports and inquiries that have come before, and more recent research and evaluation, have given us a wealth of existing evidence showing what works. In some areas of the country there is evidence of life-changing practice and leadership and we want to see this spread. Yet, there are parts of children's social care and multi-agency working that call for a wholly different approach to enable better care for children and families.

5. The realities for children and families who receive children's social care services are sobering. The need for services is rising, while local authorities are overspending and increasingly struggling to cope. There are 82,170 children in care in England (an increase of 21% since 2012-13).⁴ Currently local authorities in England spend around £10 billion per year,⁵ yet the outcomes for those children for whom social care is here to help and protect remain stubbornly poor. Spend and resource are trapped at the acute end of statutory services, which makes it increasingly difficult for children's social care to be a relationship-focused, helpful service.

6. We must break the cycle through a major reset. That reset must start with love. Our ambitions for reform will put love and stable relationships at the heart of what children's social care does. This is what families and professionals want to see happen.

7. This strategy sets out our six pillars of reform, backed by £200 million of additional investment over the next two years. Each pillar maps to the outcomes and enablers within the Children's Social Care National Framework, published alongside this strategy. The pillars are:

- Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families
- A decisive multi-agency child protection system
- Unlocking the potential of family networks
- Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
- A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one
- A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data.

⁴ 3,264 (26% of the increase) were UASC (the Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2022](#)).

⁵ Department for Education (2022) [LA and school expenditure, Financial Year 2021-22](#)

Consultation question 7

Overall, to what extent do you agree these six pillars are the rights ones on which to base our reforms for children's social care?

Select one from:

- Strongly agree;
- Agree;
- Neutral (neither agree or disagree);
- Disagree;
- Strongly disagree;
- Don't know

If desired, please explain your response.

Making sure reform works for everyone

8. Addressing disparities, protecting and promoting children's rights and creating a fairer system, lies at the heart of our reforms. As part of our proposals, the department has carefully considered how these changes might impact individuals or groups with protected characteristics. We believe that these changes will have a positive impact on the children who need help and protection from the social care system, and on the adults who provide this.

9. We are inviting views on the impact of our proposed reforms in the final chapter of the strategy. But we know that there is more to do to make sure that all children are treated fairly and receive the best possible care and support, regardless of individual circumstance or family background.

Disabled children and young people

10. We have heard from families about the difficulties they face when trying to access social care support for their disabled child's needs. We recognise that caring for a disabled child is not always easy and that sometimes parents and carers need additional help and support. We also recognise that some children with complex needs require specialist care and support, which must be joined up across social care, education and health.

11. Reforms to children's social care are happening at the same time as major changes to the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) and Alternative Provision system. The Panel are also making recommendations on how to improve the safeguarding of disabled children and children with complex health needs in residential settings.

12. We know how important it is that this work joins up to improve the quality of care available and to make services easier to access and navigate for children and families. As part of that process, we make the following commitments across the strategy to strengthen and improve the support children's social care provides for disabled children and young people:

- **Law Commission review:** We will commission a review into how legislation for disabled children could be simplified and streamlined, so that entitlements, referral routes and processes are clearer.
- **Family Help:** We will improve access to support for disabled children so they receive the necessary help while simultaneously removing the stigmas and barriers around asking for help.
- **Children in care:** We will provide stable and loving homes for disabled children who need them. We will do this through recruiting more foster carers and changing the way we commission care, particularly for children with complex needs who need specialist residential care. This will mean their needs can be met close to their local area and we achieve genuine integration across education, health and care.
- **Working Together consultation in spring 2023 and revision:** We will include a stronger focus on support and protection for disabled children and improve multi-agency working.
- **The Children's Social Care National Framework:** We will provide greater national direction so practitioners will be able to improve the quality of provision and response for disabled children.
- **Dashboard metrics:** We will include indicators for disabled children to track their experiences through the social care system.
- **Pathfinder design:** We will incorporate a strong focus on specific support for disabled children and their families in our Pathfinder testing.

13. We want to do better for this group of children. In early 2023, we will host a joint Children's Social Care and SEND roundtable on disability, where we will work with sector experts to make these commitments a reality.

Consultation question 8

What more can be done by government, local authorities and service providers to make sure that disabled children and young people can access the right type of help and support?

Teenagers

14. Teenagers are the largest growing age group in child protection and care.⁶ They often have more complex needs and are at particular risk from a range of harms outside the home, including criminal and sexual exploitation. These are issues that children's social care was not originally designed to deal with and they require strong family and community engagement alongside effective multi-agency working. We are taking action to provide intensive, targeted support for those young people who are most at risk:

- In 2022, we funded the **Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme** to develop multi-agency practice principles for local partnerships when tackling harms outside the home. These principles will be available in spring 2023.
- We have already provided funding to 4 local authorities to pilot an alternative child protection pathway for risk outside the home. We will use the learning from these projects and from our **Families First for Children Pathfinder** to update child protection processes in statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children, and support front-line staff in keeping teenagers safe.
- We are recruiting **more foster carers** who will be able to provide homes for older children and young people, such as teenagers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). UASC are often older with only 13% being under the age of 16.⁷
- We are continuing to reform **supported accommodation** for 16- to 17-year olds. We are ensuring there are national standards, registration requirements and a high-quality option for teenagers where it meets their needs.
- We are undertaking a number of reforms for children in care and care leavers that will target teenagers. This includes an **extension of post-16 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)** style funding, **supporting care leavers into employment** including apprenticeships and an uplift to the leaving care allowance.

⁶ At 31 March 2013, 56% of all Children Looked After were aged 10 and over, increasing to 63% of all Children Looked After at 31 March 2022. For children on a Child Protection Plan, at 31 March 2013, 28% were aged 10 and over, increasing to 37% of all children on a Child Protection Plan at 31 March 2022 (Department for Education (2022) [Characteristics of Children in Need, reporting year 2022](#)).

⁷ Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2022](#)

Racial disparities

15. We are committed to addressing racial disparities in children's social care. The reforms outlined in this consultation set out a far-reaching ambition to create a fairer system of care and support for all children and young people. Research led by Professor Paul Bywaters found inequalities between ethnic groups in the proportions of children in care or on a Child Protection Plan.⁸ We are taking action to reduce racial disparities and commit here to continue this work through every stage of reform planning, testing and delivery.

- **The new Families First for Children Pathfinder** areas will bring Family Help closer to communities by designing services based on their needs and by listening to what they say they need. This non-stigmatising community-based Family Help will work to reduce inequalities between different ethnic groups.
- A stronger focus **on sustaining relationships and putting families first** throughout early help and child protection, together with the role **new corporate parenting commitments** will have in reducing stigma and discrimination for children who are in care, will help reduce disparities in the way children from different ethnic backgrounds are treated and improve their experience of the care system.
- The new **Early Career Framework (ECF)** will support social workers to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to support children, young people, families and carers from diverse backgrounds, and we will make sure that the programme supports equitable progression in the workforce.
- We are **strengthening the apprenticeship route** into social work, with the aim of attracting a broader spectrum of candidates. We know that those currently entering social work through the apprenticeship route are more likely to be from the communities they work in, and so will be more likely to reflect their diversity.
- The **Children's Social Care National Framework and Practice Guides** will help embed stronger, more culturally aware practice and consistent expectations for how children's social care supports families. This will help to address disparities as practitioners engage sensitively with children and families and thereby tackle discriminatory practices.

⁸ Bywaters, P. (2018). [Extreme ethnic inequalities in the care system](#)

16. We know that there is more to do. Earlier this year, we published research into ethnicity in children’s social care.⁹ We will use our Pathfinder testing to continue to develop our understanding of race and ethnicity, and how the children’s social care system can be a powerful tool for reducing disparities and addressing the discrimination families can face. We commit to seeking input from a range of diverse voices as we deliver reforms and shape the future direction of children’s social care.

The wider context

17. This strategy is about the future of children’s social care services. These services are delivered by local authorities working in close partnership with health, police and education. It does not focus in depth on the support provided by universal services, or the critical role those services play in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

18. This strategy and the Children Social Care National Framework are a first step on the roadmap that incorporates wider government reforms, including the Supporting Families Programme, Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, the NHS 10-year plan, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Review and the Schools White Paper. This strategy aligns with these wider reforms to improve children and family services, and to those across government, including the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme, Domestic Abuse Act and the 10-year Drug Strategy, From Harm to Hope. It also aligns with reforms to improve health services including the introduction of NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) as the new NHS commissioning body in Integrated Care Systems, and the abolition of Clinical Commissioning Groups.

19. In setting out our government response today, we are also conscious of 2 other independent reports that have been published in recent months. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published its final report in October 2022. This inquiry concluded seven years of investigation into institutional failure across England and Wales to protect and safeguard children. The Government will provide a comprehensive response in line with the Inquiry’s deadline.

⁹ Department for Education (2022) [Ethnicity and children’s social care](#)

20. In addition, in October 2022 the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its phase one findings into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings. Several issues raised in the Care Review feature in the phase one report, including the need to review existing regulations, strengthen the residential care workforce (recruitment, retention, training and registration) and improve commissioning. The Secretary of State for Education responded to phase one of the review on 26 October 2022.¹⁰ The second phase of the review, reporting in spring 2023, will provide recommendations for the residential system, policy and practices.

How can you input?

21. We are committed to listening to the voices of children, families and the sector on our proposals for reform to make sure we deliver on our ambitions. That is why, alongside taking immediate actions, we are launching three 14 week consultation exercises:

- The **Children’s Social Care National Framework and Practice Guides** will help embed stronger, more culturally aware practice and consistent expectations for how children’s social care supports families. This will help to address disparities as practitioners engage sensitively with children and families and thereby tackle discriminatory practices.
- **A consultation on the proposals in our Implementation Strategy (this document)**. In each chapter, we are seeking views on our overall vision for reform and looking to understand existing practice better in various areas to inform our next steps.
- **Consultation on a draft Children’s Social Care National Framework**. This is published separately on GOV.UK. We want to consult on the outcomes and expectations the draft National Framework sets for children’s social care practice, and the indicators we will use to support learning. This consultation is likely of most interest to local authorities and those who work with children’s social care.
- **Consultation on the agency market**. This is published separately on GOV.UK. We want to consult on proposals to reform the use of agency social workers in children’s social care. It is likely to be of most interest to local authority workforce leads, social workers and employers of agency social workers.

¹⁰ UK Parliament (2022) [Written Ministerial Statement by the Secretary of State for Education on phase one of the Independent Report on Hesley Group Children’s Homes](#)

22. The responses will inform decisions on our overall direction of travel and help lay the groundwork this Parliament to unlock future resources. We have produced a child and young person guide of this Implementation Strategy, as well as an accessible version of an executive summary, to meet the needs of those with special educational needs and disabilities. Additional accessible formats and language translations are available on request.

23. We want to build on the steps we have already taken to involve people with lived experience of children's social care in the shaping of the reform programme. We will also continue to engage with those who work in children's social care at all levels to gain from their understanding. We are grateful to members of the National Implementation Board and National Practice Group who have already shown us the huge value in listening and responding to professional and lived experience in our decision-making. We recognise that many others will want to share their own experiences with us and look forward to continuing our open dialogue with children and families after publication.

24. We are currently in the process of appointing a facilitator to co-create sessions to engage with those with lived experience of the care system. The facilitator will work with their charity counterparts, virtually or face-to-face, to facilitate and run effective and inclusive sessions and engagement with people with lived experience of the care system, in order to support them in presenting their views and influencing the implementation of reforms.

Chapter 2: Family Help

Chapter summary

This chapter covers the following reforms to deliver effective, welcoming help for children and families:

- **Launching the Families First for Children Pathfinder** to deliver a new approach to Family Help in up to 12 local areas in the next two years, alongside child protection and kinship reforms.
- **Building a skilled and effective workforce** through a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers and consulting on allowing a broader group of professionals to hold child in need cases.
- **Taking action to simplify and join up support for families locally and nationally** including government programmes and inspection.
- **Ensuring Family Help works for everyone**, by aligning reforms for children with special needs and disabilities, undertaking a Law Commission review for children with disabilities, increasing research on ethnic disparities and the voice of children and families in designing services, and improving responses to material deprivation.

What is our vision?

25. All families can face challenges that make parenting difficult, whether it is unemployment, caring for a disabled child, domestic abuse, or physical or mental ill-health. Often families are able to overcome challenges themselves or with the help of relatives, friends and services such as schools, health visitors and mental health services. However, sometimes families will have more significant needs that require more intensive help and support. Meaningful and effective help for families facing challenges is the foundation of children's social care. Help for families is core to both improving children's lives and keeping them safe.

26. Our ambition is that every child and family who needs it will have access to high-quality help, no matter where they live. Family Help will provide intensive multi-disciplinary support, with social workers and other practitioners working together. It will work with families facing significant challenges that make it harder to provide their children with a loving, stable or safe family life that meets their needs. It will be based within and tailored towards their local communities. It will simplify how this support is provided, becoming a single service that removes the distinction between “targeted early help” and child in need.¹¹ It will be led by the local authority and incorporate support from universal, community and specialist services. For example, it will work alongside health visitors, schools, adult mental health teams and Family Hubs to meet the needs of all children and families fully.

27. Family Help should be something families actively seek out, rather than something to be feared or ashamed of. Investing in support for families helps children to have happy, healthy childhoods. It can help them to achieve good outcomes and it stops problems getting worse.¹² Where there are concerns about children’s safety, help for families can be an enabler for strong child protection.¹³ Holistic support coupled with good family-practitioner relationships should make it easier to identify and reduce harm. Investing in help can also rebalance local authority spending. With more families helped before they reach crisis point, investing in help can reduce expensive, crisis-driven intervention later on.¹⁴

¹¹ **Early help** describes any service that supports children and families as soon as problems emerge. Early help services provide support before the problem needs statutory intervention. Some early help is provided through “universal services”, such as through schools and NHS services. They are universal services because they are made available to all families, regardless of their needs. Other early help is provided by services coordinated by a local authority and their partners to address specific concerns within a family. Examples of early help services include parenting support, play and activity groups, mental health and wellbeing support, and housing and employment services. **Targeted early help** is a service provided to children and families who are identified by practitioners to have multiple or complex needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. It is a voluntary service that provides support before statutory intervention is needed and takes a casework approach. A lead practitioner coordinates a whole family assessment to better understand the family’s needs and identify the most appropriate support for the child, young person or family. **Child in need** refers to the statutory support provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children’s social care services, or the child is disabled. The duty to provide support is on the local authority. There will be a Child in Need Plan that sets out the support to be provided to the child and their family.

¹² The 2019 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (2021) evaluation of the Supporting Families Programme ([Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2021-22](#)) found that it achieved a 38% reduction in the likelihood of juvenile custodial sentences, a 15% reduction in the likelihood of juvenile convictions, a 25% reduction in adult custodial sentences, and an 11% reduction in the proportion of adults claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance.

¹³ The Supporting Families Programme led to a 32% reduction in the proportion of Children Looked After in the 19 to 24 months after joining the programme; however, in the first 18 months, it saw an increase in child protection plans. This indicates that more early support for families leads to better identification of risk, but also safer reduction of risk (MHCLG (2019) [National evaluation of the Troubled Families 2015 to 2020](#)).

¹⁴ The independent review of children’s social care (2022) [Costing technical report](#)

28. Family Help will build on the support systems already in place in local areas. We now know more about how to deliver good quality family support. We have learned from the Supporting Families Programme, the Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, and work by many local areas. Family Help aims to expand and formalise that support. We will increase spend on early meaningful help to reduce the need for, and spend on, late crisis intervention. We want to see every area in England providing families with evidence-based Family Help services that are local to where families live.

29. Family Help will continue if there are child protection concerns, working alongside an expert-led multi-agency response. The diagram below illustrates how Family Help will work within the wider system to support and protect children.

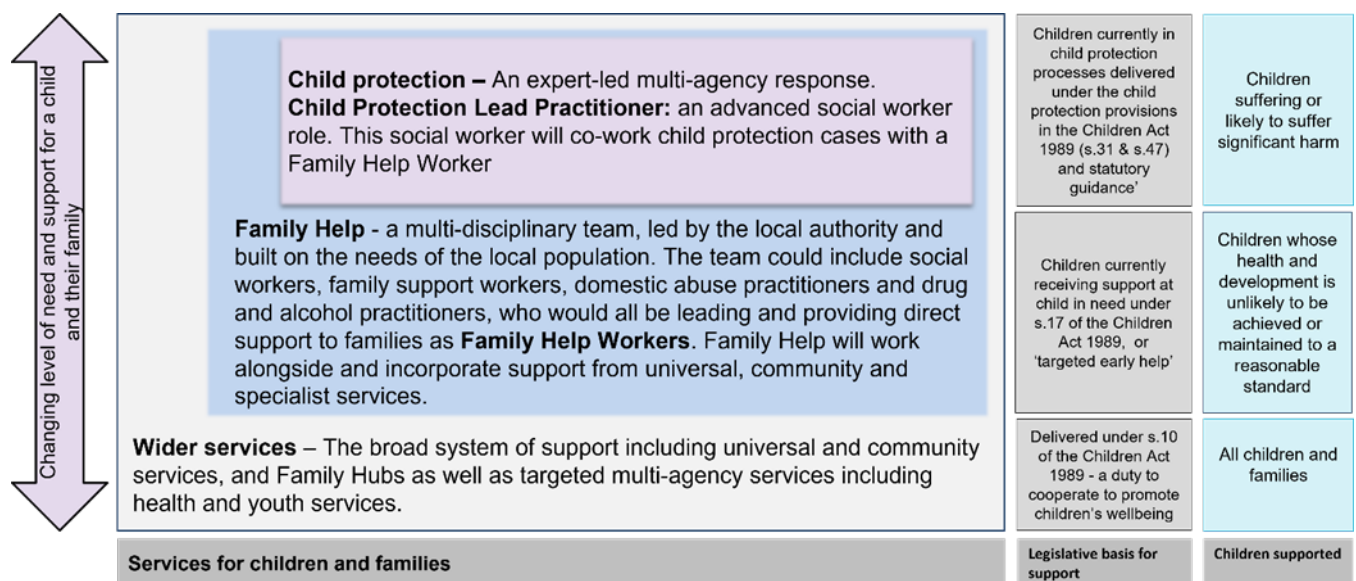


Figure 1: A diagram showing how Family Help will work with wider services (descriptive text follows this)

Description of figure 1

Figure 1 describes how family help will work with child protection and wider services that support children and families. The content is as follows:

Child protection is an expert-led multi-agency response for children suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm. It works through child protection processes set out in the Children Act 1989 and statutory guidance. It is carried out by a Child Protection Lead Practitioner who is an advanced social worker. They will co-work child protection cases with a professional from the Family Help service.

Child protection will work alongside Family Help as part of the same service. Family Help is a multi-disciplinary, local authority led team. It works with children and families with complex needs, where a child's health and development is unlikely to be achieved or maintained to a reasonable standard under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The service will be based on the needs of the local population and work alongside partners to deliver support. The team could include social workers, family support workers, domestic abuse practitioners, drug and alcohol practitioners and others. They will all be leading and providing direct support to families as Family Help Workers.

Family Help falls within wider services. Wider services are the broad system of support for all children and families including those who are receiving Family Help or child protection. They include universal and community services, and Family Hubs as well as targeted multi-agency services including health and youth services. This system of support is delivered under section 10 of the Children Act 1989 – which is a duty to cooperate to promote children's wellbeing.

30. Local areas will need support to realise this vision of Family Help, including via national investment, guidance and legislation. Inspection should also be aligned, so that the delivery of meaningful help for families is clearly captured in the National Framework.

How far from the vision are we now?

31. In recent years many local areas have made significant progress in how they support families. This has been helped by programmes such as Supporting Families, the Innovation programme and the Strengthening Families and Protecting Children programme, which have helped to change services on the ground and built strong evidence for what works.¹⁵ But we know there is more to do. There is large variation in the amount and quality of support available at a local area level, with varying thresholds to access support. It has been estimated that early help services are provided to less than 1% of children in some areas and over 15% in others. Eligibility for help also varies across the country.¹⁶ Reducing spending in support services can be a false economy, leading to costly crisis intervention and worse outcomes for children when their families face difficulties.

32. While many families do have good experiences of support, others report finding the interventions they are offered unhelpful. They often feel that they are more monitored than helped.¹⁷ The proportion of referrals that resulted in an assessment where the child was determined not to be in need increased by 10 percentage points from 19% in 2012/13 to 29% in 2021/22.¹⁸ A review of early help practice noted the prevalence of targeting and assessment-driven processes in the way in which early help services engage children and families.¹⁹ This could reflect increasing risk aversion and a need to gatekeep limited resources. Part of this is to do with the help available. We know that services can be patchy or disjointed, and that commissioned support is often not based on what the evidence tells us is effective.²⁰

¹⁵ For example, an evaluation of the Family Safeguarding Hertfordshire programme, funded through the Innovation programme, found significant reductions in the numbers of new Children Looked After aged under 12 (reduced by 26%), the average number of children on Child Protection Plans aged under 12 (reduced by 43%) and police call outs (monthly average reduced by 64%). This is four years post-intervention (Department for Education (2020) [Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding](#)).

¹⁶ This estimate is based on a Freedom of Information request sent to 150 upper-tier local authorities, which requested data on early help provision between 2015-16 and 2019-20. Responses were received from 131 local authorities to the request, of which 105 local authorities provided some of the requested data in a useable format (Action for Children (2022) [Too Little Too Late Report Final.pdf](#) (actionforchildren.org.uk)).

¹⁷ The independent review of children's social care (2022) [IRCSC Adult Engagement Summary](#)

¹⁸ Department for Education (2022) [Characteristics of children in need, Reporting Year 2022](#)

¹⁹ National Children's Bureau (2021) [Supporting and strengthening families through early help - A rapid review of evidence](#)

²⁰ Early Intervention Foundation (2018) [Realising the potential of early intervention](#)

33. When a family's situation changes, they can be moved 'up' or 'down' between early help and child in need teams. This means a change in workers, new assessments and new plans each time. With each new change in professional, children and families' histories are lost and the true scale of long-term harm becomes obscured.²¹

34. We know that some groups are particularly impacted by a lack of help. Children from black and Asian backgrounds who are removed from their family are less likely than children from a white or mixed ethnic group to receive support and intervention before this happens.²² The Care Review highlighted that parents with disabled children struggle to access the right support and find navigating services frustrating.²³ Children who live in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in the UK are 10 times more likely to be in care or on a Child Protection Plan than children in the least deprived 10%.²⁴

35. Parents who have experienced domestic abuse tell us they often feel investigated when they have been asking for help. Services for perpetrators of domestic abuse are limited and we do not have strong evidence of programmes that are effective at changing this behaviour.²⁵ Ofsted found that agencies often inappropriately attribute responsibility to the victim to protect their child, and the adult's needs (both victim and perpetrator) are not addressed.²⁶ Other groups including young carers, children with no recourse to public funds, and parents who have had a child removed from their care also report that they struggle to access enough support

36. Finally, practitioners can struggle to build strong relationships with their communities and those they work with. Too often, the help that is provided is not embedded in, or shaped by, local communities, particularly ethnic minority and religious communities. Social workers are not able to spend enough time with families, and a safeguarding focus in their work means that these interactions can become too procedural.²⁷

²¹ The Panel has said that transitions between plans can be points of risk as a result in of changes in the level of support and oversight of what is happening to children. They cite failure to deal with changing levels of risk as one of the key themes of serious incidents (The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021) [The Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2020](#)).

²² Children from black and Asian ethnic groups were less likely to have had Child in Need or Child Protection Plans at any point in the 8 years prior to becoming looked after in 2019-20 compared with white and mixed ethnicity children (39% and 36% compared with 65% and 62%, respectively) (Department for Education (2022) [Ethnicity and children's social care](#)).

²³ The independent review of childrens' social care (2022) [IRCSC Adult Engagement Summary](#)

²⁴ Child Welfare Inequalities Project (2020) [The Child Welfare Inequalities Project: Final Report](#)

²⁵ Ofsted et al. (2017) [The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse](#); Early Intervention Foundation (2017) [Improving the effectiveness of the child protection system: Overview](#)

²⁶ Ofsted et al. (2018) [Joint inspections of the response to children living with domestic abuse](#)

²⁷ Ferguson, H. (2017) [How children become invisible in child protection work: Findings from research into day-to-day social work practice](#); Munro, E. (2011) [Munro review of child protection final report: A child centred system](#)

What have we already started doing?

37. At the last Spending Review, we increased **investment in the Supporting Families Programme by £695 million**. To date, the Supporting Families Programme has supported over half-a-million families to make sustained improvements to their lives.²⁸ The Early Help System Guide has given local partnerships a structure to move towards more mature and effective systems of support. As well as more clearly defining eligibility for support, the Outcomes Framework has set better expectations for “good” outcomes for children and families. In recognition of the role the programme plays, the Department for Education (DfE) is now working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver positive outcomes for children and families.

38. **Our Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme is investing £84 million over five years (2019 to 2024)**. This programme is supporting 17 local authorities to implement one of 3 evidence-based models. They focus on improving work with families to safely reduce the number of children entering care. The evidence from these models informed the Care Review’s recommendations and our proposals for reform.

39. **We are already investing in the place-based planning and delivery of joined up family services, through the £301.75 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme**. Delivering jointly with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), this will fund 75 local authorities to create a network of Family Hubs and specific support delivered through those hubs. This will be for parent-infant relationships and perinatal mental health, infant feeding and parenting. We are also investing a further £12 million to transform services to the Family Hub model in an additional 12 local authorities.

40. We are supporting areas to tackle the reasons that families need social care support. **We have made up to £19 million available to local areas for the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme from 2022/23 to 2024/25**. This supports workforce training, the delivery of interventions for healthy parental relationships, and coordination of work across partners.

41. This year, the DfE have asked the What Works for Early Intervention and Children’s Social Care (WWEICSC) to help us identify effective local practice to support children and families experiencing domestic abuse. They are working with 4 local domestic abuse services to broaden our understanding of multi-agency work and how these services can improve outcomes for children experiencing domestic abuse.

²⁸ Department for Education (2022) [Infants children and families to benefit from boost in support](#)

42. The NHS Long Term Plan has committed to growing **funding for children and young people’s mental health services faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending**. By 2023/24, at least an additional 345,000 children and young people aged 0 to 25 will be able to access support. This is via NHS funded mental health services and school- or college-based Mental Health Support Teams.

43. The 10-year Drug Strategy, From Harm to Hope, allocated **£532 million over the current Spending Review period for improving treatment and recovery services**. This will increase the support available for parents, young people and families that have substance use issues .

44. **We are improving support for children and young people with SEND** in the forthcoming SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. There are areas of strong alignment between these reforms, which include a firmer focus on direction setting at a national level through the new Children’s Social Care National Framework (outlined in chapter 8), the new National Standards for SEND and Alternative Provision, and greater provision of short breaks helping ensure families get the support they need.

Camden community-based support for families

I'm a single dad and have no family around to help and on my own. Having a female role model for the girls, they relate to her. She helps me hear things from their perspective. She understands the family dynamics and helps give a voice to each of us... When you are in the thick of it she helps pull you out and see things differently.

Supported by investment from the local authority and the Supporting Families Programme, Camden Council launched its initial five-year Resilient Families Programme (2014-2019) with an ambition to focus on: what families need to be resilient; giving support in the right way, at the right time; and empowering families to improve their own situation. Camden has been able to maintain its investment in early intervention and prevention, and has continuously spent a significant proportion of their children's services budget on early help and family support services.

Camden delivers services close to communities, with much of their offer provided by community services and a Family Advisory Board ensuring that people with lived experience shape the help they receive. This approach provides support to families at an early stage and ensures this continues if their needs increase. A daily conversation between early help and social work services considers how families can be helped without statutory social care and ensure smooth transitions if a social worker is needed. The intensive early help team will co-work and support families at early help, child in need and child protection and parental advocacy is offered providing peer support for parents in child protection processes.

Between 2014 and 2021 Camden has seen a reduction in children referred for statutory social care from 522 to 280 per 10,000 children, and a reduction of rates of children in need from 500 children per 10,000 to 356 - indicating that families' needs are being met at a lower level. There has also been a reduction in children in care by 48% between 2012 and 2021.

Lancashire Family Safeguarding

In 2021 Lancashire adopted Hertfordshire's multi-disciplinary, strengths-based Family Safeguarding model to keep more families safely together.

It helped that the social worker had access to the right support in the team and the right workers to understand me. I've worked with all of the specialists in the Family Safeguarding team and that has been really good, and they've been more easily accessible. - Parent

In Lancashire, multi-disciplinary teams comprise of social workers, child and family practitioners, domestic abuse survivor workers, domestic abuse perpetrator workers (staff from the National Probation Service), substance misuse workers, mental health practitioners, and psychologists. They work together to support vulnerable families and use motivational interviewing which boosts parents' confidence, enabling them to make changes to their lives.

Practitioners share their specific expertise with each other and use group supervision, which helps them better support families and identify potential harm to a child.

Within a year of adopting Family Safeguarding, Lancashire had 287 fewer children entering care (age 12 and under) and over a 50% reduction in children on child protection plans (54.9 per 10,000 down to 26 per 10,000) - which brings the local authority well below the average for England. Lancashire recently moved from a 'requires improvement' to a 'good' rating by Ofsted (January 2023).

What we will do over the next two years

45. We will take 2 approaches to improving the help provided to children and families across the country - testing the deliverability of our vision for Family Help through up to 12 Pathfinder areas, while helping all local authorities to take steps closer to our vision.

Key features of our vision for Family Help are:

Families will access meaningful help in a supportive and welcoming way. This means flexible and intensive support to address the needs of the whole family for the benefit of children. This includes more effectively engaging fathers and wider family. Practitioners will carry out relationship-based work and use well-evidenced practice to help children and families with complex needs. The first contact with Family Help practitioners will be a clear and supportive conversation with families. There will be a consistent national understanding about which families should be supported by a Family Help service and close integration with the wider support system.

Based within local communities and designed to meet the needs of families that live in them. Family Help will be rooted in communities, make use of their assets and be more visible and accountable to them. It will tailor the support available to the different needs of children and families by listening to them when designing and evaluating services, using population needs assessments based on data, and having detailed knowledge of the area.

A single intensive service that provides hands-on intensive support to children and families to meet their needs in a simplified way. It will remove the distinction between targeted early help and child in need. This will cut down multiple referrals and assessments between different practitioners and teams when a family's situation changes. This service will be led from within the local authority, working with partners in other agencies such as police, health, education and community services to deliver integrated support that meets the needs of children and families.

A skilled, multi-disciplinary workforce with the time, skills and knowledge to help families. This will make it possible to meet the needs of children and families in one place. The team will include social workers and family support workers alongside specialist workers who are able to support with issues such as mental health, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol use.

A joined up approach to Family Help at both local and national levels. This will mean policies, funding for vulnerable children and their families is joined up and simplified across government. Local leadership will be strengthened, and inspection will be focused on the delivery of meaningful help for families.

Family Help Workers will prioritise seeking out family networks to support parents and children. Wider family networks and friends in the community will be empowered to support children and families. All local authorities will offer family group decision-making as standard practice and this will be used at the early stages of working with a family. They will use their resources creatively to overcome financial barriers to supporting children at home (see chapter 4 - Family Network Support Packages).

The Families First for Children Pathfinder

46. We will provide over £45 million to launch the Families First for Children pathfinder in order to implement the Family Help reforms alongside reforms to child protection and family networks.²⁹ This will be our delivery mechanism for learning how to best rollout our reforms across England. It will start with up to 12 local areas in the next two years.

²⁹ For more detail on child protection see: chapter 3: Child protection and multi-agency working. For more detail on family networks see: chapter 4: Unlocking the potential of family networks.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme

The Care Review made radical suggestions about how Family Help and kinship care should change, and both the Care Review and the Panel set out major recommendations for child protection. The scale of these changes cannot be achieved overnight, and it is important to test how they impact one another and the experience of children and families. The Families First pathfinder will therefore deliver end-to-end service reform across a limited number of local areas in the next two years, and inform the next stage of our reform programme looking to deliver transformation more widely.

We will provide over £45 million and work with up to 12 local areas to co-design and deliver end-to-end service reform, implementing new Family Help services, child protection arrangements and support for kinship care. This will deliver our future vision for how we want to work with children and families in a select number of areas.

The features of the new system:

The new system will include 3 elements - with more detail set out in the individual chapters:

1. Locally based, multi-disciplinary Family Help services providing intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.
2. A child protection response carried out by social workers with greater expertise and experience, with access to dedicated and skilled multi-agency input. It works with Family Help to protect children who are suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm (see chapter 3).
3. Greater use of family networks, with earlier use of family group decision-making throughout Family Help and child protection systems, facilitated by targeted funding to enable more children to live at home or support a transition into kinship care (see chapter 4).

How we will deliver the programme:

We will start to work with early adopters in spring 2023. In September 2023 we will launch the first wave of Pathfinders, working with 3 local areas and up to 9 more local areas in the second year.

We will provide local areas with support and funding to deliver the reforms. We will co-design these new services by working with children and families, the local authority, schools, police, health and other key partners within the area, including the third sector. Pathfinder areas will have a broad range of characteristics so that we learn how to implement reforms across the country.

We will implement the reforms using a “test and learn” approach with ongoing evaluation, in order to ensure this complex system is effectively safeguarding children and to inform us on what national guidance and legislation are required to enable delivery on the ground. This will provide us with the necessary detail and evidence to inform further implementation.

47. The key features of the Family Help Service are set out at the top of this section. The Families First for Children Pathfinder will allow us to come to a settled view on some key delivery questions. It will give us the evidence to make changes to national guidance and legislation, subject to parliamentary time. Questions we will test in Pathfinders include:

- **Delivering a single intensive and integrated service:** How to bring together child in need and targeted early help in a way that children and families receive more consistent and intensive support. This will include how support can best be delivered in a non-stigmatising way that facilitates effective child protection. We will understand how the Family Help service best works with wider support services delivered by the local authority and its partners. We will understand the best way to set out eligibility for Family Help, so that there is consistent national understanding of who should receive this support, but local areas can meet families' needs flexibly. We want to ensure families get the support they need, while balancing the need to target resources at families who need them most.
- **Building a multi-disciplinary workforce with the time and skills to help families:** How a broad range of professions best work together as a team to support a child and their family under section 17, and how to identify and allocate the most appropriate practitioner as the case-holder. Teams could include domestic abuse workers, drug and alcohol specialists and child mental health workers, alongside current family support workers and social workers. This will help inform whether to place multi-disciplinary Family Help teams on a statutory footing as recommended by the Care Review.
- **Based within local communities and meeting the needs of families that live in them:** How best to deliver Family Help services so that they are embedded in and visible to local communities. How to ensure the voices of children and families are heard. And how to maximise the use of population needs assessments, based on data and local knowledge, when designing and evaluating services.

- **Families will be welcomed and supported when using Family Help:** How to develop key features that make Family Help a supportive, non-stigmatising service that is tailored to meet the different needs of children and parents. This will include children with special educational needs and disabilities, recognising that these families may need support in order to access the right services to achieve good outcomes. Other specific groups which may need tailored approaches include: young carers; children with no recourse to public funds; teenagers and children experiencing harm in their community; black, Asian and ethnic minority families; and fathers and supporting parents who have previously had a child removed by the Family Court. How best to introduce a more effective front door to services including ensuring they start with a clear supportive conversation (similar to models in Leeds Family Valued) and considering how to best use models such as Family Hubs as a non-stigmatising route into Family Help. We want this model to have close links to other local universal services and to support families to engage with these if they would better meet a child's specific needs, such as a disability. We will evaluate the risks and benefits of removing timescales for initial assessments as recommended by the Care Review.
- **Simple and flexible funding.** We will work across government to simplify funding and streamline reporting requirements for Pathfinder areas and then evaluate the impact of this. We will use areas to test the alignment of the Supporting Families and Reducing Parental Conflict Programme funding. This will inform future decisions in the next Spending Review period.

