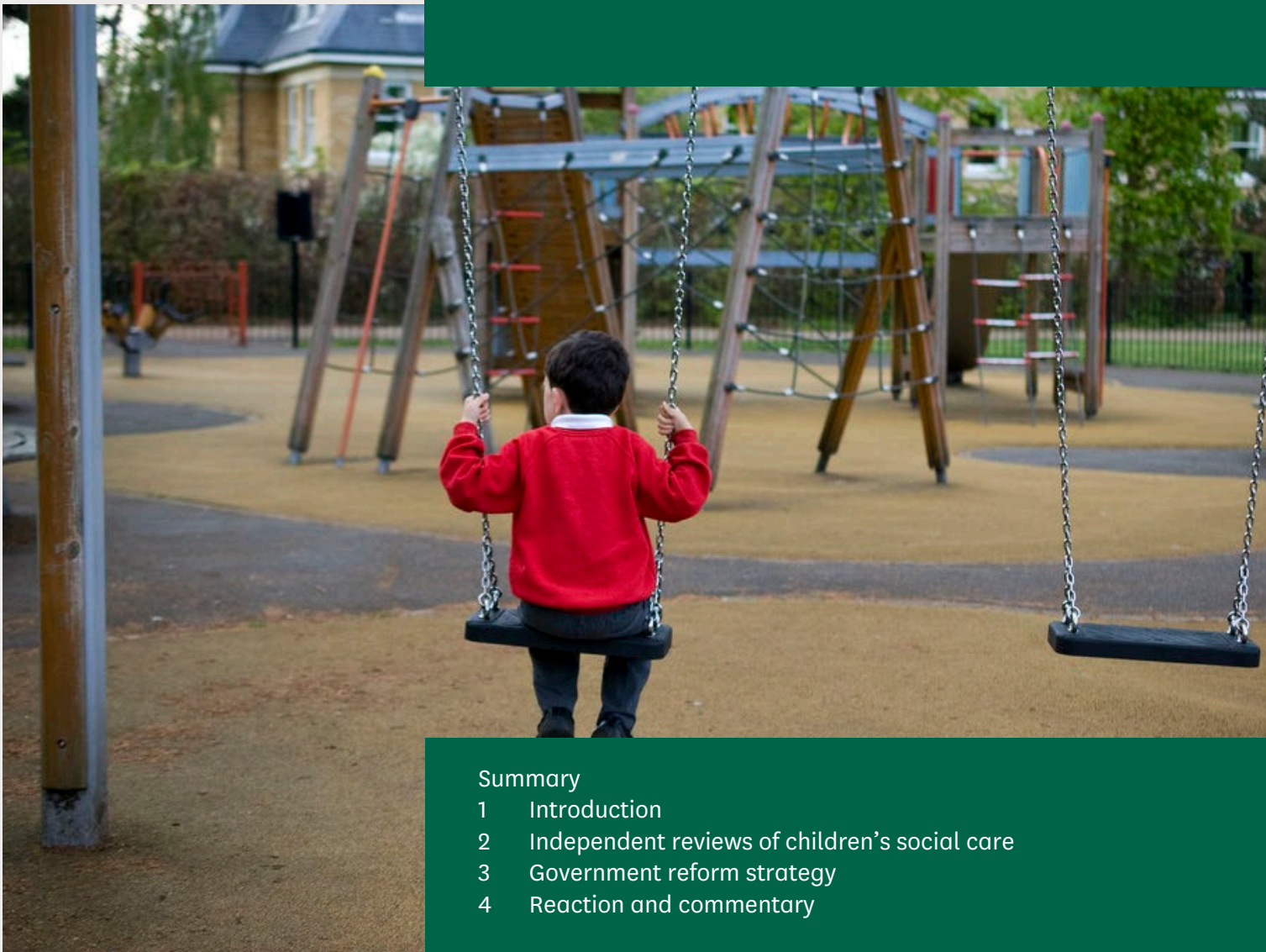


Research Briefing

21 March 2024

By David Foster

# Reform of children's social care in England



## Summary

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Independent reviews of children's social care
- 3 Government reform strategy
- 4 Reaction and commentary

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## Summary

On 2 February 2023, the Government published an implementation strategy and consultation on reforming children's social care in England: [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#).

The strategy is based on, and formed the Government's response to, three independent reports published in 2022:

- The [final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), published in May 2022.
- The [final report of the Competition and Markets Authority's market study into the children's social care market](#), published in March 2022.
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel [review into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes](#), published in May 2022.

## Government proposals for “whole system reform”

The strategy set out reforms across six “pillars”, which will be implemented in two phases:

- Over the next two years, the Government will invest £200 million “addressing urgent issues” and “laying the foundations for whole system reform.”
- After two years, the Government will focus on “embedding reform everywhere.”

### ‘Families First for Children Pathfinder’

The strategy said the Government will provide £45 million to launch a ‘Families First for Children Pathfinder’ programme in up to 12 local areas in England over the next two years. In July 2023, the Government [announced that Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton would take part in the first wave of pathfinders](#). A second wave, in up to nine additional local authorities, will run from April 2024.

The pathfinders will test:

- A new Family Help service, which “removes the distinction between ‘targeted early help’ and children in need” and provides “intensive multi-

disciplinary support” to families facing significant challenges in a “non-stigmatising way”.

- Changes to front-line child protection practice, including some child protection functions being led by a group of multi-agency staff from local authorities, police and health working as a team on a day-to-day basis.
- How to implement family group decision making, such as family group conferences, at an early stage.

## Other proposals

The Government’s other proposals range across children’s social care and include:

- Developing [a national kinship care strategy](#), which was published in December 2023. Further information is available in the [Library briefing on kinship carers](#).
- Testing the use of regional care cooperatives (regional groupings of local authorities) to plan, commission and deliver care places in two regional pilots.
- Providing £36 million for fostering recruitment and retention programmes in 60% of local authorities.
- Establishing an early career framework for social workers, to “give child and family social workers two years of consistent, high-quality support and development.”
- Establishing a children’s social care national framework, setting out the outcomes children’s social care should deliver. Following [a consultation](#), the [national framework was published](#) as statutory guidance in December 2023.

Alongside the strategy, the Government also published a [consultation on whether to set national rules on the use of agency social workers](#), including potential price caps. A response to this was published in October 2023 and a [consultation on proposed statutory guidance for local authority use of agency social workers](#) closed at the end of February 2024.

## Response to the Government’s proposals

Aspects of the Government’s reform proposals received a broad welcome, but some stakeholders raised [concerns that the proposals amounted to a “piecemeal approach”](#) rather than the required whole-system reset.

In response, the [Government said it is taking a “test and learn” approach](#) and the strategy marks “the start of the journey.”

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Local authority statutory functions

Local authorities in England have a range of statutory functions relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. These include, but are not limited to:

- A duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area by providing appropriate services.<sup>1</sup>
- A duty to provide accommodation to children in need in certain circumstances.<sup>2</sup>
- A duty to make enquiries to decide whether action is needed to protect a child from significant harm.<sup>3</sup>
- A power in certain circumstances to apply to court for an order placing a child in the care of the local authority.<sup>4</sup>
- A duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of [looked after children](#).<sup>5</sup>

Statutory guidance published by the government provides more detail, including:

- HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).<sup>6</sup>
- Department for Education, [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#).<sup>7</sup>

Although not a statutory duty, the [Working Together guidance](#) states that local authorities should also “work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services”.

The guidance explains that early help is a system of support “for children of all ages that improves a family’s resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse.” It adds that early help services can

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<sup>1</sup> Children Act 1989, section 17.

<sup>2</sup> Children Act 1989, section 20.

<sup>3</sup> Children Act 1989, section 47.

<sup>4</sup> Children Act 1989, section 31.

<sup>5</sup> Children Act 1989, section 22.

<sup>6</sup> HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), December 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education, [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#), July 2021.



typically include “family and parenting programmes, assistance with school attendance, assistance with health issues including mental health, enabling financial stability, supporting secure housing, responses to emerging concerns in extra-familial contexts, responding to a parent in custody, and help for emerging problems relating to domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse.”<sup>8</sup>

Further information is provided in the following Library briefings:

- Commons Library Briefing CBP-7730, [Local authority support for children in need \(England\)](#).
- Commons Library Briefing CBP-6787, [An overview of child protection legislation in England](#).

