

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Independent review of children's social care final report

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Health and Wellbeing Board of the publication of the Independent review of children's social care final report and the key points, recommendations and implications for action
- 1.2 This is set in the context of asking ourselves the question 'what will we do to step up and be the change that our families and young people need'?

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Independent review of children's social care commenced in March 2021 and the final report was published in May 2022. The review took place over four distinct phases:
 - **March to June 2021:** prioritised listening to those with lived experience of the children's social care system including parents, children, care experienced adults, adopters, foster carers, kinship carers and professionals. This 'call for advice' and 'call for evidence' culminated in the 'Case for Change' report which set out the problem diagnosis
 - **June to November 2021:** significant around of public engagement, evidence and visits to get a better understanding of the issues
 - **November 2021 to February 2022:** launched a public 'call for ideas' and consolidated and reflected on the range of views
 - **March to May 2022:** final phase of the review which brought together all the engagement, evidence and ideas to create a set of recommendations and a reform plan; at the same time, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel have been undertaking a National review to examine the circumstances leading up the tragic deaths Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, the outcomes of which has informed the final report
- 2.2 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care is built on the premise that it is a once in a generation opportunity to radically reset children's social care. Throughout the review, the review team have grappled with two related dilemmas:

- How do we have a system that achieves the benefits of local delivery for children and families, without having unacceptable levels of variation in the support children and families in areas receive?
- How do we promote autonomy for those working with children and families to make the right decisions, whilst still having the essential checks and balances?

2.3 The review have articulated that reform needs to help the system move towards a system with greater freedom and responsibility, setting a clear national direction about change. The goal of the reform programme – Relationships Protect – is to leave a legacy of a self-improving system and as such, six principles of reform have been proposed as follows:

1. Clear objectives are needed for children’s social care and this should come from national government
2. Decisions and delivery should happen as close as possible to families, except where there is a compelling case for setting rules or acting at greater scale
3. Greater transparency, new mechanisms for leaning and better inspection and intervention should improve performance
4. Empower a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to create change with children and families
5. Design services around children and families with better multi agency working
6. Investment linked to reform

2.4 The review acknowledges that children’s social care functions within a wider context of the welfare state, as well as structural, ethical and societal factors. A range of issues have been identified as relevant to the review findings and the future of children’s social care, even though they sit outside the scope of the review. These include poverty and inequality; pressures in family support and other services; new and emerging threats; domestic abuse; mental health; substance misuse; and immigration and asylum. In developing the review recommendations, the review team have actively considered these factors.

2.5 The review acknowledges that children’s social care functions within a wider context of the welfare state, as well as structural, ethical and societal factors. A range of issues have been identified as relevant to the review findings and the future of children’s social care, even though they sit outside the scope of the review. These include poverty and inequality; pressures in family support and other services; new and emerging threats; domestic abuse; mental health; substance misuse; and immigration and asylum.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 The recommendations identified in the final report are articulated in appendix 1, and are focussed around the following headings:

- A revolution in Family Help
- A just and decisive child protection system
- Unlocking the potential of family networks
- Transforming care
- The care experience
- Realising the potential of the workforce
- A system that is relentlessly focussed on children and families

3.2 All recommendations will likely impact on the children's social care system and across the wider partnership. However, under the auspices of 'the care experience', the key recommendations pertaining to health and wellbeing are as follows:

57. The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children's services

58. All local authorities must improve care leaver mental and physical health support, and the National Children's Social Care Framework should promote the most effective multidisciplinary models of doing this

59. Integrated Care Boards should publish their plans for improving the mental and physical health of those in care and leaving care and routinely publish progress. As part of these plans and new corporate parenting responsibilities, the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS should exempt care leavers from prescription charges up to age 25

60. As part of recommendation in Chapter Eight (improving data collection), the Office for National Statistics should collect and report data on the mortality rate of care leavers and care leaver health outcomes. Government should also launch a new cohort study which tracks the health outcomes of care experienced people and helps to gather other missing data on housing, education and employment outcomes

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 The five year reform programme 'Relationships Protect' identifies a critical path of interdependent measures which should be delivered in sequence to release cashable savings that can be reinvested to improve outcomes at pace.

It is proposed that a National Reform Board be established to drive the reform programme and oversee the implementation of the review recommendations and monitor system feedback, with the aim to reset the system, improve outcomes and make children's social care more sustainable in the future.

It is anticipated that the government will publish a White Paper within six months of the final report, which will set out a full response to the review. In anticipation of further legislation and guidance, implementation should focus on the delivery of recommendations which do not require legislation, or where foundations need to be laid in preparation for legislation being passed in Spring 2024.

The Secretary of State should be responsible for holding others to account and driving progress.