A skilled and effective workforce

48. Current family support workers are highly skilled and effective and often have more time to support families than social workers. We want to build on these strengths and give family support workers a greater role in Family Help as Family Help Workers. Family Help Workers are practitioners who work in the Family Help service as case-holders working with children and families. They will come from a range of professional backgrounds to form a multi-disciplinary team.

49. **In spring 2023 we will consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be case-holders for children in need and their families.** This will enable the right people, with the right knowledge, skills and relationships, to be able to provide families with the support they need and to make sure that children are safe and well. For example, this could mean a family support worker, a mental health practitioner or a domestic abuse practitioner could case-hold if that best meets the needs of the child and family. It will also give social workers more time to spend with children and families to benefit from their knowledge and skills. Project Crewe piloted early help workers holding low-risk child in need cases, with social worker oversight. The evaluation indicated that families received more personalised and flexible support compared with the control group, with time spent with children and families occurring 3 times more often. The pilot area closed more child in need cases and increased more protective factors than the control group.³⁰ Working Together currently sets out specific child in need processes that should be carried out by a social worker (including assessment and setting review points for a plan). However, it is unclear on wider case-holding responsibilities. We will bring more clarity by consulting on changes to enable the most appropriate practitioner to be the case-holder for a child.

50. **By summer 2024, we will publish a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers.** This will be an important part of valuing and building confidence in Family Help Workers, and setting out a common framework of the skills and knowledge required to do the job. The Knowledge and Skills Statement will do this and will be informed by new research on current family support workers. Similar to surveys on social workers, it will build our understanding of the makeup of current teams, identifying knowledge and skills, capability, and capacity gaps. The research will be launched in autumn 2023. We will work closely with local authorities, the wider workforce and families to develop the Knowledge and Skills Statement, as well as drawing on research.

Building a joined-up approach to Family Help

51. Support for our most vulnerable children and their families must be joined up and simplified both locally and nationally. The issue of disjointed central government funding is highlighted by the Levelling Up White Paper.³¹ To mirror the partnership working we expect to see at a local level, across central government we will:

- Work closely with DLUHC on the Supporting Families Programme to deliver positive outcomes for children and families. Together we will continue to share best practice, facilitate peer support between areas, and place a greater focus on achieving the reform vision in both policy and delivery work with authorities.

³⁰ Heal, J., Nolan, D. & Sanders, M. (2017) [Project Crewe: Research report](#)

³¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

- Use the Families First for Children Pathfinder to test the integration of government funding streams (as set out above). This will provide learning on how funding can be simplified and aligned for local authorities.
- Include a focus on Family Help as part of the Child Protection Ministerial Group. This will help ensure that Family Help policies are aligned and there is sufficient cross-government oversight and accountability for local support systems (see Chapter 3 for more detail on the Child Protection Ministerial Group).
- Strengthen multi-agency leadership of services at the local level through our reforms to safeguarding partners. This will bring greater clarity to roles and responsibilities for the local authority, police and health, and ensure that schools have a greater role in supporting and protecting vulnerable children.
- Work with Ofsted and other inspectorates to ensure inspection sets a focus on families receiving high-quality, evidenced-based help in the way we envisage. Together with Ofsted, we will ensure that the wishes, feelings and perspectives of children and families are central to the inspection and monitoring of Family Help services, so that we can properly measure and learn from their experiences. Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMIFRS) are currently undertaking joint inspections of early help, which will support this work.

Ensuring Family Help works for everyone

52. Family Help will support children and families with a broad range of needs. We are taking steps across our reforms to ensure all children are supported by children's social care. The Children's Social Care National Framework emphasises the importance of anti-discriminatory and poverty-aware practice, as well as meeting the needs of disabled children. Effective help for different children and families will be central to the design of the Families First for Children Pathfinder. This will include: children with special educational needs and disabilities; young carers; children with no recourse to public funds; teenagers and children experiencing harm in their community; black, Asian and ethnic minority families; and parents who have previously had a child removed by the Family Court.

Liam's story*

Liam is 16 years old, has severe autism and learning disabilities, and has experienced trauma. He has struggled with behaviour at his special schools, which led to him being excluded. He was therefore at home full time which put pressure on his mother who has 2 younger children. There was a risk that he would not be able to stay safely at home.

Liam's local authority had struggled to source the right support for him. They were unable to find a suitable care provider to provide personal assistants for Liam to support him at home and to access community-based activities. Liam had a social worker from the Children with Disabilities Team, who was dedicated and non-judgemental. He also had a community nurse from the local authority Learning Disabilities Team.

Liam's mum contacted the Children's Commissioners' Help at Hand to ask for help, as she felt he was still not receiving the support and care he needed. Help at Hand provided support and advice. They contacted the local authority and worked closely with the aim to find the right support for Liam. Liam was also helped by an advocate from a very effective local family support charity who helped Liam and his mother feel heard. Things improved following this point. Liam's social worker worked positively and proactively with the Learning Disabilities nurse, Liam's mum and his advocate to bring about change.

The local authority reassessed Liam's Education and Help Care Plan (EHCP). This led to suitable education provision being found that really met his needs. It is clear that without the improvement in support Liam was at a high risk of being taken into residential care. Instead, Liam has been able to stay at home with his family. He is now on a Child in Need Plan so that he and his family continue to receive the support they need.

*name anonymised

53. Alongside this, we are taking targeted action to provide better support for disabled children. We will implement the Care Review's recommendation for a Law Commission review of children's social care legislation for disabled children. The Law Commission is an expert body and will make recommendations to government on how this legislation could be simplified and streamlined. This will look at the patchwork of outdated legislation which leads both to variation in the services provided and to confusing, often safeguarding-focused routes to accessing support.³² This will mean entitlements, referral routes and processes are clearer for families and local authorities.

54. Following the SEND and Alternative Provision green paper, we introduced more support including £30 million of funding to test novel approaches to integrate the delivery of short breaks and support services for children and young people with SEND. This will improve their health, education and wellbeing. Additionally, the proposed new national standards are intended to set consistent expectations of how a child's needs are identified and met by support and placements at every stage of their journey across education, health and care. This includes consistent provision, processes and systems across the country for every child and young person with special educational needs or disabilities, or in alternative provision.

55. The Government consultation on the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper highlighted that families with disabled children need more integrated and coherent support across education, health and care. We need to do more to ensure there is coherence in policies and that reforms make the children's social care and SEND systems easier to access and navigate for children and families. We will use the Working Together consultation in spring 2023 to consider how we can include a stronger focus on support for disabled children. We will also look again at assessment processes and the way information is shared across children's social care, SEND systems and schools. We will work to ensure multi-agency panels and multi-agency safeguarding partners, including the new NHS ICBs, connect up in a sensible way.

56. We will seek to address the ethnic disparities highlighted by the Care Review that exist in current family support services. Pathfinder areas will bring Family Help closer to communities, by designing services based on their needs and by listening to what they need. This will help demonstrate how a different way of working can build culturally competent practice. We will ensure that all research commissioned by DfE on family support includes a specific focus on the experience of children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds. Inspection will also consider how effectively the wishes, feelings and perspectives of children and families who interact with services are reflected in the work with and decision-making for children and families. We will encourage sharing good practice on embedding culturally competent practice among practitioners.

³² The independent review of children's social care (2022) [Final report](#)

57. We want social workers to be able to better respond to the needs of families facing material deprivation. Social workers can already provide families with direct payments under section 17 of the Children Act 1989; however, more can be done. The Household Support Fund was recently extended until March 2024 with an additional £842 million funding for England (with total funding for the programme now at £2.5 billion). We will work with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve social workers' ability to use these forms of local welfare support for families they are working with. The Children's Social Care National Framework will bring focus to poverty-aware practice.

Consultation question 9

To what extent are you supportive of the proposal for a system that brings together targeted early help and child in need into a single Family Help Service in local areas?

When families need help now, there are different levels of support with different local thresholds and types of response.

"Targeted early help" describes a service provided to children and families who are identified by practitioners to have multiple or complex needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. It is a voluntary service that provides support before statutory intervention is needed and takes a casework approach. A lead practitioner coordinates a whole family assessment to better understand the family's needs and identify the most appropriate support for the child, young person or family.

"Child in need" refers to the statutory support provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children's social care services, or the child is disabled. The duty to provide support is on the local authority. There will be a Child in Need Plan that sets out the support to be provided to the child and their family.

Select one from:

- Fully supportive
- Somewhat supportive
- Neutral
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

If desired, please explain your answer.

Consultation question 10

Looking at the features of early help listed below, in your opinion or experience, what are the top 3 features that make it a supportive service for families?

We want Family Help to build on the strengths and services in early help.

“Early help” describes any service that supports children and families as soon as problems emerge. Early help services provide support before the problem needs statutory intervention.

Some early help is provided through “universal services”, such as through schools and NHS services. They are universal services because they are made available to all families, regardless of their needs.

Other early help is provided by services coordinated by a local authority and their partners to address specific concerns within a family.

Examples of early help services include parenting support, play and activity groups, mental health and wellbeing support, and housing and employment services.

Select top 3 features from the list below, where 1 is your top choice:

- The service is designed together with the input of children and families
- Early help is based in local communities and sits alongside other services, such as education, libraries, citizen’s advice services and housing services
- Information and support are available and can be accessed online
- Information and support are available and can be accessed in person
- Early help is delivered by the voluntary and community sector as well as the local authority and their partners (police and health)
- Strong relationship with one key worker/lead individual for every family
- Having people with the right knowledge and skills available to help when needed
- Having people with the right experience available to help when needed
- Being able to access the right type of support
- Other [please specify]

Chapter 3: Child protection and multi-agency arrangements

Chapter summary

This chapter covers the following reforms to deliver a more effective and robust child protection system.

Improving front-line child protection practice by:

- Delivering a new expert-led, multi-agency child protection response in up to 12 local areas as part of the Families First for Children Pathfinder
- Publishing National Multi-Agency Child Protection standards as part of an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Supporting improved information sharing between agencies through the Digital and Data Solutions fund, a report to Parliament and updating information sharing guidance
- Introducing a tailored response to protect children from harm that happens outside of the home and improving alignment of government policy

Strengthening multi-agency leadership by:

- Setting clearer roles and responsibilities for Safeguarding Partners through an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children
- Increasing education's role including consulting on it becoming a statutory safeguarding partner
- Providing greater support to safeguarding partners, and increasing accountability

Improving the family justice system by:

- Improving the use of accurate and transparent data to drive local learning on court delays and the decisions made about children's futures

What is our vision?

58. We owe it to every child to have a strong and effective child protection system, which can keep them safe from significant harm - inside or outside of the home. This chapter responds to the Care Review's child protection recommendations and the Panel's National Review into the premature deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. We intend to bring meaningful and lasting change, learning lessons from Arthur and Stars' lives and honouring their memories.

59. Our ambition is for decisive, multi-agency child protection, which identifies likely or actual significant harm quickly and accurately and takes rapid and effective protective action. We want a child protection system where interventions are meaningful and practice feels clear and compassionate for children and families. There are three parts to our vision for child protection.

60. **We need to improve how front-line child protection happens** so that agencies work together in a much more integrated way, and social workers with the highest levels of knowledge and skills lead child protection work. This means dedicated practitioners from across the local authority, police, health and other relevant agencies working together, with responsibility for specific child protection functions. They will be able to accurately and quickly identify when children are likely to experience, or are experiencing, significant harm. If significant harm is occurring, they will take decisive and skilled action to address this. Alongside this, a new Child Protection Lead Practitioner Role will mean that social workers with greater expertise and experience stay in front-line practice to work directly with children and families and make crucial child protection decisions.

61. This vision will be supported by improved information sharing and seeking within and between organisations, a more tailored response to the specific harms a child is facing, and support for parents and wider family members to better engage with child protection processes.

62. As well as **improved front-line practice, we need stronger multi-agency leadership that is joined up across police, health, local authorities and other relevant organisations**. We will set out clear roles and responsibilities for safeguarding partners to ensure they work more effectively together. There will be increased transparency and accountability of arrangements to make them more robust and effective. Alongside this, a support package will be in place to provide more opportunities for learning, especially for partnerships where arrangements are not working well. There will be a greater role for education settings in local multi-agency leadership to reflect the significant role schools, colleges, early years and other education providers play in children's lives.

63. Finally, **when children cannot live with their family, the family courts should make appropriate and timely decisions about their care**. These will be in the child's best interests, provide certainty as soon as possible, and help them achieve their full potential. We will improve the quality and consistency of decision-making with more accessible and transparent data. Practitioners will be able to work together to scrutinise where local trends deviate from other areas. This will enable them to assess where local practice can be improved and help improve decision-making. There will be better support for parental engagement during proceedings, with a system that listens to and involves parents and focuses on what is best for the child. We will return to the 26-week statutory requirement for public law proceedings by building on reforms already underway and working closely with partners across the system.

64. Alongside these changes, the wider reforms set out in this strategy will also support more effective child protection. An improved offer of Family Help will mean that problems are identified earlier so that they can be tackled and accurately investigated when there are concerns about significant harm. Our kinship reforms will create a culture of actively seeking out family networks, in order to consider their voice and empower them to be involved in solutions with parents. Family group decision-making should be used early on as a method to consider how family networks can support parents and minimise risk to the child.

65. Our workforce reforms will deliver a more stable, skilled and supported social work workforce that will have more time to spend directly with families. And through a more effective approach to intervening with services that are not good enough, we will improve individual local authorities' ability to keep children safe. Our work to give all children in care a stable, loving home, which will mean more children in care are kept safe.

What is child protection?

It is important to distinguish child protection from the wider work that happens to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, as described throughout this strategy.

- **Safeguarding and promoting welfare:** This is the broad work to protect children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development. This is about ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
- **Child protection:** This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. It is part of safeguarding and promoting welfare.

How far from the vision are we now?

66. While there is strong and effective child protection practice - undertaken by professionals from across agencies who are dedicated to this extremely challenging work - this is not consistently the case. Too often, the quality of practice and resulting outcomes for children are impacted by a fragmented understanding of what life is like for children. An episodic approach to providing help and protection can fail to take account of families' histories and context. The Panel's report into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, their Phase 1 report on Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings (The Panel's Phase 1 report) which looks at the Hesley Group Children's Homes, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and the Care Review have all highlighted long-standing issues with child protection.³³

67. The Care Review was clear that the quantity of child protection practice is not the same as quality. Over the past 12 years, the number of section 47 enquiries have more than doubled (a 148% increase), but the rate of section 47 enquiries that led to a Child Protection Conference has almost halved in the same period (51% in 2009-10, 30% in 2021-22).³⁴ The Panel's National Review stated that unnecessary child protection activity "can overheat the system and obscure the children facing the greatest risks".³⁵

68. **Child protection practitioners often lack specialist expertise, time or the right support.** Poor decision-making occurred in 41% of the most serious safeguarding incidents reviewed between 2018 and 2019.³⁶ The Panel has pointed to the need for sharper specialist child protection skills and expertise. This is particularly in relation to assessing complex risk, engaging reluctant parents, and understanding the family life of children and domestic abuse. This is compounded by social workers not having enough time to build relationships with children and families. Social workers spend less than 30% of their time working directly with children and families. They also do not receive enough supervision or support - one in four (24%) social workers have reflective supervision less than every 6 weeks.³⁷ This means they are less able to build the experience, knowledge and skills to be effective in this complex area of work and do not have enough support when making crucial decisions.

³³ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [Child Protection in England](#); The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings - Phase 1 report](#); Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2022) [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

³⁴ Department for Education (2022) [Characteristics of children in need, Reporting Year 2022](#)

³⁵ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [Child Protection in England](#)

³⁶ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) [Annual report: 2018 to 2019](#)

³⁷ Department for Education (2022) [Longitudinal study of child and family social workers](#)

69. **Information sharing between partners is challenging and too slow.** Poor exchange of critical information was present in 40% of the most serious safeguarding incidents that were reviewed in the Panel's 2019 report.³⁸ This impacts effective working and the experiences of children and families across the system. Processes often involve duplication with practitioners submitting forms or having to phone each other to find out information that should be readily available to them when they are making important decisions.

70. **The Care Review and numerous reviews from the Panel have identified the need for much improved multi-agency working with more robust critical thinking within and between agencies.** Improvements are needed across organisations with formal safeguarding responsibilities. This includes: better understanding of their roles and responsibilities; greater consistency in how safeguarding partners work together; and more accountability for how they are working together and making a difference. There is limited support available to help them achieve this.

71. **Education settings such as schools, colleges and early years settings do not have enough of a voice in multi-agency arrangements.** Schools often have the most contact and largest role in a child's life yet; but they are not given the same strategic role in safeguarding as local authorities, police or health. We know that this can lead to challenging relationships and missed opportunities to help and protect children.³⁹

72. **Poor parental engagement is a key practice theme identified in analysis of serious incidents.**⁴⁰ Both the Care Review and the Panel identified that wider family networks are often not considered as a vehicle to support children and reduce risk. And their voices are often not heard, even when they are raising concerns. In particular, the Panel has pointed to an urgent need to improve how the system engages and responds to fathers and men in a caring role.⁴¹

³⁸ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) [Annual Report 2018 to 2019](#)

³⁹ The independent review of children's social care (2022) [Local deep dives](#)

⁴⁰ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021) [Annual Report 2020](#)

⁴¹ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021) [The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse](#)

73. **We need to improve how child protection responds to specific risks and the needs of different groups of children.** Children under one are consistently the most likely age group to be involved in serious incidents.⁴² Equally the system is not responding well to risks outside of the home, which largely affects teenagers. Children who are over 16 are the fastest growing age group in child protection and care.⁴³ The Care Review highlighted that current child protection processes are not designed to respond to harms outside of the home. Fragmented responses between agencies on the ground, together with the absence of joined-up policy from national government, makes this worse.

74. **Disabled children and children with complex needs can be at risk of abuse, particularly when they are living away from home.** The culture of abuse identified at the Hesley Group Children's Homes is a significant cause for concern, and we are taking urgent action to respond.⁴⁴ This includes strengthening the standards and regulations governing the care of children in care, strengthening the National Minimum Standards for residential special schools, and working with Ofsted to strengthen its inspection and regulatory powers to hold private, voluntary and charity providers to account.⁴⁵ We will be paying close attention to the recommendations of the second phase of the review currently being undertaken by the Panel.

75. **There are unacceptable delays and backlogs in the family justice system.** The latest published statistics indicate the average duration of care or supervision cases reaching conclusion during the period January 2022 to March 2022 was 49 weeks.⁴⁶ This is despite the introduction (in the Children and Families Act 2014) of a requirement for all care proceeding cases to be concluded within 26 weeks. The Care Review highlighted the extent of these delays in the family justice system. While the system has undoubtedly had to deal with the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, this position is unacceptable. A renewed focus is needed to ensure swifter resolution of cases which involve life-changing decisions for children and their families.

⁴² Department for Education (2022) [Serious incident notifications, Financial Year 2021-22](#)

⁴³ Department for Education (2022) [Characteristics of children in need](#); Department for Education (2021) [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2020 to 2021](#)

⁴⁴ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings - Phase 1 report](#)

⁴⁵ Department for Education (2022) [Parliamentary Statement: Independent report on Hesley Group Children's Homes](#)

⁴⁶ Ministry of Justice (2022) [Family Court Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2022](#)

Jackson, Madison and Jayden's story

This is an anonymised case study provided by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. It is a composite study bringing together information from a number of similar reviews that highlight common features identified in serious safeguarding incidents.

Jackson, Madison and Jayden are aged 7, 5 and 3. Their mother is black Caribbean and father is white European. Both parents experienced trauma as children and have struggled with long-term substance misuse and unmanaged mental ill-health. This has made it difficult for them to provide consistent and good parenting. Jackson and Madison displayed challenging and distressing behaviour at school. They also made several disclosures of physical abuse to their teachers. Jayden's health visitor was concerned about developmental delay.

The family had numerous agencies involved with them for over four years during which there were periods of improvement. For instance, they built a good relationship with a social worker and made progress during a period that they were on a Child in Need Plan. However, despite some areas of strong practice, several system issues meant the children were not adequately protected over the course of their lives.

Regular changes of professionals made it hard for the family to build trusting relationships with professionals. Professionals struggled to fully understand the lives of the children. Social work involvement tended to be episodic, resulting in some progress but failing to properly understand and tackle underlying issues in the children's lives. Sometimes the full extent of the impact of harm to the children was not identified because professionals did not fully consider all the evidence about what was happening in the family. For example, what children might be communicating through non-verbal behaviour (e.g. 'aggressive' behaviour in class) and didn't show enough curiosity about what the daily lives of children with additional needs living with vulnerable parents, how race may have shaped both the family's experiences and how professionals responded to them. When improvements were made the family were offered early help support but contact was not frequent or consistent and they often declined support. This pattern of disengagement was not identified or addressed.

Jackson, Madison and Jayden's story (continued)

Professionals and organisations in the children's lives were not adequately linked up to consistently share information so that no one had a complete picture of their lives. For instance, despite the school playing a key role in supporting the family, other organisations were not aware that Madison's parents had decided to home educate her for six months. At other times information was shared with children's social care, but these were not seen as safeguarding issues and there was a lack of professional critical challenge from the referring agencies when this happened. For instance, there were referrals about children not being brought to doctors' appointments and a police visit to the home in response to the mother having a mental health crisis. During the police visit to the home the children were not spoken to and children's social care did not investigate.

Following a recent referral from the school, a multi-agency strategy meeting was held, resulting in a child protection investigation. As a result of this, the children were placed into foster care. It is evident that all three children have been experienced significant and serious harm over a long period.

***In the future system** having a dedicated group of skilled multi-agency professionals working together with responsibility for specific child protection functions would mean there would be a better picture of the child's life. They would bring different knowledge, skills and perspectives and be better placed to challenge practice assumptions, in order to make sense of what was happening to the children and take decisive action when it is needed. Child Protection Lead Practitioners would bring a high level of knowledge and skill to make sure that children's and families' lives were properly understood. A more stable, supported workforce would mean more continuity of social worker. Family Help would provide more consistent practitioner family relationships with support provided by one team - helping to encourage more sustained engagement and recognising when a family disengages.*

What have we already started doing?

76. **Over the past 10 years we have invested £200 million in the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme.**⁴⁷ This has been used to test and share effective ways of supporting children who need help from children’s social care services. This has helped develop effective models of practice for keeping children safe, including Family Safeguarding in Hertfordshire, No Wrong Door in North Yorkshire, Contextual Safeguarding in Hackney and the expansion of the Family Drug and Alcohol Courts. It also identified seven features of effective practice that are informing our reform programme.⁴⁸

77. **We established the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.** This independent panel was established in 2018 and commissions reviews of serious child safeguarding cases if a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. It works to make national and local reviews of serious incidents contribute to improved learning, professional practice and outcomes for children.

78. We have already delivered several of the child protection recommendations from the Panel and the Care Review:

- **We have extended a national offer of bespoke support to safeguarding partners led by our health, police and local authority National Facilitators.** They have worked with local areas across regions, focusing on topics such as leadership, independent scrutiny, prioritisation and governance. This is in addition to single agency support that is already in place and means organisations can work together more effectively to protect children in their area.
- **The cross-government Child Protection Ministerial Group was established in October 2022.** This is in line with the Panel’s recommendation. This is already helping to join up work at the most senior levels across government, setting shared direction for child protection and bringing shared oversight of the system. It is supported by the newly formed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partner Performance Board made up of senior civil servants across departments. This means we can better oversee improvements to the child protection system and focus our efforts across government.

⁴⁷ The Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme was launched in 2014 to test and share effective ways of supporting vulnerable children and young people who need help from children’s social care services. The programme has supported 94 projects through £200 million of investment (Department for Education (2022) [Children’s social care innovation programme: insights and evaluation](#))

⁴⁸ The seven themes are: 1. Using a clear, strengths-based framework; 2. Using systemic approaches to social work practice; 3. Enabling staff to do skilled direct work; 4. Multi-disciplinary skill sets working together; 5. Undertaking group case discussion; 6. High intensity and consistency of practitioner; 7. Having a whole family focus (Department for Education (2022) [Seven features of practice and seven outcomes](#))

- **In response to the Care Review and the Panel recommendations, we have written to all safeguarding partners to understand the current use of information sharing agreements.** The survey will explore local information sharing arrangements and barriers to sharing more broadly to inform our reform programme.

79. **We have also taken action so that child protection practice can effectively work with young children and fathers.** We have worked with multi-agency partners in local areas and Lancaster University’s Born into Care Project to build evidence on supporting vulnerable infants. This involves how best to engage parents prior to a birth. We have also worked with Hertfordshire County Council’s Family Safeguarding Project to understand effective approaches to working with male carers. The Family Hubs and Start for Life guidance ensures services engage with and are accessible to fathers and male carers, including by co-designing support with parents.⁴⁹

80. **The Government also passed the landmark Domestic Abuse Act in 2021, alongside publishing accompanying statutory guidance and in March 2022 the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan.** The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right where they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either the perpetrator or the victim. To support the needs of children, the Home Office is providing over £4 million for the second round of the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse Fund in 2022-23. This builds on the more than £12 million provided through the fund since 2018. The Home Office has also invested in the Operation Encompass scheme (which enables information sharing between police and schools in cases where a school-age child has experienced a domestic abuse incident) and is currently funding a national Teachers’ Helpline for staff in education settings to seek guidance about supporting pupils affected by domestic abuse following an Operation Encompass notification.

81. **We have invested £2.8 million in the Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme,** working with the sector to develop and embed local approaches to tackling extra-familial harm. This includes new practice principles based on best evidence which will be available from Spring 2023 and will help ensure practice is more consistent.⁵⁰ These have informed the child protection content of the Children’s Social Care National Framework, published for consultation alongside this document. **We have also provided £1.5 million in funding to 20 local authorities in order to develop and strengthen multi-agency approaches to safeguarding adolescents at risk of extra-familial harm,** as part of the Children’s Social Care Regional Recovery Fund.⁵¹

⁴⁹ For more detail on the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme see: chapter 2: Family Help.

⁵⁰ For more details see: [Tackling Child Exploitation \(TCE\) Support Programme \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

⁵¹ The Covid Recovery Fund provided £24 million in 2021 to 2022 to children’s social care services to support recovery from the pandemic.

82. **Over the past 12 months, we have worked closely with the national Family Justice Board, which brings together leaders in the family justice system, to better understand and address the drivers of delays in the system.** Building on earlier work to embed good practice at the pre-proceedings stage, in June 2022, the Board agreed a number of priority areas of work designed to improve timeliness, including:

- **Piloting an earlier conversation between the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) Guardian and the local authority,** to establish a greater and shared understanding of the child and family before the first court hearing. A key aim of this is to reduce the need for additional assessments and issues to be surfaced in court, which can lead to additional court hearings and adjournments. If the Cafcass pilot achieves the key objective of bringing down delays and helps proceedings run more smoothly, we will roll this out on a national basis.
- **Gathering and reviewing intelligence on short-notice applications.** This will enable us to understand how these impact on delays in local areas and help determine where action and change is needed.
- **Analysing the demand for and availability of independent experts in court hearings.** We will explore what steps should be taken to ensure such experts are only used where it is necessary and appropriate to do so.
- **Building a stronger evidence base on how effectively cases progress through the pre-proceedings stage.** This includes equipping local authorities with tools to collate and analyse their data, so they can take steps to tackle identified problems.

83. **We recognise the importance of having strong feedback loops in order to learn and improve practice.** Local Family Justice Boards and Designated Family Judges are regularly provided with operational data. This provides granular detail on what is happening at the local level in courts and how this compares to other local areas. Through the national Family Justice Board we have agreed key performance indicators at a national level. We are now developing proposals for more detailed, published data on local system performance.

What we will do over the next two years

84. In order to drive improvement in child protection, we will make changes in the next two years across the 3 priority areas of front-line child protection practice, multi-agency leadership and family justice.

Strengthening front-line child protection practice

The changes we want to see in front-line child protection work are:

- **Social workers with greater expertise and experience carrying out front-line child protection work as part of a new Child Protection Lead Practitioner role.** This advanced role will value the specific practice skills, knowledge and experience that are needed when working directly with families where there is actual or likely significant harm. They will tackle issues such as domestic abuse, drug and alcohol use, exploitation, sexual abuse, and non-accidental injury. They will co-work with Family Help teams so that existing relationships with families are kept while bringing a sharp child protection focus. There will be better training, career paths, support and supervision that offer high-quality, senior practice roles in child protection.
- **A new multi-agency child protection response with responsibility for specific child protection functions.** The Panel recommended establishing Child Protection Units. These would provide an integrated co-located, multi-agency team staffed by experienced child protection practitioners from police, health and local authorities. We agree with the need for a dedicated and highly skilled group of multi-agency practitioners leading specific child protection functions, such as section 47 enquiries and oversight of children on Child Protection Plans. We want a model of child protection where multi-agency practitioners work as a team on a day-to-day basis, to provide better consistency and robust critical thinking and challenge to each other when making child protection decisions. Practitioners from across agencies should be able to access this for expert advice when they need it. We want Child Protection Lead Practitioners embedded within this response, working alongside Family Help Practitioners, so that continuity in relationships for families is maintained as part of the same service.
- **Improved information sharing and seeking within and between organisations.** A child protection response with more integrated multi-agency working will enable practitioners to have a fuller picture of what is happening to a child. Practitioners will be able to use and triangulate information originating from across the agencies in a child's life when making critical decisions about their safety. This will include better use of technology and cross-agency analysis of data.
- **Support for parents and wider family members to better engage with child protection processes.** Parents and wider family need to understand what is happening and need to be supported to say what they think. This will mean they have the best chance of making changes and that practitioners can make fair and accurate decisions. Family group decision-making will mean wider family are brought in to consider how family networks can support parents and minimise risk to the child.

The changes we want to see in front-line child protection work are: (continued)

- **A more tailored response to the specific harms a child is facing.** This includes harms from outside the home, non-accidental injury to vulnerable infants, or domestic abuse or neglect. We need to make sure child protection practice can respond to these different, sometimes overlapping, concerns.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder

85. We will implement the key features of front-line child protection practice through the **Families First for Children Pathfinder**. This will allow changes to be made in a considered way alongside our Family Help and kinship reforms through a test and learn approach (see chapter 2 for more details about the Pathfinder).

86. We will use the Pathfinder to work through key questions with multi-agency partners and establish how reforms could work best on the ground. Questions we will test in Pathfinders include:

- **Child Protection Lead Practitioner Role:** How to establish co-working arrangements between Child Protection Lead Practitioners and Family Help Workers, so that families experience a single response that provides both intensive support and a sharp child protection focus. This will include the optimum conditions for how practitioners work together including supervision, oversight for cases, and joint, meaningful direct work with families. Child Protection Lead Practitioners will hold responsibility for child protection decision-making and have a strong understanding of different forms of abuse and neglect.
- **Multi-agency operating model:** How best to operationalise our vision of having dedicated, highly skilled practitioners from local authorities, police and health working as a team with responsibility for delivering specific child protection functions. This will include looking at the interaction between Family Help and child protection as part of the same service, ensuring continuity of relationships for families while undertaking child protection functions, using different models such as integrated teams, sharing day-to-day management, being co-located and other joint arrangements to support smooth information sharing. This will deliver more consistency and rigorous critical thinking and challenge across agency boundaries to support high-quality and timely decision-making. We will also explore how other professionals from across agencies can access timely, expert child protection advice through this model.
- **Parents are supported and given the right information at the right time, so they have the best possible chance to engage actively with child protection processes.** Approaches to parental representation will be included in Pathfinders from the start. This includes how to best engage fathers and male carers.

87. Pathfinder areas will also focus on the different types of risks children face. This includes how best to respond to domestic abuse, children at risk from harm from outside the home, and children with particular vulnerabilities, including babies and infants, in a non-judgemental and effective multi-agency way.

National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards and updating Working Together to Safeguard Children

88. We will consult on an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) in spring 2023, publishing the update by the end of the year. Working Together is the key statutory guidance that sets out for all individuals, organisations and agencies what they must and should do to keep children safe, and how they should work together for child protection. The update will move all areas closer towards delivering an integrated, multi-agency approach to child protection and Family Help, **building on examples of where safeguarding partners are already doing this well.**

89. Following the 2023 update, we will update the Working Together guidance every year. Where appropriate, we will incorporate the latest learning from the Pathfinder areas and other policy reforms. This mirrors our approach to Keeping Children Safe in Education and will provide an opportunity to continuously improve services.

90. As part of the update to Working Together in 2023, we will consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards. These standards will set the principles for how partners work effectively and consistently together to identify and protect children and young people. They will align with the child protection outcome in the Children's Social Care National Framework, with a focus on multi-agency roles and responsibilities. The standards will include seeking and sharing information, knowledge and skills across agencies, and creating strong, supportive and shared approaches to responding to harm in all contexts. They will be updated in line with findings from the Pathfinder areas and an evaluation of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) due to start in 2023. We will also update guidance on multi-agency child protection planning, intervention and review in response to extra-familial harm, with more substantive changes in 2024. And we will give more direction on how agencies provide parents in child protection procedures with information and support about the process.

Strengthening information sharing

91. Effective sharing and seeking of information between organisations is essential to understanding what is going on in a child's life. We will deliver a report to Parliament setting out ways to improve information sharing between safeguarding partners by summer 2023, as required by the Health and Care Act 2022. The report will be based on input from practitioners, research from departments across government, and good practice within local authorities. The report to Parliament will contain recommendations for potential technical and non-technical solutions. This will include an exploration of the use of a consistent child identifier (CCI), so that information about children can be easily linked and shared across organisations, such as the police, hospitals and children's social care. It will also include a roadmap for implementation of the recommendations. The report will be, in part, informed by 2 local authority projects funded by the Data and Digital Solutions Fund. One project is assisting in the development of a data and information sharing agreement to be used as a model for other safeguarding partnerships. The other project will carry out user research on solutions to overcome cultural and behavioural barriers to sharing information.

92. We know that practitioners often think that there are legal impediments to sharing information. We will consult on updated information sharing guidance in spring 2023 alongside the Working Together consultation. This guidance will be for professionals, in order to support them in their decision-making about when to share information and to make it clear that information should be shared in order to safeguard children.

93. Alongside the technical solutions, we are also researching the cultural and behavioural barriers to professionals sharing information. This means understanding why individuals may struggle to do this effectively, and what could make it easier for them to change their behaviours. We are working closely with other government departments to establish this and to find solutions that complement the work on technical solutions. This is likely to include further training and guidance but may also involve other good practice solutions that are discovered during the research being conducted.

Improving how parents engage with child protection

94. We will update statutory guidance on support and information for parents in child protection this year as part of the Working Together consultation. We are also including approaches to parental representation in the Families First for Children Pathfinder.

95. Alongside this, we want to better understand what works in supporting parents in child protection. We have spoken to a number of areas about the models of representation they have in place to engage parents in the process. These include peer support groups and co-producing parental support models with parents with lived experience. Despite this work taking place, there is limited UK-based evidence on the scale and effectiveness of independent representation. We are seeking views through this consultation in order to understand better examples and evidence of effective and impactful work already being carried out by local areas. We will use your responses to inform the approaches used in the Families First for Children Pathfinder.

