



**The independent review
of children's social care**

Children and young people's summary

Report

May 2022

**The Independent Review of Children's Social
Care**

Message from Josh

Government asked me to lead the independent review of children's social care to set out a bold plan to improve outcomes for children and families. I started this task by asking a big question: How do we ensure children grow up in loving, stable and safe families and, where that is not possible, that care provides the same foundations?

This report is an answer to this question. Society's first task is to care for children, and to do this our children's social care system must work with and strengthen the families and communities that children grow up in. This is where children most often feel love and belonging. This is a simple idea that has proved hard to do.

The experiences of children, care experienced adults, parents, carers and workers has shaped these recommendations more than anything. They have highlighted the positives and negatives of children's social care. I have heard stories that would make anyone feel hope and rage, anger and joy, and which should make people who hear them aim to do much better in the future.

I hope that these recommendations and the plan that goes with them will improve the lives of children now and in the future, with your support and voices joining together, this change is possible.

Message from the Experts by Experience Board to children and young people

This message is from members of the Experts by Experience Board, who are a group of ordinary people who have had the opportunity to support and advise the review because we have lived experience of the children's social care system. We are young people and adults who are, or were, in care at some point, birth parents of adopted children, foster carers, adopters, and kinship carers, and we believe that this review can bring about the biggest changes to children's social care in 30 years.

The care system has affected all our lives and so in this review we have had our say about what needs to change to make it better for everyone involved. We have told the review where children's social care is getting things wrong and what is going well and really helping children, young people and families.

Although we don't get to make the recommendations, we do think we have had a strong influence on what they are. We don't want children and families to struggle like we did with systems that don't work and people who don't and can't understand what we need. So, we have bombarded the review team with advice, information, suggestions and demands for change, along with challenging them to think about what future generations might need.

We want to see children's social care built on community based support and we want to see children stay connected to those they love. We feel like we have been listened to, along with all the others like us who contributed their stories, thoughts, ideas, and experiences. We need everyone to keep campaigning to see the changes needed become our reality.

Introduction

The purpose of this summary is to present the main recommendations that the review shared with the government to improve [children's social care](#). There is a lot more detail in the main report and other documents, called recommendation annexes, which have been published at the same time. This document is a brief summary version designed to help you understand the recommendations and what it means for children and young people. As you are reading this, you may want to talk to other people, think about your own opinions of the recommendations and what could be done to make them happen.

Throughout the review children and young people have shared their thoughts and opinions of what the problems are and how things could be changed. The review team has spoken to [children in care](#), [care leavers](#), young carers, disabled children, children in secure homes, children in youth offending institutions, unaccompanied refugee and asylum seeking children, ethnic minority children, and LGBTQ+ young people. We have tried to hear from as many people in as many different situations as possible.

We know that children's experiences with children's social care does not follow one journey. So you might want to start with the section that interests you most. All the recommendations join together to produce a big change, so you may want to go back to other sections to understand how changes there will affect changes in other parts. Love is often missing in discussions about children's social care but it is a word used throughout the main report and should be at the heart of the system in future.

As you read you could think about the following questions:

- *what did I want to see in the recommendations?*
- *what do I think about this recommendation?*

- *who holds the power to make the change? - government and MPs, the Children's Commissioner, a [local authority](#), independent agencies like fostering or adoption services, charities, communities or children and young people.*
- *how can I help make change happen?*
- *what do I feel happy to do to help?*
- *who else can be involved?*
- *how will I get started?*

If you're working in a group you might want to:

- do an activity to prioritise the most important recommendations to work on
- have individual conversations and then come together to discuss the ideas and thoughts about the recommendations
- work through a fictional story to see how the recommendations would help change the decisions about children's lives
- work together to share ideas about different actions you might take create the changes you want to see

The following pages show the recommendations of the review, in ten sections:

1. Helping families
2. Keeping children safe
3. Making good use of family networks
4. Adoption
5. Transforming care
6. Listening to children's voices
7. Protecting care experienced people from stigma and discrimination
8. Moving on
9. Helping the workforce be the best it can be
10. Making sure the system is focused on children and families

Helping families

“My mum was a young mum, so I feel like maybe, if someone tried to support her, instead of just taking her kids off her, it could have been different.” Care experienced young person

For most children, the first time that children’s social care or a social worker becomes involved in their lives is when their family needs some help. This can be for many different reasons including a parent being ill or the child having a disability, or when there are concerns about a child’s welfare. Families told us that asking for help can be scary, and that sometimes they feel too much time is spent assessing them and sending them to other services, rather than actually giving them help that would make the problem better.