## 1.2

## Demand for children’s social care

There is no single objective measure of the number of children who need or might benefit from support or intervention from children’s services. Data on levels of local authority activity in response to social care referrals can be used as a measure of demand. However, this activity is also determined by local thresholds and the scale of any need not identified through referrals is unknown.

Department for Education data which can be used as measures of demand for children’s social care include:

- The number of children in need (increased 7.2% since 2010 to 403,090 in 2023).
- The number of children on child protection plans (increased 29.9% since 2010 to 50,780 in 2023).<sup>9</sup>
- The number of looked after children (increased 30.1% since 2010 to 83,840 in 2023).<sup>10</sup>

This suggests that demand for children’s social care has increased. However, it is also important to note that these measures do not account for increases in the overall number of children in England over the period. For example, while the number of children in need increased by 7.2% between 2010 and 2023, the rate of children in need (per 10,000 children) only increased by 0.4%, from 341.3 to 342.7.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the rate of looked after children (per 10,000 children) increased by 22.4% between 2010 and 2023, from 58 to 71.

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<sup>8</sup> HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), December 2023, pp44-51.

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education, [Characteristics of children in need: various years](#), main text, figures are for 31 March each year.

<sup>10</sup> Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), 16 November 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education, [Characteristics of children in need: various years](#).



Increases in the number of looked after children over this period cannot, therefore, be explained solely by growth in the overall population of children.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.3 Funding for children's social care

There is no national government budget for children's social care in England. It is instead mostly financed through local government revenue. This revenue comes from central government funding from the local government finance settlement and locally raised revenue from business rates, council tax and income from fees and charges. Individual local authorities then determine how much is allocated to social care.

In recent years, the Government has provided additional ring-fenced funding to local authorities for children's social care. This includes £5 billion allocated for financial year 2024/25 through the Social Care Grant, ringfenced for both adult and children's social care.<sup>13</sup>

### Local authority expenditure

From 2014/15, expenditure on 'services to young people' was moved from education services to children's social care services in the local authority expenditure statistics. As a result, expenditure on children's social care cannot be tracked back to 2010/11 on a consistent basis.<sup>14</sup>

Spending on children's social care has increased considerably since 2014/15, during a time of reductions in overall local authority spending. Local authority revenue spending data shows that total net current expenditure fell by 7% in real terms between 2014/15 and 2022/23. Over the same period, local authority net expenditure on children's social care increased by 58% in cash terms, from £8.1 billion to £12.8 billion. This represents a real-terms increase of 30% (in 2022/23 prices).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), 16 November 2023.

<sup>13</sup> DLUHC, [Social Care Grant table: final local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025](#), 5 February 2024.

<sup>14</sup> MHCLG, [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing in England: 2014 to 2015 final outturn](#), February 2016.

<sup>15</sup> DLUHC, [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing](#); HM Treasury, [GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP December 2023](#) (Quarterly National Accounts), January 2024.

## 1.4

## ADCS report on demand for children's social care

Since 2007, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has published reports detailing trends in the demand for, and provision of, children's social care. The most recent report, [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8](#), was published in December 2022 and covered the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022. It was based on data from 125 local authorities, covering 83% of England's child population.<sup>16</sup> Its findings included:

- There was an overall increase in safeguarding activity, despite an initial reduction in referrals linked to Covid-19 lockdowns.
- More children not previously known to social care services were presenting at a later stage, with greater levels of need and higher risks. As a result, more children were immediately becoming the subject of child protection plans or care proceedings.
- Early help services continued, and were being further developed, despite funding pressures within local authorities.
- There continued to be a shift to older children (aged 16 and 17 years) receiving social care services.
- The local context within which children's services operated varied significantly, with levels of deprivation, geography, and government funding all contributing factors.
- Local authorities were facing greater challenges in providing suitable placements for children at affordable prices. This was one of the biggest concerns for nearly all children's services leaders.
- Securing a sufficient, skilled workforce was widely reported as one of the key challenges.
- Children's services funding had been largely protected, but the report said the continued impact of budget constraints and future funding uncertainty "cannot be overestimated."
- The top funding pressures cited included placement costs for children in care, agency social workers, and increased demand and complexity of needs.

The report concluded that children were safeguarded and services continued to be provided through early help and children's social care in a timely

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<sup>16</sup> ADCS, [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8](#), December 2022.

manner, despite increases in demand. It added, however, that children's social care was feeling the effect of pressures in other service areas:

The ripple effect of pressures in other service areas, such as health and education, are being felt and there was an overwhelming feeling that the support available from [local authority] children's services has become the last resort for some children and their families whose escalating needs should have been identified earlier and met via effective universal services. This pattern will further increase without urgent attention from national government via a whole systems approach.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8: Executive Summary](#), December 2022, pp1-7.

## 2 Independent reviews of children's social care

Section three of this briefing provides information on Government plans for reform of children's social care in England, as set out in the consultation and implementation strategy, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#), published in February 2023.<sup>18</sup> This strategy was, in part, a response to three reports published in 2022:

- The [final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), published in May 2022.<sup>19</sup>
- The [final report of the Competition and Markets Authority's market study into the children's social care market](#), published in March 2022.<sup>20</sup>
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel [review into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes](#), published in May 2022.<sup>21</sup>

This section provides an overview of these three reports.

### 2.1 Independent Review of Children's Social Care

In January 2021, the [Government launched an independent review of children's social care](#) and announced it would be led by Josh MacAlister, the founder and chief executive of the children's social work charity, Frontline.<sup>22</sup> Further information on the scope of the review and its key themes and questions were set out in its [terms of reference](#).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#), February 2023.

<sup>19</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report](#), 10 March 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#), 26 May 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education, [Education Secretary launches review of children's social care](#), 15 January 2021; [HCWS717](#), 18 January 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Department for Education, [Terms of reference for the independent review of children's social care: a bold and broad approach to support a fundamental review of children's experiences](#).

## Final report recommendations

The [final report of the Independent Review](#) was published on 23 May 2022.<sup>24</sup> The report argued that the children's social care system is "increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise". It suggested a "radical reset is now unavoidable".<sup>25</sup>

Without such a reset, the report said, there will be nearly 100,000 children in care by 2032 (up from around 80,000) and a "flawed system will cost over £15 billion per year (up from £10 billion now)." It added that its recommended changes would mean "30,000 more children living safely and thriving with their families by 2032 compared to the current trajectory."<sup>26</sup>

The report said there is a lack of national direction about the purpose of children's social care and national government involvement is uneven. It recommended the creation of a national children's social care framework "to set the direction and purpose of the system, supported by meaningful indicators that bring transparency and learning." It added the Government should appoint a national practice group to build practice guides setting out the best ways of achieving the national framework's objectives.<sup>27</sup>

The report's other recommendations ranged across the children's social care system, including early help, child protection, kinship care, the care market, and the children's social care workforce.

### Early help

The report recommended that a new category of Family Help should replace existing "targeted early help" and "children in need" work.<sup>28</sup> This would, it said, bring "the flexible, non-stigmatising approach at early help to a wider group of families."<sup>29</sup> Multidisciplinary Family Help teams would be based in community settings like schools and family hubs and the service offered would be "tailored to meet neighbourhood needs."<sup>30</sup>

The report also recommended:

- Eligibility for Family Help should be set out in sufficient detail nationally to give a more consistent understanding of who should receive it while allowing enough flexibility to respond to local needs.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022.

<sup>25</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p8.

<sup>26</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p8.

<sup>27</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, pp11-12.

<sup>28</sup> Information on the current system of "early help" and "children in need" is provided in chapter 1 of the statutory guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

<sup>29</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p35.

<sup>30</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p8.

<sup>31</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p38.

