

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 JUNE 2023**

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny members with a summary of the Government Response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, entitled "Stable Homes, Built with Love".

Summary

2. The Government has published a response to last year's Independent Review of Children's Social Care, entitled "Stable Homes, Built on Love".
3. The response is a strategy which identifies 6 pillars upon which to base reform of Children's Social Care.
4. Darlington are already actively involved in a Regional Fostering Pathfinder Project, along with the other North East Local Authorities. Children's Scrutiny can play a critical role in shaping how Children's Services responds to and implements the other pillars identified in the report.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Scrutiny note the contents of the report and consider how the Committee can support the development work of the service moving forward.

Chris Bell
Assistant Director Children's Services

Background Papers

6. This summary paper refers to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, completed by Josh McAllister and published in May 2022 and the Government Response to the Independent Review, "Stable Homes, Build on Love" which was published on 2 February 2023.

Author:

S17 Crime and Disorder	This plan will support measures to reduce crime and disorder amongst young people
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports the strategy to improve the health and well-being of children and young people
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no implications arising from this report
Diversity	There are no implications arising from this report
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	Children and Young People
Budget and Policy Framework	N/A
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the priorities agreed by the Council
Efficiency	This report supports the efficient use of partner resources through shared priorities
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

7. There are significant external challenges which are impacting upon Children's Services and the way in which they are delivered, which is recognised at a national level. The challenges are complex and multi-faceted but include long term austerity, the impact of Covid and subsequent lockdowns, cost of living crisis, rising Child poverty and significant challenges to workforces to deliver services. In response to these challenges an Independent Review of Children's Social Care was commissioned by Government and published in May 2022. A key statement from that review summarises the position as follows;
8. "This moment is a once in a generation opportunity to reset children's social care. What we need is a system that provides intensive help to families in crisis, acts decisively in response to abuse, unlocks the potential of wider family networks to raise children, puts lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and lays the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care. What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise. For these reasons, a radical reset is now unavoidable."
9. In response to this report the Government has published a Children's Social Care Reform document earlier in 2023, entitled "Stable Homes, Built on Love". There are a number of key pillars to the Reform strategy but of note is the funding gap between what was estimated to be required by the Independent Review (£2 Billion) and the funding allocated to reform (£200 Million).
10. The strategy identified 6 key pillars to the reform of Children's Social Care:
 - (a) Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children thrive within their families.
 - (b) A decisive multi-agency child protection system
 - (c) Unlocking the potential of family networks
 - (d) Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
 - (e) A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one
 - (f) A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data
11. There are a number of key actions for each of the pillars, with many being trialled around the country through a series of "Pathfinder" projects to identify best practice. The below summaries some of the key tasks for each of the pillars.
12. **Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children thrive within their families.**
 - (a) Pathfind a new approach to Family Help.

- (b) Support the Family Help workforce including support to build their knowledge and skills.
- (c) Join up funding and strategy to ensure we have more systematic and strategic join up in how local areas are funded and supported to deliver effective services.

13. A decisive multi-agency child protection system:

- (a) Pathfind a more integrated and expert child protection response.
- (b) Consult on new National Multi-Agency Child Protection Standards.
- (c) Strengthen multi-agency leadership by amending guidance to Local Authorities, Police and Health, to be clearer on roles and responsibilities.

14. Unlocking the potential of family networks:

- (a) Test how to implement reforms to family group decision-making and Family Network Support Packages; to help identify wider family members and empower them to support children and parents, using resources creatively to overcome financial barriers to support children at home.
- (b) Provide a training and support offer for all kinship carers in this Spending Review Period.
- (c) Publish a national Kinship Care Strategy by the end of 2023.

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

- (a) Deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme.
- (b) Pathfind Regional Care Cooperatives to plan, commission and deliver care places.
- (c) Develop a programme to support improvements in the quality of leadership and management in the children's homes sector.
- (d) Introduce a financial oversight regime that will cover the largest providers of children's homes and fostering agencies.
- (e) Increase the leaving care allowance and the apprenticeships care leavers' bursary

16. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one:

- (a) Prioritise high quality career development for social workers by delivering an Early Career Framework. Social Work England will also quality assure all initial education routes for social workers.
- (b) Boost social worker recruitment and explore ways to support the recruitment of up to an additional 500 child and family social worker apprentices nationally.

- (c) Improve social worker retention by supporting local authorities to retain their social workers, including improved working conditions and tackling workload drivers.

17. **A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data:**

- (a) Introduce a Children's Social Care National Framework to set out the outcomes children's social care should deliver, alongside a data Dashboard to support learning on outcomes. Practice Guides will set out the best evidenced approaches for achieving the outcomes.
- (b) Publish a data strategy by the end of this year, to improve the use of technology and data and establish a new children's social care data and digital expert forum.
- (c) Ensure inspection is aligned to the Children's Social Care National Framework. Work with Ofsted to rebalance how it looks at practice to ensure it acts as a lever for improvement, in line with the reforms.

18. Darlington are already part of a local pathfinder group, with the other 11 Local Authorities in the North East, trialling a regional approach to foster carer recruitment and retention, as part of Pillar 4. This work is in its infancy but has support via the Department for Education.

19. There are similar Pathfinder programs in other parts of the country to support the work behind the other Pillars.

20. The key challenge is to consider how Darlington, as a Children's Service, responds to and reacts to the proposed reforms, considering what areas we are well placed to embrace and which may provide us with more challenge.