

Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation

Children's Social Care Reform 2023



Pillar 1: Family help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families

- **£45m for up to 12 'Families First for Children' family help pathfinders (three in 2023 and up to nine in 2024), co-designing and delivering end-to-end service reform, with three elements: local, multi-disciplinary family help services, child protection lead practitioners, and a focus on family networks and kinship care**
- **Development of knowledge and skills statements for family help workers**
- **Consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to 'case hold' children in need cases**
- **Work to join up family help funding and strategy across government**
- **Law Commission to review children's social care legislation for disabled children with a view to simplifying and streamlining**
- **Reference to building culturally competent practice and better responding to the needs of families facing material deprivation.**

Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system:

- **'Families First for Children' pathfinders will test a new child protection lead practitioner role which will co-work with family help teams**
- **Consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards in 2023 as part of the planned update to Working Together 2018**
- **Report to go to Parliament setting out ways to improve information sharing between safeguarding partners, including exploration of the use of a single consistent child identifier**
- **Strengthen leadership across multi-agency partnerships via amends to WT18 guidance, improved accountability and an increased role for education in local safeguarding arrangements, consult on education's role as a safeguarding partner. Following a consultation, areas will be funded to implement the agreed reforms, with Pathfinder areas being early adopters**
- **Act on delays and improve parental engagement in the family courts.**

Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks:

Create a culture of family first by:

- **Using the 'Families First for Children' pathfinders, test how to implement family group decision making and Family Network Support Packages. Seven family help pilot areas to test Family Network Support Packages only**
- **Publish a national kinship care strategy by the end of 2023. This will include issues such as educational entitlements, training and LA practice plus related reforms e.g. financial allowances**
- **Invest £9m in a training and support offer for all kinship carers (those with a legal order and informal arrangements) by the end of this Parliament**
- **Explore the case for mandating a financial allowance for all SGOs and CAOs.**

Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care:

- **£27m over two years for a fostering recruitment and retention programme to be initially trialled in the North East region**
- **National minimum allowance for fostering to increase by 12.43%**
- **Continuing reforms to supported accommodation; registration in 2023, inspection in 2024**
- **Two regional RCC pathfinders to plan, commission and deliver care places – note the 'all' has been dropped and no figure on level of investment provided**
- **DfE to commission an external organisation to support LAs with forecasting, procurement and market shaping efforts**
- **Support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector – leadership programme, KSS, focus on CPD, considering professional registration of the residential childcare workforce**
- **Implement an opt-out independent advocacy, this will not replace IROs or Reg 44 visitors**
- **Introduce financial oversight regime for the largest providers thereby increasing transparency and reducing risks of sudden exit.**

Pillar 4 continued....

- **Expert group to review standards of care, regulation and guidance and consult on legislative changes**
- **£30m over two years to fund well evidenced interventions in family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes**
- **Consult on strengthening and extending corporate parenting principles to a wider set of relevant bodies in Autumn 2023**
- **Create opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve their potential with a focus on education, training and employment via VSHs, PP+, an uplift to the apprenticeship bursary and a refresh of the care leaver covenant**
- **Universal offer of wrap around support and accommodation for all care leavers via an uplift in the leaving care allowance and strengthening Staying Put / Staying Close, with entitlements up to age 23**
- **Focus on the mental and physical health of care leavers and addressing health disparities to increase life expectancy by building understanding and skills of social workers plus other professionals**
- **Update existing guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care and extend it to cover care leavers up to age 25**
- **Consult on extending the mandatory reporting of deaths or serious incidents involving children to include the deaths of care leavers.**

Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one

- **SWE to inspect all initial education routes by July 2025, commission research on the role of practice educators and take a greater role in overseeing them**
- **Development of a five-year Early Career Framework for social workers, starting with early adopters in Spring 2023 to design, develop and test ECF delivery mechanisms**
- **Boosting social worker recruitment and retention, including an additional 500 child and family social work apprentices, reviewing student social work bursaries and education support grants, and exploring international recruitment**
- **National Workload Action Group to identify unnecessary workload drivers**
- **Reduce the cost and reliance on agency social workers (separate consultation).**

Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data

- **Introduce a Children's Social Care National Framework, supported by a data dashboard by the end of 2023 with implementation by the end of 2024 (separate consultation)**
- **Publish a data strategy by the end of 2023 setting out plans for transforming data in children's social care and establish a Data and Digital Expert Forum**
- **Align inspection with the National Framework. Ofsted to rebalance how it looks at practice so it acts as a lever for improvement**
- **Development of a suite of practice guides, this work will be overseen by the National Practice Group**
- **Enhancing the DfE's intervention role and offer via a clearer interventions policy and escalation pathway, new focus on 'getting to good' in RI rated LAs**
- **Before the next Spending Review DfE, in consultation with DLUHC, will aim to update, publish and consult on a new formula for children's services funding.**

Delivery

- **Phase 1 – now to the end of the current Spending Review period (March 2025) focus is on addressing urgent issues, setting national direction and laying the foundations for reform**
- **Phase 2 – embedding reform everywhere subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcome of related consultations.**

Phase 1: Laying the foundations for reform

Activities	2023	2024
The Families First for Children Pathfinder	Wave 1 begins (September 2023)	Wave 2 (2024)
Family Networks pilot	Wave 1 begins (from summer 2023)	Wave 2 (2024)
Regional Care Cooperatives		Pathfinders (spring 2024)
Early Career Framework	Early adopter launch (spring 2023)	

Phase 1: Addressing urgent issues

Activities	2023	2024
Increasing the recruitment and retention of foster carers	North East hub established to support prospective foster carers (summer 2023) North East fostering recruitment marketing launch (autumn 2023) Regions for wider roll out selected (autumn 2023)	Support hub and marketing launch in new areas (summer 2024)
Improving the training and support offer to kinship carers	Delivery partner contract awarded (autumn 2023)	Delivery commences (spring 2024)
Improving access to family finding	Launch bidding round for new funding (spring 2023) Award funding (summer 2023)	
Uplifting the leaving care allowance	Increase the allowance available to £3,000 (April 2023)	
Addressing the use of agency social workers	Publish national rules for agency use (September 2023)	National rules in place (spring 2024)

Phase 1: Setting national direction

Activities	2023	2024
Implementation Strategy	Consultation inviting views on our proposals for strategic reform (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023)	
Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard	Consultation inviting views on the outcomes and enablers in the draft National Framework, and the indicators in the data Dashboard (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023) Issue National Framework as statutory guidance (by the end of 2023)	
Social worker workforce: proposed reforms to the agency market	Consultation inviting views on proposed reforms to the agency market (from 2 February 2023) Government response (September 2023)	
Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory guidance	Consultation inviting views on updates to strengthen the statutory framework for safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies (planned to launch in spring 2023) Issue updated guidance (by the end of 2023)	Start annual updates of Working Together (2024)

Activities	2023	2024
Information sharing guidance	Consultation inviting views on updates to guidance on information sharing between professionals (planned to launch in spring 2023) Issue updated guidance (by the end of 2023)	
Social worker workforce: Early Career Framework	Consultation, as necessary, inviting views on the draft framework (from autumn 2023)	
Proposals for legislative reform	Consultation, as necessary, inviting views on proposals for legislative reform, subject to the outcome of this consultation (in autumn 2023)	
Practice Guides for leaders and practitioners	Develop and design Practice Guides (2023/24)	Disseminate Practice Guides (2024/25)
Key publications and reports	Report to Parliament on information sharing and Consistent Child Identifier (summer 2023) Data strategy (by the end of 2023) National Kinship Care Strategy (by the end of 2023)	Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers (summer 2024)

Children's Social Care National Framework

Principles for practice, expected outcomes and indicators: statutory guidance

What is the framework?

