

Meeting: Children and Young People Board

Date: Tuesday 14 March 2023



Children's social care implementation strategy

Purpose of report

For direction

Summary

On 2 February 2023, the Government published "Stable Homes, Built on Love", its children's social care implementation strategy and consultation. The LGA will be responding to the consultation on behalf of councils; this discussion is an opportunity for councillors to provide their views on the strategy to inform the consultation response.

Recommendation/s

That the Children and Young People Board provides views on the children's social care implementation strategy to inform the LGA's response to the consultation. The final consultation response will be signed off by Lead Members in line with usual process.

Contact details

Contact officer: Louise Smith

Position: Senior Adviser – Children and Young People

Phone no: 07464 652769

Email: louise.smith@local.gov.uk

Children's social care implementation strategy



Background

1. "Stable Homes, Built on Love" is the Government's response to three independent reports published in 2022:
 - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care
 - The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Report on the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes
 - The Competition and Markets Authority Children's Social Care market study.
2. The report consists of an implementation strategy and a consultation on its proposals, plus plans for £200 million of additional investment over the next two years. The strategy covers Phase One of the Government's reforms, up to the end of this Spending Review period in March 2025. Phase One focuses on making immediate improvements where possible and laying the foundations for future reform. Subsequent phases are subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcome of consultation exercises, but are intended to embed reform everywhere.
3. Alongside the main strategy and consultation, two further consultations were published on the children and families social worker workforce and a children's social care national framework and dashboard. The LGA will respond to all three consultations.

Proposal

4. A briefing on the strategy is attached at Appendix A, including a summary of the strategy and an initial LGA view on these.
5. The Board is invited to share views on the proposals, including any issues that members feel have been missed or issues where the LGA should focus particular attention on behalf of its members.

Implications for Wales

6. The strategy applies to England only as children's social care is devolved in Wales. However, there are likely to be implications for children's social care in Wales, for example placement sufficiency challenges in both countries are having an impact on where children in care are placed.

Financial Implications

7. There are no financial implications for the LGA. However children's social care is one of the largest areas of spend for county and unitary councils, with increasing spend being driven by factors including rising demand, increasing complexity of need and the cost of placements.

Equalities implications

8. The strategy specifically addresses a range of equalities issues including the fact that children from black and Asian backgrounds who are removed from their family are less likely than children from a white or mixed ethnic group to receive support before this happens. Parents of disabled children face challenges in accessing the right support, while children who live in the more deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods are 10 times more likely to be in care or on a child protection plan than children in the least deprived 10 per cent.
9. The strategy states that the Families First for Children pathfinders to be established in up to 12 council areas will specifically consider how to ensure that different children and families receive effective help, including children with SEND; young carers; children with no recourse to public funds; teenagers and children experiencing harm in their community; black; Asian and ethnic minority families; and parents who have previously had a child removed by the Family Court.
10. The Board will wish to consider whether the strategy goes far enough in addressing equalities issues within children's social care.

Next steps

11. Feedback from the Board will be used to inform the LGA's response to the consultation. The final consultation response will be signed off by Lead Members in line with usual process.
12. The strategy indicates a range of future consultations and potential changes to legislation. These will be brought to the Board as appropriate.

Appendix A

Children's social care reform: implementation strategy and consultation

February 2023

1. Introduction

1.1. On 2 February 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published its response to three reports:

- the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) ("the Care Review")
- the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Report on the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes](#) ("the National Panel review")
- the [Competition and Markets Authority Children's Social Care market study](#) ("the CMA report").

1.2. The report consists of an [implementation strategy and a consultation](#) on its proposals, plus plans for £200 million of additional investment over the next two years. The strategy covers Phase One of the Government's reforms, up to the end of this Spending Review period in March 2025. Phase One focuses on making immediate improvements where possible and laying the foundations for future reform. Subsequent phases are subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcome of consultation exercises, but are intended to embed reform everywhere.

1.3. Alongside the main strategy and consultation, two further consultations were published on the [children and families social worker workforce](#), and a [children's social care national framework and dashboard](#). This briefing does not cover these additional consultations, though the LGA intends to respond to all.

1.4. This briefing outlines the content of the strategy and an initial LGA view as a basis for discussion with its members to inform the LGA's consultation response and its ongoing work with government and partners on children's social care reform.

1.5. The strategy has been structured under six "pillars". This briefing follows the same structure, and also draws out the specific policy and financial commitments to view at a glance.

1.6. The strategy includes detail on how far the DfE believes we are currently from its vision, and work that has already been carried out to support its vision, as well as examples of existing good practice. These sections are not included in this briefing, which looks only at future commitments and direction of travel.

2. Overarching LGA View

2.1. Keeping children safe is one of the most important roles a council fulfils. While England remains one of the safest places in the world to grow up thanks to the tireless work of our children's services colleagues and their partners, we agree that significant reform is needed to ensure the right systems are in place to not only protect children, but to help them and their families to thrive.

- 2.2. There is much to welcome in the Government's children's social care reform strategy. A focus on earlier help, support that builds on the strengths within a child's wider family network, and greater ambition for our children in care and care leavers are all areas where we can make an enormous difference.
- 2.3. We are also pleased to see the consultation on children's social work agencies. While there is a place for agency social work, too often we see a high churn of agency workers leading to poorer outcomes for children, while high costs mean cutting services elsewhere.
- 2.4. We believe that some of the proposed reforms, such as Regional Care Cooperatives, need a far stronger evidence base and are pleased that the Department is taking a cautious approach to these. Untested reforms could have unintended consequences for children and their families, so a test and learn approach is appropriate. We also welcome the Government's commitment to co-designing these reforms.
- 2.5. We would have liked to see more focus on some of those issues that lead to more children and families needing support from children's social care, including financial deprivation and access to children's mental health support. We agree with the assertion of the Care Review that without addressing issues such as these that are outside the remit of children's social care, "reforms to children's social care risk treating the symptoms and not the cause".
- 2.6. Pathfinder and pilot areas will need significant support to ensure that they are able to both co-design and implement reforms, and continue delivering high quality support to children and families while those changes are taking place. This will include support for the workforce, much of which is already under enormous pressure and will be expected to implement new ways of working at the same time as working with vulnerable families. [Research for the LGA](#) by the Isos Partnership on structural change in children's social care offers some vital learning to support this process, including the importance of political buy in, leadership and vision, communication, co-production and culture. Practical support such as dedicated funding and IT and management information systems that align across partnerships are also key.
- 2.7. The strategy commits £200 million in additional funding to support children's social care. Any additional investment is of course welcome and will be vital to implement reforms. However, LGA analysis prior to high levels of inflation indicates an existing shortfall of £1.6 billion per year simply to maintain current service levels. The Care Review recommended an additional investment of at least £2.6 billion over four years, prior to the impact of inflation, to improve the system to better meet children's needs. And despite increasing their budgets by £708 million in 2020/21, councils still overspent their budgets by £800 million that year, indicating the scale of pressure on the system.
- 2.8. Furthermore, much of the additional funding committed in this strategy will go to pathfinder and pilot areas, with very little being allocated elsewhere. This means that children living in the vast majority of the country will not benefit from the additional funding that is desperately needed.
- 2.9. While it is positive there is now have a clear direction of travel following last year's reviews, the strategy points to a range of consultations over the coming year and a period of pathfinder and pilot activity. This is important for medium to long-term change, but the children's social care system is in crisis now and most of the changes signalled in this strategy will not deliver results quickly. Inflation and pressures on council budgets will only compound the difficulties facing services, while the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis is increasing children's need for support every day.

