



Department  
for Education

# **Putting children first**

**Delivering our vision for excellent  
children's social care**

**July 2016**

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## Ministerial foreword

Social services are the backstop of our society – offering help to families in need, and intervening where things go wrong. Yet children's social care is not a service that the majority of children and families ever have to draw on. For most families, the support network provided by relatives, friends, communities, schools and health services will enable them to provide their children with a safe, stable and nurturing home. However, there is a small but important group of children – our most vulnerable – who need more intensive support to have the stable foundation that others take for granted.

These children face challenges which most of us can only imagine. They may have disabilities, or have faced abuse and neglect. They may have been let down time and again by the people who are supposed to love and protect them. They may be being exploited by perpetrators preying on their vulnerability.

The horrors of the serious cases we all know about – Daniel Pelka, Hamzah Khan, Ellie Butler, the children exploited so terribly in Rotherham – demonstrate just how heartbreaking the consequences can be when we fail to protect our children.

But there are thousands more stories of children whose lives are transformed by social workers, foster carers, residential care staff or adopters. These people epitomise the compassion and deep desire in our society to help others, without which we, and our children, would be so much the poorer.

Over the last six years, working with local government, we have made real progress towards achieving more for the children and families we serve. We have made wide reaching reforms to the adoption system, to special educational needs and to the support provided to children in care. We have invested in over 50 innovation projects, testing out new approaches to children's social care. We have maintained our strong commitment to short breaks for disabled children and their families. We have introduced 'Staying Put', enabling young people to stay in their foster home to age 21 if they want to. We have provided over £100 million via the Pupil Premium Plus to help looked after children get ahead in school.

But we will not stop there. We are determined to bring about the widest reaching reforms to children's social care and social work in a generation. Earlier this year, we set out our vision for the children's social care system. We were very clear that we want a system

staffed and led by the best trained professionals; dynamic and free to innovate in the interests of children; delivered through a more diverse range of social care organisations; with less bureaucracy; smarter checks and balances designed to hold the system to account in the right ways; and new ways to intervene where services fail.

Today we are delighted to be publishing the government's strategy to achieve that transformation: our plan for 'Putting Children First'. This plan involves fundamental reform of each of the three pillars on which the children's social care system stands:

- first, **people and leadership** – bringing the best into the profession and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the challenging but hugely rewarding work ahead, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence
- second, **practice and systems** – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish, learning from the very best practice, and learning from when things go wrong
- third, **governance and accountability** – making sure that what we are doing is working, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services

We need a system that works for every child – whether that be a child on a child protection plan whose parents are being supported to provide them with the kind of safe and stable home environment they need; a child moving towards a loving adopted home; a disabled child who needs help from social workers to live their life to the full; or a young person leaving care who needs the continued support and guidance that other young people receive from their parents. We need to get it right for every single one of these children, and that is what our plan for 'Putting Children First' is designed to achieve.

In a modern, one nation, Britain we have to strive for excellence in children's services, because as a fair and decent people, we believe that every child, no matter what their circumstances, should be afforded the best possible start in life. The kind of start that not only allows them to become successful adults, but also gives them the happy childhood that we want for all our children. We should be judged by how we treat the most vulnerable in our society, and that means putting our most vulnerable children first.



**Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**



**Edward Timpson MP**  
**Minister of State for Children and Families**

# Letter from the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

Dear colleagues,

Today the government has published 'Putting Children First – Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care'. This signifies an historic step change for how we will work with children and their families in the future. It's important you read it and in discussion within your teams and organisations reflect on what it might mean for you, but critically what it will mean for the children and families with whom you work. Great opportunity to really change things for the better is within our reach. We must maximize this chance to radically improve the child protection and care system for children and their families.

Without doubt social workers must be trusted to get on and do the job they came into the profession to do. We must be enabled to use our professional judgment in flexible and creative ways, rather than having to follow a procedural path or series of legal rules, far too automated to match the social complexity of the lives of the children and families with whom we work. We also need to work within the right cultural context which supports a practice system sophisticated enough to meet that complexity. Organisations need practice focused leaders with high ambition for what we can achieve for children and families; practice leaders who firstly respect the need for sufficient time to undertake direct work with children and families which really helps and protects the most vulnerable, and secondly provide the necessary support and resources to do so. For many overstretched social workers that might sound a little like nirvana. But it isn't.

The undeniable reality is that in every single authority in England there are great social workers doing great social work, even where caseloads are high, supervision is infrequent, resources are reducing and there is little professional development. For some social workers, however, it's not such a daily battle. For there is a small but growing vanguard of children's social care organisations that are doing things differently – organisations where practice leadership is very strong, workloads are manageable, supervision is frequent, supportive and reflective and learning and development has become centre stage. In some organisations this is now starting to translate into fewer children coming into the care system through the provision of effective family support, the

safety and long term stability of children in the care system is getting better, and new ways of working with young people are providing properly supported independence.

We need to keep on building the critical mass of children's social care services that are getting it right for children and families. 'Putting Children First' sets out how government is going to help make this ambition a reality so that even in high performing services, outcomes for children and families are even better. Social workers – as practitioners, practice supervisors and practice leaders – have a most critical role to play alongside their multi-disciplinary colleagues, and the many parents and carers who have the *most* important role in children's lives.

'Putting Children First' is the gateway to the kind of practice social workers want to be doing every day. Probably the single most refreshing thing about 'Putting Children First' is its central recognition that relationships and long term social connection is the cornerstone to child and family welfare. This of course goes to the core of social work. It is why social work is such a pivotal player in the public service landscape and why social work is important to government. The fantastic and inspiring Innovation Programme, our radical Partners in Practice Programme, the new power to innovate, new opportunities for post qualification CPD and specialist accreditation under a dedicated new body for social work as one profession, a new What Work's Centre to get research into the heart of practice, are just some of the motivating changes in which government will invest. Some of you might have to suspend disbelief to become part of this progressive movement of change, and I urge you to do so. Don't let others interpret this opportunity for you and don't let it pass you by.

It has been a pleasure to meet and speak with so many of you and to hear your views to date. I look forward, very much, to continuing to meet and discuss with you this exciting agenda, as I continue visiting children's social care services across the country.



**Isabelle Trowler**  
**Chief Social Worker for Children and Families**

# Chapter 1: Our ambition for children, young people and their families

## Putting children first

1. By putting children first, excellent children's social care can transform the life chances of our most vulnerable children and families. It can offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success.
2. Strengthening families is central to that aim. Children who grow up with safe, stable and nurturing relationships form stronger friendships, develop greater resilience, achieve more in school and are more likely to build successful careers and have positive relationships throughout their lives. The right support gives children independence, choice and control as they enter adulthood.
3. The fundamental purpose of children's social care is to make sure that our most vulnerable children – those who have been abused and neglected, or face other significant challenges such as a disability – can have a safe, dependable foundation from which to grow and flourish. This is achieved by supporting parents to provide the best possible care for their children or, where this is not possible, by giving them a stable and nurturing alternative home. It is only a small proportion of the nation's children who will need this support – around 400,000 of the 11.5 million children in England are in need or in care at one time – but intensive and highly specialist help is needed if these children are to have the opportunities that others take for granted.
4. Whether it is by finding a new 'forever family' for a child waiting for adoption, helping a child in care to understand their early experiences and settle in their foster home, supporting a disabled child to have the confidence to take part in the activities their peers enjoy, or working with struggling and distressed parents to understand where things are going wrong and what their children need to thrive – children's social care is vital and transformative.



5. And those working in social care do not, of course, do this work alone. Strong partnerships with schools, with the NHS and with the police are often vital to identifying issues and putting in place the right solutions for children.

“When I was growing up I had the same social worker for seven years. I felt like I could trust that social worker 100%. Our relationship wasn't easy, but she stuck by me through thick and thin. I always looked forward to seeing her – she was my special person. She worked with my family at the same time to protect me from my mum, who wasn't easy to work with, and she was always available to me. I didn't even realise there were other children on her caseload – it didn't even occur to me that I wasn't the only one because she was that good.

The first person I met that I really wanted to be like was my last social worker. She was so cool. She's still in my life now I'm part of her family. She was actually only 5 years older than me, I was 16 then. Sandra was so cool, she taught me a lot in life. I was in care as a child, and so were both my parents. Two generations. My daughter didn't go into care - we're not repeating that pattern. My children's upbringing and success is a credit to my social workers; they were the ones who gave me the ability to break out of that cycle. Parents usually take the credit don't they? Well my parents lost that right, with my social workers gaining it. Social workers don't always see the impact, but boy can they make a difference. I have got to where I am today because of social workers.”

**Jenny Molloy**, now a writer  
*'Hackney Child'*, Simon & Schuster, (2011)

## The case for change

6. The best children's social care services in England deliver excellent help and support to children and families. But whilst there is much impressive social work in the system, evidence from frontline delivery organisations, multiple Serious Case Reviews and from Ofsted inspections points to continued inconsistency in the quality of work with children and families. Ofsted's recent Annual Report on children's social care states that, of those local authorities inspected under the current framework, a quarter have been found to be inadequate. In addition, almost half require improvement to be good. The majority of local authorities still struggle to provide consistently effective core social work practice. Similarly, fewer than half of

Local Safeguarding Children Boards, which coordinate and challenge multi-agency working locally, do so in a way which is 'good'.