Changes in government policies associated with the Independent review of children's social care should align with and take account of other policy changes i.e. in relation to the review of SEND and Alternative Provision; major reforms to the schools system; and the introduction of Integrated Care Boards. Undertaking this work together presents a significant opportunity to set the direction of wider children's services looking across education, SEND and social care (as well as links to health).

4.2 In reflecting on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care final report, a number of initial actions and areas for further consideration have been identified from a North Lincolnshire perspective:

- Briefing papers to be shared with relevant systems leaders, democratic processes, partnerships and boards as appropriate
- Establish a Children and Families Transformation Board (to opt in wider Council colleagues and partnership representation as appropriate) to take account of key policy drivers, including the Independent review of children's social care, and drive forward system change
- Develop a delivery plan set against the review recommendations (this will include a local position statement and clarity regarding local action, lead and timescales). Progress against the delivery of the plan will be overseen by the Children and Families Transformation Board
- Hold workforce briefings across children's social care (and the wider workforce) to engage staff at the earliest point and to promote the opportunities that this review report presents
- Take account of the report as part of the review and refresh of the Children's Commissioning Strategy, and wider interface with relevant partnership and planning frameworks (including the Health and Wellbeing Board and Health and Wellbeing Strategy) to ensure opportunities to create the conditions for system transformation and integration are realised across the partnership

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 None at this time

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 None at this time

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 Not applicable

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 As part of the Independent review of children's social care, there have been a range of opportunities for staff across the North Lincolnshire children and families workforce to engage in and contribute to the calls for advice, evidence and ideas. Specifically, North Lincolnshire was invited to be one of ten local authority areas to engage in a Local Design Area Review visit, and North Lincolnshire's 'You Say Who' initiative features as a case study in the final report.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 Health and Wellbeing Board to note the publication of the Independent review of children's social care final report and acknowledge the key points, recommendations and implications for action

9.2 Health and Wellbeing Board to take account of the Independent review of children's social care final report and contribute to partnership action to drive forward system transformation and integration

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

[Independent review of children's social care final report](#)

Appendix 1: Independent review of children's social care final report recommendations

A revolution in Family Help

1. A new umbrella of 'Family Help' should combine work currently done at targeted early help and section 17, enabling handovers and bringing the flexible, non stigmatising approach at early help to a wider group of families
2. Eligibility for Family Help should be set out in a sufficient level of detail nationally to give a more consistent understanding of who should receive Family Help, whilst giving enough flexibility to enable professional judgement and empower Family Help Teams to respond flexibly to families' needs
3. Local Family Help Teams should be designed in a way that enables families and practitioners to have a conversation about their concerns rather than relying on mechanical referrals. If families are not eligible for Family Help, support should be available in universal and community services and the front door to Family Help should be equipped to link families to this support
4. Family Help should be delivered by multidisciplinary teams, embedded in neighbourhoods, harnessing the power of community assets and tailored to local needs
5. Government should make an investment of roughly £2 billion in supporting local authorities, alongside their partners, to implement the proposed transformation in Family Help. National government pots of funding should be mainstreamed into this funding stream and local partners should be incentivised to contribute. Once transformation is complete, the government should ring-fence funding for Family Help to ensure rebalanced investment is sustained
6. As part of the National Children's Social Care Framework, the government should define outcomes, objectives, indicators of success and the most effective models for delivering help. Funding should be conditional on meeting the goals of the Framework
7. Alongside recommendations to strengthen multi-agency partnerships and the role of the Director of Children's Services, government should consider legislating to put the existence of multi-disciplinary Family Help Teams on a statutory footing
8. Ofsted inspections should reinforce a focus on families receiving high quality, evidence based help that enables children to thrive and stay safely at home
9. Government should ensure alignment in how the proposals in the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper and this review are implemented. The government should ask the Law Commission to review the current patchwork of legislation that exists to support disabled children and their families

