

# Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

26 April 2023

## Response to the Children's Social Care Review



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### Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

County Wide.

#### Purpose of the report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to give members an overview of the Government's response to the Children's Social Care Review, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority review in relation to the provision of children's homes.

#### Executive Summary

- 2 In 2022 there were three significant reviews published which together call for system wide reform to children's social care.
- 3 On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023 the government published its response to these reviews in three publications. The overarching implementation strategy document is: Stable Homes, Built on Love. Alongside this the government published two separate documents: Children's Social Care National Framework and Child and Family Social Worker Workforce.
- 4 All three publications are currently subject to a consultation period which is due to end on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023.
- 5 This report provides a high level summary of the recommendations made within each of the three publications and argues that Durham Children's Social Care are in a strong position to contribute to the development of the final recommendations, and respond in a timely way when the final recommendations are published.

## **Recommendation**

- 6 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to
- (a) Note the contents of the report;
  - (b) Give consideration to responding to the consultation: [Policy papers and consultations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

## Background

- 7 In 2022 there were three significant reviews published which together call for reform to children's social care: The Independent Review of Children's Social care; The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and the Competition and Markets Authority review in relation to the provision of children's homes.
- 8 On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023 the government published its response to these reviews in three publications. The overarching implementation strategy document is: Stable Homes, Built on Love. Alongside this the government published two separate documents: Children's Social Care National Framework and Child and Family Social Worker Workforce.
- 9 All three publications are currently subject to a consultation period which is due to end on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

[Policy papers and consultations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

## Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation

- 10 This strategy is organised around 6 themes, referred to within the strategy as "pillars".
- 11 The 6 pillars are summarised below:

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

- £45m for up to 12 'Families First for Children' family help pathfinders (three in 2023 and up to nine in 2024), co-designing and delivering end-to-end service reform, with three elements: local, multi-disciplinary family help services, child protection lead practitioners, and a focus on family networks and kinship care;
- Development of knowledge and skills statements for family help workers;
- Consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to 'case hold' children in need cases Work to join up family help funding and strategy across government;
- Law Commission to review children's social care legislation for disabled children with a view to simplifying and streamlining;
- Reference to building culturally competent practice and better responding to the needs of families facing material deprivation.

## **Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system:**

- 'Families First for Children' pathfinders will test a new child protection lead practitioner role which will co-work with family help teams;
- Consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards in 2023 as part of the planned update to Working Together 2018;
- Report to go to Parliament setting out ways to improve information sharing between safeguarding partners, including exploration of the use of a single consistent child identifier;
- Strengthen leadership across multi-agency partnerships via amends to Working Together 2018 guidance, improved accountability and an increased role for education in local safeguarding arrangements, consult on education's role as a safeguarding partner. Following a consultation, areas will be funded to implement the agreed reforms, with Pathfinder areas being early adopters;
- Act on delays and improve parental engagement in the family courts.

## **Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks:**

Create a culture of family first by:

- Using the 'Families First for Children' pathfinders, test how to implement family group decision making and Family Network Support Packages. Seven family help pilot areas to test Family Network Support Packages only;
- Publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023. This will include issues such as educational entitlements, training and LA practice plus related reforms e.g. financial allowances;
- Invest £9m in a training and support offer for all kinship carers (those with a legal order and informal arrangements) by the end of this Parliament;
- Explore the case for mandating a financial allowance for all SGOs and CAOs.

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

- £27m over two years for a fostering recruitment and retention programme to be initially trialled in the North East region;
- National minimum allowance for fostering to increase by 12.43%;
- Continuing reforms to supported accommodation; registration in 2023, inspection in 2024;