The review believes that when children’s social care puts effort and money into helping families, it helps children. More help for families means more children staying safely at home, doing better at school, being healthy, and achieving their potential.

We recommend a new definition of Family Help:

A definition of Family Help

The aim of Family Help should be to improve children’s lives by supporting the family unit and strengthening family relationships. This will help children to do well and keep families together, helping them to provide the safe, caring environments that children need.

Children’s rights are essential and this includes their right to a family life. The right to a family allows children to be connected to their history, and can offer a safe space, so making sure children are safe in their families is important to making sure their rights are upheld.

Family Help services should be built in partnership with the families and communities it serves. It should start from the position that all families need help at times and that this does not mean there is a child protection issue. It should also be able to understand the risks children face and recognise if there are concerns for a child’s safety.

Family Help should be high quality and flexible enough to meet children and families’ needs. It should be delivered by skilled professionals from a range of specialities who have the time and are able to build trusting and supportive relationships with them. It should build on families’

strengths, calling on the wider relationships that families have for support. It should also make use of support and advice from within local communities, including family hubs, schools and voluntary organisations.

Family Help should be available to any family facing significant challenges that could pose a threat to providing their child with a loving, stable, safe family life. This ranges from families who currently receive “early help” to those who are on a child in need or child protection plan. This includes (but is not limited to) teenagers, children with disabilities, young carers, parents who have had a child removed (including to support reunification) adopters and kinship carers. It should aim to understand and respond to the whole range of challenges children and families face. It should bring together and organise wider services and partners to support families and avoid them falling between services. Support should be available that meets different needs and the right amount a family needs in order for them to function well with the aim, where possible, of avoiding ongoing involvement.

Family Help

Recommendations

Support that is given to families at “[targeted early help](#)” and [child in need](#) will be combined into a single category called Family Help, so that families keep a consistent relationship when they need help.

Which families should get Family Help should be more clearly defined and families should be able to ask for help without fear of judgement.

Family Help Teams should be made up of people with different expertise so families and children can directly get the help they need.

Family Help Teams should be based in places in local communities, like schools and family hubs, and respond to the needs of the community.

Government should ask the Law Commission to review the legislation that supports disabled children and their families so that getting support in the future is clearer.

Government should invest £2 billion to make Family Help a reality for families now and to keep supporting families in the future.

Government should guide the way that Family Help works as part of the National Children’s Social Care Framework, and set outcomes that are about supporting the whole family.

What this will mean for children?

More children should be able to stay at home safely with their family.

Children and their families will get the help they need so that they thrive - for example, doing better in school, being healthy and not experiencing abuse or neglect.

Children will be helped to return to their families following time away from home.

Care experienced parents will have help without making them feel different to other parents.

Children and families will need different kinds of help to meet their needs e.g. those with disabilities, families in poverty, teenagers, ethnic minorities and others. Family Help will help to recognise these families and give them the support they need.

It will feel ok for families to ask for help.

Children and families won't have lots of different workers or be passed between different teams as their needs change.

The help will be well linked into community services so that families can get support from other places if Family Help is not the right place to support them.

Disabled children and their families will be able to ask for help and get the help they need without assessments that are not needed.

How this will be supported to happen

More money for local authorities to spend on helping families.

Government to set out features of how help for families should be done.

Some of the rules government sets will need to change, for example so that different types of workers can be the main worker for families.

Family Support Workers will have more training and development.

