

Independent Review of Children's Social Care

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care published its final report on 23 May 2022. A briefing outlining the report's recommendations and [an initial LGA view is available online](#), with more detailed positions on the recommendations to be developed in the coming months in consultation with councils and partners.

Is this report confidential? Yes No

Recommendation

Members are recommended to discuss the report and highlight any areas of particular support or concern to guide the LGA's response and discussions with government in the coming months.

Action

Officers will use members' comments to inform policy development and discussions with government on the report.

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Independent Review of Children's Social Care

Background

1. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was launched in January 2021, and the LGA engaged with the review from the beginning to ensure the views of councils were represented.
2. The main way in which the LGA engaged with the review was via the [Design Group](#). This was one of three groups supporting the review, alongside the Experts by Experience Group and the Evidence Group. The Design Group was made up of public sector representatives, including the LGA, ADCS and individual councils.
3. The LGA was represented on the Design Group by Baroness Blake of Leeds, who until May 2021 chaired the LGA Children and Young People Board and was Leader of Leeds City Council. Baroness Blake was briefed by LGA officers ahead of meetings to ensure that she was aware of the views of Lead Members and the wider LGA membership on key areas of discussion.
4. As members of the Design Group, the LGA was also consulted outside of meetings to support engagement with councils, and had the opportunity to join one off meetings on particular topics to support the review.
5. The Chair of the Review, Josh MacAlister, attended a meeting of the Children and Young People Board on 16 March 2021 to seek views from board members, and spoke to Lead Members from the Board on 12 March 2021 and 10 May 2022.
6. Finally, the LGA submitted formal evidence to the review at each call for evidence, including [our response](#) to the review's [case for change](#).

Final report

7. The review team published its [final report](#) on 23 May 2022. Some of the key issues covered in the report include:
 - a) Family help – ensuring children and families receive support as soon as they need it, driven by an investment of £2 billion, including integrating individual pots of funding from across government.
 - b) Child protection – introducing an Expert Child Protection Practitioner role, an experienced social worker to co-work child protection cases with family help social workers.
 - c) Data – a taskforce dedicated to achieving 'frictionless sharing of information' between council and partner systems and improving case management systems.

- d) Family networks – improving support for kinship carers and introducing a legal right for all families to access family group decision making such as family group conferencing before they reach Public Law Outline (except in urgent cases).
- e) Children in care – improving placements through the introduction of up to 20 Regional Care Cooperatives, owned and run by councils, which would commission and manage all placements; new oversight powers for Ofsted to oversee the finances of providers (but no ban on profit-making); and the removal of the Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 visitor roles to be replaced by independent, opt-out advocacy for children.
- f) Care leavers – extending corporate parenting to other public sector bodies; making care experience a protected characteristic; and improving outcomes in relation to relationships, education, housing, employment and health.
- g) Workforce – introducing an Early Career Framework leading to Expert Child Protection Practitioner status; tackling bureaucracy for social workers; introducing national pay scales for social workers; tackling the overuse of agency social workers; and a leadership programme to train up to 700 new children’s home managers in five years.
- h) Multi-agency safeguarding - clarifying the role and improving the transparency of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements; making education a statutory safeguarding partner; incentivising partners to contribute to children’s social care by requiring them to publish their contributions and making full funding for reform contingent on partner contributions.
- i) Improvement – Ofsted inspections to increase transparency in how judgements are made and consider more how families as a whole are supported; DfE to be able to intervene ‘more decisively’ in councils receiving consecutive “requires improvement” judgements; bringing improvement commissioners into the DfE as “regional improvement commissioners” responsible for improvement of all councils in the region; ensure a clear sector-led improvement offer for all councils.
- j) System changes – a National Children’s Social Care Framework to set the purpose, objectives and outcomes for children’s social care; a scorecard of indicators; overhaul of data collections to ensure these are meaningful; oversight mechanism in central government to coordinate children and family policy; youth justice should move to DfE; an updated children’s funding formula.

A [full briefing on the report](#) has also been published with further detail on recommendations and an initial LGA view.

8. The [LGA’s initial response](#):

- a) Welcomed the review’s recognition that councils are best placed to deliver children’s social care, and its focus on issues councils have been raising for some time, including early help and support for children in care and care leavers;

- b) Noted the importance of a cross-government approach to supporting children and families;
 - c) Called for government to work quickly with councils to tackle urgent issues that cannot wait for long-term reform, including placements for children with the most complex needs, and workforce challenges; and
 - d) Noted that reform will require transformational investment to succeed.
9. The Government has committed to issuing a full response and implementation strategy by the end of 2022, but in its initial response committed to:
- a) Establishing a National Implementation Board of sector experts, people with experience of leading transformational change and with experience of the care system.
 - b) Work with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, including pathfinder local recruitment campaigns and providing more support throughout the foster carer application process
 - c) 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
 - d) Joining up data from across the public sector to increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and to the wider public (more detail will be set out later this year).
 - e) Establishing a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology
 - f) 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.

Implications for Wales

10. The Independent Review only applies to England as children's social care is devolved in Wales.

Next steps

11. The LGA will seek membership on the National Implementation Board in order to represent councils in these discussions.
12. Officers will bring key issues to the Board and Lead Members over the coming months to develop detailed policy positions on the review's recommendations, to feed into ongoing discussions with government.