- 2.10. If the Department truly accepts the challenge posed by each of the three major reports this strategy builds on, it must also accept that the challenge exists everywhere and there is an urgent need for immediate action. We already have a significant amount of evidence about what works, including that developed through the Department's own innovation programme. Additional funding for all councils, not just those in pathfinder areas, can be wisely invested in stabilising the current system to ensure strong foundations on which to build future reform.

3. Policy commitments

- 3.1. A review into how legislation for children with disabilities could be simplified and streamlined so that entitlements, referral routes and processes are clearer.
- 3.2. A Families First for Children Pathfinder programme to implement family help, child protection and family networks reforms. Work will start with early adopters in Spring 2023. The first wave of Pathfinders will launch in three areas in September 2023, with up to nine more local areas in the second year.
- 3.3. A consultation in Spring 2023 on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be case-holders for children in need and their families.
- 3.4. A workforce survey of family support workers launching in Autumn 2023, leading to a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help workers by Summer 2024.
- 3.5. A consultation on Working Together to Safeguard Children will launch in Spring 2023, including consideration of support for children with a disability; reforms to multi-agency working.
- 3.6. A consultation in Autumn 2023 on whether and how to make education a fourth statutory safeguarding partner.
- 3.7. Updated guidance on information sharing will be consulted on in Spring 2023, alongside the Working Together consultation.
- 3.8. A new child protection pathway is being piloted addressing cases where the primary risk is outside the home. Learning will inform updates to Working Together in 2024.
- 3.9. Family Network Support Packages to enable more children to remain with family networks rather than going into care will be trialled through the Families First for Children Pathfinders as well as an additional seven dedicated Pathfinders.
- 3.10. A national kinship care strategy will be published by the end of 2023 setting out comprehensive plans to better support children and carers.
- 3.11. Six 'missions' will be used to track progress on improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers, focussing on relationships; homes for children in care; corporate parenting; education, employment and training; housing for care leavers; and health.
- 3.12. A new, opt-out model of independent advocacy will be developed and consulted on in Autumn 2023 (this will not replace the role of Independent Reviewing Officers or Regulation 44 visitors)
- 3.13. All standards of care, regulations and associated legislation will be reviewed, with a consultation on changes to standards of care and regulations to be launched in Autumn 2023.

- 3.14. A financial oversight regime will be developed for independent fostering agencies and children's homes providers to increase transparency and prevent sudden market exit.
- 3.15. The Government will work with local authorities to co-design and co-create Regional Care Cooperatives in two areas with a view to rolling out after testing and evaluating the best approach in conjunction with the sector.
- 3.16. A consultation in Autumn 2023 will look at improving and strengthening corporate parenting principles, which will be extended to a wider set of relevant bodies.
- 3.17. A "gold-standard" accreditation scheme for higher and further education institutions will be developed which will drive take-up and retain students, including expectations around support for transitions, bursaries, accommodation and pastoral support.
- 3.18. 3,500 new, well-paid jobs for care leavers will be created by 2027 through the Care Leaver Covenant
- 3.19. Legislation will be brought forward to make Staying Close a national entitlement, and for both Staying Put and Staying Close to support young people up to age 23.
- 3.20. Legislation will also be brought forward to remove the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing. Statutory guidance will be strengthened to remove the use of intentional homelessness for care leavers under 25.
- 3.21. Existing joint DfE/DHSC guidance on "promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children" will be updated and extended to cover care leavers up to age 25.
- 3.22. An "Early Career Framework" (ECF) will replace the current Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for child and family social workers, with two initial years of development followed by three years of "expert practitioner" level development. It will be based on a framework developed with an expert group and will be consulted on with the sector in Autumn 2023.
- 3.23. A National Workload Action Group will be established in early 2023 to identify and address unnecessary workload drivers that do not lead to improvements in outcomes for children and families.
- 3.24. A consultation has been published alongside the strategy on national rules to address high usage of agency social workers.
- 3.25. A consultation has also been published alongside the strategy on a new Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard.
- 3.26. A data strategy will be published by the end of 2023 to set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care.
- 3.27. DfE will test the impact of a Regional Improvement Commissioner to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance, starting with one pilot area.
- 3.28. Before the next Spending Review period, the DfE will update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people's services funding.

4. Financial commitments

- 4.1. £45 million to deliver the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme.

- 4.2. Unspecified funding to deliver reforms to multi-agency working.
- 4.3. £9 million in a training and support offer for all kinship carers by the end of this Parliament.
- 4.4. £30 million to increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes.
- 4.5. £27 million will be invested from 2023 in a foster carer recruitment and retention programme, both to boost capacity and build an evidence base on how to effectively recruit and retain foster carers.
- 4.6. Unspecified set-up funding and capital investment for councils to come together regionally and innovate on how to implement the vision for RCCs.
- 4.7. The apprenticeship care leavers' bursary will increase from £1,000 to £3,000 from August 2023.
- 4.8. The leaving care allowance will be raised to £3,000.
- 4.9. Post-16 Pupil Premium Plus style funding will be extended with a further £24 million of funding between 2023-2025.
- 4.10. Funding for the Care Leaver Covenant will increase by 30 per cent in each of the next two years.