Keeping children safe

“I kind of had to build up the courage to speak to my social worker. They get in touch with someone else if it’s a severe case” Care experienced young person

Sadly, the risks of harm or death to children cannot be completely stopped, but the system of [child protection](#) can and must do better to protect children. There are a few problems that are regularly found when children are harmed. For example professionals not understanding what a child’s daily life is like, poor information sharing between services when professionals are worried about a child, and the social workers who make judgements about what should happen to a child not having the right knowledge or skills. Children and young people told us about the point where decisions were made about protecting them from harm. This can be a worrying and confusing time with lots of professionals involved and big decisions made about where they live and who they keep in contact with.

We think we need to focus on how well child protection works - making the right decisions about where investigation is necessary, where support would be the best way to keep children safe, and where a child needs to come into care so that they are safe.

Child protection

Recommendations

When there are cases of significant harm an Expert Child Protection Practitioner should work with a Family Help worker so that important decisions are made by workers who have enough experience and skills.

Instructions from government should be clear about how different professionals - like police, health services, social care and schools - work together for child protection.

To help protect children and young people from harms outside the home, for example violence in neighbourhoods, organised crime gangs or online risks, there should be a different type of plan that responds to worries that are outside the home, is more joined up and when they turn 18 help shouldn’t necessarily end.

Government should make it easier for children who are supported by both children’s social care and youth justice to have one assessment and one plan.

Government should give clearer instructions about how services share information to protect children, and help improve their ability to share information between their computer systems.

Government should give more advice to local authorities about how to work with families in a fair way. Parents should be offered representatives who help them understand and contribute to child protection situations. Parents and children should be able to understand what is happening when the courts are involved in decisions about them.

What this will mean for children?

More children will be kept safe.

When risks to children increase families will get an Expert Child Protection Practitioner to work alongside their Family Help worker, so they don't have to change their main worker and tell their story from scratch, but there is someone else with the right skills who can help make the right decisions.

If there are worries about a child, all the professionals will work together and share information so that the best decisions can be made to help and protect them.

Children and young people who face harms outside the home, will have one joined up response from all the professionals involved in supporting them. This may include professionals being able to support young people up to the age of 25.

Parents will feel that the decisions that are made about them are fairer and they will find child protection easier to understand

How this will be supported to happen?

Social workers and other professionals having more training to become experts at child protection.

Government will set ways that experts should be involved, how different services should work together and the best ways to work when children are at risk from harms outside their home.

Government will make the rules clearer about how information should be shared and set up a group to look at how to improve technology.

Local areas identify the needs of their communities and build services to make sure the right support is in place.

By spending more money helping families we will free up money currently spent on care. This means we can keep high spending on Family Help in the future.

Making good use of family networks

“I think kids should always have a choice as they first get taken away from home, you’d get a choice depending if you get to go to family or straight to care.” Care experienced young person

Relationships between children and all members of their family is important – this can include brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and step-families (pets are also very important!)

We know there will always be times where some children need to live apart from their parents, but we believe that there is more to be done to support extended family members to provide care for their relatives. Currently there isn’t enough time spent identifying family members who, with the right support, could either provide full time care, or share care with a child’s parents, whilst the parents work through resolving the problems they’re facing. We believe that some children can live with other members of their family or support network, rather than going to live with strangers who are foster carers or in residential children’s homes.

Make use of the wider family network

Recommendations

Each family should have a right to a decision making process to identify alternative carers before a child is taken into care.

A new Family Network Plan should be created which will support and give control to family led alternatives to care e.g. children staying with a family member or someone moving into the family home to support the parents and child.

Family and friends who look after children permanently and full time, are sometimes called special guardians or [kinship carers](#). All local authorities should make a financial allowance for these carers when they are stepping in to care for a child who might otherwise go into care.

Legal aid is the use of public money to help pay for legal advice for family members who cannot afford to pay.¹ This should be provided where special guardians and kinship carers have to go to the family courts.

All new special guardians and kinship carers with an order from court should be given ‘kinship leave’ from work, the same as maternity or adoption leave.

¹ <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/legal-aid-for-family-law-matters/>

Local authorities or councils should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers so that they get help and support from other people in the same situation as them.

Government should develop a new legal definition of kinship care, taking a broad range of situations into account.

What this will mean for children?

