

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

Breaking down barriers to opportunity

November 2024

- Policy statement setting out government's commitment to **wholesale reform of the children's social care** – published 18th November 2024.
- Legislative proposals will be taken forward when parliamentary time allows.
- Reflects a new '**child-centred approach** across government, where children come first and services are designed around the support they need...'
- Approach is cross-government and whole system

Context

Good progress, collective learning and improving practice across Children's Social Care

However:

- Raising spend on children's social care
- Decline in investment in prevention
- Homes for children too expensive – profiteering
- Homes for children not in right place

- Failures in information sharing
- Lack of system accountability
- Postcode lottery provision

In the context of growing & more complex...

- Gang culture
- Poverty
- Extra-familial harm
- Youth violence & knife crime
- Mental Health
- Domestic Abuse
- Addiction
- Online Harms

- Homes don't provide for needs
- Outcomes not consistent across different groups

Resulting in

- Unsustainable financial pressure
- Poor outcomes overall; failing of the most vulnerable

Four reform principles

Children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering care – whenever possible

- *Enabled by whole family working by multi-agency teams, clear plans of action and support*

Children who cannot remain at home should whenever possible live with kinship carers or fostering families rather than in residential care

- *This leads to better outcomes and reduced spend*

The broken care market must be fixed

- *Excessive and exploitative profit making must end, there must be improved regulation, competition and commissioning*

There must be investment in key enablers

- *Workforce, data and information sharing, scaling and spreading of evidence-based programmes, the National Social Care Framework, improvement and intervention work*

Reforms: keeping families together, children safe and removing barriers to opportunity

Mandating offer of family group decision making for every family prior to initiation of care proceedings

Providing parents with a legal right to be involved in planning and decision making supported by their family network, coordinators, social workers and other professionals; where this is deemed not appropriate LAs will have to explain this to the court and child and family where possible. Will be updated and new statutory guidance and legislation.

Introduction of Single Unique Identifier (SUI)

Likely to be NHS number. Legislation will be passed to enable the introduction of the SUI, but it will be piloted first and only introduced at a later stage.

New information sharing duty

New duty to provide absolute clarity on legal basis for sharing information for purposes of safeguarding. In the context of a range of wider work to support information sharing – already outlined.

Legal duty on LAs to establish multi-agency child protection units

To include police, health and education as 'named agencies', can include others. Will support the delivery of statutory child protection functions working alongside specialist child protection social workers. Strategic oversight to come from Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs). Design to be informed by Pathfinder Programme.



New duty to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements All education settings to be named as ‘relevant agencies’; education must be represented at both strategic and operational decision-making levels in MASAs. Working Together to be updated to reflect good practice arrangements already in place.

Home education

- LAs must not consent to home education where there are safeguarding concerns / LAs can require children already being home educated to attend school where there are safeguarding concerns.
- Home environment to be considered by LA when determining whether arrangements for home education are suitable.
- LAs to maintain children not in school registers.
- LAs to provide support to home educating families if requested by parents.

Extension of corporate parenting duties to Government departments and other public sector bodies Government departments to produce three-year plans covering their support, 3 yearly reporting into DfE and production of overall report for government.

Extend role of Virtual School Head (VSH) To cover children in kinship care. New duty on LAs to promote the achievement of all cohorts of children represented by VSH. Will further consider if role of VSH should also cover children leaving custody.

Extension of Staying Close LAs must consider whether each former relevant child requires Staying Close support and if so that support must be provided. 3-year implementation period following legislation being passed, recognising implementation challenges.



Wider Programme: Supporting families, keeping children safe and breaking down barriers to opportunity

Legal clarity on information sharing

Revision of legal framework for disabled children

Cross-Government programme of work on improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers

New approach to **Family Help** – lead practitioners, whole family working, family networks, evidence-based intervention, effective multi-agency leadership

Enhanced national direction through update of **Working Together**

Expanding role of Virtual School Head

Strengthened role of education in MASAs

Introduction of Single Unique Identifier



Wider Programme: Empower family networks, expand use of kinship

Mandate use of **family group decision making** pre-proceedings

Family Network Pilots testing flexible funding and practical support of extended family networks aiming to keep children at home

Updated **statutory guidance on kinship**

Trial of **kinship allowances**

Improved **training, advice and information for kinship carers** including peer support groups

New national **kinship ambassador**

Legislate to formally expand role of **Virtual School Head** to cover children in kinship care

Law Commission review of **legal orders and statuses underpinning kinship care**



Reforms: making the care system child-centred and tackling profiteering

Removing barriers to opening new homes

- Fast track route for registration of certain types of new homes
- Consider options for changing planning framework to support delivery of small homes
- Strengthened location assessments – any application to register a new home must be endorsed by local children’s services indicating an identified need

Capital investment to maintain existing capacity and expand provision

As per budget, both secure and open.