- The Government should invest around £2 billion to implement the Family Help reforms. Longer-term, funding for Family Help should be ringfenced to ensure investment is sustained.<sup>32</sup>
- The Government should consider legislating to put Family Help teams on a statutory footing.<sup>33</sup>

### Child protection

The report recommended that all cases involving significant harm to a child should be co-worked by an expert child protection practitioner, who would be responsible for making key decisions. In the future, social workers would need to have passed a five-year early career framework to undertake this role.<sup>34</sup>

To boost parental engagement, the report said parents should have representation and support to help navigate the child protection process, and there should be more transparency about decisions of the family courts.<sup>35</sup>

### Kinship care

The report said kinship carers “are a silent and unheard majority in the children’s social care system and they need far greater recognition, and support.”<sup>36</sup>

Its recommendations included:

- The Government should introduce legislation making the use of family group decisions mandatory so that “a family led alternative plan for taking care of the child can be considered before a Care Order is presented by the local authority to the court.” In some cases this should lead to a ‘Family Network Plan’ where the family members are supported to care for the child.<sup>37</sup>
- 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 Arrangements Order looking after children who would otherwise be in care.<sup>38</sup>
- Legal aid should be provided in a range of circumstances where kinship carers interact with the family courts.<sup>39</sup> From 1 May 2023, legal aid was

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<sup>32</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p56.

<sup>33</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p58.

<sup>34</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p72.

<sup>35</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p9.

<sup>36</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p9.

<sup>37</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, pp9 and 99.

<sup>38</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p106.

<sup>39</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p106.

extended to family members applying for Special Guardianship Orders through the courts.<sup>40</sup>

- All new special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangements Order should be given kinship leave matching the entitlement given to adopters.<sup>41</sup>
- The Government should develop a legal definition of kinship care.<sup>42</sup>

### The care market

The report said the focus when finding homes for children in care must be “putting relationships around them that are loving and lasting. Providing care for children should not be based on profit.” It argued that “the current system is a long way from these principles and ambitions being realised.”<sup>43</sup>

It recommended that new regional care cooperatives should take on responsibility for the creation and running of all new public sector fostering, residential and secure care in a region, as well as commissioning all not-for-profit and private sector care for children.

The report’s other recommendations included:

- A windfall tax should be levied on profits made by the largest children’s home providers and independent fostering agencies.<sup>44</sup>
- Ofsted should be given new powers to oversee and intervene in the children’s social care market.<sup>45</sup>
- The Department for Education should launch a national foster carer recruitment campaign to recruit 9,000 additional foster carers.<sup>46</sup>
- The current [Independent Reviewing Officer](#) and Independent Visitor Roles should be replaced with independent high-quality advocacy for children in care.<sup>47</sup>

### Care experience

The report said the “disadvantage faced by the care experienced community should be the civil rights issue of our time.” Children in care, it added, “are

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Justice, [Family members taking on vulnerable children to receive better legal support](#), 1 May 2023.

<sup>41</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p107.

<sup>42</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p108.

<sup>43</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p10.

<sup>44</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, pp129-130.

<sup>45</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p130.

<sup>46</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p134.

<sup>47</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p142.



powerless, are often invisible and they face some of the greatest inequalities that exist in England today.”<sup>48</sup>

The report set “five ambitious missions” to “focus collective effort to achieve dramatic change for this community”:

1. no young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027
2. double the proportion of care leavers attending university, and particularly high tariff universities, by 2026
3. create at least 3,500 new well-paid jobs and apprenticeships for care leavers each year, by 2026
4. reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely
5. to increase the life expectancy of care experienced people, by narrowing health inequalities with the wider population.<sup>49</sup>

Its recommendations included:

- The Government should make care experience a protected characteristic.<sup>50</sup>
- The 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.<sup>51</sup>
- 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.<sup>52</sup>

### The social care workforce

The report said professional development for social workers should be “vastly improved with training and development which provides progression through a five-year early career framework linked to national pay scales.” It added that this would “provide a desirable career pathway to remain in practice, specialise and be rewarded through higher pay that reflects expertise.”<sup>53</sup>

The report also highlighted a need to “identify and remove the barriers which needlessly divert social workers from spending time with children and families.” This, it said, needs to include “action on improving case management systems, reducing repetitive administrative tasks which do not

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<sup>48</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p145.

<sup>49</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p144-145.

<sup>50</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, pp145-148.

<sup>51</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p148.

<sup>52</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p156.

<sup>53</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, pp184-186.

add value and embedding multidisciplinary teams at the heart of local communities who can deliver, not just commission, the help that is needed.”<sup>54</sup>

The report's other recommendations included:

- The Government should introduce new national rules on the use of social work agencies.<sup>55</sup>
- The Government should produce a knowledge and skills statement for family support workers; appoint Social Work England to set standards and regulate residential children's home managers; and fund a new leadership programme that could train up to 700 new managers in the next five years.<sup>56</sup>

### Implementation and funding

The report said its recommendations should be “delivered at pace and with determination through a single five-year reform programme.” Achieving whole system reform, it said, would require £2.6 billion of new spending over four years, comprising £46 million in year one, £987 million in year two, £1.26 billion in year three and £233 million in year four.<sup>57</sup>

The report also recommended the Government should establish a national data and technology taskforce to coordinate local authority and national action to achieve progress on the use of data and technology. It said the taskforce should support three priority areas: “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.”<sup>58</sup>

## 1 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

Another major report relevant to children's social care was the [final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), which was published on 20 October 2022.<sup>59</sup> The Government published its [response to the report](#) on 22 May 2023.<sup>60</sup>

One of the report's central recommendations was for the introduction of a mandatory duty to report child sexual abuse. The Government has committed to implementing this through amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill that is currently progressing through Parliament. Further information is available in the Library briefing: [Duties to report child abuse in England](#).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p11.

<sup>55</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p191.

<sup>59</sup> Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), October 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Home Office, [Response to the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), 22 May 2023.

## 2.2

# Competition and Markets Authority report

In March 2021, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) launched a market study to examine “the lack of availability and increasing costs in children’s social care provision, including children’s homes and fostering.” The study covered England, Scotland and Wales.<sup>62</sup>

After an [interim report](#) in October 2021, the CMA published its [final report](#) on 10 March 2022.<sup>63</sup> The report concluded that “there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning, particularly in England and Wales”, including:

- A lack of placements means children are “not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs.”
- The largest providers “are making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices” than would be expected if the market were functioning effectively.
- Some of the largest providers are carrying very high levels of debt, creating a risk that failure could disrupt placements for children.<sup>64</sup>

## Recommendations

The report said it was clear the market “will not improve without focused policy reform” and made recommendations setting out the broad types of reform needed. It said the detail of how to implement the reforms would be for individual governments to determine.<sup>65</sup>

The recommendations fell into three main categories:

- To improve commissioning by addressing the weak position of local authority commissioners when purchasing placements. The report recommended the Government should ensure there is a set of bodies to

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<sup>58</sup> The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p222 and 244.

<sup>59</sup> Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), October 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Home Office, [Response to the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#), 22 May 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Commons Library briefing CBP-6793, [Duties to report child abuse in England](#).

<sup>62</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [CMA launches study of children’s social care provision](#), 12 March 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children’s social care market study interim report](#), 22 October 2022; Competition and Markets Authority, [Children’s social care market study: final report](#), 10 March 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children’s social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, para 4.

<sup>65</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children’s social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, para 6.

carry out collective market shaping and procurement activities, with each local authority required to participate in one.<sup>66</sup>

- To create capacity in the market. The report recommended the Government should review the regulation impacting on the placements market and should commission an annual state of the sector review.<sup>67</sup>
- To reduce the risk of children being negatively impacted by provider failure by improving market resilience. The report recommended the Government introduce a market oversight regime so that the risk of failure of the most difficult to replace providers is actively monitored. It said this could operate along similar lines to the Care Quality Commission's role in relation to adult social care.<sup>68</sup>

The report noted some respondents had argued it was inappropriate to have for-profit providers operating in children's social care. The report said it regarded this as an issue "on which it is primarily for elected governments to take a view."<sup>69</sup> It added that evidence from regulatory inspections did not indicate that private provision is lower quality, on average, than local authority provision.

In addition, it said, the cost to local authorities of providing their own children's home placements is no lower than procuring placements from private providers. However, the report said there is evidence that local authorities could provide some fostering placements more cheaply than purchasing them from independent fostering agencies.<sup>70</sup>

## 2.3

### Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report

On 26 May 2022, the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) published the report of its review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.<sup>71</sup> The report said it was clear the issues affecting practice in Arthur and Star's cases were national rather than local, and highlighted two important factors about child protection in England:

- Multi-agency arrangements for protecting children are more fractured and fragmented than they should be. The report suggested this

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<sup>66</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, paras 31-58.