Children's wider family and adult friends e.g. grandparents, aunts or uncles, family friends, or other trusted adults, will be able to put together a plan to help keep children safe within their community. Some children might be able to live with a different family member rather than living in a foster home or residential children's home. Others might move in with family members for a short while, or live there for part of the week whilst their parents receive help.

Family members will receive lots of practical support to help them when they start to look after the child.

Children will have time to settle into their new living arrangements as carers can take a break from work and still receive their pay.

Children will be able to meet other children living with family members if they want to, this will mean they can make friends and feel comfortable to talk about what's happening with other people in similar situations.

How this will be supported to happen?

Spend money to support Family Network Plans and kinship carers who care for a child who might otherwise go into care.

Simplify the laws about kinship care.

Change laws so that kinship carers can access Legal Aid and kinship leave.

Government to give new instructions about family decision making and provide training for professionals to make this happen.

Adoption:

“as well as losing that first family and getting moved around to different foster carers before being adopted, you’re moving around the country and it’s quite hard to know who you are or who you’re supposed to be. So a lot of people find their identity through things that are there for them, but when you’re a child who’s in care, you have to make your own identity, which is quite a difficult task.” Care experienced young person

We’ve been told that the contact between birth parents and children who are adopted is not good enough, that it is old fashioned and new technology could be used better. Sometimes this has led to young people being contacted by family members on social media without any support in place for them. We also heard that there are open adoptions where a child’s birth family can stay in touch with them, and closed adoptions where no contact is allowed.

We know that relationships and information about identity is important for all children and where this does not happen it can leave many unanswered questions. Some parents have also said that they want to be able to keep some contact with their birth children after they’ve been adopted, especially when they have made big changes in their lives.

Recommendations

Contact arrangements between adopted children and birth parents should always be allowed (where it is safe) and be done using up to date technology.

What this will mean for children?

Children who are adopted will have information about their birth parents and information about their identity.

As adopted children enter adulthood, they will be able to reunite with their birth family more easily if they want to.

How this will be supported to happen?

The [Adoption Support Fund](#) should provide support for better contact between adopted children, adoptive parents and birth parents.

All regional adoption agency leaders will start using ‘Letterswap’ which is a new digital way to manage contact.

Transforming care

“Children’s social care should be more focused on helping people in care not moving them” care experienced young person

“Make sure your carers will be relatable and that you have a choice on what carers you can go to and think is best for you” care experienced young person

“Care should be a happy place, for growth, development and child/young person focused. It should feel like a second home, it should be a place where those in care are able to express their feelings from positive to negative without feeling/being judged.” care experienced young person

When finding homes for children in care we need to make sure that moving to that home doesn't break the child's existing loving relationships - including with their friends, family and siblings. The way we currently find and match children with homes is not working, which means that some children have these relationships broken again and again, and regularly move between homes that cannot meet their needs. Providing care for children should not be based on making money. The current system of children's social care is a very long way from this aim.

Homes for children

Recommendations

New rules for care should be introduced, that apply to all homes for children, so that every child in care is cared for. This includes residential children's homes, secure homes, and semi-independent homes.

New 'Regional Care Cooperatives' should be created to run and set up residential care, fostering and secure care within a specific region of England. This will mean that local authorities have a better understanding of the type of homes that children need and will be able to make sure they are there for children when they need them.

The government should take a one-off payment from the following people to cover the cost of changing the care system: the largest private children's home providers and large independent fostering agencies. This payment will be based on the profit they have made from children's social care.

Ofsted should be given new powers to oversee the people who provide homes for children to make sure they have enough money in the bank for the future. If they do not, action can be taken to make sure children do not have to move at short notice.

The Department for Education should launch a national foster carer recruitment programme to recruit 9,000 new foster carers.

Foster carers should be given automatic ability to make decisions which affect the day to day lives of children in their care e.g. having a haircut, going to friends houses.

What this will mean for children?

Many more children will live in the same home throughout their time in care, which meets their needs as they grow up.

Teenagers who are over 16 will receive care and support wherever they live.

More children will be able to live in the area they grow up in rather than living miles away.

Children will be better matched with foster carers because there will be more people fostering children, this will include better cultural matching.

Children will live with foster carers who feel supported and can have training when needed. This means children will be better supported and live in homes that can meet their changing needs.

