



# Children's Social Care National Framework

A government consultation on principles  
for practice, expected outcomes and  
indicators: statutory guidance

**Summary and Proposed Consultation Response**  
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# National Framework – overview



The DfE is consulting on the Children's Social Care National Framework (National Framework) and the Children's Social Care Dashboard (Dashboard) indicators. Together, the National Framework and Dashboard provide clarity on what local authorities should achieve as they meet their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and provide care for those who need it.

The National Framework sets expectations for what should be happening in practice and will be used to inform **conversations between local authorities and the DfE's regional improvement and support leads**, to help areas to improve and spread learning. It will also inform Ofsted annual engagement meetings and **how areas are inspected**, so that inspection reflects our agreed outcomes for the system. It will become **statutory guidance** by the end of the year.

## **Purpose: why does children's social care exist?**

To help children and families, to protect children by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that children, young people and care leavers grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

## **Principles: how should children's social care practise?**

- Children's welfare is paramount and their feelings are sought, heard and responded to.
- Children's social care work in partnership with families.
- Children are raised by their families, in family networks or in family environments wherever possible.
- Practice engages partner agencies at every stage of support to identify and meet the needs of children, young people and families.
- Practice and services are demonstrably poverty-aware and anti-discriminatory

## **Long-term outcomes, achieved with partner agencies: outcomes that help children, young people and families to thrive**

- Good child development
- Good education, attendance, attainment, training and progress
- Good physical and mental health
- Family stability, including housing and financial stability
- Family functioning, including strong family relationships and support networks
- Preventing and tackling crime

# National Framework – ease of understanding



To support local authorities in delivering the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework we have sought to make the document user-friendly and easy to understand. We have tried to be concise, use plain language and provide clear explanations of what is required of leaders and practitioners.

To what extent do you agree that the National Framework is clear and easy to understand?

The document is clear, though due to its length is not as accessible as might be hoped to enable a wide audience. A summary document to sit alongside this document would be helpful (explained further in our response to question 9).

The framework references that it will inform how areas are inspected. It would be helpful to have timescales for when the Ofsted inspection framework will be reviewed and changed (given a new framework has recently been published), and how the framework will influence focused inspections and JTAs.

The framework references the Supporting Families Outcomes Framework and states that it builds on and complements it. However, whilst the Supporting Families Outcomes Framework is a helpful description of the ways in which whole family working can be delivered to support families, it is primarily in place as a framework for evidencing successful family outcomes as claims to ensure funding from DLUHC. Pillar 6 states that there will be a new formula for funding children's service, so it would be helpful to understand if this will cover social care, intensive early help, and family hubs, as they are described in Pillar 1 as a joined-up system (Family Help workforce) that requires joined up funding and strategy. It would be helpful to understand what impact this will have on the status of the Supporting Families Outcomes Framework, if it will be decoupled from the current funding implications, and if going forward it would be used alongside the practice principles included within this framework for the whole family help workforce. It has a lot of crossover with the long-term outcomes referenced in the National Framework so there seems merit in aligning them to be used across the whole children's workforce.

# National Framework – practice expectations



What do you think of the expectations for practice described in the National Framework?

Each outcome has a set of practice expectations attached to it. The key headlines include:

- Listening to the voice of children, young people and families
- Using a range of tools to support work with children and families
- Using a strengths-based approach
- Understanding stigma
- Recognising and respecting differences in culture and identity and challenging discrimination
- Ensuring CYP needs are at the forefront of all decision making
- Always applying professional curiosity
- Working proactively with partner agencies
- Building strong relationships with children, young people and families
- Understanding the importance of education as a protective factor
- Strengthening family networks and nurturing loving relationships
- Understanding the difference between safeguarding and child protection
- Understanding the context of harm outside the home
- Consideration of the interplay between home experiences and risk of harm outside the home
- Addressing the risks that individual CYP are blamed for the harm they are experiencing
- Responding to mental health concerns by working with partners to get the appropriate support
- Helping children in care and care leavers to develop and nurture loving relationships
- Preparing CYP for adulthood in a supportive way

They are clear principles and expectations that will work well alongside local authorities' own practice frameworks which provide more detailed toolkits and strategies for direct work with children and families.

