

## **Schools Forum Meeting Agenda**

Thursday, 20th April 2023 at 9.00 am  
to be held in via Microsoft Teams

### **Membership**

Stewart Biddles  
Lisa Finn  
Steven Hulme  
Stuart Bellworthy  
Mike Lock  
Clive Star  
Jim Piper

Tim Stephens  
Jayne Jones  
Steve Margetts  
Alex Newton  
Sarah Tomkinson  
Kelly Sooben

1. **Apologies/Changes to Membership**
2. **Minutes of the last meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)
3. **Financial Report** (Pages 7 - 12)
4. **Torbay Safety Valve agreement** (Pages 13 - 16)
5. **Safety Valve delivery dashboard & progress report** (Pages 17 - 21)
6. **National Updates**
  - (a) SEND & Alternative Provision improvement plan (Pages 22 - 122)
  - (b) Stable Homes built on love (Pages 123 - 342)
  - (c) Early Years & Childcare (Pages 343 - 344)
7. **Any Other Business**
8. **Future meeting dates**
  - Thursday 4th May 2023, 09:00, (Virtual Meeting)
  - Thursday 15th June 2023, 09:00 (Virtual Meeting)

*For information relating to this meeting or to request a copy in another format or language please contact:*

**Mike Freeman, clerk**  
**01803 208579**  
**[Michale.freeman@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:Michale.freeman@torbay.gov.uk)**

## **Minutes of the Schools Forum**

**19 January 2023**

**-: Present :-**

**Lisa Finn (Vice-Chair)** Secondary Academy Rep; **Tim Stephens**, Primary Academy Governor; **Clive Star**, Secondary Academy Rep; **Alex Newton**, Secondary Maintained Head; **Beth Woodward**, PRU (substitute for Stephen Hulme); **Mike Lock**, Special Schools Head; **Jayne Jones**, Early Years Rep; **Sarah Tomkinson**, Primary Maintained Head; **Kelly Sooben**, Post 16 representative

**-: Also in attendance :-**

**Rachael Williams**, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills; **Nancy Meehan**, Director of Childrens Services; **Martin Phillips**, Director of Finance; **Rob Parr**, Principal Accountant; **Dan Hamer**, Head of Vulnerable Pupils; **Hannah Spencer** Head of SEN; **Sarah White**, Early Years Finance Officer; **Michael Freeman**, Clerk

---

### **1. Islington Partnership**

As part of our sector led improvement partnership with Islington Council, the forum welcomed Nicolas King to the meeting as an observer.

### **2. Apologies/Changes to Membership**

Apologies were received from James Piper and Steven Hulme. The Forum welcomed Beth Woodward to the meeting as Steven's substitute.

Stewart Biddles also sent apologies, Lisa Finn chaired this meeting in his absence.

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting held 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were agreed as a true record.

### **4. Financial Report**

Rachael presented an updated financial report to members, having been deferred from the previous meeting.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded activities are currently forecast to overspend by £2.864m, this is an increase of approximately £130k since the last meeting. The two areas of significant volatility are within the Early Years Block and Higher Needs Block. While pressures remain the same, it was noted that EHCP top ups have slowed, and commissioned places for Special Schools have also decreased.

Lisa asked why there has been an underspend on Joint funded placements. It was explained that methodology applied through the Independent Pupil Overview Panel has seen an increase in Children remaining within the Local Authority area.

A comparison of DSG funding between 2022/23 and 2023/24, with the related increases in minimum per pupil funding levels was then shown. It was pleasing to note that it looks like funding will be in place for 2024/25, and members gave thanks for Rob Parr for his work on this.

The Forum noted the findings of the Financial report and agreed to the recommendation of continuing to work with the Local Authority to make the necessary reductions in the budget through the Safety Valve process.

## 5. Early Years Funding - Budget Allocation & Hourly Rates

The forum heard from Sarah White, Early years Finance Officer, who presented the new allocations for the Early Years Block of the DSG for 2023/24. The budget has provided the Local Area with increased rates and includes the changes to the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) following the consultation in summer 2022. There will be no changes to the local formula used by the LA.

There will be an increase of 25p per hour for both 2 year olds and 3 & 4 year olds as well as an additional £20m investment to help meet the cost of the National Living Wage increase from April 2023. Members asked whether this investment would be a one off or the new baseline, although confirmation has not been given yet officers are not expecting a reduction in funding in future years.

After discussion, members were asked to vote on the new Hourly Rates presented, voting as follows:

*To endorse the budget and hourly rates as proposed:*

**For: 9**  
**Against: 0**  
**Abstain: 0**

Forum voted unanimously in favour.

## 6. Post 16 Pathway Plans

Rachael explained to members the current process for the contract management and data requirements for Post 16 High Needs Learners, before proposing a new way of working moving forward. Whilst the pathway plans were necessary during the period where the LA was growing post 16 opportunities for young people, a recent overview of our annual review process has led to the data being recorded in annual reviews, therefore there is some duplication required in continuing to produce both documents. It was proposed pathway plans be stepped down and instead use the annual review process to gather the intelligence needed. Members asked whether we will be losing anything by stopping the pathway plan process, however it was explained that no data will be lost, merely recorded through a different mechanism.

A vote was held on the proposals as follows:

*To step down the requirement of Post 16 providers to produce a pathway plan for pupils:*

**For: 9**

**Against: 0**

**Abstain: 0**

Members unanimously supported the proposals. Rachael explained that the current cycle of pathway plans will be finished before this takes effect, as there is still some outstanding data to be collected.

## 7. Safety Valve Recovery Plan

Rachael gave an update on the progress of the Safety Valve recovery plan. A management plan has now been submitted to the DfE and colleagues will be meeting with them to discuss this on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, before the final submission date of 3<sup>rd</sup> February. Nancy said that they expect to hear from the Secretary of State in March, asking for deficit to be written off.. Whilst this is a positive position at this point, it is not in a final position, and further discussion with the DfE will be needed.

Members asked what happens if the debt isn't agreed to be written off – It was explained that all signs are that it will be, it would be surprising if it is not. Martin Phillips explained that the money is allocated to the LA over a number of years, emphasising the importance of the Action Plan and the need for monitoring and reporting mechanisms to be put in place.

Hannah then explained to members changes made to the SEN panel and the annual review process. These changes have led to a refusal rate of 34% for new RSAs (Request for Statutory Assessments), up from 5% in previous years. Parents whose children have been refused at SEN panel are now being offered next step meetings, ensuring that the reasons for the refusal to assess are made clear to parents. A more robust annual review mechanism, including colleagues from Health

and Social Care, is now in place. 232 EHCPs have been ceased this year, an increase of 74% on last year. Hannah reassured the Forum that we are not just ceasing plans, and that the annual review process is still child centered.

It was noted that the DfE has offered annual review training for all colleagues 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb.

Members were encouraged by the plan and the graduated response paperwork, acknowledging that we now have a coherent plan for moving forward. It was also felt that the better engagement with health colleagues is also a huge step forward. Whilst work is already underway and effects are being seen, Rachael pointed out that there will be a length pilot phase, and significant challenges remain ahead.

A vote was held on whether members agree with the plan, with voting as follows:

*To continue with the Safety Valve recovery plan and submit before the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February deadline:*

**For: 9**

**Against: 0**

**Abstain: 0**

Members were unanimous in their support for the plan.

## **8. Items for next meeting**

- School Allocations
- Safety Valve update

## **9. Future meeting dates**

- Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023, 09:00 (Virtual Meeting)
- Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023, 09:00, (Virtual Meeting)
- Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023, 09:00 (Virtual Meeting)

After discussion members felt that future meetings should be held virtually, making it easier for everyone to attend.

**Financial Report School Forum 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Forecast Outturn Position 2022/23**

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funded activities are currently forecast to **overspend by £2.732m**.

The following table details the main areas of both over and under spend. Many of these budgets are demand led and have been monitored during 22/23 and revisions reported accordingly. The final outturn position will be presented at the May 2023 Forum.

<b>Budget Heading</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Final Actuals</b>	<b>Over / (Under) Spend</b>
Early Years 2, 3 & 4 yr old payments – PVI's & Academies	£6.089m	£5.893m	(£196k)
Estimated adjustment from ESFA for changes in Early Years pupil numbers between Jan 22 and Jan 23 pupil counts			£166k
Early Years – ALFEY	£295k	£284k	(£11k)
Early Years – Pupil Premium & Disability Access Fund	£160k	£117k	(£43k)
Early Years – 5% retained element	£347k	£295k	(£52k)
Joint Funded Placements	£450k	£326k	(£124k)
Recovery of funding from schools for Excluded Pupils, Medical Tuition Service and Elective Home Education	(£175k)	(£185k)	(£10k)
Outstanding items relating to 19/20 & 20/21			£130k
Independent Special School Fees	£3.562m	£3.543m	(£19k)
Other packages for EHCP pupils and SEND personal budgets	£1.512m	£1.495m	(£17k)
Payments to / recoupment from other authorities for Special School places	(£125k)	£34k	£159k
Medical Tuition Service / Virtual School / Hospital Tuition / Vulnerable Students Team	£1.587m	£1.548m	(£39k)
School contingencies (Planned pupil growth, NQT induction etc)	£128k	£116k	(£12k)
EHCP in-year adjustments (see separate paper for details)	£550k	£703k	£153k
Special Schools / High Needs in-year adjustments (see separate paper for details)	£400k	£536k	£136k
School Intervention / Commissioning (includes School Improvement Grant)	£121k	£64k	(£57k)
Business Support	£201k	£167k	(£34k)
Senior Management, Admissions, EAL / Travellers, SACRE	£321k	£298k	(£23k)
Visually impaired / Hearing impaired / Advisory Teachers	£198k	£123k	(£75k)
Deficit DSG budget set for 22/23	(£2.7m)		£2.7m
<b>Total – Forecast Outturn Position 22/23</b>			<b>£2.732m</b>

The two areas of significant volatility are within the Early Years Block and Higher Needs Block. The demand led pressures in these areas are detailed below.

**Early Years Block**

Take up of early years placements continue to be high. There is currently a surplus of early years

capacity that exceeds the demand as it is noted that parental paid for hours have significantly reduced. The impact of the cost of living crisis is both having a detrimental impact on the revenue and costs that are associated with early years provision. A separate paper and agenda item have been included to discuss the early years budget announcements.

## Higher Needs Block

Torbay continues to have a greater number of children and young people requiring support up to and including a special school place than the funds available in the higher needs block. The impact of in year EHCP adjustments continues to be an area of concern and demand.

<b>Education, Health &amp; Care Plan Funding for 21/22 &amp; 22/23</b>			
	<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>Increase / (Decrease)</b>
Number of pupils with EHCP	463	512	49.00
Number of FTE's with EHCP	407	463	56.00
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Funding below £6k allocated through school formula elements	2,426,210	2,774,332	348,122
Funding above £6k allocated as a top-up per eligible pupil	2,206,696	2,967,540	760,844
EHCP Contingency	340,000	550,000	210,000
<b>In-Year adjustments</b>			
April	214,516	133,189	(81,327)
May	92,973	97,442	4,469
June	76,491	65,574	(10,917)
July	52,297	116,471	64,174
August	32,649	221,556	188,907
September	281,701	35,796	(245,905)
October	43,591	(33,353)	(76,944)
November	43,590	44,883	1,293
December	30,737	10,002	(20,735)
January	(4,276)	(1,109)	3,167
February	22,417	14,470	(7,947)
March	(1,973)	(2,068)	(95)
<b>Total - In-Year adjustments</b>	<b>884,713</b>	<b>702,853</b>	
<b>(underspend) / overspend</b>	<b>544,713</b>	<b>152,853</b>	

## Special School Profile

The following table details the special school profile:

## Financial Report School Forum 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Special School and other High Needs funding adjustments for 22/23										
	Combe Pafford	Combe Pafford	Mayfield School	Mayfield Chestnut	Mayfield Total	Brunel SEMH	Burton AP	B & B Total	Totals	Totals £
Number of places - January 22	262		263		263	56	55	111.00	636.00	
Number of pupils - January 22	264		261		261	47	39	86.00	611.00	
Number of places - September 22	265		263		263	56	55	111.00	639.00	
Initial Place led funding		2,637,500			2,630,000	560,000	550,000	1,110,000		6,377,500
Initial Pupil led funding		1,551,207			2,924,760	816,672	495,105	1,311,777		5,787,744
Initial pupil specific additional funding		61,673			162,744	36,800		36,800		261,217
Previously Teachers Pay & Pension Grants		174,075			173,580	36,960	36,300	73,260		420,915
Other funding - Outreach / 6th day provision / rent					318,093			0		318,093
Pupil Premium		141,105			182,435	35,460	32,505	67,965		391,505
<b>Total initial funding</b>		<b>4,565,560</b>			<b>6,391,612</b>	<b>1,485,892</b>	<b>1,113,910</b>	<b>2,599,802</b>		<b>13,556,974</b>
<b>In-Year adjustments</b>	<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Funding £</b>	<b>Mayfield Pupils</b>	<b>Chestnut Pupils</b>	<b>Funding £</b>	<b>SEM H Pupils</b>	<b>AP Pupils</b>	<b>Funding £</b>	<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Funding £</b>
April	264	103,334	231	32	23,830	51	48	183,759	626	310,923
May	264	(823)	229	33	(963)	50	47	(27,565)	623	(29,351)
June	261	(2,402)	230	32	(4,825)	50	50	31,738	623	24,511
July	261	0	230	34	29,715	51	45	(34,574)	621	(4,859)
August	261	0	230	34	0	51	45	0	621	0
September	266	35,165	232	31	(47,330)	46	44	(58,085)	619	(70,250)
October	262	(11,208)	231	30	(11,915)	48	38	(20,709)	609	(43,832)
November	263	6,061	228	31	(8,363)	52	39	34,250	613	31,948
December	265	3,721	229	32	7,943	54	43	28,511	623	40,175
January	268	5,133	229	32	0	55	46	13,865	630	18,998
February	268	0	229	35	9,072	56	55	21,939	643	31,011
March	271	2,349	227	32	(5,206)	56	55	0	641	(2,857)
<b>Total In -year pupil / place led adjustments</b>		<b>141,330</b>			<b>(8,042)</b>			<b>173,129</b>		<b>306,417</b>
Enhanced Provision (in-year changes in pupil top-ups)										865
Enhanced Provision (in-year increases in place numbers)										8,333
Preston Enhanced Provision - Teaching Support Sept 22 - Mar 23										15,243
Additional funding - Steps provision Sep 22 - Mar 23										33,943
Excluded Pupils / 6th Day Provision - Mayfield (Sept - Mar)										70,158
In-year pupil specific additional funding		29,891			90,870			(19,856)		100,905
<b>Total - In-Year adjustments</b>		<b>171,221</b>			<b>82,828</b>			<b>153,273</b>		<b>535,864</b>
Special School / High Needs contingency budget										400,000
<b>(under) / over</b>										<b>135,864</b>

## Financial Report School Forum 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023

### DSG School Allocations

The following information is provided to show the individual allocations to schools for 2023 -2024. The allocations were issued to schools in early February.

#### PRIMARY & SECONDARY - SCHOOL ALLOCATIONS FOR 23/24

School Name	Pupil Numbers Oct 22	AWPU	School Specific Lump Sum	Deprivation FSM / IDACI	Low Cost, High incidence SEN Attainment	Mobility	PFI	Split Sites	NDR General Rates	English as an Additional Language	2023/24 Total Formula Allocation	23/24 Funding to meet minimums £4,405 P & £5,715 S	23/24 Revised Formula Allocation	2023/24 Total MFG Allocation	Total School Allocation Formula or MFG	Total School Allocation Determined by	Total Funding per pupil	Nursery Funding	EHCP Above £6k	Enhanced Provision	De-delegation Excludes Academies	Pupil Premium	Rates paid by ESFA	2023/24 Total School Funding
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
All Saints Babbacombe C of E Primary School	194	658,436	128,000	118,210	80,607	0	0	0	4,019	3,387	992,660	0	992,660	960,459	992,660	Formula	5,116.80	0	47,410	0	0	78,525	(4,019)	1,114,576
Barton Hill Academy	573	1,944,762	128,000	551,082	225,964	5,377	0	13,523	9,830	12,067	2,890,625	0	2,890,625	3,016,405	MFG	5,264.23	224,916	176,363	76,120	0	0	431,575	(9,830)	3,915,549
Brixham C of E Primary School	208	705,952	128,000	94,510	52,911	0	0	0	4,466	1,346	987,184	0	987,184	980,923	987,184	Formula	4,746.08	101,674	59,150	0	0	78,905	(4,466)	1,222,447
Cockington Primary School	492	1,669,848	128,000	374,656	187,329	3,289	0	10,957	25,468	0	2,399,547	0	2,399,547	2,344,078	2,399,547	Formula	4,877.13	0	105,293	0	0	289,765	(10,957)	2,783,648
Collaton St. Mary C of E Primary School	205	695,770	128,000	102,660	40,772	0	0	0	5,478	2,036	974,715	0	974,715	954,058	974,715	Formula	4,754.71	0	58,812	0	0	70,175	(5,478)	1,098,224
Curledge Street Academy	384	1,303,296	128,000	293,730	196,373	2,797	0	9,062	9,523	14,715	1,957,496	0	1,957,496	1,883,656	1,957,496	Formula	5,097.65	146,785	120,724	0	0	238,150	(9,523)	2,453,632
Eden Park Primary Academy	380	1,289,720	128,000	225,870	132,063	0	0	8,968	6,810	6,084	1,797,515	0	1,797,515	1,750,047	1,797,515	Formula	4,730.30	147,385	98,459	0	0	191,635	(6,810)	2,228,184
Elacombe Academy	332	1,126,808	128,000	315,325	124,082	18,976	0	7,835	5,939	13,392	1,740,357	0	1,740,357	1,675,023	1,740,357	Formula	5,242.04	126,963	92,941	0	0	231,300	(5,939)	2,185,622
Furzeham Primary and Nursery School	249	845,106	128,000	146,820	89,004	9,507	0	32,204	5,249	0	1,255,890	0	1,255,890	1,199,150	1,255,890	Formula	5,043.73	64,247	22,715	0	0	118,075	(32,204)	1,428,723
Galmpton C of E Primary School	222	753,468	128,000	61,435	52,760	0	0	0	2,645	1,340	999,648	0	999,648	977,135	999,648	Formula	4,502.92	0	24,907	0	0	44,635	(2,645)	1,066,545
Hayes School	377	1,279,538	128,000	298,366	123,631	3,194	0	0	5,683	8,642	1,847,055	0	1,847,055	1,799,004	1,847,055	Formula	4,899.35	113,694	61,789	0	0	237,455	(5,683)	2,254,310
Homelands Primary School	210	712,740	128,000	151,528	62,324	0	137,832	0	27,392	6,090	1,225,906	0	1,225,906	1,134,094	1,225,906	Formula	5,837.65	37,157	25,302	0	(6,188)	108,745	(27,392)	1,363,530
Isham Academy	173	587,162	128,000	69,525	21,425	1,531	0	4,083	1,818	4,744	818,288	0	818,288	801,736	818,288	Formula	4,729.99	0	7,417	0	0	50,120	(1,818)	874,007
Kings Ash Academy	342	1,160,748	128,000	373,015	138,092	9,904	0	13,210	5,991	0	1,828,960	0	1,828,960	1,791,580	1,828,960	Formula	5,347.84	137,082	112,849	0	0	327,150	(13,210)	2,392,831
Oldway Primary School	645	2,189,130	128,000	257,680	150,797	0	0	15,310	8,764	0	2,749,681	106,854	2,856,535	2,858,320	2,856,535	MFG	4,431.50	130,548	161,212	0	0	216,880	(15,310)	3,351,650
Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Primary School	148	502,312	128,000	116,485	68,757	2,948	0	0	7,219	11,617	837,339	0	837,339	820,257	837,339	Formula	5,657.70	0	57,089	0	0	89,090	(7,219)	976,299
Preston Primary School	324	1,099,656	128,000	106,385	119,635	0	0	0	6,605	2,685	1,462,966	0	1,462,966	1,446,184	1,462,966	Formula	4,515.33	0	135,596	195,370	0	104,220	(6,605)	1,891,547
Priory Roman Catholic Primary School	69	234,186	128,000	54,255	35,008	4,593	0	0	2,790	2,036	460,868	0	460,868	447,484	460,868	Formula	6,679.24	0	35,701	0	0	47,255	(2,790)	541,034
Roselands Primary School	330	1,120,020	128,000	134,285	80,931	0	0	0	7,834	1,340	1,472,410	0	1,472,410	1,464,996	1,472,410	Formula	4,461.85	0	87,323	0	0	128,080	(7,834)	1,679,979
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary and Nursery School	198	672,012	128,000	103,265	84,200	113	0	4,673	3,046	8,433	1,003,742	0	1,003,742	977,414	1,003,742	Formula	5,069.40	76,810	71,863	0	0	90,435	(3,046)	1,238,804
Sherwell Valley Primary School	625	2,121,250	128,000	237,410	192,077	0	0	0	66,560	0	2,745,297	74,389	2,819,685	2,820,092	MFG	4,512.15	206,140	74,985	0	(10,948)	173,325	(66,560)	3,197,034	
Shiphay Learning Academy	424	1,439,056	128,000	156,658	119,023	0	0	7,270	5,406	0	1,855,413	19,577	1,874,990	1,877,454	MFG	4,427.96	119,434	70,490	0	0	146,120	(7,270)	2,206,228	
St Michael's C of E Academy	77.5	263,035	128,000	31,720	19,889	0	0	0	4,733	0	447,377	0	447,377	417,486	447,377	Formula	5,772.61	35,383	0	0	0	16,005	0	498,765
St. Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School	64	217,216	128,000	39,465	20,640	5,821	0	0	4,367	673	416,182	0	416,182	400,755	416,182	Formula	6,502.84	0	11,435	0	0	27,645	(4,367)	450,895
St. Margaret's Academy	403	1,367,782	128,000	270,865	166,389	0	0	6,042	7,430	0	1,946,508	0	1,946,508	1,909,878	1,946,508	Formula	4,830.04	0	113,495	77,846	0	184,025	(6,042)	2,315,832
St. Marychurch C of E Primary School	285	967,290	128,000	187,735	96,154	3,752	0	0	5,222	2,001	1,390,153	0	1,390,153	1,356,212	1,390,153	Formula	4,877.73	65,102	39,548	0	0	137,800	(5,222)	1,627,381
Torre C of E Primary School	301	1,021,594	128,000	190,951	88,196	11,283	0	0	6,400	13,642	1,460,065	0	1,460,065	1,386,909	1,460,065	Formula	4,850.72	99,224	59,990	0	0	137,755	(6,400)	1,750,634
Upton St. James Primary	93	315,642	128,000	90,155	39,912	397	0	2,195	1,547	1,363	578,211	0	578,211	549,512	578,211	Formula	6,217.32	0	17,910	0	0	79,220	(1,547)	673,794
Warberry C of E Primary School	401	1,360,994	128,000	218,538	77,362	0	0	0	6,501	7,331	1,798,726	0	1,798,726	1,776,648	1,798,726	Formula	4,485.60	152,770	36,330	0	0	152,640	(6,501)	2,133,965
Watcombe Primary School	197	666,618	128,000	177,165	75,860	0	0	18,089	1,363	0	1,069,095	0	1,069,095	1,057,524	1,069,095	Formula	5,426.88	79,934	134,474	0	(4,285)	112,035	(18,089)	1,373,165
White Rock Primary School	624	2,117,856	128,000	237,688	186,636	0	0	15,053	4,014	0	2,689,247	74,526	2,763,773	2,764,471	MFG	4,430.24	218,533	135,643	0	(12,593)	224,265	(15,053)	3,315,296	
<b>TOTAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>	<b>9,549.5</b>	<b>32,411,003</b>	<b>3,968,000</b>	<b>5,787,436</b>	<b>3,147,802</b>	<b>83,481</b>	<b>137,832</b>	<b>50,339</b>	<b>319,829</b>	<b>193,401</b>	<b>46,099,124</b>	<b>275,347</b>	<b>46,374,470</b>	<b>45,598,944</b>	<b>46,505,604</b>			<b>2,283,782</b>	<b>2,257,215</b>	<b>349,336</b>	<b>(34,013)</b>	<b>4,563,005</b>	<b>(319,829)</b>	<b>55,605,100</b>
Brixham Academy	988	4,958,620	128,000	684,240	414,103	0	0	0	34,560	10,955	6,230,478	0	6,230,478	6,080,954	6,230,478	Formula	6,306.15	0	250,989	261,097	0	323,825	(34,560)	7,031,829
Churston Ferrers Academy	751	3,776,543	128,000	193,841	3,535	0	0	0	37,888	0	4,139,807	190,046	4,329,853	4,328,739	4,329,853	Formula	5,765.45	0	20,040	0	0	70,995	(37,888)	4,383,000
Paignton Community & Sports Academy	1,481	7,390,585	128,000	1,219,248	678,213	0	0	213,683	80,128	37,591	9,747,448	0	9,747,448	9,559,103	9,747,448	Formula	6,581.67	0	227,473	121,512	0	599,870	(80,128)	10,616,175
St Cuthbert Mayne Joint Catholic and C of E School	919	4,593,799	128,000	935,272	392,683	20,210	0	0	28,160	40,784	6,138,907	0	6,138,907	5,939,084	6,138,907	Formula	6,679.99	0	115,636	0	(23,147)	411,055	(28,160)	6,614,291
The Spire College	1,052	5,292,220	128,000	926,300	422,048	0	701,094	36,460	52,298	15,650	7,574,069	0	7,574,069	7,005,916	7,574,069	Formula	7,199.69	0	194,611	229,755	(21,553)	356,380	(52,298)	8,280,964
Torquay Academy	1,240	6,222,808	128,000	1,034,817	537,023	0	0	0	53,760	6,260	7,982,668	0	7,982,668	7,809,596	7,982,668	Formula	6,437.64	0	201,900	0	0	465,445	(53,760)	8,596,253
Torquay Boys' Academy	821	4,124,869	128,000	175,799	21,490	0	0	0	44,585	1,565	4,496,300	240,292	4,736,600	4,731,133	4,736,600	Formula	5,769.31	0	3,100	0	0	60,005	(44,585)	4,755,120
Torquay Grammar School for Girls	779	3,911,131	128,000	151,175	1,015	0	0	0	38,144	3,130	4,232,595	257,534	4,490,129	4,480,871	4,490,129									

**SPECIAL SCHOOL FUNDING ALLOCATIONS 23/24**

Type of Place	Number of agreed Places Apr 23	Number of agreed Places Sep 23	Number of Pupils Jan 23	Funding Per Place £	Per Pupil top-up above £10k £	Place Funding £	Pupil Funding £	Other Funding £	Total Funding £
<b>Combe Pafford</b>									
Autism	83	92	92	10,000	8,757	882,500	805,644		1,688,144
BESD 1	19	19	16	10,000	9,708	190,000	155,328		345,328
SLD	5	5	2	10,000	9,498	50,000	18,996		68,996
Hearing	1	2	1	10,000	9,288	15,833	9,288		25,121
MLD 1	27	17	32	10,000	940	211,667	30,080		241,747
MLD 2	42	42	34	10,000	2,392	420,000	81,328		501,328
MLD 3	30	30	30	10,000	4,330	300,000	129,900		429,900
PD	17	17	16	10,000	8,757	170,000	140,112		310,112
SpecLD	3	3	4	10,000	4,226	30,000	16,904		46,904
SLCN	37	37	41	10,000	8,476	370,000	347,516		717,516
Visual	1	1	0	10,000	14,556	10,000	0		10,000
Additional funding for specific pupils								67,402	67,402
Funding previously paid as grant for Teachers Pay & Pensions (£660 per place)								174,900	174,900
To mirror 3.4% increase in mainstream schools additional grant								145,120	145,120
Pupil Premium								146,615	146,615
<b>Totals</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>268</b>			<b>2,650,000</b>	<b>1,735,096</b>	<b>534,037</b>	<b>4,919,133</b>
<b>Mayfield &amp; Chestnut</b>									
PMLD	45	45	41	10,000	17,538	450,000	719,058		1,169,058
BESD1 - Chestnut	32	32	32	10,000	15,423	320,000	493,536		813,536
SLD	186	186	188	10,000	9,393	1,860,000	1,765,884		3,625,884
Outreach Service								226,444	226,444
Excluded Pupils / 6th day provision - April - Aug								51,205	51,205
Occombe House rent								47,378	47,378
Additional funding for specific pupils								193,728	193,728
Funding previously paid as grant for Teachers Pay & Pensions (£660 per place)								173,580	173,580
To mirror 3.4% increase in mainstream schools additional grant								188,342	188,342
Pupil Premium								187,090	187,090
<b>Totals</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>261</b>			<b>2,630,000</b>	<b>2,978,478</b>	<b>1,067,767</b>	<b>6,676,245</b>
<b>Brunel &amp; Burton</b>									
Brunel - SEMH Pupils	56	55	55	10,000	18,075	554,167	994,125		1,548,292
Burton - Alternative Provision Pupils	55	55	46	10,000	13,206	550,000	607,476		1,157,476
Additional funding for specific pupils								0	0
Brunel - Funding previously paid as grant for Teachers Pay & Pensions (£660 per place)								36,575	36,575
Burton - Funding previously paid as grant for Teachers Pay & Pensions (£660 per place)								36,300	36,300
Brunel - To mirror 3.4% increase in mainstream schools additional grant								52,124	52,124
Burton - To mirror 3.4% increase in mainstream schools additional grant								42,440	42,440
Brunel - Pupil Premium								41,400	41,400
Burton - Pupil Premium								28,980	28,980
<b>Totals</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>101</b>			<b>1,104,167</b>	<b>1,601,601</b>	<b>237,819</b>	<b>2,943,587</b>
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>630</b>			<b>6,384,167</b>	<b>6,315,175</b>	<b>1,839,623</b>	<b>14,538,965</b>

**Financial Report School Forum 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Position**

The forecast outturn position of the Local Area continues to be of significant concern. The position although better understood remains volatile and continued actions and momentum are required across the system to meet needs differently.

**The in year overspend of the DSG is currently £2.732m**

**The cumulative overspend of the DSG is now £11.863m**

**Recommendation**

School Forum continue to work with the Local Authority to make the necessary reductions in the budget through the Safety Valve process.