5. Introduction to the strategy

- 5.1. The Government commits to resetting children's social care to ensure that love and stable relationships are at the heart of what children's social care does.
- 5.2. The chapter recognises the challenges faced by disabled children and their families in accessing the right support and outlines commitments within the strategy to improve quality of care and access to support. This includes reducing barriers to asking for help and a Law Commission review focussed on simplifying legislation. A joint children's social care and SEND roundtable on disability will be held in early 2023 to look at how to make commitments a reality.
- 5.3. Improvements to support for teenagers are highlighted, recognising that teenagers are the largest growing age group in child protection and care. This includes a child protection pathway for risk outside the home and an extension of post-16 Pupil Premium Plus style funding for children in care and care leavers.
- 5.4. In relation to racial disparities in children's social care, action to reduce these includes bringing family help closer to communities and introducing new corporate parenting commitments.
- 5.5. With regard to the wider context, the strategy lists a range of wider government reforms including the NHS 10-year plan and the Domestic Abuse Act that will support safeguarding and promote the welfare of children.

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

- 7.1. This chapter outlines the Government's vision for a non-stigmatising, welcoming family help service based in local communities that ensures that every child and family who needs it will have access to high-quality help no matter where they live. This will form part of wider support provided by universal, community and specialist services and will work with health visitors, schools, adult mental health teams and family hubs.
- 7.2. Family Help, in this vision, removes the distinction between targeted early help and child in need to reduce multiple referrals and assessments as family situations change. The intention is to use a skilled, multi-disciplinary workforce so that the needs of children and families can be met in one place. It will be driven by local and national join up of policies and funding.
- 7.3. Family Help workers will prioritise seeking out family and friend networks to support parents and children, offering family group decision-making as standard practice in the early stages of working with a family and using resources creatively to overcome financial barriers to supporting children at home. It would continue if there were child protection concerns, working alongside an expert-led multi-agency response.
- 7.4. The strategy proposes testing the operationalisation of the Family Help vision through up to 12 Families First for Children Pathfinder areas, supported by £45 million of investment. These pathfinders will also test reforms to child protection and family networks, to identify how the reforms work together and how they work in areas with different characteristics. Local areas will receive support and funding to deliver the reforms, which will be co-designed by working with children and families, the council, schools, police, health and other partners.
- 7.5. The strategy also commits to working across government to simplify funding, streamline reporting requirements and evaluating the impact of this. Pathfinder areas will be used to test the alignment of Supporting Families and Reducing Parental Conflict Programme funding. DfE will also work closely with DLUHC on the Supporting Families Programme and include a focus on Family Help as part of the Child Protection Ministerial Group to ensure cross-government oversight and accountability for local support systems.
- 7.6. To help build a skilled and effective workforce, the Government will consult on enabling a broader range of practitioners to be "case-holders" for children in need and their families. This will enable, for example, a family support worker or domestic abuse practitioner to case hold if that best meets the needs of the child(ren) and their family.
- 7.7. By Summer 2024, a Knowledge and Skills Statement for Family Help Workers will be published to set out a common framework of skills and to demonstrate value and confidence in Family Help workers. This will be informed by a workforce survey of current family support workers, launching in Autumn 2023, which will also help to improve understanding of the current workforce.
- 7.8. The DfE commits to working with Ofsted and other inspectorates to ensure inspection sets a focus on families receiving high-quality, evidenced-based help, and that the voice of children and families is central to the inspection of monitoring of family help services.
- 7.9. A consultation on Working Together to Safeguard Children will take place in Spring 2023. This will include consideration of how to include a stronger focus on support for children with a disability.

- 7.10. Pathfinder areas will help to demonstrate how different ways of working can build culturally competent practice, while all research commissioned by DfE on family support will include a specific focus on the experience of children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 7.11. The strategy notes that social workers should be better able to respond to the needs of families facing material deprivation, and states that the DfE will work with the Department for Work and Pensions to improve social workers' ability to use local welfare support for families. The Children's Social Care National Framework will also look at poverty aware practice.

LGA VIEW

- 7.12. We welcome the commitment to ensuring that children, young people and families can access high-quality help when they need it, in their communities. This is key to enabling children to thrive, as well as to ensuring that as far as possible, problems in families' lives can be dealt with early and well before they reach crisis point.
- 7.13. It is positive that the intention is to pilot new approaches to supporting families. While we recognise the need for reform to ensure the children's social care system can effectively meet the needs of children and families now and in the future, we must also recognise that there is much good practice already taking place which new ways of working can learn from and build upon. We will do children and families, as well as those working in the system, a disservice if we fail to build on what is already working and instead introduce untested reforms that may not deliver as hoped, or for which there may be unintended consequences.
- 7.14. Pathfinders will need to take place in a range of areas, with a range of characteristics. Reassurance that reforms will work for all children and families, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics, will only come from careful testing across a range of circumstances. They will also need to take into account the different stages that different councils are in with regard to other reforms, such as some areas being part of the ongoing family hub pilots.
- 7.15. Furthermore, this new vision draws in the workforce from a range of areas, some of whom have already been coping with significant change in how they work including as a result of the pandemic and as new ways of working have come in such as through family hubs in some areas. There is already a significant challenge in recruiting and retaining staff across much of the public sector workforce (for example, we [recently called for an ambitious plan](#) to increase the number of health visitors following a 40 per cent fall in numbers since 2015) so key to the success of reforms will be appropriately supporting staff through this change and co-creating the new model.
- 7.16. We have considerable concerns about the funding arrangements for this approach. The Care Review was clear that more investment would be needed to improve early help across the country, and the Government's response agrees with this. However, the implementation strategy indicates that a significant amount of the new funding will be focussed on pathfinder areas. If the Government truly recognises the scale of the challenge facing children's services in England, for which the Care Review laid out significant evidence, it must also acknowledge that every council needs additional financial support to start rebuilding child and family support services to meet need. Children in non-pathfinder areas should not be made to wait.
- 7.17. We welcome the commitment to simplify funding streams across government, and hope that this will go beyond the two funds identified. Councils consistently report the challenge of being asked to bid for multiple funding opportunities, which takes time and money and can result in short-term approaches, rather than being funded to deliver the services children need.