Consultation question 11

Have you ever provided or received a form of parental representation during child protection processes?

The Care Review recommends that parental representation should be offered to all parents in child protection. We are keen to understand more about the different approaches to parental representation that may be available locally and how they support parents who may be going through child protection processes.

Forms of parental representation could include, but are not limited to: peer-to-peer support, mentoring schemes and different parental advocacy approaches.

Select one from:

- Yes, I/my organisation have provided a form of parental representation
- Yes, I am a parent and have received or been offered a form of parental representation
- No, I/my organisation do not provide or facilitate any form of parental representation
- No, I am a parent who is or has been involved in child protection processes, and I have not been offered or was not offered or did not receive any form of parental representation
- Don't know
- Other [please explain]
- Not applicable to me

Consultation question 12

If you have had experience with a form of parental representation in the child protection process, please tell us about it

If you have provided a form of parental representation as an organisation, please describe the type of service, why it was offered/provided to the parent, what impact you felt it had, what the cost of it was to your organisation.

If you have received a form of parental representation as a parent, please describe the type of support you received, what difference it made to your engagement with the process, your overall experience of the service.

In answering, please do not provide any personal details about the child protection case you were involved with.

Consultation question 13

If you are happy to or would prefer to talk to us further about your experience with a form of parental representation in child protection processes, please indicate your consent to be contacted in relation to this set of questions only (questions 11, 12 and 13): Yes/no

If yes, please ensure you provide your email address so that we can contact you.

Harm outside the home

96. We want a tailored approach to harm outside the home that acknowledges how protecting children in these circumstances can be different to responding to harm that occurs within the family, while recognising and responding to children who experience both types of harm. This includes effective multi-agency child protection work between children's social care, the police, youth justice teams, health and other partners.

97. **To support this, we have funded 4 local authorities to test a Risk Outside the Home Pathway.** This responds to the Care Review's recommendation that the child protection framework set out in statutory guidance should be adapted for this type of harm. The Risk Outside the Home Pathway is based on a child protection planning and conference model developed by Wiltshire Council. It prioritises developing expertise and reducing caseloads for practitioners, stronger multi-agency working and working with families as partners. Durham University will publish a peer-reviewed paper on the pilot findings in summer 2023. This will help us to make changes to child protection processes in Working Together in 2024.

98. **The Youth Endowment Fund will test specialist multi-disciplinary teams embedded in neighbourhoods to support children who are at risk of experiencing violence or criminal exploitation from outside the home.** This will begin in spring 2023 as part of their Agency Collaboration Fund. We will use the learning from these pilots to inform the development of our Families First for Children Pathfinder. This will help us to build a tailored response to harm outside of the home within our new approach to child protection practice.

99. **The Children's Social Care National Framework places focus on how leaders and practitioners can help protect children outside of the home.** It also sets out how children, young people and families should be listened to when carrying out this work.

100. We are working across government to align policy, so there is a simpler, more coherent response for children, their families and practitioners on the ground.

101. **We also want to ensure there is better integration between children's social care and youth justice.** The Care Review recommended giving all areas the opportunity to integrate AssetPlus assessments (youth justice assessments) with child in need assessments, as piloted in a small number of areas. We have looked at how those assessments could be better integrated. By April 2023, the Youth Justice Board will have introduced a new tool for pre-court cases that will enable better integration across youth justice and children's social care assessments in terms of how data is reported and shared between agencies. This new tool will draw on learning from local authorities who have been piloting alternative assessments and ensure that the needs of children are addressed as part of a coordinated multi-agency response.

102. **The Home Office is continuing to trial the devolved decision-making for the National Referral Mechanism, so local authorities can identify child victims of modern slavery and trafficking.** The next phase of testing is now underway meaning there are now 20 sites testing this model across Great Britain. We continue to work closely with the Home Office to ensure plans for devolved decision-making align with wider safeguarding arrangements and, as they consider options for further expansion, are subject to ongoing testing of the Pilot model.

Improving multi-agency leadership

Strengthening guidance to improve multi-agency working

103. We will update statutory guidance to strengthen multi-agency leadership. Working Together sets out the equal and joint responsibilities of the 3 safeguarding partners (Local Authority Chief Executive, Chief of Police and Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board) in leading local agencies to work together to safeguard and protect children.

104. The spring 2023 consultation for Working Together will seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners. We will set out clearly their roles as strategic leaders who are jointly accountable for ensuring children and families in their area are supported by strong, well-resourced multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This will include consulting on:

- **The minimum expectations of safeguarding partners and the functions they deliver at a strategic level.** Working Together is clear that safeguarding partners have a shared and equal duty to work together and should be able to make timely and effective decisions about their agencies' activities and resources. They need to be at a level of seniority in their own agency that allows them to make decisions on the provision of services, for instance the allocation of resources in areas such as youth crime, adult mental health services, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse, and public health. However, we know that this is not consistently the case. We will be clearer on our expectations that safeguarding partners are the strategic decision-making body accountable for setting the direction of the partnership and agreeing how they will fund their arrangements as well as the allocation of resources across priorities. The membership will reflect this.
- **The introduction of a separate operational group to enable safeguarding partners to focus on strategic issues**, rather than getting caught up in day-to-day delivery concerns. This should be delegated to individuals who are senior enough to ensure the strategic priorities become a reality on the ground. They should be held accountable for delivering these actions, and able to escalate problems - for instance if they are struggling to get input from a particular organisation. This group of practice leads will be responsible for tasks including ensuring that: all multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working for Family Help and child protection is effective, that professionals and practitioners have the time and resources needed; that information is shared and used effectively; and learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews is implemented.
- **To support the splitting of strategic and operational responsibilities we will consult on the introduction of a nominated operational chair to be agreed by safeguarding partners.** Having an agreed chair at the operational level will provide a clear line of sight for strategic leaders whilst keeping the shared and equal duty on safeguarding partners. They will be expected to have operational oversight of safeguarding arrangements from early help through to children in care and care leavers. The operational and strategic leaders and operational chair need to be clearly named in yearly reports/published arrangements. Engagement with partners to date suggests this would be helpful and feedback from local authorities is that the Director of Children's Services is well placed to undertake this role, given their responsibility for delivery of specific duties in the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004. However, all 3 safeguarding partners should agree to the selection and appointment of the individual acting on their behalf within this role.

- **Actions to increase transparency of safeguarding partners, so that it is clear how all organisations make a difference.** This includes clarifying expectations for published strategic plans, annual reports and independent scrutiny, and strengthening the role and input of schools and other education settings.

105. Following the update of Working Together in 2023, we will provide funding to help safeguarding partners implement the agreed reforms. Selected Families First for Children Pathfinder areas will receive this funding early, allowing them to move into new structures. We recognise this is the first step towards improving multi-agency working and will continue to consider where we may need to go further either with statutory guidance or with legislation.

Increasing education’s role in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

106. We agree with recommendations from both the Care Review and the Panel’s National Review that education needs to play a greater role in local safeguarding arrangements. This reflects the part schools, colleges, early years and other education settings play in the lives of children and families and their safeguarding responsibilities. There are significant practical challenges to achieving this. The school system does not have a single senior leader able to make strategic or resource commitments for all local schools, and making education a fourth safeguarding partner will require changes to primary legislation. Given this, we will take a two-pronged approach to strengthening the role and responsibilities of education settings:

- **We will deliver quick progress by consulting on how to strengthen the role of education settings as part of the spring 2023 update to Working Together.** Proposals on this will include whether to clarify their roles and responsibilities within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and how education settings operate within the strategic and operational levels of these arrangements.
- **We will use learning from this to help form proposals on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner.** We will consult as necessary on these proposals in autumn 2023. If agreed, we will look to bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.

Increasing learning and accountability

107. Alongside our national offer of bespoke support to safeguarding partners, the Panel will be developing a support offer to maximise the impact of learning from safeguarding reviews. A pilot will be co-produced with a small number of safeguarding partners and begin in spring 2023. It will evaluate the quality, consistency and impact of the review process and draw out national practice learning that can be shared with all local areas. We will build on our departmental support offer to safeguarding partners once their roles and responsibilities have been clarified next year in Working Together. This will help to ensure multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are having a real impact on the lives of children in their local area.

108. In March 2022, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) announced the restart of their programme of joint targeted area inspections (JTAs). The new frameworks build on the joint inspection methodology used in Solihull in January 2022.⁵² These frameworks are more focused to allow the inspectorates to deliver inspections with less burden on local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. We will continue to work with Ofsted to ensure the joint and single inspection frameworks reflect the clarified roles of safeguarding partners as outlined in revised guidance. We will work with inspectorates to explore the feasibility of strengthening the focus of individual agency contributions in single agency inspections, such as Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), and the relationship with joint inspections.

The family justice system

109. We will maintain a relentless focus on tackling delays in the family courts, with the ambition of getting back to the 26-week requirement for public law proceedings. This remains the national Family Justice Board's top priority, and the Board will continue to build on and drive forward its reform agenda.

110. We will provide all local authorities with the opportunity to access and embed the use of a financial modelling tool to better understand the financial impact of court delays. This will help to identify where efficiencies can be made.

111. As part of DfE's Digital, Data and Solutions Fund, we will fund a local authority partner to undertake a research project on family justice data. It will provide recommendations to government on how to unblock the biggest challenges currently faced by local authorities in collecting and reporting data on pre-proceedings practice. These recommendations will be considered by government ahead of a national data collection exercise on pre-proceedings. Having consistent and reliable national data on pre-proceedings will allow us to gain a better understanding of the local differences in practice and develop evidence-informed policy in this area. This new accessible data will support local learning and decision-making, while providing transparency at the pre-proceedings stage that will allow comparisons with geographical and statistical neighbours.

⁵² Ofsted et al. (2021) [Solihull JTA: the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk](#)

112. To improve parental engagement in the family justice system, the Care Proceedings Reform Group (a subgroup of the Public Law Working Group) is taking forward the Care Review's recommendation on greater application of problem-solving approaches in the family courts. We agree there is good evidence that such approaches can result in better outcomes. A small-scale study of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) found that a 'significantly higher proportion of FDAC than comparison families were reunited or continued to live together at the end of proceedings (37% v 25%)'.⁵³ Findings from FDACs are promising. The What Works Centre for Children's Social Care are currently conducting a fuller evaluation of the FDAC model. We also know that problem-solving approaches such as FDACs can make court proceedings less adversarial for parents, meaning they are more likely to engage. The Care Proceedings Reform Group will provide recommendations to government by 2024.

⁵³ Harwin, J. et al. (2016) [After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later](#)

Chapter 4: Unlocking the potential of family networks

Chapter summary

This chapter covers the following reforms to unlock the potential of family networks:

- **Creating a culture of “family first” that prioritises family-led solutions** by piloting Family Network Support Plans and family group decision-making reforms. We also want local authorities to offer family group decision-making as standard practice from the early stages of working with a family, and to support children and parents when children return home.
- **Improving support for kinship carers and reducing barriers to kinship care**, including £9 million for a training and support offer that all kinship carers will be able to access by the end of this Spending Review.
- **Strengthening national policy on kinship care** by publishing a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023.

What is our vision?

113. Our vision is that every child’s right to a family life is prioritised wherever possible. Family networks can play an invaluable role in supporting families and enabling children to live safely at home with their parents. We want to create a culture where families are actively involved from the point a child gets a social worker. Children, young people and families should be supported to identify who in their family network could be a source of support. And where possible, families should be empowered to help and support parents and children when they are struggling. This is what many families do anyway. But when the state becomes involved in children’s lives, it does not always properly harness the strength of their family networks.

114. When a child cannot remain with their parents, wider family and friends can also offer a safe, stable and loving alternative to becoming looked after and moving in with a stranger. Being removed from the care of your parents, for whatever reason, is traumatic. Living with friends and family networks can offer a stable and permanent option for children, including through permanent legal arrangements such as Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).

115. Kinship carers can help children maintain connections with people they love and with their family. This is important for developing a healthy sense of identity and belonging. These relationships can be lifelong in ways that foster care or residential care relationships often are not. This means children living with wider family and friend networks are significantly more likely to grow up and enter adulthood with a network of people to support them to thrive. In chapter 5, we also set out how the care system should prioritise loving relationships when care is the right option for children.

116. Children in kinship care are also less likely to be separated from their siblings,⁵⁴ keeping brothers and sisters together. Research shows that children in kinship care arrangements experience improved outcomes in comparison to children in foster and residential care, including better long-term health outcomes.⁵⁵ Children leaving care on an SGO have better attainment in school (based on attainment 8 scores).⁵⁶ And children with a history of kinship care have a higher probability of achieving an NVQ level 3 qualification compared to children in foster or residential care.⁵⁷

117. As well as achieving better outcomes for children, backing kinship care and family-led alternatives to care also makes economic sense. Some local authorities who are ahead on the kinship journey have told us that they have seen financial benefits from using section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to provide flexible funding. Such funding can be used to help grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives to help keep children safe and well.

118. These local authorities have reported that this has reduced the number of children in care in their areas. We want all local authorities to prioritise providing flexible funding to kinship carers when it is safe and more cost-effective than paying for significantly more expensive foster care and residential care homes for children. However, while kinship care offers a cheaper option, it should not be seen as a free (or nearly free) option for local authorities to reduce costs. Savings should be diverted to supporting kinship carers and children.

⁵⁴ Family Rights Group [What happens to siblings in the care system?](#) (data as of 1 July 2014)

⁵⁵ Sacker, A. et al. (2021) [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care](#)

⁵⁶ Department for Education (2021) [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#)

⁵⁷ Sacker, A. et al. (2021) [The lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care](#)

119. Not all kinship care arrangements will be perfect. The purpose of our reforms is to ensure practitioners have the resources and confidence to address challenges, if this means a child can grow up safely within their family network. This is particularly the case if the alternative is moving into care to live with strangers. Managing these challenges starts right from the point of assessment to become a kinship carer. These assessments should be proportionate for prospective kinship carers to ensure they can provide a safe and stable home for children, and receive the help they need to provide short-term or long-term care. Kinship carers should not have to become foster carers, and children should not become looked after, in order to stay together.

120. Family-led alternatives should be considered for all children prior to entering the care system, or at the earliest opportunity thereafter. However, for some children, care is the right option and for others, adoption is. Adoption can provide children with a loving stable family life and boost their life chances. We are not proposing changes in this strategy to the way adoption works, with the exception of improving digital ways in which children can communicate with birth families (see annex 3 for our response to this recommendation). However, we remain committed to the Adoption Strategy and our ambition to deliver excellence in adoption services across England.⁵⁸

How far from the vision are we now?

121. The Care Review highlighted that more needs to be done to bring wider family members and friends in to inform decision-making for children. We agree that kinship care has received little national policy attention. Even where children are in kinship care arrangements, too little support is given to extended family members who play a caring role for their young relatives.

122. This lack of focus and attention has led to vastly differing levels of support for kinship carers across the country. Access to this support is generally provided based on the legal status of the carer rather than the needs of the child and family.

123. We agree with the Care Review that too often children who can live with their immediate family are in care unnecessarily. Many children become looked after by the state, which then becomes their corporate parent, even though they are living with their grandparent, aunt, uncle or adult brother or sister. As of 31st March 2022, 15% of Children Looked After live with a relative or close family friend in a foster care arrangement.⁵⁹ While some children do need to be looked after by the state, this should never be the primary option for children living within their family network.

⁵⁸ For more details see: [Adoption strategy: achieving excellence everywhere - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/adoption-strategy-achieving-excellence-everywhere)

⁵⁹ Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoptions: reporting year 2022](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108114/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions-reporting-year-2022.pdf)

124. Despite the benefits of kinship care to children, those who grow up in kinship care are frequently exposed to poverty with 89% of kinship carers worrying about their financial situation.⁶⁰ The 2011 Census indicates that 40% of all children living in kinship care arrangements in England live in households located in the 20% most income-deprived areas.⁶¹

125. We recognise that family group decision-making is already encouraged in statutory guidance and most local authorities already offer elements of this in pre-proceedings. Family-led solutions and early support can mean that children continue to live within their families and maintain a connection to those they love. Indeed, forthcoming research from WWEICSC suggests that Family Group Conferences (FGCs) at pre-proceedings are effective at preventing children from becoming looked after.⁶² The data also suggests that the FGCs in the trial were cost-effective for the local authorities that took part.

126. However, despite the benefits of family group decision-making, the Care Review found through its Deep Dives that, even where local authorities do involve families in decision-making, it is often once Care Proceedings have already started.⁶³ ⁶⁴ Not enough time is spent involving wider family in decision-making early enough. When this happens too late, there is little scope for family networks to support when families are on a Child in Need Plan, or to protect children who are on Child Protection Plan.

What have we already started doing?

127. This year we have already made good progress in increasing support for kinship carers. We have made an investment of £2 million and partnered with Kinship, who will establish 100 self-sustaining kinship peer support groups by January 2024.

128. A welcome first step has already been taken by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in extending legal aid to prospective Special Guardians who are party to private proceedings. This will ensure that prospective Special Guardians can get the advice and support they need before taking on the important responsibility of caring for a child.

⁶⁰ McGrath, P., Ashley, L. & Kinship (2022) [Kinship care: Financial Allowances Survey 2022](#)

⁶¹ Wijedasa, D. (2015) [Characteristics of children living with relatives in England: Part I](#)

⁶² Taylor, S. et al. (2023, forthcoming)

⁶³ The independent review of children's social care (2022) [Local deep dives](#)

⁶⁴ One study also found that, across 6 local authorities, between 35% and 50% of cases had at least one Family Group Conference or Family Meeting, of which half took place before the Care Proceedings were issued (Masson, J. et al. (2019) [Child Protection in Court: Outcomes for Children](#))

What we will do over the next two years

129. The progress already made by some local authorities has begun reshaping how we view and support family networks at all stages of children's social care. However, more needs to be done to prioritise kinship care and tackle the current postcode lottery of support. And kinship carers and the children and young people they care for, need to be given the opportunity to share their views and experiences to shape how services are designed and delivered. To achieve this our approach focuses on:

- creating a culture of “family first” that prioritises family-led solutions
- improving support and reducing barriers to kinship care
- strengthening national policy on kinship care

Creating a culture of “family first” that prioritises family-led solutions

130. We will **test how best to implement family group decision-making and Family Network Support Packages** in local areas. Primarily through reforms to Family Help, child protection and the end-to-end Family First for Children Pathfinder described in chapter 2. This will allow us to test:

- **Interactions with Family Help and child protection:** How family group decision-making and a Family Network Support Package can be used alongside Child in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans to improve outcomes for children.
- **Safeguarding arrangements:** The necessary safeguarding and oversight arrangements that are needed to keep children safe in kinship care, while minimising state intervention in family life.
- **Local funding:** How local authority funding can be used more flexibly to provide practical support for families who need it, where children would otherwise be in care.

131. In addition, we will invest in pilots focused on only Family Network Support Packages in 7 local areas. Delivery will be phased starting from spring 2023. These pilots will allow us to test and evaluate the impact of Family Network Support Packages on keeping families together and keeping children out of care. It will also build our understanding of the cost and savings associated with doing so.

Consultation question 14

In your view, how can we make a success of embedding a “family first” culture?

A culture of “family first” means that local authorities will actively seek out and work with a child’s direct and extended family and friends in considering the best forms of support for a child and their family. This culture will run right through children’s social care from the first moment it starts to work with a family.

Consultation question 15

In your view, what would be the most helpful forms of support that could be provided to a family network, in order to enable them to step in to provide care for a child?

A “family network” describes people connected to the child: this could include relatives or close family friends. Our ambition is that a child’s family network is fully considered as a support system for parents facing challenge, or as a provider of care for the child if they cannot live safely at home. To do this effectively, we recognise that professionals will need to proactively engage family networks.

132. We have been clear that a “family first” approach is a key part of our reform programme, and **we will work collaboratively with Ofsted to improve the visibility of kinship care in their inspection reports**. Ofsted already capture some information on kinship care in their inspections. However, to enhance visibility of kinship care, Ofsted will update their guidance and inspector training to make it clearer that reports should refer to the quality of support being provided to kinship carers and children in kinship care arrangements.

133. **We will strengthen social worker skills and knowledge through the Early Career Framework (ECF)**, as discussed in chapter 6. This will help prepare social workers to implement kinship care reforms and feel confident to prioritise family-led solutions for children.

Improving support and reducing barriers to kinship care

134. **We will invest £9 million in a training and support offer for all kinship carers** (those with a legal order and informal kinship carers) by the end of this Spending Review. We will co-create the training package with kinship carers to ensure it meets their needs. We will also work with third sector organisations and build on existing good practice such as the Kinship Ready programme offered by the charity, Kinship. We are clear that the training programme needs to remain relevant throughout the various stages of a child's lifetime and the kinship carer's journey, including before they become a carer. This package could include an offer of face-to-face and online training, useful resources such as how to find a school place, and access to independent guidance and support.

135. **We will also explore the case for mandating a financial allowance for all SGOs and Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs) in every local authority.** We agree with the Care Review's analysis that too many family members are currently incentivised to become foster carers because it is the only route to access financial support. While some local authorities already remove these barriers to permanency in kinship care, many do not. We will gather evidence on how to target an allowance to improve the financial support kinship carers receive, so that relatives do not have to become foster carers, rather than apply for an SGO or a CAOs in order to access financial support. This is important too for children, as it can be a significant barrier to the security of a permanent home.

136. **Through working in partnership with local authorities, we will encourage all local authorities to review their existing policies** to do more to support wider family networks to care for children when they cannot remain at home - both to identify those carers and then to support them. They should consider financially supporting SGOs and guardians under CAOs, particularly where this is the only barrier to permanence for these children. This often makes good financial sense for local authorities, kinship carers and, ultimately, for children and their outcomes.

137. Before the next Parliament, we will explore the case for introducing a consistent approach across England to financial allowances for kinship carers under SGOs and CAOs.

138. We will also work across government to explore possible additional workplace entitlements, and options for an extension of legal aid for kinship carers with SGOs and CAOs.

Rachel's story*

Rachel's story shows a local authority who is ahead on their kinship journey and already illustrates good practice to prioritise family-led solutions. The support provided has helped Rachel care for her grandchildren and gives the children the support they need.

Rachel has been a full-time kinship carer for seven years and cares for her 3 grandchildren, Kayleigh, Ellis and Phoebe.

Rachel was involved by her local authority from an early stage. They had a series of family mediation meetings, held with the support of the local authority, involving her in decision-making right from the beginning to help determine the best possible options for the children and to support the parents.

When the children were 6 months, 20 months and 5 years old, they were struggling to live with their parents. Discussions were then had with the family about whether Rachel would care for her grandchildren on a full-time basis. The alternative would have likely meant her grandchildren being moved into foster care with people they didn't know.

Throughout the decision-making process and while caring for her grandchildren, the local authority offered support. The support included: mediation for family contact, counselling, and ongoing training to help Rachel with the challenges associated with caring for children who have experienced trauma and adversity in early childhood.

The local authority's Virtual School staff also worked closely with Rachel, and her eldest grandchild's school and Special Educational Needs Coordinator, to ensure they were getting the support they needed within school and were able to take full advantage of extracurricular clubs and activities too.

The support offered by the local authority to Rachel and her grandchildren remained consistent and comprehensive, allowing the family to dip in and out as required.

Crucially, the local authority also helped Rachel's middle grandchild to access therapeutic play. Rachel credits this support with helping her grandchild to better regulate their emotions and behaviour. As a result, her middle grandchild will soon access life story work to help understand their family circumstances and identity - something Rachel did not think would have been possible beforehand.

*name anonymised

Consultation question 16

What support does your local authority provide to Special Guardians and/or to a non-parental party with a Child Arrangements Order?

A **Special Guardian** is someone who has been granted a special guardianship order to provide the child with a permanent home until they reach 18 (unless the court takes responsibility away earlier). The Special Guardian has parental responsibility for the child. They are not the child's parent. They are often someone with a close relationship to the child, such as a family member, former foster carer or family friend. The Special Guardian will have clear responsibility for all day-to-day decisions about caring for the child or young person and their upbringing. [Become a special guardian: What is a special guardian - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/become-a-special-guardian)

A **Child Arrangement Order (CAO)** is an order from the Court which details the arrangements for a child, including where and with whom the child will live and who else they will spend time or have contact with. A CAO is usually used to determine arrangements between parents. But it can also be used to order a child lives with another person, such as a family member or friend. We call this a “**non-parental party**”. Such an order made by the Court is legally binding on the parents of the child.

Select all that apply:

- A means tested financial allowance
- A non-means tested financial allowance
- Access to training
- Access to free legal advice
- Access to information about becoming a kinship carer
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

Strengthening national policy on kinship care

139. We welcome the Care Review's focus on kinship care and recognise that it has not received sufficient national policy attention - and so **we plan to publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023**. The strategy will clearly set out the Government's position on kinship care and comprehensive plans to better support children and carers. This will also allow us to focus on issues that were not in the Care Review but have been raised since, such as educational entitlements, training and improving local authority practice.

140. The strategy will also allow us to update on reform activity, including our exploration of financial allowances. The strategy will be an opportunity to make a real change for children in kinship arrangements and kinship carers. It will be developed with kinship carers, children and young people with experience of kinship care, the sector and relevant third sector organisations. It will also keep us all on track to push forward on the implementation of the kinship care recommendations. Alongside this, we will update existing statutory guidance, such as the Family and Friends Care guidance, which was last refreshed in 2011.

141. In the meantime, we have heard from people with lived experience of kinship care that the lack of a recognised definition of kinship care is problematic. It is difficult for adults and children in these arrangements to know whether they are in a kinship care arrangement and to know what they are entitled to. To create a greater awareness of kinship care we need a common understanding of kinship. Therefore, we have included a working definition of kinship care here. We are consulting on this definition to ensure we include the voices of those with lived experience and to create an accurate understanding of kinship. We want to hear from you about how we might improve this definition ahead of publishing our strategy next year.

Working definition of kinship care

We have been grateful to draw on the expertise of Family Rights Group in developing this definition for consultation. The definitions of “friend or family member” and “parent” as they relate to this working definition are given in the glossary annex.

Kinship care is any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent for a significant amount of the time. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term.

The following are all types of kinship care arrangement:

- An informal kinship care arrangement, that being either a:
 - Private family arrangement in which a close family member who does not hold parental responsibility, raises the child without there being prior involvement of the local authority and without matters being considered by the Family Court, or a
 - Private fostering arrangement in which someone who is not a close relative* of the child and is not already approved as a foster carer looks after the child for 28 days or more (as per section 66(1)(a) and (b) of the Children Act 1989).
- Where a ‘lives with’ child arrangements order** has been granted in respect of the child, in favour of someone who is a friend or family member but is not the child’s parent (see glossary in annex 2 regarding who is a parent).
- Where a special guardianship order has been granted appointing a friend or family member as the child’s special guardian
- Where a child is a ‘looked after child’ child under either an emergency protection order, interim care order, care order or voluntary arrangement (under section 20 of the Children Act 1989) **and** each of the following apply (this may be described as ‘kinship foster care’ or ‘family and friends foster care’):
 - The child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent, and
 - The friend or family member is approved as a local authority foster carer either on a temporary basis or following full assessment.
- Where an adoption order has been granted in respect of the child and, prior to the making of the order, the adopter was a friend or family member.

* In relation to private fostering, “relative” has the meaning given in section 105 of the Children Act 1989 (viewed on 5 December 2022). It includes only the following: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership), and stepparent (a married stepparent, including a civil partner).

** Pursuant to a relevant court power in section 10 of the Children Act 1989.

Consultation question 17

To what extent are you supportive of the working definition of kinship care?

Select one from:

- Fully supportive
- somewhat supportive
- neither supportive or opposed
- somewhat opposed
- strongly opposed
- Don't know

If desired, please explain your response.

Chapter 5: The care experience

Chapter summary

This chapter covers reforms to ensure all children in care have stable loving homes close to their family, friends and communities. It will also cover our ambitions for children in care, care leavers and care-experienced people.

We will do this by:

- Prioritising loving relationships for all children in care and care leavers
- Seeking to strengthen and widen corporate parenting duties
- Boosting the number of foster homes and children's homes
- Ensuring a stable and skilled children's home workforce
- Reviewing standards of care, regulations and guidance
- Introducing a financial oversight regime of the largest providers of children's homes and fostering agencies
- Co-designing a regional model of care to establish Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)
- Creating opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve and exceed their potential through education, employment and training
- Having wraparound support and accommodation for all care leavers
- Decrease health disparities and increase life expectancy for children in care and care leavers

What is our vision?

142. If children come into care, it is critical that we provide them with stable, loving homes close to their communities. Care needs to provide consistency, stability and warmth. Throughout the implementation of our reforms to care, we will prioritise children's loving and safe relationships (both with their families and with care givers) alongside being world-class corporate parents. Children coming into care will have experienced significant trauma, and care needs to be a place for them to recover and thrive. They need to live with people who know them well, listen to them and advocate for their needs - like any good parent would.

143. Children in care need what all children need. All children need stability, consistency in relationships with caregivers, and safe relationships with family and friends. Children should not experience regular disruption to their education just because they are in care. They should live near their school, friends and community, except in exceptional circumstances. Children should live either with or very close to their brothers and sisters, when safe.

144. Care can be transformative for children. There are many examples that, when done right, care can change children's lives with love, safety and stability. We need to make sure this is the case for all children in care. We need to listen to children in care and care leavers. This could be listening to what they want from their home, listening to them if things are not going well and listening to how we can support them to achieve their hopes and ambitions.

145. Children in care and care leavers should never face discrimination or lack of opportunity. All professionals, practitioners and carers supporting them will have high aspirations for them. We will have equally high aspirations for children in care with disabilities who may need additional support to access similar opportunities. As a society we will not perpetuate negative stereotypes or accept poor outcomes for care-experienced people. Children in care must be given the wraparound support from a core group of loving people and from their corporate parents.

146. A family-based home is best for most children to live in. Children should receive local healthcare and whatever additional support they need, close to the family home that they are living in. Where children need specialist residential or therapeutic care, this should be provided as close to where they come from as possible.

147. To deliver on this vision, our approach for children in care and care leavers needs to be twofold. First, we need to transform the way we provide the right homes for children in care and care leavers. And second, we need to be much more ambitious for them. We must give them foundations to recover from trauma, thrive and achieve their potential into adulthood. When care works well, it transforms children's lives. Crucially, to underpin this vision, we must listen to the voices of children in care and care leavers if we are successfully going to make the changes needed.

How far from the vision are we now?

148. For decades, children in care, care leavers and care-experienced people have been telling local authorities, successive governments, and the public that we are failing them. We hear them.

149. We agree with the Care Review and Competition and Market Authority's (CMA) recommendations in the most part - particularly that the way we provide care and children's care experience must improve significantly. The right home and the right care can have a significant and positive impact on a child's life.

Children in care

150. There are not enough of the right homes in the right places for children in care to live in. The way we currently plan for, commission and provide homes for children is not working. This shortage is having a negative impact on children and young people's wellbeing and outcomes.

151. In some cases, children in care are not safe. Abuse should not be tolerated, but for children in care, it is our duty to do more to prevent it. This was particularly highlighted in 2 reports last year: the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Phase 1 report on Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings (The Panel's Phase 1 report). These are the latest of many historical reports and inquiries on the abuses of children in care.

152. Children are living far from where they would call home (without a clear reason for this), separating them from loving relationships with brothers, sisters and the people that matter to them most. A third of children in England in residential homes are placed at least 20 miles from their home and community.⁶⁵

153. This can be particularly true for disabled children and children with complex health needs. In its recent publication, The Panel's Phase 1 report found that the 108 children placed at 3 children's residential care settings - formerly run by the Hesley Group - were living an average of 95 miles from home.⁶⁶

154. Some children are living in the wrong type of home for their needs. In research published by Ofsted, one third of children living in children's residential homes originally had foster care on their care plan but were instead placed in a children's home.⁶⁷

155. There are not enough foster carers in the right places with the right skills or receiving enough support. Since 2018, the number of approved mainstream fostering places has decreased by 5% while the number of children living in care has risen by 9% over the same period.⁶⁸ A shortage of foster carers is reducing a child's chances of living in a home environment and living close to their community and loving relationships.

156. Many children enter care with complex needs. These are often as a direct result of their pre-care experiences, with abuse and neglect the biggest reasons why children enter care. More than half of children in care have a special educational need or disability. This number increases to 81% of children living in children's homes, compared to 14.9% of all children in England.⁶⁹ These complex and additional needs are poorly met when children are not living in the right home or are being moved frequently.

⁶⁵ Competition and Markets Authority (2022) [Market study into children's social care in England, Scotland and Wales - Final report](#)

⁶⁶ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings - Phase 1 report](#)

⁶⁷ Ofsted (2022) [Why do children go into children's homes?](#)

⁶⁸ Ofsted (2022) [Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022](#); Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2021 to 2022](#)

⁶⁹ Ofsted (2022) [Main findings: children's social care in England 2022](#)

157. For children who need secure children's homes, there is a lack of sufficiency and support to accommodate children with multiple and complex needs. This can be exacerbated by siloed pathways for children with multiple needs.⁷⁰

158. Local authorities have told us they find it particularly challenging to find homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. These children often have specific needs and require particular support.

159. We have a care system that does not function effectively to provide enough stability for our most vulnerable children. One in 10 children lived in 3 or more different homes last year.⁷¹ This can mean they have to move school or to a different community.

160. The cost of providing homes for children in care is rising. Local authorities are paying excessive amounts for some children's care, but this does not always result in better outcomes. Some care providers are making excessive profits as a consequence.⁷²

Care leavers

161. Care leavers face barriers to securing and maintaining affordable housing, with a third of care leavers becoming homeless within 2 years of leaving care.⁷³ They are also financially vulnerable. This can prevent them from engaging in further or higher education and employment including apprenticeships. It also puts them at increased risk of loneliness and isolation. It is estimated that a quarter of the homeless population in England were in care at some point in their life.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ What Works for Children's Social Care (2022) [Commissioning Secure Children's Homes Placements in England](#)

⁷¹ Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2022](#)

⁷² Competition and Markets Authority (2022) [Market study into children's social care in England, Scotland and Wales - Final report](#)

⁷³ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2017) [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence - Report 1](#)

⁷⁴ Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (2020) [Understanding the Multiple Vulnerabilities, Support Needs and Experiences of People who Sleep Rough in England](#)

162. Financial vulnerability and the rising cost of living impacts on care leavers' employment options, accommodation choices and mental health. Some care leavers are unable to keep track of what bills they need to pay, or how to manage their money because they often live independently at a much younger age than their peers. In some cases, this can lead to care leavers getting into debt, losing tenancies, or being unable to afford food or travel. Some care leavers are still in debt years later. Care leavers have told us that being worried about money was the most common reason for feeling unsafe when they left care.⁷⁵ Currently, nearly 2 in 5 care leavers aged 19 to 21 are not in education, employment or training.⁷⁶

163. The poor physical and mental health outcomes for care leavers and care-experienced people are stark.⁷⁷ Children in care have often experienced significant trauma and then face difficulties accessing mental health support. This compounds their vulnerability when leaving care.

164. Care leavers are more likely than their peers to have an unnatural death (by suicide, violent death or accident).⁷⁸ We must take urgent action to transform the way we deliver care, and the experience, care and support children and young people have.

165. Poor outcomes are not inevitable, and we know that with the right support in place, care leavers can and do achieve great things. They do this with incredible resilience despite adversities. Sadly, too many care leavers are not supported well enough. We need the right support and high aspiration for all care leavers so they can go on to lead fulfilling lives.