How this will be supported to happen?

Guidance and rules set by government.

Inspection that looks at important things like how much money a company has and whether they are providing care.

Reinvest money made by private companies to make the recommendations happen.

Local authorities will be helped to work together to oversee the places available for children to live.

Listening to children's voices

“At the time I didn't know my legal rights and what I could do about it. Social services should advise young people about what they can do, what their rights are and how to complain if they have a problem.” Care experienced young person

“more co-production within the local area across all services, to make the voice of young people (care leavers and children in care) the forefront of meetings, to be able to be heard and acted on without the superficial action taken.” Care experienced young person

It is important that anyone making decisions that affect a child's life listens to the views of children, this is set out in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC, 1990\)](#). We heard from children and young people that they often feel ignored and not taken seriously. Children in care currently have a lot of different professionals in their lives, but not enough adults help amplify their voice at times when things are not right. The system should be simplified by replacing a number of existing professionals with truly independent advocates to make sure children are listened to. Advocates should support all children in care and in care proceedings, unless children choose not to access this service.

Care Experience – voice

Recommendations

Independent, opt-out, high quality advocacy for children in care should replace Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 Visitors.

Advocacy services should be overseen by the Children's Commissioner, who should have powers to refer children's complaints and concerns back to the court if needed.

What this will mean for children?

All children who are in care proceedings or in care will have an independent advocate when they need it. This means that the advocate will not work for the [local authority](#).

Children will know who their advocate is and how to contact them.

No important decisions at care planning meetings should be made in the future without input from children or their advocate.

Children in care will feel that their voice and opinions are taken seriously and listened to in all decisions that affect them.

Advocates will also speak to children who live in children's homes and report on the quality of care

children are getting.

How this will be supported to happen?

Change legislation to allow roles to change, this means that Independent Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 Visitors will be replaced by more independent advocates.

Government will work out who should lead independent advocacy, either a new service, CAFCASS, or the Children's Commissioner. The service will be independent of the local authority, will be able to follow up complaints and should produce a yearly report on themes that children keep raising.

Protecting care experienced people from stigma and discrimination

“Making the care experience a protected characteristic is a good idea, it would help shed a spotlight on care leavers. When the public do find out about us, it is often negative due to it being driven by the media.” Care experienced young person

The disadvantage faced by the care experienced community should be the civil rights issue of our time. Most children in care feel powerless, they are often invisible to society, and face some of the greatest inequalities that exist in England today. It is truly inspiring that in spite of these injustices, so many care experienced people go on to run businesses, start families, earn doctorates, produce drama, write poetry, become government ministers and contribute to the world in countless ways. To make it possible for children in care to face fewer barriers in the future, we will require a wider range of organisations to become corporate parents for children in care, and for the UK to be the first country in the world to recognise the care experience as a protected characteristic.

The role of government, business and society in supporting care experienced people

Recommendations

New laws should be passed which increases the corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider set of public bodies, for example schools, colleges, universities, the NHS and the police.

Government should make care experience a protected characteristic; this means it will be against the law to discriminate against someone because they are or have been in care, and will mean that those with care experience will have the same protections from discrimination as the other nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.² This should be done after talking with care experienced people and the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments.

National government should also write to every local authority and be clear about the priorities they should give to care experienced adults when accessing services, such as social housing.

What this will mean for children?

More organisations will have a responsibility to promote and support children in care and care experience adults. They will need to make specific plans to demonstrate how they are meeting their needs and supporting their long term outcomes. Employers, businesses, public services and policy makers will need to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes

² <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

for care experienced people, and this should mean more well paid jobs, support with education and better access to health services.

There will be a chance to share thoughts and ideas about making care experience a protected characteristic. The review hopes that this will mean care experienced people in the future will not feel stigma or discriminated against for being care experienced.

As care experienced children become adults, they will get the support needed to fulfil their potential because there will be clear rules about what support should be available. Changes to laws can also help change social attitudes.

How this will be supported to happen?

Changes in law.

Training and education about care experience for organisations, schools, the NHS and businesses.

Clear rules and rights of care experienced people.

