

Minister Quince Oral Statement on children's social care review

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will now make a statement on how the Government is responding to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) Children's Social Care report.

This Government believes in a country where all children are given an equal chance to fulfil their potential, but sadly we are not there yet. It is for this reason that we made our manifesto commitment to launch the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in March 2021, which was [published](#) today.

This was commissioned to take a fundamental look at the children's social care system, and to understand how we must transform it to better support the most vulnerable children and families.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Josh MacAlister and his team for this comprehensive review, as well as the children, the Experts by Experience Board and the care leavers, families and carers who shared their experiences of the current system and aspirations for a future one.

The Review is bold and broad, calling for a reset of the system so that it acts decisively in response to abuse; provides more help to families in crisis; and ensures those in care have lifelong loving relationships and homes.

I look forward to working with the sector, those with first-hand experience and with colleagues on all sides of the House, to inform an ambitious and detailed Government response and implementation strategy, to be published before the end of 2022.

To get us there, I have three main priorities:

1. The first is to improve the child protection system so that it keeps children safe from harm as effectively as possible.
2. The second is to support families to care for their children, so that they can have safe, loving and happy childhoods which set them up for fulfilling lives.
3. And the third is to ensure that there are the right placements for children in the right places, so that those who cannot stay with their parents grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

To enable me to respond effectively and without delay, I will establish a National Implementation Board, of people with experience of leading transformational change, to challenge the system to achieve the full extent of our ambitions for children. The Board will also consist of people with their own experience of the care system to remind us of the promise of delivery and the cost of delay.

Mr Speaker, I want to be straight: too many vulnerable children have been let down by the system. We cannot level up if we cannot make progress on children's social care reform. But we are striving to change this and our work to improve the life chances of children is already well underway – aligning with the key themes of the Review and CMA report.

On 2nd April, we backed the [Supporting Families](#) programme with £695 million – which will mean 300,000 of the most vulnerable families will be supported to provide the safe and loving homes their children need to thrive. We welcome the Review's recognition of this programme as an excellent model of family intervention.

And today, with the review as our roadmap, we are going further:

We will work with the sector to develop a National Children's Social Care Framework, which will set a clear direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence for how to support children and families. We will set out more detail later this year.

I want to pay tribute to every single social worker striving to offer life changing support to children and families day in, day out. Providing more decisive child protection relies upon the knowledge and skills of these social workers – which is why I support the principle of the review's proposed Early Career Framework. We will set out robust plans to refocus the support social workers receive early on – with a particular focus on child protection given the challenging nature of this work.

We will also take action to drive forward the review's three data and digital priority areas, ensuring local government and partners are in the driving seat of reform. Following the review's recommendation for a data and technology taskforce, we will introduce a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology. More detail will follow later this year on joining up data from across the public sector so that we can increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and the wider public.

And, recognising the urgency of action in placement sufficiency, we will prioritise working with local authorities to recruit more foster carers. This will include pathfinder local recruitment campaigns that build towards a national programme, to help ensure children have access to the right placements at the right time. As the review recommends, we will focus on providing more support throughout the application process to improve the conversion rate from expressions of interest to approved foster carers.

Delivering change for vulnerable children is my absolute priority and, as suggested by the review, I will return to this House on the anniversary of its publication to update colleagues on progress made.

Mr Speaker, this statement also provides an opportunity to welcome the recommendations set out in the Competition and Markets Authority report into the children's social care market, published in March. As an initial response, I have asked my department to conduct thorough research into the

children's homes workforce, engaging with the sector and experts to improve oversight of the market.

Sadly, we know that too many children are still not being protected from harm quickly enough. This is unacceptable. On Thursday, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel will set out lessons learnt from the heart-breaking deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Secretary of State for Education will come to this House to outline the Government's initial response to these tragic cases.

Mr Speaker, for too long children's social care has not received the focus it so desperately needs and deserves. I am determined to work with colleagues across the House and with local authorities across the country to deliver once in a generation reform, so that the system provides high quality help, at the right time, with tangible outcomes.

For every child who needs our protection – we must reform this system.

For every family who needs our help and support – we must reform this system.

For every child or young person in care who deserves a safe, stable and loving home – we must reform this system.

This is a moral imperative, and we must all rise to the challenge.

I commend this statement to the House.