A just and decisive child protection system

10. All cases of significant harm should be co-worked by an Expert Child Protection Practitioner who is responsible for making key decisions (in the future this would be someone who has completed our proposed Early Career Framework)
11. Working Together should set expectations on multiagency capabilities for child protection and the National Children's Social Care Framework should set out effective practice models for joint working
12. Investment in Family Help will provide resources for multidisciplinary responses to extra familial harms
13. Government should amend Working Together to introduce a Child Community Safety Plan to clarify where primary harm is not attributable to families, supported by practice guides and the Early Career Framework
14. There should be clearer expectations about partnership responses to extra familial harms across an area and this should be a priority area for learning
15. Government should integrate funding aimed at preventing individual harms into a single local response to extra familial harms, including enabling areas to integrate their Violence Reduction Unit funding and infrastructure into their local response to extra familial harms
16. Subject to a positive evaluation of the pilot to devolve responsibility for the National Referral Mechanism decisions for child victims to local areas, government should roll this out to all areas
17. Government should implement the recommendations of the Taylor Review to simplify the experiences of children in the youth justice system, and as a first step, should roll out the flexibility to all local authorities to integrate AssetPlus Assessments with children in need assessments
18. Guidance and legislation on information sharing should be strengthened and local safeguarding partners should confirm they have information sharing agreements in place and have audited practice in this area
19. Government should set a target to achieve frictionless sharing of information between local authority and partner systems and between different local authorities by 2027. To enable this they must take an imminent decision on whether to adopt the NHS number as a consistent identifier alongside work by the National Data and Technology
20. The National Children's Social Care Framework practice guides should promote effective practice for engaging families. Parental representation should be offered to all families in child protection. force discussed in Chapter Eight
21. Improve the quality and consistency of local and judicial decision making through improving the quality and transparency of data and facilitating learning at a local level.

22. The Public Law Working Group should lead work to bring learning from Family Drug and Alcohol Courts and other problem solving approaches into public law proceedings, to make proceedings less adversarial and improve parents'

Unlocking the potential of family networks

23. Government should introduce legislation which makes the use of family group decision making mandatory before a family reaches Public Law Outline. The features and delivery practice of effective family group decision making should also be included in the National Children's Social Care Framework
24. A Family Network Plan should be introduced and enabled in law to support and give oversight to family led alternatives to care
25. All 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 Arrangement Order looking after children who would otherwise be in care
26. Legal aid should be provided in a range of circumstances where special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order interact with the family courts
27. All new special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order should be given kinship leave, which matches the entitlement given to adopters
28. As part of the National Children's Social Care Framework, local authorities should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers
29. Government should develop a new legal definition of kinship care, taking a broad range of circumstances into account
30. Contact arrangements between birth parents, adopted children and adoptive parents should be assumed by default and modernised through the swift roll out of technology enabled methods of contact, such as Letterswap

Transforming care

31. New and ambitious care standards, applicable across all homes for children, should be introduced
32. Regional Care Cooperatives should be established to plan, run and commission residential care, fostering, and secure care
33. A windfall tax on profits made by the largest private children's home providers and independent fostering agencies should be levied to contribute to the costs of transforming the care system
34. Linked to our recommendations in Chapter Seven, Ofsted should be given new powers to oversee and intervene in the children's social care market

35. The Department for Education should launch a high profile national foster carer recruitment programme to recruit 9,000 additional foster carers
36. Local authorities, and eventually Regional Care Cooperatives, should use family group decision making to identify important adults that are already known to a child and may be willing to foster
37. Foster carers should be given delegated authority by default, to take decisions which affect the day to day lives of children in their care
38. All foster carers should be able to access high quality training and peer support. As part of the National Children's Social Care Framework, all local authorities should develop a model of foster carer support based on the principles of Mockingbird
39. Independent, opt-out, high quality advocacy for children in care and in proceedings should replace the existing Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 Visitor roles. The Children's Commissioner for England should oversee these advocacy services, with the powers to refer children's complaints and concerns to the court

The care experience

40. New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations
41. Government should make care experience a protected characteristic, following consultation with care experienced people and the Devolved Administrations
42. National 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
43. Local authorities should redesign their existing Independent Visitors scheme for children in care and care leavers to allow for long term relationships to be built
44. As part of the National Children's Social Care Framework, all local authorities should have skilled family finding support equivalent to or exceeding, the work of Lifelong Links in place by 2024 at the very latest
45. 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
46. As part of our recommendations about Ofsted inspection (Chapter Eight), Virtual School Heads should be held accountable for the education attainment of children in care and care leavers up to age 25 through Ofsted's ILACS framework. Pupil Premium funding should be focused on evidence led tutoring and mentoring programmes

47. Virtual School Heads should work to identify more children in care who might benefit from a place at a state or independent day or boarding school, and the Department for Education should create a new wave of state boarding capacity led by the best existing schools
48. Introduce a new kitemark scheme for higher education to drive improvements in admissions, access and support for those with care experience
49. The Care Leaver Covenant should be refreshed to align with the five missions set out in this report and co-produced with care experienced people. Employers should be able to apply for a new government led accreditation scheme which recognises their commitment to supporting care leavers into well paid jobs
50. An annual care leaver bursary should be made available to all apprentices up to the age of 25, and employers should be allowed to use unspent apprenticeship levy funds to tailor support for those with care experience
51. There should be a range of housing options open to young people transitioning out of care or who need to return, such as Staying Put, Staying Close and supported lodgings. Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' expectation
52. Introduce a stronger safety net against care leaver homelessness by removing the local area connection test, ending intentionally homelessness practice, providing a rent guarantor scheme and increasing the leaving care grant to £2,438 for care experienced people
53. The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children's services
54. All local authorities must improve care leaver mental and physical health support, and the National Children's Social Care Framework should promote the most effective multidisciplinary models of doing this
55. Integrated Care Boards should publish their plans for improving the mental and physical health of those in care and leaving care and routinely publish progress. As part of these plans and new corporate parenting responsibilities, the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS should exempt care leavers from prescription charges up to age 25
56. As part of recommendation in Chapter Eight (improving data collection), the Office for National Statistics should collect and report data on the mortality rate of care leavers and care leaver health outcomes. Government should also launch a new cohort study which tracks the health outcomes of care experienced people and helps to gather other missing data on housing, education and employment outcomes