Department  
for Education

## Dedicated Schools Grant ‘Safety Valve’ Agreement: Torbay

1. This agreement is between the Department for Education and Torbay Council, and covers the financial years from 2022-23 to 2026-27.
2. The authority undertakes to reach a positive in-year balance on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) account by the end of 2025-26 and in each subsequent year. The authority undertakes to control and reduce the cumulative deficit as follows, not including any contribution made by the department through this agreement:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Forecast DSG Deficit Profile at year end £m</b>
<b>2022-23</b>	£11.7m
<b>2023-24</b>	£13.0m
<b>2024-25</b>	£13.4m
<b>2025-26</b>	£12.9m
<b>2026-27</b>	£11.3m

3. The authority agrees to implement the DSG management plan that it has set out. This includes action to:
  - 3.1. Maintain existing special school numbers through increasing parental confidence and provision within mainstream settings;
  - 3.2. Create a culture change in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services, driving forward inclusive practice and workforce development;

- 3.3. Reform Torbay's graduated response and address multi-agency contributions to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs);
  - 3.4. Implement the Independent Placement Overview Panel to ensure that decision making on awarding EHCPs and placements is rigorous and appropriate for children and young people;
  - 3.5. Build confidence within the parental community on the level of provision that can be provided within special schools and enhanced resource bases;
  - 3.6. Implement a Transitions Panel to ensure timely and effective Post-16 planning from an earlier age, including targeted employment and education support, and cessation of Post-16 EHCPs where needs have been met;
  - 3.7. Develop an early years outreach team as part of the Family Hub, to deliver stronger inclusive practice and early intervention;
  - 3.8. Implement the co-produced new graduated response for Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), led by the commissioner for mental health services, working with early help and education provisions.
4. The authority also agrees to ongoing monitoring of its performance in fulfilling this agreement. The authority will:
- 4.1. Report tri-annually (as a minimum) in writing to the Department (Funding Policy Unit) on its progress towards implementing the plan as per the conditions set out in paragraphs 2 and 3;
  - 4.2. The monitoring reports should include progress against the conditions of grant and a financial dashboard detailing various metrics relating to demand and cost. DfE will provide a template for this;
  - 4.3. Inform the Department (Funding Policy Unit) of any unforeseen difficulties or impacts of carrying out the agreement, or any significant risks to reaching the agreed financial position as soon as they arise;

- 4.4. Meet with the Department at any time when the Department deems it necessary to discuss progress towards the agreement.
5. The Department agrees to pay to the authority an additional **£5.16 million** of DSG before the end of the financial year 2022-23. In subsequent financial years, subject to compliance with the conditions set out in paragraph 3, the Department will pay DSG sums as follows. This funding will be provided in instalments and subject to continued satisfactory progress. Subject to full compliance, Torbay should therefore eliminate their cumulative deficit no later than 2026-27.

<b>Year</b>	<b>The Department agrees to pay to the authority an additional £m of DSG by year end</b>
<b>2022-23</b>	£5.16m
<b>2023-24</b>	£1.55m
<b>2024-25</b>	£1.55m
<b>2025-26</b>	£1.55m
<b>2026-27</b>	£3.10m

6. This agreement is subject to review at any time, for example as a result of the following events:
- 6.1. Higher or lower DSG formula funding levels for the authority in future financial years than those the authority has assumed;
  - 6.2. Significant changes to national SEND policy which impact on elements of the plan;
  - 6.3. Insufficient progress being made towards the authority reaching and sustaining an in-year balance on its DSG account as set out in the plan.

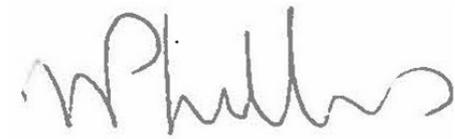
The review process will include an assessment of the impact of the change in circumstances.

On behalf of Torbay Council, signed by:

Anne-Marie Bond - LA Chief Executive

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Bond', written in a cursive style.

Martin Phillips - Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Phillips', written in a cursive style.

Nancy Meehan - Director of Children's Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Meehan', written in a cursive style.

On behalf of the Department for Education, signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Goldman', written in a cursive style.

Tom Goldman – Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit

# Agenda Item 5

## Safety Valve Progress Report – March 2023 (SEND Data for Safety Valve)

This overview report shows work to date in relation to the Safety Valve Programme.

Torbay Funded Plans 2023	Target EHCPs = 1568												by 31st March 2023
31/03/2023	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	YEAR END Totals
EHCPs Start of Month	1612	1593	1590	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Plans Issued	16	10	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43
Transfers In	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
<b>EHCPs IN SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>								
Ceased Plans	32	11	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	71
Moved Out	3	4	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
Made Inactive/Deceased	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>EHCPs OUT SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>92</b>								
<b>EHCPs Month To Date</b>	<b>1593</b>	<b>1590</b>	<b>1570</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1570</b>								

Requests for statutory assessment (RSA) received.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year Total
<b>2019</b>	25	38	33	25	37	34	17	7	25	26	24	28	319
<b>2020</b>	27	23	12	15	13	15	23	6	12	17	22	21	206
<b>2021</b>	21	27	58	23	31	26	27	7	11	16	35	27	309
<b>2022</b>	32	27	46	36	42	32	30	16	26	21	19	18	345
<b>2023</b>	30	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	64

RSAs – Data compared to last year (2021)

- Requests for statutory assessment have increased by 11.7 % in 2022, compared to last year. In 2021 the total number of requests for statutory assessment was 309, compared to the 345 requests received in 2022.
- Average RSAs first half of 2022 the average was 35.6 per month. For the second half of 2022 the average per month is 21.6. RSA data has begun to dip from October 2022. We are now meeting our specified WSoA target of 20 RSAs per month. This target decreases to 15 RSAs per month in July 2023.
- In 2023, we have so far received a greater number of RSAs than our target number. This is understood as the Graduated Response has not yet been rolled out but will be in the Summer term. This is also understood in that the support for mental health and wellbeing and speech and language is not yet accessible as part of the graduated response.

RSA - Refusal rates, year on year

- 2019 97/316 31%
- 2020 51/206 25%
- 2021 89/309 29%
- 2022 119/340 35%
- January 2023 we had a refusal rate of 40%
- Year to date \*until 29/03/2023\* we have 95 RSAs and have refused 24. Currently 25%, however this will change as and when RSAs are processed.

The new co-produced Graduated Response pilot which has just begun, and the Next steps meetings (which support multi agency planning for decisions not to assess) support the

growing understanding of meeting needs at SEND support and without an EHCP and encourage parental confidence in SEND support plans.

The refusal to assess rate is increasing due to numbers of RSA's which aren't evidencing a robust implementation of the Graduated Response. The latter part of 2022 shows a reduction RSA submission which brings our data in line with the WSOA target but this has not been sustained into 2023.

#### New EHCPs issued

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year Total
<b>2019</b>	14	8	10	12	8	9	20	10	28	30	26	16	191
<b>2020</b>	16	9	11	17	17	31	17	8	12	9	10	9	166
<b>2021</b>	6	9	25	14	11	36	29	14	22	18	18	6	208
<b>2022</b>	5	13	19	20	23	22	23	14	20	17	14	14	204
<b>2023</b>	16	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	26

#### Compared to last year

- There has been a decrease of 2% of final EHC plans being issued, from 2021 to 2022.
- Average final plans being issued in the first half of 2022 was 17 per month. For the second half of 2022 the average per month is also 17.
- The number of plans issued in 2022 is lower than in 2021, which was deemed to be a Covid recovery period with SENCO's submitting RSA's which would have been submitted the year before (2020). From August 2022 there has been a reduction in the number of EHCP's issued per month, this will be continued to be monitored through Safety Valve work into the new year which an expectation for this to remain low.

#### EHCPs 'made inactive' (ceased/moved away)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year Total
<b>2019</b>	15	10	24	4	6	19	24	47	51	32	6	7	245
<b>2020</b>	19	15	17	5	9	6	4	3	9	47	10	13	157
<b>2021</b>	6	13	6	5	10	9	8	15	33	4	16	8	133
<b>2022</b>	7	6	23	11	15	5	21	7	28	17	47	45	232
<b>2023</b>	37	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52

#### Compared to last year

- Comparing the first two months, year on year; there has been a 300% increase in cessation.
- Made inactive plans have increased by 65% from 2021 to 2022.
- A further 25 + 41 (dual) are currently ceasing in progress.
- A significant 74% increase in ceasing plans, from 2021 to 2022
- 2 cared for pupil's EHC plans have been ceased, as their outcomes were achieved, and another pupil secured paid employment
- 8 care experienced pupil's EHC plans have been ceased, for numerous reasons including employment/outcomes achieved/no longer wishes to engage in education
- There is one child that is cared for EHCP ceasing in progress
- There are two children who were care experienced EHCPs ceasing in progress

The table below illustrates that targeted ceasing activity is taking place in the age categories.

<b>AGE GROUPS (2022 / February 2023)</b>	<b>Made Inactive</b>	<b>Ceasing in Prog Total</b>
Age 0-4	0	0
Age 5-10	4	8
Age 11-15	5	24
Age 16-19	28	19
Age 20-25	15	3
<b>Total number of EHCPs by Age Group</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>54</b>

March year to date (as at 29/03/2023) there have been 69 EHC plans made inactive and with 66 ceasing in progress.

In 2022 there has been a significant increase from 2020/2021 in the number of plans ceased in the 16-25 category because of the robust Safety Valve work and monitoring of and reengagement of those young people that are NEET. In the next quarter there will be an increase in the ceasing of EHCP's pre 16 where outcomes of those children/young people have been met.

In 2023 we will be aiming to meet Phase transfer for Year 6 and Year 11 and (new for 2023) Year 2 which will improve the quality of our EHCP's and ensure that outcomes are robust and able to be met.

SEND are moving to a new way of working for Phase Transfer with a consistent worker for Secondary and Post 16 transition to see if we can promote consistency and parity of approach.

### Tribunals and Appeals

<b>Registered cases by calendar year</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Tribunals	6	9	7	9	17	4
Mediations	2	0	6	2	19	3

Tribunals and appeals have increased significantly since our November 2021 inspection. It is evidence that where Tribunal and Appeal is deemed necessary that pathways are understood.

Torbay have been successful in two Tribunals on refusal to issue, based on our assessment process.

Torbay Head of SEND improvement feels that the decisions made are sufficiently robust to attend Tribunal with a strong chance of the Tribunal not allowing the appeal. This will be enhanced by our Education, health and care management board.

Torbay conduct Informal mediations (started in 2021) and Next Steps meetings (started September 22) There have been 49 Next Steps meetings, 14 moved to assessment – 3 issued, 1 declined, 10 undergoing assessment.

9 awaiting mediation applications or further contact. 20 completed with no further action required. 2 moved to Section 19 action. 3 possible RSA's pending. 1 appeal on no to issue pending.

We are going to need to commission more Global Mediations to meet the increased demand.

### Health

The contribution of health funding required has been identified. The work with Health partners to ensure that a budget and process is created has escalated and is understood at a strategic level, The Chief Nurse, ICB Board and NHS Commissioner are all engaged in the conversations and bringing forward an agreed process.

Detailed work has been conducted on the ASQ3 data and the outcomes being achieved by children at age 2-3 in Speech Language and Communication. The data at this stage demonstrates that the majority of children are reaching their developmental milestones, leading to no additional support or intervention being provided. The data on entry to school for the same group and the requests for statutory assessment for SLCN does not match the profile of needs being seen within our SEND population. This work continues to be analysed in depth to form our response to early intervention and pathways of support to improve outcomes without the escalation to an EHCP.

Every new RSA for a child under 5 and every Educational Psychology report will include this data to ensure comparative data and feedback of anomalies.

### Next steps

- Health to identify a budget for the contribution of Health funding into EHCP plans.
- Joint working with our Sector Led Improvement Partner to consider best practice from their own JAP panels
- Communication to go out to parents and carers about the new integration pathways
- Co-production of the pathway from application to decision making process.
- Continue to deep dive our ASQ3 information to inform next steps around SLCN and preventative work.
- To take forward action planning from EHCP and Annual Review quality assurance

### Front loading – Resource and Capacity

We have brought in extra capacity to support our programme

- Consultant support with expertise in the SEND, WSOA And Special education need – joint funded with health
- An additional SEND monitoring officer in place to support the AR process and cessation of the plans
- Full time FTC – Project Manager (2 year to be reviewed) – joint funded with health
- SEND helpline officer full time in recruitment
- Head of Service for SEND and Inclusion in situ

- Recruitment request for a SEND service manager
- We have built into our base budget £300k for on-going SEND improvement work, ensuring that we can continue to target our resources and capacity to deliver the ambitions within the plan.

Next steps:

- The Graduated response launch is being rolled out to all schools during the Summer term following the pilot feedback and necessary amendments. This is being brought forward to ensure that the impact across the system can be felt and lived experiences start to change.
- The roll out of the Family Hubs, uniting the Early Help, SALT and home learning environments and the configuration of early identification and early support through this model.
- The creating of a pooled budget for workforce development plan that builds and challenges our collective culture and knowledge. This plan will include the commissioning of external and accredited training and consultancy for schools.
- Business case for addressing Amendments backlog is being discussed
- Recruitment is under way for vacancies
- There is a health audit being completed to look at funding which should be provided from health for children's needs



HM Government

# Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan

Right Support, Right Place, Right Time

March 2023





# **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan**

**Right Support, Right Place, Right Time**

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

**March 2023**



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to the Department for Education at [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](https://www.education.gov.uk/contactus).

ISBN 978-1-5286-3924-8

E02864447      03/23

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

# Contents

Table of figures	2
Ministerial Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	15
Chapter 2: A national system underpinned by National Standards	21
Chapter 3: Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood	44
Chapter 4: A skilled workforce and excellent leadership	52
Chapter 5: Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress	70
Chapter 6: A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes	81
Conclusion	91
Annex A – Consultation response summary	92
Annex B – The government’s vision for the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system and delivery approach	94
Annex C – The future Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system	96

# Table of figures

Figure 1: A vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation..... 16

Figure 2: A three-tier model for alternative provision .....25

Figure 3: National Standards .....26

## Ministerial Foreword

Children only get one childhood. They deserve to get the support they need to thrive and prepare for happy, healthy and productive adulthoods. For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or in alternative provision, this is especially vital.



There is much to celebrate about the SEND system: many children and young people with SEND, from birth to 25, receive excellent support from thousands of dedicated education, health and care staff. 89% of state-funded special schools and 87% of state-funded alternative provision schools are graded outstanding or good by Ofsted<sup>1</sup>.

However, we know from listening to children, young people and families that significant issues remain. We know that some families feel frustrated by the system and feel they need to battle to access specialist education, health or care services including from mental health services. We know that providers and services are facing delivery pressures.

It is time to deliver a more dignified experience for children and young people with SEND and to restore families' confidence in the system.

The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, published in March 2022 alongside the Schools White Paper, set out bold proposals to deliver a generational change for a more inclusive system.

With earlier identification and evidence-based provision, delivered through new National Standards, more children and young people with SEND will fulfil their potential and be set up for long-term success.

Throughout the consultation, we heard from thousands of children and young people, families, those working in education, health, social care, and local government, as well as the voluntary and community sector. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

In many cases, the proposals set out in the green paper were welcomed. Typically, people agreed with our assessment of the current challenges in the system. There was broad support for the proposal for a new national SEND and alternative provision system that delivers timely, high-quality services and support in mainstream settings, alongside swift access to more local state specialist settings, where required.

---

<sup>1</sup> State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2022, Ofsted, November 2022

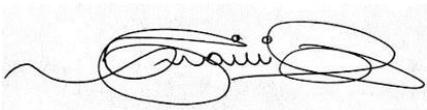
We also heard, particularly from parents, some concerns about whether proposals could make it harder to meet the individual needs of children and young people. Our ambition for this set of proposals is to create a sustainable SEND and alternative provision system that is easier for families to navigate. We want parents to have confidence that their child's needs will be met consistently and effectively as a result of earlier identification and evidence-based support.

This Improvement Plan draws on the rich feedback we heard from children and young people with SEND, their families and others. It is aligned with other reform programmes that we are taking forward to improve outcomes and experiences for all children and young people across education and care, including the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy and the upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review.

Concerted action is needed, including a period of designing and testing proposals to ensure they deliver for children and families. There are also steps we can all take in the short term to support and stabilise the system and address the immediate issues that exist, especially in the challenging economic climate we currently face.

Our Plan will be overseen by our respective departments through a new National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board jointly chaired by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy.

The steps in this Plan cannot be delivered by government alone and local system leaders can start now in learning from and adopting good practice from elsewhere. We ask that you join with us to rise to the challenge, and we look forward to working with you to deliver a single national system that delivers consistently for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.



Gillian Keegan  
Secretary of State for Education



Steve Barclay  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

## Executive Summary

1. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper explored the issues present within the current SEND system. It set out the government's proposals to improve outcomes for children and young people; improve experiences for families, reducing the current adversity and frustration they face; and deliver financial sustainability. It also considered the specific issues facing the alternative provision sector. This is because 82% of children and young people in state-place funded alternative provision have identified special educational needs (SEN)<sup>2</sup>, and it is increasingly being used to supplement local SEND systems.
2. The publication of the green paper marked the start of an extensive 16-week consultation (see Annex A). We attended 175 events, hearing from over 4,500 people including children, young people and families. We received around 6,000 responses to the online consultation, in addition to submissions from organisations and respondents received directly through email.

## Delivering for children and families

3. What we heard through the consultation – particularly from parents and families - gives us confidence to establish a new national SEND and alternative provision system with the mission to:
  - **fulfil children's potential:** children and young people with SEND (or attending alternative provision) enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment;
  - **build parents' trust:** parents and carers experience a fairer, easily navigable system (across education, health and care) that restores their confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place, at the right time;
  - **provide financial sustainability:** local leaders make the best use of record investment in the high needs budget to meet children and young people's needs and improve outcomes, while placing local authorities on a stable financial footing.
4. The foundation for the new nationally consistent SEND and alternative provision system will be new evidenced-based National Standards. Standards will improve early identification of needs and intervention, and set out clear expectations for the types of support that should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings. This will give families and providers clarity, consistency and confidence in the support that is ordinarily available, in order to be responsive to children's needs. With these expectations, and improved mainstream provision, more children and young people will receive the

---

<sup>2</sup> Special educational needs in England, Department for Education, 2022

support they need through ordinarily available provision in their local setting. Fewer will therefore need to access support through an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

5. For those children and young people with SEND who do require an EHCP and specialist provision, we want to ensure that parents experience a less adversarial system and restore their trust that their children will get prompt access to the support they need. We have heard parental concerns about the complexity they need to navigate in trying to get decisions made and provision agreed, and the frustration they feel whilst they wait for information to be confirmed and letters to be answered. Standardised EHCPs will reduce bureaucracy in the system; and alongside this publication, we are approving a tranche of applications from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline. This will mean that more children and young people have timely access to sufficient local special school places.
6. We are committed to delivering alternative provision that is fully integrated with the wider SEND system. Consultation feedback supported this integration and the vision of alternative provision we set out in the green paper. Respondents recognised the vital role that alternative provision can play in supporting children and young people to remain in mainstream education by offering early, targeted support; and in offering time-limited or transitional places in alternative provision schools for pupils who need more intensive support. The vast majority of pupils receiving alternative provision also have SEND, and these services need to be aligned throughout local planning and delivery. This is why we refer to measures about the 'SEND and alternative provision system' throughout this Plan, with specific reforms to alternative provision embedded within individual chapters.
7. We also heard about the growing challenges facing the system. Despite significant investment, local authority spending continues to outstrip funding. That is why we have already announced investment to support delivery of this Plan: £400 million of the £2 billion additional funding for schools, announced in the Autumn Statement, will be allocated to local authorities' high needs budgets in 2023-24. In 2023-24, high needs funding will be rising to £10.1 billion - an increase of over 50% from the 2019-20 allocations.
8. This extra funding will help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with SEND. It is clear, though, that more needs to be done to support and stabilise the system, as we deliver systemic changes to ensure we have a sustainable and effective system that delivers better outcomes for children and young people and improved services for families. As this Plan is implemented, we will carefully monitor the pace of progress towards the mission for the new national system, to ensure that reforms are working as intended for children and young people, their parents and families, and all those that work with them.

## **Creating a more inclusive society through a new national SEND and alternative provision system**

9. To fully realise our mission for the new national system, we agree with those respondents who called for us to seize this moment to reimagine what a more positive experience for children and young people with SEND and their families should look like in England (see Annex B). Our vision is to create a more inclusive society that celebrates and enables success in all forms, with the cultures, attitudes and environments to offer every child and young person the support that they need to participate fully, thrive and fulfil their potential. We want the process of identifying needs and accessing support to be early, dignified and affirmative, focusing on a child or young person's achievements, talents, and strengths. We also want the process to be easier to navigate, with parents being clear on what support they can expect for their child and where they can turn for help, including how to make use of support through the SEND Local Offer and SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).
10. This vision aligns with other key reforms underway across government. The recently published Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy envisages that every child and family who need it will have access to high-quality help no matter where they live. We have worked closely to ensure that the reforms across both SEND and Children's Social Care align, in recognition of the important overlap between these groups of children and young people and the services and systems designed to support them. The upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review will set out plans to spread the impact of high-quality multi-academy trusts and incentivise improvement for all children in all parts of the country, including support for children and young people with SEND who attend mainstream settings. In addition, a new Disability Action Plan will be consulted on and published in 2023, setting out the practical action ministers across government will take over the next two years to improve disabled people's lives.

## **Delivering National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards**

11. In the green paper, we proposed that the new single national SEND and alternative provision system should deliver consistent, clear and early support for children and young people with SEND. Through the consultation, we heard that a national system must give greater clarity to parents about the timely and accurate identification of needs, and how decisions around support are made from early years to post-16. Support should be put in place, based on a child or young person's needs, not where they happen to live, in line with this government's commitment to levelling up.
12. The national system, delivered through the collective impact of the policies set out in this Plan, will provide greater clarity on evidence-based support, share examples of best practice, and minimise perverse incentives that can prevent inclusion:

- For children and young people, this means that they will be able to access and regularly attend the most appropriate early years setting, school or college for their needs – be this mainstream or specialist.
- For parents and carers, a national system will provide clarity about what support their children should be receiving without a fight to secure what is appropriate, and without needing to navigate a complex system. This will increase confidence and, in turn, minimise disputes.
- For providers, it will give them clarity on the support they should be providing, who should be working together, and will enable government to hold delivery partners to account and intervene where expectations are not met. It will also provide clarity on the resources available to deliver the right provision, for example, by ensuring that the new National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards are clear on which budgets should be used to provide different types of support.

13. Critically, we agree with what we heard during the consultation: that the national system should be co-produced with families, children and young people, so we can build their confidence that the system will meet their needs quickly and effectively. We are actively engaging with children, young people and families from the earliest stages of development of the new system.

#### 14. **National Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision Standards**

(*National Standards*) will set clear and ambitious expectations for what good looks like in identifying and meeting needs, and clarify who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets, across the 0-25 system.

15. With the right resources and accountability in place, our intention as we deliver the new national system is for children's needs to be identified earlier and met more effectively. National Standards will place a greater emphasis on the important role mainstream settings play in providing quality first teaching and evidence-based SEN Support to meet the needs of the majority of pupils with SEND, so that all settings provide consistently high-quality provision. By improving early identification and the quality of SEN Support, we expect to reduce the need for EHCPs because the needs of more children and young people will be met without them, through ordinarily available provision. We are committed to working closely with children, young people and their families when writing the National Standards to ensure that the system is responsive to individual needs – and based on the latest evidence of what works – within a fair, consistent and sustainable national system.

16. The delivery of National Standards will be supported by new SEND and alternative provision practice guides for frontline professionals and an amended SEND Code of Practice for all system partners (which we will consult on). These will set out the wider processes and systems to ensure children and young people get the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

17. By the end of 2025, we will publish the first three practice guides focused on advice for mainstream settings. We will build on existing best practice, such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This will target the greatest areas of need in primary and secondary, as well as supporting the cross-government focus on improving the mental health of children and young people. We will identify any gaps in best practice to help build a stronger evidence base in the long term.
18. As we deliver the new national system, our objective is to ensure that all children's additional needs are met effectively and quickly within affordable provision, reducing the need for an EHCP and, where an EHCP is needed, to ensure that parents do not endure lengthy, adversarial and costly processes. We will judge our success, in part, by the extent to which we reduce parental complaints about their experiences of the system and the volume of cases parents take to Tribunal because of the better services we will deliver through the new national system. This will include swifter, better responses to parental concerns such as through our proposals for mediation and new guidance for local authority SEND casework teams, who play a vital role in supporting families to navigate the system and ensuring they have good experiences.
19. As we develop the National Standards, we will use these as a basis for developing a **national approach to delivering funding bands and tariffs** to support commissioners and providers to meet the expectations set out in the National Standards.

## Delivering a single national SEND and alternative provision system

20. This Plan sets out how an effective single national system based on the new National Standards will be delivered locally, through new local partnerships and an improved EHCP process to ensure that the experience of seeking support at every stage is less bureaucratic and less adversarial for families and providers alike.

### A national system underpinned by National Standards

21. We will:

- set up **engagement across education, health, and care** during spring 2023 to **develop National Standards**. This will include parents, carers, children and young people, strategic leaders, frontline professionals, voluntary sector representatives, local authorities and cross-government civil servants. This will ensure we consider a wide range of perspectives, including those with expertise across a broad range of needs, and in specific settings such as alternative provision, early years, youth justice and further education.

- by the end of 2023, start testing some elements of the **National Standards** with Regional Expert Partnerships (who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms via the Change Programme).
- **publish**, by the end of 2025, a significant proportion of the **National Standards** with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **introduce local SEND and alternative provision partnerships** that bring together partners to plan and commission support for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, meeting the National Standards.
- **expect local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to create evidence-based local inclusion plans** that will set out how the needs of children and young people in the local area will be met in line with National Standards.
- **develop and spread best practice of partnerships and plans** through our Change Programme, starting with the Regional Expert Partnership areas from spring 2023.
- invest **£2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to fund **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision. We are **approving a tranche of applications** from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline.
- **develop innovative approaches for short breaks** for children, young people and their families with **£30 million in funding** being allocated to new projects over three years.
- **review social care legislation relating to disabled children** so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to.
- **work with stakeholders to deliver a standard EHCP template, with supporting processes and guidance from 2025.** This will include testing the impact of a consistent approach to supporting local authority decision-making through the use of multi-agency panels.
- **develop digital requirements for EHCP systems** to improve experiences for parents, carers and professionals, reduce bureaucracy and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
- require local authorities to **improve information available to families** and provide a **tailored list of suitable settings informed by the local inclusion plan.** We will continue to listen to children, young people, families, SEND sector professionals and system leaders as we develop and test delivery options through the Change Programme.

- **create a three-tier alternative provision system**, focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination.

### **Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood**

22. Our ambition to enable children and young people to fulfil their potential means we need to place a far greater emphasis on preparation for adulthood. We want to have high aspirations for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, with smooth transitions into their next step, including further and higher education and employment.

23. We will:

- **publish guidance to support effective transitions** between all stages of education, and into employment and adult services.
- **conduct a pilot** to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard **English and mathematics requirements for apprenticeships**.
- **invest £18 million** between 2022 and 2025 to **double the capacity of the Supported Internships Programme**.
- continue to support the Department for Work and Pensions' **Adjustments Passport pilot** to smooth the transition into employment.
- **improve the Disabled Students' Allowance process** by continuing to work with the Student Loans Company to reduce the time for support to be agreed.

### **Delivering a single national system through three key enablers**

24. We agree with the feedback we heard that National Standards, and the single national system, will not deliver real change for parents and carers on their own. To deliver for children, young people and their parents, we need a stronger emphasis on improving the underpinning drivers that will make a national system a reality: a strong and robust workforce; strengthened accountabilities; and sustainable and fair resourcing. This Improvement Plan sets out our roadmap for implementing a single, national system and achieving real change in practice so that every child and young person can thrive.

### **A skilled workforce and excellent leadership**

25. We will:

- introduce a **new leadership level SENCo** (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) **NPQ** (National Professional Qualification) for schools.
- review the **Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks** (commencing early this year).

- **fund up to 5,000 early years staff** to gain an **accredited Level 3 early years SENCo qualification** to support the early years sector, with training running until August 2024.
- increase the **capacity of specialists**, including by investing a further £21 million to train two more cohorts of educational psychologists in the academic years 2024 and 2025; and, in partnership with NHS England, as part of our £70 million Change Programme, pioneering innovative practice through running Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders to improve access to **speech and language therapy** for those who need it.
- work together to take a **joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning**, including establishing a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which we aim to complete by 2025.
- publish the first **three practice guides** for frontline professionals, building on existing best practice, including the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- propose **new guidance** on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND **casework service** to families when consulting on the SEND Code of Practice.
- develop a **longer-term approach for teaching assistants** to ensure their impact is consistent across the system, starting with a **research project** to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.
- **strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO (Designated Social Care Officer) role** in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice.
- **extend funding** until March 2025 of the **alternative provision specialist taskforce (APST) pilot programme**, which is testing co-location of a diverse specialist workforce in pilot alternative provision schools.

### **Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress**

26. We will:

- **publish a local and national inclusion dashboard** from autumn 2023 to support the development of local inclusion plans, giving parents improved transparency of local performance, informing decision-making and driving self-improvement across the system with ongoing updates and iterations in response to user feedback.
- **deliver updated Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections** from 2023 with a greater focus on the outcomes and experience of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.

- create a **ladder of intervention for local areas** from 2023, **greater powers for the Secretary of State for Health** through the Health and Care Act 2022, and robust action for all where statutory duties for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision are not met, to **strengthen accountabilities** across all parts of the system.
- require every Integrated Care Board to have a **named Executive Board member lead accountable for SEND**.
- **facilitate a more joined-up response between the Department for Education and NHS England** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND, including social, emotional and mental health issues, and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.
- **strengthen redress for individual disagreements** by clarifying who is responsible for resolving complaints and undertaking further testing of effective mediation approaches.
- set up an **expert group** to support the development of a **bespoke national alternative provision performance framework**.
- work with local authority, trust and school leaders to review processes and develop options for **ensuring transparent and effective movement of pupils** without EHCPs, such as those requiring alternative provision, to address behavioural needs.