# National Framework – multi-agency working



The National Framework describes the role of local authority children's social care in achieving outcomes for children, young people and families. Existing statutory guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#), describes the expectations for how other agencies, such as education, health and the police, should meet their duties to work with local authorities, and safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It would not be appropriate to duplicate content across both pieces of guidance, but it is important that the National Framework reflects the importance of multi-agency working.

How could the National Framework strengthen the expectations for multi-agency working?

The framework states that the expectations for multi-agency partners are clear in Working Together, and the framework doesn't really strengthen these expectations, though it does say it's a resource for partner agencies. This could be a missed opportunity given the focus this framework will have as statutory guidance. The need for multi-agency working goes beyond the statutory partners detailed in Working Together, so this framework should address this.

It would be helpful to have a summary document to accompany the framework to clearly state the expectations, roles and responsibilities for different groups. A recent example of this is the DfE's new attendance guidance, which has a summary table of responsibilities for school attendance. This outlines expectations for parents, schools, governors and the local authority. A similar format could be used for the national framework to summarise expectations for leaders, practitioners, and multi-agency partners.

It would also be helpful to use the framework to strengthen the expectations of partnership working and information sharing with housing and benefits teams, especially in two-tier authorities where this is a challenge, as this can be a key area of support and advice for families with multiple and complex needs. The framework could support improved data sharing and more consistent data capture across different agencies to better support multi-agency working and decision-making .

# National Framework – Dashboard usage



The Dashboard is being created to support learning and bring transparency to the system so that the impact of what happens in practice can be understood. It will contain a series of indicators providing information on what is happening in practice and how the outcomes and enablers described in the National Framework are being achieved.

Are there additional ways that we can ensure the Dashboard supports continuous learning and improvement?

It will be important that the dashboard is made available to local authorities promptly after each data collection so that the information is current. It will be important to have the ability to view information for other local authorities, especially for our region, and for our statistical neighbours. This will then facilitate peer discussion and learning.

It would be helpful to have an interactive tool e.g. in Excel (like the LAIT), to enable LAs to choose whether they compare their figures to their regional or statistical neighbours, and with the ability to see graphs as well as tables, to prevent the need for all LAs to do this themselves. A format ready to share and present would be helpful e.g., like the CHAT tool.

It would also be helpful if there was a directory of key roles across local authorities e.g., strategic data leads, senior data analysts, to support improved collaborative working across LAs.

# National Framework – Dashboard publication



How often should data be published to support learning and understand how practice is making a difference to children, young people and families?

It would be helpful to have the information quarterly, but only if the data collection mechanism from LAs is straightforward and can be easily extracted from existing case management systems using a nationally agreed file specification that the major software suppliers have had time to implement and test, otherwise this would be an additional and time-consuming burden that LAs would struggle to resource.

It would also be helpful to understand how the data collection to feed this national framework will work alongside the existing statutory data collections for children's social care. If this framework details the key outcomes, will all other data collections and published information cease, e.g., the children in need census and the children looked after return?

With the intention to align the future Ofsted inspection framework to this national framework, what will this mean for the Ofsted Annex A requirements?

# Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

## Outcome 1

% of referrals which are repeat referrals

school attendance of children in need

rate of new entrants to care

rate of assessments completed

rate of children in care

- a. A focus on early intervention, and a system-wide understanding of, and response to, the challenges faced in adolescence. This includes the need for greater resources for adolescent mental health, and reduced waiting times to access CAMHS. This also includes how we learn from ongoing research into the impact of Covid on children and what emerging challenges we might see for adolescents in the next few years.
- b. It would be helpful to understand how attendance data will be collected for children in need. The DfE are moving to direct, automated data collections from schools, so will this data be matched to the children in need data collected from LAs? If LAs have to set up processes to collect attendance data for children in need this will take significant time and resource.