7. Reviews by Professor Eileen Munro, Sir Martin Narey and David Croisdale-Appleby, amongst others, have given us a deep understanding of the challenges faced by children's social care. They have described a system:

- in which initial social worker training is not consistently preparing students for the challenges of the job, and those already doing it too often lack the time, specialist skill and supervision needed to achieve real change for children and families
- that focuses too much on management and is governed by prescribed approaches rather than excellent practice
- where services have not always been designed around vulnerable children, and innovation hasn't been given enough space to thrive

8. We do not underestimate the challenges that social care faces: increased pressures on budgets; higher demand for services; and new threats to our children and young people as they become targets for radicalisation, child sexual exploitation or gang culture. But we know that these challenges are far from insurmountable. The pattern of inspection outcomes is not about how deprived an area is, or local geography, or even the amount of money being spent on children's social care. Some of the local authorities judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted this year were amongst the highest spending, whilst higher performers were found to spend their money more effectively, investing in the best services and bringing costs down. Ofsted's inspections this year show that, regardless of local context, providing outstanding services is possible, and 'good' is a standard that any local authority can achieve and maintain.<sup>1</sup> It is our moral obligation to refuse to rest until every local authority does. We owe it to Daniel Pelka and Ellie Butler, killed by their parents, and to the more than 1,200 children in Rotherham who faced the most heinous child sexual

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<sup>1</sup> [Social care: the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills \(2016\)](#)

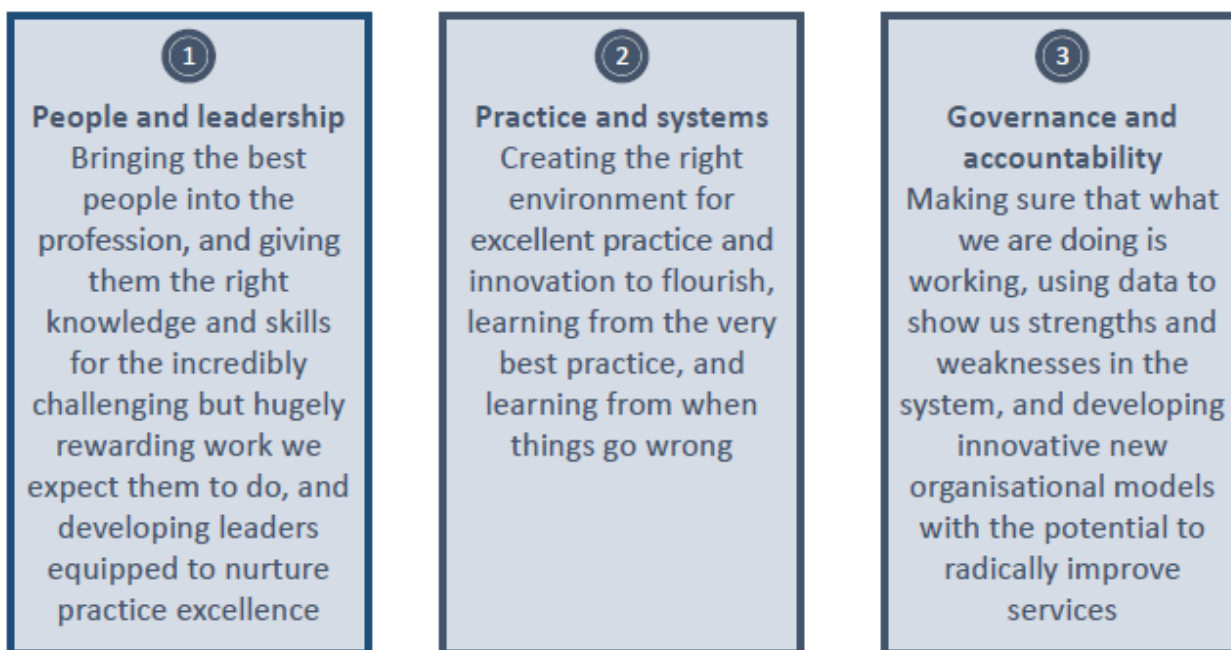
exploitation in the line of sight of people who should have intervened. We owe it to every child who has suffered without the help and protection they needed.

## **Progress so far**

9. Over the last six years, we have begun to lay solid foundations for the improvements required. We have made significant progress towards reforming the child protection system, stripping back bureaucracy. We have secured crucial additional support for children in care and those leaving care. We have reformed the adoption system, to give more children a permanent family, more swiftly. We have helped 35 local authorities move out of failure, and established the first two children's social care Trusts. We have appointed a Chief Social Worker and introduced the first definitive statements of the knowledge and skills needed by child and family social workers. We have begun the transformation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability system, to join up social care, education and health, and put the child at the heart of the system. We have invested in Frontline and Step Up to bring more high calibre recruits into social work. We have introduced the Pupil Premium Plus, giving extra money to help schools to support children in care. We have invested £100 million in testing out radical new approaches to children's social care through our Innovation Programme.
10. This is all starting to have an impact: we have seen the first 'outstanding' Ofsted judgements under the current framework; we are recruiting a new generation of talented social workers into the children's social care workforce to complement some of the outstanding social workers who enter the profession from the traditional university route; and examples of exceptional leadership are being celebrated by Ofsted and others. Importantly, we are starting to see the emergence of a culture which strives for excellent practice and has the confidence to believe that it can be achieved.

## **Our reform programme**

11. Building on that work, we have a real opportunity over the next five years to transform the quality of children's social care services in England. In January 2016, we set out our vision and our reform programme, under three fundamental pillars of reform:



12. This paper outlines in detail how we will deliver fundamental reform across each of these three pillars. It builds on the paper 'Adoption: a vision for change' which set out the government's vision for a reformed adoption system by 2020, and also responds to the important recent reviews by Sir Martin Narey and Alan Wood CBE, on residential care and multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding children respectively.
13. The government has a responsibility to support change and intervene where children's wellbeing is at risk. However it is important that local areas have the freedom and flexibility to find what works for the children in their care. We need reform to be locally driven, by leaders who know what works to help children, and by strong local partnerships. Help needs to be delivered in ways which fit the local context and the varying and complex needs of individual children and families, but to the same consistently high standards. The diverse examples of success that we are seeing are often the result of highly innovative structures, systems and practices. Their common ground is the relentless pursuit of excellent practice, irrespective of the challenge or environment.
14. By 2020 our ambition is that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, receive the same high quality of care and support, and the best outcome for every child is at the heart of every decision made. Getting this right isn't just about changing lives, it's about transforming them. The reforms outlined in this paper will

give the entire children's social care system the opportunity to do that. They will ensure that the whole system puts children first.

## Chapter 2: People and leadership

In 'Children's social care reform: a vision for change' we set out our ambition to bring the best people into the profession; give them the right knowledge and skills for the vital work they do; and develop leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.

**To achieve this, we will:**

- have an accredited practice leader in place in every local authority by 2020
- establish a new programme to develop our most talented social workers into the practice leaders of the future
- launch a programme for the development of new practice supervisors
- continue to invest in existing teaching partnerships and support new ones, to raise standards of entry into social work
- roll out a new system of assessment and accreditation for all child and family social workers, practice supervisors and practice leaders by 2020
- establish a new specialist regulator for social workers in England
- led by the new regulator, set new professional standards for social workers; new standards for qualifying education and training; and new specific standards for the continuous professional development of social workers

15. The individuals who make up the children's social care workforce have the opportunity to have a genuinely life-changing impact on our most vulnerable children. They will often find themselves to be the one person in a child's life who is both trusted enough to understand the problems the child faces and also skilled and confident enough to bring about the change that is needed to address them.
16. Our most vulnerable children are helped and supported by thousands of deeply committed child and family social workers, foster carers, residential care home workers, and a wider workforce made up of personal advisers, therapists, counsellors, social work assistants, family support workers and others. It is only through their skill, expertise and capacity to care that we can truly achieve the change we need for children.

### **Case study**

Emily graduated from University having studied English Literature, followed by a Masters in International Development. Before joining the first Frontline cohort in 2014, she worked for a national children's charity. Now in the second year of the programme, Emily is working as a newly qualified social worker in a London Council.

Emily is extremely proud to have recently qualified and enjoys the variety of the work she does in child protection: "No day is the same in social work. I have had the privilege of working with families and children who are defying the odds to work through difficult situations. I have particularly enjoyed building relationships with clients to encourage collaboration and positive change. One of the best parts of this job is the people we work with, and although there are difficulties and challenges, there are often also success stories for families involved in social services."

17. This chapter focuses on our reforms to raise the skills and confidence of the social work profession. But foster carers, residential care workers and others also have a vital role to play. These people often provide the central relationship in a child's life, the foundation on which their stability, security and self-worth are built. They have to be able to love and nurture children who can often be resistant to it. They have to be hopeful and aspirational for children who feel others have given up on them, and who have sometimes given up on themselves. This work is not easy. Not everyone can do it and no-one can do it alone. Those who do, provide a priceless service to our most vulnerable children and to society as a whole. Chapter 5 sets out our emerging plans for supporting this wider social care workforce to do their vital work.

### **Developing the social work profession – achieving confidence in practice**

18. Our vision is for a social work profession that has fully confident and highly capable social workers, who have been properly trained in the right way with the right knowledge and skills. They must have the opportunity to work in supportive environments, that facilitate critical thinking and enable them to make the best decisions for children and families.

19. Child and family social workers hold the statutory responsibility for keeping children safe and making the right decisions about their futures. Social workers know how to effect change within families, but also know when success cannot be achieved and they must pursue a stable and secure alternative family future for them. They have to be able to simultaneously build a strong, supportive relationship with a family whilst remaining open minded and forensically inquisitive about the risks a child could be facing. They know how to help young people build their social world and leave the care system brave, hopeful and equipped for the adult world.
20. There are great social workers and leaders in the system, and great local authorities that are excelling in the delivery of services to vulnerable children and families. But – across local areas and within local areas – the quality can be variable, with some social workers lacking the right knowledge and skills to do their job effectively, working under poor leadership and supervision, in systems that do not focus on what matters most: keeping children safe and supporting them to reach their full potential.
21. The knowledge and skills statements published by the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for child and family practitioners, practice supervisors and practice leaders set out for the first time what social workers, at all levels of seniority, should know and be able to do, establishing the foundations for a clear career path for the profession. Ensuring that all social workers working with the most vulnerable children and families have the right level of knowledge and skills is a key priority.



### **Case study**

Anna Banbury has worked at the NSPCC since 2013, where she is Development and Impact Manager for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) policy, practice and research. She trained and qualified as a social worker from the University of Oxford in 2003 and began her career as a social worker in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Anna is motivated by the unfairness that for some families, things are harder: “Change takes a very long time: it is hard and frightening and needs someone to stand alongside you to reassure and support. That’s the job of a social worker. We all know that there is never enough time to spend with our clients, but I have come to value research and reflection as much. So much depends on the quality of our decisions and our records. It can be hard to remember that what feels like cumbersome paperwork at the end of a long day is a person’s life story. One day they will need those records to make sense of what has happened. The hardest part about being a social worker is knowing that, for some people, our support comes too late. The hurt and harm that could have been prevented are now too deeply embedded. And we must be able to explain and evidence that. But my passion for the work comes knowing that I am helping to draw a line in the sand: for this child or this family, the cycle can be broken and there is hope for the future. Change is possible. And we can evidence that too.”