<sup>67</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, paras 59-73.

<sup>68</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, paras 74-85.

<sup>69</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, para 26.

<sup>70</sup> Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study final report: England Summary](#), 10 March 2022, paras 27-28.

<sup>71</sup> The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Child Protection in England: National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#), 26 May 2022.

sometimes prevents professionals from having a clear picture of what is happening to a child and their family, as their story is held by multiple people in multiple places.

- There has been insufficient attention to, and investment in, securing the specialist multi-agency expertise required for undertaking investigations and responses to significant harm from abuse and neglect.<sup>72</sup>

The report recommended multi-agency child protection units – integrated and co-located multi-agency teams staffed by experienced child protection professionals – should be established in every local authority area. It added that this “will see the key child protection agencies of the police, health and social care working together seamlessly as a single team.”<sup>73</sup>

The Panel said its other recommendations, outlined in chapter 13 of the report, were aimed at enabling the new multi-agency child protection units to deliver excellent practice.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Child Protection in England: National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#), 26 May 2022, pp9-10 and 98.

<sup>73</sup> The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Child Protection in England: National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#), 26 May 2022, p11.

<sup>74</sup> The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Child Protection in England: National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#), 26 May 2022, p11 and pp98-118.

## 3

## Government reform strategy

On 2 February 2023, the Government published an implementation strategy and consultation on children's social care reform, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) (referred to below as "the strategy").<sup>75</sup> This formed the Government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and the reports from the CMA and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

The strategy said the Government agreed with the problem analysis and vision for change presented by the three reports and said children's social care needed to be rebalanced "away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective help for families."<sup>76</sup>

It set out reforms across six areas, referred to as "pillars":

1. Family help
2. Child protection
3. Family Networks
4. Improving care for children in care and care leavers
5. Children's social care workforce
6. System reform

The strategy said implementation of the reforms would happen in phases:

- Over the next two years, the Government will invest £200 million "addressing urgent issues facing children and families now, laying the foundations for whole system reform and setting national direction for change."
- After two years, the Government will refresh the strategy, scale up the approaches tested and bring forward new legislation, subject to parliamentary time. Activity in the later phases will be about "embedding reform everywhere".<sup>77</sup>

In September 2023, the Government published a [response to the consultation](#) (PDF), which outlined the measures taken since its publication and the steps

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<sup>75</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: stable homes, built on love](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response \(PDF\)](#), September 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp16 and 142.

the Government would take over the next 18 months. In a small number of areas, the response outlined changes to how the proposals would be implemented in response to feedback received.<sup>78</sup>

In December 2023, the Government provided a further update on progress with implementation and published several documents related to commitments in the strategy, including a national kinship care strategy.<sup>79</sup>

This section provides a high-level overview of the reforms set out in the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy, along with developments since its publication.

## 3.1 Family Help

The strategy said “there is too much variation in the amount and quality of help families receive”, and the Government wanted “every area in England to provide families with supportive and welcoming Family Help services, delivered by a skilled multi-disciplinary workforce.”<sup>80</sup>

Family Help will, the strategy said, provide “intensive multi-disciplinary support” to families facing significant challenges in a non-stigmatising way, and will bring in wider family networks at the earliest opportunity.<sup>81</sup> It will also simplify how support is provided by becoming “a single service that removes the distinction between “targeted early help” and children in need.”<sup>82</sup>

Family Help teams will include social workers and family support workers alongside specialist workers able to assist with issues such as mental health and domestic abuse.<sup>83</sup>

In addition, the strategy said the Government would consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be case holders by removing the requirement for social workers to lead in child in need cases.<sup>84</sup> A [revised version of the Working Together statutory guidance](#), published in December 2023 following a consultation, removed this requirement.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: stable homes, built on love](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>79</sup> [HCWS144 \[Children's Social Care\]](#), 18 December 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp16-17.

<sup>81</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p17.

<sup>82</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p33.

<sup>83</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp42 and 46.

<sup>84</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp17 and 46-47.

<sup>85</sup> Department for Education, [Working Together to Safeguard Children: changes to statutory guidance](#), June 2023; Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), December 2023,



## Families First for Children Pathfinders

The strategy said the Government would provide over £45 million to launch a Families First for Children Pathfinder to implement the new model of Family Help in up to 12 local areas over the next two years. The Government says the pathfinders will help it learn how best to rollout the reforms nationally and will provide evidence to make changes to national guidance and legislation.<sup>86</sup> This will include whether to place Family Help teams on a statutory footing as recommended by the Care Review.<sup>87</sup>

In July 2023, the Government announced that Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton would take part in the first wave of pathfinders.<sup>88</sup> A second wave, in up to nine additional local authorities, will run from April 2024.<sup>89</sup>

## Support for disabled children

The strategy noted concerns about the difficulties families face trying to access support for disabled children and made several commitments “to strengthen and improve” the support provided.<sup>90</sup>

It also said the Government will work with the Law Commission to review the legislation on providing help to disabled children and their families.<sup>91</sup> The Law Commission has started preliminary work on the review and aims to publish a consultation in spring 2024.<sup>92</sup>

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para 157; Community Care, [Child in need cases opened up to non-social work staff despite risk concerns](#), 14 January 2024.

<sup>86</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp17 and 43-45.

<sup>87</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p45.

<sup>88</sup> Department for Education, [Transformation to children's social care to put families first](#), 26 July 2023; Department for Education, [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme](#), 10 November 2023.

<sup>89</sup> Department for Education, [Apply to become a families first for children pathfinder area](#), 10 November 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p26; Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp16-18.

<sup>91</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p17.

<sup>92</sup> Law Commission, [Review into 50-year-old laws on social care for disabled children](#), 17 October 2023; Law Commission, [Disabled Children's Social Care](#).

## 3.2

## Child protection

The strategy said there is too often a “fragmented understanding of what life is like for children and an episodic approach to help and protection.”<sup>93</sup> The Government, it said, wants agencies “working together in a much more integrated way, and social workers with the highest levels of knowledge and skills leading child protection work.”<sup>94</sup>

The strategy said the Families First for Children Pathfinder (see above) will be used to implement changes to front-line child protection practice, including:

- Testing a new child protection lead practitioner role, under which social workers with greater expertise and experience carry out front-line child protection work.<sup>95</sup>
- Specific child protection functions, such as section 47 enquiries and oversight of child protection plans, being led by a group of multi-agency practitioners from local authorities, police and health working as a team on a day-to-day basis.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, the strategy said the Government would consult on an update to the Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance in Spring 2023 and would publish an update by the end of the year. As part of this, it said, the Government would consult on new national multi-agency child protection standards, which would “set the principles for how partners work effectively and consistently together to identify and protect children and young people”.<sup>97</sup>

The consultation on changes to the Working Together statutory guidance was launched in June 2023 and the updated guidance was published in December 2023.<sup>98</sup> The Department for Education also published a [document setting out the main changes made in the updated guidance](#) (PDF), including the new multi-agency child protection standards.<sup>99</sup>

The strategy also said the Government would report to Parliament by summer 2023 setting out ways to improve information sharing between safeguarding

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<sup>93</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p17.

<sup>94</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p17.

<sup>95</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p64.

<sup>96</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p64.

<sup>97</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 66.

<sup>98</sup> Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children: changes to statutory guidance](#), June 2023; Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), December 2023.

<sup>99</sup> Department for Education, [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: Summary of Changes](#) (PDF), December 2023.

partners. The report, it said, would include an exploration of the use of a consistent child identifier (CCI) so that information about children can be linked and shared across organisations.<sup>100</sup> The report was published in July 2023: [Improving multi-agency information sharing](#). Among other things, this said the Government planned to “further investigate the use of the NHS ID as a CCI for children and to seek out legislative opportunities to mandate this as needed.”<sup>101</sup>

Other proposals on child protection included:

- The updated Working Together statutory guidance (see above) clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the three safeguarding partners (local authorities, health and police).<sup>102</sup>
- The strategy said the Government would look at how to strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including whether it should be made a fourth safeguarding partner, as part of the consultation on the changes to the Working Together guidance. In response to the consultation on the guidance, the Government said it planned “to test out how a strengthened role of education would look in practice through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.” It added that it had “established a Task and Finish Group of multi-agency and education leaders to develop our proposals.”<sup>103</sup>
- The Government will focus on tackling delays in the family courts, with the ambition of “getting back to the 26-week requirement for public law proceedings.”<sup>104</sup> The response to the consultation on the strategy highlighted that the Government had “recently invested an additional £10 million to test new initiatives to reduce family court delays in public law cases.”<sup>105</sup>

### 3.3 Family networks

Family networks, the strategy said, can play an invaluable role in supporting families and can offer an alternative to a child becoming looked after and

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<sup>100</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p67.

