

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care Report by Josh MacAlister

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The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh MacAlister, was commissioned in March 2021 to take a fundamental look at the children's social care system, and to gain an understanding of how it must be transformed to better support the most vulnerable children and families.

The Review published the final report in May 2022

The Review proposes six principles of reform:

- Requirement for clear objectives for Children's Social Care provided by National Government
- Families should be involved more closely in decisions and delivery, except where there is a compelling case for setting rules or acting at greater scale
- Increased transparency, with new processes for learning and better inspection and intervention which should improve performance
- Empowering a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to transform processes for children and families
- Designing services around children and families with better multi-agency working
- Investment linked to reform

Review Proposals

- Replace targeted Early Help and Children in Need work with one category of Family Help
- Create multi-disciplinary teams including social workers, domestic abuse workers and family support workers
- Base in community settings e.g. schools and family hubs
- Requires a temporary injection of £2bn over the next 5 years, targeting about half a million children who need extra support

Kent's Position

- Integrated Children's Services under single management oversight since 2018 has resulted in seamless interface between Early Help and Children's Social Work Teams, within statutory parameters
- Raising Resilience, Reducing Referrals project with 3 Dover schools (Astor Secondary School, Dover Christ Church Academy and St Edmunds Catholic School) bases a Senior Early Help Worker in schools to deliver early help interventions and provide targeted support to vulnerable young people and their families

Review Proposals

- ‘Expert Child Protection Practitioner’ post created to co-work alongside the Family Help team with responsibility for making key decisions
- Greater support for parents to help navigate the child protection process and more transparency about decisions made in the family courts
- Address cultural barriers and clarify legislation to enable frictionless sharing of information
- Introduce a bespoke CP pathway through a Child Community Safety Plan so that police, social care, etc can provide a robust response to extra-familial harm

Kent's Position

- Through the Kent Academy, a robust workforce development programme is delivered which enhances the skills and practice of existing social workers
- Young people are provided the opportunity to chair their own Child Protection Review meetings, leading to greater understanding of the process and transparency
- The use of Contextual Safeguarding has been embedded across ICS and children who are identified as being at risk of contextualised harm are well supported by the adolescent teams and county wide services

Review's Proposals

- More recognition and support for extended family
- Before bringing children into care, more must be done to bring wider family members and friends into the decision-making process to come up with a family led plan to care for the child/children
- Could lead to a Family Network Plan whereby local authorities can find and support family members to care for the child
- Wider set of informal kinship carers should get a comprehensive support package

Kent's Position

- The recent inspection report by Ofsted quoted the following:
Family group conferences provide the backbone to Kent's commitment to exploring homes for children within their extended family and friend networks. This enables social workers to find suitable homes, and for some children avoids the need to come into the authority's care. Kent's work with its connected carers is a strong area of practice, with thoughtful and sensitive assessments undertaken with those offering their homes to children. Fully assessed connected carers retain the same status and support given to other foster carers. Ongoing support, fees and allowances continue for carers on staying together plans when they secure special guardianship orders, enabling many children to exit care and secure permanence and security in familiar environments.

Fixing the Broken Care Market and Giving Children a Voice

Review's Proposal

- The introduction of up to 20 Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs), owned and run by councils, which would:
 - Have the sufficiency duty in the local area
 - Run and create public sector fostering, residential and secure provision for the area
 - Commission not-for-profit and private sector care for children where they choose to do so
- Create a 'new deal' for foster carers to reduce the number of children in residential homes, providing support networks and training for foster carers to enable them to provide the best care
- Government to launch a new foster carer recruitment programme to approve 9000 new foster carers over 3 years
- An independent advocate should be available for all children in care that is opt out rather than opt in

Fixing the Broken Care Market and Giving Children a Voice

Kent's Position

- Whilst the recruitment of new foster carers remains a challenge, the increased use of social media, using digital tools to promote Kent Fostering, has seen a significant increase in the number of enquiries from our newly designed website
- New policies introduced include Step Across to Fostering Scheme which supports young people living in residential care return to living in a family environment
- Looked after children and care leavers placement project has resulted in the re-launch of our Hub Families campaign where experienced carers offer support to a group of foster carers
- Children with Complex Lives Project Board includes the Directors of Children's Services from West Sussex CC, Portsmouth CC, Southampton CC and Kent CC who are working together to address the sufficiency challenge in finding registered placements for children and young people with complex needs

5 'Missions' for Care Experienced People

Review's Proposal

The foundations for a good life include:

- Loving relationships
- Quality education
- A decent home
- Fulfilling work
- Good health

The UK to be the first county in the world to recognise the care experienced as a protected characteristic

Kent's Position

The recent Ofsted inspection quoted the following:

Care experienced young people receive ongoing and regular support that helps them to make progress. Personal advisers (PAs) invest time in building relationships with the young people they support. PAs know the young people they work with well, and for many young people these supportive relationships are maintained until they reach the age of 25.

The Lifelong Links service is used by young people to make contact or safely re-engage with extended family members and other significant people they have lost contact with, to develop these relationships and build networks that will extend beyond their time in care.

Report's Proposals

- Professional development should be vastly improved with training and development which provides progression through a 5 year Early Career Framework linked to national pay scales
- Identify and remove barriers which stop social workers spending time with children and young people, such as by improving case management systems
- Social work managers, leaders and academics to be required to continue working directly with children and young people to ensure the whole system is rooted in the realities of practice
- Reduce the use of agency social workers through the introduction of regional staff banks
- Improve the knowledge and skills of family support workers and children's home staff in order to provide better care and help for children and families

Kent's Position

The recent Ofsted report outlined the following:

There is a strong focus on and a commitment to workforce development. Kent has a practice framework and culture which is based on shared values and behaviours. This is implicit in its workforce and learning events and is embedded and well understood by practitioners across the workforce. Through the academy, mandatory e-learning and a range of organised internal and external training events, staff and external partners have access to information, training and tools to strengthen them in their work to support children and their families.

Other support strategies have included redirecting non-case-holding staff, assistant social workers and early help practitioners to provide consistent support with social work tasks, including visits to children.

Report's Proposals

- National Children's Social Care Framework needed to set the direction and purpose of children's social care, supported by meaningful indicators
- Multiagency safeguarding arrangements should be clarified to confirm their strategic role, including making schools a statutory safeguarding partner
- Inspections should be more child-focused and better reflect what matters most to children and families
- Regional Improvement Commissioners should oversee progress in Inadequate and drifting authorities
- Introduction of a National Data and Technology Taskforce to ensure sharing of good practice and improved data collection and its use in informing decisions

Kent's Position

The recent Ofsted inspection quoted the following:

Senior leaders and managers have access to an extensive array of performance information and data reports. These reporting frameworks are well established, and regularly scrutinised and tracked. They provide leaders, managers and workers with a comprehensive overview and insight into all aspects of work and performance across children's services.

The local authority provides appropriate steer and has brought strong leadership to the local multi-agency safeguarding partnership, although there have been some recent challenges with consistency of membership and business support. Despite these challenges, the focus on learning from serious incidents has persisted and is clearly evidenced.

Prior to any of these recommendations being made legislation, Kent can:

- Launch Recruitment campaign on the back of 'Outstanding' inspection outcome
- Drive to attract more foster carers back from the independent sector as well as recruit new ones
- Ensure that before any child is brought into care (except in an emergency situation), a Family Group Conference takes place to explore the possibilities of permanency with an extended family member
- Submit bid to be one of the pilot authorities to take forward some of the proposed recommendations
- Lobby government for changes in legislation and additional funding to take the changes forward both directly and through the ADCS