⁷⁵ Ofsted (2022) ["Ready or not": care leavers' views of preparing to leave care](#)

⁷⁶ Department for Education (2022) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#)

⁷⁷ The rate of mental health disorders in the general population aged 5 to 15 is 10%. However, for those who are looked after, it is 45%, and 72% for those in residential care (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2021) [Nice guideline: Looked-after children and young people](#)). Barnardo's surveyed care leavers and found that 46% were identified as having mental health needs, with 65% of them not receiving any form of statutory support (Barnardo's (2017) [Neglected Minds: A report on mental health support for young people leaving care](#)).

⁷⁸ Adults who spent time in care as children between 1971 and 2001 were 70% more likely to die prematurely than those who did not. The extra risk of premature death rose for care leavers from 40% in 1971 to 360% in 2011 (Murray, E.T. et al. (2020) [Association of childhood out-of-home care status with all-cause mortality up to 42-years later: Office of National Statistics Longitudinal Study](#), BMC Public Health, 20(1), 735; Nuffield Foundation (2021) [Policy Briefing: The lifelong health and well-being of care leavers](#)).

What have we already started doing?

166. We have relaunched the Care Leaver Ministerial Board, with a refreshed vision that aligns with the Implementation Strategy. We are securing a robust cross-government approach to care leaver policy and **corporate parenting**. The Board will continue to champion the needs of care leavers, address key barriers, raise the care leaver profile across government and the sector, and tackle stigma.

167. We have put in place a significant range of measures to improve the **education outcomes of children in care**. Virtual School Heads (VSHs) have brought expert leadership to the education of children in care. Their work, coupled with the other measures we have introduced, has brought a steady reduction in permanent exclusions.

168. Drawing on the guidance issued by DfE and support from the Care Leaver Covenant, over 70 higher education institutions have published their offer to care leavers on the Covenant website. Universities, such as York, are now offering a comprehensive offer of support including bursaries and support with all-year accommodation for care leaver students.

169. To **bolster employment, education and training opportunities**, the Care Leaver Covenant has already secured over 2,000 offers for care leavers, from over 350 signatories. These include the NHS which has committed to provide up to 1,000 employment opportunities to care leavers over the next 3 years, as well as high-profile employers such as the John Lewis Partnership, Sky and Amazon, all of which provide supported pathways into employment and training.

170. We are continuing with the award-winning Civil Service Internship Scheme with its annual intake, which the Care Review identified as an example of best practice. We are proud to say that the **scheme has already offered paid roles to over 800 care leavers in over 26 government departments** with around 80% being converted to permanency.⁷⁹

171. In starting to **reduce care leaver homelessness**, we have already announced funding to expand Staying Close over this Spending Review period. This will mean that by the end of this period around 50 local authorities will be offering Staying Close, which provides move-on accommodation and practical and emotional support to children leaving residential care.

⁷⁹ For more details see: [Civil Service Care Leavers Internship Scheme | Civil Service Careers \(civil-service-careers.gov.uk\)](#)

172. We have published the Joint Housing Protocols for Care Leavers. This best practice guidance supports children’s services and housing authorities to work effectively together. We are funding specialist Personal Advisors (PAs) in 68 councils to build upon these protocols and continue work to **prevent care leaver homelessness** and rough sleeping.

173. We have commissioned the WEIFCSC to identify examples of best practice in supporting care leavers to access the **mental health support** they need. The findings from the research will be published in spring 2023.

What we will do over the next two years

174. To drive improvement, we will track progress across 6 key missions:

- Mission 1: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place.
- Mission 2: By 2027, we will see an increase in high-quality, stable and loving homes available for every child in care local to where they are from.
- Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.
- Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers.
- Mission 5: By 2027, we will see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and reduce care leaver homelessness.
- Mission 6: We will work closely with health partners to reduce the disparities in the long-term mental and physical outcomes of care-experienced people.

175. This chapter will focus on each of these missions individually and set a clear direction for how we will achieve for children in care.

Consultation question 18

Overall, to what extent do you agree that the 6 key missions are the right ones to address the challenges in the system?

Select one from:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

If desired, please explain your response.

Mission 1: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place

176. By 2027 we want to see significant progress in children in care and care leavers having and maintaining loving relationships with people who are important to them. Throughout this reform package, we have described how we want local authorities to prioritise children's loving relationships throughout Family Help and child protection. We want children to have consistent practitioners and professionals in their lives who they can build relationships with. This will be the key to unlocking, supporting and maintaining loving relationships for children. We want to see family-led approaches to edge of care decision-making and local authorities prioritising kinship care wherever safe and possible. Where this cannot happen, children should live close to the people they know and love when they come into care (where it is in the child's best interests).

177. In mission 2 (below), we describe how we want to change the way we provide homes for children to live in. With enough of the right homes in the right places, children will live close to and see their parents, brothers, sisters and friends and live in their communities where it is safe - which is the case for most children. Children living with their brothers and sisters will be prioritised wherever possible. The decision on where children live should be heavily informed by how close they will be to people they know and love (whenever that is in the child's best interest).

178. We will monitor our progress in helping children in care and care leavers to maintain loving relationships using the following measures: feel lonely often/always; do not have a really good friend; do not have someone they trust; or do not have someone who will be there for them. We will be undertaking further work to look at how best to routinely track these areas going forward.

179. We will provide over £30 million in the next two years to significantly increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes including Lifelong Links. These programmes help children in care and care leavers to identify and connect with the important people in their lives and create new relationships.

Charlie's story*

I went into care when I was pretty young, and most of the connections with my family were cut off but I still thought about them loads. I wanted my brothers and sister back in my life and always asked questions about mum and dad.

I've got younger siblings and always felt it was my responsibility to get us back together. Thanks to Lifelong Links I now have contact with them all.

I was nervous about Lifelong Links and being rejected or not finding folk, but if you never try you never know - and I hate not knowing! My Lifelong Links coordinator was incredibly supportive and helped me build relationships I never thought I would have.

My mum died when I was 9, so I don't have much memory of her. But I met my auntie, and it was nice to hear these little bites of goodness of what it was like for my mum growing up. From doing Lifelong Links I feel more secure in myself and my relationships. I'm a lot happier day-to-day, that is because I have relationships that I never expected to have.

I've got a letter from my sister, I've met my auntie, my cousin and her daughter. I've met both my brothers. By taking part in Lifelong Links, you won't lose anything. Things will stay the same, or you could have memories, relationships and people in your life that you never thought possible.

Lifelong Links has not only brought people and family into my life, it has given me confidence and helped with my self-esteem and self-worth. For a long time, I felt I would end up like the "bad" parts of my family, and seeing it isn't like that helped get those negative thoughts out of my mind.

Lifelong Links is truly life-changing.

*Name has been anonymised.

180. Ofsted's implementation of its standalone care leaver judgement criteria will be used to assess leaving care services. It will strongly reinforce the importance of loving relationships, alongside the rest of our missions.

181. We will increase the accessibility and take-up of the Independent Visitors offer by working with the sector to reinforce current good practice and developing standards for Independent Visitor services.

182. We are working with the sector to implement an opt-out model of independent advocacy. We held our first meeting with the Advocacy Expert Group in November 2022 and will consult as necessary on this measure in autumn 2023. We will develop the policy to ensure that a future advocacy service will empower and listen to children and young people, including children with different communication needs. This will ensure children and young people understand their rights at pivotal transitions in their life.

183. Advocacy services for children in care will not replace the role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) and Regulation 44 (Reg 44) visitors. We recognise the complexities and variability of practice nationally in these roles and acknowledge concerns raised by recent reviews. This includes the Panel's ongoing review of residential settings for children with complex health needs and disabilities. The Panel's early findings indicated shortcomings in both roles, and this will be considered further in their final report in early 2023.

184. As part of the wider review of the standards of care, we will review the effectiveness of both roles to ensure they provide a vital and independent safeguarding check as part of the overall system. We will do this while carefully engaging children and care-experienced people. If necessary, we will consider other options, including responding to any recommendations from the Panel's final report.

185. We will assess levels of interest in introducing a way for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone they care about, such as a former foster carer or family friend. We will seek to understand better the practical changes that care-experienced people would want to see. We are consulting on the demand for a new lifelong guardianship order and what purpose people would want the order to fulfil.

Consultation question 19

To what extent do you agree or disagree that a care-experienced person would want to be able to form a lifelong legal bond with another person?

The Care Review considered that creating a "lifelong legal bond" would mean that care-experienced people will be able to demonstrate that they have legally and practically joined the family of another non-related adult who is important to them from their time in care.

Select one from:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Consultation question 20

What would you see as the advantages or disadvantages of giving legal recognition to a lifelong bond?

186. We want local authorities and practitioners to better identify opportunities for wider family members to support parents and children in reunification where it is in the child's best interest. The focus on maintaining important relationships throughout Family Help, child protection, kinship and care will better support successful family reunification where it is possible.

Mission 2: By 2027, we will see an increase of high-quality, stable and loving homes available for every child in care, local to where they are from

187. We recognise the urgent calls from the CMA and the Care Review to transform the way care is provided to children. The heart of this approach is prioritising children's loving relationships and a home that best meets their needs. There are several measures needed at a national, regional and local level to increase sufficiency and improve standards of care and regulations. This includes supporting local authorities to improve their commissioning of homes for children ahead of moving to a regional model. We need to work together with local authority, sector and charity leaders to make the urgent changes needed. We need to take immediate action to:

- Boost the number of the right homes in the right places available for children as a matter of urgency.
- Review all legislation, regulations and standards of care to ensure all children in care receive what they need, no matter where they live.
- Financially oversee independent private and voluntary providers of foster homes and children's homes and deliver national support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping to local authorities.
- Work with local authorities to develop a regional model of planning, commissioning and providing homes for children in care.

Boosting the number of the right homes in the right places

188. Local authorities have primary responsibility for the children in their care. This includes ensuring there is sufficient accommodation locally to meet the range of needs of children in care in their area. The needs of the child are paramount when deciding the right place for a child to live. Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there is sufficient provision for their children in care. This includes commissioning places from private or voluntary sector providers as required. We recognise the challenges that local authorities face when commissioning places. Detailed below, we outline the national support to be provided with forecasting, procurement and market shaping.

189. We recognise the urgent need to change the way local authorities recruit and retain foster carers. We will be investing over £3 million to deliver an initial fostering recruitment and retention programme in the North East Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance. This will introduce a regional support hub to support individuals interested in applying to foster, facilitate targeted communications and improve retention with the evidence-based model Mockingbird. This will create end-to-end improvements in fostering recruitment and retention and allow us to gather insights ahead of further programmes.

190. Delivering a regional programme for fostering recruitment and retention signals the first step in moving the system to deliver care for children in a regional model. We will expand our recruitment and retention programme from 2023 by investing over £24 million. In the development of fostering recruitment, we will work to recruit and retain more foster carers where there are particular shortages. Depending on local need, this may include sibling groups, teenagers, UASC, other children who have suffered complex trauma or parent and child foster homes. This will boost fostering capacity and build an evidence base on how to effectively recruit and retain foster carers, building towards fostering being subsumed into RCCs across England.

191. In recognition of the increasing costs of living, we are also raising the National Minimum Allowance (NMA). Foster carers will benefit from a 12.43% increase to the NMA. This above inflation increase in allowance will help foster parents cover the increasing costs of caring for a child in their home.

Simone's story*

Simone is 11 years old. Until last year, she lived at home with her mum, who has a history of unmanaged mental ill-health. Simone cared for her mum, and this impacted all areas of Simone's life. She had poor school attendance and was frequently absent. Her health needs were not met, she was isolated and unable to talk to people about her worries. The situation reached a crisis when Simone's mum was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and admitted to hospital. Simone moved to live with foster carers Helen and Steve. Helen and Steve live close to Simone's home and, from the beginning, her ability to visit her mum and to maintain links with friends was a priority. Having a home close to Simone's family and community was crucial.

She continued to attend her primary school and was able to transfer to secondary school with her friends. She walks to school with her friends every day. She is rarely absent from school, only when ill.

Simone has been welcomed as part of Helen and Steve's family. They share a love of football and music. Simone has been on holiday with Helen and Steve and has tried new activities, such as netball. Simone has been able to continue attending her local clubs and likes that her friends can come home to tea with her.

An active lifestyle and healthy eating mean that Simone's health is significantly improving, and she takes pride in feeling well. She can talk to Helen and Steve about her worries and knows that her feelings are important.

Steve and Helen help Simone to see her immediate family and build relationships with wider family. She visits mum weekly in hospital. She has also started to stay overnight with people in her wider family, something she had never done before. This has been so positive for Simone and her family that a move to live with them permanently is being explored.

*Name anonymised

192. We have been working across government with DLUHC in order to assist local authorities when they are considering planning applications for new homes for children, and we will issue a joint Ministerial Statement to clarify the national policy position. We need leaders at a local and regional level to support this approach. This will create more homes for children in their local area which meet their needs, significantly reducing the need for out of area places for children to live.

193. We will continue to build on our work reforming supported accommodation for 16- to 17-year-olds. Semi-independent provision, including supported lodgings, can be the right option for some older children, but only where it is high-quality and the young person is ready for the level of independence it promotes. Ofsted will begin to register providers from spring 2023, and the national standards and registration requirements will become mandatory from autumn 2023 following a minimum 6-month application window.

194. We are continuing with the Children's Home Capital Programme, which has seen £259 million of capital funding invested to increase provision in local authority-run open and secure children's homes. We are working with local authorities to create new children's homes and increase provision in their local area.

195. We need to ensure we have a stable and skilled workforce in children's homes. Over the next two years we will gather data and qualitative information to enhance our understanding of the children's homes workforce. We will undertake a workforce census in 2023 and 2024 and carry out in-depth cases studies, which will focus on recruitment, retention, qualifications and training. We agree with the CMA's recommendation that the Government should gather regular data and information about the children's homes workforce. We will explore how best to do this beyond the census.

196. We will develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector. We will be exploring proposals for introducing professional registration of the residential childcare workforce. We will also be exploring the development of a leadership programme for new managers, alongside a new Knowledge and Skills Statement with accompanying continued professional development for all managers as part of this programme.

Review all standards of care, regulations and associated legislation

197. We will set a high bar for the quality and consistency of care that children and young people should receive. Standards should provide flexibility and allow innovation to respond to different needs, while crucially safeguarding children and improving outcomes.

198. We have set up an expert working group to review all existing legislation and regulation and to develop a core overarching set of standards for fostering, children's homes and supported accommodation. The first meeting of the group took place in November 2022. Its work will include reviewing regulations that impact on the placements market in England, in order to remove any unintended barriers to ensuring enough of the right types of home are available for the children and young people who need them. This will start to unlock barriers to creating homes at a local level before we move to a regional model.

199. In tandem, we will consult with other government departments that use the current regulations. We will undertake some initial sector expert engagement followed by a consultation as necessary in autumn 2023 on changes to standards of care and regulations, with a view to updating legislation subject to parliamentary time.

200. Alongside strengthening standards and regulations, and as part of the department's response to the Panel's Phase 1 report, we will work with Ofsted to strengthen its inspection and regulatory powers in order to hold private, voluntary and charity providers to account.

Financial oversight of the sector

201. There are a variety of different types of providers who operate in this sector and play a vital role in providing homes for children in care. However, we recognise some of the concerns associated with this, particularly with regard to large providers with complex, and sometimes opaque, ownership structures. As the CMA concluded, the largest private providers of homes for children are making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices, than would be expected if this market were functioning effectively.⁸⁰

202. To ensure the resilience of both independent fostering agencies and children's homes providers, we will work with Ofsted and the sector to develop plans for a financial oversight regime. This will increase transparency and prevent sudden market exit, which would disrupt the lives of children living there. To do this, DfE and Ofsted will work with DHSC and CQC to learn from their experience in the adult social care market.

203. We are aware of the detrimental impact that market exit could have on the care and stability of where children and young people live. We should not be in a position where we are waiting for this to happen. Therefore, we are seeking to design a robust regime to ensure increased financial transparency across settings where children are living away from home, particularly regarding large providers with complex organisational structures. The regime will serve as an early warning system to allow the sector to be prepared for and manage such an incident should it occur within children's social care.

204. We recognise the importance of taking action as soon as possible, therefore, in advance of bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows, we will begin immediate work to develop a voluntary oversight regime overseen by Ofsted. We will look to the sector to support the department and Ofsted with successfully developing an effective and proportionate voluntary regime, which could support the transition towards a statutory function. This will enable close monitoring of the financial health of providers, allowing for greater financial transparency across the sector, and ensuring that children continue to receive the care that they need.

⁸⁰ Competition and Markets Authority (2022) [Market study into children's social care in England, Scotland and Wales - Final report](#)

205. While the CMA recommended that the Government should not take forward proposals for banning for profit care, or capping prices and profits, they found the market is not functioning well. The CMA found prices for places in children's homes were rising by 3.5% a year between 2016 and 2020 after accounting for inflation.⁸¹ Local authorities are sometimes paying too much for placements, and our view is it is not right that council taxpayers are footing the bill. We will seek to bring greater transparency, for example on ownership, debt structures and profit making across both independent fostering agencies and residential children's homes. We will make an assessment, with colleagues across government and the sector, on what impact changes in the strategy have on the capacity in the market and the cost of placements to inform our future policy.

206. We will deliver national support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping to local authorities. Initially, we will commission an external organisation to deliver the support. Over time, the function could be subsumed into a regional model. As part of this, we will seek to increase the financial transparency of providers to strengthen local authorities' understanding of the financial position of the organisations they commission to deliver care. We will also seek to publish data held by government to support local authorities with forecasting.

Co-designing Regional Care Cooperatives

207. We support the approach of a regional model for providing homes for children. We will work with local authorities to co-design and co-create Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) in two areas with a view to rolling out after testing and evaluating the best approach in conjunction with the sector. While RCCs will signal a radical shift in the care system, they will need to build on the measures laid out at a local and sector level in order to boost sufficiency and ensure children can be matched to homes more effectively.

208. Alongside local authorities, we will work with partners across health, justice and the third sector to support the co-design of RCCs to make lasting change. For health, every ICB will have an Executive Lead(s) responsible for Children and Young People, SEND and Safeguarding. They will be responsible for ensuring the ICB functions work in the interest of children and young people. They will ensure join up with colleagues in children's social care. Every Joint Forward Plan is required to set out the steps to meet the particular needs for children and young people. Every integrated care strategy will set out how the integrated care system will meet the needs of its population, including children and young people. Working with health, local government and other partners, children's social care can play an important role in designing and implementing these plans and strategies. We will consider how connections can be made across ICBs and other stakeholders in the development of RCCs.

⁸¹ Competition and Markets Authority (2022) [Market study into children's social care in England, Scotland and Wales - Final report](#)

209. We will provide set-up funding and seek to provide capital investment for local authorities to come together regionally and innovate on how to implement our vision. The development of RCCs will create a much-needed change primarily in order to increase sufficiency. We accept the CMA and Care Review direction and highlight our vision of the benefits of RCCs below.

The vision for Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)

- **Better and more accurate information to improve planning for care:** We agree with the CMA that local authorities are operating at too small a scale to forecast effectively for children's needs in 152 areas. Forecasting how many children will enter care in the future, where they will come into care and with what needs must be carried out at some scale. Working regionally will help us to better predict what homes will be needed for children, and where they will be needed.
- **Better economies of scale:** With increased scale, there is increased capability. A regional model will have the financial force and shared risk to plan ahead and invest in homes and models of care that individual local authorities currently lack. It is good practice for children to be involved in decisions about where and with whom they live. A regional model of care will ultimately increase the availability of the right homes in the right places for children who need them - giving children more voice and choice in decision-making.
- **Better support for foster carers:** There are artificial barriers, embedded in current structures, that are unnecessarily limiting the options for both children and foster carers. By working together, and with RCCs delivering foster care, we will achieve better recruitment and retention of diverse and excellent foster carers. By working together, children who live on the border of neighbouring authorities will have a wider pool of foster carers who they could be matched with, while still living close to home and school. In all, we will have more choice and better matching for children and better tailored support for foster carers.
- **Better collaboration with health and justice to improve services for children in care:** A key role of RCCs will be to work closely across social care, health and youth justice, in order to better meet the needs of children in care, particularly those with complex needs.
- **Better planning and running of homes for children with complex needs:** Once fully established with the costs of care reduced by pooling resources and expertise, RCCs will be better equipped to provide more residential care homes for those children with the most complex needs. We will work with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to understand what the RCC model might mean for children in all forms of secure care, including those in the health and justice systems. Where children require an inpatient mental health service, there should be strong multi-agency arrangements to ensure that they are supported during their stay and return to the community. This will reduce the chances that children, including disabled children, will need to live far from home in order to receive the care they need.

The vision for Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) (continued)

- **Increased transparency of the cost of care:** By working together under RCCs, local authorities will be able to accurately compare how much they are each paying for foster homes, residential homes, supported accommodation, and secure and therapeutic care homes. It is not possible for 152 local authorities to compare prices, but working in regional groups of up to 20, commissioners will be better placed to compare both the cost and quality of services they are procuring. We will ask RCCs to regularly publish management information about the cost of care.
- **Improved commissioning practices:** By working together, RCCs will be able to learn and share learning on better commissioning. We will support this work by providing national support with forecasting and procurement on how best to plan for sufficiency and how best to commission and procure the right homes in the right places. With a smaller number of commissioning teams, but operating at greater scale, they will be better placed to share learning about how best to commission. This includes how we hold providers of care to account for quality through these commissioning contracts.
- **Action on excess profit making:** Children will be better matched to homes as stated in their care plans. For example if a foster carer is the best match for a child, there will be a foster home available for them. Improved recruitment and retention of foster carers will reduce the need to use residential care as an overflow for a lack of places in foster homes. Better planning for care, better commissioning and more transparency about the cost and quality of care, will reduce excess profit making. There will be a reduced use of spot purchasing. Combined with action on financial oversight of the market, local authorities will be in a much better position to manage the market in the best interests of children.
- **Updated regulation and inspection of care:** To support this regional collaboration, after our review of regulations and care standards, we will ensure that all children will receive the same level of care when they live away from home. We will work with Ofsted to align their inspection to these new regulations and standards and develop a framework for the inspection of Regional Care Cooperatives. This will be important in ensuring we hold RCCs to account in providing sufficient, quality places for children to live.
- **Better outcomes for children in care:** When children's social care operates effectively, children in care and care leavers will be safe in homes that meet their needs. RCCs will significantly increase the likelihood that children are living close to their community. RCCs will prioritise matching with local homes and achieving permanency for children. Proximity to their home environment keeps children safe and maintains loving relationships. Children will have their voices heard. Children will live in homes matched to their likes, dislikes, religion, culture, personality, and physical and mental health needs.

210. We recognise the wide variety of views on how RCCs could operate, including those of local authorities, placement providers, foster carers and social workers. We will work with the sector to understand how RCCs should work and how they fit into wider plans to deliver sustainable and safe places to live for children in care, such as financial oversight of the independent sector. No matter where children are from, at the heart of this approach, it is crucial that children live close to their family, friends and school. A regional way of working should improve, not impede, this.

211. We will be investing in two Pathfinders to test the model of RCCs with local authorities and how it can deliver better care for children and young people. We will collaborate with local authorities to trial an approach to make RCCs work within the current legal framework ahead of bringing forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows.

Consultation question 21

What support is needed to set up and make a success of Regional Care Cooperatives?

Consultation question 22

Do you have any additional suggestions on improving planning, commissioning and boosting the available number of places to live for children in care?

Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector

212. We will improve corporate parenting principles. We are consulting on these plans and will further consult as necessary in autumn 2023, bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows. We are inviting initial views as part of this consultation.

213. The Care Review highlighted that, while local authorities play a crucial role in delivering services to children in care and care leavers, other organisations also have an important role to play. We know that children in care and care leavers experience worse outcomes than their peers across a range of areas including loving relationships, health, education, employment and housing. We want to make sure corporate parenting responsibilities are helping these young people achieve better outcomes across these areas. We want to increase awareness of the stigma and discrimination they can experience, setting high aspirations for them in all aspects of their lives.

214. There is an existing set of corporate parenting principles that local authorities must have regard to when delivering services and support to children in care and care leavers. These principles ensure that local authorities are acting in the best interests of the child or young person, in the way a birth parent would. They require them to:

- act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those young people
- help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- ensure those children and young people are safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

215. We want to strengthen the principles of corporate parenting to reflect the priorities from the Care Review, including to reduce the discrimination and stigma associated with care experience.

Consultation question 23

Are there changes you think would be helpful to make to the existing corporate parenting principles?

216. Extending the principles to a wider set of relevant bodies would increase and improve multi-agency working, because more organisations would be considering the needs and views of children in care and care leavers in delivering their policies and services under a set of shared principles. This would ultimately improve outcomes for children and young people in care and leaving care. We will ensure that any extension of corporate parenting principles sits alongside and complements the exercise of other bodies' existing functions.

Consultation question 24

Which bodies, organisations or sectors do you think should be in scope for the extension of the corporate parenting principles - and why?

217. Through working together with other government departments and the private sector, we will explore how we can provide extra, tailored support for care leavers across all aspects of their lives, including providing help with transport costs, support to avoid digital poverty, and measures to reduce loneliness and isolation.

218. We will encourage local authorities to use the flexibilities that exist to provide free bus travel for care leavers and build on initiatives such as the Greater Manchester (GM) care leaver offer, which includes free travel for all care leavers across the 10 GM local authorities. We will work with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Care Leaver Covenant to address digital poverty through initiatives such as Sky's Tech Grants, in order to provide care leavers with equipment and connections to get online.

Corporate parenting in Scotland

Through the Children and Young People Act (2014), the Scottish Government changed the law to name 126 Scottish bodies and organisations as corporate parents, including colleges, universities, health boards and police, and other national bodies in Scotland. Regular reports are submitted by Scottish Ministers to Parliament every 3 years to highlight progress on actions to support care experienced children and young people.

The most recent report, published in November 2021, outlines a wide range of corporate parenting activities that bodies and organisations across Scotland have offered children in care and care leavers, despite significant variance in the size, remit and focus of applicable national bodies. Examples include:

- Police officers in Edinburgh receiving training, advice and guidance on the importance of not criminalising young people for behaviours, which, if they happened in a child's family home, would not involve a parent calling the police, thus reducing reoffending.
- The University of the Highlands and Islands College network, includes corporate parenting in staff inductions, comprising an information session followed up by an online mandatory training module and online trauma training.
- Sports Scotland's collaboration with a range of partners to provide outdoor activities for care-experienced young people to reconnect through sport and outdoors activity.
- Health boards introducing bespoke corporate parenting training, awareness raising sessions, and e-learning for staff or board members, as well as introducing changes to induction materials to highlight corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Creative Scotland commissioning a series of events with artists and arts organisations interested in or already working with care-experienced young people.

The extension of corporate parenting responsibilities in Scotland has positive impacts for care experienced children and young people including:

- increased empowerment, so their voices are increasingly sought and heard
- enhanced support and opportunities
- improved awareness and understanding of care experience
- stronger relationships with senior staff

219. We recognise and accept the Care Review's findings that children in care and care leavers face stigma and discrimination. We hear their concerns and have considered how we can best tackle these barriers. We are determined to ensure young people do not face stigma or discrimination as a result of being or having been in care, that is why we are prioritising strengthening and widening corporate parenting principles. We believe this will be an impactful method of both driving real change in tackling discrimination against children in care and care leavers and securing equal access to all areas of life and the support care leavers receive. This will impact on the way in which policies and services are designed and how they are delivered. This will take into account and mitigate against the challenges and barriers that children in care and care leavers face.

220. We are taking steps to improve our understanding of care leavers' long-term outcomes. For example, the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data set, which was used to support the Care Review, allows us to explore educational pathways, employment and earnings rates and evidence of those on benefits. This data set will be maintained and used to inform specific aspects of project work as needed. We are in the process of linking data with both DHSC and DLUHC, giving us detailed health and housing data for care leavers in the next two years. We will look further at the need for any focused longitudinal study in light of this new evidence base.

Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers

Supporting children at school

221. Ensuring children live close to their communities when they come into care will mean they remain at the same school wherever possible. Stability in a child's education is critical to their success. We expect this to be a key feature in decision-making for children in care, alongside maintaining loving relationships.

222. Alongside this, we will ensure that Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) is spent on well-evidenced interventions that are clearly linked to robust Personal Education Plans. And that these interventions include, but are not limited to, tuition and mentoring, with plans setting out clear pathways to education and employment on leaving care.

223. We will expand the Broadening Educational Pathways (BEP) programme to support children in care into independent schools. This includes outreach activities such as mentoring, sporting and cultural enrichment opportunities, as well as coaching to support post-18 pathways.

224. To support children in care to continue in education and training beyond 16, we will consult as necessary on our plans to build on the success of the Virtual School Heads model and expand the Virtual School Head role to include children in care and care leavers up to 25.

225. We will extend the post-16 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) style of funding with a further £24 million of funding between 2023 and 2025 to address the cliff edge in educational support that children in care and care leavers face in 16- to 19-year-old education.

Supporting care leavers into higher education

226. We will narrow the gap in care leaver higher education participation rates compared to the general population year-on-year from 2027, with a view to this being minimal by 2030. To do this, we will increase the level of opportunity and support for care leavers in further and higher education.

227. We are committed to introducing a gold standard accreditation scheme for further and higher education institutions. We want the scheme to set a high standard that all institutions will aspire to, including how to drive take-up and retain students. We will bring leaders in the sector together, in order to support the development of the scheme. Grounding our work in the care leaver experience, we will set out our expectation of support in areas such as:

- targeted activities to encourage applications and support transition
- bursaries
- affordable year-round accommodation
- pastoral and mental health support
- dedicated staff leads on care leaver education
- whole staff training

Supporting care leavers into employment

228. In addition to our ambition to increase the number of care leavers going to university, we will also do more to increase how many care leavers access further education and other training opportunities. This will build a solid foundation for future careers and stable employment.

229. We will create 3,500 new, well-paid jobs for care leavers by 2027. To do this, we will refresh the Care Leaver Covenant and boost its capacity and profile, increasing its budget by 30% in each of the next two years. The additional support and encouragement that employers, such as the John Lewis Partnership and Amazon, are putting in place to improve care leavers' life chances are inspiring, and we know that there are many more employers willing to make these commitments.

230. The Covenant - in partnership with members from its Business Council - has developed an employer charter that asks businesses to commit to as part of signing the Covenant. The charter sets expectations that employers will offer well-paid jobs to care leavers, as well as provide tailored support to care-experienced employees and apprentices, to enable them to succeed in the workplace, achieve senior positions and complete relevant qualifications.

231. We want to see more care leavers starting and completing high-quality apprenticeships that can help them into sustainable work and improve their future earnings. From August 2023, we will increase the apprenticeships care leavers' bursary from £1,000 to £3,000. We will ensure that more employers and training providers know about the bursary and the additional £1,000 funding they can each claim to support care leaver apprentices. We will encourage them to use it to provide effective, tailored assistance to increase achievement.

232. In November 2022, for the first time, we published data on the number of care leavers aged 17 to 21 who are in apprenticeships. This showed that only 2% of care leavers were undertaking apprenticeships in the year ending March 2022. We will use this new data and the bursary increase to inform a communications drive in 2023 to improve take-up of apprenticeships and additional funding. This will include raising awareness amongst care leavers and carers, practitioners, professionals and charities who advise and support them, as well as apprenticeship employers and training providers. We want to share learning of what works to support care leavers into sustained education, employment and training.

233. We have agreed to host an employment summit in Spring 2023 to promote examples in the public, private and voluntary sectors on how best to support care leavers into employment; and to share learning from the care leaver social impact bonds that DfE funded.

Mission 5: By 2027, we will see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and a reduction in care leaver homelessness

234. To support care leavers financially, we will increase the amount available for the leaving care allowance from £2,000 to £3,000 from April 2023. This goes further than the Care Review's recommended amount. We want to ensure young people leaving care have the sufficient funds to meet their needs when setting up home.

235. We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, for Staying Close to be a national entitlement. We recognise that young people in the general population are leaving home at older ages. We will explore Staying Put and Staying Close in order to support young people up to age 23. We will see an increase in young people accessing Staying Put and Staying Close nationally.

236. If care leavers do face homelessness, they will have reasonable preference (priority) for an allocation of social housing. Local authorities have discretion to give them additional preference (high priority). We will continue to encourage local authorities to prioritise care leavers for access to suitable, stable housing. We will build on existing work to reduce homelessness, including the support offered by specialist Personal Advisors (PAs), focused on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping.

237. We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to remove the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing at the next available opportunity. We will strengthen statutory guidance and set out procedural expectations on intentional homelessness to remove its use for care leavers under 25 and legislate if necessary. We will promote rent guarantor schemes to encourage all local authorities to use the freedoms they already have. We will monitor this strategy and gather evidence to ensure that local authorities provide the best offer for care leavers' individual needs.

238. We will increase provision and take-up of "supported lodgings" models, where care leavers live in a family environment with support to develop independent living skills.

239. We recognise the vital role that Ofsted has in holding local authorities to account for the quality of support they provide to young people leaving care. Ofsted's single judgement focused on the leaving care experience will bring much stronger scrutiny of the quality of local authorities' local offers to care leavers, including housing.

Mission 6: We will work closely with health partners to reduce the disparities in long-term mental and physical health outcomes and improve wellbeing for care-experienced people

240. We will make clear our expectations of best practice in supporting the mental and physical health of children in care and care leavers. We will update the existing joint DfE/DHSC guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of Children Looked After and extend it to cover care leavers up to age 25. Guidance will be updated to encourage local authorities to purchase NHS Prescription Prepayment Certificates (PPCs) for care leavers who have ongoing medical conditions and struggle to pay for prescriptions.

241. We are working with NHS England and DHSC to ensure all Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs), Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) and local authorities better support the planning and commissioning of services to meet the assessed physical and mental health needs of children in care and care leavers in their area. This will include sharing good practice where ICBs, ICPs, HWBs and local authorities are working effectively across services to identify and address the health needs of this group. We will emphasise existing duties and consider whether it is necessary to strengthen guidance, including statutory guidance, for children in care and care leavers in the future.

242. We are proposing to extend the mandatory reporting of deaths or serious incidents involving children to include the deaths of care leavers. We will be consulting on this as part of the wider consultation on Working Together in spring 2023.

243. We will ensure the ECF (detailed in chapter 6) builds social workers' understanding of mental health and wellbeing and develops their skills so they can better respond to children and adults with mental health needs.

244. In addition to driving progress through the ECF for social workers, we will review current levels of knowledge and skills in relation to mental health among other social care practitioners, such as Personal Advisors, children's homes staff, staff working in virtual schools and Family Help practitioners.

245. This will include reviewing what content on mental health is already included in social care qualifications, early career training and continuing professional development. We will also consider what level of training is needed by different practitioners, from children's homes workers to Personal Advisors. We will work to understand how training could best be delivered, drawing on learning from the work to improve the mental health knowledge and skills of practitioners working in schools. We will conclude this by the end of 2023.

Consultation question 25

Do you have any further feedback on the proposals made in the 6 missions of this chapter?

Chapter 6: Workforce

Chapter summary

This chapter will cover the following reforms to better value, train and support our social worker workforce:

- **Ensuring a strong workforce where social workers are supported and valued and can build and sustain quality relationships with children and families** - by increasing the number of people entering the profession, providing national support to improve retention rates across the country and taking action on workload and overreliance on agency workers.
- **Prioritising high-quality career development** - through a new Early Career Framework and Social Work England's inspection of all initial education routes for social workers by 2025 as part of their three-year cycle.