## **Developing leadership to transform children services**

### **Definition of practice leader – knowledge and skills statement**

Practice leaders are qualified social workers with the day-to-day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors. They are typically referred to as the Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care or Director of Family Services.

22. As the most senior qualified and experienced social workers in an organisation, practice leaders are in a unique position to lead and to improve practice. Practice leaders provide clarity of organisational purpose, create the context for excellent practice, are able to design systems to support effective practice, develop excellent practitioners, support effective decision making and set and uphold high quality

practice standards. They instil a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on the lives of children and families, being committed to continually improve the services provided. The importance of this role has recently been recognised in the Ofsted note on practice leadership<sup>2</sup>:

*“The qualities that make a successful children’s services leader aren’t straightforward to define – but inspections show that they’re very obvious when present – and strikingly so when they aren’t.*

*“It isn’t just a question of good leadership and management skills, although these must be present in abundance. Like all good leaders, social work practice leaders are inspirational and influential. They are energetic, visible, and ensure that they are surrounded by a strong team at every level.”*

23. Our ambition is that all local authorities will have an accredited practice leader in post by 2020. Some local authorities may choose to have more than one practice leader in place, but it is essential that in appointing more than one practice leader the essence of the role is not diluted, losing the clear line of leadership, accountability and ownership over the quality of practice. As with the wider social work profession, it is important that practice leaders are centrally accredited to build professional and public confidence around them. The first group of practice leaders will be accredited in 2017.

24. As announced by the Secretary of State in January 2016, it is important that we start investing now in those talented social workers who will be the practice leaders of the future. As part of their work as a Partner in Practice, Tri-borough (Westminster City Council, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) will lead work to develop and deliver this programme, with the support of other Partners in Practice and high performing local authorities. The programme will have input from the best existing practice leaders and will have a particular focus on developing the pipeline of future leaders to work in challenging areas and newly-created Trusts.

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<sup>2</sup> Schooling E, ‘Practice leadership’, Ofsted, [Commentary on social care: June 2016](#)

## **Bringing the very best into the profession and improving the quality of education**

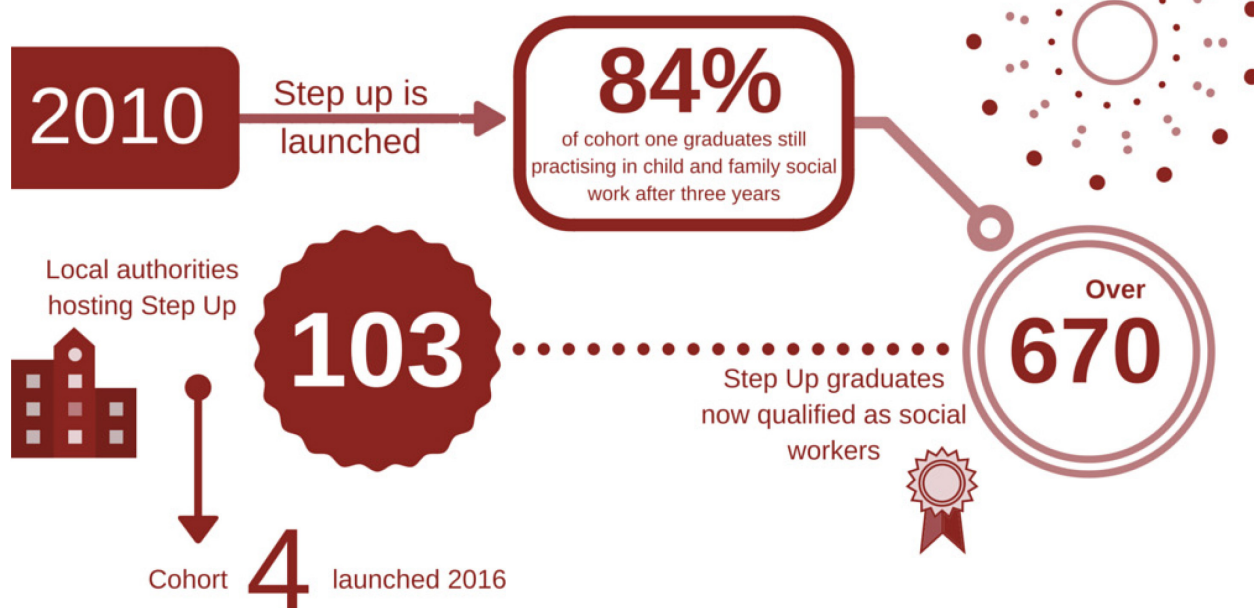
25. The main route for people to enter child and family social work is through a generic three-year social work degree or a two-year Masters. As the Narey Review (2014)<sup>3</sup> showed, the quality of these courses is hugely variable. While some courses are very strong, some accept poor calibre individuals, have too limited a focus on the skills and knowledge needed to be a social worker, and lack high quality practice placements. Universities are too often insufficiently responsive to the voice of the employer. And only a proportion of those being trained ultimately end up working as social workers. Latest figures show that only 3,000 of the 4,700 qualifying from social work programmes (65%) have entered the profession six months after the end of their course.<sup>4</sup>
26. We need more high calibre recruits to enter social work, taught through a curriculum based on the knowledge and skills they need to work with the most vulnerable children and families and assessed against the knowledge and skills statements. Supportive, high quality statutory placements are also fundamental for their effective future practice.
27. During the last Parliament we invested in establishing and developing two successful new entry routes – Frontline and Step Up. Both programmes build on the generic foundations of social work with a specific focus on the knowledge and skills required to operate effectively in a child and family statutory setting. Both programmes have been very popular with both high calibre students and employers.
28. Our ambitions for these fast-track routes are therefore high. By 2018 we anticipate around 30% of new child and family social workers will come from fast-track routes, and up to 40% by 2020.

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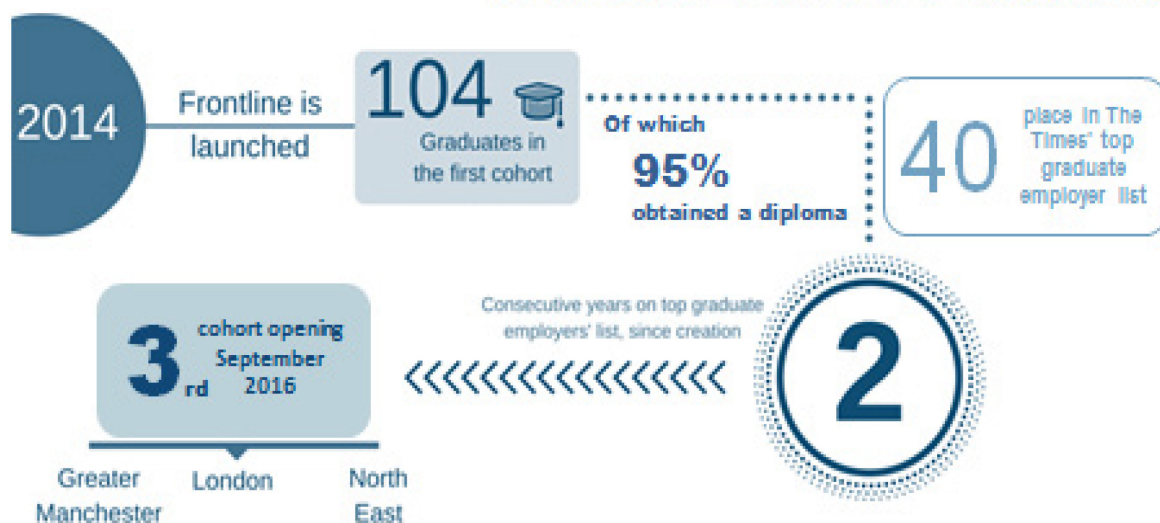
<sup>3</sup> [Making the education of social workers consistently effective: Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of the education of children's social workers](#) (2014)

<sup>4</sup> Social Work, Skills for Care, March 2016, page 12. <https://www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/Get.aspx?id=957463>

## STEP UP: IN FIGURES



## FRONTLINE IN FIGURES



29. In 2010 Step Up operated in just 42 local authorities; now 103 local authorities are hosting the programme. Frontline will expand from the London and Manchester areas into the North East from September 2016 and the West Midlands from September 2017. **We want every local authority to have the opportunity to benefit from at least one of these programmes by 2020 and will work with local authority senior managers to ensure full national coverage.**

30. But standards of education must rise across the board, with no tolerance for courses that fail to prepare students for the realities of statutory work. In 2015 the Department for Education, together with the Department of Health, launched four teaching partnerships, bringing together a range of local authorities, other social care and health organisations and universities. These partnerships are raising standards of entry into conventional social work programmes, are incorporating the Chief Social Workers' Knowledge and Skills into teaching and practice curricula and have a strong focus on statutory placements.

"Teaching partnerships play a key role in transforming social work practice. The teaching partnership has re-energised and re-focused our commitment to and passion for social work as a true vocation. Feedback we have received reaffirms the value of teaching partnerships being employer-led and responsive to the needs of the statutory sector in a way that has never been seen before."

**Christine Bennett**

Assistant Director (Children Fieldwork Services), Sheffield City Council  
and Chair of the South Yorkshire Teaching Partnership

31. We continue to invest in existing teaching partnerships and will support new ones to build on the positive impact already achieved. The interest in the teaching partnership programme continues to grow with 23 new applications received for phase two of the programme from a total of 98 different local authorities, 43 universities and a range of other public sector, private, voluntary and independent organisations. A panel led by the Chief Social Workers for Adults and for Children and Families is reviewing these proposals and making recommendations to ministers for expansion.

32. The teaching partnerships programme paves the way for the standards that the new social work regulator will set across the board. Although the exact details of these standards will be for the new regulator to decide, it is expected that they will build on the requirements for teaching partnerships including promoting high entry requirements, focus on the Chief Social Worker's knowledge and skills statements, a strong emphasis on statutory placements and continuous professional development (CPD) that supports the new career framework. The expansion of the teaching partnership programme enables institutions to work towards those standards.