For the re-referrals indicator, what is the proposed timescale for this? Is it re-referral at any point in time, or within 12 months from the previous case closure?



# Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

## Outcome 2

% of section 31 proceedings that end with the child living with parents, and the age of the children in the proceedings

% of children in care living with their family networks

- a. Support practitioners to routinely ask about and identify important non-familial relationships as the focus is often on extended family and grandparents. Need to embed an approach that is applied and explored consistently across all casework with families.
- b. For the proposed indicator ‘% of children in care living with their family networks’, what types of legal arrangements would you plan to include within this measure, and would you also want to report on children living with family networks where there is no legal arrangement for this in place? Use of section 20 and private fostering arrangements need to be considered as part of the thinking around this outcome.

For the pre-proceedings indicator, this seems to be more than a single indicator. Are you proposing different age-bands to create multiple indicators, and if so, what will this look like?

# Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

## Outcome 3

rate and number of section 47 investigations

rate of section 47 investigations which result in an initial child protection conference

rate of new child protection plans

% of children whose plans were de-escalated and did not present again with unmet needs in 2 years

- a. It would be useful to understand the planned legal status of LA intervention for extra-familial harm. The work on contextual safeguarding by the University of Bedfordshire suggested that this should be on a par with, but maybe delivered differently to, child protection plans. Has this been decided? It would be helpful to have further guidance on this, especially if there are expectations on this that will be inspected by Ofsted in future.
- b. In relation to question 9 about multi-agency arrangements, you could report on the involvement of multi-agency partners as part of the section 47 and ICPC meetings.

The plan de-escalation indicator is unclear. Need to be clear if this is specific to CP plans, or also CIN plans. Is it trying to look at whether a CP plan de-escalates to a CIN plan or an EH plan, or case closure? Does not presenting again with unmet meet mean no escalation of the case to CP again, or any type of re-referral into social care?

# Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

## Outcome 4

% of children in care living in foster care

% of children in care living in residential care

distance of placements from home

stability of placements of children in care

strengths and difficulties questionnaire scores for children in care

progress and attainment in Key Stage results for children in care

% of care leavers in education, employment or training

% of care leavers in higher education

% of care leavers in apprenticeships

% of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation

- a. We know that there are issues with placement availability and cost, and LAs are always running recruitment campaigns to encourage more people to become foster carers. What can be done nationally to support this agenda?
- b. This links to Pillar 3. It would be useful to understand the proportion of care leavers that have a significant lasting relationship identified and established, irrespective of whether there is legal order for this arrangement.

# Enabler 1: the workforce is equipped and effective



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this enabler which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this enabler?

## Enabler 1

social worker turnover

agency social worker rates

social worker caseloads

- a. No
- b. This links to the consultation on use of agency social workers. It is hoped this will lead to a more stable and more skilled workforce, but it would be useful to add in additional indicators about the proportion of the permanent social worker workforce that have been employed by the LA for 2+, 5+, and 8+ years (for example, time periods to be decided), to enable monitoring of new workers coming into the profession, and how many stay after their 5 Year Early Career Framework is complete.

# Enabler 2: leaders drive conditions for effective practice



- a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this enabler which are not specified in the National Framework?
- b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this enabler?

## Enabler 2

share of children's social care spend on children in care

turnover of Director of Children's Services and practice leaders

- a. No
- b. The proposal for share of children's social care spend on children in care is one useful measure, but as the move is to a joined-up system across the continuum of support with a Family Help Workforce, it would also be helpful to see this as a proportion of all Family Help spend.

The LA cannot be sole driver for this enabler, as the spend is driven by government grants, so it would also be important to understand the share of Family Help spend in the LA that is funded by permanent ongoing government grants.