What is our vision?

246. It is the people working everyday across the whole of children's social care and wider services for children and families who really make a difference to children's and families' lives. Successful delivery of this strategy relies on them: social workers, children's homes staff, Personal Advisors, family support staff, Virtual School Heads, commissioners, analysts, managers, leaders and the wider workforce. This is alongside the foster carers and kinship carers who care for children and family networks who support children and parents. Those working in children's social care in a wide range of roles do their best every day to deliver for the country's most vulnerable children and families.

247. It is vitally important for children and families who need extra support from children's social care to have consistent practitioners in their lives with whom they can build a relationship. We want to support professionals to have longer-lasting relationships with the children and families they work with. That means taking action to empower everyone working in children's social care to use their skills, knowledge and experience with confidence, make the right decisions for children and families, and access the development they need for their roles. This will ensure they are happy and healthy at work, have greater trust and autonomy and feel valued for what they do. Ultimately and most importantly, supporting our workforce will improve outcomes for children and families.

248. In this chapter, we focus specifically on the actions we are taking to support social workers. Other parts of the strategy have set out actions we are taking to develop and support the wider workforce:

- Chapter 2 covers the importance of the Family Help Workers in delivering our vision for the right help at the right time for children and families. This includes how we will consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be case-holders for children in need and their families.
- Chapter 3 discusses the important role that multi-agency partners, such as police, health, education and those working in the family courts system, play in keeping children safe.
- Chapter 4 proposes action to support the social care workforce to involve wider family, friends and communities to protect and help children.
- Chapter 5 outlines how we will better support children's homes staff and give a greater role to commissioners, analysts and leaders at a regional level in services for Children Looked After.
- Chapter 7 will discuss the role of leaders, analysts and those working in regulatory or inspection roles to set direction and drive improvement.

249. However, we know there is more to do to give these wider workforces the support and recognition they deserve, and this will be an area of continued focus.

250. Our ambition is that there is an excellent social worker for every child and family who needs one. To do this, we must better align the realities of the profession with the role that social workers are trained to do. Children and families should expect to build a trusting relationship with their social worker and feel confident they understand their needs and are working in their best interests. We must support social workers to increase the amount of time they spend directly working with children and families and to build lasting relationships with them. That means improving the stability and retention of the workforce and reducing unnecessary workload pressures.

251. Social workers at all levels should be recognised for their professional skills and the incredible difference they make to children's and families' whole lives. They should feel confident they have the skills and knowledge to keep children safe, with child protection prioritised in the initial education, early career support and leadership routes for social workers. They should have access to high-quality training and continuous support throughout their career, with their wellbeing prioritised by leaders and government.

252. We want our social worker workforce at all levels to represent the communities they serve. All social workers, regardless of their background, must be supported to make the same progress as their peers, be represented at leadership levels, and have access to appropriate opportunities for learning and development. That way, children and families can also be treated fairly and receive effective support regardless of their background and characteristics.

253. We will work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and make sure actions we are taking for child and family social workers are compatible with those for the adult social care workforce. We will continue to work closely with DHSC to ensure we are attracting enough social workers through a range of routes, and that they have the right skills, knowledge and support across the profession.

254. We know that a great social worker who has the tools and time to do their job well can make a huge difference to children's and families' lives. While we reform, we must listen carefully to children and families about what they need from their social worker, and to social workers about what they need to make a difference to children's and families' lives.

How far from the vision are we now?

255. The Care Review argued that the greatest strength of children's social care lies in its workforce, yet it is constrained by the way the system currently operates. To realise the workforce's potential, the Review recommended changes that would give practitioners the time and resources to build relationships with children and families and develop the workforce's expertise, so that these relationships consistently bring about change.

256. We agree with the Care Review's overall assessment and accept most of its recommendations relating to social workers. Where we are not accepting the recommendation, we agree with the problem identified, but think there is a more effective way to address it.

257. Through our analysis and engagement with the sector, we have also identified a further issue we want to address: that is, the Care Review did not comment on the sufficiency of the social worker workforce. While we agree it is true that wider reforms to the system will positively impact on retention and caseloads, evidence points to a need to act now in order to attract higher numbers of people to join, rejoin and stay in the profession. Vacancy rates were 16.7% at 30 September 2021, the highest since 2017,⁸² and there is evidence they are continuing to increase. As Ofsted referenced in its recent report:⁸³

“Local authorities and providers are using various incentives to attract and retain staff, such as higher salaries and greater investment in wellbeing and training. But the persistent issue is that the pool of suitable staff is too small.”

⁸² Department for Education (2022) [Children's social work workforce: Reporting year 2021](#)

⁸³ Ofsted (2022) [Children's social care 2022: recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

258. Retaining social workers is also a significant challenge. In the year leading up to September 2021, there were 32,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) local authority-employed social workers. In the same year, 2,780 FTE (8.6%) of all local authority children's social workers left children's services.⁸⁴ Feedback from the workforce has suggested that years 2 to 4 of social workers' career are often the toughest as they lose the support provided by the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. The early career experience of social work is crucial. Adjusting to the realities of child and family practice is a steep learning curve, and a lack of support and development at this stage can lead social workers to leave the profession early or to continue with gaps in their practice.

259. Social workers do not always feel supported, valued and trusted. There is not enough recognition of the difficult decisions that social workers have to make on a daily basis, the valuable work they do, and the skills and expertise required for the role. Social workers report that their primary reason for moving into agency work or self-employment is pay, followed by flexibility over when, where and how they work and a better work-life balance.⁸⁵ They can be frustrated by not being able to spend enough time with families, which might be driven by poor IT systems, inefficient processes and high caseloads.⁸⁶ The extent to which health, wellbeing and inclusion are valued is also a key factor in determining how social workers feel at work.⁸⁷

260. This is likely to impact on some groups more than others. Social workers from ethnic minority backgrounds report barriers to career progression, higher workloads and greater scrutiny.⁸⁸ Anecdotal evidence from the sector suggests similar experiences for disabled social workers.

261. Social workers frequently told the Care Review that duplication can result from the strict conditions for when, how and what data must be inputted, which can directly influence their practice. Case management systems are not working well for social workers. This is partly due to 152 local authorities individually commissioning a small number of providers without setting a clear shared direction on improvements they want to see.

⁸⁴ Department for Education (2022) [Children's social work workforce: attrition, caseload, and agency workforce](#)

⁸⁵ Department for Education (2022) [Longitudinal study of child and family social workers](#)

⁸⁶ Department for Education (2012) [Longitudinal study of child and family social workers](#)

⁸⁷ WWCS (2021) [Happier, Healthier Professionals: Small Scale Interventions to Improve Social Worker Wellbeing](#); Department for Education (2022) [Longitudinal study of child and family social workers](#); [Guardian \(2022\) "It's frustrating": UK social workers say they lack time and resources to do their job](#)

⁸⁸ What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, Social Work England and the Principal Social Worker Network (2021) [Anti-racism full report](#); GatenbySanderson (2021) [Breaking through the mistrust: Increasing diversity of leadership in children's services](#)

262. Given these workforce challenges, competition between local authority employers and agencies who provide social workers to local authorities is high.⁸⁹ This has resulted in escalating pay rates for temporary staff, workforce churn and, in some cases, reduced quality of practice.⁹⁰ This is not financially sustainable for local authorities and reduces the resource available to invest in other local services.

263. There are excellent agency social workers and, in some circumstances, there is a need for some temporary staffing in children's services. However, we are told that high agency use is becoming a feature of more and more local authorities and social workers are joining agencies earlier in their career.⁹¹ Local authorities tell us that whole teams are moving from local authority to agency, creating several vacancies at short notice.⁹² These teams report to their agency, yet local authorities remain the decision maker and quality assurer in relation to their work, leading to confused accountability. We need to move to a more sustainable model that can provide greater stability, improved quality assurance and reduce costs.

264. With too few experienced social workers,⁹³ there is not always the necessary practice experience to help make complex decisions for children and families. The Panel's 2020 Annual Report highlighted variation in the quality of social workers' assessment and identification of risk, while other reports have highlighted gaps in social workers' knowledge and skills.⁹⁴

265. These circumstances impact on the children and families that social workers joined the profession to help. Children and families say that frequent changes in their social workers and insufficient time to build relationships mean they are not always getting the help they need.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ The independent review of children's social care (2022) [Final Report](#)

⁹⁰ Department for Education (2022) [Children's social work workforce: attrition, caseload, and agency workforce](#); BBC News (2022) [Children's social work agency spending soars, research suggests](#); ADCS (2022) [ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Research Phase 8](#)

⁹¹ Simpson, F. (2022) [Recruitment agency practices compound workforce pressures](#); Association of Directors of Children's Services (2022) [ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Research Phase 8](#)

⁹² Association of Directors of Children's Services (2022) [ADCS President's opening address, National Children and Adult Services Conference 2022](#)

⁹³ Ofsted (2022) [Children's social care 2022: recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

⁹⁴ Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2021) [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: Annual Report 2020](#); Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) [National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#)

⁹⁵ Simpson, F. (2022) [Recruitment agency practices compound workforce pressures](#)

What have we already started doing?

266. Every year, government invests more than £50 million on recruiting, training and developing child and family social workers. Our programmes, which support social workers from initial training right through to Directors of Children’s Services (DCS) level, provide the foundations of a coherent and rewarding career pathway. When coupled with effective local support and structures, this investment helps social workers develop their practice, stay in the profession and give the right support to children and families.

267. We promote social work as a great career by funding bursaries with DHSC for students at higher education institutions. We also fund 2 fast-track child and family social work training programmes designed to attract participants who may not have initially chosen social work as a career, providing almost 4,000 qualified social workers since they were set up.⁹⁶ In addition, over 220 social worker apprentices qualified since the route started in 2018.⁹⁷ We fund Teaching Partnerships to ensure join up between employers and providers, and the professional regulator Social Work England sets professional, education and training standards.

268. For newly qualified social workers, we fund the ASYE programme, which bridges the gap between initial training and the first year in employment through training and a protected caseload. The ASYE supports 3,000 social workers per year.⁹⁸ After the first year, it is for local authorities to determine their ongoing continuous professional development offer. Some choose to extend the ASYE to two or three years to build social workers’ confidence to manage complex cases and improve retention.

269. We also deliver high-quality leadership training programmes, which give leaders the skills and knowledge to create working cultures that are inclusive, diverse and support social workers to thrive. We invest £4.5 million in these programmes per year. The new Social Work Leadership Pathways programme launched in autumn 2022 to support over 1,000 social workers each year, while the Upon programme targets 40 aspiring and new-in-post Directors of Children’s Services each year.

270. This reform programme is an opportunity to attract a wider pool of people into social work, strengthen initial and early career training for social workers and set clearer direction on the actions all parties should take to improve the retention of social workers. This includes bringing consistency and transparency to the way agencies recruit child and family social workers, an area where central government has not directly intervened until now.

⁹⁶ Step Up to Social work (set up in 2010) is designed to attract career changers with experience of working with children and families and Frontline (set up in 2014) is designed to attract high performing graduates (Skills for Care (2022) [Social work education](#)).

⁹⁷ Department for Education (2022) [Apprenticeships and traineeships: Academic year 2021 to 2022](#)

⁹⁸ Skills for Care (2022) [Child and family ASYE 2021 to 2022 portal registrations data](#)

What we will do over the next two years

Prioritising high-quality career development for social workers

Ensuring high-quality initial education in social work

271. All social workers should receive comprehensive initial education and training, which are quality assured and validated. That is why Social Work England is inspecting all initial education routes between March 2022 and July 2025. This will ensure those who qualify are equipped with the skills, knowledge, values and behaviours to meet the expected professional standards from day one.

272. Practice placements are a critical part of social work education and training, preparing future social workers for practice. Social Work England will be commissioning research on the role of practice educators and taking on an increased role to oversee them.

Establishing an Early Career Framework

273. The early career experience of social workers sets the groundwork of professional confidence and competence and can support social workers to stay in practice for longer.

274. The Early Career Framework (ECF) will give child and family social workers two years of consistent, high-quality support and development. Once it is established, it will replace the current ASYE programme for child and family social workers. The ECF will improve retention and ensure that all social workers make a strong start and develop the skills and knowledge needed to support and protect children.

275. We will look to develop an expert practitioner level of the ECF for years 3 to 5 post-qualifying. The expert practitioner level of the ECF will enable social workers to further develop their expertise, creating a cohort of highly trained social workers capable of dealing with the most complex cases and spreading best practice.

276. The ECF will be based on a framework document setting out the detailed, comprehensive skills and knowledge needed to support and protect vulnerable children, families and carers at both practitioner and expert practitioner levels. This will align with the Children's Social Care National Framework and include the skills and knowledge needed to make a reality of our reform priorities, such as increased use of kinship care and loving relationships for children in care. We will work with an expert group to develop the framework, building on the post-qualifying standards for child and family social work. We will consult the sector on the content of the framework before finalising it.

277. The support and training provided to early career social workers should balance national consistency with the ability to adjust to the local realities of individual local authorities. We will work with early adopter local authorities and social workers to design and test the early career offer. Through this, we will test what should be delivered by a training provider procured by the Department for Education (DfE), and what should be delivered by local authorities, funded by the DfE. We will contact local authorities with information on how they can become involved shortly.

278. We want to use years 3 to 5 of the ECF to ensure that more social workers stay in front-line roles, carry out complex work with children and families and model excellent practice for others. As well as forming a pool of highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners that child protection teams can draw on (as described in chapter 3), we expect these practitioners to work widely across the children's social care system and provide important support for newly qualified social workers. Therefore, the whole framework will describe a breadth of skills and knowledge as well as depth of focus on child protection.

279. Given the importance of social work in supporting and protecting the most vulnerable children, the sector, government, the public and social workers themselves need to be assured that social workers have the practice capability needed. As with ASYE, we will expect local authorities to provide the right support to social workers completing the ECF. At the same time, we will expect social workers to evidence that they have achieved the skills and knowledge required by each level of the framework, in line with other professions.

280. We will work with social workers, employers and assessment experts to design rigorous, supportive and fair assessment processes, which are integrated into the development and training aspects of the programme. In designing these assessment processes, we will learn from what did and did not work well in the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) pilot programme. However, we will not be restarting the NAAS programme because of the assessment element of the ECF.

281. We want to recognise the achievement of completing the ECF. We will work with Social Work England, DHSC and local authorities to consider how best to recognise career progression, including exploring how local authorities can do so through current pay scales, job descriptions and grading.

282. Starting in spring 2023, we will begin work with early adopters to design, develop and test ECF delivery mechanisms. We will learn from what is already working in the sector, alongside testing and evaluating different approaches taken by local authorities. From autumn 2023, we will consult as necessary on the draft framework. We will explore how we can make the ECF an entitlement for all child and family social workers from September 2026.

Encouraging leaders and academics to stay close to front-line practice

283. The Care Review recommended that, in order to ensure all leaders and academics keep up with the realities of front-line practice, every registered social worker should spend 100 hours in direct practice as a condition of their registration.

284. The Care Review is right to highlight the importance of leaders and academics remaining close to practice. Those who educate social workers and steer the system need to have a robust understanding of quality direct work and the challenges faced by the those on the front-line. However, we would want to ensure that any changes do not expose children and families to more changes of social worker or take managers away from important tasks such as supervision.

285. To address this, we will promote proximity to practice by aligning our leadership programmes with the direction of the reforms, as well as working with Ofsted and Social Work England. We will gather good practice examples of how leaders and academics can undertake direct work in line with children's interests. Over the course of 2023, Social Work England will work on an approach to asking all social workers how much time they are spending in direct practice and how they are using it to support their professional development. However, this will not be a condition of registration.

Tackling social worker sufficiency

Ensuring there are enough social workers, and they feel supported and valued

286. The reform programme as a whole will have a positive impact on social worker supply, capacity and capability. The introduction of Family Help teams with a multi-disciplinary skill set will ensure that social workers will form part of wider teams, in order to provide the right support at the right time for a family, and can use their expertise to ensure the best outcomes for children. This, together with strengthened use of family networks, will reduce the level of demand in the system and free up social worker capacity.

287. Where cases do escalate, our child protection reforms will ensure all social workers working in those teams have the expertise, information and multi-agency input necessary to work more effectively with families. Our broader reforms, including a clearer articulation of what good looks like through the Children's Social Care National Framework, will empower social workers to do what they are passionate about – build relationships and drive change for children and families.

288. In the shorter-term, we will also take action on social worker recruitment and support social workers to stay in the profession for longer.

Boosting the recruitment of social workers

289. We will explore ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally. Increasing the number of people entering the profession through the level 6 social worker apprenticeship will widen the pool of people entering the profession. It will give a route into social care for non-graduates, career changers or those who may already have valuable experience working with children and families. Local authorities can also support existing members of staff to move onto an apprenticeship, allowing them to grow their own workforce pipeline.

290. We will work with DHSC to explore how student social work bursaries and education support grants can better contribute to our vision of initial social work education. We will also work with DHSC and Social Work England to explore opportunities to make the international recruitment of social workers as straightforward as possible for employers.

Celebrating our social workers

291. Our wider reform package aims to provide social workers with better access to services that help children and families, ultimately making social work more rewarding and manageable. We will work with Social Work England to inform and educate people on the role social workers play within society, while promoting social work as a rewarding profession to support recruitment and retention.

Supporting local authorities to create the right working conditions for social workers

292. Local authorities will have their own strategies in place to retain their social workers. These should be shaped by evidence about what works to improve social workers' job satisfaction and wellbeing, such as access to psychological services and providing social workers with administrative support, so they can spend more direct time with families.⁹⁹ But there are also actions national government can take to help local authorities retain their social workers.

293. First, we are working in partnership with local government, Ofsted, Social Work England and others to help ensure all are playing their part to support social worker retention.

⁹⁹ Department for Education (2017) [Social Care Innovation in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight: Evaluation Report](#); Children and Youth Services Review (2017) [Levels of stress and anxiety in child and family social work: Workers' perceptions of organisational structure, professional support and workplace opportunities in Children's Services in the UK](#); Guardian (2022) ["It's frustrating": UK social workers say they lack time and resources to do their job](#)

294. Second, we will create a national virtual hub in 2023 to 2024 to identify and spread best-evidenced practice to retain social workers. It will contain resources to improve working conditions, including health, wellbeing and improving organisational culture, as well as data and information on agency use and pay. The virtual hub will also include best practice resources on flexible working.¹⁰⁰

295. Third, we will work with the sector to enhance the social work employer standards health check.¹⁰¹ The health check enables local authority leaders to understand the experiences of their workforce and the cause of their recruitment and retention challenges. The virtual hub will host the best practice tools that leaders can use to respond effectively to the result of their health check.

¹⁰⁰ The Care Review (2022) recommended trialling flexible working models. We will learn from what local authorities and other countries are doing and add case studies to the virtual hub.

¹⁰¹ Local Government Association (2022) [Employer standards health check 2022](#)

A 'stable and high-quality workforce' in Tower Hamlets

In 2017, Tower Hamlets had a vacancy rate of over 40% and turnover of 36% per year. Ofsted had reported poor social work practice and leadership.

Tower Hamlets decided it needed to change its culture and create a high-quality, valued and permanent workforce. It set up a Learning Academy in 2018 as the engine to drive this organisational transformation.

The Academy's five workstreams are: embedding a relational practice framework, quality assurance, learning and development, overseeing recruitment and workforce development, and facilitating innovative practice. Its success lies in bringing existing skills and knowledge across the organisation into one place. Quality assurance leads identify knowledge gaps by running audits, including seeking feedback from children and families. The Learning and Development team and practice leads can then arrange and deliver the training needed quickly.

A key element of the Academy is its 'Steps to Success', a five-year programme for newly-qualified social workers. Year 2 sees social workers take an accredited course that consolidates their learning from ASYE. In year 3, social workers have access to more specialised training and group coaching led by a senior leader. The final two years – currently in development – will see practitioners receive leadership support and training to become practice leaders and managers.

As a result of this approach, vacancy and turnover rates at Tower Hamlets have fallen over the last three years to below 20% and below 12% respectively. In 2022, Ofsted found a 'stable, high-quality workforce' due to 'manageable caseloads, regular and reflective supervision and access to training and development opportunities through the social work academy'. Crucially, this focus on workforce has had a direct impact on the children and families in Tower Hamlets, with Ofsted highlighting that children can 'build effective and supportive relationships with committed, skilled and highly motivated social workers'.

Reducing workload pressures

296. Improving case management systems (CMS) is one way to enable social workers to spend more time directly with children and families. It is also vital to reducing workload pressures for social workers and therefore an important factor in helping improve workforce retention. We want to support local authorities to set a clear shared direction on improvements they want to see. To address this, we will bring together and work with local authorities to:

- identify the shared aims and objectives for CMS
- identify solutions that could be used across the sector
- communicate these clear aims to CMS providers and explore the most efficient commercial models for local authorities to procure them

297. We are also working with DHSC, which, in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), has identified similar challenges around adult social care case management system commissioning. We will explore opportunities for a cross-government approach that will improve join up across services and deliver more user-orientated and value-for-money systems.

298. To help the sector deliver approaches to make recording less burdensome for social workers, as part of our Data and Digital Solutions Fund, we are funding 2 groups of local authorities to carry out user research into how social workers' data recording is impacting their practice. This will aid development of solutions that ensure that the data gathered is of maximum benefit to all in the children's social care system, in a way that reduces the recording burden on social workers and supports, rather than hinders, good social work. We are funding a further 2 local authorities to work with software companies in developing a proof of concept for the use of advanced technology to reimagine how they record, retrieve, share and analyse information.

299. We will also tackle excessive workload pressures by establishing a National Workload Action Group from early 2023. The group will include representatives from Ofsted, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), Unison and Principal Social Workers (PSW) and those with lived experience of children's social care. It will be asked to identify and address unnecessary workload pressures that do not lead to improvements in outcomes for children and families, to diagnose the issues driving them and to develop solutions.

Increasing transparency on pay

300. The Care Review suggested we improve retention by introducing DfE-led national pay scales. Local government already has a national pay spine which includes job descriptions and grading for child and family social workers to help achieve consistency, transparency and fairness in pay and progression. We do not intend to create new DfE-led pay scales. Nationalising child and family social worker pay and removing a subsection of council employees from local government pay and conditions may be destabilising to councils without having the desired effects.

301. However, we do think there is helpful action we can take to increase transparency on pay. We will work with the sector to ensure that current pay rates, job descriptions and grading reflect the challenge of the role and career progression, and we will look to improve the quality of pay data.

Reducing the cost and overreliance on agency social workers

302. Alongside these actions to improve working conditions, we must take more direct action to address the high use of agency.

303. We are proposing the following actions to bring consistency and quality assurance to the use of agency social workers. Alongside this document, we have published a consultation separately on GOV.UK seeking views on the measures below to make sure they can be introduced in a fair and sustainable way:

- Setting clear expectations about how agency workers should be used through national rules. This will include acceptable notice periods, comprehensive references, expected level of post-qualified experience, pay rates and data sharing. This will give social workers, agencies and local authorities greater consistency and clarity when they operate across local authorities or regions.
- Establishing price rates on the amount local authorities can pay per hour for an agency worker. This is intended to bring agency worker pay in line with local authority employees and create greater consistency and fairness for social workers carrying out the same role. This should reduce spend on agency workers so it can be invested in children and families services.
- We will look at increasing transparency on agency usage and costs to help local authority decision-making and workforce planning.

304. We think these actions are right to pursue in the immediate term, and we will keep further actions under review. These potentially include legislation to prevent local authorities from using agency social workers, and options to regulate and inspect suppliers of social workers. The Care Review recommended funding not-for-profit staff banks in each of the 9 local authority regions. We are currently seed funding local approaches such as the North West staff bank to learn more about the model, and we will keep this recommendation under review.

Consultation question 26

Overall, to what extent do you agree that our proposals on the social worker workforce address the challenges in the system?

Select one from:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral (neither agree or disagree)
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Consultation question 27

If you want the proposals to go further, what would be your top priority for longer-term reform?

Chapter 7: Improving the system

Chapter summary

In this chapter, we will cover the following reforms to bring about system-wide change:

- **Establishing a Children’s Social Care National Framework** to set national direction for the system with clear outcomes. This will be supported by a **Children’s Social Care Dashboard**, which, alongside the data strategy, will ensure that we make better use of data to understand progress towards outcomes in the strategy. **Practice Guides** will support leaders and practitioners with the best available evidence on practice issues identified in the National Framework. We will embed learning loops where practitioners, leaders and those with lived experience provide feedback on reform.
- **Working with Ofsted to ensure inspection is aligned with the National Children’s Social Care Framework.** This will be coupled with an **enhanced improvement and intervention approach** to support and intervene in local authority performance when this is needed.
- **Consulting on a new formula for the distribution of children and young people’s services funding to local authorities.**

What is our vision?

305. Throughout this strategy we have described the changes we want to see for children and families and set out how we plan to achieve these across different areas of children’s social care.

306. Our overriding objective in reforming children’s social care is to benefit the children, families and those working hard to help them. However in order to achieve these benefits we need to support the system so that the impact we are seeking can be achieved effectively. Families can have complicated lives, interacting with multiple services and with needs that change over time. In the same way children’s social care is complicated, with many different partners at local, national and regional levels playing a role. To truly improve children’s social care we also need to improve how that system works together.

307. Alongside this strategy, we are setting out a single framework for children’s social care, setting out its goals and how we will deliver reform. This will provide national direction, which both the Care Review and the Panel identified as necessary to achieve system-wide improvement. This will mean leaders, practitioners who work in it, children and families who experience it, and the general public understand the outcomes it should achieve.

308. We will share best evidence on how to achieve these aims. We will improve how we collect and use data to bring more transparency and drive learning on how both local and national government are achieving these aims. Better technology will mean this can happen more quickly and be achieved with less effort.

309. This direction on “what” children’s social care should achieve, and transparency about how things are working, should be accompanied by autonomy and accountability for local authorities in how they deliver it. Both inspection and intervention should support areas to learn and improve. Change should also be supported by funding, which is based on an up-to-date assessment of needs.

310. Taken together, these changes should create a learning cycle to improve the experiences of children and families. Leaders and practitioners and those with lived experience will have an open and honest dialogue using the best data and evidence on how to achieve the outcomes set out nationally.

How far from the vision are we now?

311. Currently there is **no single framework** for what children’s social care is trying to deliver and how it should approach practice. While the evidence base for what works in children’s social care has been growing, it has not yet been embedded consistently. The Care Review and the Panel both pointed to the need for more national system direction.

312. Local use of data to understand performance through regional arrangements has been growing in recent years, particularly through Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs). Data is not, however, consistently available to help practitioners and leaders learn about practice locally, or to help demonstrate what is happening nationally. There is no consensus on which indicators are the most important to track. This can lead to Ofsted ratings being used as the overriding judgement of system success, which is not the case in other remits such as education or childcare. Accountability in the current system is primarily driven by Ofsted inspection frameworks. This means Ofsted has become a significant driver of behaviour with services often prioritising areas that they believe are focused on by inspectors. This can lead to some areas of the system not receiving sufficient attention.

313. There are also lags between when data is recorded and when it becomes publicly available. This makes it difficult to use data to understand how practitioners are making decisions and what could be done to improve outcomes. Compared to other public services, such as the NHS, use of data is less developed in children’s social care. Some local authorities struggle to take advantage of opportunities available in the digital and data space. Unlike other sectors, there is limited national coordination of data and technology in children’s social care. This means that lessons from individual areas are not mainstreamed across the country.

314. The Department for Education’s (DfE’s) Improvement and Intervention programme has shown good results. Since 2017 there has been a 47% reduction in local authorities receiving an Ofsted rating of Inadequate. Our improvement work has contributed by identifying poor performance early and brokering support to local authorities before performance slips into failure. But there is more we must do to combat poor performance. As of 19 January 2023, 43% of local authorities were given either an Inadequate or Requires Improvement rating.¹⁰² This means that over 5 million children are in local authorities who are not delivering services that are good enough.¹⁰³

315. As of 19 January 2023, 49 out of 152 authorities were given a Requires Improvement rating, 22 of those were given a Requires Improvement rating on at least 2 consecutive judgements, indicating that, in some places, we need a stronger ambition to get to Good. DfE does not routinely support or intervene in all cases where local authorities receive a Requires Improvement rating. Instead we target our interventions towards those deemed “at risk”, where there is evidence of declining performance. This is because local authorities who are given a Requires Improvement rating are not all the same. Some are on an upward trajectory whereas others may be drifting or slipping. Regardless, services must be ambitious for children, and we need to identify the best approaches for supporting improvement in local authorities where Requires Improvement ratings are persistent, in order to achieve more Good and Outstanding services.

316. A large part of the funding provided to local authorities takes into account their relative needs and the resources they have available through locally-raised income, such as council tax. The Government last updated the relative needs formulas used in its assessment of local government funding in 2013-14. A large amount of the underlying data is several years older than this.

¹⁰² Ofsted (accessed 23 January 2023) [Ofsted | Search](#)

¹⁰³ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Demography and migration data, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

317. Since 2013-14, our understanding of what drives local need for children’s social care services has moved on substantially, particularly the significant role that deprivation plays. Our latest analysis on local need in children’s social care was published alongside the Care Review.¹⁰⁴ It is important that any available resources are allocated fairly and accurately, and so the assessment for local government funding needs to be revisited. However, it is important that we consider the timing of updating our approach. This is particularly critical in the existing economic climate, as redistribution will inevitably shift the share of funding from some towards others.

What have we already started doing?

318. Over the past decade we have made significant progress in **building evidence and learning** and establishing ways to disseminate this to practitioners. Since 2014, DfE has spent £333 million in support of innovation projects. We have drawn together learning from this programme and expanded the most effective projects. This includes through the £84 million Strengthening Families Protecting Children programme.¹⁰⁵ The National Audit Office has reported that this work was a positive step in funding new ways of working and provides a good example of using evaluation within policy development.¹⁰⁶

319. The Government established the What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care in 2017 and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (‘the Panel’) to learn from practice and to create and disseminate evidence. More recently, in December 2022, the What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care and the Early Intervention Foundation merged, establishing a single authoritative What Works Centre for vulnerable children and families - the currently titled What Works for Early Intervention and Children’s Social Care (WWEICSC).

320. We have also worked with local authorities to improve the availability of regular data, implementing quarterly data returns and recently expanding the indicators collected. We have also initiated a pilot with 3 local authorities to streamline data collection. We are trialling automated methods to bring data into the department directly from case management systems. This will then be shared with local authorities and within DfE to assess the usefulness of the data, how straightforward it is to obtain, and how it can be used for benchmarking.

¹⁰⁴ Fitzsimons, P. et al. (2022) [Drivers of Activity in Children’s Social Care’ \(Department for Education\)](#)

¹⁰⁵ Department for Education (2022) [Children’s social care innovation programme: insights and evaluation](#); Department for Education (2022) [Seven features of practice and seven outcomes](#)

¹⁰⁶ National Audit Office (2022) [Evaluating innovation in children’s social care](#)

321. On 6 October 2022, we launched the £7 million Data and Digital Solutions Fund (DDSF). This fund will run over two years with 11 projects on information sharing, data analytics, improving case management systems and data improvement. The evidence gathered and products delivered will be a key part of delivering our ambition in this area.

322. There has also been broader work across government to improve the use of data in related areas. This includes the development of the Supporting Families Outcomes Framework, the establishment of the Office for Local Government (Oflog) and DHSC's data strategy Data Saves Lives.¹⁰⁷

323. Ofsted inspection frameworks have increasingly taken a more risk-based and proportionate approach. This supports the rigorous but fair inspection of services, balancing the need to hold local authorities to account with ensuring that inspection requirements are not too resource intensive. They have moved away from a single inspection framework to a more nuanced and practice-focused system involving self-evaluation, annual meetings, focused visits and short and standard inspections.

324. We have already moved to intervene more decisively by acting quickly to engage with local authorities that we assess to be "at risk" of being inadequate and brokering improvement support. Our interventions policy has also evolved to reflect changes in Ofsted's inspection approach. This includes responding decisively where local authorities receive Areas of Priority Action following an Ofsted inspection.

325. The department has invested further funding to support the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances; 9 regional infrastructures made up of local authorities that facilitate peer challenge and scrutiny of local authority performance and support the delivery of improvement activity. The alliances are a key component in our improvement infrastructure, allowing us to identify and act more quickly following signs of poor performance.

326. The department intervenes decisively in all local authorities judged to be Inadequate by Ofsted. We closely monitor all local authorities and broker support for those we assess to be "at risk" of being Inadequate to prevent further failure. Since introducing this approach in 2017, we have delivered a total of 59 interventions including setting up 8 new Children's Services trusts to drive improvement in those areas with the most serious failures. This approach has seen 34 local authorities leave intervention and not return to inadequacy, while reducing the number of Inadequate local authorities by half - from 30 in April 2017 to 14 by 1st February 2023.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Department of Health and Social Care (2022) [Data saves lives: reshaping health and social care with data](#)

¹⁰⁸ [Improvement notices and directions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

327. Peer support is at the heart of the Improvement and Interventions programme. In 2022, the department invested approximately £8 million to expand sector-led improvement activity. This enabled us to grow the cohort of strong performing local authorities who are sector-led improvement partners. There are currently 19 sector-led improvement partners, operating across all 9 regions. Since 2018, the programme has supported 81 local authorities across the country.

328. The department has invested over £4 million over 3 years to March 2024 in order to support political and corporate leadership across children's services. The department works with the Local Government Association to deliver a range of leadership support to develop knowledge and skills in scrutiny and oversight of children's social care services. This is available to all local authority leaders in England. So far, 146 out of 152 local authorities have benefited from the programme.

329. The department looks to continually improve its understanding and find more accurate means of analysing the factors that drive activity in children's social care. It has one of the richest sources of data in the world: the National Pupil Database. Calling on this resource and several other published data sets, DfE and DLUHC jointly commissioned a new formula for children's services in 2018. This was in the context of an ongoing commitment by government to ensure that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. Consultation on a formula for children and young people's services was planned for early 2020; however, this was prevented by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

What we will do over the next two years

Establish a Children's Social Care National Framework

330. Over the next year we will establish and embed a Children's Social Care National Framework, Dashboard and Practice Guides. We have already made progress towards this, through establishing a National Practice Group. This is made up of experts in practice, evidence, lived experience and multi-agency working. Working with the National Practice Group and a range of other stakeholders we have developed a draft National Framework, which is published separately for consultation on GOV.UK alongside this strategy.

331. We plan to undertake wideranging consultation on this work, including with practitioners and those with lived experience. Through this consultation we are also seeking advice from local authorities and other experts on the content of the National Framework and the most suitable indicators, in order to ensure indicators measure what matters.

332. We will issue the National Framework as statutory guidance by the end of the year. There will be an implementation period of one year to give local authorities the opportunity to consider how they will implement it. The updated National Framework will sit alongside updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children, giving the sector a single coherent view of the changes that will be expected of them.

Deliver the Children's Social Care Dashboard and improve use of data and technology

333. By the end of 2023 we will set out which indicators will form the Dashboard and when these will start to be collected. We will then work with the sector so that by the end of this Parliament we will have produced a Dashboard that is a useful platform for local areas to understand their children's social care data, while allowing comparison nationally and locally.