## **A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes**

27. We will:

- increase **core school funding by £3.5 billion** in 2023-24 compared to the year before, of which almost £1 billion of that increase will go towards high needs. This means high needs funding will be £10.1 billion in 2023-24.
- support **local authorities** through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes and share the best practice from local areas with inclusive and sustainable high needs provision more widely.
- develop a **system of funding bands and tariffs** so that consistent National Standards are backed by more consistent funding across the country.
- publish a response to the **consultation on the schools National Funding Formula** in 2023 which includes proposals on funding for SEND, including the notional SEND budget, and a mechanism for transferring funding to high needs budgets.
- develop **new approaches to funding alternative provision** aligned to their focus on preventative work with, and reintegration of pupils into, mainstream schools. We will do this in consultation with mainstream schools, the alternative provision sector and local authorities.
- re-examine the state's **relationship with independent special schools** to ensure we set comparable expectations for all state-funded specialist providers.

## A sustainable system set up for long-term success

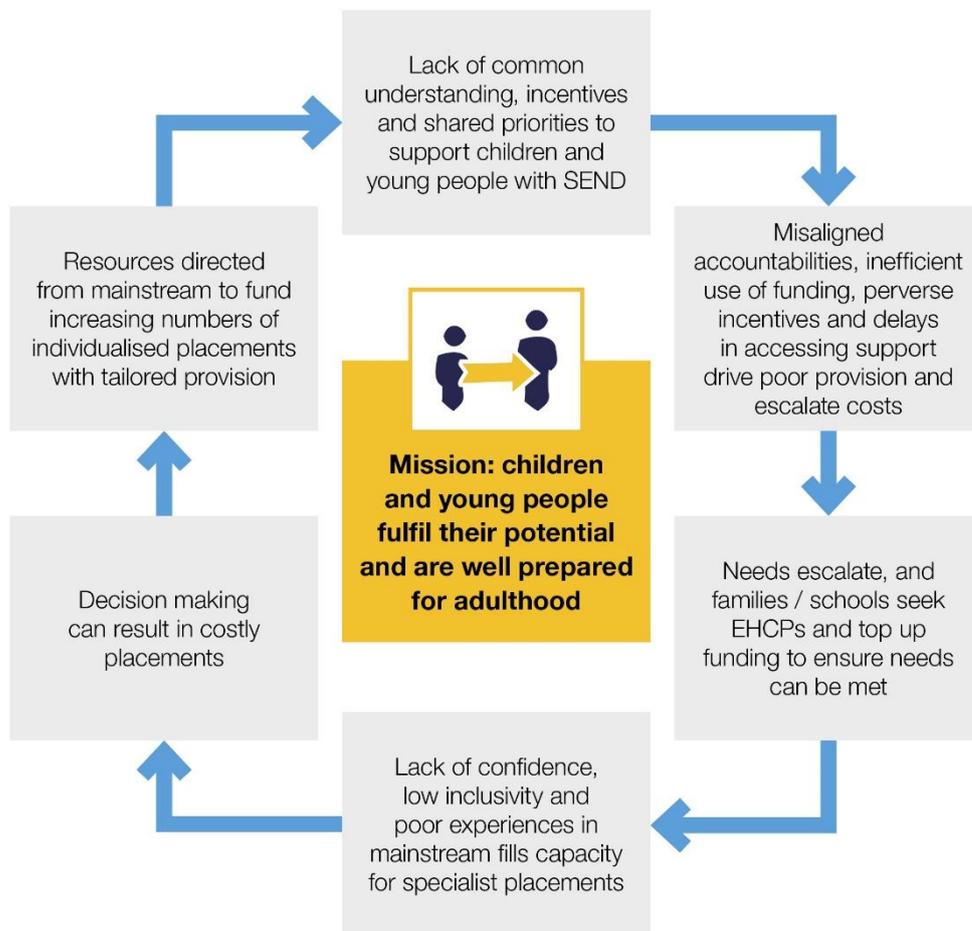
28. Our vision is that, once these reforms have been implemented, we will have achieved the following (see Annex C):

- The new **national SEND and alternative provision system will be well established** and bring national consistency to the identification of need and provision of support as set out in the evidence-based National Standards.
- The system will be **financially sustainable** for local authorities with needs routinely being met effectively where they arise.
- **Parents have confidence** that high-quality teaching and targeted evidence-based support will be available as a matter of course in mainstream settings when a need is identified, to avoid needs escalating.
- **Children and young people can access additional support** through a **fair and consistent process** where children, young people, families and professionals work together to put in place the right value-for-money support to meet their needs.
- Longer-term proposals, such as options for the tailored list, have been tested, co-produced and delivered.
- Evidence will emerge from **Regional Expert Partnerships** to support the co-production of careful and effective improvements to the statutory framework in the next Parliament.

29. The National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board will publish updates on progress in delivery against this Plan for children, young people and parents.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper identified 3 key challenges facing the system:
  - **The system is failing to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.** Children and young people with SEND are not consistently being helped to fulfil their potential.
  - **Parents' confidence in the system is in decline.** Too many parents have lost faith in a system that is not sufficiently responsive to them, which is increasingly adversarial, and in which they face long waiting times to access information and support for their children, including accessing therapists and mental health support.
  - **Despite substantial additional investment,** the system has become financially unsustainable. The government has increased investment in high needs by over 50% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, with no marked improvement in outcomes or experiences.
2. The green paper highlighted that there is a vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation that drives these challenges across the system. This cycle starts in early years and mainstream settings, where early identification of needs and provision of support does not happen consistently, despite the best efforts of the workforce. Children and young people's needs are identified late or incorrectly, with needs escalating and becoming more entrenched. The inconsistency across the system means that parents, carers and providers do not know what to reasonably expect from their local settings, resulting in low confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to effectively meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.
3. Due to this low confidence, parents, carers and providers feel they need to secure EHCPs and, in some cases, specialist provision as a means of guaranteeing support. This results in further challenges across the system. Parents feel that they have to navigate long, difficult processes to access information and support. As more children and young people receive EHCPs to be supported in mainstream and attend specialist settings, more resource and capacity is pulled to the specialist end of the system. There is then less resource available to deliver early intervention and effective, timely support in mainstream settings. As a result, the vicious cycle continues. The unprecedented investment into the high needs system has not been felt, especially by families, because outcomes and experiences do not improve.



**Figure 1: A vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation**

**4. The green paper proposed to improve outcomes and experiences within a fair and financially sustainable system in five ways:**

- Creating a single, national SEND and alternative provision system, underpinned by National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards for identifying and meeting need from early years to further education, regardless of place or needs.
- Improving capacity and expertise in mainstream education from early years to post-16. This is so that all those working with children and young people with SEND have the confidence and expertise to do so and can identify additional needs and access targeted support when this is needed.
- Ensuring there is appropriate, high-quality specialist provision for those who need it, with a clear vision for alternative provision in delivering early intervention.
- Identifying clear roles and responsibilities across the system, with strengthened accountabilities and funding reform to deliver National Standards effectively.
- Focusing on effective delivery from the very start and supporting the system to respond to immediate challenges whilst preparing for longer-term reform.

**Through the green paper consultation, we listened carefully to the views of many, including children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision**

5. Through the consultation, we wanted to understand whether our proposals would deliver a system across education, health and care that would deliver improved outcomes for children and young people, and better experiences for them and their families. We wanted to understand if the proposals would give families confidence that their children's needs would be met more consistently and effectively, through earlier identification and evidence-based support. We thank everyone who took the time to share their views with us. We have especially listened to the views of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, and their families.
6. The publication of the green paper marked the start of an extensive and accessible 16-week consultation period:
  - We attended 175 events, hearing from over 4,500 people, including children, young people and families.
  - We received around 6,000 responses to the online consultation questions. These included 21 specific questions, and a final question that allowed respondents to share general reflections.
  - We also received submissions from organisations and respondents directly through email.
7. An independent report on the consultation feedback, taking account of responses to the online consultation and feedback received via submissions and emails, has been produced. This Improvement Plan reflects the feedback that we received through events, through the online consultation, and through submissions from organisations and emails.

**The sequencing of our proposed reforms is based on consultation feedback**

8. We intend to move most quickly on the proposals where consultation feedback gives us confidence that they have the greatest potential to improve experiences for children, young people and families, with the lowest risk of unintended consequences.
9. Through our £70 million Change Programme, we will establish up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms. This will include the establishment of new local SEND and alternative provision partnerships, agreed local inclusion plans, strengthened accountabilities and new inclusion dashboards.
10. We will take the time to consider how to deliver those proposals which parents and those representing children were most concerned about. This is so that children, young people and their families can be confident that their needs and feedback are at the heart of any changes. We remain committed to delivering a tailored list of placements and proposals for mandatory mediation, as well as developing a national system of

funding bands and tariffs. However, we recognise the challenges and risks involved in such a move and will review and test these policies carefully through the Change Programme to ensure that they work and do not create unintended consequences for families.

11. We will use the findings from the Change Programme to inform future legislation to deliver these reforms. This would include new burdens assessments and consideration of the capacity required to manage the delivery of the reforms.

### **Delivering improved outcomes in a financially sustainable system**

12. Our goal is to achieve an inclusive system that enables children and young people to fulfil their potential, has parental trust and is financially sustainable. This will be a system in which local partners work together effectively with families to deliver for children and young people, with each partner accountable for playing their part. The right balance will be struck, so that more resources can be dedicated to providing timely, effective support early and as a matter of course in mainstream settings. This will reduce the need for as many parents to have to navigate lengthy statutory EHCP assessment processes.
13. This Improvement Plan sets out the next steps in a multi-year programme to deliver this improved system. This includes plans to design and test reforms, through our Change Programme, to inform future choices about delivery and put the system on a more efficient and financially sustainable footing. We will ensure that the system delivers effectively throughout this period, and we are taking action now to ensure that it does. The government has made substantial investment to secure the sustainability of the system, with the high needs budget rising by more than 50% over 5 years from 2019-20: it will increase to £10.1 billion in 2023-24.
14. Despite this substantial investment, a significant proportion of local authorities have accumulated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits due to high needs block overspends. The government has recently extended a 'statutory override'<sup>3</sup> on local authority DSG deficits for a one-off period of three years (up to March 2026), to give local authorities the flexibility they need to implement sustainable change.
15. We will continue to work with local authority leaders to ensure that we are all doing everything possible to ensure high-quality and sustainable systems which are delivering good value for money. It is important that, when the 'statutory override' comes to an end in 2026, local authorities are delivering high-quality SEND services for children, young people, and their families, as well as being in a position to manage their high needs DSG spending and eliminate accumulated deficits. We will continue to

---

<sup>3</sup> The statutory override treats DSG funding as separate from the general funding of local authorities, and any deficit an authority may have on its DSG account is kept separate from the authority's revenue account and placed in a separate account established solely for that purpose. This has recently been extended for a one-off period of three years up to and including the 2025-26 financial year.

support the sector through spreading best practice and disseminating practical lessons from those authorities that are improving their local service including moving to a more sustainable position. We will also continue to work with the sector to assess progress and, if the system is not on track to achieve such financial sustainability, take further action to ensure that local authorities can and do bring their high needs budgets back into balance.

## 16. We have three approaches to delivery:

- 1 – Support and stabilise:** We will support and stabilise the system, getting local areas working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and to ensure that local authority deficits are brought under control. This includes supporting local authorities with financial deficits through the **Delivering Better Value** and the **Safety Valve** programmes. Further information on these programmes is set out in chapter 6.
- 2 – Delivering capacity to address supply issues:** In the short to medium term, we will take action to address supply issues – ensuring that there is sufficient support available for children and young people when they need it, in the most efficient way. This includes **investing £2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to deliver **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision, reducing the need for costly independent provision.
- 3 – Design and test for systemic reform:** Our £70 million Change Programme will create up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships that will test and refine longer-term, systemic reforms including developing and testing National Standards, strategic partnerships and inclusion plans, the proposed alternative provision service and tailored lists. This will help guard against unintended consequences and build a strong evidence base to inform future funding and legislation.

## We will monitor progress towards delivering our mission

17. To understand whether the system is delivering on our mission, we would expect to see the following shifts:

- **Fulfil children’s potential:** Better outcomes driven by earlier identification of needs and evidence-based targeted support to meet needs promptly, including mental health support. Higher levels of attendance for those with SEN both in more inclusive mainstream settings and in alternative provision. Improvements in attainment, with more children identified with SEN and in alternative provision reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of primary education<sup>4</sup> and improved GCSE grades in English language and

---

<sup>4</sup> 18% of pupils with SEN reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2021/22, compared to 69% of those with no identified SEN, National curriculum assessments at key stage 2, Department for Education, 2022

mathematics<sup>5</sup>. For the very small number of children and young people for whom reaching the expected standard may not be an appropriate aim, we would expect to see an increase in the progress they make. Better preparation for adulthood at every age and stage means that those with SEND and in alternative provision are able to live more fulfilling and independent adult lives with improved employment outcomes.

- **Build parents' trust:** Families find it easier to navigate the system and access support. They have greater confidence in it, reporting better experiences of a system which is based on dignity and affirmation. Mainstream settings are seen as being high-quality and inclusive, valuing those with SEND. Specialist provision is seen to be delivering effectively and is available locally to those needing it without lengthy processes that are difficult to navigate.
- **Provide financial sustainability:** Local systems deploy their resources effectively such that spending shifts towards early intervention and away from costly specialist provision, where this is not required. Local authorities operate within their budgets and achieve value for money so that record investment in the high needs budget is used effectively and with evidenced outcomes that are financially sustainable. As a result, local authorities will be able to deliver high-quality services within budgets.

18. The actions we are taking now set a path towards delivering on our mission and we will monitor progress. As we design and test for systemic reform, using the Change Programme to help us, we will develop proposals further so that the objectives above can be achieved. As we do so, we will continue to work with children, young people, and families so that the proposals are responsive to children's needs, build confidence, and deliver positive change. In particular, for proposals that require primary legislation, we will set out further detail for consultation, supported by evidence from the Change Programme. We want to make sure that with every step we take to implement this Improvement Plan, we are building confidence that it will work, learning from experience and hearing the voices of children, young people and families.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 2021/22, 32% of pupils with SEN achieved grades 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs, compared to 76% of those with no identified SEN, GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics, Department for Education, 2022

## Chapter 2: A national system underpinned by National Standards

1. In the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, the government outlined a vision for an inclusive education system with excellent mainstream and specialist provision that puts children and young people first. Through the consultation, we heard that this approach was welcomed, but we needed to be clearer about what we meant by inclusion and what it would look like in practice. We also heard, particularly from parents and organisations supporting families, that we should be more ambitious in reimagining a society that is inclusive at every level. A society with cultures and environments that are designed to offer every child and young person the support they need to fulfil their potential, both within the classroom and beyond.

### We will:

- set up **engagement across education, health and care** during spring 2023 to **develop National Standards**. This will include parents, carers, children and young people, strategic leaders, frontline professionals, voluntary sector representatives, local authorities and cross-government civil servants. This will ensure we consider a wide range of perspectives, including those with expertise across a broad range of needs, and in specific settings such as alternative provision, early years, youth justice and further education.
- by the end of 2023, start testing some elements of the **National Standards** with Regional Expert Partnerships (who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms via the Change Programme).
- **publish**, by the end of 2025, a significant proportion of the **National Standards** with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **introduce local SEND and alternative provision partnerships** that bring together partners to plan and commission support for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, meeting the National Standards.
- **expect local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to create evidence-based local inclusion plans** that will set out how the needs of children and young people in the local area will be met in line with National Standards.
- **develop and spread best practice of partnerships and plans** through our Change Programme, starting with the Regional Expert Partnership areas from spring 2023.
- invest **£2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to fund **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision. We are **approving a tranche of applications** from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline.
- **develop innovative approaches for short breaks** for children, young people and their families with **£30 million in funding** being allocated to new projects over three years.

- **review social care legislation relating to disabled children** so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to.
- **work with stakeholders to deliver a standard EHCP template, with supporting processes and guidance from 2025.** This will include testing the impact of a consistent approach to supporting local authority decision-making through the use of multi-agency panels.
- **develop digital requirements for EHCP systems** to improve experiences for parents, carers and professionals, reduce bureaucracy and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
- require local authorities to **improve information available to families** and provide a **tailored list of suitable settings informed by the local inclusion plan.** We will continue to listen to children, young people, families, SEND sector professionals and system leaders as we develop and test delivery options through the Change Programme.
- **create a three-tier alternative provision system,** focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination.

## **A vision for a society where every child and young person can succeed**

### **A society that celebrates and affirms success**

2. Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates, encourages and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND or in alternative provision. A society where we hold high aspirations for all children and young people, recognising that although success looks different for everyone, it is no less worthy of celebration. A society where navigating systems and accessing support across education, health and care is dignified, involves children and young people in decision-making about their own support, and recognises the broad array of strengths held by children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision. This is a significant societal change. To achieve this will take time and effort across many aspects of society, but we are clear that the rewards are significant.

### **An inclusive system where everyone can thrive**

3. Delivering an inclusive society will require improved, high-quality mainstream provision where children and young people have their needs identified early and can access prompt, evidence-based, targeted support. This will mean that more children and young people can have their needs met through ordinarily available provision, without the need to rely on an EHCP to access the support they need. An inclusive system also depends upon improved access to timely, high-quality specialist provision, where this is appropriate for the child or young person, so that every child and young person has

access to the resources, information and opportunities that enable them to thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging. For some children and young people who are falling behind their peers, high-quality teaching, alongside short-term classroom-based support will be sufficient to meet their needs without a SEND diagnosis.

4. The Schools White Paper, published in March 2022, set clear expectations about what high-quality and inclusive mainstream provision entails and its value in supporting all children and young people to reach their full potential, alongside removing any barriers that prevent them from engaging in their learning. Across the 0-25 SEND system, such provision involves fair access, effective central leadership teams, high aspirations for every child and young person and the use of evidence-based curriculum design and implementation to facilitate high-quality teaching within calm, safe and supportive settings. We are continuing this approach and building on the reform set out in the Schools White Paper through our upcoming plan to increase primary attainment, which will be published in 2023.
5. In a 0-25 SEND system, we recognise the important role of the early years sector in the early identification of needs and in building up effective working relationships with parents about their child's needs. In practical terms, improved mainstream provision will enable more of the children and young people with SEND in early years, schools and further education to fully participate within mainstream settings and receive the additional support they need through ordinarily available provision. The further education (FE) sector is the launching point into adult life for many young people with SEND. Staff in FE settings play a crucial role in making sure that young people are prepared for adulthood and supported to transition to their next stage – whether that's employment, higher education, or adult services. Children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision will receive the adaptations and support they need to attend and engage in early years settings, at school or in college to access the same benefits of improved attainment and wellbeing as those who do not face the same barriers to education.
6. The system will provide earlier, more accurate and more consistent identification of need, targeted support to address those needs and timely access to specialist services and support, including specialist placements where appropriate. This ambition is based on evidence that greater inclusion in mainstream settings can improve the academic achievement for children and young people with SEND and has neutral or small positive effects on the outcomes of those without SEND. A whole-setting inclusive ethos improves the sense of belonging for those with SEND and has been found to increase acceptance of difference amongst peers<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Gray, P., Norwich, B., Webster, R. (2021) A review of the evidence on the impact of inclusion on pupils with SEND and their mainstream peers; Kart, A., & Kart, M. (2021). Academic and social effects of inclusion on students without disabilities: A review of the literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(1), 16

## **Case study – King Ecgbert School, Sheffield**

King Ecgbert School in Sheffield is a mainstream secondary school and part of the Mercia Learning Trust. The school aims to be warm, welcoming and inclusive in all senses of the word, including for its pupils with SEND. It sets inclusion as “everyone’s job” – both staff and pupils.

The school has high expectations for all pupils and strives to ensure that all reach their potential. Consistent quality-first teaching, as the first step to supporting pupils with SEND, helps all classrooms at King Ecgbert School to be inclusive and the current continuous professional development programme for staff is focused on this. The percentage of pupils at the school with EHCPs is higher than the national average for state-funded mainstream secondary schools<sup>7</sup> and the school’s Progress 8 score is above the national average<sup>8</sup>.

Some of the school’s pupils with EHCPs are attached to its integrated resource for pupils with autism. The aim is for those pupils to be supported into the mainstream classroom and able to access the broad curriculum for most of the time (at least 80% of the time) but also access a parallel curriculum to help them with life skills and emotional regulation.

Tom in the integrated resource, who is going to sit 9 GCSEs this summer and plans to go on to sixth form to study A levels, said, “the integrated resource has helped me in a variety of ways. It has supported my mental wellbeing and it also helps me pursue my educational desires and hopes. The resource is a great place for students like me and I am glad I’ve been able to access it.”

## **An integrated SEND and alternative provision system**

7. Alternative provision is an important aspect of our reforms and will be used as an intervention, not a destination. High-quality alternative provision, including for social, emotional and mental health needs, will create additional capacity for mainstream school leaders and staff to address challenging behaviour earlier and re-engage pupils in education. Interventions will be based on a three-tier model with a focus on targeted support whilst children are in mainstream school, to deal with needs early and reduce preventable exclusion. Time-limited or transitional placements into an alternative provision setting will provide more intensive intervention or longer-term support where it is needed, before these young people return to a new mainstream setting or progress to a sustainable post-16 destination.

---

<sup>7</sup> Absence and pupil population - King Ecgbert School, Department for Education, 2022

<sup>8</sup> Secondary - King Ecgbert School, Department for Education, 2022. Due to the uneven impact of the pandemic on school and college performance comparisons between schools and colleagues and national averages should be interpreted with caution.

## A three-tier model for alternative provision

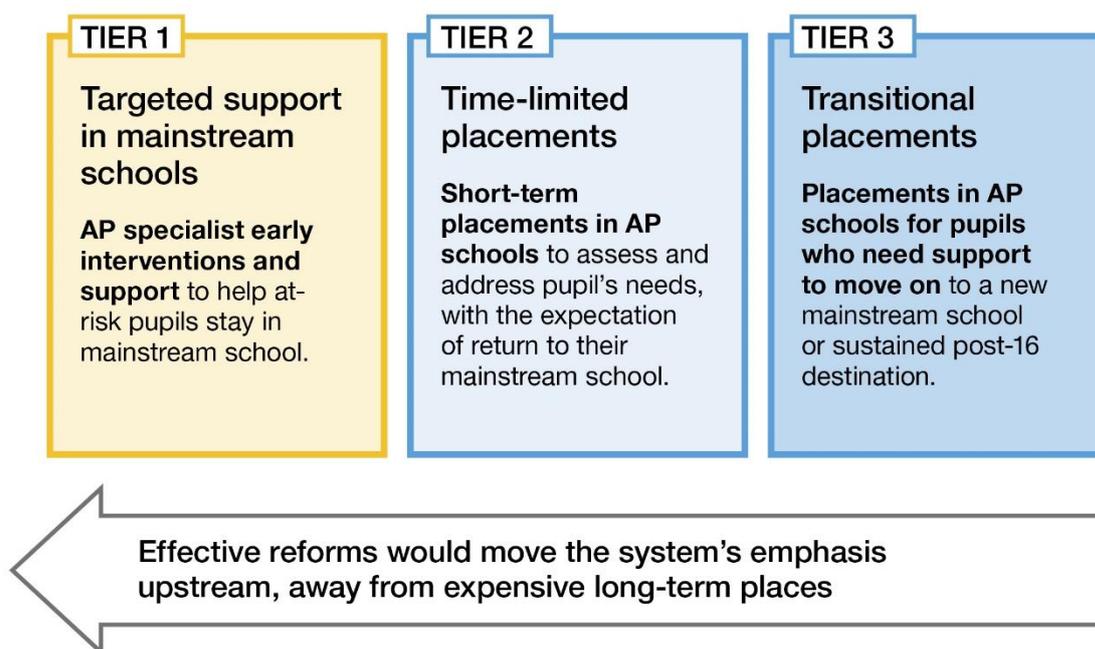


Figure 2: A three-tier model for alternative provision

### A supportive system for children and families

8. Our vision is echoed in the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, which envisages that every child and family who need it will have access to high-quality help no matter where they live. Many respondents to the green paper highlighted that the SEND reforms must also align with reforms to the wider children's social care system and share a focus on providing help to families early and at the right time. Families reported barriers to accessing support and experiencing safeguarding-focused assessments which made them feel criticised and undermined. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy includes a commitment to strengthen the focus on disabled children's needs in the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. The proposed update to this guidance will also focus on the role of education settings, further strengthening links between education and social care for children and young people with SEND.
9. Although some families with disabled children are fully supported by universal services, many children with SEND, and their families, benefit from expert help and support when it is first needed. For help to be effective, it must be offered without stigma or criticism, in recognition of the fact that parenting a disabled child can be challenging and families may need additional support to access services which enable them to thrive. We know that there are areas where we need to do more to ensure there is coherency so that reforms make the children's social care and SEND systems easier to navigate for children and families. We will work with all partners in the system, including children, young people and their families, and across government, to ensure

that at every level there is sustained and considered join up between children's social care and the SEND system.

## National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards

10. The consultation feedback is clear that while respondents supported a more inclusive and consistent mainstream system that worked for all children and young people, with a dedicated role for alternative provision, aspects of the current system need to change for that vision to be fully realised. We need to address the 'postcode lottery' of SEND and alternative provision support that exists currently. Children, young people and their families do not know what to reasonably expect, settings are ill-equipped to support needs and needs are identified late or incorrectly.
11. We heard during the consultation that respondents wanted more detail on what the standards are, who they are for and how they will work in practice. This included greater clarity on what should be ordinarily available in every nursery, school, and college, as well as from health and social care. Children and young people told us that it would be good for schools to know what they must deliver. We have used this feedback to develop the next layer of detail for the National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards ('National Standards').

### National Standards will clarify:

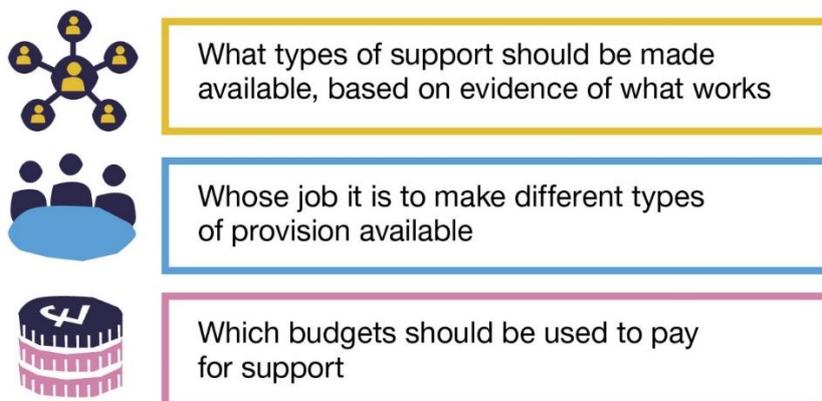


Figure 3: National Standards

12. To deliver our vision of an inclusive society for all, the National Standards will set clear and ambitious expectations for what good looks like in identifying and meeting a range of needs. They will provide clarity for children, young people and their families on what provision should be available through ordinarily available provision and for those with EHCPs. National Standards will clarify what good evidence-based provision looks like, who is responsible for securing it and from which budgets. This will help families, practitioners and providers understand what support every child or young person should be receiving from early years through to further education, no matter where they live or what their needs are. This section details our plan to develop these standards, including how we will work with partners in the system such as children, young people

and their families and test proposals through the Change Programme's Regional Expert Partnerships.

13. The National Standards will set out what provision system leaders, such as multi-academy trust leaders, governing bodies, headteachers, college principals and chief executive officers (CEOs), directors of children's services and Integrated Care Boards, need to make available for all children with SEND in every local area, nursery, school and college. We intend to underpin the standards with legislation for education at the earliest opportunity to facilitate intervention in education settings if standards are not met. This will allow us to set out the provision, resources, policies and training that must be available across local areas and in education settings. As we develop the standards, we will undertake new work to consider how to design accountability mechanisms to ensure the government's expectations are met, including considering the role of Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). When National Standards are delivered, this will mean every child and young person will have access to consistently high-quality and evidence-led support.
14. National Standards will cover the evidence-based approaches to identification and intervention for those with SEN Support and for those with EHCPs. For example, standards will set out how nurseries, schools and colleges must adapt the physical and sensory environment of the setting to enable children and young people with SEND to learn alongside their peers and the role of the local authority in supporting this. This will build on existing best practice, such as Portsmouth City Council's Ordinarily Available Provision, which sets out expectations of the support that should be made available for children and young people with SEND in early years, schools and colleges. This will help children, young people and their families understand what support they can expect to receive. Clear standards for universal and SEN Support provision will enable better accountability at this stage, whilst ensuring that those who need it receive high-quality specialist support. This will help children, young people, and their families understand what support they can expect to receive.
15. During the consultation, organisations raised concerns that the individual needs of a child or young person could be overlooked in the move towards a single, national system. National Standards will help ensure every child and young person, regardless of where they live, receives consistent high-quality support, at both SEN Support level and for those with EHCPs. We recognise that every child or young person with SEND or in alternative provision will have unique needs and these will depend on their personal circumstances and backgrounds. We are committed to working closely with children, young people and their families when writing the National Standards to find a balance between national consistency and individual needs.

