

Fundamental shift in children's social care set out

Vulnerable children and families in England will be better supported by a fundamental shift in how children's social care services are delivered, guided by the findings of an independent review of children's social care published today.

The government is setting out initial new measures in response to recommendations set out in Josh MacAlister's independent review of children's social care, which looked at how children and their families interact with the care system and how it can be improved.

Families most at risk will be supported to stay safely together, with a focus on early help, preventing them from reaching crisis point.

As part of this, the Government has revealed plans to set up a new National Implementation Board of sector experts and people with experience of leading transformational change and the care system. It will also boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, increase support for social workers including on leadership, recruitment and retention, improve data sharing, and implement a new evidence-based framework for all the professionals working in children's social care.

Seven areas of England will also receive funding to set up family hubs which offer early help and intervention, in recognition of the importance of strong, joined up local services as a foundation for an improved social care system.

Local authorities will also receive funding for schemes that support vulnerable children to remain engaged in their education and strengthen links between social care and education.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, said:

This is the start of a journey to change the culture and dramatically reform the children's social care system.

Everything we do to raise the outcomes for children and families must be backed by evidence. This report will be central in taking forward our ambition to ensure every child has a loving and stable home and we will continue working with experts and people who have experienced care to deliver change on the ground.

I am grateful to Josh MacAlister for his work, as well as to the families, young people, and professionals who shared their experiences.

We are ready to meet the challenge set by this review and I will

set out my plans for bold and ambitious change in the coming months.

The seven new areas receiving funding for Family Hubs will build on a successful network of centres that are already up and running and are making a transformative difference in the lives of parents who may not have an immediate support network. A further five areas will also receive part of a £12 million investment, in addition to the 75 areas that will receive part of a £302 million pot of funding, delivering on the manifesto commitment to a network of Family Hubs around the country.

Funding will also be provided to LAs for continued delivery of the Social Workers in Schools and Designated Safeguarding Lead Supervision programmes, building on successful pilots which have supported young people in hundreds of schools since launching in September 2020. Through strengthened working between social care and schools, they have helped improve early identification of need, provided better support for families from social care, and kept vulnerable young people engaged with their education, helping to boost attendance, behaviour and attainment.

To support vulnerable children to remain engaged in their education and strengthen links between social care and education, local authorities will also receive funding in 2022/23 to continue schemes that put social workers onsite in schools and provide designated safeguarding leads with supervision from senior social workers.

These measures respond to findings in today's report which call for more help for families in crisis, decisive action in response to abuse, and a commitment for those in care to benefit from lifelong loving relationships. Plans to reform the system include:

- Setting up a National Implementation Board of sector experts and people with experience of leading transformational change, and with experience of the care system;
- Working with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, ensuring children have access to the right placements at the right time;
- Reframing and refocusing the support social workers receive in the early part of their careers, particularly to enhance their skills and knowledge in child protection;
- Joining up data from across the public sector to increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and to the wider public, setting out more detail later this year; and
- Developing a National Children's Social Care Framework, which will set direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence to support families and protect children.

Children's Commissioner for England Dame Rachel de Souza said:

The publication of Josh MacAlister's Review of Children's Social

Care is an important opportunity for all of us working with, and for, children. We must grasp this unique moment to deliver ambitious reform, designed around children and families. A system that delivers so we can properly shift the dial on their experiences and outcomes.

Whilst the publication of reviews is only ever the first stage in a process, and the ideas held in them only as good as their implementation, we must not underestimate the need to act – so many children's lives and futures are at stake. Too many tell me they feel let down by the services designed to protect and support them, so let's seize this chance to do better. We need everywhere to be as good as the best and we must have no tolerance for anything less than excellent.

I look forward to doing whatever I can to make this much needed reform a reality. We owe it to England's children.

Today's announcement builds on measures the government has taken to address the most urgent issues facing vulnerable young people, following a generous settlement for children's social care at last autumn's Spending Review.

This includes banning under-16s from unregulated accommodation, bringing in improved standards of care, providing the largest package of children's social care placements since 2010, investing millions in programmes that support families in crisis and young people leaving the care system and working with experts to tackle the barriers to children's school attendance.

Recruitment, retention and professional development of child and family social workers in England has also been prioritised, and backed by £100 million over the last two years alone. Through these efforts, the number of child and family social workers is increasing every year and the size of the workforce has grown by 14% since 2017.