<sup>101</sup> Department for Education, [Improving multi-agency information sharing](#), p11.

<sup>102</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 71-72; Department for Education, [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023: Summary of Changes](#) (PDF), December 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Department for Education, [Changes to statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children: Government consultation response](#), December 2023, p34;

<sup>104</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 73-74.

<sup>105</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p25.

living with strangers. However, not enough is currently done to involve family networks in decision making for children.<sup>106</sup>

The strategy set out reforms aimed at “unlock[ing] the potential of family networks” and creating “a culture of “family first” that prioritises family-led solutions.”<sup>107</sup>

The 12 Families First for Children Pathfinders (see above) will test how to implement family group decision-making, such as family-group conferences, at an early stage.<sup>108</sup>

In addition, £7.8 million of the £45 million committed for the Families First for Children Pathfinders will be used to test providing Family Network Support Packages (a re-naming of the care review’s suggested Family Network Plans) in seven areas.<sup>109</sup> In July 2023, the Government announced that Brighton and Hove, Sunderland, Gateshead, and Telford and Wrekin would start Family Network pilots that month, and Staffordshire, Hartlepool, and Hammersmith and Fulham would start pilots in spring 2024.<sup>110</sup>

## Kinship care

The strategy said kinship care has “not received sufficient national policy attention” and, “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.”<sup>111</sup>

It said the Government would:

- Provide £9 million for a training and support offer which all kinship carers will be able to access by the end of the Parliament.<sup>112</sup> As part of this, in November 2023 it was announced that the charity Kinship had been

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<sup>106</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p18.

<sup>107</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 75.

<sup>108</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 79; [DfE care review response: key points](#), Community Care, 7 February 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp18 and 79; [DfE care review response: key points](#), Community Care, 7 February 2023; Department for Education, [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme](#), 10 November 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Department for Education, [Transformation to children's social care to put families first](#), 26 July 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p77.

<sup>112</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19, 75 and 81.

awarded an 18-month contract worth £3 million to deliver a national training and support programme for kinship carers.<sup>113</sup>

- Explore the case for mandating a financial allowance for kinship carers with a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.<sup>114</sup>
- Publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023.<sup>115</sup>

On 15 December 2023, the Government published its kinship care strategy for England, [Championing Kinship Care](#).<sup>116</sup> The strategy commits £20 million in 2024/25 to improve the lives of children in kinship care. This funding is additional to the £200 million committed as part of the Stable Homes, Built on Love implementation strategy (see above).<sup>117</sup>

Commitments in the kinship care strategy include:

- Providing £16 million to pilot giving a financial allowance to special guardian kinship carers caring for children who were previously looked after by a local authority. The pathfinders will run from 2024 to 2028 in up to eight local authorities.<sup>118</sup>
- Publishing [guidance for employers on how kinship carers can be supported at work](#).<sup>119</sup>
- Providing £3.8 million to expand the role of [Virtual School Heads](#) to promote the education of children in kinship care.<sup>120</sup>
- Publishing a definition of kinship care, which was set out in the strategy.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Children and Young People Now, [Charity to deliver government-funded national kinship care training](#), 3 November 2023; [PQ755 \[Carers: Finance\]](#), 20 November 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p81.

<sup>115</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19 and 83-84.

<sup>116</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023; Department for Education, [England's first ever kinship care strategy launches](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, p10.

<sup>118</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, pp25-27.

<sup>119</sup> Department for Education, Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, p29; Department for Education, [Kinship carers in the workplace: guidance for employers](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, pp32-33.

<sup>121</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, p44.

- Updating the [2011 statutory guidance on family and friends care](#) and renaming it Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. The updated guidance will be published in spring 2024.<sup>122</sup>
- Agreeing that the Law Commission will carry out a review into the legal statuses and orders for kinship carers and make recommendations on how they can be simplified and streamlined. Further information is available on the Law Commission's website at: [Review of law on kinship](#).<sup>123</sup>

The kinship care strategy also reaffirmed that the Government will establish a training, information and support offer for kinship carers, which will be live from spring 2024.<sup>124</sup>

More detailed information is available in the [Library briefing on kinship carers in England](#).<sup>125</sup>

## 3.4 Children in care and care leavers

The Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy said the way homes are currently planned, commissioned and provided for children in care is not working, with the result that children “are living far from where they would call home in the wrong type of home for what they need.”<sup>126</sup> It added that when children leave care they “face barriers to having a stable home, a good job, strong relationships and good health.”<sup>127</sup>

The strategy said the Government will track progress across six key missions and set out the actions it will take under each over the next two years.

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

The strategy said the Government will:

- Provide £30 million over the next two years to “significantly increase” the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes. The strategy explained these programmes “help children in care and care leavers to identify and connect with important

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<sup>122</sup> Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, p45.

<sup>123</sup> Law Commission, [Review of law on kinship](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>124</sup> Department for Education, Department for Education, [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy](#), 15 December 2023, p30.

<sup>125</sup> Commons Library briefing CBP-2967, [Kinship carers in England](#).

<sup>126</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p19.

<sup>127</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p19.

people in their lives and create new relationships.”<sup>128</sup> Further information on how local authorities could apply for the funding was published in July 2023: [Family finding, befriending and mentoring: funding for programmes](#).<sup>129</sup>

- Assess levels of interest in introducing a way for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone such as a former foster carer or family friend.<sup>130</sup> In its response to the consultation on the strategy the Government said it recognised the complexity of the proposal and was “currently exploring non-legally binding policy options, which will offer the stability and security of formalising a meaningful relationship but prevent the risks of a legal agreement.”<sup>131</sup>

The Government rejected the Care Review’s proposal to abolish [the independent reviewing officer role](#), and instead proposed to review the effectiveness of the role.<sup>132</sup> This recommendation had been the subject of opposition from social work bodies and charities.<sup>133</sup>

In September 2023, the Government published a [consultation on revisions to the national standards and statutory guidance](#) for the provision of advocacy services. The consultation closed in December 2023 and the Government is yet to respond.<sup>134</sup>

## **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.**

The strategy said the Government will test the use of regional care cooperatives (regional groupings of local authorities) to plan, commission and deliver care places in two regional pathfinders, with a view to rolling out after evaluation.<sup>135</sup>

In its response to the consultation, the Government highlighted that concerns had been raised concerning this proposal by some respondents. The Government said it had used the feedback to “refine” its approach to the

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<sup>128</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 94.

<sup>129</sup> Department for Education, [Family finding, befriending and mentoring: funding for programmes](#), 21 July 2023.

<sup>130</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p96.

<sup>131</sup> Department for Education, [Children’s Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p40.

<sup>132</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p96; [Independent reviewing officer role saved in DfE care review response](#), Community Care, 2 February 2023.

<sup>133</sup> [Independent reviewing officer role saved in DfE care review response](#), Community Care, 2 February 2023.

<sup>134</sup> Department for Education, [Revisions to the national standards and statutory guidance for advocacy](#), 21 September 2023.