16. In the green paper, we committed to producing an amended version of the SEND Code of Practice. We will ensure the National Standards and amended SEND Code of Practice support one another, so that any new legislation is explained in a clear and accessible way for all. We will consult on an amended version of the SEND Code of Practice and work with individuals and organisations across the system to prepare recommendations for the update, including considering how we reflect wider reforms to alternative provision.
17. To equip frontline professionals, such as teachers and early years practitioners, with the skills and expertise to make best use of provision and to identify needs early, accurately and consistently, we will produce a suite of SEND and alternative provision practice guides. We have set out our plans to develop practice guides in chapter 4 as part of our commitment to building SEND skills and knowledge, prioritising areas such as speech and language development, autism and social, emotional and mental health.
18. Together, the National Standards, practice guides and amended version of the SEND Code of Practice will set clear and consistent expectations for what should be ordinarily available for all children, young people and their families, from early years to further education.
19. When the National Standards are delivered effectively, every leader will be bought into a shared vision for how needs should be identified and supported, whether at the universal, targeted, or specialist level and there will be clarity on how support should be paid for, supporting financial sustainability. This will include a clear role for alternative provision across three tiers of support, with a focus on early intervention and inclusion in mainstream settings where appropriate. Parents, carers and families will have clarity on the roles of individual system leaders and the standards they must meet. When delivered successfully, these standards will enable all children and young people to access an inclusive, high-quality education alongside their peers and will prepare them for happy, healthy and productive adulthoods.

## **Developing the National Standards**

20. Throughout the consultation, we heard from a number of respondents about the importance of co-production in developing and delivering the green paper proposals. Specifically, we heard that the process for developing the National Standards needs to involve a wide range of key partners, including children, young people and families.
21. We have reflected this feedback in our plans to develop the National Standards with a wide range of stakeholders, including professional experts across education, health and care, as well as children, young people and their families. We will involve these partners at the earliest opportunity, with a focus on understanding the views of children, young people and their families. Working with leaders and professionals across different areas and sectors will ensure the standards reflect evidence of the best practice already in the system, the unique needs of early years and further education settings as well as the

impact of these reforms. The case study below from Lincolnshire is a valuable example of how co-production can be built in throughout policy development.

### Case Study – Lincolnshire Young Voices

Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV) is a participation group set up to improve service delivery for young people with SEND. The group's members are young people with SEND in the area, who bring their voices and experiences to the forefront of their work. The group encourages and welcomes new members and is funded and supported by Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board.

LYV works strategically with partners across Lincolnshire to:

- research and improve issues young people with SEND face in the community.
- raise awareness of members' SEND experiences and of LYV in organisations, with professionals, councillors and the wider public.
- inspire young people with SEND to have a voice.

In 2022 LYV developed an online learning resource called 'A Rough Guide to not Putting Your Foot in it', for professionals such as GPs to improve their confidence when communicating with people with SEND. The group led the project, including drafting the course content and recording the video scripts. Their presentation on the resource has been delivered nationally and LYV have been asked to support other areas around the country in developing similar resources and participation groups.

LYV won the NASEN (National Association for Special Educational Needs) Award for co-production in 2022.

22. During spring 2023, we will set up a steering group of cross-sector representatives to oversee the development of standards. We will regularly test our work with a wide range of stakeholders across education, health and social care, including children, young people and their families. We will embed development of standards in the work of the Change Programme to ensure the standards can be tested, iterated and set up for success. We will also build on the findings from the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) pilot (see chapter 4) to reflect existing best practice. Sign-off from the Department for Education will play an important role in ensuring the standards are evidence-based, deliverable and support financial sustainability.

23. We know that it will take time to develop a complete set of standards and to set the system up to implement these successfully. To allow time for genuine co-production and testing, we will develop the standards in stages:

- **During spring 2023**, we will establish the National Standards Steering Group and identify experts to begin developing the content of the standards.
- **By the end of 2023**, we will have some elements of the National Standards ready for testing by the Regional Expert Partnerships.

- **By the end of 2025**, we will publish a significant proportion of the National Standards, with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **At the earliest opportunity**, we will underpin the National Standards with legislation and, ahead of legislating, we will publish the National Standards in full for consultation.

24. Throughout this process, we will use the best available evidence on what works to support a range of needs, from universal support, through SEN Support, to the more specialist support provided via EHCPs. This will build on existing successful programmes, such as the £17 million Nuffield Early Language Intervention that targets children needing extra support with their speech and language development and is proven to help them make around three months of additional progress. We will identify any gaps in evidence and explore opportunities to build a stronger evidence base in the long-term, including commissioning new research as necessary.
25. Publishing the National Standards will signal the government's expectations of what high-quality and evidence-based support should be available across universal, targeted and specialist support. In turn, this should shape commissioning behaviour at a local area and whole school or college level by influencing the content of local inclusion plans, the commissioning practices of system leaders and the support that individual children and young people receive.
26. We received consultation feedback on the importance of the National Standards for health and care as well as education. The Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England have agreed to engage health and social care bodies at set points and on specific standards. They will be closely involved in the development of the National Standards, which will ensure strategic oversight and input from frontline health professionals. We will develop National Standards that recognise the role of health and social care and the interdependencies, while operating within the existing statutory framework for health and adult social care.
27. In parallel to these reforms to the SEND and alternative provision system, the government is also delivering an ambitious plan for reform of children's social care. Alignment between the two programmes will ensure that social care needs are more effectively addressed. Government is taking forward the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to introduce a Children's Social Care National Framework that sets the direction for practice and is supported by practice guides that bring together evidence-based advice and information. The Children's Social Care National Framework was published on 2 February 2023, alongside the government's formal response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which is now open to consultation.

## **Delivering National Standards**

28. We heard that delivering the National Standards in practice is critical if we are to genuinely improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people and their families and we agree that accountability is essential for successful implementation. Others told us that the standards need to strike a balance between supporting and challenging the system if they are to deliver real culture change. Local government organisations and unions stressed the need for funding to incentivise delivery against the standards. They also highlighted that improving skills and capacity across the workforce is vital to delivering the right provision for children and young people.
29. We recognise that publishing National Standards will not deliver change on their own. Standards will only be translated into reality through efficient funding, effective accountability and an appropriately resourced and skilled workforce. The remainder of this Plan sets out the underpinning drivers that are necessary for implementing National Standards in practice. We know that such large-scale change across education, health and care will take time as we test and refine key proposals, but we remain committed to achieving this shared ambition in the months and years to come.

## **Local SEND and alternative provision partnerships and local inclusion plans**

30. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper consulted on the proposal to establish statutory local SEND and alternative provision partnerships. These partnerships would bring together partners across education, health (including mental health) and care and enable local authorities to work collaboratively with each other, with parents and other extended partners such as youth justice, to meet their statutory responsibilities for children and young people with SEND and those who need alternative provision. We set out that partnerships will be responsible for undertaking a joint needs assessment and producing a strategic local inclusion plan (LIP) for local delivery including setting out the provision and services that should be commissioned in line with the National Standards. The LIP will inform the existing statutory local offer of SEND services and provision, as well as clarifying the graduated SEN Support offer, so parents and practitioners can clearly see what they can expect in their area. In due course, this will also form the basis for providing parents and carers with a tailored list of settings.
31. Throughout the consultation we heard broad support for these proposals. Stakeholders agree that bringing key partners together at the right level to make strategic decisions is essential. Whilst there are excellent examples of effective partnership working in some areas currently, it is not happening consistently across the system. As a result, decisions are not always ultimately made in the best interests of children and young people.

32. We also heard that the views of parents, carers, children and young people are vital in successful partnerships. Consultation respondents welcomed local SEND and alternative provision partnerships as a way of facilitating effective representation of children, young people and their families, ensuring co-production is at the centre of decision-making, improving transparency and communications with parents. We also heard the importance of structures to facilitate regional collaboration, particularly for post-16 and the commissioning of provision for children and young people with the most complex needs where providers regularly face challenges working across a number of local authorities. We will seek to address this in the guidance for partnerships and plans.
33. Many consultation responses highlighted how the need for specialist provision exceeds the available places because the system is not managed well enough. Children and young people whose needs could be met in a well-supported mainstream setting are instead in special schools or alternative provision, while those who need a specialist placement may not be offered one, or able to find one close to home. Children and young people with particularly complex SEN and disabilities often have to be placed a considerable distance from their families and community. In its recent report, the National Safeguarding Panel found that the 108 children placed at three children's residential care settings formerly run by the Hesley Group were placed an average of 95 miles from home<sup>9</sup>. A strong LIP, grounded in an evidence-based understanding of the services and placements which children and young people will need in the future, will allow local authorities, Integrated Care Systems, schools and colleges to change what they offer so that it meets evolving needs. We want to amplify best practice and support areas to maximise effective partnership working. To achieve this, we are planning to approach delivery in three phases across financial years 2023 – 2025 and beyond.

<b>Phase one (2023)</b>	<b>Phase two (2024)</b>	<b>Phase three (2025 onwards)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme's Regional Expert Partners will support areas to design and test their partnerships and LIPs, beginning in spring 2023.</li> <li>• Non-statutory guidance will be issued in autumn 2023, outlining the full detail of the expectations for local SEND</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme's Regional Taskforce Teams will target support to areas most in need/least mature to develop their partnership structures and develop LIPs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to introduce primary legislation at the next available opportunity to put partnerships on a statutory footing and mandate collaborative working.</li> <li>• Support the future introduction of tailored lists of settings.</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2022

<p>and alternative provision partnerships including clear roles and responsibilities for the partnership collectively and the partners individually.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance will set out the requirements for LIPs including the requirements for co-production with children and their families.</li> <li>• This will be underpinned by a maturity matrix self-assessment tool to support local areas to evolve partnerships and move towards new model of plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department for Education’s Regions Group will work with local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to develop and agree LIPs by end of 2024.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work with Ofsted to make sure framework reflects updated arrangements.</li> </ul>
--	---	--

## Capital investment in new specialist placements and alternative provision

34. Many respondents reported that the need for specialist provision exceeds the available places. We have committed to invest £2.6 billion over the next three years to deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND aged between 0 and 25, or who require alternative provision.

35. On 29 March 2022, we announced High Needs Provision Capital Allocations amounting to over £1.4 billion of new investment. This funding will support local authorities to deliver new places, across the 0–25 system, for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who need alternative provision.

36. On 10 June 2022, we published our ‘how to apply’ guidance for the latest special and alternative provision free school application waves. We are approving a tranche of applications from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline. Applications for partnerships to open new alternative provision free schools closed on the 17 February 2023. We are currently in the process of assessing those applications and we expect to announce the outcome of both application waves in autumn 2023.

37. Starting from summer 2023, we plan to collect data from local authorities on the capacity of special schools and SEN units/resourced provision in mainstream schools, as well as forecasts of the numbers of specialist placements local authorities expect to

make in SEN units/resourced provision, special schools (of all types) and alternative provision. We expect this to be an annual data collection, forming part of the existing School Capacity Survey (SCAP) which will support local authorities in managing their specialist provision. We will explore options for improving and broadening the data we collect in future years. We are working closely with local authorities and other sector stakeholders to ensure the data we collect best supports the needs of users across the 0-25 system. Guidance on completing the SCAP survey, including tools to support local authorities in assessing the capacity of special schools, will be published in the spring.

### **Case Study – Unity Schools Partnership**

Unity Schools Partnership is a multi-academy trust (MAT) consisting of primary, middle, secondary and special schools in Suffolk, on the Essex and Cambridgeshire borders and in East London. The trust has an inclusive ethos centred around providing education that caters for all children in the community. There are three tiers of SEND support within the trust: special schools, high-quality inclusive teaching in mainstream schools and specialist units at mainstream schools.

In all of its schools, high-quality teaching for children with SEND is the first response to meeting their needs and the SENCo ensures teaching staff have guidance and support. Unity Schools Partnership schools have high aspirations of and expectations for all learners, aiming to enable all pupils to take part in lessons effectively and participate fully in school life.

Looking at its more specialist provision, specialist units were opened in five schools in the trust in September 2020 as part of a local authority capital programme in Suffolk to create new specialist education places. Each unit caters for different age ranges from key stage 1 to 4 and different types of need.

The specialist units allow children and young people to be part of a dedicated class which supports their individual needs, while also having access to the mainstream school community, for example:

#### **The Arch at Castle Manor Academy**

The Arch at Castle Manor Academy supports 22 pupils in key stages 3 and 4 with cognition and learning needs. Pupils follow a personalised curriculum and integrate within the mainstream setting at a level that is appropriate to their needs, with the support of teaching assistants. Where possible, pupils 'shadow' the mainstream expectations, values and curriculum themes so they can participate with the wider school when they are ready. Pupils in The Arch take part in a wide range of curriculum and extra-curricular activities. They enjoy many activities including collecting badges for their work in living the school values, school trips with their peers and all play a musical instrument. Staff have noted that strong friendships have been made both within and outside of The Arch.

## Specialist post-16 provision

38. Several respondents highlighted a lack of strategic planning for specialist post-16 provision both locally and regionally, which they felt led to missed opportunities to make the most of such provision, particularly for young people with complex needs. We received strong calls from specialist post-16 institutions and their representatives that the sector is not given the right recognition. Too often this provision is considered as sitting outside, rather than an integral part of the further education sector.
39. We propose to work with the sector to review the way the Department for Education defines and manages specialist further education and to consider what changes could be made to reinforce that integrated position within the wider further education sector.

## Wraparound support for families

40. There will be improved access to wraparound services for families and more timely access to specialist support from health and social care partners where a child or young person requires this. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy committed to including a stronger focus on support for children with a disability as part of proposed updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children. Through the rollout of family hubs, we are seeking to improve access to a range of services and have set specific requirements for local authorities receiving family hubs funding around helping families who have children with SEND.

## Short Breaks Innovation Fund

41. Short breaks provide children, young people and their families with opportunities to enjoy extra-curricular activities, respite and space to develop skills beyond their everyday school and home contexts. They aim to strengthen student resilience and family capacity, therefore de-escalating the interventions that might be required for pupils at risk of moving from mainstream to specialist settings, or into care. The green paper committed £30 million to the Short Breaks Innovation Fund to develop national policy for short breaks by funding innovative, integrated and inclusive approaches to short breaks to address the concern that the policy is under-developed and inconsistently applied.
42. In the first year of the programme (financial year 22-23), we are funding 7 local authority projects to deliver innovative approaches to short breaks in addition to their normal provision, across the 0-25 age range. For year two of the programme, we have taken on board feedback that bids should be co-produced with families and set a requirement that all bids must be supported by the local parent carer forum. £10 million is available for grants of up to £1 million to 10-15 local authorities for year two and successful bidders will be announced shortly.

43. Three years of developing innovative approaches will give us a stronger evidence base on what works well. As part of our reforms to children's social care, we will ensure that we draw on the innovative and inclusive approaches emerging from the Short Breaks Innovation Fund to influence our own approach to structural reform and service design.

### **Case Study – Short Breaks Innovation Fund in Sunderland**

Sunderland City Council is one of the local authorities taking part in the Short Breaks Innovation Fund programme. One of its offers is Breathing Space, a whole-family model of short breaks both after school and during school holidays. It is designed to offer joined-up support and create positive opportunities for families with children who have social, emotional or mental health needs or autism and who are at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion from school. The aim is to improve behaviour over the longer term to improve and/or maintain children's attendance at school.

Breathing Space has different hubs, including:

- a family hub centre which delivers specialist emotional support sessions for children.
- a group for non-verbal children with autism, providing sensory and crafts sessions.
- an alternative provision school providing after-school extra-curricular activities, such as cooking and trips to the theatre.

Overall, the Breathing Space short breaks provision has helped with:

- an improvement in pupils' attendance.
- an improvement in pupils' behaviour in school, linked to improved attitudes to learning.
- a decrease in suspensions.

### **Supporting Families**

44. As part of the Supporting Families programme, a £450,000 pilot project will be established to test approaches to establishing more robust links between SEND and the early help system in each area. Local authorities will be invited to bid for funding to test models of strengthening the join-up between systems locally. This could include, for example, ensuring that any family whose child is undergoing an EHC assessment is offered an early help conversation so that the needs of all members of the family can be understood and support provided. Some areas may also develop projects to increase the involvement of school staff, who already know and understand children with SEND in their settings, to lead on or contribute to early help assessments, ensuring that families with children with SEND are identified and offered support. This increased focus on non-stigmatising access to help is also central to our Family Help reform proposals, which will improve the experience and outcomes for disabled children and their families.

45. We have committed through the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to track the experiences of children with a disability through the care system and will incorporate a strong focus on specific support for children with a disability and their families in our pathfinder testing. In response to the recommendations in the Independent Review of

Children's Social Care, we will establish pathfinders in up to 12 local areas, to test elements of the Family Help reforms. The Support and Protection pathfinders will help us effectively deliver reforms around eligibility for Family Help, access to services via the 'front door' so that it is more needs-based and welcoming, the Family Help workforce working with families in need (under section 17 of the Children Act 1989) and the tailoring of support to meet specific needs, including SEND. An important area for us to test will be how a multidisciplinary team of Family Help workers hold section 17 cases in a way that reduces handovers that are unhelpful for families and avoids the stigma which some families with a child with SEND currently experience.

46. In line with the recommendation made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, we have asked the Law Commission to review existing social care legislation relating to disabled children so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to, ensuring that families know how to access support and local authorities know what they are expected to provide.
47. We will convene a joint children's social care/SEND roundtable discussion on disability this year, to work with sector experts to make these commitments a reality.
48. The Department for Work and Pensions launched the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme in 2018 to encourage local authorities across England to embed parental conflict support in their local service provision for families. Up to £19 million is available to local authorities to progress this work during this Spending Review. This is particularly important for parents of children with SEND, as this can be a key driver of conflict between parents.

## A reformed, nationally consistent EHCP process

49. The green paper set out a vision for EHCPs where there was greater consistency between local authorities' processes, to ensure that those who need more specialist support can get it faster and in a more joined-up way. The green paper restated our commitment to the principle of co-production: that children, young people and their families and services work together as equal partners to support children and young people to achieve their goals. To improve the experience and quality of these plans, we proposed to:
  - **standardise** the templates and processes around EHCPs to improve consistency and best practice, improving experiences for families and children and young people seeking plans.
  - **digitise** EHCPs, to reduce the burden of administrative process in the system, improve the experience and satisfaction of parents, carers and professionals and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
  - **introduce the use of local multi-agency panels** to improve parental confidence in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment process.

50. These measures were broadly popular across all respondent groups who reported that the EHCP process would benefit from being standardised, simplified, accessible and available digitally. However, while there is agreement that these are the right measures to pursue, it is also clear that local authorities' arrangements have evolved over time to reflect their different circumstances and the needs of their local communities. Therefore, any changes to EHCP processes will need to be worked through carefully to deliver the improvements we all want to see.
51. We said in the green paper that we would consult separately on changing the timescale for the issuing of draft EHCPs following annual reviews. We have considered the responses to the subsequent consultation alongside those to the green paper, given that both consultations relate to reform of the EHCP system. We will shortly be publishing the government response.

## **Standardisation of templates**

52. Although many agreed that standardising EHCP templates is the right thing to do, there was also agreement that plans for this diverse group of children and young people were often complex for good reason, and that standardised paperwork should not result in standardised provision. Most of those who responded to this proposal felt that section F (special educational provision) particularly needed reform. Some respondents felt plans were not revised often enough to reflect the needs of the child or young person as they progressed. Children and young people wanted their plans to be co-produced with them and reflect their goals, ambitions and the full breadth of their lives – their friends and interests as well as their education and employment. They wanted their plans to enable others to understand their strengths as well as the things they found difficult.
53. We will now start work on a national EHCP template, supported by guidance, in partnership with relevant bodies, including parents, children and young people. We will encourage all local authorities to adopt the template and consider the case for mandating its use through legislation.

## **Digitised EHCPs and digital requirements for EHCPs**

54. We think the case is clear for all SEND services to move to digital systems for EHCPs. Digital systems can deliver better experiences for both families and professionals and enable them to continuously improve their services – focusing staff time on working with families rather than managing bureaucracy. These improvements could also help realise the benefits of anonymous data collection, taking account of data protection laws considerations and information sharing protocols, to track indicators such as progress made towards outcomes, trends in the prevalence of need and the provision that is made available. This timely picture of the health of the SEND system could help build the evidence base for National Standards and be a feature of the national and local inclusion dashboard.

55. We are pleased that so many local authorities have already implemented digital EHCP systems and would like all local authorities to move quickly to digitise to gain the benefits outlined.

56. This is an evolving market. We recognise that local authorities are at very different stages of their digital journey and that this Improvement Plan contains significant, long-term reforms to the SEND system which digital EHCP systems will need to accommodate. We have spoken to local authority SEND teams and recognise the need for local collaboration and leadership to drive these improvements forward. Any digital EHCP system should also be implemented to recognise and comply with additional data collection asks, such as the SEN2 annual survey.

57. Therefore, in parallel to local digitisation, the Department for Education will work to develop digital requirements for local authorities to adapt to over time. We will continue to work with local authorities and suppliers to best support this shift towards digitisation and move towards consistent standards of digital EHCP systems.

58. We will work to develop and deliver digital requirements for EHCP processes by:

<b>Phase one (2023)</b>	<b>Phase two (2024)</b>	<b>Phase three (2025)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with local authorities, suppliers and families to further test how digital solutions might best improve their experiences of the EHC process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing digital solutions and testing drafts with local authorities and suppliers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependent on digital solutions tested and agreed upon, begin rollout of requirements across local authorities.</li> </ul>

## Multi-agency panels

59. Respondents agreed that having a wider group of relevant professionals and partners to advise the local authority at key decision points through the EHC process – at the application, planning and review stages – could add value. However, they felt that government needed to be precise about the scope, status and membership of these panels for them to be effective.

60. We know that many local authorities have established multi-agency panels who meet regularly. We recognise that there are other panels (such as multi-agency safeguarding hubs, Local Inclusion Group members or advisory panels of expert practitioners) that already provide support and challenge and we do not want to increase bureaucracy in the system. However, the main source of independent scrutiny of local authority decisions specifically related to the statutory SEND system is currently the First-tier Tribunal. We think enabling a more holistic conversation between local partners about

a child or young person's needs and plan, where those partners can support and challenge each other, would promote good local authority decision-making and facilitate timely help and access to services for children and young people with SEND.

61. We believe there is a potential role for panels to bring together partners who can provide services more quickly and easily, drawing on the expected provision outlined in the National Standards for educational support, and linking up with health-commissioned services and family help, including short breaks. The panels could help to ensure families are offered services, going beyond signposting and helping families to navigate the system across education, health (including mental health) and care. Offering the right services at this early stage will help to reduce escalation of need and reassure parents that their child is being effectively supported to thrive through ordinarily available services, providing consistency around when an EHC assessment can add most value. Where a child does require more intensive and coordinated support, the panel can support the local authority in the decision to carry out an EHC assessment, whilst also looking to offer support promptly.
62. We will work with a small number of local authorities to develop and test a standard for multi-agency advisory panels, to assess the most effective size, membership and remit of a group, and whether the standard EHCP form is effective. We will take this forward alongside the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy's commitment to strengthen the role of education settings as part of proposed updates to the statutory guidance on Working Together to Safeguard Children.

## Tailored Lists

63. As this Plan makes clear, we must ensure that children and young people receive the support that is right for them and that decisions about placements are backed by evidence of what will set them up for success.
64. We outline in this chapter how new local inclusion plans overseen by the new local SEND and alternative provision partnerships will set out how the needs of children and young people in the area will be met in line with the new National Standards. We will ensure this informs the existing statutory local offer of SEND services and provision, as well as clarifying the graduated SEN Support offer, so parents can clearly see what they can expect in their area.
65. In response to the green paper many families, local authorities and those working in education agreed that greater clarity is needed around what support and placements are available so that children and young people get the right support in the right setting. We have heard agreement that a tailored list of settings would provide parents and carers with clearer information, supporting them to express an informed preference for a placement.

66. We want to improve families' experiences, by helping them to understand and assess the available options. A tailored list would allow local authorities to give clear choices to families and better meet the needs of children and young people, while supporting them to manage placements in a way that ensures financial sustainability for the future. To ensure we can deliver these goals, we will first test this proposal through the Change Programme in a limited number of areas to gain feedback on the best way to support families. In the areas we test this proposal, there will be no change to the existing statutory framework and parents and young people's existing rights will be unaffected.
67. We have also heard some of the significant concerns, particularly from groups representing parents, carers and children and young people, about the introduction of the tailored list. Many were concerned that this would reduce choice, and that meeting the needs of the child or young person would not be the central consideration in drawing up the list. Others wanted to see further detail on this proposal.
68. We will continue to listen to children, young people, their families and SEND sector professionals as we develop and test delivery options for amending the process for naming a place within an EHCP by providing parents and carers with a tailored list of settings. These will include mainstream, specialist and independent placements where appropriate, informed by local inclusion plans that will be produced through engagement with children, young people and their families. We are committed to ensuring parents, children and young people continue to be involved in the decision-making process and will have the right to request a mainstream setting for their child, even when they are eligible for a specialist setting.
69. Development of the tailored list will be sequenced alongside wider system reforms, particularly the introduction of National Standards, improved accountability and better local planning. Tailored lists will only be introduced in an area once the local inclusion plan has been quality assured and signed off by the Department for Education's Regions Group as being in accordance with the National Standards.

## **Testing and delivering change through a £70 million Change Programme**

70. We have heard frequently that the primary reason why the high aspirations of the 2014 reforms have not yet been achieved is because insufficient attention was paid to implementation. That is why we committed in the green paper to support delivery of these reforms through a £70 million SEND and alternative provision Change Programme. This will test and refine key reform proposals and support local SEND and alternative provision systems across the country to manage local improvement.

71. The emphasis we have placed on delivery and implementation for this reform programme has been welcomed. We have heard that lessons must be learned from the past to prevent unintended consequences, such as a drift away from inclusion in mainstream education and over-emphasis on securing an EHCP in order to access support in the future. Some consultation feedback focused on the need to develop a programme that delivers effective support for children, young people and families whilst enabling professionals within the system to deliver their duties and implement significant reforms.

72. Many respondents wanted to see further information about the proposed pace and timing of reforms. Some highlighted the need for fast and effective delivery in the short term, with clear direction for longer term changes.

73. We are clear that we need to support local SEND systems across the country to manage current pressures and local improvements. We need to do this whilst also testing and refining some of the more complex key areas of reform so we can be confident that they will deliver on our ambitions, without introducing unintended consequences. This will enable our understanding of the overall impact of reforms on the system. The £70 million Change Programme will serve as the delivery vehicle for this work by creating up to 9 Regional Expert Partnerships. These Partnerships will consist of a cluster of 3-4 local authorities in each region, including at least one lead local authority. These will help test and refine the key reforms over the next two years, with oversight from the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board. The programme will:

- test, deliver and iterate the key reforms to achieve our ambitions for children and young people with SEND or who are supported by alternative provision. This will ensure we allow services to deliver to a high standard. It will also ensure that we deliver the systemic improvements needed to improve outcomes and can intervene to secure improvement where needed. Testing will provide an early indication of progress against our reform mission. It will build the required evidence base to determine the advantages, and understand the potential disadvantages, of the reforms in the SEND and alternative provision system.
- spread this learning and provide bespoke targeted support in areas that are struggling the most, by creating and deploying an expert 'taskforce' to support change in each region. The taskforces will draw on expertise from the Regional Expert Partnerships and the Delivery Partner's SEND, alternative provision and system transformation expertise. The taskforces will build capacity and proficiency and implement best practice in these areas, complementing any improvement support already being received. They will do this by supporting local areas to harness, innovate, scale and support the spread of effective practice on the ground. This will drive high standards and excellence in the basics, help to stabilise the system and prepare the sector for delivery of the SEND and alternative provision reforms to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND or who are in alternative provision.

74. The proposed model builds on consultation feedback that we need to focus on improving mainstream settings to ensure more timely support is available, whilst sharing effective practice on the ground. The model creates a consortium of expertise in each Region, with a clear rationale for identifying those providing support, those being supported and the focus of that support. Delivery in local areas will be overseen by local strategic partnerships to give fast and effective support.
75. Data on outcomes and experiences of the SEND system highlights some disparities in relation to certain characteristics such as place, gender and race. The government has committed to addressing these disparities more broadly, including through the Inclusive Britain report, published in March 2022. In testing and delivering proposals for the SEND and alternative provision system, we want to ensure that the voices of all children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision and their families are effectively heard and no group is disadvantaged in securing timely access to the right provision – irrespective of place, disadvantage, race or gender. Through the evaluation of the Regional Expert Partnerships, we will assess the extent to which our reforms are enabling this ambition and refine our plans accordingly.

## Chapter 3: Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood

1. Our vision is of a SEND and alternative provision system which supports children and young people to successfully move through education and into adulthood, regardless of whether they have an EHCP, through the wide variety of routes available.
2. Although each child and young person's journey will be different, destination planning should be built in from the earliest stages and should continue through their education, centred around the aspirations, interests, and needs of the child or young person. Provision should support children and young people to develop independence, contribute to their community, develop positive friendships, be as healthy as possible, and, for the majority of young people, prepare them for higher education and/or employment.
3. The Department for Education's skills reforms will provide a ladder of opportunity to help young people access excellent education and skills training and continue learning through adulthood, to secure good jobs and progress in their careers.

### We will:

- **publish guidance to support effective transitions** between all stages of education, and into employment and adult services.
- **conduct a pilot** to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard **English and mathematics requirements for apprenticeships**.
- **invest £18 million** between 2022 and 2025 to **double the capacity of the Supported Internships Programme**.
- continue to support the Department for Work and Pensions' **Adjustments Passport pilot** to smooth the transition into employment.
- **improve the Disabled Students' Allowance process**, by continuing to work with the Student Loans Company to reduce the time for support to be agreed.

### Supporting effective transitions

4. Successful transitions must be well-planned. Late planning and decision-making for a child or young person's next stage and poor support around transitions were clear themes in the consultation feedback, particularly in relation to post-16. Many felt that support is not in place at the point of transition as information about students' needs is not shared readily, easily or early enough. For students with an EHCP, local authorities must specify the post-16 provision and name a setting by 31 March for students leaving school, but this deadline is regularly missed. For those without an EHCP, there is no consistent approach for sharing this information between schools and post-16 settings.