## **Developing confidence in the social work profession – assessment and accreditation**

33. Social work can be a lonely job and proper supervision and support is vital to doing it well. Quality of individual practice is variable, with different standards and expectations being applied by different employers. Although the knowledge and skills statements set out in clear terms what child and family social workers are expected to know and be able to do, there is no nationally consistent mechanism to demonstrate whether individual social workers are able to meet these standards.
34. The assessment and accreditation system will provide that mechanism, so that employers and the public can therefore be assured that social workers meet these expectations. It will offer an opportunity for social workers to demonstrate the quality of their practice through a test of their knowledge and through observations of simulated practice in a number of role play scenarios with actors. It offers both the opportunity to develop the confidence of the public in the profession, and for the profession to develop confidence in the quality of its own practice against clear standards.
35. During the proof of concept phase, which ran from April 2015 to March 2016, almost 1,000 social workers took part and helped the department shape the future of the system. We plan to publish our conclusions about the proof of concept phase and what it means for the future of the assessment later this year.
36. This will be published alongside a consultation document on the future of the assessment and accreditation system, covering the key questions about the future implementation of the system. This will include whether accreditation should be made compulsory and, if so, for what roles or functions, and the consequences of failing to achieve accreditation. If accreditation were to be made compulsory, this would not be until after 2020, when we expect all child and family social workers to have had the opportunity to be accredited.
37. From 2017 to September 2018 (phase 1 of the rollout), our Partners in Practice and a group of volunteer local authorities will help the department shape delivery, and pioneer the assessment with their workforces. Social workers who have recently

completed their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment are also expected to be part of this phase.

38. Phase 1 of the rollout will give us the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the impact that assessment and accreditation has on the workforce and the ability of employers to manage the implications for their staff. It will also enable us to develop a robust infrastructure to support further rollout and pass responsibility to the new social work regulator at that time.

39. **We intend to publish guidance later this year to support employers and social workers to embed the knowledge and skills into their practice.**

40. **We will launch a tender for the selection of a delivery partner to support phase 1 of the rollout alongside the publication of the consultation and the results of the proof of concept phase.**

## **Investing in continuous professional development**

41. Learning does not stop at qualification and we know social workers are eager to continue to develop their own practice, with many employers providing a programme of post qualification training and development.

42. The transition from initial qualification into the realities of practice is a crucial time in the development of a strong social work professional. Previous work experience, quality of classroom and practice teaching, type of student placement, curriculum content and the quality of support provided by the employer all have an impact. The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) helps bridge this transition, ensuring newly qualified social workers are supported to become confident in practice and evidencing that they can apply their social work knowledge and skill to particular work contexts.

43. Nearly 10,000 child and family social workers have been supported through ASYE, with over £18 million invested over the past five years. We know that this programme is highly valued but we also know that the level of support participants receive is variable and standards fluctuate across local authorities. The introduction of the knowledge and skills statements and assessment and accreditation provides an



opportunity to strengthen this programme, with ASYE participants expected to gain accreditation following completion of their ASYE. **We will continue to invest in ASYE, with the launch of cohort 5.**

44. Moving from initial qualification into work is not the only transition that social workers will face. Moving into supervisory roles is equally important and it is essential that social workers are supported in this transition to ensure they are properly able to supervise and support others under their responsibility. **That is why we will establish a new programme for the development of those making the transition from frontline practice into practice supervision, akin to the ASYE for frontline practitioners. The programme will launch its first cohort in 2017.**

45. Alongside the core social work reform programme, we are keen to provide social workers with opportunities for rigorous continuing professional development which promote depth of practice in key areas of child and family social work. As announced in 'Adoption, a vision for change' the first area of practice we want to focus on is the knowledge and skills required to achieve permanence for children within and outside the social care system. **We are creating a new optional training programme to support social workers to develop or sharpen skills they need in order to make and support robust permanence decisions.** The content of the training will be based on a specialist statement of knowledge and skills. This statement will set out what a child and family social worker needs to know and be able to do in order to successfully undertake the complex assessment, analysis and permanence decision-making we require of them, and progress permanence plans with urgency and skill. A formal consultation on the proposed knowledge and skills statement will be published shortly on the gov.uk website. We will use this area to trial this approach to developing depth of practice and then consider whether additional areas of child and family social work would benefit from a similar approach.

## **A new regulatory body for social work**

46. Social work is a complex and challenging profession that has the power to transform lives. Key to this is a highly skilled and expert workforce. However, we know that excellent practice is not found consistently across the country. As set out above, the government has developed a significant reform programme to improve social work quality and the quality of the systems which support social workers. To embed these



reforms, we need a regulatory system that focuses on practice excellence and raising standards from initial education through to post qualification specialism.

47. Subject to the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill a new specialist regulator for social workers in England will be set up. The new regulator will cover both child and family social work and adult social work and will have an absolute focus on raising the quality of social work education, training and practice with children young people, families and adults. This will help improve public safety and promote the status and standing of social work. To achieve this the new regulator will:

- publish new professional standards, aligning with the Chief Social Workers' knowledge and skills statements
- set new standards for qualifying education and training, and reaccredit providers against these standards by 2020
- maintain a single register of social workers, annotating it to denote specialist accreditations
- set new, social work specific, standards for continuous professional development
- oversee a robust and transparent fitness to practise system
- approve post qualifying courses and training in specialisms such as Approved Mental Health Professionals and Best Interest Assessors
- oversee the proposed new assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers
- oversee the required arrangements for successfully completing the ASYE
- make effective use of workforce-related data available to it to offer insight and advice which informs and supports workforce planning by both local and central government

48. On 28 June, the government published a policy statement that set out the vision for this vital area of reform.<sup>5</sup> To achieve these ambitions collaboration, consultation and engagement with the social work sector will be vital and that will be a key feature of the development and running of the new regulatory framework.

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<sup>5</sup> [‘Regulating Social Workers: Policy Statement’](#) (June 2016)

**Extract from 'My Heroes... My Happiness...'**

**By Steven, Year 8, Luton. Winner of Coram VOICES writing competition 2016**

"I lay there like death lies over the graves of the living. Jumping into the darkness of the night like light jumps into the darkness of the abyss. My life being shadowed like the British clouds shadow the light and all that is good for this world. Being drowned into the depths of the ocean like a fish gets drowned in the depths of the air. My soul being burnt like the rain burns the fire to the deepest pits of hell. But still I am happy, and the two people who make this possible...

My heroes... Clint and Estelle... I had felt a new emotion that I had never felt before. I was greeted by happiness. I was greeted by another feeling that I had never felt before when I met them... love. My eyes filled with tears of joy as I struggled to keep in the happiness. Warmness flooding through my veins. A sigh of relief as I felt as though I had found my safe haven...

Struggling to control my emotions as strangers became my friends and friends became my family. Could I have been there? Was I in heaven? Every day I asked myself these exact same questions. But then I have to come back into reality and realise that I was still in this same world of war and torment. But with these people helping me through my poisonous life I can do it and I will eventually become stronger and no longer crying my way to sleep every night...

The past ten years of my life have been the best I have ever experienced. Our family is like the story of Romeo and Juliet except in our family the love is returned because there is always love and sometimes it is consistent and that is why I love my family and they love me in my family. They are my heroes. They are my happiness. I love them loads..."

*Used with the permission of Coram*

## Chapter 3: Practice and systems

In 'Children's social care reform: a vision for change' we set out our ambition to create a system that provides the right environment for excellent social care practice and innovation to flourish; learns from the best, and learns when things go wrong; and frees up social workers to use their skills and talents to the full.

### **To achieve this, we will:**

- expand the Innovation Programme through the £200 million additional investment announced in April, launching a new bidding round in September 2016
- work with our eight leading local authorities as Partners in Practice to: understand how authorities get to good and what it takes to move from good to excellent; interrogate the most important practice questions facing children's social care; and develop additional sector-led, peer to peer improvement
- seek to use a new Power to Innovate to test where legislation, regulations and guidance might be getting in the way of excellent practice
- launch a new What Works Centre for children's social care
- establish a new national framework for inquiries into cases of serious harm to children
- develop effective responses to new and emerging threats
- move from a system of data collection to data-driven practice, and improve the quality and collection of data

49. This chapter is about what the children's social care workforce does when working with children and families – making sure that they are intervening in a way that will make a genuine, long lasting difference to children and families.

50. We mostly know who the children in need of support, care and protection are, and we know a lot about their family life, their experiences and the challenges they are facing. But what we don't yet understand deeply enough is whether what we are doing to support them is actually helping. In order to put children first, we need to foster a resilient and dynamic practice system, underpinned by a robust and continuously evolving evidence base. We need a national learning infrastructure that brings

together everything we know about the best ways of helping our most vulnerable children, and makes this available and easily accessible to the whole system. The future we want to see is one in which excellent professionals do not shape their practice to comply with diktat from Whitehall, or even the Ofsted framework – but rather they form a confident profession, constantly pushing the boundaries and redefining what works through rigorous and evidence-based practice.

51. Actions taken in the last Parliament have already started to develop our understanding of how excellent practice can be unleashed. Our £100 million investment in innovation has energised the sector, and built consensus around the need to push boundaries and rigorously test and verify new approaches. Emerging messages from the first round of our Innovation Programme, and from the Ofsted annual report and commentaries, suggests that the following are key features of successful children's social care systems:

- leaders know what excellent social work looks like and fearlessly put children's needs first, and resources, or corporate pressure, second
- leadership and governance brings teams and organisations together around a 'golden thread' of a clearly thought-out, coherent vision for improving the lives of children – creating shared values and purpose that is championed by leaders but owned by everyone
- social work methods and practice focus on strong relationships – strengthening the relationships at the heart of children's lives to increase stability, create real change for birth families, and better support children and young people
- the workforce culture creates an enabling environment and common practice between professionals – a single theory of practice across the whole workforce so professionals are speaking the same language and working in a consistent way with children and families; with manageable caseloads; high quality reflective supervision and clinical support for staff; time to do direct work with families; and integrated, inter-disciplinary and cross-agency teams
- system conditions enable new approaches to take off – which can be created by new delivery models focused exclusively on children's social care, and/or by new approaches to commissioning and funding which put children's needs front and centre

- staff are challenged and supported to take appropriate managed risks – leaders and managers who take responsibility and don't seek to apportion blame

52. Our ambition for developing the practice system now is to:

- deepen our understanding of the system conditions needed for excellent practice, and properly understand how these can be fostered across children's social care organisations
- investigate and build our evidence base on the biggest and most important practice questions and challenges facing children's social care
- work out what it takes to move organisations from good to excellent
- extract, properly understand and disseminate lessons from analysis of the most serious incidents of abuse and neglect
- boost sector-led improvement and development, where the best authorities support those who are struggling, and authorities work together in a concerted way to tackle cross-system and cross-boundary challenges
- establish a national repository of knowledge and insight, bringing together everything we know about what works for our most vulnerable children and families, and identifying priorities for further investigation

53. To achieve this, we will expand the Innovation Programme, establish a new Partners in Practice programme to work with our leading local authorities, make better use of data to improve practice, and take a new approach to learning from serious incidents. We will also create a new What Works Centre for children's social care, giving professionals the authoritative and trusted voice on 'what works' in social care practice and systems that they both need and deserve. Collectively these actions will add up to a new national learning infrastructure, the role of which will be to create a deeper understanding of practice excellence, and spread that across the country.