Moving on

“They should change the law to make sure children can get the contact with their family and friends. It should be a human right that children can see those that are important to them.” Care experienced young person

“The transition out of care needs to be better.” Care experienced young person

We were told that moving on from care was often challenging and uncertain. Five ambitious missions are needed so that more care experienced people have a strong network of loving relationships, live in a safe and suitable home, progress to university, have a well paid job and lead a happy and healthy life. Central government, local authorities, employers, the NHS, schools, colleges and universities must step up to make these five foundations for all care experienced people happen.

Recommendations

The review is recommending five missions (or tasks) for government, local authorities and wider society to support children in care and care experienced people. More detail about how this will happen is written in the full report.

1. No young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027.
2. Double the number of care experienced people going to university, with a particular focus on high tariff universities, by 2026.
3. Create at least 3,500 well paid jobs and apprenticeships each year for care experienced people, 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.

What this will mean for children?

More children in care and care leavers will be able to have an independent visitor who will build a long term relationship with them.

Children in care and care leavers will be supported to keep important relationships with their birth parents, wider family, siblings and friends through a new family finding service in every local authority.

If care experienced people have built a relationship with an adult who loves them and wants to become a more formal part of the family they can get a lifelong guardianship order, a bit like adult adoption, to make their bond official and recognised.

Children in care will have access to mentoring or tutoring programmes so that they are able to achieve well in education.

Some children in care may be able to attend state or independent day or boarding schools, this can help children do better in education and allow some children to have a shared care arrangement, living in school and visiting home.

Young people will be able to see what support the university offers care experienced people through a new scheme that awards universities with a certificate for the level of support they give. Care experienced people will then receive the best support possible at university.

In the future care leavers up to the age of 25 will be able to get an annual bursary of £1,000 for each year they are completing an apprenticeship. This is money that you can use to pay for things like clothing, books, equipment, transport and lunch.

In the future if employers have any unspent apprenticeship funds, they should be able to use this to support people with care experience to get the skills and experience to gain employment.

Young people will be able to have a better choice whether they Stay Put with their foster carer, choose Staying Close with residential children's homes or move to supported lodgings.

Care experienced young people will not be made homeless because they are living in a different local authority, not able to keep a tenancy, or do not have a rent guarantor.

Young people will be able to afford to kit out their new home and the money will be reviewed each year to make sure it changes with the cost of living.

Young people will be supported by professionals in children's social care who have had training to support them with their mental health if they need it.

Young people leaving care across England will have better mental and physical health support because local authority teams have the skills to do this.

How this will be supported to happen?

The Care Leaver Covenant will be refreshed so the five Missions set out by the review are achieved.

Employers will be able to apply for a new government led accreditation scheme to recognise how they are supporting care leavers into well paid jobs.

Young people leaving care will have a legal entitlement to remain in a Staying Put arrangement, Staying Close arrangement or benefit from supported lodgings until they are 23.

There will be a stronger safety net to prevent care leavers from becoming homeless by removing the local connection test, which means they will be able to apply for housing with the local authority even if they haven't lived in that area for more than 2 years.

Local authorities will no longer be able to consider care leavers intentionally homeless, and will need to provide more support to help them manage in their own accommodation. Intentionally homeless means someone deliberately did something to cause them to lose their home.

When a care leaver is ready to move into their own accommodation the leaving care grant they receive to help buy furniture and decorate their home will be increased from £2,000 to £2,438, and this amount will continue to be reviewed so care leavers have enough money to make a home.

If care leavers want to live in private rented accommodation their local authority will provide a deposit or act as a guarantor.

Professionals and carers will get more training to help identify and meet the mental health needs of children in care and care leavers, and local authority teams will work more closely with mental health professionals to ensure you can access the right support when you need it.

Local health services must work with councils to produce and publish their plans for improving mental and physical health support for children in care and care leavers, and those leaving care will not have to pay for health prescriptions until they are 25.

The government will ask councils and other agencies like the NHS to collect and share more information on care leavers health and wider outcomes to help inform future plans and policies.