- 7.18. We welcome work to ensure a stronger focus on supporting children with disabilities through the Working Together consultation and the Law Commission review of legislation. This will be a helpful starting point in ensuring that children receive the support they need and we hope it will be a starting point for further changes, working with schools and the NHS. It will be important to link this work with ongoing reforms to provision for children with SEND as set out in the SEND Green Paper.
- 7.19. The strategy is right to highlight the challenges in supporting families facing material deprivation, however it is disappointingly quiet on the impact of poverty on children and families and how we can prevent families reaching financial crisis earlier. Given the clear evidence on the link between deprivation and contact with children's social care, addressing this is vital if we are to prevent more families requiring support in the first place. This is becoming ever more important with evidence showing that less well-off families with children are being more significantly impacted by cost-of-living pressures. There is a range of ways in which we can strengthen the financial safety net more broadly, including:
- 7.19.1. Ensuring that the mainstream benefits system (rather than emergency local welfare support) provides the principal form of support for low-income households, including work to increase the supply of affordable social and private rental properties
 - 7.19.2. Putting the Household Support Fund on a permanent footing to allow councils to put in place effective support and referral pathways
 - 7.19.3. Enabling councils to use limited resources, including the Household Support Fund, to strengthen financial resilience where possible
 - 7.19.4. Developing a cross-government approach to addressing the cost-of-living crisis, mirroring approaches taken in councils and the LGA, to consider the variety of ways in which services can support children and families including through housing, health and education.

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

- 9.1. The strategy proposes introducing a new Child Protection Lead Practitioner role. This role would value specific skills, knowledge and experience needed to work with children and families where there is actual or likely significant harm, and would co-work with Family Help teams to maintain existing relationships.
- 9.2. The strategy also agrees with the proposal from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel that there should be integrated, co-located multi-agency teams with responsibility for child protection, staffed by experienced child protection practitioners from police, health and councils. These teams and the Child Protection Lead Practitioner role will be trialled through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.
- 9.3. A report will be delivered to Parliament by Summer 2023 setting out ways to improve information sharing between safeguarding partners and will contain recommendations for potential technical and non-technical solutions. It will include an exploration of the use of a consistent child identifier so that information about children can be easily linked and shared across organisations.
- 9.4. Updated guidance on information sharing will be consulted on in Spring 2023, alongside the Working Together consultation.
- 9.5. Support for parents and wider family members to better engage with child protection processes, including through wider use of family group decision-making, is emphasised as an important part of giving families the best chance to make changes while minimising the risk to the child.
- 9.6. The consultation seeks views on how to improve how parents engage with child protection, including any examples of good practice locally.
- 9.7. A tailored approach to harm outside the home will be introduced. To support this, four councils have been funded to test a Risk Outside the Home Pathway based on a child protection planning and conference model developed by Wiltshire Council. This prioritises developing expertise and reducing caseloads for practitioners, stronger multi-agency working and working with families as partners. Durham University will publish a peer reviewed paper on the pilot findings in Summer 2023, leading to changes to child protection processes in Working Together 2024.
- 9.8. The Youth Endowment Fund will test specialist multi-disciplinary teams embedded in neighbourhoods to support children who are at risk of experiencing violence or criminal exploitation from outside the home. Learning from these pilots will inform the development of the Families First for Children Pathfinders.
- 9.9. Work is already underway to enable better integration across youth justice and childrens social care assessments to ensure the needs of children are addressed as part of a coordinated multi-agency response.
- 9.10. Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements will be strengthened through clearer roles and accountabilities for safeguarding partners, increased transparency and accountability, greater support and learning, and a greater role for education settings in local multi-agency leadership. The Spring 2023 consultation on updates to Working Together will consider how to improve multi-agency working to safeguard and protect children. This will include consultation on:

- 9.10.1. Minimum expectations of partners and the functions they deliver at a strategic level.
 - 9.10.2. The introduction of a separate operational group to enable safeguarding partners to focus on strategic issues rather than day-to-day delivery concerns. This group will be made up of individuals senior enough to ensure that strategic priorities become a reality on the ground.
 - 9.10.3. The introduction of a nominated operational chair to have operational oversight of safeguarding arrangements and to provide a clear line of sight for strategic leaders. This is likely to be the Director of Children's Services but should be agreed by all safeguarding partners.
 - 9.10.4. Increased transparency for partners including the publication of strategic plans and annual reports.
 - 9.10.5. New National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards, setting the principles for how partners work effectively and consistently together to identify and protect children and young people.
 - 9.10.6. How to strengthen the role of education settings in multi-agency arrangements at both strategic and operational level.
- 9.11. Funding will be provided to help safeguarding partners implement and embed the new reforms after the 2023 update to Working Together. This funding will be expedited for Pathfinder areas.
 - 9.12. There will be a consultation in Autumn 2023 on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner.
 - 9.13. The National Panel will develop a support offer to maximise the impact of learning from safeguarding reviews. A pilot will be co-produced with a small number of safeguarding partners and begin in Spring 2023, evaluating the quality, consistency and impact of the review process.
 - 9.14. Changes to the family justice system are also proposed, including more accessible and transparent data, better support for parental engagement during proceedings and timely decision making, returning to the 26-week statutory requirement for public law proceedings.
 - 9.15. All councils will be given the opportunity to access and embed the use of a financial modelling tool to better understand the financial impact of court delays to identify where efficiencies can be made.
 - 9.16. One local authority partner will be funded to undertake a research project on family justice data, making recommendations on how to unblock the biggest challenges currently facing local authorities in collecting and reporting data on pre-proceedings practice. These recommendations will inform a national data collection exercise on pre-proceedings to improve understanding of local differences in practice and to develop evidence informed policy.
 - 9.17. The Care Proceedings Reform Group, a subgroup of the Public Law Working Group, will take forward the care review's recommendation on greater application of problem-solving approaches in the family courts, drawing on the good evidence from Family Drug and Alcohol Courts. The Care Proceedings Reform Group will provide recommendations to government by 2024.

