



The independent review of children's social care

Dear Foster Carers,

My name is Josh MacAlister and 14 months ago the government asked me to lead an independent review of children's social care. Today I have published the final report which includes a clear set of recommendations, alongside a plan and costings, that I am asking the government, public services and businesses to support and implement.

Foster carers are some of the most remarkable people in society. You open your hearts to provide tens of thousands of loving homes for children. I have heard stories that demonstrate just how life changing fostering can be for children and for carers themselves. I recognise the valuable role you play in children's social care, while also recognising your need for better support.

It has long been known that there is a significant shortage of foster carers across the country, which puts even more pressure on those of you who are fostering now. One of our immediate priorities for government in responding to the review is to launch a recruitment programme at a scale and pace never attempted before in England, so that by 2026 we have 9,000 more foster carers. Doing this will not only mean that children have more choice in where they live, but it will put less pressure on you to rush introductions or endings with children, result in better matches for children and lead to greater stability.


I am also recommending that the government takes a different approach to recruiting and supporting foster carers. Just because you live in one local authority, or work for one Independent Fostering Agency, should not mean that you cannot care for a child or children who come from 20 minutes down the road but live in another local authority. That is why I have asked the government to create Regional Care Cooperatives, which will focus on bringing local authorities together to manage their fostering services and support foster carers better. These new bodies will take a number of years to set up but I believe that having dedicated organisations that have the right scale and skills will mean you get better support in the future.

This letter has an offer and ask of each of you too.

Alongside continuing the brilliant work you are already doing, my "ask" is that you encourage your friends, families, communities to consider stepping forward to become a foster carer. You are the best advocates for fostering and your efforts will be essential if we are to reach the goal of finding an additional 9,000 foster homes for children over the next three years.

I know you can only promote fostering by giving a true account of the experience and that is why there needs to be much greater support for you. This is part of a 'new deal' for foster carers that I have recommended in the review.





First, when families take the significant step of expressing an interest to become a foster carer we need to provide those families with much more intensive and responsive support. Rather than expecting potential carers to navigate lengthy and complex application processes alone, I make a recommendation which asks national government to assist local authorities by offering a wraparound support service for prospective carers as they go through the process. I hope that putting this in place we will reverse trends seen in recent years where, in 2020/21 alone over 160,000 families who expressed an interest in fostering did not submit a full application. While not everyone can do what you can do, I think more support and better recruitment processes would make a difference.

Secondly, from meeting hundreds of committed foster carers during the review I know that you understand the needs, wants and dreams of the children you care for, and in some cases the child you care for will have lived with you for years. Yet you are often not given enough delegated authority to make the day-to-day decisions that affect their lives. Whilst seemingly a small change, my recommendations would give foster carers the ability to agree whether a child in their care can have a haircut, or go on a school trip.

Finally, we must improve the uneven patchwork of support foster carers receive across the country. Whilst some of you reading this letter might have received support through programmes such as the excellent Mockingbird Family Model – every carer deserves the right to access comprehensive and ongoing support, and the quality and availability of that support should not be determined by the postcode you live in. That is why I have recommended that all local authorities must make available a foster carer support service and network, which mirrors or betters the support provided by existing programmes.

This package of recommendations sit alongside many more which should improve the outcomes for looked after children, better support for care experienced adults and fix the broken children's social care market which is leading to children living far from home in places that cannot meet their needs. Developing these recommendations has only been possible due to the generosity of hundreds of foster carers who gave their time to help shape and inform these recommendations. From focus groups in Stockport, meetings facilitated by fostering charities, online polls and national online events, I hope that you can see your input to the final conclusions and recommendations, and that these inspire you to take action.

You can read the final report on our website here <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk> alongside supporting documents which include more information on the recommendations, a children and young people's version of the report and a children's rights impact statement.



Jon Martin





Josh MacAlister

Chair of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