Realising the potential of the workforce

57. A nationally led programme should get social workers back to practice through: action on technology to reduce time spent case recording; a mechanism for challenging unnecessary workload drivers; requiring all registered social workers to spend time in practice, and trialling flexible working models around the lives of children and families
58. Introduce a five year Early Career Framework for social workers, an Expert Practitioner role and national pay scales
59. The government should introduce new national rules on agency usage supported by the development of not-for-profit regional staff banks to reduce costs and increase the stability and quality of relationships children and families receive
60. To support the development of the wider social care workforce, 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
61. The Department for Education should strengthen existing leadership programmes to better align them with the review's reforms and increase the diversity of leadership

A system that is relentlessly focussed on children and families

62. A National Children's Social Care Framework should set the objectives and outcomes for children's social care
63. The National Children's Social Care Framework should include a balanced scorecard of indicators to support learning and improvement. To support this there should be an overhaul of what data is collected and how those collections work, so that we have more meaningful metrics and more regular data to help drive transparency and learning in the system
64. The National Children's Social Care Framework should include practice guides, setting out the best evidenced approaches to achieving the objectives set out in the Framework
65. Data and feedback should be used to prompt local and national learning to continually improve services. At a national level this should be via a National Practice Group and a National Reform Board. The evidence and learning landscape should be strengthened through the integration of overlapping What Works Centres, starting with the integration of the Early Intervention Foundation and What Works for Children's Social Care
66. The National Reform Board should establish a mechanism for local authorities to raise where they feel there are national regulatory blockers to taking a course of action that is in the best interests of children and families, with action taken to address this

67. The responsibilities of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be amended to emphasise their role as a strategic forum focused on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, with attendance reflecting this
68. Working Together should be amended to set out clear joint and equal operational responsibilities for partners. The Director of Children's Services should be the primary interface between strategic and operational leaders to facilitate effective multi-agency working
69. The role of the Director of Children's Service should be reviewed to give clarity to the role following this review, the SEND and AP Green Paper, and the Schools White Paper, to reflect their role as a champion for children and families within their area
70. The individual contributions of partners to achieving the review's vision should be set out clearly in Working Together and reflected in each organisations' strategic plans
71. Partnerships should become more transparent, including publishing minutes of partnership meetings and the financial contributions of each partner. The Safeguarding Children Reform Implementation Board should be reviewed and strengthened to take a greater leadership role in safeguarding arrangements, including requesting and publishing critical information about partnerships
72. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and relevant What Works Centres should take a more hands on role in promoting evidence and supporting partnerships to improve
73. Each agency inspectorate should review their framework to ensure there is sufficient focus on individual agency contribution to joint working. Where there are concerns about the functioning of partnerships, joint inspections, with a judgement attached, should be triggered
74. Schools should be made a statutory safeguarding partner and contribute to the strategic and operational delivery of multiagency working
75. Government should incentivise greater partner contributions through requiring partners to publish their financial contribution and making receiving the full funding for reform contingent on partner contributions
76. National government should ensure it has an oversight mechanism in place to ensure policy relating to children and families is aligned in contact with children's social care. Government programmes should be streamlined to support these reforms and youth justice policy should move to the Department for Education
77. Government should introduce an updated funding formula for children's services, and take greater care to ensure that changes in government policy that impact the cost of delivering children's social care are accompanied by additional resources for local government

78. Ofsted inspection should be reformed to increase transparency in how judgements are made, ensure inspection applies a rounded understanding of being 'child focussed' and to ensure inspection supports the proposed reforms
79. Strengthen intervention powers and introduce Regional Improvement Commissioners to provide more robust challenge in the system. Ensure there is a clear expert improvement offer for local authorities
80. Government should establish a National Data and Technology Taskforce to drive progress on implementing the review's three priority recommendations 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
81. The Department for Education should have a proactive strategy on making better use of data in children's social care, including a strategy for data linking for children's social care with other data sources that makes use of the ONS integrated data service