LGA VIEW

- 9.18. While we welcome recognition of the highly skilled work of those working in child protection and agree that ensuring social workers have the right skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their roles, we are concerned about proposals to introduce a Child Protection Lead Practitioner role. Children's social work operates on a spectrum from early help through to child protection, and children and families may move along that spectrum throughout their time working with children's social care. It is vital that all social workers are able to spot the signs of a child being at significant risk and not just those in specialist child protection roles. We also question whether we will have sufficient social workers to be able to operate in this model, and how many social workers will want to work in a solely child protection role if this is separated from family help. It is positive therefore that these proposals are being piloted first to identify whether and how they can improve children's safety.
- 9.19. We look forward to seeing proposals to improve information sharing within and between organisations and to supporting government to implement changes. This is an issue that too often features in Serious Case Reviews and action is needed to finally overcome the persistent challenges to improvement, including ensuring that information teams have the capacity and skills to make best use of data. Government support and a strong focus across agencies will be needed to deliver on these recommendations.
- 9.20. Improving accountability and transparency of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements will be helpful and we look forward to seeing more details in the forthcoming consultation. Keeping children safe must be a top priority for all partners locally and action to ensure all partners are clear on their roles in this is welcome.
- 9.21. We look forward to the results of the pilots testing new ways of protecting children where the risk is outside the home. We agree with the Care Review that this is an area where practice could improve and where new approaches could significantly improve outcomes for children and young people. If results of the pilots are positive, we urge the Government to move quickly to identify how best to roll this out more widely, including consideration around developing expertise and identifying resources.
- 9.22. While we welcome steps to ensure better integration across youth justice and children's social care, the Care Review went further than this strategy in terms of supporting children and young people in secure custody. There is [significant evidence](#) that children in Young Offender Institutions and Secure Training Centres have poorer outcomes than their peers and are often at risk of violence and self-harm, while there are significant issues around over-representation particularly for children from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller or Black and ethnic minority background. We would like to see far more alignment and joint working across the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education to improve outcomes for children in youth custody, and there must be more urgency applied to tackling this long-term issue. Our [joint paper](#) with ADCS and the Association of YOT Managers, A Youth Justice System that Works for Children, outlines our position on this issue further.
- 9.23. Greater application of problem-solving approaches in the family courts, learning from the positive work of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, is welcome. The Care Review also recommended developing learning and feedback loops for the judiciary, so that the impact of decision-making is better understood. We believe this would help to improve the quality and consistency of decision-making and would like to see this taken forward.

11. Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks

- 11.1. The strategy is clear that a child's right to family life should be prioritised wherever possible. Families should be actively involved from the point a child gets a social worker, and where children cannot remain with their parents, wider family and friends should be looked to for support. Reforms will aim to create a culture of "family first" that prioritises family-led solutions.
- 11.2. The DfE will test how best to implement family group decision-making and Family Network Support Packages. This will include consideration of how to ensure children are safe in kinship care while minimising state intervention in family life, and looking at how to use council funding more flexibly to provide practical support for families who need it where children would otherwise be in care. These will be tested through the Families First for Children Pathfinders, but also in an additional seven Pathfinder areas which will focus only on Family Network Support Packages in order to evaluate the impact of these and build understanding of the costs and savings associated with them.
- 11.3. Work will be undertaken with Ofsted to improve the visibility of kinship care in inspection reports, including updated guidance and training for inspectors.
- 11.4. There will be investment of £9 million in a training and support offer for all kinship carers (including informal carers), which will be co-created with kinship carers to ensure it meets their needs. The DfE will also explore the case for mandating a financial allowance for all those with Special Guardianships Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs).
- 11.5. All councils will be encouraged to review their existing policies for kinship carers to do more to support wider family networks to care for children when they cannot remain at home, including consideration of financial support for SGOs and CAOs.
- 11.6. A national kinship care strategy will be published by the end of 2023 setting out the government's position on kinship care and comprehensive plans to better support children and carers. This will include issues around financial allowances, workplace entitlements, educational entitlements, training and improving local authority practice. Relevant statutory guidance will be updated at the same time.
- 11.7. The strategy proposes a definition of kinship care for consultation, recognising that the lack of a consistent definition can make it difficult for adults and children to know what they are entitled to.

LGA VIEW

- 11.8. We strongly welcome improved support for kinship carers, and work to enable more children to live within their family networks even where they cannot live with their birth parents. Recent increases in the number of friends and family foster carers indicates an increased focus on supporting children to stay with those close to them, and enabling this to happen without bringing children into care where it is not necessary for the child's safety and wellbeing will be a positive step.
- 11.9. We welcome also investment in training and support for all kinship carers, and hope that the lessons learnt from piloting Family Network Support Packages will be swiftly shared, along with necessary funding to implement changes, so that children and carers across the country can benefit as soon as possible.
- 11.10. It will be important for the national kinship strategy to also recognise the role of partners in supporting kinship arrangements. This includes mental health support for both children and

adults who may have experienced significant trauma prior to and during the set up of kinship arrangements, and support from the prison and probation service where carers are providing homes to children where parents are in custody or have been recently released.

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

13.1. The Government's vision is that where children need to come into care, we provide them with stable, loving homes close to their communities. Children's loving and safe relationships with both their families and care givers will be prioritised, and they will be listened to and have their needs advocated for.

13.2. The strategy states that a family-based home is best for most children to live in. Where children need specialist residential or therapeutic care, this should be provided as close to their home as possible.

13.3. To achieve this, the Government aims to transform the way we provide homes for children in care and care leavers, and to be far more ambitious for these children. Progress will be measured across six missions, which are detailed in the rest of this section.

13.4. **Mission 1: By 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place.**

13.4.1. This will in part be achieved by ensuring more children in care are able to live close to their friends and family.

13.4.2. £30 million will be invested in family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes including Lifelong Links.

13.4.3. Ofsted's new care leaver judgement in the ILACS inspection framework will reinforce the importance of loving relationships.

13.4.4. The accessibility and take-up of the Independent Visitors offer will be increased.

13.4.5. An opt-out model of independent advocacy will be developed and consulted on in Autumn 2023. This will not replace Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) or Regulation 44 (Reg 44) visitors.

13.4.6. The effectiveness of the IRO and Reg 44 visitor roles will be reviewed as part of a wider review on standards of care.

13.4.7. The demand for a new lifelong guardianship order and its purpose is being consulted on.

13.5. **Mission 2: By 2027, we will see an increase of high-quality, stable and loving homes available for every child in care, local to where they are from.**

13.5.1. £3 million will be invested in a fostering recruitment and retention programme in the North East Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance. This will introduce a regional support hub which will support prospective foster carers, facilitate targeted communications and improve retention with the Mockingbird model. This will create end-to-end improvements in fostering recruitment and retention and be used to gather insight ahead of further programmes.

13.5.2. £24 million will be invested to boost fostering capacity and build an evidence base on how to effectively recruit and retain foster carers. This will include recruiting foster carers where there are particular shortages, for example those who are able to support sibling groups, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or parent and child foster homes.

