

# Review of Children's Care: Service update from Children's Social Care

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Special CYP OSC  
3rd October 2024



# Key contents requested:

- Independent Review of Children's Social Care, including an update on the progress in County Durham
- Impact on children and families accessing services
- Impact on the service and information on the National Framework
- National policy / legislation which are expected in the year ahead

# Independent Care Review - Key Aims

Government review commissioned in 2021 and published in 2022.

Review aimed to explore:

- Intensive help to families in crisis
- Decisive responses to abuse
- Unlocking the potential of wider family networks to raise children
- Putting lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system
- Laying the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care

# Care Review - Key Recommendations

- A revolution in family help
- An expert child protection system
- Unlocking the potential of family networks
- Transforming care
- The care experience
- Realising the potential of the workforce
- A system focused on children and families
- Implementation required substantial funding

# Care Review - Government Response



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

Children's Social Care Reform 2023

February 2023



# The Care Review: 6 pillars of Reform



## In December 2023, the Department for Education published several documents, marking the first opportunity to ask all parts of the system to respond to the vision set out in ‘Stable Homes, Built on Love’



Our statutory guidance, **Working Together to Safeguard Children**, has been updated and replaces the 2018 version. It makes clear that successful outcomes for children relies on help, support and protection.



The **Children's Social Care National Framework** brings together the purpose, principles, enablers and outcomes that children's social care should achieve so children, young people and families can thrive.



Our **Data Strategy** sets out how we will transform data and additional services in children's social care. We will improve information sharing through research and evaluation, make improvements to data services and use our data and digital solutions fund to continue testing innovative practice.



**Championing Kinship Care** outlines the practical and financial support we will provide kinship families and is backed by £200 million investment.

These publications will enable us to start to move closer to supporting families at an earlier stage, to introduce decisive child protection, and to promote the stronger use of data and evidence across children's social care.

Alongside these publications and a reform statement, we have also developed documents to support the sector to embed these changes, including:

- Advice for local authorities and safeguarding partners on how to embed guidance
- A Children and Young People version of the National Framework
- An update on the Children's Social Care Dashboard and indicators

## National Framework – one page summary

### Purpose of children's social care

Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect them 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.

### Principles of children's social care

- Children's welfare is paramount.
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to.
- Children's social care works in partnership with whole families.
- Children are raised by their families, with their family networks, or in family environments wherever possible.
- Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families.
- Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances which may impact children, young people and families.

### Enablers

- **Enabler:** Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- **Enabler:** Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- **Enabler:** The workforce is equipped and effective

### Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- **Outcome 2:** children and young people are supported by their family network
- **Outcome 3:** children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- **Outcome 4:** children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes



# National Progress to Date

# Last year, significant progress was made against the pillars of our implementation strategy, 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'. We are now moving from strategy into an implementation and delivery space.



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

- Started co-design of the **Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP)**
- Consulted on enabling a wider range of professionals to hold cases
- Commissioned the **Law Commission** to review legislation for disabled children



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

- Expanded investment into **foster care recruitment and retention** (£36 million) and began work with the North East
- Started to lay the groundwork for a future financial oversight regime
- Launching expressions of interest into **Regional Care Cooperatives**
- Started a programme to fund family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes
- Started to consider how to strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities



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

- Consulted on and published an update to **Working Together**
- Testing new pathways to protect children from harms outside the home
- Secured **£10 million** to test initiatives to address the longest delays in family courts



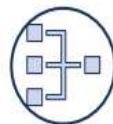
## Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one

- Started drafting the **Early Career Framework** to support social workers at the start of their careers with the sector
- Started to recruit additional child and family social work apprentices
- **Consulted on National Rules** on use of agency social workers



## Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks

- Started to invest **£9 million** to provide training and support to **kinship carers**
- Started to test greater support for family networks through the FFCP and **Family Network Pilots**
- Published the first ever National Kinship Care Strategy, 'Championing Kinship Care'



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

- Published the **Children's Social Care National Framework** as statutory guidance
- Published a **data and digital strategy** and a paper explaining the purpose of the dashboard
- Continued to develop our evidence base for what works to support persistently "RI" Authorities

## Next steps: We will be taking action to support LAs and partners to embed the publications

**Learning events:** The Department carried out engagement with stakeholders during the drafting of the publications. We want to continue to engage the sector, including through a series of learning events on each publication and over the year on CSC reform.

**Implementation funding:** To further support the sector to embed the National Framework and Working Together, we are providing £7 million for the sector. We published 'Improving practice for children, young people and families' which sets out the key changes in the publications and outlines practical and financial support available to LAs. LAs will continue to have a one-year implementation period to embed the National Framework.

**Engaging people with lived experience:** We also want to ensure the voices of children and young people are at the core of our work as we progress policy development and delivery. On behalf of the Department, National Children's Bureau are also launching a Children and Young People's Advisory Board for children's social care, to run initially until March 2025.

**Legislation:** In December, we made steps to clarify expectations for the sector. We will continue work on **upcoming consultation on legislative changes** needed to provide the supportive framework for the sector.

**Rolling out pathfinders:** We will roll out the financial allowance pathfinder, whilst also continuing the existing pathfinder and pilot programmes, including the Families First for Children Pathfinder wave 2, Regional Care Cooperatives, and Family Networks Pilot.

**Ongoing enhanced engagement:** We will also embed a wider framework for engaging with the sector to hear from them about progress and where further support is required, and to deliver our commitment to embed learning loops. This will include delivering a series of engagement opportunities with Justin Russell across the year; close work with Regions Group; and learning from the improvement and intervention programme.