334. To do this we need to make data available more frequently. Our initial view is that Dashboards should be published on a quarterly basis. This will allow sufficient time between reports to see trends, while supporting a frequent learning loop. This would represent a significant change from present arrangements. We are therefore seeking views as part of the National Framework consultation on whether quarterly data is the right frequency for the collection and publication of the Dashboards. We will seek to fully understand the implications of making the local authority Dashboards public and how we can mitigate any risks.

335. There are also data gaps that we want to address, which will require local areas to collect new data and adapt systems accordingly. In doing this, we want to minimise burdens on local authorities and support better use of data. Therefore, by the end of 2023 we will publish a data strategy to set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care.

336. The data strategy will set out how we move toward collecting and using the right data well, including looking at what data government can stop collecting. As DLUHC is establishing Oflog, we will ensure that the children's social care metrics reported through Oflog are aligned with the Dashboard, including drawing from the same data sets where appropriate, so that we set a consistent direction on outcomes and reduce duplication.

337. The data strategy will include learning from the Data and Digital Solutions Fund. This is funding 5 lead local authorities working with partners to undertake a project each on data improvement. This includes developing a standard children's social care data set, alongside the tools and framework required for its maintenance. Other projects will look at pre-proceedings data, section 251 children and young people's services financial data collection, and how to better capture children and families' voices. Another project will evaluate the use of diagnostic and predicative analytics tools.

338. To ensure our data and digital work has maximum impact, we will set up a new children's social care data and digital expert forum. This will include experts from local authorities, academia and the third sector, as well as other government departments, non-departmental public bodies such as Ofsted, and people with lived experience. The expert forum will meet the intent of the Care Review recommendation to establish a National Data and Technology Taskforce.

Deliver Practice Guides

339. Practice Guides will support leaders and practitioners to embed the Children's Social Care National Framework. They should provide a useful tool for all those working with children and families, distilling the best available evidence on important practice issues into key ideas and recommendations. Practice Guides will both help leaders to commission and design services and support practitioners to plan and deliver help for children and families.

340. Practice Guides will draw on a range of available sources of evidence, from robust, well-conducted experimental evaluations to systemic reviews, qualitative research, and practitioner and service user insights. They will be based on a clear set of evidence standards and a set of criteria for assessing the strength of evidence behind different approaches or interventions. Recommendations will be transparent about the evidence that sits behind them. The National Practice Group will oversee the development of the Practice Guides.

341. We have asked WWEICSC to test how best to produce, disseminate and embed Practice Guides within the sector and other evidence bodies. This work will be completed shortly and inform our approach to commissioning and identifying priority areas and gaps where new research is needed. The work will learn from other sectors (for example NICE guidelines and advice developed by the Education Endowment Foundation) and explore the most useful approach with leaders and practitioners.

342. We will work to embed Practice Guides across our reform programme. For example we will ensure they inform and complement the skills and knowledge that social workers develop through the Early Career Framework (ECF).

Embedding learning loops

343. The Care Review recommended that data and feedback should be used to prompt local and national learning to continually improve services. To deliver this, we will establish learning events to bring together leaders and practitioners to create a dialogue about how areas are implementing the National Framework, Dashboard and, in time, Practice Guides. These events will provide an opportunity to disseminate the latest good practice and for areas to learn from each other about progress implementing reform.

344. We will continue to engage widely with practitioners, leaders and those with lived experience to hear their feedback on reform. DfE's Regional Improvement and Support Leads will also continue to hold regular informal conversations with areas to understand where there are barriers to best practice. We will ensure there is a mechanism as part of our reform governance to consider system blockers reported through our regional infrastructures and other forums. We will regularly communicate how government and other national bodies have taken feedback on board.

345. The National Practice Group will also act as a feedback mechanism, helping to ensure feedback from how implementation works on the ground informs future iterations of the National Framework and, in time, Practice Guides.

Inspection of children's social care

346. As the system is reformed, we will work in partnership with Ofsted on the shared goal of delivering improved services and better outcomes for children and families. We will both work to ensure inspection is aligned with the National Framework, and so reflects policy aims.

347. Ofsted will rebalance how it looks at practice, as it did with the Public Law Outline, to ensure it acts as a lever for improvement in line with the reforms. This will include how thresholds are applied and how well local authorities engage wider family including kinship arrangements. The new care leaver judgement already planned will ensure that support for care leavers is prominent in inspection.

348. We will ask Ofsted to keep ILACS under review as the reforms develop so that inspection continues to reflect current practice.

Enhancing our Improvement and Intervention approach

349. We are developing an enhanced interventions policy to set out clearly the range of actions the department currently takes to support and intervene in local authority performance. Our interventions policy will:

- provide local authorities with a clear escalation pathway
- outline how our regional teams and Ministers will engage with local authorities to prompt their engagement and facilitate action-focused improvement - particularly where improvement has not been prioritised
- include changes to how and when the department will deploy statutory directions and improvement notices - which will ensure local authorities are quick to address performance issues
- provide clarity around how we will work with local authorities who have received an Area of Priority Action, following an Ofsted inspection

350. To support more local authorities to reach Good and Outstanding, we need to improve our evidence base around what works to effectively target Requires Improvement-rated local authorities, especially those who have received this rating on consecutive inspections. We will take 3 approaches to test our understanding of what works:

- **Systems approach:** Acknowledging the budgetary pressures that local authorities face, we want to understand more about supporting local authorities to improve the delivery of children's social care services while working towards financial sustainability. Building on the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme, we will work with an initial 3 Requires Improvement-rated local authorities to trial a diagnostic programme, whose aim will be to identify safe ways to adjust spending and create efficiencies, in turn, enabling services to be delivered in a more cost-effective, sustainable way.
- **Practice approach:** Building on learning from our intervention work and the Innovation Programme, we need to identify the best approaches for supporting and accelerating improvement in persistently Requires Improvement-rated local authorities. We will commission further research to better understand this cohort and to identify barriers to improvement. This will help us to identify potential gaps in our existing improvement offer.
- **Regional approach:** We will test the impact of introducing a Regional Improvement Commissioner (RIC) to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance. The RIC's role will focus on supporting the region with systemic issues that are impacting performance across multiple local authorities. The department will initially identify one region to pilot this approach.

351. Learning from these approaches will help grow the department's evidence base for effective improvement models that support more authorities get to Good and Outstanding. This activity will also support our aim of minimising the number of local authorities rated Inadequate, keeping this at less than 10% of the total over the next two years.

Improving children’s social care in Wakefield

Wakefield’s Child and Young People Services (CYPS) embarked on a successful journey of improvement, taking them from Inadequate in 2018 to ‘Good’ with ‘Outstanding’ leadership in 2021.

Their journey focused on delivering improvements across several priority areas including:

- developing effective governance and partnership arrangements, providing robust challenge and scrutiny
- improving their use of data and record keeping
- developing a new quality assurance framework to improve practice quality and learning
- addressing workforce challenges.

Strong leadership and fostering a culture of improvement were key to their improvement. To deliver their improvement activity, Wakefield developed a clear action plan, outlining how their priorities would be delivered, incorporating staff feedback to secure cross-organisational support. At the February 2019 monitoring visit, Ofsted found that leadership in Wakefield had “arrested the fall” and put in place foundations for improvement.

Engagement from the broader council was another key enabler. Putting in place efficient systems and structures meant that the service benefited from the necessary scrutiny, assurances and flexibilities in order to act quickly where needed. On occasion, this meant that bespoke solutions or ways of working needed to be created for the CYPS as distinct to other parts of the council.

Wakefield also had a strong working relationship with Ofsted and DfE, providing a balance of support and challenge to help drive improvement activity. DfE appointed an Improvement Commissioner in Wakefield for the first 18 months of their journey, who supported the council by advising on the systemic, “big picture” factors that were key to unlocking their performance. An Independent Improvement Board Chair and Improvement Advisor supported Wakefield, who provided more granular support and guidance on the specific activity needed to make a difference to staff, practice quality and outcomes for children. Both these roles were carried out by experienced former Directors of Children’s Services with the expertise to provide the right levels of advice, guidance and support.

Ensuring funding reflects local authorities' share of children's needs

352. Over the next two years, before the next Spending Review period, we will aim to update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people's services funding. We will work with DLUHC to identify opportunities for implementing the new formula.

Consultation question 28

Beyond the proposals set out in this chapter, what would help ensure we have a children's social care system that continues to share and apply best practice, so that it learns from and improves itself?

The Care Review called for the need for "learning cycles" where every part of the system - locally, national and regionally - is focused on considering feedback, data and information, while participating in an open and honest dialogue with others about how to improve.

Chapter 8: Delivery

Introduction

353. The Government commissioned the independent review of children's social care as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform systems and services. This implementation strategy takes account of the recommendations across the Care Review and other reviews published over the last year and sets out how we will transform that opportunity into reality.

354. We want love and stable relationships to be at the heart of what children's social care does. Where children are unable to grow up in loving, safe and stable families, care should provide the same foundations.

355. Realising our vision for the children's social care system requires reform spanning beyond the end of this Parliament, underpinned by further investment and changes to legislation.

356. We will achieve this through:

- **Focusing on outcomes:** We will ensure all the actions we take contribute towards our 4 outcomes and 2 enablers in the Children's Social Care National Framework.
- **Delivering in partnership with others:** We need to work with wider government, businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations and the public to achieve ambitious outcomes for children.
- **Taking proportionate national intervention:** Wherever possible, decisions should happen locally, with national government setting direction and intervening when it is in children's best interests.
- **Building on existing action:** We already have programmes in train that contribute to our vision - for example, our adoption strategy supports adoptive children find permanent loving families as quickly as possible, and our capital investment in children's homes ensures high-quality and safe accommodation for children in care.
- **Reforming in phases:** We will make urgent improvements now while building the evidence we need to deliver long-term reforms most effectively.

357. **Phase one of our reform takes place from now to the end of this Spending Review period in March 2025.** Actions in phase one focus on laying the foundations for whole system reform and making immediate improvements where we can. Activity in subsequent phases will be about embedding reform everywhere. This will require further investment, legislation (subject to parliamentary time) and a wider programme of support to embed the reset of the whole system that is required.

358. This chapter discusses the phases of activity, the outcomes we want to achieve, how all delivery partners will work together, and how we will know we have been successful. Finally, we suggest actions that can be taken now to work towards a reformed children's social care system.

Phase one: laying the foundations for whole system reform

359. Over the next two years, our activities focus on **addressing urgent issues, setting national direction, and laying the groundwork for future reforms**, such as demonstrating the future operating model for children's social care through Pathfinders. Taken together, these will put us in a position where we have made some immediate improvements to the care system, the sector has a single coherent view of changes expected of them, and we are gathering the evidence needed to underpin wider rollout of new models and any legislation required. We will assess and fund any new burdens that would impact local authorities due to our reforms.

360. We are **addressing urgent issues** through increasing the number of foster carers in the system, supporting local authorities to address the high use of agency social workers and increasing the leaving care allowance that is available to ensure young people have sufficient funds to meet their needs when they start living independently.

361. We are **setting national direction** based on a set of outcomes about what children's social care is trying to achieve. We are doing this through the National Framework, the Dashboard and the Practice Guides, as well as statutory guidance such as Working Together. We are also taking steps to define roles and responsibilities of the wider workforce, such as those working in Family Help and children's homes, so that all areas of the workforce have the knowledge, skills and support they need to help and protect children and families. These actions support everyone who works in and with children's social care to understand the expectations of their work. As the National Framework and the Dashboard are now out for consultation, this will kickstart conversations between local authorities, partner agencies, Ofsted and government about how to help areas to improve, spread learning and agree how best to measure our progress going forward.

362. We are **laying the groundwork for future reforms through 2 Pathfinders** (the Families First for Children Pathfinder, and the other trialling Regional Care Cooperatives), which will demonstrate the future system we want all areas to adopt in subsequent phases of reform - as well as improving services in those areas now. They will allow us to test complex reforms in order to enable improved family support, more decisive child protection, empowerment of wider family networks, and improved planning, delivering and commissioning of homes for children to live in. The Pathfinders will help us answer key delivery questions, develop our understanding of the benefits and constraints of new models, and work collaboratively with local areas and partners to operationalise them. Through ongoing evaluation and feedback loops, we will ensure those local authorities who are not Pathfinders are also benefitting from the learning. We are also using phase one to start establishing the Early Career Framework (ECF), which will ensure all social workers develop the skills and knowledge needed to support and protect children.

363. We will seek views to shape our reforms, including through a series of formal consultations. These milestones are included in figures 2 and 3 below. As part of our commitment to improve the local government finance landscape in the next Parliament, discussed in chapter 7, we would also expect to consult on a new funding formula for children and young people's services with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) over the next two years.

364. Figure 2 and figure 3 present the key milestones that make up phase one. Annex 1 sets out phase one actions in more detail and describes what we will have achieved by the end of this two-year period.

Figure 2: Key milestones that make up phase one (image version). Some milestones are subject to the outcome of consultation exercises

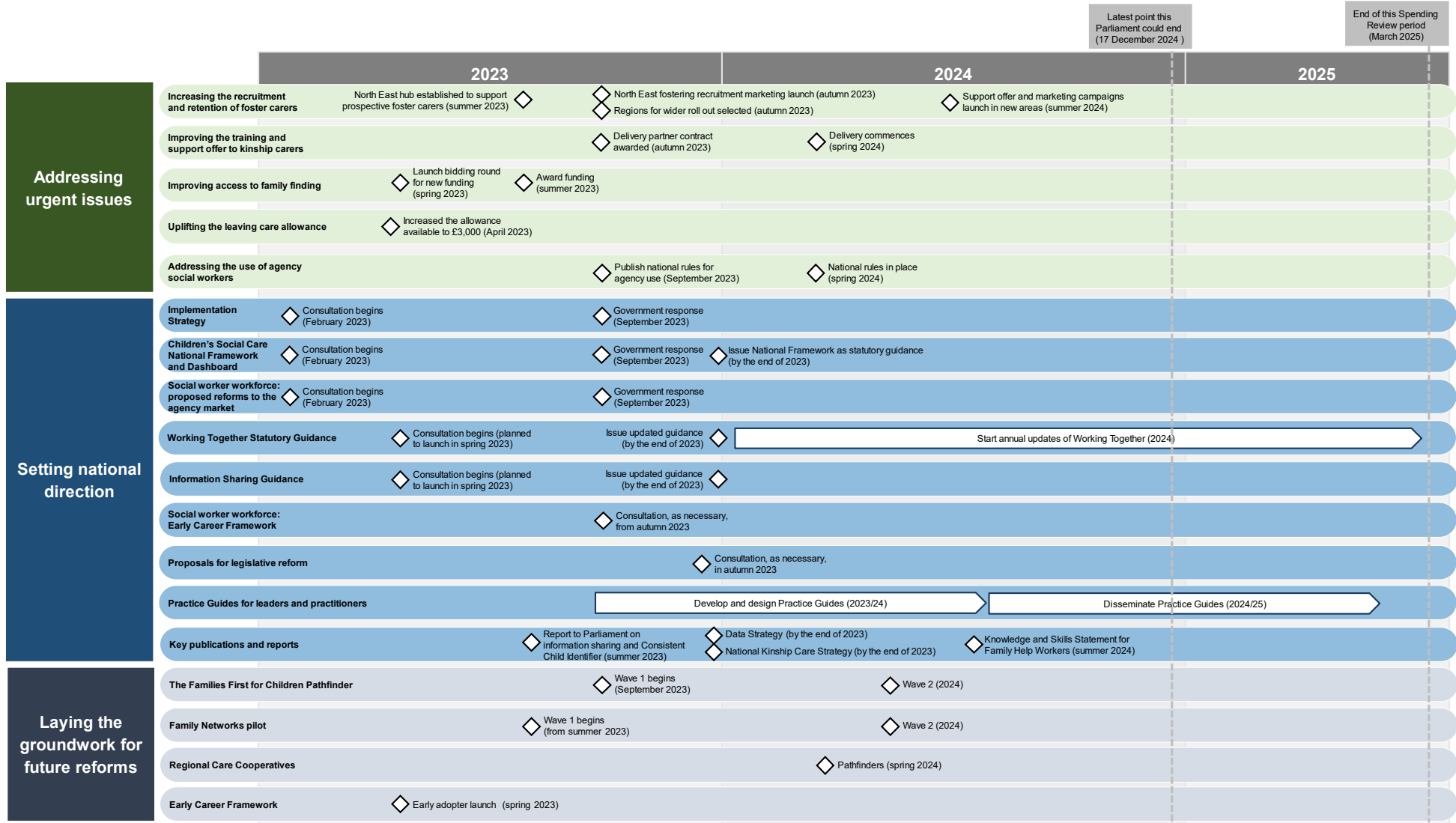


Figure 3: Key milestones that make up phase one (table versions). Some milestones are subject to the outcome of consultation exercises.

Addressing urgent issues

Activities	2023	2024
Increasing the recruitment and retention of foster carers	North East hub established to support prospective foster carers (summer 2023) North East fostering recruitment marketing launch (autumn 2023) Regions for wider roll out selected (autumn 2023)	Support hub and marketing launch in new areas (summer 2024)
Improving the training and support offer to kinship carers	Delivery partner contract awarded (autumn 2023)	Delivery commences (spring 2024)
Improving access to family finding	Launch bidding round for new funding (spring 2023) Award funding (summer 2023)	
Uplifting the leaving care allowance	Increase the allowance available to £3,000 (April 2023)	
Addressing the use of agency social workers	Publish national rules for agency use (September 2023)	National rules in place (spring 2024)

Setting national direction

Activities	2023	2024
Implementation Strategy	Consultation inviting views on our proposals for strategic reform (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023)	
Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard	Consultation inviting views on the outcomes and enablers in the draft National Framework, and the indicators in the data Dashboard (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023) Issue National Framework as statutory guidance (by the end of 2023)	
Social worker workforce: proposed reforms to the agency market	Consultation inviting views on proposed reforms to the agency market (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023)	
Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory guidance	Consultation inviting views on updates to strengthen the statutory framework for safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies (planned to launch in spring 2023) Issue updated guidance (by the end of 2023)	Start annual updates of Working Together (2024)

Setting national direction continued

Activities	2023	2024
Information sharing guidance	Consultation inviting views on updates to guidance on information sharing between professionals (planned to launch in spring 2023) Issue updated guidance (by the end of 2023)	
Social worker workforce: Early Career Framework	Consultation, as necessary, inviting views on the draft framework (from autumn 2023)	
Proposals for legislative reform	Consultation, as necessary, inviting views on proposals for legislative reform, subject to the outcome of this consultation (in autumn 2023)	
Practice Guides for leaders and practitioners	Develop and design Practice Guides (2023/24)	Disseminate Practice Guides (2024/25)
Key publications and reports	Report to Parliament on information sharing and Consistent Child Identifier (summer 2023) Data strategy (by the end of 2023) National Kinship Care Strategy (by the end of 2023)	Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers (summer 2024)

Laying the groundwork for future reforms

Activities	2023	2024
The Families First for Children Pathfinder	Wave 1 begins (September 2023)	Wave 2 (2024)
Family Networks pilot	Wave 1 begins (from summer 2023)	Wave 2 (2024)
Regional Care Cooperatives		Pathfinders (spring 2024)
Early Career Framework	Early adopter launch (spring 2023)	

Subsequent phases: embedding reform everywhere

365. The actions we take in subsequent phases will be subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcome of consultation exercises. Our current ambitions are to:

- bring forward proposals for legislation, subject to parliamentary time
- fully rollout the reforms, continuing to work in close partnership with national and local government to assess deliverability, and learn from the evidence base

Our desired outcomes for children’s social care and how we will monitor progress against them

366. The six pillars of reform in this strategy map onto the 4 outcomes and 2 enablers we want to achieve for children’s social care.

367. Through work with partners such as education, health and police, we aim to achieve a set of wider and long-term outcomes that underpin what it means for children, young people and families to thrive.

368. The box below presents the pillars, short-term outcomes and enablers and long-term outcomes that we aim to achieve through reform. These determine the actions we are taking in phase one and will shape those we take in subsequent phases.

Vision, pillars and outcomes for a reformed children social care system

Our vision for children's social care

- Children grow up in loving, safe and stable families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations, so all children can achieve their potential

6 pillars of our overarching vision for children's social care

1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children thrive within their families
2. A decisive multi-agency child protection system
3. Unlocking the potential of family networks
4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one
6. A system that continuously learns, improves and makes better use of evidence and data

4 outcomes and 2 enablers that children's social care should achieve for children, young people and families

- Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- Children and young people are supported by their family network
- Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- Children in care and care leavers have a stable, loving home
- The workforce is equipped and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

Long-term outcomes that children's social care and its partners should be committed to supporting

- Good child development
- Good educational attendance, attainment training and progress
- Good physical and mental health
- Family stability, including housing and financial stability
- Family functioning, including strong family relationships and support networks
- Preventing and tackling crime

369. Our new data Dashboard will help us understand our progress in achieving these outcomes. In chapter 7, we describe the Dashboard's purpose. In the shorter term, the Dashboard will increase transparency and support local, regional and national learning. In the longer term, as more of our reforms come on stream and support the system to change, we would also expect to use some indicators on the Dashboard to capture progress against the desired outcomes.

370. Overall, if our reforms are successful, we will see the following shifts:

- The balance of spending moves away from high-cost crisis intervention and care towards earlier help. This shift will improve children's outcomes and lead to a more financially sustainable children's social care system. The proportion of children living safely with their family or family networks increases and the proportion of children living in residential settings decreases. This is because:
 - Families receive better support so problems are resolved before they escalate.
 - Where children cannot live safely at home, local authorities test whether living with wider family members is the right move and support wider family members financially and practically to make this a possibility.
 - Where children are in care, there are enough of the right kinds of foster home so that children only need residential settings where it is definitely the right option for them, for example if a child has specific and intensive therapeutic needs.
- Children in care are in more stable homes and move less frequently. This is because local authorities can accurately assess which types of home are needed, and the homes have the right spaces, allowing local authorities to make decisions based on children's best interests.
- More social workers stay in local authority employment for longer with a reduced caseload.
- The proportion of Good and Outstanding local authorities increases, and Ofsted ratings reflect reform priorities. This will mean local authorities are managing risk appropriately, and the right children and families are having their needs met by the right part of the system.
- Children improve their achievement, attainment and attendance at school, and more young people are in education, employment and training.
- Disparities between how children and families with protected characteristics experience the system reduce.

371. We will also have our own set of metrics to measure the speed and success of the reforms. They will include inputs (for example delivering our foster recruitment programme on time), outputs (the number of foster carers recruited) and outcomes (the number of children in care with a stable, loving home), and we would expect our progress against each to shift in that order.

We are all responsible for delivering reform

372. Throughout the strategy, we have emphasised the need for a whole system approach to reforming children’s social care, requiring input from health providers, police, education providers, family courts, youth justice, business, voluntary organisations and civil society alongside central government, local authorities and the workforce. All partners involved in supporting and protecting children will need to work together to achieve our shared ambition. The coming months and years will be a collective endeavour underpinned by clear roles and responsibilities and partnership working. All partners should be confident in their own role and clear on how others are playing their equal part to achieve reform. We will also need all partners to be held accountable for their roles, as well as hold each other to account, on the measures we all agree are necessary to achieve transformational change.

373. We will continue to be held to account by our National Implementation Board,¹⁰⁹ whose role is to challenge us on the scale and pace of delivery, and whose members have already influenced the way we have designed our delivery approach. We have promised to update Parliament on our progress and welcome the helpful challenge and scrutiny this will bring. Finally, we want to encourage open dialogue and constructive, collective challenge. We recognise that national governance alone will not achieve this. We look forward to continuing to create opportunities for partnership learning, support and feedback where we collectively agree these add value.

Actions we can take now to create the future system we want to see

374. We do not want local authorities and partners to feel the need to wait for permission to act now. Instead, our intention is that the strategy will illustrate our vision for a reformed children’s social care system and encourage partners to start moving towards it. Additionally, we know that this strategy reflects existing good practice that many areas will already be modelling and that others are moving towards.

375. Of course, we know areas will be considering their approaches and ways of working in the context of wider challenges such as the impact of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, workforce pressures and financial challenges. It is even more important that, as partners do that, they feel confident to pursue approaches and ways of working that we know are the right ones. That could include:

¹⁰⁹ For more details see: [Children’s Social Care National Implementation Board - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-implementation-board)

- Local authorities and partners **reviewing the services they commission and provide to make sure they reflect the best evidence** - the Early Intervention Foundation toolkit provides a resource to do this.¹¹⁰
- Local authorities exploring how they **use and deploy a multi-disciplinary workforce** to provide direct support that meets the needs of children and families, alongside the social worker workforce.
- Local authorities reviewing their existing support offers for kinship carers, including financial support for Special Guardians and guardians with CAOs. Businesses can ask themselves whether they have employment policies in place to support kinship carers.
- All public bodies, businesses and voluntary organisations can review all available opportunities to support **children in care and care leavers to build relationships**. This includes access to family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes such as Lifelong Links, Independent Visitors and peer support schemes. Businesses and charities can also be encouraged to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant.¹¹¹
- **Use the social work employer standard health check**¹¹² to improve working conditions and foster inclusive organisations that encourage social workers back into local authority employment.

Consultation question 29

In your opinion, how can we ensure the delivery of reform is successful?

¹¹⁰ Early Intervention Foundation (2022) [Interventions with establish evidence of preventing, stopping or reducing the impact of child abuse and neglect and related risks](#)

¹¹¹ Care Leaver Covenant [Companies & Charities - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](#)

¹¹² Local Government Association (2022) [Employer standards health check 2022](#)

Equalities impact assessment

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising the functions of the Secretary of State, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

As part of our policy design, the department is carefully considering how these changes might have an impact, whether positive or negative, on individuals and groups who share protected characteristics and those who do not. We will undertake a full equality impact assessment as part of our response to this consultation.

Consultation question 30

Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on those who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

Where you identify any negative impacts, we would also welcome suggestions of how you think these might be mitigated.

Children's rights impact assessment

We have considered how these policy changes will impact children's rights, focusing particularly on the rights of children in care and care leavers, but also a wider group of vulnerable children, including disabled children, children living with families receiving additional support and services from their local authority, and children who are eligible for special protection or assistance.

Having considered the 4 general principles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 54 articles of the Convention, we are confident that these reforms are putting children at the heart of change by ensuring that the system as a whole is better at keeping children safe, considering their views, wishes and feelings, and supporting their best interests.

Consultation question 31

Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on children's rights?

Consultation Questions (consolidated)

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response. Please note that this consultation applies to England only.

We know that not everyone will wish or feel able to answer all of the questions in this consultation. You are encouraged to answer the questions you would like to respond to, but you do not have to respond to all of them.

Privacy notice

The personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) that you provide in response to this consultation is processed by the Department for Education (“the department”) as a data controller in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this consultation. The department relies upon the lawful basis of article 6 (1) (e) of the UK GDPR, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for conducting consultations as part of our function.

We may share information we hold about you with certain organisations, where the law allows it or we have a legal obligation to do so. There may be some circumstances where we will need to share information about you with others without your consent. For example this might be to prevent or detect a crime, or to produce anonymised statistics for research purposes. In all cases, we will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.

The personal information will be retained for a period of 12 months following the closure of the consultation period, after which it will be securely destroyed.

You can read more about what the department does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter, which can be found here: [Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Confidentiality notice

Information provided in response to consultations, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential. If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the department.

About you

The following introductory questions will help us understand more about you.

1. We want to hear from children and young people with lived experience of care, as well as others. Are you responding as: a child or young person under 18, an adult or an organisation? [Select one]

2. To help us analyse responses, please tell us more about you. In what capacity are you responding? As a... [Select all that apply from the list below]

- Child or young person under 18
- Care leaver
- Birth parent
- Adoptive parent
- Kinship carer
- Foster carer
- Special Guardian
- Family member of a child who is in care
- Family member of a care leaver
- Director of Children's Services
- Chief Executive of a local authority
- Local authority practice leader
- Local authority principal social worker

- Social worker
- Social work team manager
- Local authority (other – please specify)
- Family support worker
- Independent domestic violence advisor
- Substance misuse worker
- Charity
- Residential children’s home worker
- Educational institution (e.g. early years setting, school, alternative provision setting, college or university)
- Academic
- Health practitioner
- Police officer
- Youth justice worker
- Probation officer
- Other [please state]

3. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, what is your role within that organisation? [Select one from: Front-line practitioner; Manager; Senior leader; Corporate/administrative]

4. Would you like us to keep your response confidential? Yes/No. If yes, please explain why.

5. In sharing findings from this consultation, may we quote from your response publicly? [Select one from: Yes, anonymously; Yes, attributable to my organisation; No]

6. This question is only for adults over the age of 18, or organisations. May we contact you if we have any follow-up questions? [Yes/No] If yes, please provide your email address.

Consolidated list of consultation questions throughout the Implementation Strategy

7. Overall, to what extent do you agree these six pillars are the right ones on which to base our reforms for children's social care? [Select one from: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree or disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know]. If desired, please explain your response.

8. What more can be done by government, local authorities and service providers to make sure that disabled children and young people can access the right types of help and support?

9. To what extent are you supportive of the proposal for a system that brings together targeted early help and child in need into a single Family Help Service in local areas? [Select one from: Fully supportive; Somewhat supportive; Neutral; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose; Don't know] If desired, please explain your answer.

10. Looking at the features of early help listed below, in your opinion or experience, what are the top 3 features that make it a supportive service for families? [Select 3 only]

- The service is designed together with the input of children and families
- Early help is based in local communities and sits alongside other services such as education, libraries, citizen's advice services and housing services
- Information and support are available and can be accessed online
- Information and support are available and can be accessed in person
- Early help is delivered by the voluntary and community sector as well as the local authority and their partners (police and health)
- Strong relationship with one key worker/lead individual for every family
- Having people with the right knowledge and skills available to help when needed
- Having people with the right experience available to help when needed
- Being able to access the right type of support
- Other [please specify]

11. Have you ever provided or received parental representation during child protection processes? [Select one]

- Yes, I/my organisation have provided a form of parental representation
- Yes, I am a parent and I have received or been offered a form of parental representation

- No, I/my organisation do not provide or facilitate any form of parental representation
- No, I am a parent who is or has been involved in a child protection process, and I have not been offered or was not offered or did not receive any form of parental representation
- Don't know
- Other [please explain]
- Not applicable to me

12. If you have had experience with a form of parental representation in the child protection process, please tell us about it.

13. If you are happy to or would prefer to talk to us about this, please indicate your consent to be contacted in relation to this set of questions only (questions 11, 12 and 13): Yes/No. If yes, please ensure you provide your email address so that we can contact you.

14. In your view, how can we make a success of embedding a “family first” culture?

15. In your view, what would be the most helpful forms of support that could be provided to a family network, in order to enable them to step in to provide care for a child?

16. What support does your local authority provide to Special Guardians or to a non-parental party with a Child Arrangements Order? [Select all that apply]

- A means tested financial allowance
- A non-means tested financial allowance
- Access to training
- Access to free legal advice
- Access to information about becoming a kinship carer
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

17. To what extent are you supportive of the working definition of kinship care? [Select one from: Fully supportive; Somewhat supportive; Neither supportive or opposed; somewhat opposed; strongly oppose; Don't know] If desired, please explain your response.

18. Overall, to what extent do you agree that the 6 key missions are the right ones to address the challenges in the system? [Select one from: Strongly agree; somewhat agree; Neutral (Neither agree nor disagree); Disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know] If desired, please explain your response.
19. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a care-experienced person would want to be able to form a lifelong legal bond with another person? [Select one from: Strongly agree; Agree, Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know]
20. What would you see as the advantages or disadvantages of giving legal recognition to a lifelong bond?
21. What support is needed to set up and make a success of Regional Care Cooperatives?
22. Do you have any additional suggestions on improving planning, commissioning and boosting the available number of places to live for children in care?
23. Are there changes you think would be helpful to make to the existing corporate parenting principles?
24. Which bodies, organisations or sectors do you think should be in scope for the extension of the corporate parenting principles - and why?
25. Do you have any further feedback on the proposals made in the 6 missions of this chapter?
26. Overall, to what extent do you agree that our proposals on the social worker workforce address the challenges in the system? [Select one from: Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral (neither agree or disagree); Disagree; Strongly disagree; Don't know]
27. If you want the proposals to go further, what would be your top priority for longer-term reform?
28. Beyond the proposals set out in this chapter, what would help ensure we have a children's social care system that continues to share and apply best practice, so that it learns from and improves itself?
29. In your opinion, how can we ensure the delivery of reform is successful?
30. Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on those who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 that we have not identified? Where you identify any negative impacts, we would also welcome suggestions of how you think these might be mitigated.
31. Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on children's rights?