5. To address this, the Department for Education is developing good practice guidance to support consistent, timely, high-quality transitions for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision. This will ultimately look at transitions between all stages of education from early years and will focus initially on transitions into and out of post-16 settings. This includes transitions into employment, adult services and for young people leaving alternative provision at the end of key stage 4, building on learning from the recent Alternative Provision Transition Fund.
6. We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and key partners from the SEND and post-16 sectors, including the Association of Colleges and Natspec, to develop the project. We are working with young people with different types of need, including those with and without EHCPs, to co-produce the guidance to ensure it improves experiences and outcomes. We will also involve parents and carers. This guidance will feed into the National Standards and practice guides as they are developed. We will consider how this is reflected when amending the SEND Code of Practice. As set out in chapter 5, we are strengthening accountabilities across the 0-25 system, to ensure children, young people, and their families receive the support they need, including at key transition points.
7. We are also conducting research to understand current user journeys of young people applying and enrolling in post-16 education, to improve the sharing of information.
8. The Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions are working closely together to underpin successful and supported transitions into employment: the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, the Minister for Disabled People and the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression will meet regularly to drive forward cross-departmental activity to support those transitions.

### **Case Study – George’s\* experience in further education at City College Norwich**

\*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

George joined the agriculture and land-based college at City College Norwich and has additional needs of autism; social emotional and mental health needs; dyspraxia and hypermobility.

The college planned George’s transition into college well, involving his parents and the college’s specialist EHCP team. Through visits, George was able to orientate his way around the site and reduce his anxiety. George flourished which soon meant that the support he needed reduced. By the end of the year, George had grown in confidence and independence which enabled him to give peer support to other learners.

George said, “I feel I’ve made some friends on my course. I have friends from high school who I keep in contact with. I feel I’m on the right course and training to be what I want to be. I am slowly getting to talk to more of the class. I’m good at practical things and a decent amount of theory.”

His parents have noted that George is joining in and speaking more. They feel this is a combination of realising that he has to ask for help, and that he is enjoying the lessons as they all relate to what he wants to do in the future.

## Transitions to Adult Services

9. We recognise that transitioning between child and adult services, including into adult social care, can be challenging. The Department for Education is working with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to identify how we can improve these transitions, with the aim to include this in the transitions guidance mentioned above. The work set out in chapter 5 to improve accountability across the 0-25 system will also support this. We are working together with the Department of Health and Social Care to update the Statutory guidance for local authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the adult autism strategy, which includes a chapter on transitions. We will also explore good practice to smooth the transition into adult services for young people whose needs are very complex and who may never be able to undertake paid work, to ensure they have options which enable them to flourish and live life to the full.

## Higher Education

10. We expect all professionals working with children and young people with SEND to have high aspirations for them, and this includes striving for them to access higher education (HE). We heard through consultation events that a proportion of young people do not feel effectively supported to transition into HE, with some reporting delays in receiving support through Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), and that there are significant differences in the levels and types of support available at different Higher Education Providers (HEPs). Some consultation responses suggested extending EHCPs to support people in HE, to address these issues.
11. In preparation for the 2014 SEND reforms, there was significant discussion with stakeholders followed by debate in Parliament about whether the statutory SEND system (including EHCPs) should extend to HE. It was decided that it should not, as the HE sector already has a number of systems in place to support young people with disabilities. However, we recognise that more can be done to strengthen these systems.
12. The Department for Education and the Welsh Government are working with the Student Loans Company to reduce the length of time it takes for a student to progress from making their DSA application to having their DSA support agreed. We will also seek to set expectations through our transitions guidance on how students should be supported to transition into HE, including how they should be supported to apply for DSA.

13. The Department for Education agrees with the recommendation from the Disabled Students' Commission that university staff need guidance on how to support disabled students. This is so university staff understand the barriers students face and so they can improve students' experiences in HE. This recommendation is likely to be included in the 'Commitment' the Disabled Students' Commission is due to launch in March 2023, asking HEPs to commit to a range of recommended good practice in supporting disabled students.

## **Qualifications reform**

14. The government is committed to supporting students with their future and career planning by improving the quality of qualifications and streamlining their number. Since 2013, we have reformed the national curriculum, GCSEs and A levels to set world-class standards across all subjects. These reforms were substantial and have made a lasting improvement to qualifications, ensuring they reflect the knowledge and skills all pupils need to progress. Our gold-standard qualifications system gives all young people, including those with SEND, the opportunity to achieve their full potential and prepare for a huge range of careers. It does this by offering them a wide choice of different high-quality, evidence-informed academic and technical pathways.

15. Alongside this, our reforms to post-16 level 2 and below qualifications will help to deliver an improved landscape for students. This will enable learners to benefit from high-quality provision that better equips them for progression into work or further study at a higher level. In the government response to the post-16 level 2 and below qualifications review consultation, we set out the groups of qualifications that we intend to fund in the future, grouping the qualifications by level and by purpose, i.e. whether they support progression to employment or to higher levels of study. We are committed to having flexibilities in place to ensure students with SEND can access these qualification groups, and there will be a range of options at all levels which create pathways through the system. We will also regularly review the mix and balance of qualifications approved and engage with SEND stakeholders to ensure we are meeting the needs of all learners.

16. We are also developing a set of National Standards for Personal, Social and Employability Skills Qualifications. These qualifications provide knowledge and skills to support the transition into employment and are particularly important for some students with SEND. We will design these with experts from the education sector and industry, drawing on their extensive knowledge and expertise to shape standards that flexibly meet student needs and deliver relevant knowledge, skills and content in accessible ways.

## Preparation for employment

17. We know that with the right preparation and support, the overwhelming majority of young people with SEND are capable of sustained, paid employment. Throughout the consultation, we heard repeatedly that children, young people and their families want to be confident that their education is preparing them for work, and that the people working with them share those high ambitions. They want to know what options and pathways are available to them, and what support and adjustments can help them succeed.
18. We expect Careers Leaders to work closely with the relevant teachers and professionals in their school or college, including the SEND lead, to identify the careers guidance needs of all pupils, in order to help children, young people and their families understand the full range of relevant education, training and employment opportunities available and to support them to achieve their ambitions. To support them with this:
- **The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)** provides training and support to design and deliver careers education programmes tailored to the needs of young people with SEND regardless of their educational setting. CEC also encourages employers to provide opportunities for young people with SEND to gain experiences of workplaces, employer encounters and employment.
  - **The Career Development Institute** provides professional development for careers advisers working with young people with SEND.
19. Over 600,000 primary school pupils will benefit from a new £2.6 million careers programme that will deliver targeted, age-appropriate careers support in over 2,200 primary schools, to encourage children to think about future jobs and raise aspirations. The programme is a commitment in the Schools White Paper that will be run by CEC and which aims to challenge stereotypes, including about people with disabilities.

## Transitions into employment

20. In addition to providing careers support, we are working with the Department for Work and Pensions to smooth young people's transition into employment, for example through the pilot of an Adjustments Passport. The Passport aims to raise awareness of in-work support and empower young people to have more structured conversations with employers about their support needs. We have been supporting the Passport pilots in three HEPs. Evaluation reports show strong agreement from the more than 200 HE students taking part in the pilots that the Passport will help them get adjustments in the workplace. We are working with Supported Internship and Apprenticeship providers to trial the Passport with supported interns and apprentices and will consider whether it could be trialled in different settings.
21. To ensure disabled people can access the support they need in work, the Department for Work and Pensions provides Access to Work funding. This is a demand-led, discretionary grant that contributes to the disability-related extra costs of working faced by disabled people and those with a health condition in the workplace which go beyond

standard reasonable adjustments, but it does not replace an employer's duty under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments. The grant can provide personalised support, including workplace assessments, travel to/in work, support workers, specialist aids and equipment to enable disabled people to move into or retain employment. Young people on supported internships can claim Access to Work funding to support them in their work placement, where needed.

22. We recognise that some young people will need ongoing support to help them secure and sustain employment in adulthood, and we work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure our programmes are complementary. The Department for Work and Pensions's Local Supported Employment (LSE) scheme started in November 2022 and will run until March 2025, helping people with learning difficulties and / or autism to find and retain work. The aim of LSE is to develop a sustainable model for delivering Supported Employment that can help increase the number of supported jobs delivered by local authorities, providing individuals with significant barriers to work with intensive one-to-one support. LSE is being delivered in 28 local authorities across England and Wales and will support around 2,000 people.
23. In 2020/21, the Department for Work and Pensions tested an Autism Accreditation scheme in 15 of its local offices. This scheme developed a service delivery framework to improve the services that job centres deliver to autistic people, by building the knowledge and skills of work coaches and improving processes and systems to better support autistic jobseekers. Although aimed at jobseekers on the autism spectrum, the service delivery framework will also have benefits for other customers with additional needs. The test was a success, and the Department for Work and Pensions are now exploring how to roll-out Autism Accreditation across the whole Jobcentre network.
24. Through the Disability Confident scheme, the Department for Work and Pensions are working with employers to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in the workplace. The scheme encourages employers to think differently about disability and to take positive action to address the issues disabled employees face in the workplace. As of February 2023, there are over 17,700 employers who are members of the scheme<sup>10</sup> covering over 11 million paid employees<sup>11</sup>.

## Supported Internships

25. The green paper committed to invest £18 million over the next three years to build capacity in the Supported Internships Programme and support more young people with EHCPs into employment. Since then, we have appointed the Internships Work consortium as the delivery partner for this investment. They will be working closely with

---

<sup>10</sup> Employers that have signed up to the Disability Confident scheme, Department for Work and Pensions, 2023

<sup>11</sup> Disability Confident Jobs Fair Speech, Department for Work and Pensions, 2022

local authorities to double the number of supported internships by 2025 and will engage with all partners in the system to level up the quality of internships across the country. Over 700 job coaches will be trained by 2025 to ensure interns receive high-quality support on their work placements.

26. As part of this work, up to £10.8 million in grant funding will be available to all local authorities over the next three years, alongside support and training. This will enable all local authorities to access a supported employment forum and strengthen the quality of their Supported Internship offers to improve the transition into sustained, paid employment for interns.

### **Case Study – Katie’s\* experience on the Supported Internship Programme**

\*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

Katie, who is 20 years old and autistic, was apprehensive when starting her Supported Internship as sustaining a job was something ‘she didn’t imagine she’d ever be able to accomplish’.

As part of the programme, Katie’s employer received close support to understand her needs and any reasonable adjustments required. Katie’s job coach supported her with reassurance, confidence and navigating work-life and relationships. Regular check-ins between Katie, her job coach, and her managers ensured they could review, adjust and work together to help their relationship flourish. The ongoing offer of support during and beyond the Internship was key to making it a success.

Shortly after starting the role, Katie’s confidence grew as she was supported to thrive over her difficulties with peer relationships, social communication, and anxiety. Katie quickly became an invaluable team member, leading to her being offered a full-time position as Helpdesk Administrator. Her manager reported that “being able to teach a young person our world and seeing it make a positive impact has been the most rewarding part of this placement.”

Reflecting upon her experience, Katie shared: “I wouldn’t be in this job without receiving the support I got, I can see all the hard work paid off. It has opened my eyes to the real world and has made me more confident to try new things. I feel ready for the future and I’m happy and proud of myself.”

## **Apprenticeships**

27. Consultation feedback highlighted the importance of supporting young people with SEND as they move into employment like an apprenticeship. We are investing in a comprehensive package of professional development for the apprenticeship provider workforce, which we launched in November 2022. The package supports providers to deliver excellent apprenticeships that meet the needs of all individuals, including making reasonable adjustments for apprentices with disabilities.

28. Alongside this, we have published new guidance to make the claims process for learning support funding clearer. Providers can help eligible apprentices to access and complete their learning by claiming additional funding where a reasonable adjustment is provided and evidenced. We are also conducting a pilot to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard English and mathematics requirements (currently apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability may be eligible to achieve their apprenticeship with a reduced level of English or mathematics if they hold an EHCP).
29. We heard about the importance of raising employer awareness and encouraging inclusive practices so young people can access opportunities like apprenticeships. We have been working in partnership with the Disabled Apprentice Network and employers in the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network to share the experience of disabled apprentices and examples of best practice support through publications and events during National Apprenticeship Week 2023. We will update our employer roadmap so employers have the information they need to support their apprentices. Employers could receive £1,000 towards the costs of workplace support when they take on an apprentice aged 16-18 or 19-25 with an EHCP, as well as help to cover the extra costs working individuals may have because of their disability through the Department for Work and Pensions' Access to Work scheme.
30. Consultation feedback also highlighted that children and young people wanted more understanding about what apprenticeships entail. The Department for Education's Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme continues to inform and inspire young people about apprenticeships, traineeships and T Levels so that they can access these important routes. This includes additional support to students with SEN and working with identified development schools. We will work with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that young people with SEND who are in contact with their services through Jobcentres are aware of apprenticeships and of the benefits they would bring to them.

## **Local Skills Improvement Plans**

31. We have published Statutory Guidance for employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). This guidance highlights the important role that national bodies focussing on disability employment, supported employer providers and local disability groups can play in helping education providers and employers to support people with SEND so they can be part of the solution to meeting local skills shortages. This focus on strategic local skills development and supported employment complements the support we are providing to local authorities as part of the Internships Work programme, to strengthen their local supported employment offer.

## Chapter 4: A skilled workforce and excellent leadership

1. The multitude of professionals who deliver for children and young people with SEND – in early years, schools, colleges, health and care settings, specialist and alternative provision, local authorities and beyond – are dedicated, highly skilled and passionate about meeting their needs. Throughout the consultation process, we heard clearly that reform is not possible without a strong and capable workforce with robust leadership. Any reform must build on the extensive expertise held by the sector and focus on setting consistent standards and incentives to build one united workforce around the child or young person.

### We will:

- introduce a **new leadership level SENCo** (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) **NPQ** (National Professional Qualification) for schools.
- review the **Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks** (commencing early this year).
- **fund up to 5,000 early years staff** to gain an **accredited Level 3 early years SENCo qualification** to support the early years sector, with training running until August 2024.
- increase the **capacity of specialists**, including by investing a further £21 million to train two more cohorts of educational psychologists in the academic years 2024 and 2025; and, in partnership with NHS England, as part of our £70 million Change Programme, pioneering innovative practice through running Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders to improve access to **speech and language therapy** for those who need it.
- work together to take a **joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning**, including establishing a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which we aim to complete by 2025.
- publish the first **three practice guides** for frontline professionals, building on existing best practice, including the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- propose **new guidance** on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND **casework service** to families when consulting on the SEND Code of Practice.
- develop a **longer-term approach for teaching assistants** to ensure their impact is consistent across the system, starting with a **research project** to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.
- **strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO (Designated Social Care Officer) role** in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice.
- **extend funding** until March 2025 of the **alternative provision specialist taskforce (APST) pilot programme**, which is testing co-location of a diverse specialist workforce in pilot alternative provision schools.

2. Equipping the sector to deliver reform for children and young people is a long-term challenge – and we know that the impact of the cost of living, compounded by the impact of the pandemic, will make this even more complex. Our programmes and policies will build confidence and expertise at every level of the workforce, from teachers and classroom staff through to specialists, and to leaders who set the overall direction and culture of their settings. We want ordinarily available provision and high-quality teaching to meet children and young people’s needs wherever possible, and specialist support to complement the skills and expertise of the wider workforce.
3. A key aspect of this will be our SEND and alternative provision practice guides, which will equip frontline professionals with the skills and expertise to make best use of provision and to identify needs early, accurately, and consistently. By the end of 2025, we will publish the first three practice guides focused on advice for mainstream settings. We will build on existing best practice, such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government’s guidance on promoting children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing. We will identify any gaps in best practice and help build a stronger evidence base in the long-term.
4. We also know that local authority SEND casework teams play a vital role in supporting families to navigate the system and ensuring they have good experiences. Timely and accurate communications are important factors in maintaining parental confidence. Many of the proposals in this Improvement Plan, such as producing good EHCPs through a template and a digitised system, ensuring redress systems are effective and using multi-agency panels well, depend on high-quality delivery by casework teams. We will further consider the skills and training that these teams receive, and when we consult on amending the SEND Code of Practice, we will propose new guidance on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND casework service to families.

### **Case Study – Telford and Wrekin’s SEND casework team**

In Telford and Wrekin there has been significant investment in how to approach SEND casework, with a focus on securing positive relationships with parents and carers and keeping open communication.

The local authority has found that a key part of this is to “do the basics brilliantly”. A swift response to queries is their priority and as far as possible, they call rather than email.

The team has developed several communication tools with support from its parent carer forum (PODS) and SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).

They report that the guide they have produced for parents and carers explaining the EHC assessment 20-week timeline has been welcomed as it clearly sets out to the family who their allocated officer is, how to contact them and what to expect during the 20-week pathway.

They also run Moving Forward Meetings as part of the EHC assessment process. Where a difficult decision has been taken, the moving forward meeting, which is always conducted

face to face at the child's educational setting, allows the officer to talk through the decision with the parents/carers and agree a forward plan. The local authority shares that this informal dispute resolution has been incredibly productive, enabled good quality discussions to take place and supports endeavours to minimise a fall into formal mediation processes and ultimately Tribunals.

Every year the local authority reflects and refreshes its approach. Recently officers from the SEND team have led parent drop-ins, which include issues such as early intervention, alternative funding and support mechanisms. They have also delivered workshops focusing on parental participation at annual reviews and report that their family newsletters are very well received.

5. Finally, we are clear that the workforce will be crucial to every aspect of system improvement. Whilst this chapter sets out our vision for the professionals working with children and young people, we will consider the workforce throughout all our reform plans, and understand how we can build the right expertise, capacity and culture to put these into practice.

## **Improving mainstream provision through high-quality teaching and SEND training**

**Supporting and upskilling the teaching workforce, so that all pupils and students have access to high-quality teaching, and every teacher is able to adapt their practice to meet the needs of their classroom**

6. Teacher quality is one of the most important in-school determinants of pupil outcomes, reducing the risk that children fall behind due to missed opportunities or lack of appropriate support. High-quality, evidence-based teaching is critical in ensuring that the special educational needs of pupils are not mis-identified when their difficulties may be due to poor classroom provision, as well as ensuring that the needs of those with SEN are met effectively.
7. The Schools White Paper set out an ambitious target of 90% of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. We know we cannot reach this without the right support for children with SEND. The needs of most children can be met through high-quality teaching, and the green paper outlined how adaptive teaching for children and young people with SEND already underpins the frameworks for initial teacher training and early career teachers.
8. We heard, however, that we need to go further if we are going to achieve the aim of improving mainstream provision so that it is more inclusive of children and young people with SEND. Respondents consistently highlighted the need for ongoing teacher training – and when children and young people who are in alternative provision were asked what would have helped them stay in their mainstream school, the most common answer was teacher training in SEND.

9. We will explore opportunities to build teacher expertise through a review of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework. Due to begin early this year, the review will identify how the frameworks can equip new teachers to be more confident in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.
10. We are also working with the sector to develop guidance on special schools' involvement in ITT. This will include the appropriate use of special schools for ITT placements and help ensure that providers have confidence to involve special schools and alternative provision in their partnerships. This will enable trainees to benefit from valuable placement experience and enable expertise from special schools and alternative provision to be incorporated into their ITT.
11. We are also providing free SEND-specific professional development, online training, live webinars and peer mentoring opportunities to school and college staff at any stage in their career through the Universal Services programme. The programme, which began in 2022, is backed by almost £12 million and aims to reach at least 70% of schools and FE colleges each year until 2025. Delivery is led by NASEN, in partnership with Education Training Foundation and Autism Education Trust.
12. Since September 2022, the programme has reached out to over 17,000 schools and engaged 99.5% of FE colleges. Almost 3,000 professionals have accessed free online training and attended live webinars with sector specialists, and 60,000 professionals have undertaken autism awareness training through a 'train the trainer' model. Individualised support is also available, with over 80 schools and 135 colleges starting peer reviews to identify ways to improve their SEND provision<sup>12</sup>.
13. We are also expanding training to increase school staff confidence in using assistive technology (AT). Following the promising results of our initial pilot, we are extending assistive technology training to a further 150 maintained schools. The extension, known as the 'AT Test and Learn' programme, will teach mainstream school staff how to use AT effectively, with a focus on the technology schools already have available or can easily obtain, such as text-to-speech tools. It will build on last year's pilot by training more schools over a longer period and with more impact data to gain a fuller picture of how AT training can support wider SEND continuing professional development. The AT Test and Learn course is free to attend, and the next cohort will run from March to July 2023.
14. Finally, we recognise the recruitment and retention challenges many settings are facing, and we know that more needs to be done to ensure teaching remains an attractive, high-status profession. Continuing to attract, retain and develop the highly skilled teachers we need is one of our top priorities, as set out in our Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy. That is why we are delivering 500,000 training

---

<sup>12</sup> Nasen internal report

and development opportunities by the end of 2024, alongside a range of resources to help schools address teacher workload issues, prioritise staff wellbeing and introduce flexible working practices.

### **Supporting and upskilling teaching assistants, so they are deployed effectively to support children and young people with SEND**

15. Support staff play a key role in supporting children and young people with SEND. Some respondents to the consultation wanted to see more action to acknowledge their critical role. Evidence suggests that effectively deployed and well-trained teaching assistants (TAs) can achieve up to four months' progress in pupil attainment.
16. The green paper committed to setting out clear guidance on the effective use and deployment of TAs to support children and young people with SEND. We will do this through the new SEND and alternative provision practice guides, enabling TAs and learning support assistants to make best use of the available provision set out in the National Standards and setting expectations for good practice in meeting the needs of individual children and young people.
17. We will also develop a longer-term approach for TAs to ensure their impact is consistent across the system and the different responsibilities they take on. We want TAs to be well-trained and to be able to develop specific expertise, for example in speech and language interventions. As the first step, we will commission a research project to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.

### **Targeted programmes and initiatives to improve educational provision**

18. We are investing in the wider school and college workforce and funding evidence-based interventions that can be delivered to all pupils and students who need them, including those with SEND. This includes:
  - Continuing the National Tutoring Programme. To improve the tutoring experience for children and young people with SEND, schools can request SEND specialists, maintain smaller group sizes for pupils with SEND, and align tutoring provision with EHCP requirements.
  - Offering 1:1 tuition and small group support for SEND students and those with EHCPs through the 16-19 tuition fund, which covers vocational and academic subjects, to provide the skills and learning in preparation for adulthood.
  - Additional teaching and learning hours in 16-19 education. To ensure those aged 16 - 25 with an EHCP can benefit, institutions have flexibility to deliver additional hours or appropriate alternative support for these students.
  - Supporting schools to provide a high-quality curriculum, by establishing Oak National Academy as an arm's length body to provide evidence-based, adaptable curriculum resources. Oak's existing resources include specialist lessons for pupils

with SEND and therapy-based lessons covering occupational, physical and speech and language therapy.

- Tackling attendance barriers for pupils with SEND. We know some pupils find it harder to attend school or alternative provision, so may require individualised attendance support at a higher level to their peers. Our new guidance, 'Working together to improve attendance', supports schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities to work collaboratively to address the in- and out-of-school barriers to attendance (e.g. unmet SEND need) children and their families may be facing.
- Continuing the Accelerator Fund for another three years following its inception in 2021/22. This includes expanding English hubs to 680 additional schools in areas that will benefit most from specialist phonics support and mathematics hubs projects to help pupils to secure the foundation they need to progress, and which may have been missed due to Covid-19.

## **Equipping SENCoS to shape their school's approach through a new SENCo NPQ**

19. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCoS) play a vital role in setting the direction for their school, coordinating day-to-day SEND provision and advising on the graduated approach to providing SEN Support. We want to invest in their training to ensure they are well equipped, valued by their colleagues and the attainment of children with SEND improves.

20. Currently, SENCoS must complete the mandatory National Award for SEN Co-ordination (NASENCo) within 3 years of taking the role<sup>13</sup>. To ensure the qualification provides the skills needed for the role, aligns with wider teacher training reforms and is completed consistently, the green paper proposed introducing a new mandatory leadership level SENCo National Professional Qualification (NPQ) and strengthening the mandatory timeframe requirement in which the qualification must be undertaken.

21. We heard through the consultation that introducing a new NPQ sends an important message about the role of the SENCo and the need for it to be "whole-school, senior and strategic" whilst reflecting the complexity of the system and preparing SENCoS for this. Where respondents saw disadvantages, it was because they felt that the current qualification is fit for purpose and that changing the type of qualification risks undermining the SENCo role. We heard consistently that there was strong support for strengthening the mandatory requirement to undertake SENCo training.

---

<sup>13</sup> if they had not previously been a SENCo at that or any other relevant school for more than twelve months prior to September 2009.

22. We intend to replace the NASENCo with a mandatory leadership level SENCo NPQ for SENCos that do not hold the current qualification, including those that became a SENCo prior to September 2009. To ensure the NPQ is high-quality and provides the knowledge, practical skills and leadership expertise needed for the role, we will work with SEND experts to develop the NPQ framework and course design. We are determining arrangements for the transition from the NASENCo to the SENCo NPQ and as part of this, we will consider how the proposal to strengthen the mandatory training requirement is implemented. We will ensure that any strengthened timeframe requirement aligns with teacher recruitment cycles, that the availability of training places meets demand, and that the responsibility for ensuring the SENCo has the relevant training sits at the right level within a school.
23. Further details on the timings for the procurement to identify providers of the NPQ and the approach for introducing the new qualification will be provided in due course.

## **Ensuring SEND expertise is held at every level**

24. As well as the crucial role played by SENCos, we heard about the importance of SEND expertise being held at every level, including senior leaders. Senior leaders play a key role in setting an inclusive culture, in which individual needs are identified and where there are high ambitions for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision. To support excellent SEND leadership, we have:
- Committed to setting out the first descriptors for academy trust strength, which will include measures for a high-quality, inclusive education. This will help ensure that trust leaders set the right calm, safe and supportive culture for inclusion and improving the outcomes of pupils with SEND and in alternative provision.
  - Begun work on a new MAT CEO development offer, providing leaders with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to lead improvement at scale, with the needs of children with SEND and those requiring alternative provision embedded throughout.
  - Introduced a new NPQ for Early Years Leadership to support current and aspiring leaders to develop expertise in leading high-quality early years education and care which meet the needs of all learners, including those with SEND.
  - Developed the NPQ for Headship to support teachers and leaders to develop the knowledge that underpins expert school leadership and enables all pupils to succeed, including designing and implementing fair and inclusive policies, making reasonable adjustments and encouraging staff to share best practice on supporting pupils with SEND.
  - Provided training and capability building to senior strategic leaders in local authorities through the Delivering Better Value Programme, supporting them to design, implement and embed effective change management and evidence-based decision-making.

- Promoted the Local Government Association Leadership Programme, which provides targeted support to senior leaders in local authorities with responsibility for children’s social care. SEND is embedded throughout the programme including training, mentoring and bespoke support to deliver targeted interventions to improve their SEND services.

## Embedding support from early years to further education

### Supporting early years staff to meet need through high-quality early years provision

25. During the consultation, respondents highlighted the crucial role of high-quality early years support in preventing unnecessary escalation of need and providing children with a strong foundation for their future educational journey.
26. Early years staff play a critical role in providing high-quality support for all children to help them reach their potential and avoid learning difficulties arising. To support those children who do have additional needs, the Department for Education committed to funding training for up to 5,000 early years staff to gain an accredited Level 3 EY SENCo qualification. Training will run until August 2024, and we have already had over 4,000 applications for the course. Training is available to all SENCos working in group-based and childminder settings, with additional targeting to specific areas based on levels of disadvantage.
27. In response to feedback from the sector, we have also undertaken a review of the Early Years Educator (EYE) Level 3 criteria. We have consulted on the inclusion of SEND as a standalone criterion, to ensure that all EYE courses include a specific focus on supporting children with SEND. The consultation response will be published in spring 2023.
28. These changes are being taken forward as part of the Early Years Recovery Programme, which provides a package of up to £180 million of workforce training, qualifications and support for the early years sector. As well as SENCo training and EYE reform, the programme includes:
  - funding for up to 10,000 professionals to undertake early mathematics, early communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development training through the third phase of our Professional Development Programme. The previous phase provided more than 1,300 professionals in 51 local authorities with bespoke training, improving the support received by an estimated 20,000 children.
  - the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL), which includes SEND training.
  - the introduction of up to 18 new Stronger Practice Hubs to support early years practitioners to adopt evidence-based practice improvements, build local networks for sharing effective practice and cultivate system leadership.

## **A skilled, confident further education workforce**

29. Further education (FE) plays a vital role in preparing learners, including young people with SEND, for the next phase of their life, including further learning, training and employment opportunities.
30. The Department for Education's Universal Services programme offers a comprehensive package of SEND training and support for the FE workforce, including employer-led webinars advising on how settings can prepare young people for adulthood and employment, and additional FE-focussed webinars which over 700 college staff and leaders have accessed to date. The programme also offers peer reviews, where FE leaders are given the opportunity to engage in improvement projects.
31. To provide expert support for young people with SEND in FE, we offered bursaries worth £15,000 each, tax free, in academic year 2022/2023 for trainees undertaking SEND Further Education Initial Teacher Education (ITE).
32. Awareness of individual learner needs, and how to respond to these through effective teaching practice, is also a key component of the revised Learning and Skills Teacher (LST) occupational standard. We will require all publicly funded FE ITE programmes to be clearly based on the LST occupational standard from academic year 2024/25, to help to ensure that all those training to teach in FE can effectively recognise and support learners with SEND.
33. To support recruitment across the FE sector, Taking Teaching Further (TTF) is a Department for Education funded initiative that helps FE providers recruit and train experienced business and industry professionals to become FE teachers. TTF has been expanded to include a 'core skills' element, which includes SEND. The aim is to equip industry experts to support learners with SEND into employment in one or more of the 15 technical areas.
34. By March 2023 our FE governance guide will also include the expectation that the governing body of every FE college corporation should have a SEND link governor, who would have a particular interest in the needs of students with SEND.

## **Providing specialist support at the point of need**

35. We are committed to improving the supply, training and deployment of key workforces, to make the best use of professional expertise, at whatever age or stage it is needed, and prevent needs from escalating. Our aim is to harness the expertise of each workforce to create a virtuous cycle where the roles and responsibilities of different professionals and sectors are complementary. National Standards will play a key role in this by clarifying who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets.

36. The green paper recognised that children and young people need access to the right specialists but are currently facing delays in accessing this professional support. Through the consultation, we heard further about the challenges presented by long waiting times and staff shortages when it comes to receiving support from specialists.
37. In the green paper, the Department of Health and Social Care committed to working with the Department for Education, NHS England and Health Education England to commission analysis to better understand demand for support for children and young people with SEND from the health workforce so that there is a clear focus on SEND in health workforce planning. The analysis will cover key allied health professionals, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.
38. Building on this analysis, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education will work together to take a joint approach to SEND workforce planning, informed by a stronger evidence base. We will establish a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which will feed into the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board, and aim to complete it by 2025.