- Two regional RCC pathfinders to plan, commission and deliver care places – note the ‘all’ has been dropped and no figure on level of investment provided;
- DfE to commission an external organisation to support LAs with forecasting, procurement and market shaping efforts;
- Support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children’s homes sector – leadership programme, KSS, focus on CPD, considering professional registration of the residential childcare workforce;
- Implement an opt-out independent advocacy, this will not replace IROs or Reg 44 visitors;
- Introduce financial oversight regime for the largest providers thereby increasing transparency and reducing risks of sudden exit;
- Expert group to review standards of care, regulation and guidance and consult on legislative changes;
- £30m over two years to fund well evidenced interventions in family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes;
- Consult on strengthening and extending corporate parenting principles to a wider set of relevant bodies in Autumn 2023;
- Create opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve their potential with a focus on education, training and employment via Virtual School Heads, Pupil Premium+, an uplift to the apprenticeship bursary and a refresh of the care leaver covenant;
- Universal offer of wrap around support and accommodation for all care leavers via an uplift in the leaving care allowance and strengthening Staying Put / Staying Close, with entitlements up to age 23;
- Focus on the mental and physical health of care leavers and addressing health disparities to increase life expectancy by building understanding and skills of social workers plus other professionals;
- Update existing guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care and extend it to cover care leavers up to age 25;
- Consult on extending the mandatory reporting of deaths or serious incidents involving children to include the deaths of care leavers.

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

- SWE to inspect all initial education routes by July 2025, commission research on the role of practice educators and take a greater role in overseeing them;

- Development of a five-year Early Career Framework for social workers, starting with early adopters in Spring 2023 to design, develop and test ECF delivery mechanisms;
- Boosting social worker recruitment and retention, including an additional 500 child and family social work apprentices, reviewing student social work bursaries and education support grants, and exploring international recruitment;
- National Workload Action Group to identify unnecessary workload drivers;
- Reduce the cost and reliance on agency social workers (separate consultation).

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

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

### **Children’s Social Care National Framework**

12 This proposed framework sets out five key principles that should underpin practice nationally:

- Children’s welfare is paramount and their feelings are sought, heard and responded to;
- Children’s social care work in partnership with families;
- Children are raised by their families, in family networks or in family environments wherever possible;
- Practice engages partner agencies at every stage of support to identify and meet the needs of children, young people and families;

- Practice and services are demonstrably poverty-aware and anti discriminatory.
- 13 It describes four outcomes that enable children to thrive:
- 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 stable, loving homes.
- 14 It then sets out two system level enables that help children’s social care to achieve these outcomes:
- The workforce is equipped and effective;
  - Leaders drive conditions for effective practice.
- 15 It proposes a data set of key indicators that would provide a common understanding of how well the above outcomes are being achieved.

### **Child and Family Social Worker Workforce**

- 16 This document proposes 8 national rules in relation to the recruitment of agency staff:
- Engage agency workers only via commercial compliant procurement routes;
  - Only engage agency workers within national price caps;
  - Minimum of five years post-qualified experience in LA children’s social care and completion of ASYE to qualify for agency role;
  - Not engage project teams for social work;
  - Standard references for all candidates that relates to standard of practice for any agency worker;
  - Three month wait for workers leaving substantive roles before taking agency role in same region;
  - Minimum six week notice period for agency social workers;
  - Quarterly data return.

### **Current position**

- 17 The system wide approach within the government’s response is welcomed. The Review itself recommended an investment of £2 billion over the next five years. The government’s response has identified funding to support the pathfinder pilot areas, but the funding to support the wider implementation of these reforms remains unclear and this will be vital to successful implementation.

- 18 Within Durham Children's Social Care we are in a very strong position to respond to the final strategy; our most recent Ofsted ILACS inspection found that our practice is good and graded our leadership of practice as outstanding.
- 19 We have a strong practice framework (Signs of Safety) which is underpinned by principles aligned to those proposed within the Children's Social Care national framework, and has a focus on identifying and working with the existing networks of support that exist around families.
- 20 We have strong partnerships in Durham, a well established Early Help service that is located within communities, and a track record of establishing new and innovative services where there is a need identified. These factors will provide a sound foundation when responding to any necessary structural changes (Pillar 1 and 2).
- 21 We have a well established academy for our Newly Qualified Social Workers and have recently enhanced the offer of support for this cohort to continue into year 2 and 3. We won the Employee of the Year Award at the Social Worker of the Year Awards in November 2022. These facts combined with a comprehensive training offer will provide a solid base from which we can respond to recommendations in relation to establishing a 5-year early career framework (Pillar 5).
- 22 We have a comprehensive Sufficiency Strategy that aligns to the ambition set out in the strategy (Pillar 4).
- 23 We have begun to take part in the trial of a fostering recruitment and retention programme on a regional footprint across the Northeast (Pillar 4).
- 24 Workforce pressures are well documented locally and nationally and the proposals within the Children and Family Social Worker workforce publication are welcomed; there is an urgency to implement the proposals nationwide.