13.5.3. The National Minimum Allowance (NMA) for foster carers will be increased by 12.43 per cent.

- 13.5.4. Clarity will be provided on the national policy position around planning permission for new children's homes.
- 13.5.5. A children's homes workforce census will be undertaken in 2023 and 2024, along with in-depth case studies on recruitment and retention, and qualifications and training.
- 13.5.6. A programme will be developed to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector, including exploration of proposals for professional registration of the residential childcare workforce and a new leadership programme for new managers.
- 13.5.7. All existing legislation and regulation related to the provision of homes for children in care will be reviewed and a common set of standards for all form of care will be developed. A consultation on changes to standards of care and regulations will be launched in Autumn 2023 with a view to updating legislation subject to parliamentary time.
- 13.5.8. Work will be undertaken with Ofsted to strengthen its inspection and regulatory powers to hold private, voluntary and charity providers to account.
- 13.5.9. A financial oversight regime will be developed for independent fostering agencies and children's homes providers to increase transparency and prevent sudden market exit. In advance of legislation being brought forward, a voluntary regime will be introduced in the immediate term.
- 13.5.10. The Government will seek to bring greater transparency around ownership, debt structures and profit making across independent providers.
- 13.5.11. National support with forecasting, procurement and market shaping will be delivered to local authorities, along with the publication of data by government to support forecasting.
- 13.5.12. The Government will work with local authorities to co-design and co-create Regional Care Cooperatives in two areas with a view to rolling out after testing and evaluating the best approach in conjunction with the sector. It will also work with partners across health, justice and the third sector to support the co-design of RCCs to support lasting change. Set up funding and capital investment will provided for councils to come together regionally and innovate on how to implement the vision (which is set out on page 104 of the strategy).

13.6. Mission 3: By 2027, we will strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.

- 13.6.1. A consultation in Autumn 2023 will look at improving and strengthening corporate parenting principles, which will be extended to a wider set of relevant bodies.
- 13.6.2. Education outcomes data is being linked with health and housing data for care leavers to better understand care leavers' long-term outcomes.

13.7. Mission 4: By 2027, we will see an improvement in education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers.

- 13.7.1. Stability in a child's education will become a key feature in decision-making for children in care, alongside maintaining loving relationships.
- 13.7.2. Pupil Premium Plus will be spent on well-evidenced interventions clearly linked to robust Personal Education Plans, with clear pathways to education and employment on leaving care.

- 13.7.3. The Broadening Education Pathways programme will be expanded to support children in care into independent schools, including outreach activities.
- 13.7.4. There will be a consultation on plans to expand the Virtual School Head role to include children in care and care leavers up to 25.
- 13.7.5. Post-16 Pupil Premium Plus style funding will be extended with a further £24 million of funding between 2023-2025 to address the cliff edge in educational support that children in care and care leavers face in 16-19-year-old education.
- 13.7.6. The gap in care leaver higher education participation rates compared to the general population will narrow year on year from 2027 with a view to being minimal by 2030. A “gold-standard” accreditation scheme for higher and further education institutions will be developed which will drive take-up and retain students, including expectations around support for transitions, bursaries, accommodation and pastoral support.
- 13.7.7. 3,500 new, well-paid jobs for care leavers will be created by 2027 through the Care Leaver Covenant, which will have its budget increased by 30 per cent in each of the next two years.
- 13.7.8. The number of care leavers completing apprenticeships by 2027 will double. The apprenticeship care leavers’ bursary will increase from £1,000 to £3,000 from August 2023, and more employers and training providers will be made aware of this and the £1,000 additional funding they can claim to support care leaver apprenticeships.
- 13.7.9. The DfE will also host an employment summit in Spring 2023 to promote examples in the public, private and voluntary sectors on how best to support care leavers into employment, and to share learning from the care leaver social impact bonds that DfE funded.

13.8. Mission 5: By 2027, we will see an increase in the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and a reduction in care leaver homelessness.

- 13.8.1. The leaving care allowance will be raised from £2,000 to £3,000 from April 2023.
- 13.8.2. Legislation will be brought forward to make Staying Close a national entitlement. The Department will explore extending both Staying Put and Staying Close to support young people up to age 23.
- 13.8.3. Legislation will be brought forward to remove the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing. Statutory guidance will be strengthened to remove the use of intentional homelessness for care leavers under 25. Rent guarantor schemes will be encouraged.
- 13.8.4. Provision of supported lodgings will be increased.

13.9. Mission 6: We will work closely with health partners to reduce the disparities in long-term mental and physical outcomes and improve wellbeing for care-experienced people.

- 13.9.1. Existing joint DfE/DHSC guidance on “promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children” will be updated and extended to cover care leavers up to age 25.
- 13.9.2. Work is taking place with NHS England and DHSC to ensure all Integrated Care Boards, Integrated Care Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards and councils better support the planning and commissioning of services to meet the needs of

children in care and care leavers. This will include sharing good practice and consideration of whether guidance needs to be strengthened.

- 13.9.3. The consultation on Working Together in Spring 2023 will consult on extending the mandatory reporting of deaths or serious incidents involving children, to include the deaths of care leavers.
- 13.9.4. The Early Career Framework for social workers will ensure understanding of mental health and wellbeing and skills to respond to children and adults with mental health needs.
- 13.9.5. Work will be undertaken to understand what level of training on mental health is needed by different practitioners, from children's homes workers to Personal Advisers.

LGA VIEW

- 13.10. We share the Government's vision that all children who need to come into care should have stable, loving homes close to their communities, and that we must be ambitious for these children.
- 13.11. We are concerned that residential care for children appears to be given a far lower priority in this strategy than foster care. While family settings will be the best option for many children, our members have repeatedly highlighted that for some children in their care, residential children's homes are the best choice, for example for some older children who express that they do not want to live in another family environment to the one they have grown up in. [Research for the LGA](#) highlighted that one of the barriers to developing new children's homes is their perceived role as an "option of last resort". If we are to ensure that we have the right homes for all children who need to come into care, we must ensure that a range of options is available and not introduce additional barriers as an unintended consequence of policy.
- 13.12. We know that strong relationships for children in care and care leavers can make a significant difference to a child's wellbeing and future outcomes. It is positive that the Government will support councils to invest in programmes that support children to develop these networks.
- 13.13. We support the Government's decision not to remove the Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 visitor roles, which can be highly effective. However we know that the effectiveness of these roles is not consistent, and we therefore welcome plans to review this to ensure that those in these roles are able to advocate in a child's best interests.
- 13.14. The LGA has long called for national support around the recruitment of foster carers, so investment in this is very welcome. Similarly, we welcome plans to support the residential care workforce who have often been undervalued despite the vital care and support they provide children every day.
- 13.15. Finances should not be a barrier to providing children in care with loving homes and an increase to the National Minimum Allowance will support foster carers to look after children. We will be seeking urgent clarification as to how this increase will be funded.
- 13.16. We have also called for financial oversight of larger independent providers of children's placements for some time and are pleased to see commitment to this in the strategy. The Government should work closely with the Care Quality Commission and those in the adult social care sector to ensure that lessons are learnt from the equivalent scheme for adult social care providers. We would also like to see consideration given to how this can be linked to considerations around quality of provision and children's experiences, and powers given to Ofsted to enable them to easily identify any patterns across provision by a provider or overarching ownership structure.