### **Increasing the number of educational psychologists**

39. We know that educational psychologists play a critical role for children and young people with SEND – in the EHCP assessment and review system, but also in providing early identification and intervention to support the needs of children and young people, and prevention of escalation.
40. In response to the consultation, we heard about the difficulties in securing timely access to educational psychologists. In the green paper we outlined the steps we are taking to increase the number of educational psychologists, including our investment of £30 million to train three cohorts which started in academic years 2020, 2021, and 2022.
41. Since the green paper was published, we have announced a further £10 million for a cohort of over 200 trainee educational psychologists starting this year, and a further £21 million to fund 400 more trainees, commencing in 2024 and 2025.

### **Access to therapists in areas of need**

42. There is strong evidence that without receiving the right support early to address speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), children are at increased risk of poor educational attainment, poor social emotional and mental health and poor employment outcomes. In partnership with NHS England, we will include Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders within our £70 million Change Programme by supporting 9 ICBs and one of the local areas within each of our 9 Regional Expert Partnerships to trial new ways of working to better identify and support children with SLCN in early years and primary schools.

43. The aim of the ELSEC pathfinders is to:

- provide earlier identification and support to children and young people with SEND to reduce the number of children and young people requiring an EHCP to have their needs met.
- build evidence of new ways of working to better and earlier identify and support children with SLCN that could be rolled out more widely.
- test the impact on pupil outcomes such as attendance, attainment, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing over the 2 years of the pilot.

44. This will build on existing initiatives to increase the supply of speech and language therapists and occupational therapists to the NHS. Since September 2020, all eligible undergraduate and postgraduate degree students have been able to apply for a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year, with further financial support available for childcare, accommodation and travel costs.

45. Local inclusion plans will also set out each area's strategic approach to ensuring sufficient education workforces to deliver effective services.

### **Training teachers of children and young people with sensory impairments**

46. We are committed to ensuring a secure supply of teachers of children and young people with visual, hearing and multi-sensory impairments in both specialist and mainstream settings. The importance of these roles came through clearly in consultation feedback and we recognise concerns regarding the number of Teachers of the Deaf.

47. Those teaching classes of children with sensory impairments must hold an appropriate qualification approved by the Secretary of State – the Mandatory Qualification for Sensory Impairment (MQSI). Teachers working in an advisory or peripatetic role are also strongly advised to complete MQSI training, in the best interests of the children and young people with whom they work.

48. To support the supply of teachers with an MQSI, we have already developed a new approval process to determine providers of QSIs from the start of the academic year 2023/24 and issued contracts. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) are also developing an occupational standard for teachers of Sensory Impairment. This will open up a paid, work-based route into teaching children and young people with sensory impairments by enabling people to undertake high-quality apprenticeships. This will improve the supply of those qualified to teach this important cohort and further help to improve their outcomes. The apprenticeship will attract levy funding, meaning those wanting to undertake it would be funded to do so whilst being in paid work. This will help to open up the profession to individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. IfATE are working with universities, local authorities and sector representatives, including the National Deaf Children's Society,

the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People to develop the qualification, and expect it to be available from 2025. In addition to this, the Department for Education are exploring further options to maximise take up of MQSIs with a view to improving the supply of teachers for children with sensory impairments.

### **Building the health workforce through expanded apprenticeship routes**

49. As chapter 3 outlines, we are delivering an extensive package of professional development to the apprenticeship provider workforce. Alongside this offer, our wider work to support growth in apprenticeships is enabling us to support the growth of the health and care workforce. We have seen strong growth of registered nursing degree apprenticeships in recent years, with 3,420 starts in 2021/22, compared to 1,040 in 2018/19<sup>14</sup>.
50. There is now a complete apprentice pathway in nursing from entry to postgraduate advanced clinical practice – for example, a person could join the NHS as a Level 2 Healthcare Support Worker apprentice, progress to a Level 5 Nursing Associate apprenticeship, then onto an accelerated Level 6 Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship. Health Education England have worked with NHS Trusts to support Nursing Associates' progress onto Registered Nurse apprenticeships – completing one or two years more quickly than their counterparts coming through the typical apprenticeship. People wanting to train as a doctor could achieve their degree by an apprenticeship route from 2023/24, which aims to widen access and participation in undergraduate medical education and deliver better care to patients through a diverse workforce that is more representative of local communities.
51. NHS England are developing a long-term plan for the NHS workforce that will look at the mix and number of staff needed in the future. The plan focusses on the practical action the NHS will look to take, working with partners in government, to grow and transform the workforce, and continue to embed compassionate and inclusive cultures. This includes continuing to grow apprenticeship opportunities from entry level to postgraduate advanced clinical practice. The Department for Education are working with The Department of Health and Social Care to support the growth of apprenticeships needed for the long-term workforce plan.
52. By 2024/25, we will increase investment in apprenticeships across all sectors to £2.7 billion, in addition to making up to £8 million available in 2022-23 to Higher Education Institutions to expand their degree apprenticeships provision.

---

<sup>14</sup> Apprenticeships and traineeships, Department for Education 2022, Table: Subjects and levels – standards and frameworks

## Bringing services together

53. We know that for children and young people with complex needs, joined up working across health, education and care services is particularly important, to support both early identification of needs, and to make sure the right support is put in place as early as possible. We will build upon the good practice initiated through cross-Government commitments in the NHS Long-Term Plan and, for autistic children and young people and those with a learning disability, the Building the Right Support Action Plan (July 2022), to drive faster progress. The Building the Right Support Action Plan brings together actions across government and public services to strengthen community support and reduce overall reliance on mental health inpatient care.
54. Building on last year's investment of £13 million, NHS England are investing £2.5 million in 2022/23 and £1.5 million in 2023/24 to improve autism diagnostic pathways. NHS England are also developing national guidance for Integrated Care Systems about how to improve access to an autism diagnosis assessment.
55. The NHS Long-Term Plan also set out that, by 2023/24, children and young people with a learning disability and/or who are autistic with the most complex needs will have a designated keyworker, implementing the recommendation made by Dame Christine Lenehan.<sup>15</sup> Initially, keyworker support will be provided to children and young people who are inpatients or at risk of being admitted to a mental health hospital. Keyworker support will also be extended to the most vulnerable children with a learning disability and/or autism.
56. The community Keyworking model was developed through extensive consultation with young people, parent carers and other stakeholders, and what families said mattered has been written into the framework for what Keyworkers must deliver. Keyworking services make sure that local systems are responsive to fully meeting the young people's needs in a joined-up way to provide care and treatment in the community with the right support, whenever it is possible. The Keyworking services established in the pilot and early adopter phases within health, local authority or voluntary and community sector hosts actively bring together support to avoid admission, facilitate robust support on discharge and achieve positive outcomes for children and young people and their families. The model is now being rolled out across all areas.
57. To improve early identification, the Department for Education has also invested £600,000 into significantly expanding an autism early identification pilot in at least 100 schools over 3 years, including 10 currently running in Bradford. A 'neurodiversity profiling tool' will empower schools to provide early support for children's needs and decrease the downstream pressures across the system. The Department for Education

---

<sup>15</sup> These are our children. Council for disabled children.

[www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/These%20are%20Our%20Children\\_Lenehan\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/These%20are%20Our%20Children_Lenehan_Review_Report.pdf)

has since developed a series of 'Pathfinders' into four new areas, seeking to understand potential for further development.

### **Case Study- NHS England Autism in Schools Project**

The Autism in Schools project was co-produced by NHS England, parent carer forums and local authorities in North Cumbria and the North East to support autistic children and young people by creating positive environments that support mental health. The project was rolled out in over 300 schools across 26 ICBs in England between 2021/22 and 22/23, following a successful pilot in North Cumbria and the North East, and continues to have positive outcomes for children and young people, families and schools.

Projects were based on bringing education, health and social care services together, providing learning opportunities for school staff, and developing the support available to autistic children and young people. As part of this, most of the schools undertook environmental assessments, also referred to as a sensory audit or learning walk. These explored the sensory aspects of the school environment and were led by occupational therapists, educational psychologists, mental health support teams and local charities.

School staff reported that engagement with the project has made them more open to change, helped them feel empowered to better support the needs of autistic children and young people and supported them to develop stronger relationships with parents, carers and other professionals within the system. Schools also reported finding the whole school training on neurodiversity delivered through the projects especially helpful in allowing them to make reasonable adjustments that support young people to engage in learning, such as low stimulus areas in classrooms, time out passes and individual resource boxes.

Alongside these practical adjustments, schools also reviewed policies and made changes to behavioural and uniform policies to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners.

58. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduces a new requirement for CQC registered providers to ensure their staff receive specific training on learning disability and autism, which is appropriate to their role. To support this new training requirement, the government have made significant progress on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training, which was trialled in England during 2021 with over 8000 people. Part one of this training – an e-learning package – became available in November 2022.

### **Providing mental health support to children and young people**

59. Meeting children's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs is a crucial aspect of strong SEND provision. Schools and colleges play a vital role in promoting and supporting pupil and student mental health and wellbeing. They work to create safe, calm, supportive and inclusive environments, tackle bullying and teach pupils and students about their mental health and about when to ask for help. Through daily interactions, staff can validate children's feelings, boost their confidence and increase

their resilience. Many education settings also offer targeted support, for example through play therapy or counselling or a nurture or social skills group.

60. However, as the NHS Long-Term Plan recognised before the pandemic, we know many families, children and young people struggle to get timely access to additional specialist support from mental health services.
61. Investment in NHS children and young people's mental health services is growing faster than both NHS funding and mental health investment overall, and the specialist workforce has been growing as a result. A £79 million funding boost in 2021/22 to expand children's mental health services has helped allow 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services, on top of growth already planned in the NHS long-term plan.
62. This funding has also accelerated the roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools and colleges, which will be expanded to around 400 operational teams later in 2023, covering around 35% of pupils in England, and reach around 500 operational teams by 2024.
63. Setting teams up involves training a new workforce of Education Mental Health Practitioners to work across health services and schools. This is part of an additional all-age investment of £2.3 billion a year into NHS mental health services by 2023/24. Part of this investment will enable an additional 345,000 children and young people to access NHS-funded mental health support.
64. The independent process evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Support Team Trailblazer Programme identifies substantial progress in MHST implementation, despite challenges presented by the pandemic. Pupils and students had positive experiences of the first 25 MHST Trailblazer sites it examined, and school and college staff grew in knowledge and confidence around mental health. The programme has evolved since the Trailblazers were launched and the findings will continue to inform the future rollout and mobilisation of MHSTs.
65. To further support positive holistic approaches to promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing, we are also offering all state schools and colleges grants to train a senior mental health lead by 2025, backed by £10 million in 22/23. Over 10,000 schools and colleges - including more than half of state-funded secondary schools in England - have taken up the offer so far.
66. To supplement the senior mental health lead training, we are developing an online hub of practical tools and resources to help mental health leads in schools and colleges to develop and sustain their whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing; and a toolkit to support schools and colleges to plan their pastoral offer for pupils and students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

67. The recently published Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy committed to reviewing mental health content included in social work qualifications, early career training and continuous professional development by the end of 2023, including ensuring identification and response to poor mental health issues is embedded in workforce training programmes.

### **Extending the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce Pilot (APST)**

68. The APST pilot co-locates a diverse specialist workforce in an alternative provision school, with a blended team of specialists providing wraparound support and early needs assessment. Youth and family workers build trust with pupils and families; speech and language therapists develop pupils' communication skills; post-16 coaches support aspirational transitions; youth justice workers prevent offending and reoffending; and mental health therapists improve social and emotional regulation. The APST pilot addresses a critical gap in the evidence on effective practice models in alternative provision by evaluating the impact of embedded multidisciplinary specialist support on attendance, attainment, engagement with education, social and emotional wellbeing, reintegration into mainstream and post-16 transition.

69. Since November 2021, 22 alternative provision schools have worked with over 2,500 young people. Feedback from APSTs is demonstrating the value of building trusted relationships and offering timely and accessible support. In addition, co-locating the core group of specialists is improving staff training and enabling a holistic understanding of and response to a child's needs. The pilot is being fully evaluated by independent evaluators in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund, which will result in a full impact evaluation<sup>16</sup>.

70. The APST pilot will now be funded to run until March 2025. An extension to the pilot will teach us more about the impact on engagement in education, how to secure funding sustainability and how to recruit and retain specialists. We will incorporate the evidence from this pilot into the new National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards and practice guides to ensure expectations for system leaders and frontline professionals are based on existing best practice. The evidence should also encourage local areas to consider this model as an effective strand of their SEND and alternative provision inclusion plans.

71. The APST pilot also provides a valuable opportunity to understand how a specialist taskforce can develop the role of alternative provision in the wider school landscape.

---

<sup>16</sup> Internal information (metrics and case studies) provided to DfE from AP schools participating in APST pilot

## **Case Study – Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce pilot: Reuben’s\* experience**

\*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

Reuben is in secondary school. His SEND needs include dyslexia, ADHD, social communication difficulties and learning difficulties. He lives with his mother and his younger siblings (a toddler and premature new-born), in a one-bedroom flat.

Reuben often does not get to sleep before 1am and is torn between helping his mother and attending school: his school attendance is historically low. He has a history of offending behaviour associated with being a victim of child criminal exploitation.

The APST’s family worker conducted home visits, made regular phone calls and visited Reuben at school. The mental health lead gave Reuben’s mother safety advice around managing a new-born child in restricted living arrangements and advised on an approach to support Reuben’s emotional wellbeing. The youth offending worker took Reuben on as a prevention case, bringing additional intelligence to inform his safety planning.

The APST’s interventions have meant that Reuben has been kept safe. While improvements in Reuben’s attendance are still being established, he is engaging and benefitting greatly from the support of the specialists. The taskforce is also arranging for him to access speech and language therapy. Reuben is being supported with his post-16 transition options and has now started to look to the future. Looking at possible careers, Reuben has said he would like to be an engineer in the future.

## **The role for alternative provision schools in providing early outreach support for mainstream schools**

72. There is also a key role for special and alternative provision schools in providing early outreach support. This can help mainstream schools with pupils demonstrating challenging behaviour or having difficulty engaging in their education (see case study below) and sits alongside the Department for Education’s behaviour hubs programme.

## **Case Study – Alternative Provision Outreach Support**

St George’s Primary is one of 62 primary schools within Wandsworth local authority where pupils benefit from local targeted alternative provision outreach support. The funding for this is provided directly from the local authority as part of its universal SEND offer.

The outreach offer supports around 200 of Wandsworth’s most vulnerable pupils. Many have multiple overlapping needs including contact with social services and SEND (particularly social, emotional, and mental health needs). The offer includes:

- short-term emergency support in response to specific incidents
- 1:1 support for individual academic, curriculum and behaviour needs including emotional regulation and literacy, and improving social skills
- access to specialist support like mental health services, speech and language therapists or educational psychologists as part of local “team around the child” meetings.

In St George's this is being delivered in a specially designed in-school nurture space. The support from the alternative provision school gives its pupils the confidence to engage in their education within a calm, safe and supportive environment. The school's headteacher believes that this collaboration has provided valuable support which has improved the children's wellbeing and reduced the risk of suspension or preventable permanent exclusion.

## Support from Social Care

73. We recognise the importance of aligning SEND reforms with those set out in the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy. Together, the reforms are designed to create a stronger and more stable network of professionals to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. This includes strengthening social worker training through the new Early Career Framework, to ensure social workers have skills and knowledge to meet the needs of different cohorts of children and investing in Family Hubs to provide multidisciplinary support.

74. We are developing stronger national guidance for leaders and practitioners through the Children's Social Care National Framework, setting principles for practice and the outcomes that children, young people and families should achieve. This approach reflects the ambition for clear national direction for practice and mirrors the focus on a consistent and robust offer of support, with help being made available at the earliest stage without stigma - the same principles which underpin the proposed National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards. We will develop frontline practice guides, including for professionals working specifically with disabled children to make sure they know how to communicate with children with a disability and provide appropriate help and support to families.

### The Designated Social Care Officer Role

75. Many of our proposals, such as standardisation of EHCPs, and introducing multi-agency panels, will improve integration of services and accessibility of support. In the green paper, we advocated for the adoption of Designated Social Care Officers (DSCO) and proposed to use findings from a pilot supported by the Council for Disabled Children to establish what a high-quality standardised DSCO role would look like.

76. We will strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO role in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice. The job description and practice expectations for the DSCO will provide the capacity and expertise to improve the links and contributions from care services into the SEND process. Similarly to the DCO/DMO role in health, the DSCO role will support both operational input (such as the contributions from care to Education, Health and Care assessments and reviews) and more strategic planning functions (such as the commissioning of care services such as short breaks) for disabled children and those with SEN.

## Chapter 5: Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress

1. We have set out a vision for a SEND and alternative provision system where decisions are made, collectively and consistently by partnerships and informed by robust data and evidence. This will be underpinned by strengthened accountabilities for all those responsible for local delivery. We heard consistently throughout the consultation that current accountability measures are not effective enough. Many respondents felt that whilst the design of the current system and legal framework is right, more should be done to hold all elements of the system to account. They told us that if this is implemented, the support and experiences for children and young people with SEND would improve and the system overall would be less adversarial for families.
2. We agree that more can be done to make sure statutory duties are delivered. Parents should have confidence that their children's needs will be met and that local systems are delivering in line with National Standards, with proportionate and effective action taken, where required, so that children and young people can achieve the best outcomes. Parents should also know that if they have a concern, it will be listened to and resolved in a transparent and efficient way. Our proposals are intended to work together to drive improvements across the 0-25 system. They are underpinned by strong local leadership and supported by a culture of effective relationships, mutual trust and accountability to enable children and young people to get the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

### **We will:**

- **publish a local and national inclusion dashboard** from autumn 2023 to support the development of local inclusion plans, giving parents improved transparency of local performance, informing decision-making and driving self-improvement across the system with ongoing updates and iterations in response to user feedback.
- **deliver updated Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections** from 2023 with a greater focus on the outcomes and experience of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.
- create a **ladder of intervention for local areas** from 2023, **greater powers for the Secretary of State for Health** through the Health and Care Act 2022, and robust action for all where statutory duties for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision are not met, to **strengthen accountabilities** across all parts of the system.
- require every Integrated Care Board to have a **named Executive Board member lead accountable for SEND**.
- **facilitate a more joined-up response between the Department for Education and NHS England** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND, including social, emotional and mental health issues, and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.
- **strengthen redress for individual disagreements** by clarifying who is responsible for resolving complaints and undertaking further testing of effective mediation approaches.
- set up an **expert group** to support the development of a **bespoke national alternative provision performance framework**.
- work with local authority, trust and school leaders to review processes and develop options for **ensuring transparent and effective movement of pupils** without EHCPs, such as those requiring alternative provision, to address behavioural needs.

## **National and local inclusion dashboard**

3. The green paper set out a proposal to establish a national and local inclusion dashboard that will present timely performance data across education, health and care. The dashboards will improve public transparency, help to enable better decision-making at a national and local level and drive self-improvement across local areas. The metrics in the dashboards will support an assessment of overall system performance and provide a basis for measuring whether we are achieving our mission of improved outcomes, better experiences and a financially sustainable system. Ultimately, the dashboards will help to incentivise the behavioural and cultural change across the SEND and alternative provision system to achieve maximum impact of reform.

4. Respondents welcomed inclusion dashboards as a way of improving their understanding of what was happening in their local area and as a tool to strengthen accountability. They noted, however, that there are significant challenges of placing additional burdens on already stretched services and duplicating various dashboards that are already produced across local areas, including some which are shared with local delivery partners such as schools and parents. Where new mandatory data collections are proposed for the SEND dashboards, they will pass through the Single Data List procedure, which assesses whether a proposed data collection is genuinely necessary; non-duplicative; comparable and coherent with all other data collections; places a minimal burden on local authority data providers; and is fully funded in accordance with the cross-government 'New Burdens Doctrine'.
5. We also heard the need for caution in selecting the metrics to avoid unintended consequences, such as increasing the focus on targets or the misinterpretation of data, as well as ensuring that dashboards are triangulated with other forms of intelligence to develop a fuller understanding. Feedback showed that all stakeholder groups were opposed to including provider-level data (i.e. for individual early years, schools, further education or post-16 settings) as part of the dashboards, given other tools exist or are being developed that fulfil this purpose, such as school and college performance tables.
6. We heard a range of views regarding the metrics to be included in the dashboards and the needs of the various users. For example, some parent groups highlighted the importance of the dashboards being easy to understand and wanted it to focus more on holistic, long-term outcomes and appropriateness of provision, with less focus on the numbers of pupils in certain types of provision. On the other hand, local authorities and mainstream providers thought key contextual measures such as the proportion of children and young people educated in mainstream, were useful for planning with more functionality to explore data.
7. To ensure we develop a tool that helps us achieve our overall objectives, considers the various users in the system and sets out relevant and useful metrics, there is a need to fully test this. We will also seek to address the tensions in the requirements of the various users. Therefore, we propose to test an initial prototype dashboard from April 2023 with a view to making a fully public version available in autumn 2023. Our proposed approach to delivery in the financial year 2023 and beyond is set out below.

Phase 1 (spring 2023)	Phase 2 (autumn 2023 onwards)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a prototype dashboard that will consist of core metrics using existing data to minimise any burdens.</li> <li>• Test the prototype through the Change Programme from April 2023 to develop a greater understanding of who users are, what they are using the dashboard for and their needs.</li> <li>• Consider whether a fuller, more sophisticated dashboard is needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish a first, fully public version of the inclusion dashboards in autumn 2023.</li> <li>• Ongoing assessment to consider updates and future iterations. This could include new metrics and frequent data collection, supported by the long-term digitisation of EHCP processes.</li> </ul>

8. In addition, the Further Education (FE) Performance Dashboard, proposed as part of FE Accountability Reforms in the ‘Skills for Jobs’ White Paper, will show skills-related outcomes for FE learners at provider level, including breakdowns by SEND learners. More detail about the FE Performance Dashboard is set out in the Department for Education’s FE Funding and Accountability consultation which ran from July to October 2022. Subject to user testing, the FE Performance Dashboard is currently planned to go live by the end of the 2023/24 academic year.

## Strengthened accountabilities to enforce statutory responsibilities and drive better outcomes and experiences

9. Through the consultation, we heard that current accountabilities are too weak, and families have to battle the system to get support. The new National Standards and local partnerships and plans will provide clarity in the system and encourage people to work together, but we know there is a need for stronger incentives and better enforcement for local areas, including providers, to meet statutory duties.

10. Our measures seek to have an impact across the local system to enable the delivery of improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people from 0-25 years old. Families should feel confident that all parts of the system will be held to account and appropriate action will be taken to prevent and tackle failures. They should also feel confident that where issues arise, there are clear and effective routes of complaint so that the right support is provided as soon as possible.

11. Across local areas we are strengthening accountabilities for local authorities, schools, colleges and multi-academy trusts in the following ways:

- **Updated Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspections:** In January 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission introduced a new approach for area SEND inspections.

These place greater emphasis on the outcomes that are being achieved for children and young people, look more closely at children under 5 and those aged 16-25 years old and include alternative provision for the first time. It will have three possible inspection outcomes providing more nuanced judgements for areas to better inform a Department for Education response into local areas. Finally, as part of the framework, there will be a series of thematic visits each year, with the first focusing on alternative provision, publishing in autumn 2023.

- In 2023, the Department for Education will adjust its response to poor performance, in line with the **new joint Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspection framework**, so that it can act proactively when areas fail to provide the necessary support to meet the needs of children and young people, including the removal of service control and imposition of a trust or commissioner on local authorities, where required. We will develop a holistic new ladder of intervention for local areas, with a focus on creating financial sustainability and improving outcomes for children and young people, based on evidence and data, including data in the new inclusion dashboards and delivery of local inclusion plans alongside inspection outcomes.
- In addition, in 2023, we will evaluate the full evidence base of where statutory duties are met and not met across the local SEND and alternative provision system, to consider mechanisms to ensure we are able to be more robust with any partner that fails to meet their statutory responsibilities.
- Over the next three years, we will continue to support local authorities through several different improvement programmes to address concerns raised by Ofsted and CQC, as well as those identified by our expert advisors. These include improvement programmes such as, targeted performance improvement providing support to areas in need, sector-led improvement offering peer-to-peer support, the SEND and Children's Social Care Joint Local Government Association Leadership Programme focusing on political leadership challenges in local authorities, and what works in SEND identifying and distributing good practice. The programmes focus primarily on local authority practice and provision by addressing the underlying cross-cutting issues affecting SEND performance, including issues around timeliness and high needs budgetary pressures. The aim is to stabilise the system and build capacity and capability to respond to long-term reforms. In addition, the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes are supporting local authorities with the biggest deficits to reduce pressure on the high needs budget.
- **Inspections under Ofsted's 2019 Education Inspection Framework:** to be judged good or outstanding, schools and colleges must show that children and young people with SEND achieve good outcomes. The school inspection handbook emphasises that pupils with SEND have different needs and starting points, and inspectors will expect to see an inclusive culture in all education settings. All schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers will have at least one inspection between May 2021 and July 2025. For FE, Ofsted focuses on how well learners

with SEND acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life, through an ambitious curriculum based on high-quality teaching and training.

- **Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review:** will set out for the first time, detailed descriptors for academy trust strength which recognise the value that trust-wide policies and leadership can add to individual schools. These descriptors include measures for a high-quality, inclusive education, helping to incentivise leaders to focus on setting the right culture for inclusion and improving the outcomes of pupils with SEND and in alternative provision across trusts.
- The requirement for all schools to publish **SEN Information Reports** that was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014 means that every school now has published, standardised information about its policy for pupils with SEN. We will now explore whether the expectations about the contents of the SEN Information Report could be developed further to improve transparency.
- **Attendance:** The recently published 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance sets out clear roles and responsibilities for schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities to work together to provide access to early help services and ensure joined up support for children and their families facing special educational needs, health or disability related barriers to attendance. In working with their parents to improve attendance, schools should be mindful of these barriers and put additional support in place such as pastoral or curriculum support.

12. The Department for Education will also work with health colleagues to strengthen lines of accountability through health structures by:

- **Every Integrated Care Board (ICB) will have an Executive Board Lead** for Children and Young People with SEND and Safeguarding, responsible for supporting the ICB Chief Executive in meeting the legal requirements of relevant legislation. Statutory guidance will be issued for ICBs in relation to the requirement for an Executive Lead role for safeguarding and SEND.
- **Continue to review and bring together the existing functions of Designated Clinical Officers and Designated Medical Officers.** This will provide greater consistency in the offer this role brings to the local SEND partnership in relation to the health needs of children and young people with SEND. We will work to maintain the expertise that Designated Clinical Officers and Designated Medical Officers bring to the role and consider whether Designated Health Officer is the most appropriate title.
- **Facilitating a more joined up response between Department for Education and NHS regional and national teams** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.

## Strengthened redress and mandatory mediation

13. Throughout the consultation, many families told us that they felt they needed to go through a lengthy, stressful and often expensive appeals process to secure support for their child.
14. The delivery of National Standards, improved co-production with families and strengthened accountabilities will make it clearer for families what support should be provided and by whom. These improvements should help to prevent disagreements arising in the first place.
15. To help maintain positive relationships locally, we will refresh the model set for co-production at a local level including clear and transparent communication with parents. This will set out expectations for how local areas should work with families in their area to engage constructively and, as a result, prevent issues from escalating. We will also continue to offer training and support, via our contracted delivery partners, to SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS). SENDIASS provide valuable support and free advice to families of children with SEND, and to local areas to resolve disputes early and at formal stages. We will work with our partners to promote the published minimum standards for SENDIASS services and consider with our partners whether the minimum standards should be incorporated into the SEND Code of Practice.
16. When families feel that the service they have received from the local authority has not been good enough, such as deadlines being missed, there are existing routes to seek redress, such as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). To make it clearer for families how SEND-related concerns and complaints should be dealt with, we will amend the SEND Code of Practice so that it is clearer about who is responsible for resolving concerns. We will set out the routes of escalation if families remain unhappy with the way their concerns have been addressed. To inform this, we will look at what the role of the LGSCO, who consider complaints against local authorities, should be in a reformed SEND system. Additionally, the upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review will look at removing the duplication of processes between different bodies, improving the experience for trusts, schools and parents.
17. Data on complaints and appeals will be made transparent through national and local inclusion dashboards and be used, alongside other metrics, to monitor performance across areas and drive improvements.
18. For appeals about decisions regarding EHC needs assessments and plans, we proposed in the green paper to make mediation a mandatory part of the Tribunal appeals process. The consultation showed some support for mediation and giving it a greater role to play in redress. We also heard that for mediation to be effective, it needs to be high-quality. However, there were concerns about how making mediation mandatory could lengthen the resolution process for cases that do need to go to Tribunal and how this could delay children and young people with SEND receiving appropriate support.

19. Mediation can help narrow areas of dispute and pave the way for an agreement to be reached. It is usually much quicker than going through a Tribunal process and can help to prevent the additional stress that can come from preparing a case for Tribunal. To ensure that mediators understand the SEND system and are properly equipped to understand all views and appropriately guide families through the process, we will review and build on existing professional standards for SEND mediators. Local authorities will remain responsible for commissioning and funding mediation at no cost to families.
20. We will further improve the quality of mediation and ensure it offers a good service to families by:

<b>Phase 1 2023 (autumn)</b>	<b>Phase 2 2024 (autumn)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the Civil Mediation Council, the College of Mediators, other sector partners and families to review and build on the professional standards for SEND mediators.</li> <li>• Improving the information, advice and guidance available to families on mediation.</li> <li>• Evaluate the outcomes and impacts of mediation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly setting out what processes should be followed by education, health and care partners locally.</li> <li>• Setting out how the mediation process will be monitored to give families confidence in it.</li> </ul>

21. We will continue to explore options for strengthening mediation and will test and evaluate approaches further before deciding whether to bring forward legislation to make these strengthened processes statutory and make mediation mandatory. We will be more effective at using data on how mediation is carried out locally to inform intervention activity and will take action where local areas are not participating in mediation as required.
22. The SEND Tribunal is an important backstop for cases that cannot be resolved through early dispute resolution. Resolving more cases via early dispute resolution and mediation will enable the SEND Tribunal to hear cases more quickly than it does now and improve the experience for families who need it. It will also enable more local authority resource to be focussed on providing direct support to families rather than on the administrative burden of preparing for Tribunal cases.
23. The SEND Tribunal also hears disability discrimination claims against schools. In the green paper we set out that we wanted to explore how well the Tribunal's remedies in disability discrimination cases against schools were working in practice. Throughout the consultation, we heard calls for more guidance to increase awareness of schools' duties under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent discrimination, as well as some feedback that the remedies available to the Tribunal in disability discrimination cases should go

further by enabling financial compensation to be awarded. We will seek to prevent discrimination from arising in the first place by supporting schools to comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010. We will also further consider our policy on how disability discrimination claims against schools are dealt with.

