

Social Care Reforms Children's Scrutiny Committee

May 2023



Somerset
Council

Context

Three reviews were published in 2022, providing the impetus and vision on which to base proposed reforms to CSC:

- March 2021 - **Independent Review of Children's Social Care** launched in March 2021 – led by Josh MacAlister – published May 2022. A number of recommendations, including investment of £2 billion over 5 years
- May 2022 – **Child Safeguarding Review Panel** publish their report in to the deaths of **Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson**
- March 2022 - the **Competition and Markets Authority review** highlighted 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.

Context

In February 2022, the government published '**Stable homes built on love**' – an implementation strategy and consultation, backed by £200m of additional investment.

The strategy sets out a vision to rebalance CSC away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective early support. It sets out actions that seek to:

- Address urgent issues facing children and families now
- Lay the foundation for whole system reform
- Set a national direction for change

The strategy is based on six pillars of reform.

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

- More **support available early** for families who need extra help
- **Welcoming Family Help Services**, delivered by a **skilled multidisciplinary workforce**
- Work closely with universal, community and specialist services
- Bring in **wider family networks** at the earliest opportunity
- £45 million investment – 12 x Families First for Children Pathfinders
- Development of an **Early Help career framework**
- Join up funding and strategy - work across government and inspectorates including Ofsted to ensure a more **systematic and strategic join up** in how local areas are funded, supported and inspected to deliver effective services.
- Work with the Law Commission to review the legislation on providing help to disabled children and their families.

Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system

- A Families First for Children Pathfinder will test a new **Child Protection Lead Practitioner** role which will **co-work with family help teams**
- Consultation on new **National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards** in 2023 as part of an update to the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- **Improved information sharing** and develop a new, more bespoke response to **harms outside of the home**.
- **Strengthen multi-agency leadership**. Amended guidance to local authorities, police and health (the 3 statutory partners) to bring greater clarity to roles and responsibilities
- 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

- Test how to implement **family group decision-making and Family Network Support Packages**. 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.
- 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

- 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 include **supporting foster carers better**, so they want to continue fostering. 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.

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

- £30m over 2 years to fund practical interventions of well evidenced **family finding, befriending and mentoring** programmes
- **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.
- Create **opportunities for children in care and care leavers** to achieve their potential through education, employment and training, via Virtual School Heads (VSHs) and Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) funding.
- 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. **Build social workers' and other practitioners' understanding and skills** to respond to children's mental health needs. 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

- Prioritise **high-quality career development for social workers**. 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**. 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, govt has published a consultation on whether to set national rules on agency usage, including potential price caps.
- **Boost social worker recruitment**. Explore ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally.

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

- Introduce a **Children's Social Care National Framework**, supported by a data dashboard by the end of 2023 with implementation by the end of 2024 (separate consultation)
- Publish a data strategy by the end of 2023 setting out plans for transforming data in children's social care and establish a Data and Digital Expert Forum
- **Align inspection with the National Framework.** Ofsted to rebalance how it looks at practice so it acts as a lever for improvement
- Development of a **suite of practice guides**, this work will be overseen by the National Practice Group
- Enhancing the DfE's intervention role and offer via a clearer interventions policy and escalation pathway, **new focus on 'getting to good'** in RI rated LAs
- Before the next Spending Review DfE, in consultation with DLUHC, will aim to update, publish and consult on a new formula for children's services funding.

Questions?