<sup>135</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children’s Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19 and 102-106.



pathfinders and that it planned to develop regional care cooperatives on a “staged basis”. It added, however, that its long-term vision remained unchanged.<sup>136</sup>

The response said the Government had invited local authorities to apply to be one of the two pathfinders, with a view to having operational pathfinders in 2024.<sup>137</sup>

The strategy said the Government would also:

- Work with Ofsted and the sector to develop plans for a financial oversight regime, which will cover the largest providers of children’s homes and fostering agencies.<sup>138</sup> The consultation response said the Government had worked with Ofsted on the scope and objectives of this.<sup>139</sup>
- Invest £3 million to deliver an initial fostering recruitment and retention programme in the North East, which would be extended to more areas from 2023 with an additional £24 million provided.<sup>140</sup> In December 2023, the Government said it would provide an additional £8.5 million for delivering the fostering reforms, taking the total investment to £36 million. It added that would allow the recruitment and retention programmes to cover 60% of local authorities.<sup>141</sup>
- Develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children’s homes sector, which will include exploring proposals for professional registration of the residential childcare workforce.<sup>142</sup>
- Set up an expert group to review all existing legislation and regulation and to develop a core set of standards for fostering, children’s homes and supported accommodation.<sup>143</sup> The consultation response said the expert group had held five meetings and is helping the Government “develop a set of overarching standards focussed on the individual needs

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<sup>136</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp42-46.

<sup>137</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp41 and 45.

<sup>138</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19 and 101.

<sup>139</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p41.

<sup>140</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19 and 97-98; Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp8 and 41.

<sup>141</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: reform statement](#), 15 December 2023; [HCWS144 \[Children's Social Care\]](#), 18 December 2023.

<sup>142</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp19 and 100.

<sup>143</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 100.

of children in residential care rather than the settings in which they are placed.” It said the Government would consult as necessary in autumn 2023, with a view to updating legislation subject to parliamentary time.<sup>144</sup>

- Issue a joint ministerial statement to clarify the national policy position on planning applications for children’s homes. This [was issued in May 2023](#).<sup>145</sup>

The strategy rejected the Care Review’s recommendation for a windfall tax on profits made by the largest children’s home providers and independent fostering agencies, as the Government believed it would “either result in providers exiting the market or it would lead to higher prices to cover the cost of the tax.” The response also noted the Competition and Markets Authority had recommended against action to limit profits as it would “likely exacerbate existing problems and drive supply from the sector.”

However, the strategy said the Government “recognise[d] concerns around profiteering” and was seeking to rebalance the market through its investment in foster care and capital funding for local authorities to build their own children’s homes. It also suggested the proposed regional care cooperatives would give region greater buying power and put them in a stronger position when negotiating with private providers.<sup>146</sup>

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

The strategy said the Government will strengthen the principles of corporate parenting towards children in care and care leavers and consider which additional bodies the principles should be extended to. It said the Government would consult on the plans as necessary in autumn 2023 and bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows.<sup>147</sup>

The consultation response said it remained the Government’s ambition to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to government departments and relevant public bodies. It added that it was “refining [its] proposals on primary legislation”, which will “be enacted when parliamentary time allows”.<sup>148</sup>

The strategy also said the Department for Education will work with other government departments and the private sector to explore how additional

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<sup>144</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p41.

<sup>145</sup> [HCWS795 \[Looked-after Children: Accommodation\]](#), 23 May 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p195.

<sup>147</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 106-108.

<sup>148</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp47-48.

support can be provided to care leavers “across all aspects of their lives”, including, for example, help with transport costs.<sup>149</sup>

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

The strategy said the Government will create opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve their potential through education, employment and training, using Virtual School Heads and Pupil Premium Plus funding. It added that the Government will boost the Care Leaver Covenant and the rate of the apprenticeship care leavers' bursary.<sup>150</sup> The apprenticeships bursary was increased from £1,000 to £3,000 from August 2023.<sup>151</sup>

The Government rejected the Care Review's recommendation that care experience become a protected characteristic, highlighting concerns that self-declaration of care experience could increase stigma.<sup>152</sup>

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

The strategy said the Government will have a universal offer of wrap-around support and accommodation for all care leavers. It also said the Government will:

- Increase the leaving care allowance from £2,000 to £3,000 from April 2023. In March 2023, the Government published funding allocations to enable local authorities to do this.<sup>153</sup>
- “Uphold and strengthen” the [Staying Put](#) and [Staying Close](#) offers, including bringing forward legislation for Staying Close to be a national entitlement.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 108.

<sup>150</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p20.

<sup>151</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p12.

<sup>152</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p196.

<sup>153</sup> Department for Education, [Leaving care allowance uplift: section 31 grant determination letter](#), 31 March 2023.

<sup>154</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 112-113.

**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.**<sup>155</sup>

The strategy said the Government will take actions to decrease mental health and physical health disparities and increase life expectancy for children in care and care leavers, including building social workers' understanding and skills to respond to children's mental health needs.<sup>156</sup>

## 3.5

### Children's social care workforce

The strategy said the social care workforce is "under pressure, with rising vacancy rates, increasing use of agency social workers and too few experienced social workers."<sup>157</sup>

It set out plans for the establishment of an early career framework (ECF) for social workers, as recommended by the Care Review, which will "give child and family social workers two years of consistent, high-quality support and development." The Government will also look at establishing an "expert practitioner" level of the ECF for years three to five. It said the Government would work with early adopter local authorities from spring 2023 to design the ECF, and would consult on a draft framework from autumn 2023. It will explore how the ECF can be rolled out fully from September 2026.<sup>158</sup>

The Government's response to the consultation highlighted that the Government had commissioned a number of ECF Early Adopter local authorities and had also appointed an Expert Writing Group who will write the framework of skills and knowledge for the ECF.<sup>159</sup> It added that the Government would consult on the ECF document setting out the skills needed by local workers in the next 18 months.<sup>160</sup>

The strategy also set out several proposals aimed at improving social worker sufficiency, including:

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<sup>155</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p93.

<sup>156</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p20.

<sup>157</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p20.

<sup>158</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp21 and 121-122.

<sup>159</sup> Community Care, [Employers chosen to design and test social work early career framework](#), 21 September 2023; Department for Education, [Government continues children's social care reform](#), 25 October 2023.

<sup>160</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, p49.

- Exploring ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices nationally.<sup>161</sup> In October 2023, the Government announced that £11.7 million would be allocated to local authorities to hire up to 461 additional children's social worker apprenticeships.<sup>162</sup>
- Supporting local authorities to improve the retention of social workers, including by improving working conditions and tackling workload pressures. This will include the creation of a national virtual hub to identify and spread best practice to retain social workers. The Government will also set up a national workload action group which will be asked to identify and address unnecessary workload pressures.<sup>163</sup> The workload action group was set up in September 2023.<sup>164</sup>
- Reducing the cost and reliance on agency social workers.<sup>165</sup> The Government [published a consultation on whether to set national rules on agency usage](#), including potential price caps, alongside the strategy.<sup>166</sup> In its response to the consultation, published in October 2023, the Government set out proposed national rules on the use of agency social workers. The response added that the Government would not implement national price caps, but would set out in statutory guidance that local authorities in a region should work to agree and implement price caps in their region.<sup>167</sup> A [consultation on the proposed statutory guidance for local authority use of agency social workers](#) was published on 31 January 2024. The consultation closed on 28 February and the Government has not yet responded.<sup>168</sup>

The strategy noted the Care Review's recommendation for national pay scales for social workers but said the Government did not intend to do this. Nationalising child and family social worker pay, it said, "may be destabilising to councils without having the desired effects." It did, however, say the Government will take action to increase transparency on pay.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp21 and 124.

<sup>162</sup> Department for Education, [Government continues children's social care reform](#), 25 October 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p21 and 124-125.

<sup>164</sup> Community Care, [DfE sets up group to tackle social worker workloads](#), 8 September 2023.

<sup>165</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp21 and 128.

<sup>166</sup> Department for Education, [Child and family social worker workforce](#), 2 February 2023. For a summary see, [Agency social worker pay to be capped to that of permanent staff](#), 3 February 2023.

<sup>167</sup> Department for Education, [Child and family social worker workforce: Government consultation response](#), 25 October 2023; Department for Education, [Government continues children's social care reform](#), 25 October 2023; Children and Young People Now, [DfE rows back on plans to ban agency social work teams](#), 25 October 2023.

<sup>168</sup> Department for Education, [Child and family social workers: agency rules statutory guidance](#), 31 January 2024.

<sup>169</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p127; [DfE backs early career framework but rejects national pay scales for children's social workers](#), Community Care, 8 February 2023.