Diversification of types of providers in market

Encouraging growth of non-profit; development of innovative funding mechanisms to support with set up costs.

Exploration of new requirement that new providers must be UK domiciled

Including corporate owners and majority stakeholders; to ensure responsible tax practice.

Deprivation of Liberty

- Amendment of legislation to create statutory framework for placements of children deprived of liberty
- Variety of further work in this space including further research into needs of these young people and piloting of a new model for community-based approach.



Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs)

- Legislation to enable establishment of RCCs by all LAs, drawing on experience of pathfinders.
- Government will have powers to direct the establishment of a RCC or to intervene in RCCs if not delivering.
- Ofsted will have powers of inspection over RCCs.

Greater cost and price transparency

Engagement with sector to bring about greater cost and price transparency to better enable LAs to challenge profiteering, negotiate on costs and enable greater central government oversight.

New financial oversight scheme

Led by DfE, to increase financial and corporate transparency of 'difficult to replace' providers, to enable better assessment of financial risk and improve advance warning of likely provider failure – will reflect learning from current CQC scheme for adult market.

Market exit

Exploration of scheme to require providers to provide sufficient warning of intention to exit the market.

Profit capping

New power for the Secretary of State to cap profit levels – cap to be introduced through secondary legislation if the other measures outlined do not result in sufficient voluntary change in market.



Regulation and inspection frameworks

Work with Ofsted and CQC on regulation and inspection frameworks including improving re-registration process for managers moving homes (to make this quicker) and clarifying expectations within frameworks, ensuring these reflect what we know about the conditions needed to help different groups of children thrive.

Provider groups

Bring provider groups operating multiple homes into regulatory and inspection framework; improvement plans can be requested which apply to whole groups; momentary fines could be applied, and restrictions could be placed on expansion for non-compliant providers.

Unregistered provision

Greater powers to Ofsted against unregistered provision including ability to issue civil fines.

Agency workforce

New regulation making power to enable strengthening of rules on procurement and management of temporary workers across children's social care (not just social workers) – likely to mirror existing new statutory guidance on restrictions on use of agency social workers – further consultation will inform how this is taken forward.



Wider Programme: Placements are secure, high quality and designed with children's interests in mind

Funding for Adoption England to support **RAAs** to improve recruitment, matching and post adoption

Setting **national adoption standards**

£15m investment in foster care – covering ensuring every LA can access a regional fostering recruitment hub

Joint work with NHS to develop integrated, multi-agency community provision for children **deprived of liberty**

Enable all LAs to set up **Regional Care Co-operatives**

Improving availability of data to support LAs with assessing **need for placements**

Encourage entry of **non-profits** into market

New financial oversight scheme for **difficult to replace providers**

New **provider groups oversight scheme**

Strengthening of Ofsted powers against **unregistered provision** including power to fine

Exploration of new requirements on companies re **domiciling in UK and responsible tax practice**

Fast track registration route for homes

Investing in and promoting **Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund** to improve access to therapeutic support

Secretary of State powers to **cap profits**



Wider Programme: Enablers

Embed **National Social Care Framework**, align policy to Framework and embed use of Dashboard

Drive **improvement** through use of LGA, RIAs and SLIPs with continued intervention for failing LAs

Data and Digital Strategy to inform learning and improve support

Improve **strategic multi-agency leadership** – national facilitators for statutory safeguarding partners and yearly reporting by statutory partners to improve accountability and drive learning

Implement statutory guidance on **agency social workers** and create regulation making power to enable creation of **legally binding framework on use of agency workers** across all social care roles

Work between DfE and MHCLG to better **join up funding streams** and remove burdens by **consolidating small grants** and **better distributing funding**

Improved sharing of data and learning from **Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel**

Improve **Ofsted** in response to Big Listen consultation

Support **recruitment and retention** of workforce – publishing of a national virtual hub with resources to support LAs with retention and improving conditions

Addressing drivers of delay in **Family Court**



Local Government Finance Policy Statement 25-26

- ✓ Increases adult and children's **Social Care Grant** by £680m to £5.7bn
- ✓ New **£250m Children's Social Care Prevention Grant** to start reform of system and enable investment in additional support via Family Help (will nearly double direct investment in prevention)
- ✓ Consolidates 6 existing DfE grants into **single £414m Children and Families Grant** (includes previous Supporting Families money) – should be used to continue to run existing preventative services. Supporting Families PbR model will be suspended for rest of 24/25 and on-going.
- ✓ New **£600mn Recovery Grant** for most in need areas (determined by deprivation)
- ✓ Uplift of **National Minimum Allowance** for foster carers by 3.55%

Autumn Budget:

- ✓ £40m for Kinship Allowances Trial
- ✓ £4m boost for foster carers recruitment
- ✓ £90m capital for children's homes



In 2026 -27 the Prevention Grant and the Children and Families Grant will be merged and there will be exploration of potential for further consolidation in financing.