### **Timescale of future developments**

- 25 In addition to the fostering recruitment and retention pilot that we are already involved in, the current time the Department of Education have set out a high-level summary of the opportunities that Local Authorities will have to shape the reforms over the next 18 months:

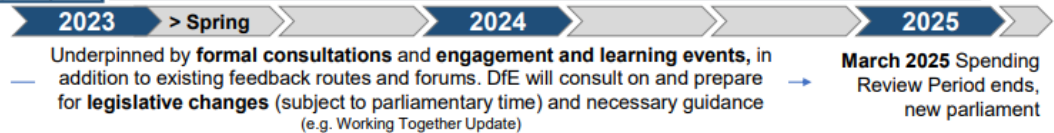


## Opportunities for Local Authority Involvement

Over the next 18 months there will be multiple opportunities for local authorities to shape the reforms and be involved in activities addressing urgent system issues. This is a high level summary, and we will share further information soon.

<b>Foster Carer Recruitment &amp; Retention</b> – initially building skills and capacity in the Northeast, then select further areas for roll out	<input type="checkbox"/> NE* Support Hub set up in <b>12 LAs</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> NE communications campaign launch, LA clusters for further roll out selected (Autumn 2023)	<input type="checkbox"/> Wider roll out of Support Hubs
<b>Addressing use of Agency Workforce</b> taking action through formal Consultation, Task & Finish Group and feedback through informal channels	<input type="checkbox"/> Consult until May 11 <sup>th</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Publish national rules (September 2023)	<input type="checkbox"/> National rules in place spring 2024
<b>Kinship Carers Training &amp; Support</b> Bespoke offer available to all kinship carers to be developed and rolled out		<input type="checkbox"/> Delivery partner contract awarded	<input type="checkbox"/> Delivery starts (Spring 2024)
<b>Families First for Children Pathfinder</b> Testing reform delivery across: Family Help, Child Protection and Family Networks - before we consider wider roll out		<input type="checkbox"/> Wave 1 live autumn 2023 (3 areas)	<input type="checkbox"/> Wave 2 live 2024 (Up to 9 areas)
<b>Family Network Support Package Pilot</b> Evaluating impact of new package authorities, to keep families together	<input type="checkbox"/> Wave 1 live summer 2023 (4 areas)		<input type="checkbox"/> Wave 2 live 2024 (3 areas)
<b>Regional Care Cooperatives Pathfinder</b> Co-designing regional commissioning model, in partnership with the sector			<input type="checkbox"/> Live in 2 regions
<b>Early Career Framework</b> to support career development (replacing ASYE) and strengthen social worker skills and knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> Design and Test with Early Adopter local authorities – work on-going from Spring 2023 onwards		
<b>National Framework and Dashboard</b> to set national direction for practice with clear outcomes, and support better use of data and transparency	<input type="checkbox"/> Consult until May 11 <sup>th</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Issued as Statutory Guidance by end of the year	

Note additional announcements in strategy not captured above, e.g. uplift in care leaver's allowance, Family Finding programmes



26 As the Department of Education share more detailed information about these opportunities we will review them and respond to those where we believe we can make a real contribution to the development of the children's social care system.

27 John Pearce, Director of Children and Young People's Services, will take up the role of President of ADCS from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and as such will be a member of the Children's Social Care National Implementation Board. This will mean that Durham Children's Services will continue to have an excellent understanding of developments and opportunities and enable us to respond in a timely way.

## Conclusion

28 The three publications represent significant proposed reforms across the children's social care system and will require significant investment from central government to effectively implement. With this investment, Durham Children's Social Care are well placed to respond in a timely way to the final recommendations.

## Background Papers

- None

## **Other useful documents**

- None

## **Authors(s)**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

None.

### **Finance**

None.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

None.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

None.

### **Procurement**

None.