## **Supporting greater innovation**

54. The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme is the vehicle by which we will test new approaches to tackling the most important and difficult practice questions facing the children's social care system. The programme is already supporting local authorities and other organisations to develop new approaches to children's social

care with an investment of over £100 million in 53 projects, and in April this year we announced a further £200 million investment to extend the programme.

### **Case study**

**Pause's 'Preventing Repeat Removals' project** received £4.3m of funding for their work to break the cycle of children being removed into care, often related to complex trans-generational patterns of neglect or abuse. Pause's aim is to break these cycles by intervening at a point when women have no children in their care, working intensely with them through a systemic, integrated model. Pause is currently delivering across seven areas in England, working intensely with up to 20 women at each area.

Evidence has so far demonstrated a number of positive outcomes as a result of the intense therapeutic, practical and behavioural support, provided through a one-to-one Practitioner relationship. As well as a reduction in pregnancies and removals, many women are now in safe accommodation, receiving help and support from domestic violence or mental health services, and engaged in training and education, as well as volunteering and employment. Some women have reengaged in positive and consistent contact with their children, with feedback beginning to demonstrate a positive impact on children.

55. So far the Innovation Programme has focused on three areas:

- rethinking children's social work – these projects have started to show evidence that giving social workers and other frontline workers freedom and support to design services that they know children and families need can have a dramatic impact, and includes projects that have redesigned the organisational systems and practice frameworks
- rethinking support for adolescents in or on the edge of care – including projects providing integrated models of support to young people on the edge of care, and new models for specialist foster care and foster care working in partnership with residential care to create greater stability for young people
- other innovative ideas outside these two priority areas – giving the opportunity for the sector to drive reform where it is most needed, such as the work that the Council for Disabled Children have been doing with five local authorities to explore

challenges and potential solutions in relation to the assessment of disabled children, young people and their families

56. These priorities continue to be central to the programme. Indeed, we are continuing to support projects with positive results and where there is good potential for replication. We are also enabling projects to extend their evaluations.

57. The next phase of the Innovation Programme is a real and enduring opportunity to strengthen and spread the best ideas so far and to drive more innovation in new areas up to 2020.

### **Case study**

**Tri-borough** (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster local authorities) have implemented their ambitious new model called Focus on Practice, a project designed to bring greater coherence and confidence to social work practice, embed a new culture based on systems thinking and reduce the number of re-referrals of family cases and the number of children in care. The main idea is that social work should be encouraging families to seek solutions for themselves, with the support of practitioners. Focus on Practice involves employing clinicians (family therapists and clinical psychologists), which is proven to be making a difference to social work practice. Clinicians are seen as authentic experts, an extra resource to help resolve 'stuck' cases. They are embedded in teams and provide social workers with systemic ways of tackling problems. The first two 'outstanding' Ofsted judgments under the new framework were recently awarded to two of the authorities in this project, and the programme was cited as contributing to their success.

58. We need to use the next phase of the Innovation Programme to make progress on two fronts:

- deepen our understanding of the system conditions needed for excellent practice, building on the messages emerging from phase one of the programme, and supporting more local authorities to rethink their whole practice system around these conditions

- investigate and build our evidence base on the biggest and most important practice questions facing children's social care, including building on phase one by continuing to develop our understanding of how we can best support young people making the transition to adulthood

59. In response to Sir Martin Narey's report on residential care, and building on the adolescents strand of phase one of the Innovation Programme, local areas will be invited to test innovative new ways in which residential care could be used in a more dynamic and creative way to support children and to link seamlessly with other care placements and with other services. In response to Sir Martin Narey's specific recommendation, we are committed to introducing Staying Close for young people leaving residential care. Staying Close – similar to the Staying Put arrangements which exist for children in foster care – will enable young people to live independently, in a location close to their children's home with ongoing support from that home. As Sir Martin recommends we are going to pilot variations of the scheme, in order to understand the costings, practicalities and impact first. We will also make Innovation Programme funding available for local authorities to come together in larger scale commissioning arrangements for residential care placements to test Sir Martin Narey's view that this could lead to significant savings, wider placement choice and better outcomes for children.

60. We also want to use social investment to improve the way that care leavers are supported as they make the transition to independent living, and particularly to support their sustained participation in employment and training. Where providers succeed in doing so, they will be paid for their 'social impact'. We will make funding available from the Innovation Programme to support the development and commissioning of care leaver Social Impact Bonds over the rest of this Parliament to test new approaches.

61. We are also keen that the next phase of the Innovation Programme has a focus on testing out alternative delivery models for children's social care (see chapter 4). Whilst structural change is not an end in itself, there is emerging evidence that, in the right circumstances, it may be the key to unlocking improvement and innovation. We want to use the Innovation Programme to build our evidence base in this area.



**62. The Innovation Programme will open for its next round of applications in September 2016.**

## **Understanding and spreading excellence through our Partners in Practice**

63. Our Innovation Programme has started to develop our understanding of the conditions needed to create excellent practice in children's social care. What is clear is that some local authorities – all of whom are already engaged in the Innovation Programme – are achieving this already. These are the authorities we want to make our 'Partners in Practice'. We want to work with the Partners in Practice local authorities, as the leaders in their field, to achieve the following:

- interrogate how these authorities got to good, and further develop our emerging understanding of the conditions needed for excellent practice to flourish
- work out how authorities can go from good to excellent – by providing freedoms, flexibilities and other forms of support, we want to see just what these authorities can achieve when barriers are removed, creating a model of excellence that the whole system can learn from
- boost sector led improvement, by backing the Partners in Practice to drive improvement in authorities still working to get to good
- use these leading authorities to contribute to our effort to investigate the most important and difficult practice questions facing the children's social care system

64. This is an approach that puts genuine partnership between local and national government at the heart of work to improve services, with our very best practitioners and leaders in the driving seat of reform for children and young people.

65. We want the Partners in Practice to help us fundamentally rethink the framework in which social workers operate and social care leaders design, manage and quality assure their services. In particular, they will provide evidence about new structural models and innovations; trial the new social work workforce reforms; explore greater freedoms in how they design and deliver their services; and support work looking at how best to measure performance and outcomes. They will also tackle some of the hardest practice questions facing the system, adding to our understanding of what actually works to make change happen for the most vulnerable families.

66. We will undertake rigorous evaluation of how the Partners in Practice authorities work to provide the sector with insight on what works to improve outcomes for children and also how local authorities could move from 'good' to 'outstanding'. As this work and our other reforms take effect, we will take on more Partners in Practice.

### **Case study**

#### **Lincolnshire County Council: Partners in Practice**

Our ambition is to use the power to innovate to redesign how social work is delivered. We will reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and enable social workers on the front line to spend more time working with families and less time sitting in front of their computers and filling in forms. It will allow social workers to make real, lasting, effective change for the better in the lives of families, doing the job they expected to do when they trained for it.

We will use the most recent research on the education of children in care and develop a programme that aims to ensure that their progress educationally is better than what is expected. This will be done by creating a new approach based on a "Caring Schools and Learning Placements" methodology.

The way in which we currently make plans for our children in care is too bureaucratic, adult focused and time consuming. We will redesign care planning by putting children in charge of the decisions about their lives in a way that engages them to respond.

We will explore an alternative delivery model of Children's Services and explore opportunities for more collaborative working. Lincolnshire County Council has a track record of introducing effective new models through commissioning and has stated its aspirations to be a commissioning council. We believe that an alternative delivery model will open up opportunities for greater collaboration to drive efficiencies and improvement.

## Removing barriers to effective practice

67. One important ambition for our Partners in Practice programme is that we use this programme to work out what children's social care organisations should *stop* doing in order to be great, as well as what they need to do. Putting children first means freeing up social workers to deliver genuinely high quality practice and drive better outcomes for our children, and we recognise that achieving this means stripping back some of the process and bureaucracy that gets in the way. While it is crucial that the children's social care system is effectively regulated, with appropriate safeguards and standards, we must be careful not to step into over-prescription, which constrains innovative, locally developed practice.
68. We have already made progress. Following Professor Eileen Munro's 2011 review of child protection, we substantially reduced and streamlined our 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' statutory guidance in 2013, ensuring that it focuses clearly on the core legal requirements that all professionals should follow to keep children safe.
69. Within the revised guidance, we streamlined the assessment process, removing the distinction between initial and core assessments and creating a single, continuous assessment process better geared towards ensuring that children are given the right help at the right time. However, in 2013 we fell short of fully implementing another of Professor Munro's recommendations by retaining a 45 working day timescale for the completion of the single assessment. We have been trialling exemptions from this and other timescales in statutory guidance for a number of years and we will now explore whether the time is right to remove these more broadly.
70. We need to continue to ask rigorous questions about which elements of our work with children and families genuinely add value, and which do not. There is a consensus stemming from the Munro Review that over-regulation gets in the way of good social work practice and prevents social workers and other staff from putting children first. In recent years the government has been working to create the conditions for local authorities and others to test radical new approaches that improve outcomes and efficiencies in children's social care. The Innovation Programme has already generated an exciting suite of projects that test the limits of the current framework – but local authorities tell us they often want to go further for children and families than legislation allows.