- 13.17. National support for forecasting, commissioning and market shaping is welcome. These areas can be challenging for some councils as expertise has been lost in recent years, while other councils have seen success in pooling resources to carry out this work. We are keen to work with the Government to develop this support offer to ensure that it meets councils' needs and builds on existing good practice.
- 13.18. We have previously outlined our concerns regarding the Regional Care Cooperative model, including the importance of ensuring that decision making is taken as close to the child as possible and the value of strong relationships between corporate parents and care providers. We have also seen that in existing examples of strong regional commissioning arrangements, sufficiency challenges remain, while we are concerned about adding an additional layer of bureaucracy to the system. However, we do recognise that regional or sub-regional working is a helpful approach to developing more specialist placements including secure provision, as well as for strategic issues including forecasting and market shaping. It is positive that this approach is being tested prior to a potential roll out, and it will be vital to ensure that the approach delivers significant improvements – and that we understand the drivers for these improvements - prior to any scaling up.
- 13.19. We do not believe that RCCs will be able to address the issue of insufficient placements quickly, particularly for those children with the most complex needs, and therefore call on the Department to work with councils and the NHS to improve sufficiency swiftly rather than waiting for RCCs to deliver results. This is imperative; too many children are not living in the right home for their needs and those children cannot wait for action to be taken.
- 13.20. The strategy is right to emphasise the importance of education for children in care. The commitments are helpful, however this strategy must be considered alongside plans to improve support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and access to children's mental health services. 56.3 per cent of children who had been in care for at least 12 months on 31 March 2022 had SEN, compared to 15.6 per cent of all pupils. Ensuring children in care receive the right SEN support will be key to helping them to achieve in education.
- 13.21. Plans to increase the care leaver bursary are positive. As part of our [Work Local ambition](#) we believe plans around apprenticeships could go further, allowing more flexibility around the use of funds such as enabling local government to work with employers to pool the levy to plan provision across an area; devolving unspent levy and traineeships to local government to design and commission local provision would help address the supply / demand issues and widen participation.
- 13.22. Increasing the leaving care allowance will be a welcome support for care leavers. We will be seeking clarity on how this will be funded.
- 13.23. Proposals around Staying Put and Staying Close are positive and we support the ambition within them. However evidence shows that Staying Put places additional pressure on capacity for children in care and is significantly underfunded, both of which limit councils' ability to ensure it is an option for all children. The Government must review the new burdens funding associated with Staying Put to ensure all children have the option to remain with their foster carers, and to ensure that foster carers feel supported (including financially) to offer this.
- 13.24. We support plans to improve care leavers' access to social housing.
- 13.25. We believe that the strategy could have gone much further in relation to the provision of mental health services for children in care and care leavers. Councils consistently report difficulties that they face in securing appropriate mental health support for children in their care, including for children facing acute mental health crises. Children will not thrive where

they are struggling with mental health challenges, and this is therefore a fundamental issue that we must address. We recognise that this strategy focuses on children's social care services, however all Government departments must take responsibility for supporting the outcomes of children in the care of the state. The Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England must take action to ensure that every child in care with a mental health need – and particularly where this need poses a significant threat to the wellbeing or even life of a child – receives the care and support they need.

- 13.26. Also in relation to mental health, upskilling children's social workers and others working with children to ensure a strong understanding of mental health issues is very helpful, particularly to help support those young people with lower-level mental health and wellbeing needs. However this must not come at the expense of formal mental health support from trained practitioners, for all children and young people being supported across children's social care.

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

- 15.1. The strategy notes the importance of children and families having consistent practitioners and professionals in their lives with whom they can build a relationship. The Government's ambition is to ensure there is an excellent social worker for every child and family who needs one.
- 15.2. The Government also wants to ensure that the social worker workforce represents the communities they serve at all levels.
- 15.3. The strategy identifies that the Care Review did not comment on the sufficiency of the children's social worker workforce, and recognises that action is needed now to attract higher numbers of people to join, re-join and stay in the profession. The strategy outlines a range of challenges impacting on recruitment and retention, including pay, work-life balance, how social workers are supported and valued, and workload issues.
- 15.4. While recognising that agency social workers play an important role in some circumstances, issues are highlighted in relation to escalating pay rates, workforce churn and in some cases, reduced quality of practice as a result of increasingly high agency use.
- 15.5. An "Early Career Framework" (ECF) will replace the current Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for child and family social workers, with two years of consistent, high-quality support and development. In years three to five, the expert practitioner level of the framework will enable social workers to further develop their expertise, creating a cohort of highly trained social workers capable of dealing with the most complex cases and spreading best practice.
- 15.6. The ECF will be based on a framework document setting out the detailed, comprehensive skills and knowledge needed. The framework will be developed with an expert group before consultation with the sector from Autumn 2023 with an ambition to make the ECF an entitlement for all child and family social workers from September 2026. Delivery will be funded by the DfE, and will be designed and tested with a group of early adopter local authorities.
- 15.7. The strategy does not take forward the Care Review's recommendation that every registered social worker should spend 100 hours in direct practice as a condition of their registration. However, Social Work England will work on an approach to asking all social workers how much time they are spending in direct practice and how they are using it to support their professional development.
- 15.8. The strategy commits to exploring ways to support the recruitment of up to an additional 500 child and family social worker apprentices, and to work with DHSC on how student social work bursaries and education support grants can be used, and on making international recruitment more straightforward.
- 15.9. Work will be undertaken with Social Work England on informing and educating people on the role social workers play in society, and promoting it as a rewarding profession.
- 15.10. The DfE will work with local government, Ofsted, Social Work England and others to agree responsibilities around social worker retention. A national virtual hub will be developed in 2023 to 2024 to identify and spread best-evidenced practice in retaining social workers. The social work employer standards health check will also be enhanced to ensure local authority leader understand the experiences of their workforce.