The framework includes:

- The purpose of CSC
- Principles underpinning leadership
- Outcomes to be achieved plus enablers and how leaders and practitioners should hear the voices of children, young people and the families they support
- The indicators that will form the CSC dashboard.

The purpose of CSC is defined here as follows:

“Children’s social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect children and young people by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.”

Principles underpinning the framework

A series of principles underpin the framework drawn from legislation, guidance and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Children's welfare is paramount, and their wishes and feelings are sought, heard and responded to**
- CSC works in partnership with families**
- Children are raised by their families, in family networks, or in family environments wherever possible**
- Practice engages with partner agencies at every stage of support to identify and meet the needs of children, young people and families**
- Practice and services are poverty aware and anti-discriminatory.**

Outcomes and enablers

There are four outcomes which lay the foundations that enable children to thrive:

- 1. Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need**
- 2. Children and young people are supported by their family network**
- 3. Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes**
- 4. Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.**

There are two system level enablers that help CSC to achieve these outcomes:

- 1. The workforce is equipped and effective**
- 2. Leaders drive conditions for effective practice.**

Plus there are wider outcomes that public services should aspire to e.g. good education and good mental and physical health.

The CSC data dashboard

The dashboard brings together a set of LA level indicators via a publicly accessible, interactive form with the aim of increasing transparency and supporting learning. It is not intended to measure the performance of LAs and does not set performance targets.

Enabler 1

social worker turnover
agency social worker rates
social worker caseloads

Enabler 2

share of children's social care spend on children in care
turnover of Director of Children's Services and practice leaders

Long-term outcomes, achieved with partner agencies: outcomes that help children, young people and families to thrive

- Good child development
- Good education, attendance, attainment, training and progress
- Good physical and mental health
- Family stability, including housing and financial stability
- Family functioning, including strong family relationships and support networks
- Preventing and tackling crime

Indicators: how will children's social care understand progress?

Outcome 1

% of referrals which are repeat referrals
school attendance of children in need
rate of new entrants to care
rate of assessments completed
rate of children in care

Outcome 2

% of section 31 proceedings that end with the child living with parents, and the age of the children in the proceedings
% of children in care living with their family networks

Outcome 3

rate and number of section 47 investigations
rate of section 47 investigations which result in an initial child protection conference
rate of new child protection plans
% of children whose plans were de-escalated and did not present again with unmet needs in 2 years

Outcome 4

% of children in care living in foster care
% of children in care living in residential care
distance of placements from home
stability of placements of children in care
strengths and difficulties questionnaire scores for children in care
progress and attainment in Key Stage results for children in care
% of care leavers in education, employment or training
% of care leavers in higher education
% of care leavers in apprenticeships
% of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation

Annex D: One page summary of National Framework and Dashboard

Children's Social Care National Framework - one page summary						
<i>Why does the CSC system exist?</i>	Purpose					
	To help children and families, to protect children by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that children, young people and care leavers grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.					
<i>How should CSC practice?</i>	Principles of practice					
	Children's welfare is paramount and their feelings are sought, heard and responded to	Children's social care work in partnership with families	Children are raised by their families, in family networks or in family environments wherever possible	Practice engages partner agencies at every stage of support to identify and meet the needs of children, young people and families	Practice and services are demonstrably poverty-aware and anti-discriminatory	
<i>What should CSC achieve?</i>	Outcomes for children and families				System enablers	
	Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need	Children and young people are supported by their family network	Children and young people are safe in and outside their homes	Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes	The workforce is equipped and effective	Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
	Practice guides					
<i>How will CSC understand progress?</i>	Proposed dashboard indicators					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ % of referrals which are repeat referrals ▪ School attendance of children in need ▪ Rate of new entrants to care ▪ Rate of assessments completed ▪ Rate of children in care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ % of section 31 proceedings that end with the child living with parents, and the age of the children in the proceedings ▪ % of children in care living with their family networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rate and number of section 47 investigations ▪ Rate of section 47 investigations which result in an initial child protection conference ▪ Rate of new child protection plans ▪ % of children whose plan was de-escalated and did not present again with unmet needs in 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ % of children in care living in foster care ▪ % of children in care living in residential care ▪ Distance of placements from home ▪ Stability of placements of children in care ▪ Strengths and difficulties questionnaire scores for children in care ▪ Progress and attainment in Key Stage results of children in care ▪ % of care leavers in education, employment or training ▪ % of care leavers in higher education ▪ % of care leavers in apprenticeships ▪ % of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social worker turnover ▪ Agency social worker rates ▪ Social worker caseloads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share of children's social care spend on children in care ▪ Turnover of Directors of Children's Services and practice leaders
<i>Outcomes that help children, young people and families to thrive</i>	Long-term outcomes, achieved with partner agencies					
	Good child development	Good education attendance, attainment, training, and progress	Good physical and mental health	Family stability, including housing and financial stability	Family functioning, including strong family relationships and support networks	Preventing and tackling crime

Child and Family Social Worker Workforce Consultation

National rules on the engagement of agency
social work resource in children's social care

Rationale

Following recommendations made in the Independent review of children's social care's final report, DfE is consulting on proposals to improve quality and reduce costs associated with the use of agency social workers.

The consultation builds upon existing regional Memoranda of Understanding/Cooperation to create a set of national rules. Subject to consultation responses, DfE intends to set out the national rules in September 2023. By spring 2024, LAs and all procurement routes used by LAs to engage agency social workers should comply with the national rules.

DfE expects that social workers who are currently working for a local authority via an agency should be offered the opportunity to transition to permanent or fixed-term employment. They will work with the sector to ensure “simple and effective means to complete transition” subject to the outcome of the consultation.

National rules

- 1. Engage agency workers only via commercial compliant procurement routes**
- 2. Only engage agency workers within national price caps**
- 3. Minimum of five years post-qualified experience in LA children's social care and completion of ASYE to qualify for agency role**
- 4. Not engage project teams for social work**
- 5. Standard references for all candidates that relates to standard of practice for any agency worker**
- 6. Three month wait for workers leaving substantive roles before taking agency role in same region**
- 7. Minimum six week notice period for agency social workers**
- 8. Quarterly data return.**

Procurement of social workers

- **By spring 2024, all procurement routes used by LAs to engage agency workers should comply with the national rules**
- **Compliance will be monitored via regular data collection and local and regional spot checks**
- **Agencies that circumvent national rules would be restricted by LAs from accessing new vacancies.**

Price caps

- **Cap on the rate LAs can pay for an agency social worker**
- **Bring agency worker pay in line with substantive worker pay. This will take into account contract differences e.g. holiday pay**
- **Create greater national consistency around pay for social workers (substantive and agency) who are carrying out the same role in different LAs or regions**
- **Ban on bonuses which take amount of pay a worker earns over the cap.**

Post-qualified experience

- **Social workers who graduated in or after April 2024 must have a minimum of five years post qualified experience working within LA children's social care and have completed their ASYE before being employed as an agency social worker**
- **DfE funding cannot be used to support agency social workers in the attainment of their ASYE**
- **International social workers – should this also apply to them?**

Project teams

- **Project teams no longer engaged for child and family social work**
- **Multiple agency workers can be employed but each one contracted individually.**

Data and monitoring

- **The following data to be collected and shared quarterly:**
 - agency worker job type and pay rate
 - substantive worker job type and pay rate
 - vacancies by job type
 - use of market and other supplements
 - substantive worker full time equivalent (FTE)
 - leavers FTE
 - agency worker FTE.
- **Data sharing agreement for data to be shared with DfE and between LAs and regions.**