71. Our Partners in Practice will help us to do this. Many areas still feel unable to take measured and managed risks in the interests of children for fear of falling foul of prescribed approaches. In many cases the work that the Partners in Practice want to do means taking a fresh look at established practice, legislation and regulation and thinking hard about how far it genuinely supports the sort of changes we want our social workers to be able to make in the lives of young people. We need them to show us what they are capable of achieving when they are given the freedom to design practice around an uncompromising focus on what children and families need.

72. In order to safely test and evaluate the removal of barriers that social work leaders tell us get in the way of good practice, **we are seeking a new ‘Power to Innovate’ through the Children and Social Work Bill, currently before Parliament.** This would create a controlled environment in which we could enable local authorities to test deregulatory approaches that are not currently possible, before taking a decision to make substantial changes to existing legislation that would apply across the board.

“I welcome the introduction of the power to innovate set out in the Children and Social Work Bill. This is a critical part of the journey set out in my Independent Review of Child Protection towards a child welfare system that reflects the complexity and diversity of children's needs. Trusting professionals to use their judgement rather than be forced to follow unnecessary legal rules will help ensure children get the help they need, when they need it. Testing innovation in a controlled way to establish the consequences of the change, before any national roll out, is a sensible and proportionate way forward.”

**Professor Eileen Munro**

## **Effective responses to new and emerging threats**

73. Familial abuse and neglect remain the biggest reasons for children to be in the child protection system. But our children now also face new threats: from online abuse, made easier via access to social media and the Internet; from sexual exploitation through gangs and from peers; and from extremist ideologies. As a result, local authorities and social care Trusts need to understand how the risks presented by non-familial abuse are being picked up by children's social care, and what interventions are needed in response.

74. In the aftermath of shocking child sexual abuse in Rotherham and elsewhere, the Department for Education and the Home Office have worked with local authorities to understand the nature of the threat and the appropriate social work response. The report of the joint targeted area inspections into child sexual exploitation have also helped significantly and **we have now let a contract with the National Working Group for a Child Sexual Exploitation Response Unit, to bring expertise and support to those local authorities who face new or particularly challenging child sexual exploitation issues.** Given this is a fast moving area of practice that has been subject to recent developments, we recognise the role for government in bringing together examples of effective approaches, **and intend to publish new practice guidance and a revised civil definition of child sexual exploitation later this year.** This will help further with spreading good practice about dealing with child sexual exploitation.

75. Similarly, we have just completed the first phase of research to understand what best practice is when tackling issues of radicalisation of children. Here too, we are committed to supporting local authorities to build capacity and capability in these emerging areas of practice.

## **Understanding why serious incidents occur**

76. Learning from the most serious incidents of abuse and neglect has to be a core part of our new national learning infrastructure. The current Serious Case Review (SCR) system seldom gets to the heart of why things went wrong. Reviews take too long to carry out and, as the national panel of independent experts has stated, the quality of reports is 'disturbingly variable, with good reports being outnumbered by those still failing on key points'. We need a system in which families, practitioners and the public can have confidence. 'Children's Social Care Reform: a vision for change' announced a move to a more centralised system. This will create a more sophisticated understanding of the factors in serious case reviews, so that local agencies can improve the quality of the services that they provide to vulnerable children and families. This will bring greater consistency to public reviews of serious incidents involving children; improve the speed and quality of reviews at local and national levels; make sure that reviews which are commissioned are proportionate to the circumstances of the case they are investigating; and support the development of both national policy and local practice.

77. To support this, **we intend to establish, through the Children and Social Work Bill, a Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to oversee a national framework for inquiries into cases of serious harm to children.** The current system of SCRs and miscellaneous local reviews will be replaced with national and local child safeguarding practice reviews. National reviews will include reviews of the most serious and/or complex cases, and will be undertaken when the Panel believes that the cases involve issues of national significance. Commissioning of local reviews will remain with local areas. This picks up some key recommendations in the review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards undertaken by Alan Wood CBE earlier this year. We will make sure that the outcomes of these reviews are properly analysed and disseminated through the new What Works Centre.

### Using good data to improve practice

78. The relentless pursuit of excellent practice across the system will depend on high quality data being shared and used. At a national level, data should inform policy and legislation about children's social care; help us target support and challenge to local areas; and facilitate local learning. At a local level, data can ensure that the need for help is identified early; resources are targeted appropriately; services are commissioned effectively and efficiently; risk is managed well; and the right support is put in place for children and their families.

79. We have sought ways to reduce the burden of data collection, and increase quality (such as improved workforce data on social workers). We have also developed new ways of sharing data, for example by adding a range of special educational needs and disability (SEND) data to the Local Government Association's LG Inform tool. This helps local authorities compare their SEND performance more effectively, and the Local Authority Interactive Tool enables authorities to compare their performance with peers, with both tools including financial benchmarking.

80. Strong local authorities are increasingly using data to inform commissioning and resourcing decisions, and to monitor the support provided to children, for example using their registers of disabled children to ensure that they provide the support services needed in the right places. Central government, local authorities, and other public sector organisations need to know their unit costs and how these costs compare, to make the best decisions about services and to manage successfully in

the current budgetary climate. We want to encourage local authorities to make the best use of financial planning and comparator tools, such as that being produced by Aldaba and the Dartington Social Research Unit, in their commissioning and planning decisions.

### **Case study**

**West Sussex County Council** has teamed up with local charity Amaze, to manage Compass West Sussex, West Sussex County Council's disability register for 0-25s. Joining the register will entitle children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities access to the Compass Card West Sussex, a leisure discount card and the opportunities this offers. West Sussex has used this approach to support families to engage with their community and to encourage them to sign up. The register will provide a rich data set that they can use to inform better commissioning decisions and better engagement with those families.

81. Despite this progress, however, we still do not get full value out of the wealth of data we collect; the quality and timeliness of data varies; and at its extreme data collection can divert resource away from working with children and young people. Too often, data are used primarily to try to indicate good or bad performance at specific intervals, rather than to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children on an ongoing basis. Leaders and practitioners report that the way we share data does not always meet their needs and that local authorities can lack the tools, and capacity to fully utilise data to improve practice and outcomes for children.

82. To help us move from a system of data collection to data-driven practice, we will:

- work with local areas and organisations including the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Local Government Association and the Adoption Leadership Board to explore better ways of sharing data and analysis, and to understand barriers within local areas to using data
- promote effective practice to support authorities to use data to improve practice, manage risk, improve commissioning, and scrutinise their costs. This will include working with the Behavioural Insights Team to ensure that lessons from the big data project are disseminated effectively to local authorities; and sharing tools

and findings from work by the government and Boston Consulting Group on costs of local authority services

- identify opportunities to use national data in a more innovative way, for example analysing data from across government to identify trends that could help us target resources more effectively

83. We will also improve the quality and collection of data by:

- ensuring that everything we collect is collected for a clear purpose, and based on what central and local government find most useful, including working with local government to look at improving the section 251 data collection
- working with Ofsted and government departments across Whitehall to ensure data requests are as aligned as possible and duplication minimised
- encouraging better benchmarking of value for money data and lessons from Innovation Programme projects, to help local areas to meet the challenges of the current fiscal climate
- exploring how we can make fuller use of technology to improve how we collect and share data, and to move towards more timely data
- developing a framework of what good local data looks like, led by Partners in Practice, based on early work which indicates that there is consistency in the type of data strong local authorities collect

84. Performance data are crucially important in managing the provision of effective services but, as Professor Munro identified in 2011, should not be treated as unambiguous indicators of performance, particularly in child protection where the majority of information available is more nuanced. At the moment, however, local areas report that meaningful performance indicators are, at best, buried within the surfeit of data they are required to collect.

85. Bearing Munro's findings in mind, we will explore whether there is an appetite for developing a streamlined set of measures across children's social care, or for specific groups of children. We are considering, for example, how to make better use of the rich data already collected on children in care and care leavers, including looking at



the development of an outcomes framework consisting of the most useful indicators of success, to enable better local authority decision-making.

## Establishing a new What Works Centre

86. Our new What Works Centre (WWC) is our long term solution to bringing together in one place our national understanding of practice excellence. For some time now social workers and practitioners have been asking for a children's social care equivalent of NICE for the NHS or the Education Endowment Foundation for education. It is important they have an authoritative and trusted voice on 'what works' in social care practice and systems – testing the strength of the evaluated evidence and disseminating key messages. This is exactly why we are establishing a new What Works Centre for children's social care.
87. The WWC will have a sharp focus on improving outcomes for our most vulnerable children and their families. It will identify best practice in supporting children suffering from, or at risk of, abuse and/or neglect from targeted early support all of the way through to permanence. By looking at both effective interventions and practice systems we expect that the WWC will be able to build a truly comprehensive picture of what excellence looks like.
88. While building the evidence base in children's social care is important, it is not enough on its own to transform outcomes for children. That is why we expect the WWC to work in close partnership with the sector and bring new and innovative approaches to gathering, disseminating and embedding its findings, drawing on lessons from a wide range of interventions – including reviews of serious cases, the Innovation Programme and Partners in Practice. It will be a critical part of our plan to raise the status and quality of the social work profession, and in learning lessons from horrific cases of the past.
89. We have already started early market engagement and plan to commission the WWC over the next few months. **We expect to launch the new organisation at the end of the year.**

## Chapter 4: Governance and accountability

In 'Children's social care reform: a vision for change' we set out our ambition to establish diverse and dynamic children's social care organisations; reform the arrangements across agencies for coordination and accountability of services and responsibilities for safeguarding children; and intervene swiftly and decisively to turn around failing organisations.

### **To achieve this, we will:**

- encourage bids for Innovation Programme funding from areas interested in testing out a new delivery model for all or part of a children's social care service
- undertake a review of the role of the local authority in relation to children, including children's social care
- introduce new, more robust, flexible and proportionate inspection arrangements
- introduce a stronger statutory framework for multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, creating greater accountability for the three key agencies of health, police and the local authority
- intervene decisively in cases of failure, removing service control from any local authority which has persistently or systemically failed and does not have the immediate capacity to improve

90. Through the Innovation Programme and through Partners in Practice, we have begun to see some real excellence emerge in the provision of children's social care services. It remains the case, however, that there are too few examples of excellence and too many examples of failure or of organisations struggling to deliver strong services. Too often vulnerable children and families have not been the singular focus for how services are managed; innovation has not been given the space to thrive; data have not been used intelligently; leadership has not been strong enough; and services have not been delivered within a coherent and consistent framework, driving practice. Local authorities are also facing an increasingly constrained fiscal climate, seeing greater demand for services and dealing with new threats to children and young people.