## **A bespoke alternative provision performance framework**

24. Measures used to indicate the performance of mainstream schools do not work well for alternative provision schools. Pupils entering alternative provision will do so having disengaged with education and have significant gaps in their learning, and alternative provision schools will often only have a short time to work with pupils to address those issues. This lack of clear measures specific to the needs of pupils in alternative provision schools makes it hard for those schools to assess where they need to make improvements.
25. To improve the quality of alternative provision based on our new vision for a three-tier service, we proposed to introduce a bespoke alternative provision performance framework based on five named metrics. This would be designed to set robust standards focused on aspects such as increased attendance, attainment, re-integration into mainstream education or progression to sustainable post-16 destinations. Respondents from alternative provision settings, and their commissioners, offered the greatest support and agreement to this proposal. There was also a positive response to setting up an expert group to help improve alternative provision data and performance information at both provider and local level, so that it supported the inclusion of alternative provision into Area SEND inspections. We will set up this expert group as a next step in developing an alternative provision performance framework.

## **Greater oversight of pupil movements**

26. The majority of schools and local authorities act appropriately in facilitating the movement of pupils without EHCPs, for example when children and young people require alternative provision to address behavioural needs. In most areas, local authorities and schools work well together to secure the right places for children, but this does not happen everywhere, and some pupil movement is opaque. A lack of clear oversight can lead to children being placed in settings that don't meet their educational needs. At the most extreme, they may be missing education altogether, putting already vulnerable children at greater risk. Feedback from the consultation consistently identified a lack of joint working as one of the main weaknesses in the current system. Poor partnership arrangements can also work against our three-tier model for alternative provision, acting as a block to reintegrating children when they are ready to return to mainstream education.

27. We will work with local authority, trust and school leaders to develop options for ensuring transparent decision-making on pupil movement with the child's best interest at heart. These will include arrangements for fair access panels, and will be in line with new National Standards around the role of specialist and mainstream schools in making arrangements for alternative provision. Alongside this, where a school place has not been secured through fair access, we will look at how we can make the process of applying to the Secretary of State for a direction to admit as effective as possible. We will keep the effectiveness of these changes under review and will consider further powers around the placement of children if we need to go further to ensure there are safe and appropriate placements for every child.

## **Unregistered alternative provision**

28. We recognise the need to strengthen protections for children and young people in unregistered alternative provision settings, so that every placement is safe and has clear oversight. To find the right solution, we launched a call for evidence on the use of unregistered alternative provision, which closed on 30 September 2022. We have seen responses that reflect small, flexible provision being able to address individual need in supporting children and young people to engage with education. We have also heard powerful testimony from young adults who feel their life chances were transformed through attending non-school settings.

29. In some local areas there are strong delivery models, for example, with close management by local authorities or alternative provision schools, of frameworks offering quality assured providers, backed up by strong attendance management systems, safeguarding controls and support for wider development. However, this approach is not enough on its own. It can only be effective alongside rigorous oversight of pupil placements and continual attention to the needs of the child. In the best systems, planning for the end of the placement begins at the outset, with a focus on the pupil's progression back into mainstream education.

30. We are analysing responses to the call for evidence whilst having further conversations with providers, commissioners and users on potential implications of the proposals, such as restricting the use of unregistered settings to part-time or time-limited placements, and how such placements should complement education in school. We will set out further proposals as they develop. Separately, for the limited and exceptional cases where commissioners deem full-time online alternative provision to be in the child's best interest, the Department for Education has launched an Online Education Accreditation Scheme for those providers.

## National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board

31. The green paper proposed setting up a National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board to hold partners to account for the timely development and improvement of the system. Following feedback we heard throughout the consultation, we will establish the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board, comprised of parents, sector leaders across education including schools, early years and post-16, health and care and local and national government. The board will be jointly chaired by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy.
32. The purpose of the Board will be to oversee the implementation of this Improvement Plan. It will be informed by data and sector views, the needs and views of children, young people and parents will be central to its work, and it will embrace the principles of co-production in how it operates. It will draw from, and promote, good practice to lead and drive change across the SEND and alternative provision sector.
33. The Board will also receive regular input from a wide range of stakeholders, including children, young people and parents, and from groups that have been set up to inform the development of specific system reforms. The Board will publish updates on progress in delivery against this Plan for children, young people and parents.

## Chapter 6: A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes

1. The new single national SEND and alternative provision system should deliver consistent, clear and early support for children and young people with SEND and provide financial sustainability. The system should enable local partners to work together effectively with families to deliver for children and young people. Each partner should be accountable for playing their part, restoring young people and families' faith in the support they receive. Alongside record investment in high needs, these reforms should mean more resources are dedicated to providing timely, effective support early and as a matter of course in mainstream settings. This should reduce the burden on parents to have to navigate the lengthy statutory EHC assessment process to receive support.
2. Through the Change Programme, we will build momentum towards this fairer and financially sustainable national SEND and alternative provision system that identifies clear standards for the provision and processes that should be in place for all children and young people, no matter what their need or where they live. This will help design and test these policies to ensure they work and do not create any unintended consequences for families. Meanwhile, we are supporting all local authorities to look at what positive action can be taken now to deliver high-quality services while bringing high needs budgets under control, so that local areas are in the best position to deliver the wider SEND system reform.
3. These reforms will be a significant change to the high needs system and will require reforms to funding arrangements to support their delivery, for example, by ensuring that funding allows providers to deliver the expectations set out in the National Standards efficiently. Clear and transparent processes, which strike the right balance between national consistency and individual need, will ensure a fairer and clearer system that takes all voices into account, especially those of children, young people and their families. Ensuring an appropriate supply of specialist provision will make sure that high-quality specialist settings are available to those that require them.

### **We will:**

- increase **core school funding by £3.5 billion** in 2023-24 compared to the year before, of which almost £1 billion of that increase will go towards high needs. This means high needs funding will be £10.1 billion in 2023-24.
- support **local authorities** through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes and share the best practice from local areas with inclusive and sustainable high needs provision more widely.
- develop a **system of funding bands and tariffs** so that consistent National Standards are backed by more consistent funding across the country.
- publish a response to the **consultation on the schools National Funding Formula** in 2023 which includes proposals on funding for SEND, including the notional SEND budget, and a mechanism for transferring funding to high needs budgets.
- develop **new approaches to funding alternative provision** aligned to their focus on preventative work with, and reintegration of pupils into, mainstream schools. We will do this in consultation with mainstream schools, the alternative provision sector and local authorities.
- re-examine the state's **relationship with independent special schools** to ensure we set comparable expectations for all state-funded specialist providers.

## **Fairer, sustainable funding**

### **Supporting local authorities**

4. We are supporting all local authorities to look now at what positive action can be taken to improve the way children and young people's needs are met, prepare for wider SEND system reform, bring high needs costs under control and address DSG deficits. This includes the additional funding following the 2022 Autumn Statement, high needs funding will be rising to £10.1 billion in 2023-24 – an increase of over 50% from the 2019-20 allocations.
5. Despite this level of funding, and the best efforts of local authorities, there continues to be a significant proportion of local authorities with accumulated DSG deficits, with the total deficits increasing to over £1 billion by the end of 2020-21. The DSG 'statutory override' has been extended for a one-off period of three years (up to March 2026) to allow local authorities the short-term flexibility needed to implement sustainable change. It is critical that, during this extension, local authorities continue to work with all parts of the SEND system to put themselves in the best position so that when the 'statutory override' comes to an end, local authorities are able to demonstrate their ability to deal with remaining DSG deficits. In view of this, we have already begun supporting local authorities facing particular challenges in delivering their high needs system for children and young people sustainably. More than half of local authorities have been invited to join either the Safety Valve programme or the Delivering Better Value programme.

6. The Safety Valve programme, introduced in 2020-21 for those local authorities with the very highest percentage DSG deficits, requires these local authorities to develop substantial plans for reform to their high needs systems. With support and challenge from the Department for Education's SEND and financial experts, authorities produce plans to rapidly place their system on a sustainable footing by running it more effectively, working collaboratively with key partners and families to do so. The Safety Valve programme has demonstrated that, if a local area's leadership work together, it is possible for even those areas facing the most acute challenges to create innovative and viable plans to reach a sustainable position and maintain a focus on high-quality provision for children and young people with SEND. Steps they have taken to do this include developing a stronger mainstream offer, improving support for phase transitions, and ensuring sufficient local places to meet needs.
7. As part of the programme, we expect local authorities' chief executives, chief finance officers, and Directors of Children's Services to work together on the development of plans. These plans must also include listening to the experiences of children and young people and their families, and local authorities must have the support and engagement of local leaders, schools, parent and carer forums, and other key stakeholders. The principles of all Safety Valve agreements reflect the need to reach sustainability through genuine collaboration with partners to ensure children and young people's needs are met early and appropriately.
8. In 2022, we introduced the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme to target the 55 local authorities who have the next highest percentage DSG deficits after those in the Safety Valve programme. The programme takes a Diagnostic approach to helping local authorities identify achievable and sustainable changes that can drive high-quality outcomes for children and young people with SEND and equip authorities with the tools to enable them to maintain these changes sustainably, on an ongoing basis.
9. The objective of the Diagnostic is, through robust evidence gathering and wider system engagement, to support authorities to identify the most impactful changes that can be made to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Since the programme started, 20 local authorities have completed the Diagnostic, with inputs from over 1,800 parents and carers, 500 education providers and professionals, and 700 practitioners across the 20 local systems. The work so far demonstrates that achievable opportunities exist to improve parent, carer and child experiences while managing spend more effectively across the SEND system. We will share learning, insights and best practice from the programme as it progresses.
10. We are seeing that local authorities are able to refocus their resources and provision to encourage mainstream schools to be more inclusive, ensure needs are met early and appropriately and use available local provision effectively. We have published a research report and accompanying guidance to assist local authorities as they make plans for sustainability, drawing on existing good practice in the sector and learning from the programmes. The research report shares over 60 case study examples of

positive practice found in local authorities and offers advice and recommendations that can be applied in other local areas. The initial experience from the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes, along with this research, has demonstrated that some local authorities can and should be doing more to manage their systems well and sustainably. By supporting all local authorities to act now to adopt practices which support children and young people effectively and sustainably, we can put the system in the best position in advance of our wider reforms.

## **Bands and tariffs**

11. The green paper acknowledged that to improve financial stability in the system, we must make the most effective use of high needs funding so that local authorities can use the record levels of investment to deliver quality support for children and young people with SEND and balance their high needs budgets. We will introduce a national framework of banding and price tariffs to support commissioners and providers to meet the expectations set out in the National Standards. Whilst there will always be some local variation, to have a consistent, national SEND and alternative provision system and ensure value for money, we must move to a world where similar types of support are backed by similar levels of funding. Bandings will cluster specific types of education provision and tariffs will set the rules and prices that commissioners use to pay providers to deliver what is set out within the National Standards. This will be implemented alongside our broader changes to the national funding system and the development of National Standards. This will ensure that money is targeted to where it is needed most and incentivise and equip settings to provide high-quality education provision, thereby improving outcomes of those with SEND.
12. Many stakeholders have welcomed the proposal for a more nationally consistent and transparent system. Some stated that a national framework will improve consistency and reduce the administrative burden on settings that accept pupils and students from multiple local authorities (such as colleges), while others welcomed more transparency from providers to show how budgets are spent.
13. Many respondents also expressed the importance of ensuring that funding and spending are designed to meet children and young people's needs, so that national consistency does not undermine supporting individual needs. This was echoed by stakeholders who noted that children and young people's needs change over time and those with the most complex needs may not fit into neat categories or descriptors. Similarly, some said that a national approach should not cut across personalised individual decision making. Some stakeholders agreed that need should drive provision and that any nationalised approach should only help inform funding. We also heard that a degree of flexibility at a geographical level was necessary, to be able to respond to different financial landscapes.

14. Most local authorities already make use of banded funding arrangements, based on local levels of available provision and costs. We know that an effective funding system is one that is consistent but is also flexible, transparent and simple. The introduction of a national bands and tariffs funding system that sets expectations for the cost and delivery of provision, with appropriate flexibility, is dependent on other policy proposals, particularly the development of National Standards, so this will be developed alongside them. It will be designed to appropriately reflect the needs of children and young people, including the most complex needs, and to meet the cost of the provision that they need. It will give providers clarity on how much funding they should expect to receive in delivering support or a service and enable commissioners to determine the funding required.
15. We know that currently there is significant variation in the cost of provision across the country, so, starting in 2023, we will undertake research to gather more information about the costs of provision and then explore the best way to manage and reduce this variation as much as possible. To do this we will:
- work with commissioners and providers to collect and analyse data on the cost of provision, which will then be used to inform the development of the bands, tariffs and funding structures needed to deliver the support set out in the National Standards.
  - consider how this research data can be shared with local authorities and providers to inform local decisions on commissioning and funding.
16. We will look at how we can support local authorities by sharing this data to help inform their spending decisions. This will help to address some of the current inconsistencies in spending on high needs, in advance of the implementation of National Standards and the accompanying tariffs.
17. To further support fairer, sustainable funding, we will continue to work with independent specialist providers to consider how we can ensure that there is clarity and transparency about the cost of bespoke packages of support for children and young people with the most complex needs.

## **Standardisation of Notional SEND Budgets**

18. It is important that mainstream schools are resourced appropriately for making suitable provision for their pupils with SEND. In August, we published guidance on the notional SEN budget for mainstream schools that sought to clarify what the current notional SEN budget is for and how local authorities should review the calculation of that budget through local funding formula factors.
19. We are progressing towards fully implementing the National Funding Formula (NFF) for mainstream schools. We consulted in summer 2022 on moving to a direct NFF whereby all mainstream schools are directly funded via the NFF rather than through

150 local school funding formulae. As part of this, we consulted on whether the direct NFF would identify an indicative SEND budget for schools. Most responses to the consultation, including the majority of responses from local authorities and schools, indicated support for the direct NFF to include the identification of an indicative SEND budget determined by the Department for Education. We will publish more details on the outcome of this consultation in spring 2023.

20. In moving towards the implementation of the direct NFF for mainstream schools, we will be looking carefully at what the National Standards say about the SEND provision that schools should make available. This important first step will inform the level of funding that schools will need within their total budget to deliver the expected type and level of provision for their pupils with SEND. We can then work out how best to design the calculation of the indicative SEND budget for each school.

### **Funding stability for alternative provision**

21. Alternative provision schools face a unique difficulty in accurately predicting pupil numbers. The link between funding and pupil numbers also presents a potential perverse incentive to admit and keep pupils when they could receive interventions in, or return to, mainstream provision. Given these issues, the green paper proposed to ensure that state-funded alternative provision schools (whether local authority-maintained pupil referral units or alternative provision academies or free schools) have the funding security and stability they need to deliver a support service focused on early intervention. Under this proposal, local partnerships would draw up a plan for delivering alternative provision in their area and identify the budget that would be needed to implement the plan over a minimum period of 3 years.

22. This proposal was welcomed across the sector, with consultation responses recognising the benefits of providing greater certainty. Responses also suggested that identifying a specific budget for alternative provision would help in local decisions about how much high needs and other funding should be earmarked for that purpose.

23. We will develop new approaches to the funding of alternative provision, based on the three-tier system that prioritises preventative work and reintegration of pupils back into mainstream schools. Funding changes will also need to reflect the role that local partnerships will play in organising alternative provision for an area and establish a more stable financial system for those delivering this provision. As we test the changes in the planning and delivery of alternative provision through the Change Programme, we will make sure that they are supported by appropriate funding reforms. Before implementing funding changes nationally, we will carefully consult with those who provide alternative provision, with mainstream schools that should benefit from their services and, importantly, with local authorities. Local authorities will remain legally responsible for arranging suitable education for those without a school place.

## Post-16 funding

24. We are very conscious of the distinct funding issues for colleges and the further education sector, and the many calls on the 16-19 disadvantage funding that is partly allocated to support students with SEND and other additional needs. We have heard a great deal about the challenges across the sector, including the variable approaches to commissioning and funding that colleges experience from the local authorities that they deal with, and, in some cases, the sheer number of authorities that they have to engage with. We know that reform is needed, and we will continue to work with the college sector and local authorities as we consider any changes for the future that may be needed, in addition to the introduction of the National Standards and funding bands and tariffs.

## Early years funding

25. In early years, local authorities are required to establish a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) to provide additional top-up funding to providers to improve outcomes for children with SEND. Funding for the SENIF can come from both the early years and high needs funding blocks of the DSG. We are very aware that the early years sector is facing economic challenges – similar to challenges being faced across the economy – making it more important than ever that the early years funding system is effectively supporting children with SEND. We will work with local authorities, early years providers and stakeholders to consider whether changes to the SENIF and other associated elements of the wider current early years funding system are needed, to ensure early years SEND funding arrangements are appropriate and well-targeted to both improve outcomes for all pre-school children with SEND, and to support the introduction of a national framework for bands and tariffs.

## Management of independent special schools

### State-funded independent schools

26. The green paper proposed that national bands and tariffs would apply across the whole range of special education provision, including the independent specialist sector. Independent special schools represent a third of special schools and support 5% of pupils with EHCPs (School Census 2022). The sector's funding comes overwhelmingly from the state, for example in 2022, local authorities placed over 20,000 children and young people with EHCPs in independent special schools<sup>17</sup>. Despite this, the sector is not treated in the same way as state-maintained specialist provision. Its regulation is designed for private fee-paying schools. Management is fragmented and small-scale, based on local authorities' individual pupil placements. This is inefficient for both commissioners and providers and makes it difficult to assess the overall impact of independent special schools. Provision can be opened or closed regardless of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Special – Independent, Education, health and care plans, Department for Education, 2022

effect on the existing local offer of provision made by schools and colleges, leaving local authorities to deal with over or under supply.

27. We will re-examine the state's relationship with independent special schools to ensure the expectations we set are comparable to those on other state-funded specialist providers. We will work with the sector to consider how they should be aligned with the new National Standards, defining the provision they offer and bringing consistency and transparency to their costs. This will mean that independent specialist providers should be part of local authorities' strategic planning and that decisions about changes to the supply of their provision should be made through Local Inclusion Partnerships.

28. A number of respondents to the consultation were concerned by the risks of trying to standardise highly specialised provision. We do not wish to prevent bespoke packages of support being offered for children and young people with the most complex needs. However, there should be clarity and transparency about the provision available including at highly specialised schools and colleges so that children and young people who need such provision can access it quickly, and to ensure that costs are reasonable. Our work with commissioners and providers to understand the provision offered and its costs will therefore ensure that we do prioritise such provision for those with the most complex needs.

### **Residential placements for children and young people with complex needs**

29. 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. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has also raised issues such as children's voices not being heard, the different regulatory standards for residential special schools and children's homes, and the failure of existing checks and balances. This builds on concerns raised by Dame Christine Lenehan in her two 2017 reports into children's homes<sup>18</sup> and residential special schools<sup>19</sup>. The evidence submitted to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care also highlighted that placements for children and young people with complex needs (often autism, learning disabilities and mental health needs, which can include behaviour which challenges) are often poorly planned and unavailable locally when needed. This results in children and young people being placed far from home, sometimes in placements which are not ideally matched to their needs. A consistent theme has been that children and young people with complex needs who are placed far away from home are more vulnerable. These reports also highlight that disabled children who have difficulty in communicating are at increased risk of abuse. It is vital that we look at what more can be done for those children and those who are outside their local area.

---

<sup>18</sup> These are our children: a review by Dame Christine Lenehan, Department of Health and Social Care, 2017

<sup>19</sup> Good Intentions, Good Enough? Residential special schools and colleges, 2017

30. A significant proportion of the children and young people in residential special schools are placed there because of challenging behaviour. Residential provision may be the right way to meet the needs of some children and young people, but it places them at greater risk by removing them from their families and local support networks. The proposals set out in this Improvement Plan to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet a wider range of needs, have a key role to play, supported by a proactive alternative provision outreach programme. This is coupled with the increased focus from children's social care on Family Help, providing support for parents and carers and access to services such as short breaks in the child's own community (as recommended in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care), as well as the Department of Health and Social Care-led Building the Right Support programme, which seeks to avoid the need for in-patient mental health provision by making specialist and intensive support services available where children are. These reforms seek to meet need at the earliest stage, avoid escalation to crisis situations and enable children and young people to remain in their families and communities.
31. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy seeks to transform the way care is provided to children and young people, prioritising children's loving relationships in a home which best meets their needs. It sets out reforms at national, regional and local level to increase sufficiency, improve standards of care and regulations and move towards a regional model for providing homes for children. This will have an impact on residential special schools, including dual-registered 52-week residential special schools. These reforms include:
- reviewing the existing legislation and regulation for all forms of care for looked-after children and young people and developing a core overarching set of standards.
  - working with Ofsted and the sector to develop plans for a financial oversight regime, to increase transparency and to prevent sudden market exit which would disrupt the lives of children living there.
  - supporting local authorities with forecasting, procurement and market shaping, and establishing Regional Care Co-operative (RCC) pathfinders in two areas, which will plan, deliver and commission homes for children in care across the region.
  - improving the sufficiency of residential care provision through capital investment.
32. We will work alongside the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy's RCC pathfinders to explore how they can best commission and manage residential provision for children and young people with the most complex needs, and how they should work alongside Local Inclusion Partnerships. Our commitments to both set up an expert working group to review all existing legislation and regulation and develop a core overarching set of standards for all forms of care placements and move to a regional model of care commissioning, will also contribute to more consistent and better-quality care placements for both looked-after children and those with complex learning or disability needs.

33. In taking forward our reforms following the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Safeguarding Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs in Residential Settings report, we have an opportunity to set out a new strategy for children and young people with the most complex needs (particularly challenging behaviour), building on existing programmes of activity in SEND, children's social care and the NHS. The Department for Education is considering how to respond to these system-wide issues.

## Conclusion

34. This Improvement Plan sets out how we will work alongside children, young people and their families, and those who work across every part of the SEND and alternative provision system, to deliver improvements for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.
35. As we have demonstrated throughout this Plan, there is work underway now to address the immediate challenges facing the system. We know as well that there are many areas of the country where there is excellent practice, and children and young people are receiving the support that they need to succeed. We look forward to continuing to work with you to spread this practice, as well as testing our longer-term proposals for systemic reform, so that we can all play our part in supporting children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.

# Annex A – Consultation response summary

During the consultation period we:

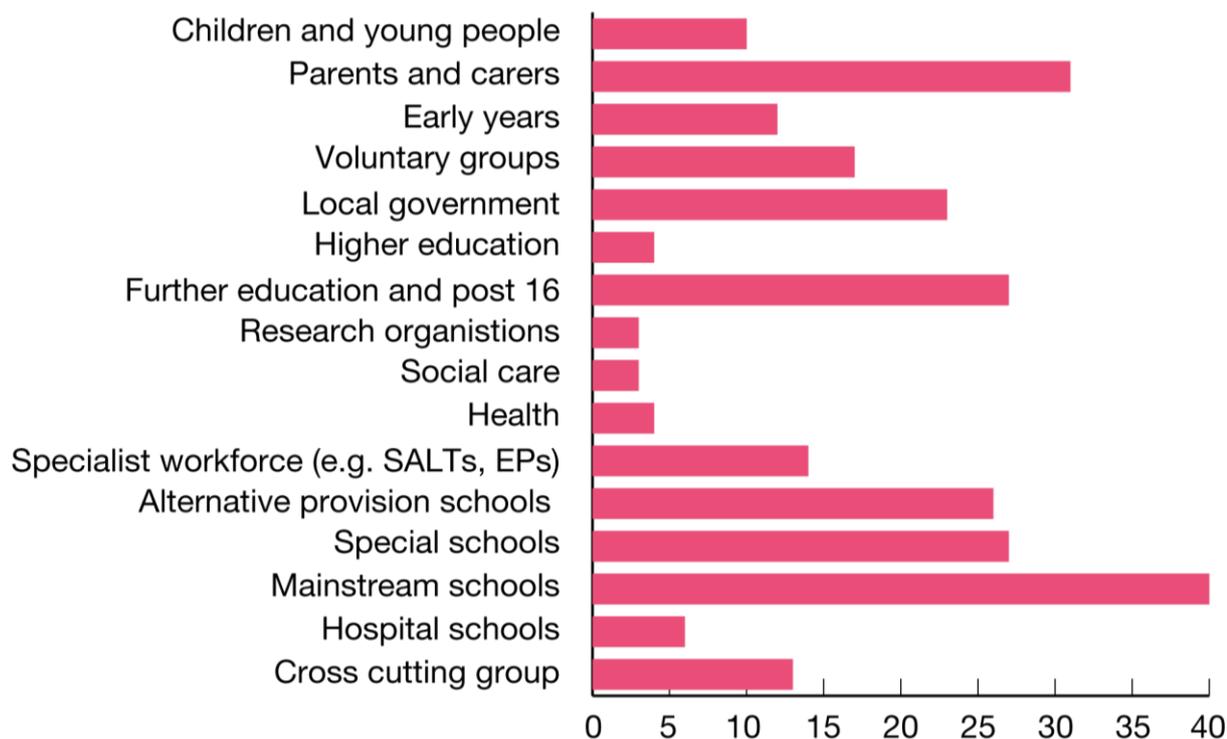


**over 60 events**  
were with children, young people and parents and carers.



spoke to over  
**4,500**  
people

## Consultation events by sector



This table does not add up to 175 as multiple sectors attended some of the same events.

## Online consultation received nearly

**6,000**  
responses

Parents and carers and headteachers/teachers/other teaching staff collectively accounted for 72% of all responses.



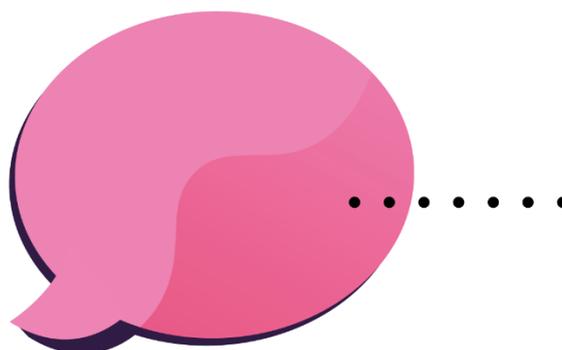
**15%**

of responses were received via direct email. We also received responses from organisations representing the views of multiple stakeholders.

7 separate questions were aimed at children and young people:

**162**

children and young people responded



**40%**

of responses came from those aged between 19–25.

### **Some respondents told us they liked...**

- our proposal to develop a national system with National Standards setting clear and high expectations for good practice.
- our proposals to improve inclusive mainstream provision.
- our new vision for alternative provision.
- the focus on early intervention.

### **Some respondents agreed with....**

- our diagnosis of the system – including the existence of a vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient allocation of resources.
- our suggestion that there is a lack of clarity around the responsibilities between different agencies and therefore too much variation in support – which creates a postcode and social capital lottery.

### **Some respondents wanted to hear more about...**

- how proposals would work in practice – this included acknowledging issues with system capacity.
- our plans to ensure the workforce has the training, expertise and support to achieve our vision for the system.
- an inclusive society where every child and young person is set up to thrive.
- our plans for early years and post-16 settings and for those who need support from adult social care.

### **Some respondents were concerned about...**

- some proposals (like tailored lists) creating a system that does not respond effectively to the needs of individual children and reduces choice.
- some proposals (like mandatory mediation) creating a system that could make it difficult for families to access support promptly.

# Annex B – The government’s vision for the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system and delivery approach



## Vision

Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates and enables success in a variety of forms, with the culture, attitudes and environments to offer every child and young person the support that they need.

We want the process of accessing support to be dignified and affirmative, focusing on a child’s achievements, talents, and strengths.

Above all, we want to create a system where every child and young person can thrive and fulfil their potential. This starts with being able to access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.



## Mission

We want all those working across education, health and care to work with local and central government to:

- 1. Fulfil children’s potential:** children and young people with SEND (or attending alternative provision) enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment.
- 2. Build parents’ trust:** families find it easier to navigate the system and access support. They have greater confidence in it, reporting better experiences of a system which is based on dignity and affirmation. Mainstream settings are seen as being high-quality and inclusive, valuing those with SEND. Specialist provision is seen to be delivering effectively and is available locally to those who need it.
- 3. Provide financial sustainability:** local systems deploy their resources effectively such that spending shifts towards early intervention and away from costly specialist provision, where this is not required. Local authorities operate within their budgets and achieve value for money so that record investment in the high needs budget is used effectively and with evidenced outcomes that are financially sustainable. As a result, local authorities will be able to deliver high-quality services within budgets.



## Values

Our single SEND and alternative provision system is based on 5 core values:

- 1. Nationally consistent:** a system based on a suite of National Standards where children, young people and their families know what to expect and providers know what is expected and are accountable for that.

2. **Evidence-driven:** our reforms will ensure decisions around support and placements are driven by evidence of what works best for the child or young person.
3. **Responsive:** early identification of need, targeted support to address children and young people's individual needs and timely access to specialist services and support, including specialist placements where appropriate.
4. **Co-produced:** children, young people and their families will be involved in the decision-making process around the support they receive and in the development of the policy which drives those decisions.
5. **Inclusive:** build on the ambition of the Schools White Paper for high-quality, well-led and inclusive schools with fair access to excellent teaching of evidence-based curricula in calm, safe and supportive settings, where individual needs are identified and targeted academic, pastoral or specialist support is given.