Helping the workforce be the best it can be

“Children’s social care should know the person, not their reports. I want them to talk to me and know my side not just the tick boxes” Care experienced young person

“Professionals should be educated on different cultures and have an understanding that every family is different, and culture and background play a large role in their view on things.” Care experienced young person

No change for children, young people and families is possible without the people who work in children’s social care. When relationships between professionals and children and families are positive and trusting, children and families can more easily get the vital support they require. But this is not always available, and for too many children and families these relationships are a source of stress, which fail to offer the help needed.

Many of the people who work in children’s social care have told the review that they are frustrated because they feel held back by the way the system works. They do not feel supported to do their jobs well. Social workers told the review that rather than spending time with children and families, they spend most of their working day on paperwork.

For the review’s recommendations to make a difference for children and families, change is needed for the whole of the children’s social care workforce. This means giving professionals the time and resources they need to build strong, respectful relationships with children and families. It also means supporting professionals to develop expertise so that when they build relationships with children and families they are able to properly help them to bring about change.

Changes in social work

Recommendations

Social workers will get back to spending more time working with children and families by having access to better technology and reducing paperwork that distracts from focusing on children. It is expected that all registered social workers, even if they are managers, will spend time working directly with children and families. There should be funding to try different kinds of flexible working so that social work fits with children and families lives and social workers are available when they are needed.

Social workers gain specific experience from a five year programme of training and support, so that when they start in the job they are developing skills to help children and families. Progress

through this learning should be linked to how much social workers get paid so that social workers keep getting better at their jobs and want to stay in their jobs for longer.

The government should introduce new rules for local authorities on how they recruit and use agency social workers who work temporarily in teams. This costs a lot of money and doesn't help to provide stable professional relationships for children and families. Instead government should set rules about how agency workers can be used, and there should be regional staff banks where local authorities work together to fill urgent gaps in their workforce, rather than trying to fix workforce problems on their own.

Other people who work in children's social care, for example family support workers, children's homes managers and staff, should be given more training and skills. We should start putting children's home staff on a professional register.

The Department for Education should strengthen existing leadership programmes for senior managers in local authorities so that they are able to support their social workers and help them deliver help and support that works better for the children and young people they are there to look after.

What this will mean for children?

Children and families will feel that the social worker supporting them understands their family and the things they talk about or are experiencing, for example their cultural or gender identity, and their sexuality.

Children will have the same social worker for longer and the social worker will have the knowledge and skills that they need to provide support.

Where children and families work with a family support worker instead of a social worker, this person will be able to do their job well and offer genuine help.

For children in care who live in residential homes, there will be new managers where there might have been gaps before. They will make sure that all their staff feel valued and stay in the job longer so that young people receive care from the same people over the long term.

How this will be supported to happen?

Change in the amount and kind of training for all new social workers and new expectations about

prioritising time spent working directly with children and families.

Changes in the rules about agency social workers and setting up a new way to provide temporary cover.

A statement that sets out the knowledge and skills needed for anyone who is a family support worker or residential children's home manager, so that everyone is clear on what they need to do. Better training and programmes for professionals in children's social care like residential children's home managers.

Making sure the system is focused on children and families

“How can you have a normal childhood? There are too many procedures.” Care experienced young person

“Change will not happen if the government will not fund local authorities better. It’s not our fault we grew up in care, that we’re in the system.” Care experienced young person

“Having more young people involved in the system as well. We need people with lived experience to be part of it.” Care experienced young person

The changes to children’s social care and the way that children and families experience it cannot happen without change to the system that controls it. In the full report, the review sets out the changes that the government needs to make to set clear direction about what local authorities should be trying to achieve for children and families, to make sure there is action if that doesn’t happen and to improve how different services work together and how technology is used.

Changes in social work

Recommendations

We recommend that the government works with people with lived experience of services, practitioners, researchers, and other public services to develop a National Children’s Social Care Framework to set the direction and purpose for everyone who works in children’s social care. The Framework would apply to the whole of children’s social care - from Family Help through to supporting children in care and work with care experienced adults - and would help everyone, like social workers and managers, understand what they need to do.