91. All of this makes a clear case to do things differently. Structural solutions and stronger accountability have an important role to play in driving change. Our reforms in this area focus on: supporting the emergence of innovative organisational models for children's social care including Trusts and as a strategic priority within devolution deals; ensuring sharper and more focused accountability; and intervening decisively in cases of failure.

## **Supporting new organisational models**

92. The current system, where the vast majority of children's social care services are delivered by in-house local authority teams, is not delivering consistently excellent practice. Local authorities are diverse in size and demography, but the structure for delivering services is much less diverse and governed by very many of the same rules whether in large cities and counties or in small unitaries. Whilst structural change is not an end in itself, in the right circumstances it may be the key to unlocking improvement and responding to budgetary pressures as well as new threats to our children and young people. New models can:

- refresh leadership and attract strong and ambitious people to organisations where new ways of doing things are needed
- attract good people more generally – including to areas where previous organisations have had a poor reputation and recruitment problems
- provide a sharper focus on children's social care as a whole or on aspects of the system
- enable existing strong organisations to innovate more easily and to create a distinctive culture of excellence
- bring together different areas and organisations in robust structures which go beyond collaboration and into integration

93. Over recent years we have seen two particular approaches emerge:

- new Trust arrangements – whereby children's social care functions are delegated to not-for-profit organisations separate from local authorities (though political accountability remains with the council). This can be achieved voluntarily, by local authorities seeking to pursue new ways of working, and has also been delivered

under direction from central government in cases of local authority failure, for example in Doncaster and Slough

- combined authorities<sup>6</sup> (including new sub-regional or city deal arrangements) – where local authorities come together in a variety of arrangements to operate some or all children’s social care services across a larger geographical area. Again, this might happen voluntarily as innovative local authorities seek to drive change (e.g. Tri-borough in London); or as a result of local authority failure, with a high-performing local authority leading work to improve services in a failing authority (e.g. Hampshire leading work in the Isle of Wight)

94. It is, of course, possible to combine approaches. Richmond-upon-Thames and Kingston-upon-Thames voluntarily combined their children’s services and created a new community interest company to deliver those services, Achieving for Children.

95. We have also seen that in specialist areas partnerships with strong national charities can help to transform service quality (for example, Coram in adoption) by offering a singular focus on and expertise in relation to children and families in need of that service. This can help a struggling part of the service to catch up, or can bring increased improvement capacity and expertise to one part of a wider improvement plan.

96. Evidence from the small number of existing alternative delivery models already in existence is very encouraging. We know already that some of the strongest local authorities and their partners are thinking creatively and boldly about how alternative delivery models could improve outcomes for children – making services better, more secure and effective in the future. By the end of this Parliament, the government anticipates that most local authorities will be in a devolution deal and we therefore expect to see a significant shift in the national picture of children’s social care delivery

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<sup>6</sup> Combined authorities are a legal structure that may be set up by two or more local authorities in England, with or without a directly-elected mayor. They may take on statutory functions transferred to them by an Order made by the Secretary of State, plus any functions that the constituent authorities agree to share. The relevant legislation is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016

with a mixed economy of delivery models. **Our ambition is that, by 2020, over a third of all current local authorities will either be delivering their children's services through a new model or be actively working towards a different model.**

97. In future we expect to see more children's services not-for-profit Trusts leading children's social care services in a single authority, or having the responsibility for all children's social care services in a combined authority area. It is also likely that we will see Trusts delivering a sub-set of children's social care services, for example, for leaving care services. In some areas combined authorities will commission services across wider areas and different kinds of services will operate across different areas, according to what works best to improve outcomes for children and families. We intend no change in the current legal arrangements which prevent local authorities from delegating their functions to profit making organisations.

98. Areas of focus for combined services might include:

- establishing centres of excellence for specialist teams and services operating across groups of local authorities or Trusts (for example, leaving care teams, disabled children's teams, or for children with the most complex needs)
- creating joined-up commissioning arrangements – for residential care and fostering
- ensuring clearer lines of accountability and strong leadership: this might include a single leadership structure for several authorities or Trusts, controlling a single budget
- developing better structures for working with partner agencies, based on a closer alignment of boundaries
- creating workforce development programmes that operate across boundaries
- forming strategic partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations, drawing on their specialist expertise to deliver services

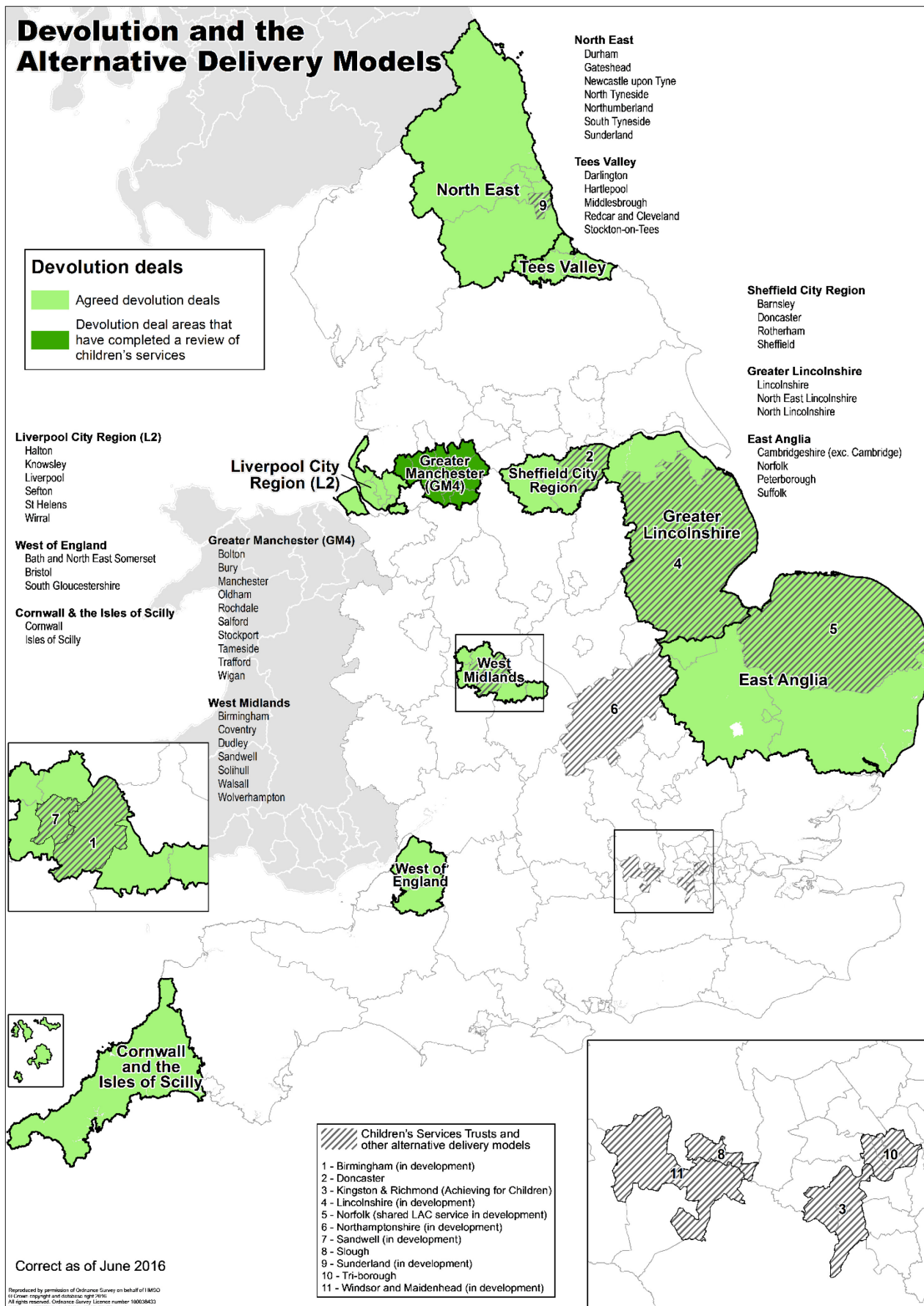
## Case study

**Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)** has set a vision to achieve the best outcomes and life chances for children and their families across Greater Manchester (GM) and to build a system that works for families and delivers the same high quality support regardless of traditional boundaries across the city. In 2015, GMCA began a fundamental review of its children's services including a comprehensive service mapping, analysis of data and cost comparisons. This has resulted in a set of recommendations for how we want to organise and govern children's services across GM in the future. For the GMCA and each of ten councils this means we will have collective responsibility and accountability for our children and young people and we will have an agreed set of standards and performance metrics to monitor our practice and our progress. Our services will be governed and run at either a combined authority level; via a Greater Manchester centre of excellence led by a specific authority; at a locality level; or commissioned via the GMCA, depending on the type of provision.

99. We are particularly interested in testing specialist Care Leavers Trusts – new organisations that would be focused entirely on improving the life chances of care leavers (aged 16-25), putting the care leaver at the centre and better providing them with the holistic, all round support they need.
100. Local authorities are also coming together with voluntary adoption agencies to form larger Regional Adoption Agencies to improve outcomes and practice. The government currently supports 19 proposed Regional Adoption Agencies, all of which have made progress in recent months towards defining the role of the new regional structure and built partnership arrangements between local authorities and the voluntary sector to deliver services. Through increased and more effective co-operation within regions and across boundaries, Regional Adoption Agencies will help maximise children's chances to find an adoptive family and improve outcomes. They will also provide an opportunity to share existing good practice between local authorities and the voluntary sector and develop innovative working practices. The views of adopters and children have helped shape the service design with a view to improve their experience under the new system.