## Approach

Feedback from the consultation reflected there is both consensus on the urgency to secure improved outcomes and experiences for children, young people and their families and that bolder proposals for reform need to be carefully designed and tested in order to be successful and reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

We will deliver reform in three different ways:

1. **Support and stabilise:** we will support and stabilise the system, getting local areas working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and to ensure that local authority deficits are brought under control. This includes supporting local authorities with financial deficits through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes.
2. **Addressing supply issues:** in the short to medium term, we will take action to address supply issues – ensuring that there is sufficient support available for children and young people when they need it, in the most efficient way. This includes investing £2.6 billion between 2022 and 2025 to deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision, reducing the need for costly independent provision.
3. **Design and test for systemic reform:** our £70 million Change Programme will create up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships that will test and refine longer-term reforms including developing and testing National Standards, strategic partnerships and inclusion plans, the alternative provision service and tailored lists. This will build a strong evidence base to inform future funding and legislation.

# Annex C – The future Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system

Below we have set out how the changes in the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan will benefit children, young people and families, education settings and local systems.



## National Standards

- will give clarity to children, young people and families about what evidence-based support should be in place for their child.
- will give clarity to education settings and providers about the provision they will need to make available for different needs.
- will give local authorities and health and care partners clarity about the support that should be available.



## Workforce

- children and young people will have access to a highly trained workforce in their classroom, and from health and care partners.
- we will introduce a new leadership level SENCo NPQ (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator National Professional Qualification) for schools, and practice guides will offer evidence-based support for frontline professionals.
- health partners will have increased specialist capacity and local authority SEND Casework teams will be well placed to deliver high-quality support.



## Education, Health and Care

- families will engage with a standardised Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, with increased use of digital technology, making it easier to navigate.
  - for education settings, a standardised EHCP process with increased use of digital technology will reduce bureaucracy.
  - Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces will help deliver wraparound support in alternative provision schools.
  - for local systems, each area will be encouraged to have a Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO). Local multi-agency panels will aid decision making, with standardised EHCPs.
-



## Preparation for Adulthood

- children and young people will have improved transitions and access to a range of suitable, ambitious pathways post-16.
- education settings will support children and young people to experience smoother transitions, due to transition standards.
- for local systems, adjustment passports and more Supported Internships will support more young people into sustained employment and higher education.



## Accountability

- families will be part of Local Inclusion Partnerships, and help to develop local inclusion plans. Strengthened accountability across the system will increase confidence.
- for education settings, inspections under the Education Inspection Framework must show that children and young people with SEND achieve good outcomes to deliver a good or outstanding judgement.
- for local systems, inclusion dashboards will improve transparency and inform decision making. Local areas will be held to account under new Area SEND inspections.



## Financial Sustainability

- children and young people who need a specialist placement will have access to a suitable school, promptly.
- for education settings, the National Funding Formula will give clarity to schools and new funding approaches for alternative provision will be aligned to preventative work.
- for local systems, local authorities will be supported to address current financial deficits and bands and tariffs will give clarity about costs of provision.

---

### **The National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board**

oversees the implementation of the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, leading and driving change across the sector.

E02864447

978-1-5286-3924-8



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



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/official-documents](https://www.gov.uk/official-documents).

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to the Department for Education at [www.gov.uk/contact-dfe](https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe)

ISBN 978-1-5286-3880-7

E02855097 02/23

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

# Contents

Table of figures	10
Ministerial foreword	11
About this consultation	14
Issue date	14
Responding to the Implementation Strategy consultation	14
Enquiries	14
Deadline	14
Response	15
Executive Summary	16
Pillar 1: Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families	16
Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system	17
Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks	18
Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care	19
Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly-skilled social worker for every child who needs one	20
Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data	21
Chapter 1: Introduction	23
Purpose of this report	23
What is our vision	23
Making sure reform works for everyone	25
Disabled children and young people	25
Teenagers	27
Racial disparities	28
The wider context	29
How can you input?	30
Chapter 2: Family Help	32
Chapter summary	32
What is our vision?	32

How far from the vision are we now?	36
What have we already started doing?	38
What we will do over the next two years	41
The Families First for Children Pathfinder	43
A skilled and effective workforce	46
Building a joined-up approach to Family Help	47
Ensuring Family Help works for everyone	48
Chapter 3: Child protection and multi-agency arrangements	53
Chapter summary	53
What is our vision?	53
How far from the vision are we now?	56
What have we already started doing?	61
What we will do over the next two years	63
Strengthening front-line child protection practice	64
The Families First for Children Pathfinder	65
National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards and updating Working Together to Safeguard Children	66
Strengthening information sharing	67
Improving how parents engage with child protection	67
Harm outside the home	69
Improving multi-agency leadership	70
The family justice system	73
Chapter 4: Unlocking the potential of family networks	75
Chapter summary	75
What is our vision?	75
How far from the vision are we now?	77
What have we already started doing?	78
What we will do over the next two years	79
Creating a culture of “family first” that prioritises family-led solutions	79
Improving support and reducing barriers to kinship care	81
Strengthening national policy on kinship care	83
Chapter 5: The care experience	87

Chapter summary	87
What is our vision?	87
How far from the vision are we now?	88
Children in care	88
Care leavers	90
What have we already started doing?	92
What we will do over the next two years	93
Mission 1: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place	94
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	97
Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector	106
Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers	110
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	112
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	113
Chapter 6: Workforce	115
Chapter summary	115
What is our vision?	115
How far from the vision are we now?	117
What have we already started doing?	120
What we will do over the next two years	121
Prioritising high-quality career development for social workers	121
Tackling social worker sufficiency	123
Chapter 7: Improving the system	130
Chapter summary	130
What is our vision?	130
How far from the vision are we now?	131
What have we already started doing?	133
What we will do over the next two years	135

Establish a Children’s Social Care National Framework	135
Deliver the Children’s Social Care Dashboard and improve use of data and technology	136
Deliver Practice Guides	137
Embedding learning loops	137
Inspection of children’s social care	138
Enhancing our Improvement and Intervention approach	138
Ensuring funding reflects local authorities’ share of children’s needs	141
Chapter 8: Delivery	142
Introduction	142
Phase one: laying the foundations for whole system reform	143
Subsequent phases: embedding reform everywhere	150
Our desired outcomes for children’s social care and how we will monitor progress against them	150
We are all responsible for delivering reform	153
Actions we can take now to create the future system we want to see	153
Equalities impact assessment	155
Children’s rights impact assessment	156
Consultation Questions (consolidated)	157
About you	158
Consolidated list of consultation questions throughout the Implementation Strategy	160
Annex 1: Phase one of reform: activity against our desired outcomes	163
Annex 2: Glossary	170
Annex 3: Government response to the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care	180
Family Help - as detailed in chapter 2 of the Implementation Strategy	180
Child protection, multi-agency working and the courts- as detailed in chapter 3 of the Implementation Strategy	183
Unlocking family networks - as detailed in chapter 4 of the Implementation Strategy	190
Transforming care experience- as detailed in chapter 5 of the Implementation Strategy	192
Workforce - as detailed in chapter 6 of the Implementation Strategy	201
Improving the system - as detailed in chapter 7 of the Implementation Strategy	203
Annex 4: Government response to Child Protection in England	209



## Table of figures

Figure 1: A diagram showing how Family Help will work with wider services (descriptive text follows this) .....	34
Figure 2: Key milestones that make up phase one (image version). Some milestones are subject to the outcome of consultation exercises.....	145
Figure 3: Key milestones that make up phase one (table versions). Some milestones are subject to the outcome of consultation exercises.....	146

## 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.

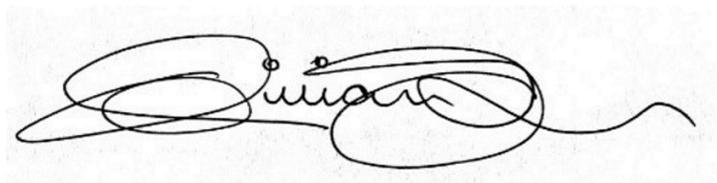
This strategy is about focusing on what really matters to children - family, love and a safe, stable and reliable place to call home. These are the things that ultimately make a difference to children's happiness and success. These are the things children and people who have experienced care tell us 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, cursive script.

**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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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.<sup>1</sup> 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 million<sup>2</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.**<sup>3</sup> 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.

---

<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> Currently local authorities in England spend around £10 billion per year,<sup>5</sup> 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.

---

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>
- 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.

---

<sup>6</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.

---

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

---

<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

---

<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Where there are concerns about children’s safety, help for families can be an enabler for strong child protection.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> **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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>14</sup> 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.

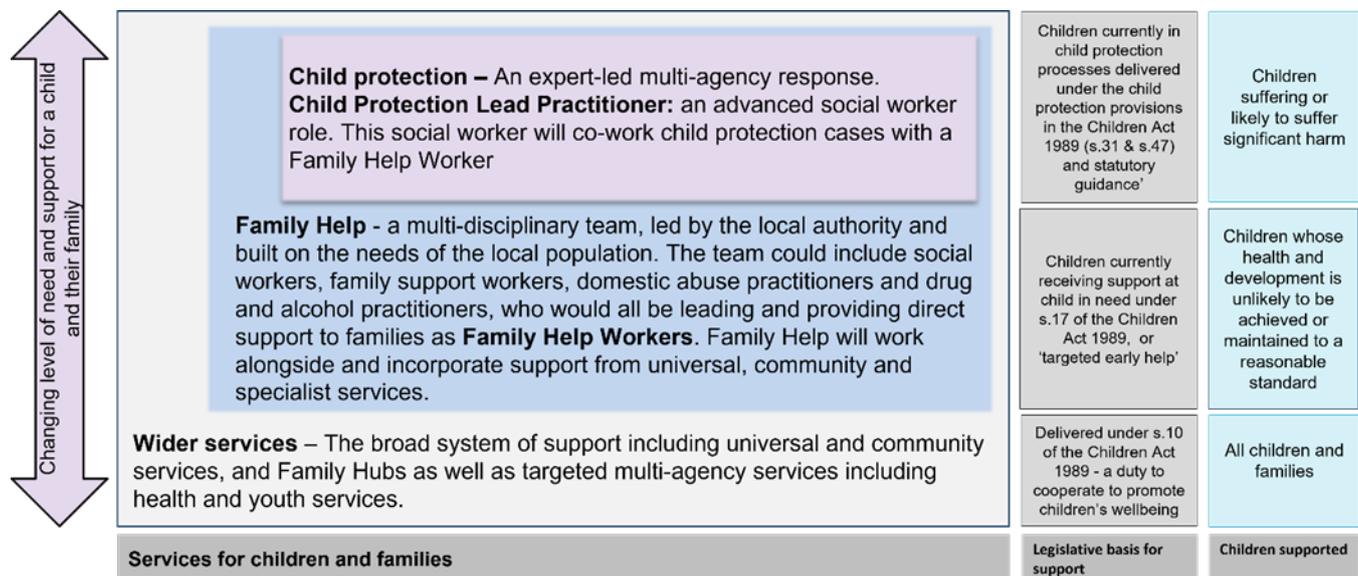


Figure 1: A diagram showing how Family Help will work with wider services (descriptive text follows this)

## 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>16</sup> 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](http://actionforchildren.org.uk))).

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

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

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

<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> The Care Review highlighted that parents with disabled children struggle to access the right support and find navigating services frustrating.<sup>23</sup> 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%.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>22</sup> 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](#)).

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

<sup>24</sup> Child Welfare Inequalities Project (2020) [The Child Welfare Inequalities Project: Final Report](#)

<sup>25</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

---

<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.

---

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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.

---

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

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.

---

<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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).<sup>34</sup> The Panel's National Review stated that unnecessary child protection activity "can overheat the system and obscure the children facing the greatest risks".<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.

---

<sup>33</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

72. **Poor parental engagement is a key practice theme identified in analysis of serious incidents.**<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

---

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

<sup>39</sup> The independent review of children’s social care (2022) [Local deep dives](#)

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

<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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.

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>46</sup> 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.**<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

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.

---

<sup>47</sup> 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](#))

<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

---

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

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

<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.

---

<sup>52</sup> 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%)'.<sup>53</sup> 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.

---

<sup>53</sup> 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,<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> Children leaving care on an SGO have better attainment in school (based on attainment 8 scores).<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

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.

---

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

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

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

<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

## 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.

---

<sup>58</sup> For more details see: [Adoption strategy: achieving excellence everywhere - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/106422/adoption_strategy_achieving_excellence_everywhere.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> 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/106422/adoption_strategy_achieving_excellence_everywhere.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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup> 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.

---

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

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

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, S. et al. (2023, forthcoming)

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

<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup>

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.<sup>67</sup>

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.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> These complex and additional needs are poorly met when children are not living in the right home or are being moved frequently.

---

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

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

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

<sup>68</sup> 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](#)

<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup>

## 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

---

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

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

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

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

<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> Currently, nearly 2 in 5 care leavers aged 19 to 21 are not in education, employment or training.<sup>76</sup>

163. The poor physical and mental health outcomes for care leavers and care-experienced people are stark.<sup>77</sup> 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).<sup>78</sup> 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.

---

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

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

<sup>77</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup>

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.

---

<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup>

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.

---

<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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.

---

<sup>81</sup> 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 overspill 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,<sup>82</sup> and there is evidence they are continuing to increase. As Ofsted referenced in its recent report:<sup>83</sup>

“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.”

---

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

<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> The extent to which health, wellbeing and inclusion are valued is also a key factor in determining how social workers feel at work.<sup>87</sup>

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.<sup>88</sup> 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.

---

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

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

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

<sup>87</sup> 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](#)

<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> This has resulted in escalating pay rates for temporary staff, workforce churn and, in some cases, reduced quality of practice.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> Local authorities tell us that whole teams are moving from local authority to agency, creating several vacancies at short notice.<sup>92</sup> 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,<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup>

---

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

<sup>90</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>94</sup> 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](#)

<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup> In addition, over 220 social worker apprentices qualified since the route started in 2018.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.

---

<sup>96</sup> 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](#)).

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

<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup> 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.

---

<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup>

295. Third, we will work with the sector to enhance the social work employer standards health check.<sup>101</sup> 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.

---

<sup>100</sup> 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.

<sup>101</sup> 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 Childrens 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 (RIIAs). 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.<sup>102</sup> This means that over 5 million children are in local authorities who are not delivering services that are good enough.<sup>103</sup>

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.

---

<sup>102</sup> Ofsted (accessed 23 January 2023) [Ofsted | Search](#)

<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup>

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.

---

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

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

<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup>

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.<sup>108</sup>

---

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

<sup>108</sup> [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

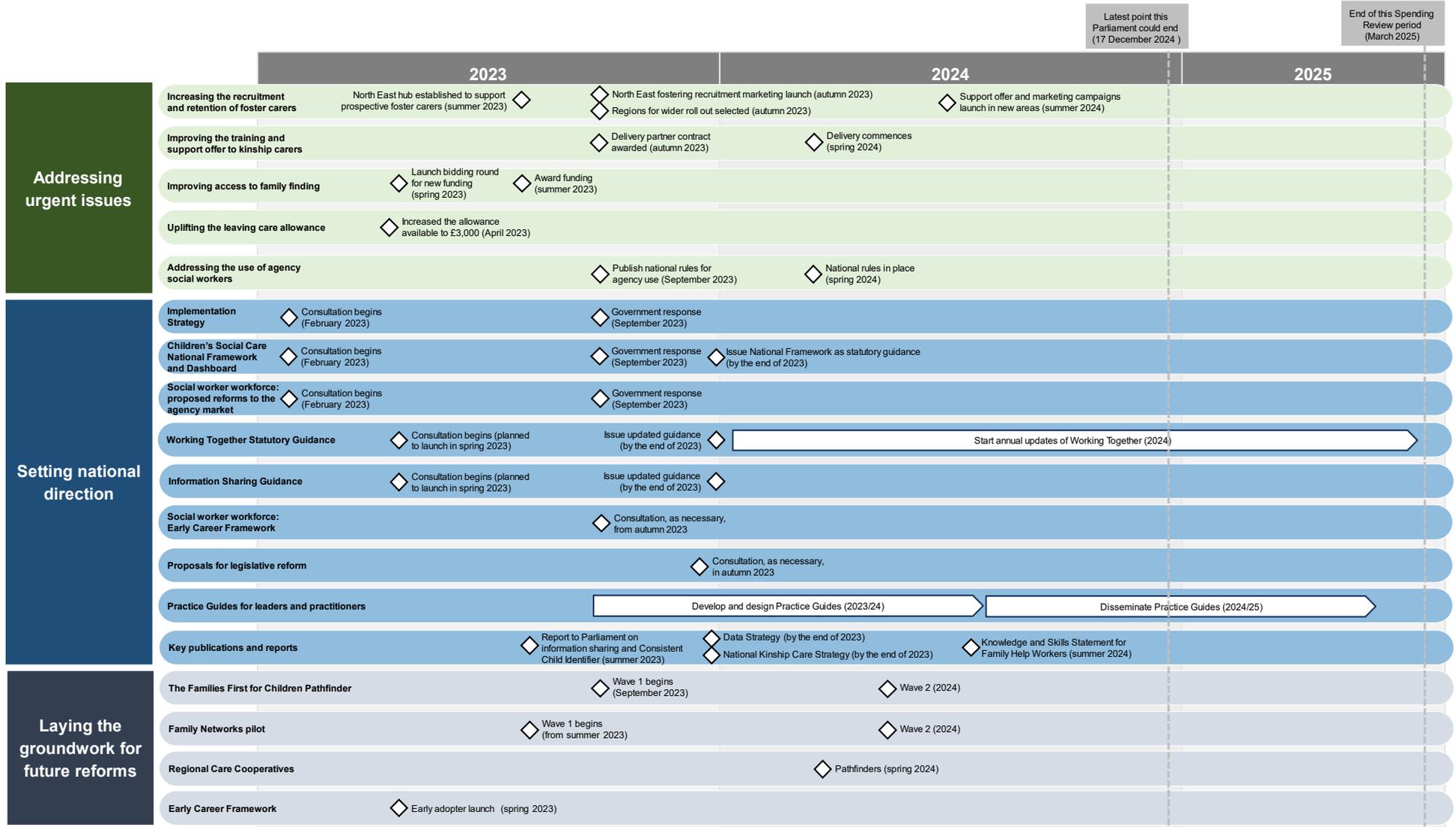


Figure 3: Key milestones that make up phase one (table versions). Some milestones are subject to the outcome of consultation exercises.

**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	<p>Consultation inviting views on our proposals for strategic reform (from 2 February 2023)</p> <p>Government response (September 2023)</p>	
Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard	<p>Consultation inviting views on the outcomes and enablers in the draft National Framework, and the indicators in the data Dashboard (from 2 February 2023)</p> <p>Government response (September 2023)</p> <p>Issue National Framework as statutory guidance (by the end of 2023)</p>	
Social worker workforce: proposed reforms to the agency market	<p>Consultation inviting views on proposed reforms to the agency market (from 2 February 2023)</p> <p>Government response (September 2023)</p>	
Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory guidance	<p>Consultation inviting views on updates to strengthen the statutory framework for safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies (planned to launch in spring 2023)</p> <p>Issue updated guidance (by the end of 2023)</p>	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,<sup>109</sup> 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:

---

<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup>
- 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.<sup>111</sup>
- **Use the social work employer standard health check**<sup>112</sup> 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?**

---

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

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

<sup>112</sup> 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](http://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>Goal: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023)</li> <li>• Publish a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers (summer 2024) informed by new research (autumn 2023)</li> <li>• Consult on an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) (spring 2023)</li> <li>• Work with the Law Commission to review the legislation on providing help to disabled children and their families (to be launched in 2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence built on how we implement new approaches to Family Help through the Families First for Children Pathfinder</li> <li>• We will have a shared understanding and expectations of the skills and knowledge needed for Family Help work</li> <li>• We will have agreement on which practitioners can case-hold for children in need</li> <li>• Law Commission exploring how to simplify and strengthen children’s social care legislation for disabled children</li> </ul>

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> <p>Page 285</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch the new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023)</li> <li>• Deliver a bespoke training and support offer which can be accessed by all kinship carers (delivery starts from spring 2024)</li> <li>• Launch Family Network Support Package pilots in 7 local areas (summer 2023)</li> <li>• Publish a national kinship care strategy (by the end of 2023)</li> <li>• Update the Family and Friends Care guidance</li> <li>• Work with Ofsted to improve the visibility of kinship care in its inspection reports</li> <li>• Explore the case for introducing a financial allowance for Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Order (CAOs)</li> <li>• Explore the introduction of additional workplace entitlements and options for an extension of Legal Aid for kinship carers with SGOs and CAOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Kinship carers will feel better supported through the establishment of 100 self-sustaining kinship peer support groups</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

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"> <li>• Launch the new Families First for Children Pathfinder in up to 12 local areas (wave 1 to be launched in September 2023)</li> <li>• Consult on National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards as part of an update to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) (spring 2023)</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Consult on updated information sharing guidance (spring 2023)</li> <li>• Report to Parliament on setting out ways to improve information sharing including an exploration of the use of a Consistent Child Identifier (summer 2023)</li> <li>• Consult on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner</li> <li>• Embed a financial tool into all local authorities and identify where efficiencies can be made to reduce backlogs in the Family Court</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence built on how we will implement new approaches to child protection through the Families First for Children Pathfinder</li> <li>• Multi-agency working and child protection are strengthened through clarified roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners as a result of the Working Together consultation</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Better integration across youth justice and children’s social care assessments through a new tool for pre-court cases</li> <li>• A tailored child protection response for children experiencing harm outside of their home</li> <li>• Action underway to improve information sharing</li> <li>• Provided funding to help safeguarding partners implement and embed reforms</li> </ul>

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>Page 287</p> <p>4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in practical interventions to see more local authorities using family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes</li> <li>• Seek views and evidence on how best to implement an opt-out model of independent advocacy</li> <li>• Review and strengthen the role of Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 visitors</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Issue a Joint Ministerial Statement to assist local authorities when approving planning applications to create new homes for children in their area</li> <li>• Explore developing a leadership programme for children’s homes managers and explore developing a Knowledge and Skills Statement</li> <li>• Set up an expert group to review standards of care</li> <li>• Pathfind Regional Care Cooperatives to plan, commission and deliver care places (spring 2024)</li> <li>• Introduce a voluntary oversight regime of the largest providers overseen by Ofsted</li> <li>• Deliver local authorities national support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly more local authorities are using family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes</li> <li>• An increase in the number foster carers and better rate of retention</li> <li>• Providers of semi-independent accommodation are registered with Ofsted, and national standards and registration requirements are mandatory</li> <li>• Successful and proportionate voluntary oversight regime established, giving greater financial transparency across children’s homes and fostering agencies</li> <li>• Regional Care Cooperative Pathfinders co-designed and established in 2 regions</li> <li>• Stronger corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector</li> <li>• More children in care and care leavers aged 16 to 19 benefit from investment in PP+-style funding</li> <li>• Narrow the gap in care leaver higher education participation rates compared to the general population</li> <li>• More care leavers benefit from high-quality apprenticeships that help them into sustainable work and improve their future earnings</li> <li>• Available leaving care allowance is increased to £3,000</li> </ul>

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 288</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult on plans to improve and widen corporate parenting responsibilities (from February 2023)</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Increase the rate of the apprenticeships care leavers bursary from £1,000 to £3,000 (autumn 2023)</li> <li>• Boost funding of the Care Leaver Covenant by 30%</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Review mental health content included in social work qualifications, early career training and continuous professional development (end of 2023)</li> <li>• Provide an uplift to the leaving care allowance that is available from £2,000 to £3,000 (April 2023)</li> <li>• Progress and complete the Children Home Capital Programme that is match funding local authorities to create new children home provision in their area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Care Leaver Covenant budget is increased by 30% to boost employment opportunities and tailored support for care leavers</li> <li>• An increase in the number of well-paid jobs available for care leavers</li> <li>• We have approximately 350 new children’s homes places across England by the end of 2025</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>Page 289</p> <p>695: The workforce is equipped and effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult as necessary on the Early Career Framework to strengthen social worker skills and knowledge (from autumn 2023)</li> <li>• Social Work England to quality assure all initial education routes to social work (between March 2022 and July 2025)</li> <li>• Establish a National Workload Action Group to tackle social worker workload (early 2023)</li> <li>• Create a national virtual hub to identify and spread best-evidenced practice to retain social workers (2023 to 2024)</li> <li>• Improve case management systems for social workers to enable them to spend more time directly with children and families</li> <li>• Boost social worker recruitment and retention through apprenticeships</li> <li>• Consult on rules on the use of agency social workers (consult from February 2023, rules published in September 2023, in place from spring 2024)</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Career Framework agreed through testing in early adopter local authorities and public consultation</li> <li>• Supported local authorities to recruit up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally</li> <li>• National Workload Action Group identifying and addressing unnecessary workload pressures</li> <li>• National Virtual Hub supporting local authorities to retain their social workers</li> <li>• Reduced reliance on agency social workers, with national rules on agency usage in place</li> </ul>

Outcomes and enablers	What will we do next?	What will we have achieved after 2 years?
<p>Pa: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice</p> <p>Page 290</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Publish data strategy setting out our long-term plan for transforming data in children’s social care (by end of 2023)</li> <li>• Set up a new children’s social care data and digital expert forum</li> <li>• Produce and disseminate Practice Guides in priority areas of practice (by 2024-25)</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Introduce a Regional Improvement Commissioner to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s Social Care National Framework issued as statutory guidance</li> <li>• Dashboard in use and future indicators agreed with work underway to fill data gaps</li> <li>• Published data strategy setting out our long-term plans for transforming data in children’s social care</li> <li>• Agreed formula for children and young people’s services funding</li> <li>• Disseminated Practice Guides in area of practice that practitioners consider a priority</li> </ul>

## 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 blood<sup>113</sup> brother or sister

---

<sup>113</sup> 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-parent<sup>114</sup> (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.

---

<sup>114</sup> 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 \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

**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 \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

**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 &amp; 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 <a href="#">National Adoption Strategy</a>. 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"> <li>• a marketing campaign to attract new foster carers</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• roll out of an evidence-based retention programme across the region to support retention of foster carers</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• identify the shared aims and objectives for case management systems (CMS)</li> <li>• identify solutions that could be used across the sector</li> <li>• communicate these clear aims to CMS providers and explore the most efficient commercial models for local authorities to procure them</li> </ul> <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 <a href="https://www.gov.uk">gov.uk</a>.</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>

<b>Recommendation Text</b>	<b>Response</b>
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 &amp; 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><b>Recommendation 1.1: Larger scale market engagement</b></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><b>Accept</b></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><b>Recommendation 1.2: National support for purchaser engagement with the market</b></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"> <li>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.</li> <li>To support the effectiveness of this function:</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul> <p>Market shaping and procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul> <p>National contracts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Department for Education should support the reintroduction of national procurement contracts covering terms and conditions that do not need to reflect local conditions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Accept</b></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><b>Recommendation 1.3: Support for increasing local authority foster care</b></p> <p>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><b>Accept</b></p> <p>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>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><b>Recommendation 2.1: Review of regulation</b></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><b>Accept</b></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><b>Recommendation 2.2: Review planning requirements</b></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><b>Accept in principle</b></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><b>Recommendation 2.3: Regular state of the sector review</b></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><b>Accept</b></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><b>Recommendation 3.1: Monitor and warn of risks of provider failure</b></p> <p>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><b>Accept</b></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>

Page 338

Recommendation	Response
<p><b>Recommendation 3.2: Contingency planning</b></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><b>Accept</b></p> <p>This will form part of the financial oversight regime which is being developed.</p>



E02855097

978-1-5286-3880-7

## Early Years and Childcare Budget Announcement – March 2023

---

### Contextual Information

**In the Government's Spring Budget the Chancellor announced transformative reforms to childcare for parents, children, the economy and women.**

- By 2027-28, this Government will expect to be spending in excess of £8bn every year on free hours and early education, helping eligible working families with their childcare costs. This represents the single biggest investment in early education and childcare in England ever.
- This will include over £4.1bn to fund extended free hours for children over the age of 9 months, a funding rate increase, increasing the supply of wraparound childcare, and wider market reforms.
- The OBR estimate that 60,000 more parents will enter the workforce as a result, while many will increase their hours

**Childcare plays a vital role in enabling parents to work and supporting children's early development, which in turn improve economic growth**

- Affordable childcare improves economic growth by increasing parents' access to paid work, including lone parents and secondary earners
- Flexible childcare also improves progression and hours worked, expanding the jobs that parents can access
- This is particularly important for mothers, whose employment rates and pay are disproportionately impacted by parenthood
- The early years are also a critical period for children, improving a child's early development and later outcomes, as well as closing the disadvantage gap early on.

### What are the proposed reforms?

- **Entitlements:** Eligible working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week, for 38 weeks a year, from when their child is 9 months old to when they start school. Govt will also increase the hourly rate for providers.
- **Wraparound:** The government will invest £289m over two academic years, from Sept 2024, to enable schools and local areas to set up wraparound childcare provision
- **Market reforms,** including more choice for childminders and changes to EYFS requirements, to improve flexibility for providers and support the workforce.
- **Changing staff:** child ratios from 1:4 to 1:5 for two-year-olds in England to align with Scotland and provide greater flexibility for providers
- Childminder grants to attract people to childminding, with £1200 for those who register with a childminder agency and £600 for those who register with Ofsted
- **Universal Credit reforms** will pay childcare support up-front when parents move into work or increase their hours and increase the monthly re-imburement caps

## The proposed timescales of reforms?

### Autumn 2023

- Childminder grants become available
- Invest £204m into 3/4yo and 2yo funding rate
- Staff: child 2yo ratio change

### April 2024

- 15hrs for eligible working parents of 2-year-olds introduced
- Invest £288m into 3/4 yo and 2yo funding rates

### September 2024

- National wraparound support begins
- 15hrs for eligible working parents of children 9 months plus introduced

### September 2025

- 30hrs for eligible working parents of children from 9 months to primary school age introduced

### September 2026

- All schools able to offer 8am-6pm wraparound on their own or in partnership