

The independent review of children's social care: final report

The independent review of children's social care in England began in March 2021 and has just concluded (May 2022). The Review's final report makes a series of recommendations to Government for improvements across children's social care and calls for an investment of £2.6 billion to deliver this change, with significant emphasis on better 'Family Help' to prevent children going into care.

The Government will publish a full response and implementation plan by the end of the year. Until then we do not know which recommendations they will accept or agree to fund.

The report recognises the significant contribution foster carers make to the lives of children in care and takes on board many of the representations The Fostering Network made to the review team on behalf of our members. You can read the final report [here](#) and we have pulled out the key points and recommendations most relevant to fostering below.

A "new deal" for foster care:

The report recommends:

- Increasing the number of foster carers in England by 9,000 over three years.
- Local authorities should use family group decision making to identify important adults that are already known to a child and may be willing to foster.
- Establishing new routes for people who already know a child (such as a teacher) to foster them.
- Increasing the support offered to foster carers, trusting foster carers more, and giving carers a direct say in decisions which affect children's lives.
- Foster carers should be given delegated authority by default, to take decisions which affect the day to day lives of children in their care.
- All foster carers should be able to access high quality training and peer support. As part of a new National Children's Social Care Framework, all local authorities should develop a model of foster carer support based on the principles of Mockingbird.
- Independent, opt-out, high quality advocacy for children in care should replace the existing Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 Visitor roles. The Children's Commissioner for England should oversee these.

Changes to the system:

The report recommends:

- New universal care standards should be introduced covering all types of care. These standards should guarantee care for every child in care, and provide the flexibility needed to ensure homes can meet the needs of children.
- The commissioning and running of children's homes, recruitment and training of foster carers, to be moved into new Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) meaning foster carers will more easily be

able to foster children from other local authority areas. Local authorities will continue to act as the corporate parent.

- Government to assist local authorities by offering a wraparound support service for prospective carers as they go through the inquiries and approvals process to become a foster carer.
- Ofsted should have a new Inspection Framework and be given new powers to oversee and intervene in the children's social care market including applying a more rounded understanding of being child focused, and prioritise measuring the things that matter most to children and families.
- Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' expectation.

The Government's response:

The Government has given an initial response which includes commitments to:

- establish an Implementation Board to oversee reform
- develop a nation children's social care framework, and
- prioritise foster carer recruitment.

What happens next?

We are pleased to see that the review team listened to foster carers and to see such a clear focus on fostering. However, there are some areas missing from the report that we had hoped to see included and there is a lot of detail to work through to understand the implications of all the recommendations for children in foster care, foster carers and fostering services.

We want to ensure that foster carers' views are heard by the Government as they consider next steps. The Fostering Network will be consulting with our members shortly to ask what you think about the fostering recommendations in the report.