The Government also rejected a recommendation from the Care Review that all registered social workers should spend 100 hours in direct work each year to remain close to practice.<sup>170</sup> While recognising the importance of leaders and academics staying close to front-line practice, the Government said it wanted to ensure any changes “do not expose children and families to more changes of social worker or take managers away from important tasks such as supervision.”<sup>171</sup>

## 3.6 System reform

The strategy recognised a need for the Government to provide clearer national direction on what children's social care should deliver. It also said the use of data is less developed than in other public services, such as the NHS.<sup>172</sup>

To provide national direction, the strategy said the Government would establish a Children's Social Care National Framework setting out the outcomes children's social care should deliver.<sup>173</sup> It added that practice guides will also be produced setting out approaches for achieving the outcomes set out within the Framework.<sup>174</sup>

The Government will also, it said, establish a children's social care dashboard.<sup>175</sup>

The Government published a [consultation on the proposed national framework and dashboard](#) alongside the strategy. A response to the consultation was published in September 2023 and the [national framework was published as statutory guidance](#) in December 2023.<sup>176</sup>

The Government has published [guidance for local areas on how to embed the national framework](#) and the updated Working Together statutory guidance

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<sup>170</sup> The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022, p183.

<sup>171</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p123.

<sup>172</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp131-132.

<sup>173</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp135-136.

<sup>174</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp21-22 and 137.

<sup>175</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp21-22 and 136.

<sup>176</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care national framework and dashboard](#), September 2023; Department for Education, [Children's social care: national framework](#), 15 December 2023.

(see section 3.2 above). It will also provide £7 million over the next two years to support this.<sup>177</sup>

In December 2023, the Government also published a policy paper [setting out its plans for the children's social care dashboard](#).<sup>178</sup> This states that the first version of the dashboard will be published in 2024.<sup>179</sup>

The Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy additionally said the Government would:

- Publish a data strategy by the end of 2023, setting out the Government's long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care.<sup>180</sup> This [data strategy was published in December 2023](#).<sup>181</sup>
- Work to ensure inspection is aligned with the national framework.<sup>182</sup>
- Improve the evidence base around what works to effectively support "drifting authorities" (those which have received consecutive Requires Improvement judgements). An interventions policy will set out the escalation pathway.<sup>183</sup>
- Aim to update and consult on a new formula for children and young people's services funding provided to local authorities.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Department for Education, [Supporting local areas to embed working together to safeguard children and the national framework](#), 15 December 2023; Department for Education, [Improving practice with children, young people and families](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>178</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: dashboard and indicators update](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>179</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: dashboard and indicators update](#), 15 December 2023, p5.

<sup>180</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, p22.

<sup>181</sup> Department for Education, [Children's social care: data and digital strategy](#), 15 December 2023.

<sup>182</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp22 and 138.

<sup>183</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp22 and 138-139.

<sup>184</sup> Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp22 and 141.



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## 4 Reaction and commentary

### 4.1 Debate in Parliament

#### House of Commons debate

The Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, made a [statement on the Government's strategy for children's social care](#) on 2 February 2023.<sup>185</sup> The Secretary of State outlined action the Government had already taken up to that point, including establishing a national implementation board, setting up a new child protection ministerial group, and launching the data and digital solutions fund.

She outlined the strategy's "six pillars of action" and said it provided "a pathway towards fundamental, whole-system reform of children's social care".<sup>186</sup>

The Shadow Children's Minister, Helen Hayes (Lab), welcome the additional funding but said the strategy was "not the radical reset that the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care] demanded and that we need." She questioned how the proposed "piecemeal measures" would provide "transformative change".<sup>187</sup>

Munira Wilson (LD), Education Spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, also argued that the Government's announcements were "a piecemeal approach" that "barely scratch the surface."<sup>188</sup>

In response, Gillian Keegan emphasised that the strategy marked "the start of the journey, to lay the foundations for wider whole-system reform." She added that there were complex issues and the Government needed evidence to see what works.<sup>189</sup>

#### House of Lords debate

The statement setting out the Government's strategy was [debated in the House of Lords on 8 February 2023](#).<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> [HC Deb 2 February 2023, cc483-485](#).

<sup>186</sup> [HC Deb 2 February 2023, c485](#).

<sup>187</sup> [HC Deb 2 February 2023, c486](#).

<sup>188</sup> [HC Deb 2 February 2023, c490](#).

<sup>189</sup> [HC Deb 2 February 2023, c487](#).

<sup>190</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2023, cc1226-1238](#).

Baroness Chapman (Lab), then Labour's education spokesperson in the Lords, said there was "insufficient vision for the direction of children's social care" in the Government's plans. Baroness Chapman added that the "lack of a sustainable workforce plan" constituted "the gaping hole in the reforms".<sup>191</sup>

Baroness Tyler of Enfield (LD) welcomed several aspects of the Government's plans, including the trialling of new family help teams and the proposal to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to more public bodies. However, she said the strategy "does not address the urgency of the crisis that vulnerable children face."<sup>192</sup>

Among other things, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Barran, responded to concerns that the funding committed was less than that recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care:

I think it is important that we do not compare apples and pears. Josh MacAlister's review was for a five-year period and national implementation, and he recommended £2.6 billion of investment. We have announced, at this point, £200 million over two years, with a focus on pathfinders principally in those 12 areas that I referred to, although there will be two regional care co-operatives and seven additional specific pathfinders in relation to kinship care. So, we are not comparing the same things there.<sup>193</sup>

She added that if the 12 pathfinders were successful, the Government "will be able to scale up and review the funding that is required at that time."<sup>194</sup>

## 4.2

## Consultation response

In its response to the consultation on the children's social care reform strategy, the Government said there was "widespread support for the 6 pillars of reform", including the focus on love and relationships and the emphasis on early help and prevention.

However, concerns were raised about the implementation of the reform programme, including the sufficiency of funding, and "a need for clarity on how proposed changes would translate into practice."

In response to concerns about funding, the Government said it "recognise[d] the financial constraints local areas are facing", but highlighted the £200 million of investment for the reforms up to 2024-25,. It added that during this first phase of reform the Government would continue to assess "how best to use funding to achieve ambitious outcomes for children and families." The

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<sup>191</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2023, c1229.](#)

<sup>192</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2023, c1230.](#)

<sup>193</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2023, c1233.](#)

<sup>194</sup> [HL Deb 8 February 2023, c1233.](#)

response also noted that local authorities' core spending power had increased by 9.4% in cash terms between 2022-23 and 2023-24.<sup>195</sup>

Concerns were also raised in some specific areas, including:

- Delivering Regional Care Cooperatives
- Workforce issues, including recruitment, retention and capacity of practitioners.
- The need for greater recognition of the wider context within which the social care system operates, including economic and inflationary pressures on both families and local authorities.
- The need for more focus on access to health services, particularly mental health support.<sup>196</sup>

## 4.3

## Other commentary

### Local Government Association

The Local Government Association (LGA) said there was “much to welcome in the Government’s children’s social care reform strategy.” It added that “a focus on earlier help, support that builds on the strengths within a child’s wider family network, and greater ambition for our children in care and care leavers are all areas where we can make an enormous difference.”

The LGA suggested some of the proposed reforms, such as regional care cooperatives “need a far stronger evidence base” and it was pleased the Government was “taking a cautious approach to these.” It also said it would “have liked to see more focus on some of the issues that lead to more children and families needing support from children’s social care, including financial deprivation and access to children’s mental health support.”<sup>197</sup>

While welcoming the additional £200 million of funding, the LGA noted that much of the extra funding will go to pathfinder areas meaning “children living in the vast majority of the country will not benefit from the additional funding that is desperately needed.”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp14-15.

<sup>196</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government Consultation Response](#) (PDF), September 2023, pp5-6.

<sup>197</sup> Local Government Association, [Children's social care reform: implementation strategy and consultation](#), 3 February 2023.

<sup>198</sup> Local Government Association, [Children's social care reform: implementation strategy and consultation](#), 3 February 2023.

## Association of Directors of Children's Services

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) said there was much to welcome in the strategy, including the focus on providing earlier support, and addressing recruitment and retention issues amongst foster carers and social workers. It also supported the Government's decision to take a 'test and learn' approach to implementation.

