

Independent review of children's social care in England

Background to the review

Led by:

Josh MacAlister: Chair of the independent review of children's social care

Operating independently of Government:

- Drawing on external perspectives and expertise in delivery, policy and finance in the children's social care sector and across public services, in England and internationally.
- Report will be presented to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Education, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Supported by:

- Review team: civil servants from a range of backgrounds and disciplines
- Engagement with those with lived experience of children's social care, placing their voice at the heart of the review
- Experts by Experience Board to guide the review's approach to hearing from children, young people, families and adults
- Expertise and perspectives from across the children's social care sector and beyond

Case for Change

The Case for Change is the Review's first major milestone – published on 17th June

- The Case for Change set out the biggest problems in the children's social care system and will be the jumping off point for the review's work.
- It is positioned as an early interpretation of the evidence and not a definitive position.
- The Case for Change is based on the review's work so far:
 - Call for Advice – 900+ responses
 - Call for Evidence – 200 responses
 - Feedback from review groups – Experts by Experience Board, Design Group and Evidence Group
 - Feedback from review engagement events and initial stakeholder meetings
- We're inviting feedback through a variety of events, focus groups, surveys and one-to-one conversations.

Helping Families

Effective Intervention

Children in Care & Care
Experienced Adults

Improving the System

Theme 1: We're not doing enough to help families

- Most families in children's social care enter the system because they are struggling to **parent in conditions of adversity** rather than because of they have or are likely to cause significant harm.
- When the state needs to step in, the focus should be support not investigation.
- This disproportionately affects families living in deprived areas and there are racial disparities in intervention.
- Investing in family help matters – but more money alone is not a silver bullet.
- We need a clear understanding of what is meant by family help.
- Community is the first line of defence but we do not utilise its full potential to help families

Theme 2: More effective intervention

- Decision making and risk assessment related to harm is too inconsistent and often isn't good enough
- Professionals and parents trying to safeguard teenagers facing harm outside of the home, are being failed by a system that was not designed for the task.
- When cases escalate there needs to be more decisive action and the right support.
- We should find stability and permanency for children where they cannot remain with their families and kinship should be prioritised and supported.
- More needs to be done to support parents who have their children removed.

Theme 3: Children in care and care experience

- Care does not do enough to strengthen relationships.
- There are not enough homes in the right places with the right support.
- Care for children who need secure accommodation reflects short term siloed thinking across government.
- The state is not the pushy parent children in care need.
- Important birthdays are accompanied by unequal and insufficient help.
- Care experience carries stigma and can weaken identity.

Theme 4: System factors

- Children's social care is under significant financial pressure and urgent action is needed.
- There is insufficient national coordination and accountability is confused.
- Multi-agency arrangements don't take a multidisciplinary approach to working with children and families.
- The system is complicated, bureaucratic and risk averse.
- There is more to do to recruit, retain and support a high-quality workforce.
- We are good at describing the challenges in the system but progress improving the system has been slow.

What have we heard from Parent Carers?

The review team met with around 100 parent carers during April and May. Some of the key themes included:

Support not
Safeguarding

Seeking help often leads to an assessment of parenting – and little support offered for disabled children.

Thresholds

Issues reach 'crisis point' before meeting the threshold for support. Thresholds aren't consistent nationally.

Multi-Agency Working

Health, education and social care systems don't join up effectively.

Social Workers

Some excellent social workers who understand SEND – too many don't. Relationship between family and SW is vital.

Questions:

1. What do you think the purpose of children's social care should be?
2. How do we address the tension between protection and support in Children's Social Care that families describe? Is a system which undertakes both support for families and child protection impeded in its ability to do both well?
3. What do you think about our proposed definition of family help? What would you include or exclude?