Annex 1: Phase one of reform: activity against our desired outcomes

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023) • Publish a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers (summer 2024) informed by new research (autumn 2023) • Consult on an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) (spring 2023) • Work with the Law Commission to review the legislation on providing help to disabled children and their families (to be launched in 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence built on how we implement new approaches to Family Help through the Families First for Children Pathfinder • We will have a shared understanding and expectations of the skills and knowledge needed for Family Help work • We will have agreement on which practitioners can case-hold for children in need • Law Commission exploring how to simplify and strengthen children’s social care legislation for disabled children

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>2: Children and young people are supported by their family network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch the new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023) • Deliver a bespoke training and support offer which can be accessed by all kinship carers (delivery starts from spring 2024) • Launch Family Network Support Package pilots in 7 local areas (summer 2023) • Publish a national kinship care strategy (by the end of 2023) • Update the Family and Friends Care guidance • Work with Ofsted to improve the visibility of kinship care in its inspection reports • Explore the case for introducing a financial allowance for Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Order (CAOs) • Explore the introduction of additional workplace entitlements and options for an extension of Legal Aid for kinship carers with SGOs and CAOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided routes for families to develop their own plan for keeping children safe within their family network and built evidence on how to make greater use of family networks through the Families First for Children Pathfinder • Kinship carers will feel better supported through the establishment of 100 self-sustaining kinship peer support groups • We will have worked with families across the country and evaluated the impact of Family Network Support Packages on keeping families together and keeping children out of care

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>3: Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch the new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023) • Consult on National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards as part of an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) (spring 2023) • Update statutory guidance on harms outside of the home following the Risk Outside the Home Pathway and testing multi-disciplinary teams as part of the Youth Endowment Fund (evidence building 2023, updated guidance 2024) • Consult on updated information sharing guidance (spring 2023) • Report to Parliament on setting out ways to improve information sharing including an exploration of the use of a Consistent Child Identifier (summer 2023) • Consult on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner • Embed a financial tool into all local authorities and identify where efficiencies can be made to reduce backlogs in the Family Court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence built on how we will implement new approaches to child protection through the Families First for Children Pathfinder • Multi-agency working and child protection are strengthened through clarified roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners as a result of the Working Together consultation • Clearer expectations about how different agencies work together to carry out child protection – professionals are clear on when and how to share information to keep children safe following the information sharing consultation • Better integration across youth justice and children’s social care assessments through a new tool for pre-court cases • A tailored child protection response for children experiencing harm outside of their home • Action underway to improve information sharing • Provided funding to help safeguarding partners implement and embed reforms

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in practical interventions to see more local authorities using family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes • Seek views and evidence on how best to implement an opt-out model of independent advocacy • Review and strengthen the role of Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 visitors • Deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme to build local authority skills and capacity to boost approvals of foster carers (regional fostering hub to be live from mid-2023, further rollout in 2024) • Issue a Joint Ministerial Statement to assist local authorities when approving planning applications to create new homes for children in their area • Explore developing a leadership programme for children’s homes managers and explore developing a Knowledge and Skills Statement • Set up an expert group to review standards of care • Pathfind Regional Care Cooperatives to plan, commission and deliver care places (spring 2024) • Introduce a voluntary oversight regime of the largest providers overseen by Ofsted • Deliver local authorities national support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly more local authorities are using family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes • An increase in the number foster carers and better rate of retention • Providers of semi-independent accommodation are registered with Ofsted, and national standards and registration requirements are mandatory • Successful and proportionate voluntary oversight regime established, giving greater financial transparency across children’s homes and fostering agencies • Regional Care Cooperative Pathfinders co-designed and established in 2 regions • Stronger corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector • More children in care and care leavers aged 16 to 19 benefit from investment in PP+-style funding • Narrow the gap in care leaver higher education participation rates compared to the general population • More care leavers benefit from high-quality apprenticeships that help them into sustainable work and improve their future earnings • Available leaving care allowance is increased to £3,000

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult on plans to improve and widen corporate parenting responsibilities (from February 2023) • Provide £24 million in Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)-style funding to better support Children Looked After and care leavers in 16 to 19 education (2023-25) • Increase the rate of the apprenticeships care leavers bursary from £1,000 to £3,000 (autumn 2023) • Boost funding of the Care Leaver Covenant by 30% • What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care to publish examples of best practice in supporting care leavers to access mental health support (spring 2023) • Review mental health content included in social work qualifications, early career training and continuous professional development (end of 2023) • Provide an uplift to the leaving care allowance that is available from £2,000 to £3,000 (April 2023) • Progress and complete the Children Home Capital Programme that is match funding local authorities to create new children home provision in their area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Care Leaver Covenant budget is increased by 30% to boost employment opportunities and tailored support for care leavers • An increase in the number of well-paid jobs available for care leavers • We have approximately 350 new children's homes places across England by the end of 2025 • Remove the local area connection requirement and the use of homelessness intentionality for care leavers, and promote rent guarantor schemes to reduce care leaver homelessness

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>5: The workforce is equipped and effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult as necessary on the Early Career Framework to strengthen social worker skills and knowledge (from autumn 2023) • Social Work England to quality assure all initial education routes to social work (between March 2022 and July 2025) • Establish a National Workload Action Group to tackle social worker workload (early 2023) • Create a national virtual hub to identify and spread best-evidenced practice to retain social workers (2023 to 2024) • Improve case management systems for social workers to enable them to spend more time directly with children and families • Boost social worker recruitment and retention through apprenticeships • Consult on rules on the use of agency social workers (consult from February 2023, rules published in September 2023, in place from spring 2024) • Build our understanding of wider workforces, through new research (autumn 2023) and a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers (summer 2024) and through exploring a programme for children’s home managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Career Framework agreed through testing in early adopter local authorities and public consultation • Supported local authorities to recruit up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally • National Workload Action Group identifying and addressing unnecessary workload pressures • National Virtual Hub supporting local authorities to retain their social workers • Reduced reliance on agency social workers, with national rules on agency usage in place

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>6: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult on and establish the Children’s Social Care National Framework and a Children’s Social Care Dashboard (consult from February 2023 – issue framework as statutory guidance by the end of 2023) • Publish data strategy setting out our long-term plan for transforming data in children’s social care (by end of 2023) • Set up a new children’s social care data and digital expert forum • Produce and disseminate Practice Guides in priority areas of practice (by 2024-25) • Enhance our Improvement and Intervention approach by strengthening accountability over local authority performance to ensure improvement activity is prioritised and acted on quickly to prevent failure • Introduce a Regional Improvement Commissioner to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance • Update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people’s services funding to ensure it reflects local authorities’ share of children’s needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Social Care National Framework issued as statutory guidance • Dashboard in use and future indicators agreed with work underway to fill data gaps • Published data strategy setting out our long-term plans for transforming data in children’s social care • Agreed formula for children and young people’s services funding • Disseminated Practice Guides in area of practice that practitioners consider a priority

Annex 2: Glossary

AssetPlus - AssetPlus is an end-to-end assessment and planning framework for use with children and young people across England and Wales by youth offending teams and the secure estate.

Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) - the Association of Directors of Children's Services is a membership organisation. Members hold leadership roles in children's services departments in local authorities in England.

British Association of Social Workers (BASW) - The British Association of Social Workers is the independent professional membership organisation for social work.

Care Leaver Covenant - a commitment from public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support people leaving care. [Care Leaver Covenant - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Care order - A care order is made by a court. It places the child in the care of a local authority. Under the Children Act 1989 a court can make a care order if a child is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm, which is attributable to the care being given to the child or the child being beyond parental control.

Care Proceedings - When a local authority decide they need to get involved with a family to keep a child safe they may start court proceedings, known as care proceedings.

Case management system (CMS) - Case management systems are local authority digital systems that support the children's social care workforce to manage child and family cases. They support social workers in their day-to-day work; carry the record of what has happened to and for a child; and hold information and data important to local and national decision-making and service oversight.

Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) - An order from court which details the arrangements for a child, including where and with whom the child will live, and who else they will spend time or have contact with. A CAO is usually used to determine arrangements between parents but can also be used to order that a child lives with, or otherwise has contact with, another person, such as a family member or friend.

Child in need - Is defined under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children's social care services, or the child is disabled.

Child in Need Plan - sets out the support to be provided to a child in need and their family by children's services.

Child protection - Part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

Child Protection Lead Practitioner - Will lead child protection work and be responsible for making child protection decisions. They will have the specific practice skills and experience that social workers need to work directly with families where there is actual or likely significant harm. They will provide support and co-work with Family Help practitioners on cases where there are concerns about significant harm. They will also provide expert advice and consultation to others across the system where there are child protection concerns. The role will be tested in the Pathfinder programme.

Child Protection Plan - A child becomes the subject of a Child Protection Plan if they are assessed as suffering, or are likely to suffer significant harm, at an initial child protection conference.

Children - Anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) Guardian - When working with children in respect of public law legal proceedings, the Cafcass worker is known as a children's guardian. The guardian's most important role is to make sure that local authority arrangements and decisions for and about children protect them, promote their welfare and are in their best interests.

Children's homes - The Care Standards Act 2000 provides that 'an establishment is a children's home... if it provides care and accommodation wholly or mainly for children'. 'Wholly or mainly' means that most, or all, of the people who stay at a home must be children.

Children's homes Regulations - Regulations that cover children's homes; children's homes that provide short break care; secure children's homes; and residential special schools or boarding schools who accommodate children for more than 295 days per year.

Children's social care - Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect children and young people by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (CSCIP) - The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme was launched in 2014 to test and share effective ways of supporting vulnerable children and young people who need help from children's social care services.

Children's Social Care National Framework – Guidance that has been published for consultation alongside the Implementation Strategy. The National Framework describes the principles of practice and the outcomes that children's social care should achieve, for children, young people and families. It includes Children's Social Care Dashboard indicators which will help to understand progress towards the outcomes of the National Framework.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) - The Competition and Markets Authority is an independent non-ministerial government department, responsible for strengthening business competition and preventing and reducing anti-competitive activities.

[Competition and Markets Authority - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Consistent child identifier (CCI) - A consistent identifier is a code that confirms a person's identity and enables appropriate information sharing once relevant agreements are in place. [Using a consistent identifier - education and children's services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Corporate parent - The term used to describe the local authority who has the responsibility to support looked after children and care leavers in a way that other children are supported by their parents. Corporate parenting principles are set out in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Early Career Framework (ECF) - The Early Career Framework sets out what early career social workers are entitled to learn about, and learn how to do, when they start their careers. See chapter 6 of the Implementation Strategy.

Early help - Any service that supports children and families as soon as problems emerge. Early Help services provide support before the problem needs statutory intervention. Some Early Help is provided through 'universal services', such as through schools and NHS services. They are universal services because they are made available to all families, regardless of their needs. Other Early Help is provided by services coordinated by a local authority and their partners to address specific concerns within a family. Examples of Early Help services include parenting support, play and activity groups, mental health and wellbeing support, and housing and employment services.

Extra-familial harm - As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; teenage relationship abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) - An alternative problem-solving family court for care proceedings that are specially designed to work with parents who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse.

Family group decision-making - A process that allows practitioners to identify family members and empower them to come together and develop solutions to issues the family might be experiencing.

Family Help - A service that is coordinated by local authorities for families who need a higher level of support than can be provided solely through universal services and where it is beneficial for the child and family to work closely with a Family Help Worker. This service will be for families to engage with and will support children and families that are currently in targeted early help, child in need (including disabled children) and child protection. For more information see chapter 2 of the Implementation Strategy.

Family Help Worker - A practitioner who holds cases in the Family Help service. These practitioners will include social workers, family support workers and a broad range of other professionals such as social workers, family support workers, domestic abuse practitioners, drug and alcohol practitioners.

Family Hub - Family Hubs are a place-based way of joining up locally in the planning and delivery of family services. They bring services together to improve access and improve the connections between families, professionals, practitioners, services, and providers. Hubs are designed to put relationships at the heart of family support.

Family Network Support Package - Family-led alternatives that can be used prior to a child entering care. To enable extended family networks to provide additional and substantial care for children when it is in their best interests and prevent them from entering the care system. For more information see chapter 4 of the Implementation Strategy.

Foster care - When children become looked after and are placed with another adult by Children's Social Care services who is an approved foster carer. This adult will have responsibility to care for the child and must be approved by the local authority or an independent fostering agency. Foster care is a broad term for different types of fostering arrangements.

Friend and Family members (as they relate to the working definition of kinship care in chapter 4) - Research, practice and families tell us that the categories of friends and family that are often kinship carers include:

- a close friend of the child, or of the child's parent(s)
- a 'close family member' of the child (this includes anyone who is defined as a relative under the Children Act 1989 that being 'a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt - whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership, or step-parent', and includes someone who is the child's great aunt, great uncle or cousin)
- a close friend of the child's 'close family member'
- a 'close family member' of the child's half blood¹¹³ brother or sister

¹¹³ This terminology is not well-liked. It is, however, adopted from the terminology used in the Children Act 1989

- someone who was formerly the child's step-parent¹¹⁴ (they may or may not have parental responsibility for the child)
- someone who was previously in a cohabiting relationship with the child's parent and whose relationship with the child was that of a child of the family
- a person with a prior connection to the child who does not otherwise fall within one of the other categories above (for example, a teacher, youth worker, childminder)

Health and wellbeing board - A committee of the partner local authority, often considered to be at 'place' level (although 'places' are locally determined, this will not be the case in all areas). Established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 they must include listed representatives from the local authority, including the Director of Children's Services, local Healthwatch, and each integrated care board in the local authority's area, alongside such other persons as the local authority considers appropriate. They produce a joint strategic needs assessment and a joint local health and wellbeing strategy.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) - A registered social worker with at least five years' experience, who makes sure that children's services are meeting the child's needs.

Independent Visitors - Independent Visitors are adult volunteers who give up some of their free time to support a child or young adult.

Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) - The framework for inspecting local authority children's services. [Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Integrated Care Board (ICB) - A new type of NHS body that bring the NHS together with partners across their area. Integrated care boards are responsible for developing a plan for meeting the health needs of the population, managing the NHS budget, and arranging for the provision of NHS services in their area.

Integrated care partnership - Each integrated care board and their partner local authorities will be required to establish an integrated care partnership, bringing together health, social care, public health (and potentially representatives from the wider public space where appropriate). Integrated care partnerships will be tasked with promoting partnership arrangements to address the health, social care and public health needs of their system.

¹¹⁴ A step-parent means a person who is married to, or in a civil partnership with, a parent who has parental responsibility for the child

Integrated care strategy - This is produced by the integrated care partnership. It is an assessment of how the ICB, local authorities, or NHS England will meet the needs identified in the health and wellbeing boards' joint strategic needs assessments. It may include a statement on the integration of health and social care services with health-related services. It differs from the joint local health and wellbeing strategy as it is at system, rather than place, level.

Kinship care - A broad term which refers to any situation in which a child is being cared for by a friend or family member who is not their parent for a significant amount of time. The arrangement may be temporary or longer term. We have included a working definition in chapter 4. We are consulting on this definition from February 2023.

Law Commission - The statutory independent body created by the Law Commissions Act 1965 to keep the law of England and Wales under review and to recommend reform where it is needed.

Local area connection test - Section 199(1) of the Housing Act 1996 provides that a person has a local connection with the district of a housing authority if they have a connection with it because:

- they are, or were in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of their own choice; or,
- they are employed there; or,
- they have family associations living there; or,
- of any special circumstances

Looked After Children - A child is looked after by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation by the local authority for a continuous period of more than 24 hours; are subject to a care order; or are subject to a placement order.

Multi-agency working - Work across organisations to meet children's needs including effective information sharing, joint decision-making and co-ordinated interventions.

Multi-disciplinary working - A range of practitioners and professionals from different backgrounds working together to enable the best outcomes for children.

National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) - The national assessment and accreditation system enabled child and family social workers to develop skills and knowledge to improve outcomes for children and families. [National assessment and accreditation system \(NAAS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-assessment-and-accreditation-system)

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) - An independent expert committee that was set up to identify, commission and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases across England. The Panel brings together experts from social care, justice, policing, health, education and the third sector to provide a multi-agency view on cases which they believe raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.

National Practice Group - The National Practice Group is made up of experts in practice, evidence, lived experience and multi-agency working. It has a role in supporting the development of the Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard, Practice Guides and the Early Career Framework.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM) - A framework for identifying victims of human trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate protection and support.

NEET - A young person who is not in education, employment or training.

Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) - A newly qualified social worker who is registered with Social Work England and is in their first year of post-qualifying practice.

Ofsted - The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, who inspect services providing education and skills, and inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people.

Parent - Our definition of parent (as it relates to the working definition of kinship care in chapter 4 – this is not a legal definition) includes:

- 'any birth parent, with or without parental responsibility for the child'.
- 'any stepparent, with or without parental responsibility for the child, who is in a subsisting relationship with the birth parent'.
- 'any adoptive parent who prior to the making of the adoption order in respect of the child was not a 'friend or family member' as defined in this Act'.
- 'any parent by virtue of section 42 or section 43 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, whether or not they have parental responsibility for the child'.

Pathfinders - The programmes to test how reforms should be implemented and manage the associated risks, before wider roll-out (subject to various approvals and funding).

Personal Advisor (PA) - Every care leaver is entitled to support from a Personal Advisor through their local authority, in some cases up to the age of 25, to support their entry into adulthood.

Practice Guides - Practice Guides will support leaders and practitioners to embed the Children's Social Care National Framework, by bringing together advice on how to achieve its outcomes, based on the best available evidence. For more information see chapter 7 of the Implementation Strategy.

Pre-proceedings - Pre-proceedings is the stage where children's services consider what should happen before the initiation of public law proceedings under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 to apply for a care or supervision order. Pre-proceedings is the last opportunity for parents to make improvements to their parenting before care proceedings are issued.

Public Law Outline - The Public Law Outline is a process within which public law care proceedings must be dealt with. It sets out the duties that the local authority has when thinking about taking a case to court to ask for a Care Order or Supervision Order to be made and the subsequent duties of the local authority and court when taking a case through proceedings.

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) - funding for looked after and previously looked after pupils. Pupil premium is funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England.

Reducing Parental Conflict Programme - A programme to support parental relationships in order to improve children's outcomes. [Reducing Parental Conflict programme and resources - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) - The organisations that we intend will plan, commission and deliver care places. For more information see chapter 5 of the Implementation Strategy.

Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) - RIAs draw in local authority chief executives, lead members for children's services, directors of children's services and other senior leaders of children's services. RIAs also include both local authorities and trusts in a bid to challenge and support each other collectively to be ambitious for all children, young people and families.

Safeguarding - The broad set of actions that are taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. This includes protecting children from abuse and maltreatment; preventing harm to children's health or development; ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Section 17 - Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area.

Section 20 - Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 sets out when a local authority must provide accommodation for a child within their area if that child needs it, due to the child being lost/abandoned or there being no person with parental responsibility for that child.

Section 31 - Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the circumstances in which a court may order that a child who is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm be placed in the care, or under the supervision of a local authority.

Section 47 - Where a child in a local authority's area is subject to an emergency protection order (in police custody or may be suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm) local authority social care services must make enquiries and decide if any action must be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. This will include multi-agency assessment, and where appropriate multi-agency strategy discussions, planning and review.

Secure children's homes - Secure children's homes are children's homes for vulnerable young people aged between 10 and 20. These homes restrict children's liberty to ensure their safety. Secure children's homes are run by local authorities, voluntary organisations, or they are privately run.

Special Guardians - A special guardian is someone who has been granted a special guardianship order to provide the child with a permanent home until they reach 18 (unless the court takes responsibility away earlier) and has parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian is not the child's parent but will have clear responsibility for all day-to-day decisions about caring for the child or young person and their upbringing. A Special Guardian is often someone with a close relationship to the child, such as a family member, former foster carer or family friend. [Become a special guardian: What is a special guardian - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Standards of Care - A broad term to describe the regulations, quality standards and national minimum standards currently used across various care settings.

Staying Close - A model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option of Staying Put (see below). It provides an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support, provided by a member of staff from their former children's home or from someone who they know and trust.

Staying Put - The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children Act 1989 to introduce a duty on local authorities to support young people to continue to live with their former foster carers once they turn 18 (the 'Staying Put' duty). Both the foster carer and young person need to agree. This includes a young person continuing to live with a kinship foster carer. This duty came into force on 13 May 2014.

Strengthening Families Programme - A programme to improve work with families, to safely reduce the need for statutory support and reduce the number of children entering care. [Strengthening families, protecting children \(SFPC\) programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Supported accommodation - Often termed as 'unregulated provision' because it is not currently subject to Ofsted registration and inspection. It is provision that delivers accommodation and support for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 or 17 to enable them to live semi-independently. This could include group-living arrangements with other young people, supported lodgings where the young person lodges with a family, or solo-living arrangements either on-site or with support.

Supporting Families Programme - Funds local authorities in England to provide intensive, wrap around support to vulnerable families facing multiple, interconnected problems and improve the multi-agency early help system that supports them.

Supported lodgings - Supported lodgings services provide a young person with a room of their own in a private home where they are a member of the household but are not expected to become a member of the family.

Targeted early help - a service provided to children and families who are identified by practitioners to have multiple or complex needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. It is a voluntary service which provides support before statutory intervention is needed and takes a casework approach. The lead practitioner coordinates a whole family assessment to better understand the family's needs and identify the most appropriate support for the child, young person or family.

Teaching Partnerships - A programme to improve the quality of education received by social work students, including through provision of statutory placements for more students and increased employer involvement in student selection.

Virtual School Heads (VSH) - VSHs are responsible for promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after by their local authority and the educational achievement of previously looked-after children who live in their local authority area.

Working Together - Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) is statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It clarifies and builds upon the core legal requirements, making it clear what individuals, organisations and agencies must and should do to keep children safe. It seeks to emphasise that effective safeguarding is achieved by putting children at the centre of the system and by every individual and agency playing their full part.

Annex 3: Government response to the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

Family Help - as detailed in chapter 2 of the Implementation Strategy

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Family Help should be delivered by multidisciplinary teams, embedded in neighbourhoods, harnessing the power of community assets and tailored to local needs.</p>	<p>We will test the operationalisation of our vision for Family Help in the [Support and Protect] Pathfinder over the next two years. This will include how a broad range of professionals can best work together and how best to deliver Family Help services so that they are embedded in and visible to communities.</p>
<p>To support the development of the wider social care workforce, government should produce a Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) for family support workers.</p>	<p>We will publish a Knowledge and Skills statement for Family Help Workers by summer 2024. This will be informed by new research on current Family Support workers being launched in autumn 2023.</p>
<p>Alongside recommendations to strengthen multi-agency partnerships and the role of the Director of Children’s Services, government should consider legislating to put the existence of multi-disciplinary Family Help teams on a statutory footing.</p>	<p>We will consider the findings from both the new workforce research and the Pathfinders when considering whether to place Family Help teams on a statutory footing.</p>
<p>Government should ensure alignment in how the proposals in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision Green Paper and this review are implemented. The government should ask the Law Commission to review the current patchwork of legislation that exists to support disabled children and their families.</p>	<p>We will commission the Law Commission (LC) to begin their review as soon as possible.</p> <p>We acknowledge the need to do more to ensure there is coherence in policies and that reforms make the children’s social care and SEND systems easier to access and navigate for children and families. We will look again at assessment processes and the way information is shared across Children’s Social Care (CSC), SEND and schools, as well as the relationship between multi-agency panels, multi-agency safeguarding partners and the new NHS Integrated Care Boards, to make sure that these bodies connect in a sensible way.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Local Family Help teams should be designed in a way that enables families and practitioners to have a conversation about their concerns rather than relying on mechanical referrals. If families are not eligible for Family Help, support should be available in universal and community services and the front door to Family Help should be equipped to link families to this support.</p>	<p>This feature of the future system will be included in the Families First for Children Pathfinder. This will be our delivery mechanism for learning how to best roll out our reforms across England. Government continues to invest in a range of wider universal and community services, including through the £301.75 million Family Hubs and Start for Life programme.</p>
<p>As part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, the Government should define outcomes, objectives, indicators of success and the most effective models for delivering help. Funding should be conditional on meeting the goals of the Framework.</p>	<p>Alongside this strategy we have published a draft Children’s Social Care National Framework and Dashboard, which includes the outcomes “Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need”. This is an area where we will also consider a Practice Guide.</p>
<p>Ofsted inspections should reinforce a focus on families receiving high quality, evidence-based help that enables children to thrive and stay safely at home.</p>	<p>Work with Ofsted and other inspectorates to ensure inspection sets a focus on families receiving high-quality, evidenced-based help in the way we envision. Together with Ofsted, we will ensure that the wishes, feelings and perspectives of children and families are central to the inspection and monitoring of Family Help services, so that we can properly measure and learn from their experiences.</p>
<p>National government should ensure it has an oversight mechanism in place to ensure policy relating to children and families is aligned in contact with children’s social care. Government programmes should be streamlined to support these reforms</p>	<p>The join up across government on programmes is already working well, for example the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE) are now working together to deliver positive outcomes for families and children through the Supporting Families programme.</p> <p>We will use the Families First for Children Pathfinders to test the alignment of government funding streams. This will provide learning on how funding can be simplified and aligned for local authorities.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>A new umbrella of “Family Help” should combine work currently done at targeted early help and section 17, ending handovers and bringing the flexible, non-stigmatising approach at early help to a wider group of families.</p>	<p>We will test this change through the Families First for Children Pathfinder. This will be our delivery mechanism for learning how to best roll out our reforms across England.</p>
<p>Eligibility for Family Help should be set out in a sufficient level of detail nationally to give a more consistent understanding of who should receive Family Help, whilst giving enough flexibility to enable professional judgement and empower Family Help teams to respond flexibly to families’ needs.</p>	<p>We will test how best to set out eligibility through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.</p>
<p>Government should make an investment of roughly £2 billion in supporting local authorities, alongside their partners, to implement the proposed transformation in Family Help.</p> <p>National government pots of funding should be mainstreamed into this funding stream and local partners should be incentivised to contribute.</p> <p>Once transformation is complete, the Government should ring-fence funding for Family Help to ensure rebalanced investment is sustained.</p>	<p>As we work through the Families First for Children Pathfinder, and towards the next Spending Review, we will assess the level and form of investment required in the system to achieve meaningful and sustainable change.</p> <p>We will work across government to simplify funding and streamline reporting requirements for Pathfinder areas and then evaluate the impact of this. We will use areas to test the alignment of Supporting Families and Reducing Parental Conflict funding. This will inform future decisions in the next Spending Review period.</p>

Child protection, multi-agency working and the courts- as detailed in chapter 3 of the Implementation Strategy

Note: for this chapter we are responding to the recommendations are from the Care Review. Responses to Child Protection in England can be found in annex 4.

Recommendation	Response
<p>All cases of significant harm should be co-worked by an Expert Child Protection Practitioner who is responsible for making key decisions (in the future this would be someone who has completed our proposed Early Career Framework)</p>	<p>We will test how to set co-working arrangements between Child Protection Lead Practitioners and Family Help Workers through the Families First for Children Pathfinder. We will invest in and develop the expertise of the social work workforce through the Early Career Framework.</p>
<p>Working Together should set expectations on multi-agency capabilities for child protection and the National Children’s Social Care Framework should set out effective practice models for joint working.</p>	<p>We will strengthen expectations around multi-agency capabilities in the guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. Consultation is planned to launch in spring 2023 and revised guidance planned for publication by the end of the year. Following the 2023 update, we will update Working Together every year.</p> <p>The Children’s Social Care National Framework will provide direction for those working in local authority children’s social care on practice that strengthens multi-agency working and practice. A draft National Framework has been published alongside the Implementation Strategy for consultation.</p>
<p>Investment in Family Help will provide resources for multidisciplinary responses to extra-familial harms.</p>	<p>We are introducing multi-disciplinary Family Help teams as part of the Families First for Children Pathfinder.</p> <p>The Youth Endowment Fund will test specialist multi-disciplinary teams embedded in neighbourhoods to support children, who are at risk of experiencing violence or criminal exploitation from outside the home in a pilot is being delivered through their Agency Collaboration Fund.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Government should amend Working Together to introduce a Child Community Safety Plan to clarify where primary harm is not attributable to families, supported by practice guides and the Early Career Framework.</p>	<p>We have funded four local authorities to test a Risk Outside the Home Pathway. The pathway is based on a child protection planning and conference model developed in Wiltshire Council. It prioritises developing expertise and reducing caseloads for practitioners, stronger multi-agency working and working with families as partners. Durham University will publish a peer reviewed paper on the pilot findings in Summer 2023. This will help us to make changes to child protection processes in Working Together to Safeguard Children in 2024.</p> <p>Findings will also be included in later phases of the Families First for Children Pathfinders.</p> <p>Outcome 3 of the Children’s Social Care National Framework is: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes. It places focus on how leaders and practitioners should respond to harms outside of the home. It also sets out how children, young people and families should be listened to when carrying out this work.</p>
<p>There should be clearer expectations about partnership responses to extra-familial harms across an area and this should be a priority area for learning.</p>	<p>In spring 2023 we will consult with stakeholders to strengthen Working Together to Safeguard Children to clarify the expectations around multi-agency working and the importance of a joined-up approach to addressing harm outside the home.</p> <p>We will also use the learning from the Families First for Children Pathfinder testing multi-agency arrangements at a local level to inform subsequent reviews of Working Together.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Government should integrate funding aimed at preventing individual harms into a single local response to extra-familial harms, including enabling areas to integrate their Violence Reduction Unit funding and infrastructure into their local response to extra-familial harms.</p>	<p>We are working across government to test wider funding integration through the Families First for Children Pathfinder. We will work across government to consider how to ensure funding is joined up for local areas in future funding opportunities.</p>
<p>Subject to a positive evaluation of the pilot to devolve responsibility for the National Referral Mechanism decisions for child victims to local areas, government should roll this out to all areas.</p>	<p>The Home Office is continuing to trial the devolved decision-making for the National Referral Mechanism so local authorities can identify child victims of modern slavery and trafficking. The next phase of testing is now underway meaning there are now 20 sites testing this model across Great Britain. We continue to work closely with the Home Office to ensure plans for devolved decision-making align with wider safeguarding arrangements and as they consider options for further expansion, subject to ongoing testing of the Pilot model.</p>
<p>Government should implement the recommendations of the Taylor Review to simplify the experiences of children in the youth justice system, and as a first step, should roll out the flexibility to all local authorities to integrate AssetPlus Assessments with children in need assessments</p>	<p>By April 2023, the Youth Justice Board will have introduced a new tool for pre-court cases that will enable better integration across youth justice and children’s social care assessments in terms of how data is reported and shared between agencies.</p> <p>This new tool will draw on learning from local authorities who have been piloting alternative assessments and ensure that the needs of children are addressed as part of a coordinated multi-agency response.</p>
<p>Guidance and legislation on information sharing should be strengthened and local safeguarding partners should confirm they have information sharing agreements in place and have audited practice in this area.</p>	<p>We will consult on updated information sharing guidance in spring 2023 alongside the Working Together consultation.</p> <p>The Government has written to all safeguarding partnerships to survey the use of information sharing agreements and further understand local information sharing practices.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Government should set a target to achieve frictionless sharing of information between local authority and partner systems and between different local authorities by 2027. To enable this they must take an imminent decision on whether to adopt the NHS number as a consistent identifier alongside work by the National Data and Technology Taskforce.</p>	<p>Our first key milestone to delivering frictionless sharing of information is delivering a report to Parliament in summer 2023 on improving information sharing, including the feasibility of using a consistent child identifier.</p> <p>We are funding two local authority projects through the Data and Digital Solutions Fund. These will: assist with the development of a data and information sharing agreement to be used as a model for other safeguarding partnerships; and carry out user research into solutions to overcome cultural and behavioural barriers to sharing information.</p> <p>We are also setting up a data and digital expert forum which will bring together expertise from inside and outside government to ensure our reforms have maximum impact.</p>
<p>The National Children’s Social Care Framework practice guides should promote effective practice for engaging families. Parental representation should be offered to all families in child protection.</p>	<p>We have published a draft of the Children’s Social Care National Framework for consultation alongside the Implementation Strategy. This will be for those working in local authority children’s social care and will provide direction on practice that strengthens multi-agency working and practice. Alongside the National Framework we are scoping the Practice Guides, and parental representation is an area for possible future inclusion.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Independent representation offered to all parents in child protection.</p>	<p>We will consult on Working Together to clarify expectations for support and information for parents in child protection.</p> <p>We will use the Families First for Children Pathfinder to improve engagement by ensuring parents are given the right information at the right time, and by including approaches to parental representation from the start.</p> <p>We are consulting from February 2023 to understand what works in supporting parents in child protection. We will also undertake local authority and stakeholder engagement to understand capacity and the national picture for parental representation.</p>
<p>Improve the quality and consistency of local and judicial decision-making through improving the quality and transparency of data and facilitating learning at a local level.</p>	<p>We recognise the importance of having strong feedback loops to learn and improve practice. Local Family Justice Boards and Designated Family Judges are regularly provided with operational data that provides granular detail on what is happening at the local level in courts and how this compares to other local areas. Through the National Family Justice Board we have agreed key performance indicators at a national level and we are now developing proposals for more detailed, published data on local system performance.</p> <p>We will provide all local authorities with the opportunity to access and embed the use of a financial modelling tool to better understand the financial impact of court delays for local authorities, and to identify where efficiencies can be made to reduce backlogs and delays.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>The Public Law Working Group should lead work to bring learning from Family Drug and Alcohol Courts and other problem-solving approaches into public law proceedings, to make proceedings less adversarial and improve parents' engagement in the process.</p>	<p>The Care Proceedings Reform Group (subgroup of the Public Law Working Group) is taking forward the Care Review's recommendation on greater application of problem-solving approaches in the family courts. The Care Proceedings Reform Group will provide recommendations to government by 2024.</p>
<p>The responsibilities of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be amended to emphasise their role as a strategic forum focused on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, with attendance reflecting this.</p>	<p>We will consult in spring 2023 as part of updates to the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. We will publish updated guidance by the end of 2023.</p>
<p>Working Together should be amended to set out clear joint and equal operational responsibilities for partners. The Director of Children's Services should be the primary interface between strategic and operational leaders to facilitate effective multi-agency working.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>The role of the Director of Children's Service should be reviewed to give clarity to the role following this review, the SEND and AP Green Paper, and the Schools White Paper, to reflect their role as a champion for children and families within their area.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>The individual contributions of partners to achieving the review's vision should be set out clearly in Working Together and reflected in each organisations' strategic plans.</p> <p>Partnerships should become more transparent, including publishing minutes of partnership meetings and the financial contributions of each partner. The Safeguarding Children Reform Implementation Board should be reviewed and strengthened to take a greater leadership role in safeguarding arrangements, including requesting and publishing critical information about partnerships.</p>	<p>As above</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and relevant What Works Centres should take a more hands on role in promoting evidence and supporting partnerships to improve.</p>	<p>Since the publication of the Care Review and the Panel's National Review we have been providing a bespoke national facilitator support to local areas where they have requested it. We will engage with stakeholders on future support options once roles and responsibilities are clarified in statutory guidance. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel will be developing a support offer to maximise the impact of learning from safeguarding reviews. A pilot will be co-produced with a small number of safeguarding partners and begin in spring 2023 to evaluate the quality, consistency and impact of the review process and to draw out national practice learning that can be shared with all local areas.</p>
<p>Each agency inspectorate should review their framework to ensure there is sufficient focus on individual agency contribution to joint working. Where there are concerns about the functioning of partnerships, joint inspections, with a judgement attached, should be triggered.</p>	<p>In March 2022 Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) announced the restart of their programme of joint targeted area inspections (JTAs). The new frameworks build on the joint inspection methodology used in Solihull in January 2022, and are more focused to allow the inspectorates to deliver inspections with less burden on local safeguarding partnerships.</p> <p>We will continue to work with Ofsted to ensure the joint and single inspection frameworks reflect the clarified roles of safeguarding partners as outlined in revised guidance. We will work with inspectorates to explore the feasibility of strengthening the focus of individual agency contributions in single agency inspections (such as ILACs) and the relationship with joint inspections.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Schools should be made a statutory safeguarding partner and contribute to the strategic and operational delivery of multi-agency working.</p>	<p>In spring 2023, we will consult on how to strengthen the role of education settings as part of the 2023 update to Working Together. Proposals on this will include whether to clarify their roles and responsibilities within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and how they operate within the strategic and operational levels of partnerships.</p> <p>We will use learning from this to help form proposals on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner through consultation in autumn 2023. If agreed, we will bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows</p>
<p>Government should incentivise greater partner contributions through requiring partners to publish their financial contribution and making receiving the full funding for reform contingent on partner contributions.</p>	<p>We will consult on this in spring 2023 as part of updates to the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. We will publish the updated guidance by the end of the year.</p>

Unlocking family networks - as detailed in chapter 4 of the Implementation Strategy

Recommendation text	Response
<p>All local authorities should make a financial allowance paid at the same rate as their fostering allowance available for special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order looking after children who would otherwise be in care.</p>	<p>We will explore the case for introducing a financial allowance for carers with a Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and non-parental Child Arrangement Orders (CAO). We will continue to work directly and collaboratively with kinship carers and local authorities to refine our proposals where there are opportunities to do so.</p> <p>We are encouraging local authorities to act sooner and review their existing policies to do more to support children and carers in kinship care arrangements.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>A Family Network Plan should be introduced and enabled in law to support and give oversight to family led alternatives to care.</p>	<p>We will test the implementation of Family Network Support Packages and increased use of family group decision-making through the joint Families First for Children Pathfinder, alongside Family Help and child protection recommendations.</p> <p>We will also deliver pilots in 7 local areas that will test the Family Network Support Packages and family group decision-making reforms.</p>
<p>Government should introduce legislation which makes the use of family group decision-making mandatory before a family reaches Public Law Outline. The features and delivery practice of effective family group decision-making should also be included in the National Children’s Social Care Framework.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>All new special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order should be given kinship leave, which matches the entitlement given to adopters.</p>	<p>We will continue to work across government to explore possible additional workplace entitlements during the rest of this Parliament.</p>
<p>Legal aid should be provided in a range of circumstances where special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order interact with the family courts.</p>	<p>We recognise that a welcome first step has already been taken by the Ministry of Justice in extending legal aid to prospective Special Guardians who are party to private proceedings.</p> <p>We will work across government to explore possible options for an extension of legal aid for kinship carers with SGOs and CAOs.</p>
<p>As part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, local authorities should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers.</p>	<p>We have invested £2 million and partnered with Kinship to establish 100 self-sustaining kinship peer support groups by January 2024.</p> <p>During this Spending Review we will invest a further £9 million in a bespoke training and support offer for all kinship carers (those with a legal order and informal kinship carers).</p>
<p>Government should develop a new legal definition of kinship care, taking a broad range of circumstances into account.</p>	<p>We have included a ‘working definition’ of kinship care in the Implementation Strategy and we are actively seeking feedback on it through consultation from February 2023.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Contact arrangements between birth parents, adopted children and adoptive parents should be assumed by default and modernised through the swift roll out of technology enabled methods of contact, such as Letterswap.</p>	<p>The Government committed to improving contact arrangement practice in its National Adoption Strategy. This includes working with the Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) Leaders Group to develop and trial what good practice looks like, with a view to setting national standards in this area. RAAs are receiving £19.5 million across three years to deliver the strategy. This work includes engagement with birth families, young people, adult adoptees and adopters.</p> <p>RAA leaders are currently trialing a new programme called 'Letterswap'. This new digital solution will improve the current system by making communication secure, online and much quicker. The pilot will conclude in spring 2023 and then begin to roll out across the country.</p>

Transforming care experience- as detailed in chapter 5 of the Implementation Strategy

Note: for this chapter we are responding to the recommendations are from the Care Review. Responses to the Competition & Markets Authority market study of children's social care can be found in annex 5.