ADCS said that while regional care cooperatives "may offer part of the solution" to issues around children's placements, they "are unlikely to achieve the desired results without a shift away from profiteering in the children's placement market."<sup>199</sup>

It also highlighted the need to get buy in from partners in health, schools and others to achieve real change.<sup>200</sup>

While ADCS welcomed the consultation on agency workers, it said the timeline for implementation was too long. It added that "bold efforts" from the Government were also needed "to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis we all face in public services."

It also noted that the level of funding beyond the next two years was uncertain.<sup>201</sup>

## British Association of Social Workers

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) suggested the Government appeared "to have no clear and funded plan on how to retain social workers... and ensure their working conditions are fit for their role." It said a national recruitment strategy was needed "as well as a national review of their pay, terms, and conditions."<sup>202</sup>

BASW supported aspects of the strategy, including recognition of the role of foster carers, and support for kinship carers.

It also said, however, that the £200 million of funding over two years "falls short" of the £2.6 billion over four years recommended by the Care Review.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, [ADCS response: Children's social care implementation...](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>200</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, [ADCS response: Children's social care implementation...](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>201</sup> Association of Directors of Children's Services, [ADCS response: child and family social worker workforce...](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>202</sup> British Association of Social Workers, [BASW Statement on UK Government Strategy for Children's Social Care](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>203</sup> British Association of Social Workers, [BASW Statement on UK Government Strategy for Children's Social Care](#), 2 February 2023.

## Others

Josh MacAlister, who led the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, said the Government's strategy "sets out the right direction" but "without a transformative whole system reset, outcomes for children and families will remain stubbornly poor." The Government must, he said, "go further and faster to reach the tipping point." Among other things, he suggested the Government needed to expand the rollout of family help "so that more areas across England can get access to reform and investment."<sup>204</sup>

After the Government published further details on reform plans in December 2023, including the kinship care strategy and the national framework for children's social care, MacAllister said this showed the Government was "genuinely responding" to the need to improve children's social care. However, he again suggested some of the changes were "too timid".<sup>205</sup>

The children's charity, Action for Children, welcomed the Government's approach but said "greater investment will be needed to turn the system around." Without significant investment, it added, "the reforms won't deliver the transformational change government envisions." Among other things, Action for Children also suggested the Government should look at the legislation around early intervention "to set clearer expectations about the services local authorities should deliver."<sup>206</sup>

The charity, Family Rights Group, said the Government's strategy "presents a positive vision for a 'family-first' approach to children's social care". It added, however, that the "reforms and funding announced...fall alarmingly short of the scale of the crisis that is gripping children's social care."<sup>207</sup>

Children in care and young care leavers' charity, Become, suggested the Government had "set out an ambitious vision to put love and stability at the heart of children's social care, but their proposed implementation plan is lacking the urgent action and investment needed to make this vision a reality." It added that "the proposed small-scale pilots and limited resources will not bring the urgent change needed for children in the care system right now."<sup>208</sup>

The children's charity, Barnardo's, welcomed the Government's proposals "to improve support for children in the social care system" but expressed concern

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<sup>204</sup> Medium, [The right direction. Now let's go further and faster to transform Children's Social Care](#), 1 February 2023.

<sup>205</sup> Children and Young People Now, [MacAlister: Government care review plans 'welcome' but 'too timid'](#), 20 December 2023.

<sup>206</sup> Action for Children, [Our response to the government's 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' consultation](#), 10 May 2023.

<sup>207</sup> Family Rights Group, [Government's children's social care strategy provides warm words but fails to deliver for children and families](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>208</sup> Become, [Press release: Government's response to the Care Review](#), 2 February 2023.

that the committed £200 million in funding “is too little to help address the current crisis in children’s social care.”<sup>209</sup>

On 23 May 2023, one year after the final review of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care was published, five children’s charities – NSPCC, Action for Children, Barnardo’s, The Children’s Society, and the National Children’s Bureau – published analysis suggesting the Government’s decision to wait at least two years before implementing the reforms nationally would cost the public finances £1 billion over the next ten years. The analysis said the increased costs are largely the result of more children needing to be in care, “caused by a lack of comprehensive early support during the two-year delay.”<sup>210</sup>

## 4.4

### Lords Committee report

On 25 May 2023, the Lords Public Services Committee published [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#).<sup>211</sup> The report said “there is much to commend in the [Government’s] strategy because in many key areas the direction is right.” It added, however, that it “fails to deliver the radical reset that is needed. It lacks scale, ambition, and pace and for several years will have an impact in only a few areas, and then only as a pilot programme.” There is also “no guarantee of long-term reform”.<sup>212</sup>

The report also emphasised that successful implementation will require cross-departmental cooperation and political buy-in and recommended the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit should have responsibility for driving implementation.<sup>213</sup>

The report’s other conclusions and recommendations included:

- The strategy’s focus on stable, loving homes ignores the need for radical reform of residential homes. Action needs to be taken to raise standards.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Barnardo’s, [Barnardo’s responds to the Government’s Care Review Strategy](#), 2 February 2023.

<sup>210</sup> NSPCC, [Government delay in reforming children’s social care in England will cost taxpayers £1 billion over 10 years](#), 23 May 2023.

<sup>211</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23.

<sup>212</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p3.

<sup>213</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p9.

<sup>214</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p10.

- The level of funding outlined in the strategy is “entirely inadequate and will ensure the Government will fail to achieve its vision for children’s social care.”<sup>215</sup>
- The approach to ‘Family Help’ “represents a step in the right direction.” However, the decision to trial it in a small number of areas will “delay well-evidenced reforms”. The Government should examine which elements could be rolled out nationally and provide funding to all local authorities to roll-out these policies.<sup>216</sup>
- The kinship care strategy should ensure sufficient financial support for kinship carers and additional funding should be allocated to local authorities to provide this. Legal definitions of ‘kinship care’ and ‘kinship carers’ should be set out in primary legislation so that families can access support.<sup>217</sup>
- The aim to boost the number of foster carers is undermined by the failure to include targets or metrics in the strategy. The Department for Education should urgently set regional and national targets for foster carer recruitment and retention.<sup>218</sup>
- There is not enough in the strategy on recruiting additional staff. Without more ambitious recruitment targets, “the objectives of the Government’s reforms will not be achieved.”<sup>219</sup>
- Steps to maximise the amount of time staff spend directly supporting children are welcome. The Government should roll out workforce interventions nationally more rapidly.<sup>220</sup>
- The Committee was not convinced that regional care cooperatives will ensure more care placements and suggested alternative approaches should be explored. Steps should be taken to ensure a regional approach does not result in large providers wielding disproportionate influence. If the Government does decide to proceed with the roll-out of regional care cooperatives, this must be accompanied with a strong accountability regime.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p11.

<sup>216</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p17.

<sup>217</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p22.

<sup>218</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p25.

<sup>219</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p27.

<sup>220</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, p28.

<sup>221</sup> Public Services Committee, [A response to the Children’s Social Care Implementation Strategy](#), 25 May 2023, HL Paper 201 2022-23, pp33-34.

## Government response

The Government provided a response to the Committee's report in July 2023.<sup>222</sup>

In response to concerns that the implementation strategy lacked ambition, the Government said it was committed to “transformational, whole-system reform”. It added, however, that it also recognised the need to “to balance necessary reform in children's social care, with the need to scale evidence-based intervention safely and effectively.”<sup>223</sup> It said, for example, that the Government would work first with the 12 Family First for Children Pathfinders before assessing “the level and form of investment required to achieve meaningful and sustainable change system wide.”<sup>224</sup>

## 4.5

## National Children's Bureau Review

In January 2023, the National Children's Bureau announced it would work with Verian and Alma Economics to deliver a five year evaluation of the children's social care reforms. The evaluation will focus on the Families First for Children Pathfinder and the Family Network pilots.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> [Government Response - Short Inquiry: 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' \(2023\). Department for Education](#), July 2023 (PDF).

<sup>223</sup> [Government Response - Short Inquiry: 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' \(2023\). Department for Education](#), July 2023 (PDF), paras 7-10.

<sup>224</sup> [Government Response - Short Inquiry: 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' \(2023\). Department for Education](#), July 2023 (PDF), paras 18-19.

<sup>225</sup> National Children's Bureau, [Evaluation of transformational reforms to family help and children's social care begins](#), 18 January 2024; Children and Young People Now, [NCB launches evaluation of Care Review reforms](#), 18 January 2024.




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