# Current Government Position

- Local authorities are awaiting an update on the direction from central government on Stable Homes Built on Love

# Other Key National Change and Development

- King's Speech 2024
- The Children's Wellbeing Bill will put children and their wellbeing at the centre of the education and children's social care systems, and make changes so they are safe, healthy, happy and treated fairly.
- The Bill will remove barriers to opportunity and raise school standards to ensure the school system is fair for every child, no matter their background and deliver our manifesto commitments on children's social care to ensure that all children can thrive in safe, loving homes.

The Bill will remove barriers to opportunity for children and their families by: keeping children safe, happy and rooted in their communities and schools by strengthening multi-agency child protection and safeguarding arrangements.

# Ofsted - Big Listen

## Key commitments announced:

- Ofsted commits to putting vulnerable children, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at the heart of its reforms.
- New inspection framework to have greater focus on pupil outcomes to drive higher standards, alongside a range of measures to reduce teacher stress.
- The overall 'single word judgement' will be phased out of Ofsted inspection reports, to be replaced with a report card, as announced by government. Awaiting confirmation as to whether this will apply to social care.

# Durham Key Activity Aligned to Reform



# How we Practice in Durham

## Things we "Must Do"

### How we Practice in Durham



**1** We will use kind and clear language in all that we do.



**2** We will use creative tools in our direct work.



**3** We will use mapping to inform our work.



**4** We will help families find and use their family networks.



**5** We will use the Harm Matrix when we have worries.

Behaviour	Timespan	Severity			Impact on the child
		First	Worst	Last	

**6** We will create Words and Pictures by working with parents, to help their children understand what we are worried about.



**7** Monthly Group Supervision will be held by every team.



**8** Sometimes we must remove children from the care of their family. Where we can, we do everything we can to return children home, by creating a timeline for safety planning on the first day of removal.

- Embedded Early Help offer to grow and develop family help
- Current Practice model - family as experts and solution to change
- Expansion of routes to Social Work
- Integrated commissioning arrangements with Health and Social Care
- Development of specialist services to support key cohorts - Adolescent Sexual Exploitation Team (ASET), Rapid Response, Pre-birth, Future Hope
- Sufficiency Board
- Regional Fostering Recruitment
- System focus on Permanence and Belonging
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) arrangement review
- Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and Leadership Academy

- Ongoing development on participation
- Development of Major Project Board
- Representation on National Groups to shape practice - ADCS, policy, public law, workforce

# Impact - What the data tells us:

- Of the 34 children supported by the Rapid Response Service, none have required hospital admission before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday after support has ended. (Pillar 1,2,5)
- Durham has the lowest re-referral rate in the region and is higher performing than national and statistical neighbours – right support at the right time. (Pillar 1,5)
- Durham remains higher than regional, national and statistical neighbours in respect of permanence through Special Guardianship Order (SGO) with family. This is the highest percentage of children exiting care on SGO since 2016. (Pillar 3,5)
- 54 children are now matching with their forever families since January 2024. This is a 54% and 25% increase on full year total in 21/22 and 22/23. (Pillar 4,5)

- Future Hope have reached 84 women who have had, in total, 257 children removed from their care. None of the women have gone on to have any further children removed. There are a number of women who have gone on to have babies that have remained in their care. Women have had updated assessments which have resulted in children returning to their care or where family time has been progressed to unsupervised. (Pillar 1)
- Pre-birth service - of the children with care experienced parents who had no previous children removed, 90.9% are currently in the care of one or both parents. Of the children with young parents, 77.78 % were supported to remain in the care of parents. (Pillar 1,2 and 4)
- We currently have the lowest turnover rate on record at 9.29%. We are below comparators, and this has been a downward trend since 2023. (Pillar 5)

# What children tell us:

*"Thanks for helping me move to my Nana's. I am happy now... I am settled now and love it with Nana. Thank you for everything."*

*"I just wanted to say thank you for everything you've done for me, and I really appreciate it like honestly, you've made things so much better you've made me think about things more and see things differently in a good way a positive way instead of being negative so thank you and I hope you go on to help another young person in need like you helped me. I know you will help someone you're such a lovely person a person who truly cares."*

# What families tell us:

*"I honestly felt like I had reached rock bottom, and no one cared but the genuine empathy that you all showed made us see that there was people out there that wanted to help. We are all in a better place now and although we still have a long way to go, thanks to you all, there is much light at the end of the tunnel."*

*"Thank you for not giving up on me and guiding me towards a better path for me and my beautiful amazing little girl. I know I haven't exactly been easy to work with, but I do appreciate the help you have given me and A. Thank you"*

*"...from the start we were asked our thoughts and so were the children. (Social Worker) spent time with the children on their own to make sure they could speak if they needed to... (we worked together) really well, open, and approachable, genuine, and helpful. We feel very supported. (Social Worker) has managed things well."*

Hope can be found even  
in the darkest places

# What the workforce is telling us:

*"I really appreciate the leadership academy; it helps me slow down and think about what I need as a leader and what my team need from me."*

*"Fabulous support from my enhanced practitioner. He was very supportive, welcoming and I could go to him for anything. I learnt lots of things from him."*



## What professionals tell us:

*"I would like to give particular thanks to the Social Worker who provided an exceptionally high quality of social work evidence which was provided to the court. It was exceptional and made preparation for this hearing much easier. It should be used as a model going forward."*

*"...in all of my years as an independent review officer this is probably one of the most profound changes, I have been involved with it's not unusual for one parent to make the change but for both parents to make such a remarkable turnaround in their lifestyle and choices is fantastic to have experienced. (The Children) are back where they should be living with that mother as a family and with a plan for their father to return to the family home at some point in the new year. This is an excellent example of multi-agency working and the families first team should be very proud."*

# Next Steps

- Government direction
- Learning from national pathfinders
- Development of the Durham Approach