Recommendation text	Response
<p>New and ambitious care standards, applicable across all homes for children, should be introduced.</p>	<p>We have set up an expert working group to review all existing legislation and regulation and develop a core overarching set of standards for fostering, children's homes and supported accommodation.</p> <p>We will work with Ofsted to strengthen its inspection and regulatory powers to hold private and voluntary/charity providers to account. We are continuing to reform supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Regional Care Cooperatives should be established to plan, run and commission residential care, fostering, and secure care.</p>	<p>The Care Review and the CMA report recommended a more collective approach to planning for and commissioning care placements, and that government should mandate the appropriate level of collaboration. In response to both recommendations, we are proposing to work with the sector to co-design the Regional Care Cooperative model – and run two Pathfinders to work through implementation challenges before bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.</p> <p>We will work with Ofsted on inspection arrangements for the Regional Care Cooperatives.</p>
<p>Give Care Quality Commission (CQC)/Ofsted the power to financially regulate Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and Children’s Homes.</p>	<p>We recognise the importance of taking action as soon as possible, therefore in advance of bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows, we will begin immediate work to develop a voluntary oversight regime overseen by Ofsted. We will look to the sector to support the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted with successfully developing an effective and proportionate voluntary regime, which may support the transition towards a statutory function. This will enable close monitoring of the financial health of providers, allowing for greater financial transparency across the sector, and ensuring that children continue to receive the care that they need.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>The Department for Education should launch a high profile national foster carer recruitment programme to recruit 9,000 additional foster carers.</p> <p>Local authorities, and eventually Regional Care Cooperatives, should use family group decision-making to identify important adults that are already known to a child and may be willing to foster.</p> <p>Foster carers should be given delegated authority by default, to take decisions which affect the day to day lives of children in their care.</p> <p>All foster carers should be able to access high quality training and peer support. As part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, all local authorities should develop a model of foster carer support based on the principles of Mockingbird.</p> <p>Funding for innovative projects by local authorities targeted at recruiting and retaining more foster carers to reduce their reliance on IFAs.</p>	<p>We are investing over £27 million this Spending Review to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so foster care is available for more children who need it.</p> <p>We will roll out a programme of end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers on a regional basis, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a marketing campaign to attract new foster carers • regional support hub to provide information about fostering and support alongside the assessment and approval process to maximise the number of people who take forward a fostering application • roll out of an evidence-based retention programme across the region to support retention of foster carers • <p>Delivering a regional programme for fostering recruitment and retention signals the first step in moving the system to deliver care for children in a regional model.</p> <p>We will update guidance to set clear expectations that foster carers should have delegated authority by default, unless there is a reason not to.</p> <p>We are also raising the National Minimum Allowance (NMA). Foster carers will benefit from a 12.43% increase to the NMA.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Social Work England to set standards and regulate residential children’s home managers.</p> <p>Fund a new leadership programme that could train up to 700 new managers in the next five years.</p>	<p>We will develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children’s homes sector. We will be exploring developing proposals for introducing professional registration of the residential childcare workforce. We will also be exploring developing a leadership programme for new children’s home managers, and a new Knowledge and Skills Statement with accompanying CPD for existing managers as part of this programme.</p> <p>We will gather data and qualitative information to enhance our understanding of the children’s homes workforce by conducting a workforce census in early 2023 and 2024. We will consider the annual state of the sector review as a long-term option for gathering regular data and information about the workforce.</p>
<p>A windfall tax on profits made by the largest private children’s home providers and independent fostering agencies should be levied to contribute to the costs of transforming the care system.</p>	<p>The CMA recommended against action that would limit prices or profits as that would likely exacerbate existing problems and drive supply from the sector. We believe a windfall tax would either result in providers exiting the market or it would lead to higher prices to cover the cost of the tax. The former would lead to fewer places at a time when local authorities are already struggling to find suitable places for children in care. The latter would result in higher prices being passed on to local authorities for future care placements.</p> <p>We recognise the concerns around profiteering and are seeking to rebalance the market through investing in foster care as set out above and through providing capital funding to help local authorities develop more of their own children’s homes, thus reducing their reliance on high-cost provision. In addition, our proposals on regional commissioning above will give regions greater buying power and put them in a stronger position when negotiating with private providers.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.</p>	<p>We are consulting in February 2023 on extending corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider set of public bodies. We will consult as necessary in autumn 2023 in more detail on proposals for legislative reform which we will look to bring forward when parliamentary time allows.</p>
<p>Government should make care experience a protected characteristic, following consultation with care experienced people and the devolved administrations.</p>	<p>We have carefully considered the recommendation to make 'care experience' a protected characteristic. There are significant concerns in the sector that self-declaration of care experience could increase stigma. We will not be taking forward this recommendation at this time and will prioritise our proposals to extend corporate parenting responsibilities, which we believe will be more impactful in driving real change in the way in which policies and services are designed and delivered to take account of the challenges that care leavers face.</p>
<p>National government should issue statutory guidance to local authorities setting out the priority that should be afforded to care experienced adults in accessing local services such as social housing.</p>	<p>We will work with DLUHC to encourage local authorities to use existing statutory guidance which encourages local authorities to make exceptions from their residency requirement for care leavers housed outside their district, and those who need support to rehabilitate and integrate back into the community.</p>
<p>Independent, opt-out, high quality advocacy for children in care and in proceedings should replace the existing Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 Visitor roles. The Children's Commissioner for England should oversee these advocacy services, with the powers to refer children's complaints and concerns to the court.</p>	<p>We support the need for an independent, opt-out advocacy service. However, although we recognise the complexities and regional variations, we do not agree to remove the role of the IRO and Reg 44 visitors. Instead, as part of the wider review of the standards of care (described above), we will review and strengthen how these roles operate.</p>
<p>Local authorities should redesign their existing Independent Visitors (IV) scheme for children in care and care leavers to allow for longer term relationships to be built.</p>	<p>We will increase the accessibility and take-up of this offer by working with the sector to reinforce current good practice and developing standards for Independent Visitor services.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
All local authorities should have skilled family finding support equivalent to or exceeding, the work of Lifelong Links in place by 2024 at the very latest.	We will be providing over £30 million investment over the next two years to increase the number of local authorities having practical interventions of well-evidenced family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes such as Lifelong Links.
A new lifelong guardianship order should be created, allowing a care experienced person and an adult who loves them to form a lifelong legal bond.	We are consulting in February 2023, with the launch of the Implementation Strategy, on the demand for and purpose of a new lifelong guardianship order.
Local authority Virtual Schools Heads (VSHs) for looked-after children should be accountable for the education of children in care and care leavers up to age 25 through Ofsted's ILACS framework.	We will consult as necessary in autumn 2023 on expanding the Virtual School Head role to include children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25.
Pupil Premium funding should be focused on evidence led tutoring and mentoring programmes.	We will ensure Pupil Premium Plus funding for children in care is spent on well-evidenced interventions that are clearly linked to robust personal education plans, and that these interventions include, but are not limited to tuition and mentoring.
Increase the number of children in care benefitting from a place at a state or independent boarding school. The Department for Education should create a new wave of state boarding capacity led by the best existing schools.	We have extended the Broadening Educational Pathways Programme to increase the number of children in care in independent and state boarding schools. We will use the evidence generated from this to inform long-term ambitions for this programme.
Introduce a kitemark scheme for higher education to drive improvements for those with care experience.	We are committed to introducing a gold standard accreditation scheme for higher and further education institutions and will be engaging key stakeholders and sector leaders to co-design this scheme.
The Care Leaver Covenant should be refreshed to align with the five missions set out in this report and co-produced with care experienced people. Employers should be able to apply for a new government led accreditation scheme which recognises their commitment to supporting care leavers into well paid jobs.	We will refresh the Care Leaver Covenant and increase its budget by 30% over the next two years to boost its capacity and profile.
An annual care leaver bursary should be made available to all apprentices up to the age of 25.	We will increase the current apprenticeships care leavers' bursary rate from £1,000 to £3,000 in autumn 2023.

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Enable employers to use unspent apprenticeship levy funds to tailor support for those with care experience.</p>	<p>We pay employers and training providers £1,000 each to support every care leaver apprentice. We will raise employers' awareness of this additional funding and encourage them to use it to support more care leavers to start, and complete, apprenticeships.</p>
<p>A range of housing options should open to young people transitioning out of care or who need to return, such as Staying Put, Staying Close and supported lodgings. Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an 'opt-out' rather than an 'opt-in' expectation.</p>	<p>Our long-term ambition is to have a universal offer of wrap around support and accommodation for care leavers through the expansion of Staying Close and promoting/sharing good practice on supported lodgings. We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, for Staying Close to be a national entitlement and for both Staying Put and Staying Close to support young people up to age 23, recognising that young people in the general population are leaving home at older ages.</p> <p>We do not think Staying Put should be opt-out given the pressure this would put on foster care placements and will consider making Staying Close opt-out as part of further work on the statutory duty.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Introduce a stronger safety net against care leaver homelessness by removing the local area connection test, ending intentionally homelessness practice, providing a rent guarantor scheme and increasing the leaving care grant to £2,438 for care experienced people.</p>	<p>We will bring forward legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to remove the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing at the next available opportunity. DLUHC will work with DfE to consider the most appropriate way to do this and consider factors such as whether a time limit should be applied to the removal in a similar way to that applied to members of the armed forces.</p> <p>We will strengthen statutory guidance and set out procedural expectations on intentional homelessness to remove its use for care leavers under 25 and legislate if necessary.</p> <p>We will promote rent guarantor schemes to encourage all local authorities to use the freedoms they already have. We will monitor this strategy and gather evidence to ensure that local authorities provide the best offer for care leavers' individual needs.</p> <p>To support care leavers financially, we will increase the leaving care allowance that is available to £3000 from April 2023. This goes further than the care review's recommended amount.</p> <p>We have published the Joint Housing Protocols for Care Leavers. This best practice guidance supports children's services and housing authorities to work effectively together. We are funding specialist Personal Advisors in 68 councils to build upon these protocols and continue work to prevent care leaver homelessness and rough sleeping.</p>
<p>The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children's services.</p>	<p>We will ensure identification and response to poor mental health issues is embedded in our workforce training programmes, and explore whether additional training is needed for some workforces e.g. leaving care Personal Advisors.</p>

Recommendation text	Response
Local authorities must improve care leaver mental and physical health support, and the national framework should promote the most effective multi-disciplinary models of doing this.	We will encourage local authorities to improve care leaver mental and physical health support through the National Framework and updating the joint DfE/DHSC guidance on 'promoting the health & wellbeing of Looked After Children' and extend it to cover care leavers up to age 25.
Integrated Care Boards should publish plans to improve the mental and physical health of children in care and care leavers.	We are working with NHS England, and DHSC to encourage all Integrated Care Boards, Integrated Care Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards and local authorities to better support the planning and commissioning of services that meet the assessed physical and mental health needs of children in care and care leavers in their area through emphasising existing duties and considering whether it is necessary to strengthen guidance, including statutory, for this group in the future.
DHSC and NHS should exempt care leavers from prescription charges up to age 25.	We will encourage local authorities to purchase pre-payment prescription certificates for care leavers who have ongoing medical conditions and do not fall under one of the existing exemptions.
The Office for National Statistics (ONS) should collect and report data on the mortality rate of care leavers and care leaver health outcomes.	We will consult on updating the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children in spring 2023 to require local authorities to report through Serious Incident Notifications on the deaths of care leavers up to the age of 25 (currently this requirement is only for children in care up to age 18).

Recommendation text	Response
<p>Government should launch a new cohort study which tracks the health outcomes of care experienced people and helps to gather other missing data on housing, education and employment outcomes.</p>	<p>We are taking steps to improve our understanding of care leavers' long-term outcomes including those stated in this recommendation. We have developed the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data set which was used to support the review – allowing us to explore educational pathways, employment and earnings rates and those on benefits. This dataset is repeatable and allows identification of cohort information. We are linking this data with both DHSC and DLUHC datasets – giving us detailed physical and mental health and housing data for care leavers over the next two years – and will look further at the need for focussed longitudinal study in the light of this new evidence base.</p>

Workforce - as detailed in chapter 6 of the Implementation Strategy

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>Introduce a mechanism for challenging unnecessary workload drivers.</p>	<p>We will establish a new National Workload Action Group from early 2023. The group will include sector representatives, including those with personal experience of children's social care. Its objective is to identify unnecessary workload pressures that do not lead to improvements in outcomes for children and families and recommend solutions to address them.</p>
<p>Social Work England should introduce a requirement that a registered social worker needs to spend 100 hours each year in direct practice.</p>	<p>We will encourage proximity to practice through aligning our leadership programmes with the direction of the reforms, gathering good practice and working with Ofsted and Social Work England. Social Work England will work on an approach to asking all social workers how much time they are spending in direct practice and how it supports their professional development. However, this will not be a condition of registration.</p>
<p>Trial flexible working models that fit around the lives of children and families.</p>	<p>We will set up a virtual hub to provide online support and best practice to local authorities for their retention strategies, including on flexible working.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>Reward expertise, improve retention and reduce agency through National Pay Scales.</p>	<p>The National Joint Council (NJC) (made up of local government employers and trade unions) set out the local government pay scale. Social worker roles have already been developed to fairly and consistently assess roles against the local government national pay scales.</p> <p>We do not intend to remove child and family social workers from the local government pay framework and develop a new central government pay scale for these workers. It is right that pay, terms and conditions are negotiated by local government employers and trade unions. We will work with the NJC to support the use of the social worker role profiles and that the current pay scales, job descriptions and grading reflect the challenge of the role and career progression.</p>
<p>The Government should introduce new national rules on agency usage.</p>	<p>We are consulting separately from February 2023 on the introduction of national rules alongside the Implementation Strategy.</p>
<p>Set up not-for-profit regional staff banks.</p>	<p>We will keep the recommendation to set up staff banks under review while we consult on the national rules relating to agency use.</p>
<p>Introduce a five-year Early Career Framework for social workers.</p>	<p>The ECF will replace the current Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for child and family social workers with two years of consistent, high-quality support and development. In years three to five, the expert practitioner level of the Framework will enable social workers to further develop their expertise, creating a cohort of highly trained social workers capable of dealing with the most complex cases and spreading best practice.</p>
<p>The Department for Education should strengthen existing leadership programmes to align with the review's reforms.</p>	<p>We are working with our leadership programme delivery partners to align existing leadership programmes with our reforms.</p>
<p>The Department for Education should increase the diversity of leadership.</p>	<p>We will look to integrate enhanced support for black, Asian and ethnic minority leaders in social work through our existing 'Leadership Pathways' programme.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>A nationally led programme should get social workers back to practice through action on technology to reduce time spent case recording.</p>	<p>We will bring together and work with local authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the shared aims and objectives for case management systems (CMS) • identify solutions that could be used across the sector • communicate these clear aims to CMS providers and explore the most efficient commercial models for local authorities to procure them <p>To help the sector deliver approaches to make recording less burdensome for social workers, as part of our Data and Digital Solutions Fund we are funding two groups of local authorities to carry out user research into how social workers' data recording is impacting their social work practice. This will aid development of solutions that ensure data gathered is of maximum benefit to all in the children's social care system and in a way that reduces the recording burden on social workers and supports rather than hinders good social work.</p> <p>We are funding a further two local authorities to work with software companies to develop a proof of concept for the use of advanced technology to reimagine how they record, retrieve, share and analyse information.</p>

Improving the system - as detailed in chapter 7 of the Implementation Strategy

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>A National Children's Social Care Framework should set the objectives and outcomes for children's social care.</p>	<p>Since the Care Review was published, work has been underway to develop the Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard. We have published a draft for consultation alongside the Implementation Strategy. The Children's Social Care National Framework describes the purpose, principles and outcomes for children's social care and will, in due course, be issued as statutory guidance.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>A National Practice Group to oversee introduction of practice guides.</p>	<p>A National Practice Group has been established to advise on the development of the Practice Guides, along with the National Framework and Dashboard. This includes social work practice leaders, multi-agency representatives, evidence representatives and people with lived experience of social care. The National Practice Group met for the first time in October 2022. The membership is published on gov.uk.</p>
<p>The National Children’s Social Care Framework should include practice guides, setting out the best evidenced approaches to achieving the objectives set out in the Framework.</p>	<p>In 2023 we will start to produce Practice Guides, working with the sector to identify the areas of priority. The National Practice Group will oversee the development of the Practice Guides and will help to ensure they align with the National Framework and bring together the best available evidence to offer advice both to leaders and to practitioners.</p>
<p>The National Children’s Social Care Framework should include a balanced scorecard of indicators to support learning and improvement.</p>	<p>The Children’s Social Care National Framework draft includes a summary of the metrics for a Dashboard, which will support learning and improvement. We are referring to this as a Dashboard because we think that better reflects these aims. This has been published for consultation alongside the Implementation Strategy.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>Data and feedback should be used to prompt local and national learning to continually improve services. At a national level this should be via a National Practice Group and a National Reform Board. The evidence and learning landscape should be strengthened through the integration of overlapping What Works Centres, starting with the integration of the Early Intervention Foundation and What Works for Children’s Social Care.</p>	<p>We will establish learning events to bring together leaders and practitioners to create a dialogue about how areas are implementing the National Framework, Dashboard and, in time, Practice Guides. These events will provide an opportunity to disseminate the latest good practice and for areas to learn from each other about progress implementing reform. The National Practice Group will contribute to learning, through considering emerging trends in practice and sharing practice knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>On 15 December 2022, the What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care and the Early Intervention Foundation merged, establishing a single authoritative What Works Centre for vulnerable children and families - the currently titled What Works for Early Intervention and Children’s Social Care (WWEICSC).</p>
<p>The National Reform Board should establish a mechanism for local authorities to raise where they feel there are national regulatory blockers to taking a course of action that is in the best interests of children, with action taken to address this.</p>	<p>We will continue to engage widely with practitioners, leaders and those with lived experience to hear their feedback on reform. DfE’s Regional Improvement and Support Leads will also continue to hold regular informal conversations with areas to understand where there are barriers to best practice. We will ensure there is a mechanism as part of our reform governance to consider system blockers reported through our regional infrastructures and other forums. We will regularly communicate how government and other national bodies have taken feedback on board.</p>
<p>Government should establish a National Data and Technology Taskforce to drive progress on implementing the review’s three priority recommendations to achieve frictionless data sharing by 2027, drastically reduce the time social workers spend on case recording and improve the use and collection of data locally.</p>	<p>We agree with the three priority actions set out by the review and we are taking action to achieve them. We will set up a new children’s social care data and digital forum, inviting experts from local authorities, academia and the third sector, as well as other government departments, non-departmental public bodies, like Ofsted, and people with lived experience.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>The Department for Education should have a proactive strategy on making better use of data in children’s social care, including a strategy for data linking for children’s social care with other data sources that makes use of the ONS integrated data service.</p> <p>There should be an overhaul of what data is collected and how those collections work, so that we have more meaningful metrics and more regular data to help drive transparency and learning in the system.</p>	<p>We have a pilot underway with three local authorities to streamline data collection.</p> <p>We will publish a data strategy by the end of 2023 to set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children’s social care.</p>
<p>Intervene decisively with inadequate and drifting authorities.</p>	<p>We will test the impact of different improvement models on performance in ‘Requires Improvement’ authorities.</p> <p>We are developing an interventions policy that will articulate the range of actions the DfE currently takes to support and intervene in local authority performance. The interventions policy will provide local authorities with a clear escalation pathway, outlining how our regional teams and ministers will engage with local authorities to prompt their engagement and facilitate action focused improvement – particularly where improvement has not been prioritised. This policy will also include changes to how and when the DfE will deploy statutory directions and improvement notices to ensure local authorities are quick to address performance issues. We will also provide clarity around how we will work with local authorities who have received an Area of Priority Action, following an Ofsted inspection.</p>
<p>Introduce Regional Improvement Commissioners to provide more robust challenge in the system.</p>	<p>We will test the impact of introducing a Regional Improvement Commissioner (RIC) to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance. The RIC’s role will focus on supporting the region with systemic issues that are impacting performance across multiple local authorities. The DfE will initially identify one region to pilot this approach.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>Simplify and bring together the support for Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances and Sector Led Improvement Partners into a single clear improvement offer.</p>	<p>The DfE has recently published its sector lead improvement offer and is looking at ways to formalise the support offered through Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs).</p>
<p>National government should ensure it has an oversight mechanism in place to ensure policy relating to children and families is aligned in contact with children’s social care. Government programmes should be streamlined to support these reforms.</p>	<p>We are working across government to align families policy and funding.</p> <p>We will work across government to simplify funding and streamline reporting requirements for Pathfinder areas and evaluate the impact of this and inform future decisions on the programme in the next Spending Review period.</p> <p>We have established the new cross-government Child Protection Ministerial Group. The group has met in October and December 2022 and there will be ongoing quarterly meetings.</p> <p>We have also established a new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partner Performance Board made up of senior civil servants across departments, providing oversight of the child protection system.</p>
<p>Youth justice policy should move from the Ministry of Justice to the Department for Education.</p>	<p>While we recognise the rationale and principle behind the recommendation, we do not agree that youth justice policy should move from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to DfE. A machinery of government change is time-consuming and complex, and there is little evidence of the benefits for children. It is also important the youth justice system remains connected to other important principles, about ensuring justice is done and that victims’ rights are also protected and promoted. Youth justice policy is also partly devolved and partly reserved, which would present challenges to DfE as an England-only department. Instead, we will ensure that government departments continue to work closely on ensuring that children in, or at risk of entering, the youth justice system (particularly those in care) get the support they need to turn their lives around.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
Government should introduce an updated funding formula for children's services.	Over the next two years, before the next Spending Review period, we will update, consult on and publish a new formula for children and young people's services funding. We will work with DLUHC to identify opportunities for implementing the new formula.
Government to take greater care to ensure that changes in government policy that impact the cost of delivering children's social care are accompanied by additional resources for local government.	As above
Ofsted inspection should be reformed to increase transparency in how judgements are made.	<p>As the system is reformed, we will work in partnership with Ofsted on the shared goal of delivering improved services and better outcomes for children and families. We will both work to ensure inspection is aligned with the National Framework, and so reflects policy aims.</p> <p>Ofsted will rebalance how it looks at practice, as it did with the Public Law Outline, to ensure it acts as a lever for improvement in line with the reforms. This will include how thresholds are applied and how well local authorities engage wider family including kinship arrangements. The new care leaver judgement already planned will ensure that support for care leavers is prominent in inspection.</p> <p>We will ask Ofsted to keep Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) under review as the reforms develop so that inspection continues to reflect current practice.</p>
Ofsted should ensure inspection applies a rounded understanding of being 'child focussed'.	As above
Inspect new bodies and responsibilities as a result of reform and align inspection to the National Children's Social Care Framework.	As above

Annex 4: Government response to Child Protection in England

Recommendation Text	Response
A new expert-led, multi-agency model for child protection investigation, planning, intervention and review.	We will test delivery models for an expert-led, multi-agency child protection response in local areas through the Families First for Children Pathfinders.
Establishing National Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Child Protection.	<p>We will also consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards in spring 2023 as part of updates to the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children.</p> <p>We are also working with Home Office (HO) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to commission a joint evaluation of MASH arrangements. This will inform the new child protection standards.</p>
Strengthening the local Safeguarding Partners to ensure proper co-ordination and involvement of all agencies.	We will consult on changes to the statutory guidance Working Together in spring 2023 and publish the updated guidance by the end of the year.
Changes to multi-agency inspection to better understand local performance and drive improvement.	<p>In March 2022 Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) announced the restart of their programme of joint targeted area inspections (JTAs). The new frameworks build on the joint inspection methodology used in Solihull in January 2022, and are more focused to allow the inspectorates to deliver inspections with less burden on local safeguarding partnerships.</p> <p>We will continue to work with Ofsted to ensure the joint and single inspection frameworks reflect the clarified roles of safeguarding partners as outlined in revised guidance. We will work with inspectorates to explore the feasibility of strengthening the focus of individual agency contributions in single agency inspections (such as ILACs) and the relationship with joint inspections.</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>A new role for the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in driving practice improvement in Safeguarding Partners.</p>	<p>Since the publication of the Care Review and the Panel report we have been providing bespoke national facilitator support to local areas where they have requested it. We will engage with stakeholders on future support options once roles and responsibilities are clarified in statutory guidance.</p> <p>The Panel will be developing a support offer to maximise the impact of learning from safeguarding reviews. A pilot will be co-produced with a small number of safeguarding partners and begin in spring 2023 to evaluate the quality, consistency and impact of the review process and to draw out national practice learning that can be shared with all local areas.</p>
<p>A sharper performance focus and better co-ordination of child protection policy in central government.</p>	<p>We have undertaken a review of existing governance structures. We have established the new cross-government Child Protection Ministerial Group. The group has met in October and December 2022 and there will be ongoing quarterly meetings.</p> <p>We have also established a new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partner Performance Board made up of senior civil servants across departments. The first meeting took place in October 2022.</p> <p>This means we can better oversee improvements to the child protection system and focus our efforts across government.</p>
<p>Using the potential of data to help professionals protect children.</p>	<p>We are undertaking a range of activity to improve the use of data to help professionals to protect children, including through the Data and Digital Solutions Fund and through the National Framework (see chapter 7 of the Implementation Strategy for more information).</p>

Recommendation Text	Response
<p>Specific practice improvements in relation to domestic abuse.</p>	<p>We agree further work is needed to ensure a stronger multi-agency response to domestic abuse. We are exploring opportunities alongside wider recommendations, including commissioning arrangements for safeguarding partners and multi-agency training, to ensure that reforms to strengthen the multi-agency child protection response consider the needs of children and families experiencing domestic abuse. We have funded the WWEICSC to help us to identify effective local practice to support children and families experiencing domestic abuse. We will publish the report in April 2023.</p>

Annex 5: Government response to the Competition and Market Authority's (CMA) market study into children's social care - England

Commissioning

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1.1: Larger scale market engagement</p> <p>We recommend that the UK Government requires a more collective approach to engagement with the placements market. This should include:</p> <p>Setting out what minimum level of activity must be carried out collectively. This should include an appropriate degree of activity in each of the key areas of forecasting, market shaping and procurement.</p> <p>Ensuring that there is a set of bodies to carry out these collective market shaping and procurement activities, with each local authority required to participate in one of them. We expect sub-national bodies to be appropriate for England.</p> <p>Providing an oversight structure to ensure that each body is carrying out its functions to the appropriate level. This should involve an assessment of the extent to which sufficiency of placements is being achieved within each area.</p> <p>The UK Government should determine how best to implement this recommendation taking into account key issues that lie beyond the scope of our study. In examining the relative advantages and disadvantages of different options, the UK Government should consider the factors set out in paragraph 4.82. In addition:</p> <p>Sufficiency duties should be enhanced to allow more transparent understanding of the extent to which sufficiency of placements is being achieved in each area. In order to do this, better information is required to understand how often children are being placed in placements that do not fit their needs, due to a lack of appropriate placements.</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We support the approach of a regional model and we will work with local authorities and other key stakeholders to co-design and co-create Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) as recommended by the independent review of children's social care. This will include setting out the minimum level of activity to be carried out collectively, including on forecasting, market shaping and procurement. We propose to work with Ofsted to develop plans for inspecting RCCs.</p> <p>We will provide funding and capital investment for local authorities to come together regionally. We will invest in Pathfinders to trial RCCs with local authorities within the current legal framework, ahead of bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows. We will consider further what changes might be needed to the current sufficiency duties as part of this process.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 1.2: National support for purchaser engagement with the market</p> <p>We recommend that the UK Government provides additional support to local authorities and collective bodies for forecasting, market shaping and procurement.</p> <p>Forecasting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK Government should establish functions at a national level supporting the forecasting of demand for and supply of children’s social care placements. These functions should include carrying out and publishing regional and national analysis and providing local authorities and collective bodies with guidance and support for more local forecasting, including the creation of template sufficiency reports. • To support the effectiveness of this function: • Local authorities’ statutory duties should be expanded to include a requirement to provide specified data to and to co-operate with the body carrying out the forecasting function. • Duties should be placed on local authorities to produce and publish sufficiency reports using templates created by the national function, in line with guidance issued by it. <p>Market shaping and procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK Government should support the increase in wider-than-local activity by funding collective bodies to trial different market shaping and procurement techniques and improving understanding of what market shaping and procurement models work well. <p>National contracts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department for Education should support the reintroduction of national procurement contracts covering terms and conditions that do not need to reflect local conditions. 	<p>Accept</p> <p>We will deliver national support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping to local authorities. Initially, we will commission an external organisation to deliver; over time the function could be subsumed into a regional model. We will seek to publish data held by government to support local authorities with forecasting.</p> <p>We will consider and consult further as necessary on any changes to local authorities’ statutory duties (including whether any of these could or should be carried out by RCCs in future).</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p data-bbox="114 220 1200 252">Recommendation 1.3: Support for increasing local authority foster care</p> <p data-bbox="114 312 1352 491">We recommend that the UK Government offers targeted funding support for innovative projects by individual local authorities, or groups of local authorities, targeted at recruiting and retaining more foster carers to reduce their reliance on IFAs. Any such projects should be evaluated carefully to provide an evidence base to help shape future policy.</p>	<p data-bbox="1397 220 1509 252">Accept</p> <p data-bbox="1397 312 1966 564">We will work with local authorities to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme to boost approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage and test and develop a best practice regional model for future programmes.</p> <p data-bbox="1397 625 1989 911">We will expand our recruitment and retention programme from 2023 with over £27 million investment. This will boost fostering capacity and build an evidence base on how to effectively recruit and retain foster carers, building towards fostering being owned by Regional Care Cooperatives across England.</p>

Creating capacity in the market

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 2.1: Review of regulation</p> <p>We recommend that the UK Government should carry out, or commission, a thorough review of regulation relating to the provision of placements, during which protecting the safety and wellbeing of children must be the overriding aim, but also considering whether specific regulations are unnecessarily restricting the effective provision of placements.</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We have set up an expert working group to review all existing legislation and regulation and develop a common set of standards for fostering, children’s homes and supported accommodation. The first meeting of the group took place in November 2022. Its work will include reviewing regulations impacting on the placements market in England so that there are no unintended barriers to ensuring enough of the right type of placements are available for the children and young people who need them. This will start to unlock barriers to creating homes at a local level before we move the system to a regional model.</p> <p>In tandem we will consult with other government departments that use the current regulations. We will undertake some initial sector expert engagement followed by a consultation, as necessary in autumn 2023 on changes to standards of care and regulations with a view to updating legislation, subject to parliamentary time.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 2.2: Review planning requirements</p> <p>We recommend that the UK Government considers removing any distinction, for the purposes of the planning regime, between small children’s homes and domestic dwelling houses. This could include, for example, steps to make it clear that children’s homes which can accommodate less than a specified number of residents at any one time are removed from the requirement to go through the planning system notwithstanding that the carers there work on a shift pattern. We recommend that where children’s homes remain in the planning system (for example because they are larger) the UK Government introduces national guidance clarifying when planning permission may be required and the circumstances in which it is likely to be granted or refused.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>We have been working across government with DLUHC and we will issue a joint Ministerial Statement to clarify the national policy position, in order to assist local authorities when they are considering planning applications for new homes for children. We need leaders at a local and regional level to support this approach. This will create more homes for children in their local area which meet their needs, significantly reducing the need for out of area placements.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2.3: Regular state of the sector review</p> <p>We recommend to the UK Government that there should be an annual assessment of the state of the workforce to provide a clear overview of staffing pressures and concerns, and to recommend measures to address bottlenecks. This would be similar in scope to the CQC’s annual State of Care review in England. The UK Government should also give attention to whether national measures, such as recruitment campaigns, measures to support professionalisation and career pathways are required. We recommend to the UK Government that there should be an assessment of the likely future need for foster carers and that the UK Government should take the lead in implementing an effective strategy to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers.</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>We will undertake a workforce census in 2023 and 2024 and undertake in-depth cases studies which will focus on recruitment and retention and qualifications and training. We agree with CMA’s recommendation that the government should gather regular data and information about the children’s homes workforce. We will explore how best to do this beyond the census.</p> <p>We will consider whether the organisation commissioned for recommendation 1.2 can support an assessment of the likely future need for foster carers. As set out at recommendation 1.3 we are delivering a fostering recruitment and retention programme.</p>

Resilience of the market

Recommendation	Response
<p data-bbox="114 347 1128 384">Recommendation 3.1: Monitor and warn of risks of provider failure</p> <p data-bbox="114 440 1115 584">We recommend that the UK Government creates an appropriate statutory oversight regime that is capable of assessing the financial health of the most difficult to replace providers of children’s homes and warning placing authorities if a failure is likely.</p>	<p data-bbox="1167 347 1279 384">Accept</p> <p data-bbox="1167 440 1989 919">We recognise the importance of taking action as soon as possible, therefore in advance of bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows, we will begin immediate work to develop a voluntary oversight regime overseen by Ofsted. We will look to the sector to support the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted with successfully developing an effective and proportionate voluntary regime, which may support the transition towards a statutory function. This will enable close monitoring of the financial health of providers, allowing for greater financial transparency across the sector, and ensuring that children continue to receive the care that they need.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Recommendation 3.2: Contingency planning</p> <p>We recommend that the UK Government via its appointed oversight body should require the most difficult to replace children’s home providers to maintain a “contingency plan” setting out how they are organising their affairs to mitigate the risk of provision having to close in a sudden and disorderly way in the event that they get into financial difficulties or insolvency. One important element will be to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that providers have the necessary time and financial resources to enable an orderly transition where the provision can be operated on a sustainable basis, either by its existing owner or any alternative owners. Contingency plans should seek to address these risks, for instance through ensuring that: appropriate standstill provisions are in place with lenders; companies are structured appropriately to remove unnecessary barriers to selling the provision to another operator as a going concern; and, providers maintain sufficient levels of reserves to continue to operate for an appropriate length of time in a stressed situation.</p>	<p>Accept</p> <p>This will form part of the financial oversight regime which is being developed.</p>

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