The government should appoint a National Practice Group, to build practice guides which would offer information and advice to local authorities and people working in children’s social care so they can work in the best way possible. This will help children and families receive the best support possible and reduce differences between local areas. There should be clear ways of measuring how well services are doing, to help everyone learn how to get better - including a new measure of child and family satisfaction.

There should be clearer expectations for all organisations who are responsible for safeguarding so that they know how they should work together – this includes children’s social care, health, and the police. Schools should now be part of this work. There should be more support to help them do this well and more consequences if they don’t.

Government should work in a clearer and more linked up way when supporting children and their families. One way to do this is for youth justice work to move from the Ministry of Justice into the

Department for Education so that all the support programmes are linked up and children have all their needs met.

The government should update how it gives money to children's social care based on what each area needs.

Ofsted should focus more on what matters to children and families when it inspects local authority services and children's homes.

The Department for Education should get involved more firmly in local authorities that are inadequate or have been underperforming for a long time. The Department should introduce Regional Improvement Commissioners to oversee progress in these areas so they improve how they work and deliver services for children and families.

Children's social care should make better use of data and technology through a National Data and Technology Taskforce - a group who would support three priority actions - 1) improving social work computer systems to reduce social worker time spent recording instead of with children and families, 2) enabling smooth sharing of information, and 3) improving what data or information is collected and how it is used to help decision making. One example that young people told us about was information about if they are LGBTQ+, where they told us they don't want to have to come out to different people and professionals can talk about them using the correct information.

What this will mean for children?

The quality of help and support that children get will be better and more consistent across the country. Children and their families won't see big differences in support between different areas based on what each area can afford.

Children and their families will have better support from services who work well together.

Fewer children will live in areas where the services are not good enough.

Children and families will get more time with their worker because they are spending less time away from them recording cases.

How this will be supported to happen?

Groups involving people with personal experience of children's social care.

Ofsted will involve children and families more in its inspections and will be clearer with local authorities and children's homes about what it is looking for.

The Department for Education will intervene more quickly if services aren't living up to what children and families need and deserve.

Local authorities will be able to afford the services that children and families need and deserve, because funding will go where it is most needed.

Terms that are used:

Adoption Support Fund: The Adoption Support Fund provides funds or a pot of money, to local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) families.³

Care experienced: A child or young person who has lived in foster care, in a residential home, or in semi-independent living. Sometimes people use the words 'looked after child' or care leaver, this means that children are, or have been, in the care of the local authority.

Child in need: Section 17(1) of the Children Act 1989 places a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children 'in need' and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.⁴

Child protection: Children's Services are expected to provide help and support to children in their area and take action under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.⁵ This will include a child protection conference, and a child protection plan. This plan will be focused on making sure the child is safe.

Children's services or social care: The department in a local authority who is responsible for services supporting a child or young person and their family, including Family Help, children in care and care leavers.

Targeted early help: When a child or family faces a problem and needs help, early help or early intervention services can support them. This can happen at any age, before the birth of a child through to 18 years old. Targeted early help in this review refers to services that support families who need help with complicated problems.

Kinship care: Kinship care is when a child lives full time or most of the time with a relative or friend who isn't their parent, usually because their parents aren't able to care for them. That relative or friend is called a 'kinship carer'.⁶ Kinship care can be provided informally, or through a legal permanence order such as an Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.

³ www.gov.uk/guidance/adoption-support-fund-asf

⁴ <https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Section-17-support-July-2019-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/child-in-need-services/>

⁶ <https://kinship.org.uk/for-kinship-carers/what-is-kinship-care/>

Local authority: The local part of the government who are responsible for services (things like schools, housing and care for people who need support) in each area in the country (for example Manchester City Council or Southwark or Brent in London).⁷

Special Guardianship Order⁸: Where children live permanently with someone other than their birth parents as ordered by the court. This person is a special guardian and will have responsibility for a child's care and upbringing until the age of 18.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990): The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis of all of UNICEF's work. It is the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history.

⁷ <https://coramvoice.org.uk/myrights/being-in-care-or-a-care-leaver-important-words-and-what-they-mean/being-in-care-or-a-care-leaver-important-words-and-what-they-mean-english/>

⁸ <https://lawstuff.org.uk/childrens-services/special-guardianship/>