- 15.11. The DfE will lead work on how to improve case management systems to ensure these work effectively for social workers and deliver good value for money. Two groups of councils are also being funded as part of the Data and Digital Solutions Fund to carry out user research into how social workers' data recording is impacting their social work practice. This will be used to develop solutions that reduce the recording burden on social workers and ensure that data recording supports rather than hinders good social work.
- 15.12. A further two councils are being funded to work with software companies in developing a proof of concept for the use of advanced technology to reimagine how they record, retrieve, share and analyse information.
- 15.13. A National Workload Action Group will be established in early 2023 to identify and address unnecessary workload drivers that do not lead to improvements in outcomes for children and families.
- 15.14. The strategy keeps local authority children's social workers on the local authority pay spine, however it states that work will be undertaken with the sector to ensure that current pay rates, job descriptions and grading reflect the challenge of the role and career progression.
- 15.15. A consultation has been published alongside the strategy on action to address the high use of agency. This includes proposals such as:
 - 15.15.1. Clear national rules on how agency workers should be used including acceptable notice periods, references, expected level of post-qualified experience, pay rates and data sharing.
 - 15.15.2. Establishing price rates on the amount councils can pay per hour for an agency worker.
 - 15.15.3. Increasing transparency on agency usage and costs.

LGA VIEW

- 15.16. We are pleased that the Department has listened to councils' significant concerns around the children's social care workforce and is taking immediate action to provide support with this including through the consultation on use of children's social work agencies. It is positive that the Department has engaged closely with councils to understand the issues and develop potential solutions.
- 15.17. It can be difficult for councils to make long term plans for staffing and development when they continually have single year funding settlements. It is therefore crucial that councils have long term funding settlements so that local services have a long-term, sustainable future and can confidently make plans to develop or recruit the workforce they need.
- 15.18. We welcome work to improve case management systems and to identify and address unnecessary workload drivers. We know that children's social workers' time is best spent working directly with children and families as far as possible and ensuring they are able to do so should not only help to improve outcomes for children and their families, but improve job satisfaction, recruitment and retention.
- 15.19. It is also positive that Social Work England will undertake work to educate people on the role of children's social work, and promote this as a positive career. It would also be helpful if the vital work of children's social workers was positively discussed in Parliament and in the media, rather than it only being highlighted when things go wrong.

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

- 16.1. The Government's ambition is to create a "learning cycle" in the system whereby leaders and practitioners at all levels understand what the children's social care system is trying to achieve and understand how things are working.
- 16.2. A Children's Social Care National Framework will, along with a Dashboard and Practice Guides, provide national system direction and a single framework for what children's social care is trying to achieve and how it should approach practice. A draft Framework has been developed with a National Practice Group, and is published alongside the strategy for consultation. The final Framework will be published by the end of the year with an implementation period of one year. The updated framework will come alongside updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children so that the sector has a single coherent view of the changes that will be expected of them.
- 16.3. A Dashboard with key metrics will, subject to consultation, be published quarterly, with the intention of allowing councils to see trends quickly and act on these. The frequency and content of the dashboard forms part of the Framework consultation above.
- 16.4. A data strategy will be published by the end of 2023 to set out the long-term plan for transforming data in children's social care, ensuring the right data is collected and used well. As part of the plan, DfE will ensure the children's social care metrics reported through the Office for Local Government (Oflog) are aligned with the Dashboard to reduce duplication and set a consistent direction on outcomes.
- 16.5. A children's social care data and digital expert forum will be established to ensure work on data and digital has maximum impact.
- 16.6. Practice guides will support leaders and practitioners in embedding the Children's Social Care National Framework, distilling the best available evidence on important practice issues into key ideas and recommendations.
- 16.7. Regular learning events will be established to bring together leaders and practitioners to create a dialogues about how areas are implementing the National Framework, Practice Guides and to reflect on the Dashboard. These will help to disseminate good practice.
- 16.8. A mechanism will be developed to consider system blockers reported through regional infrastructures and other forums.
- 16.9. An interventions policy will be developed that articulates the range of actions the department currently takes to support and intervene in local authority performance. This will provide local authorities with a clear escalation pathway and clarity on how the department works with councils facing improvement challenges (including through regional teams).
- 16.10. The department will work to improve the evidence base around what works to effectively target Requires Improvement rated local authorities and support them to reach Good and Outstanding. Three approaches will be taken:
 - 16.10.1. Systems approach: how to improve deliver of children's social care services whilst working towards financial sustainability.

- 16.10.2. Practice approach: research will be commissioned to better understand how to support persistently Requires Improvement authorities.
 - 16.10.3. Regional approach: the DfE will test the impact of a Regional Improvement Commissioner to provide additional challenge and oversight of regional performance, starting with one pilot area.
- 16.11. Before the next Spending Review period, the DfE will update, publish and consult on a new formula for children and young people's services funding. It will work with DLUHC to identify opportunities for implementing the new formula.

LGA VIEW

- 16.12. A National Children's Social Care Framework will help to provide clarity to the sector while providing a clear ambition for all government departments and partners to align themselves with.
- 16.13. We have concerns about the potential for unintended consequences with the introduction of a dashboard, such as prioritising what is measured over what is needed, and focussing on national priority over local need. This will need to be developed with the sector to ensure its value with regard to learning and improvement, while the extent to which it drives improvement will need to be carefully monitored.
- 16.14. The proposed data strategy will be helpful if it aligns work across the major reforms underway or proposed across the children's services remit, including changes to the SEND system and work on the first 1001 days. Data can be of enormous value in driving improvement, but only where we are collecting and using the right data in the right way rather than adding significant data burdens onto councils that do not support improvements in children's lives. It is helpful that the strategy will be developed in discussion with Oflog, and we recommend that sector practitioners are involved in the data and digital expert forum.
- 16.15. Councils have increasingly been raising concerns with us about the lack of clarity in the way in which the Department intervenes with councils where it believes there are challenges with performance. We therefore welcome the development of an interventions policy that articulates the Department's approach to supporting and intervening in council performance. This must compliment any work undertaken with regard to SEND improvement and should not be developed in isolation. It will be helpful to develop this policy alongside the LGA, ADCS and Ofsted, recognising that all have a role to play in council improvement and the value of sector-led improvement in particular. This will also help to avoid duplication in support which may be counter-productive.
- 16.16. We are unclear on the value of a Regional Improvement Commissioner. We are not convinced that these would hold sufficient independence from both the DfE and the council to provide impartial advice, and we are cautious about adding a further layer of oversight into the system which risks complicating the landscape without adding value.