101. It is likely that there will be variable geography in how services are delivered across England and that not all boundaries will be co-terminus with existing arrangements. Whilst this might not offer the one size fits all simplicity that it is tempting to apply from Whitehall, the important thing is that each area offers the right services for their particular children and families, and that those services are run to suit the needs of each area.
102. In working through these steps authorities need to be ambitious – to think creatively and act boldly to secure excellence – ensuring that their services are the best possible fit for their local area. We want to encourage all areas to open up a dialogue with local partners and to scrutinise and review services – not to feel constrained by historical divisions and practices.
103. To support these ambitions, we will:
- encourage more bids on alternative delivery models for the next round of the Innovation Programme and provide access to expertise in policy and change management approaches to those areas that are developing proposals for new models
  - co-design approaches with each devolved region and provide support in sharing best practice through networks, communications and support
  - de-regulate where there are barriers
  - help to tailor a children's social care element to each devolution deal to match the local landscape and to pull in engagement across government where needed
  - work with Ofsted to develop a model of inspection that works with services operating in different geographical areas and under different models of governance, including combined authorities
  - offer support to broker and form strategic partnerships with VCS organisations, particularly as part of a Trust arrangement
  - work closely with Regional Adoption Agency projects to understand and address the challenges they face and help to ensure they will bring about real practice improvements

# Devolution and the Alternative Delivery Models



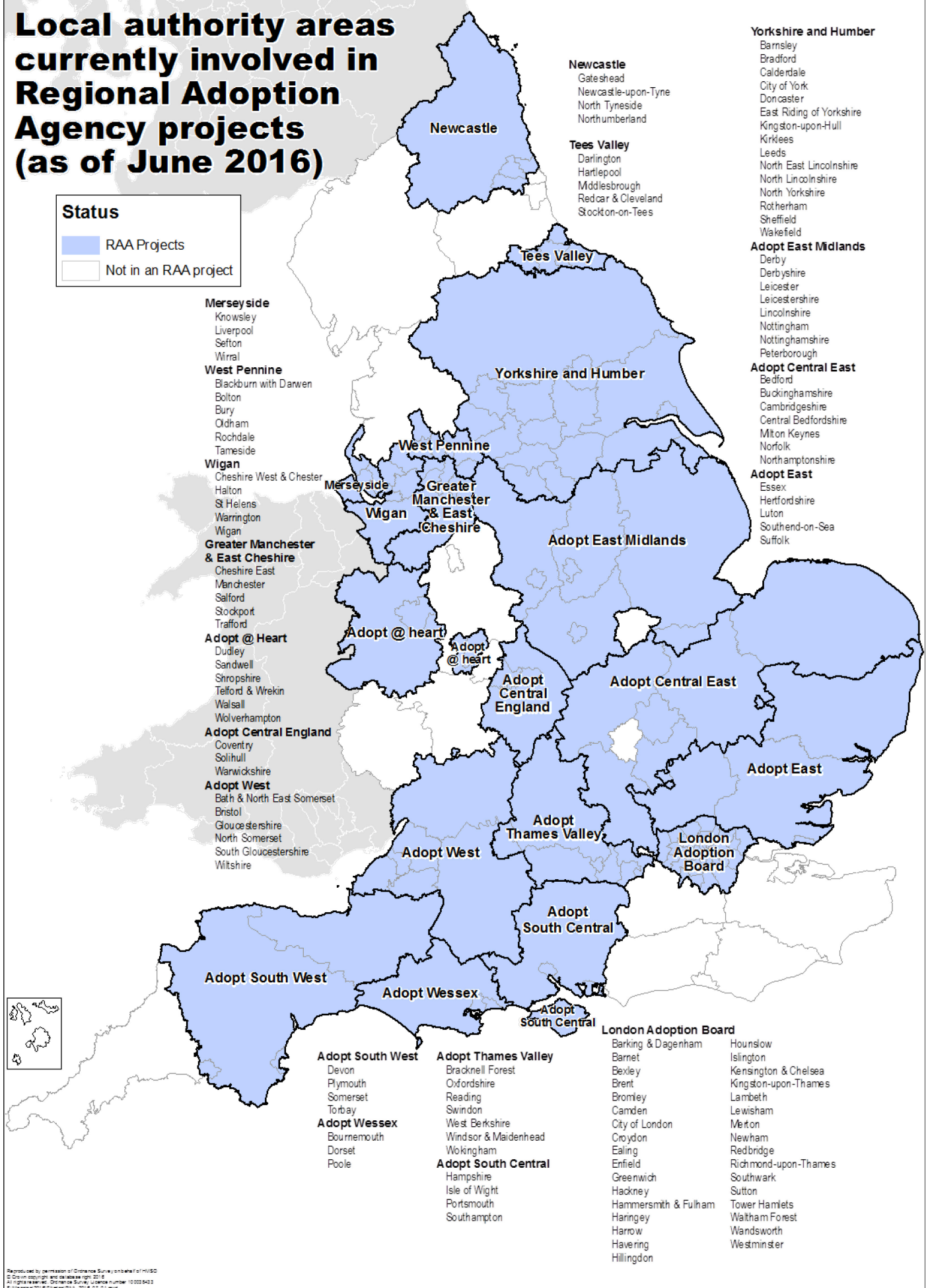


# Local authority areas currently involved in Regional Adoption Agency projects (as of June 2016)

**Status**

RAA Projects

Not in an RAA project



## Regional commissioning of residential care placements

104. Regional arrangements are also of potentially significant benefit when it comes to commissioning residential care placements. Skilled commissioning plays a vital role in ensuring that residential care placements of the right type, quality and price are available and can be readily accessed when children need them. Over recent years, the large majority of local authorities have chosen to commission their fostering and residential care services collaboratively, recognising the potential for savings, wider placement choice, and therefore better outcomes for children.
105. But Sir Martin Narey's detailed look at commissioning as part of his review of residential care indicates that the current collaborative arrangements are not delivering anything like the cost and quality benefits, the increased placement choice or the impact on children's outcomes that they could.
106. We agree with Sir Martin that better commissioning practice – including a more intelligent use of block and cost and volume contracts – will ensure better value for money for local authorities and improved confidence for providers.
107. We also agree with Sir Martin that organising commissioning on a larger, regional scale is key. Children's care needs are changing and diversifying, and local authorities need to come together to shape the market and provide a wide range of placement options if they are to put children's needs first. A regional approach will better ensure local authorities find the best placement for each child, and always make informed decisions about where to place them – going out of area where this is the right thing for the child rather than because there is no alternative. Commissioning on a much larger scale could play an important role in extending placement choice, improving quality and meaning children get the support they need, when and where they need it.
108. To help drive this forward, and as part of the new round of Innovation Programme funding covered earlier, we will invite local authorities to come together to bid to pilot new, larger scale commissioning arrangements that will test the options for wider placement choice, better value for money, greater confidence for providers and better outcomes for children.

109. For secure homes, the government has signalled its wish to see a more co-ordinated approach to planning and placements. We are already funding a central co-ordination unit which is collecting data to enable us to test whether a move to central commissioning would provide better support to this most vulnerable group of looked after children.

## **Reviewing the role of the local authority**

110. The White Paper, 'Educational Excellence Everywhere', set out a radical vision for the full academisation of the schools system. Local authorities will continue to play a positive and important role in the reformed system, but it will clearly be a changing role. The White Paper made a commitment to review the responsibilities of local authorities in relation to children, including implications for the roles of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children. As children's social care is already the largest role local authorities play in relation to children, it is important that the review looks at the implications of changes in relation to schools for the social care system. The review will consider three broad questions:

- what the future role and responsibilities of the local authority in relation to children and young people should be
- what powers and levers local authorities will need to carry out those responsibilities effectively
- what transition and implementation arrangements will be needed to help local authorities manage change over the coming months and years

111. Talking to local partners will be key, both informally and through an advisory board to test key findings. Alan Wood CBE, former Chief Executive of the Learning Trust, will chair this advisory group.

## **Ensuring robust and proportionate inspection**

112. Ofsted's current Single Inspection Framework (SIF) provides a comprehensive baseline of local authority performance in children's social care. Its focus on practice has moved the quality of debate forward significantly and provided a robust basis for identifying and addressing poor performance.

113. The SIF was introduced in November 2013, bringing together previously separate inspections. All local authorities will have been inspected under the SIF by the time the cycle is completed at the end of 2017. Its detailed and intensive approach means, however, that the inspection process can be burdensome for frontline services and is not able to respond effectively to changing circumstances.

114. **Ofsted is now consulting on the principles of the next inspection framework, and will be consulting on the detailed content later in the year.** Ofsted intend to move towards a new inspection regime that will act as an enabler for excellent social work practice and innovation. Having secured a clear baseline of performance across all local authorities the future regime will take a more proportionate, more dynamic approach, with shorter, sharper and more frequent inspections. This will allow high performing councils the space to get on with the job, and free up the inspectorate to spot failure sooner in areas of concern. Modular inspections would underpin a more targeted approach to supporting local authorities in getting to good and, equally, where early signs of deterioration in performance in a good authority are detected, identifying where the local authority needs to focus its attention to maintain a good judgement.

115. Alongside its inspection activity, Ofsted's regional structures and systems provide good access to local intelligence and data about council performance in children's services and a channel for discussing innovative approaches and good practice. Under the proposals which Ofsted is consulting on, this local information will support decisions about the timing of inspections and underpin a greater understanding of the issues and challenges facing individual local authorities.

## **Using joint targeted inspections to drive improvement**

116. Recognising that safeguarding children is the responsibility of a range of agencies Ofsted has now also commenced its initial round of joint targeted area inspections, alongside inspectorates for the constabulary, probation and health. Under this approach, a joint inspection team looks together at the experiences of children and young people in the local area, with a focus on how agencies work with each other to safeguard children. In addition, the review teams will be looking at leadership and management, and the influence of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

117. The focus of the first round of inspections is child sexual exploitation and children missing from home, care and education and a comprehensive report will be published in September setting out findings and highlighting good practice across the sector. A second round will commence in the autumn with a focus on children living with domestic abuse.

## **Improving multi-agency working**

118. The review by Alan Wood CBE of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) was published in May, together with the government's response. Alan consulted extensively during his review and found a clear consensus in favour of reform. As a result, we are seeking to introduce a stronger statutory framework which will introduce greater accountability on the three key agencies involved in safeguarding children, namely local authorities, the police and the health service. As well as being stronger, the arrangements will be more flexible and enable local areas to determine the best way to organise themselves. There will be no obligation to have a Local Safeguarding Children Board, if local areas can develop more effective arrangements.

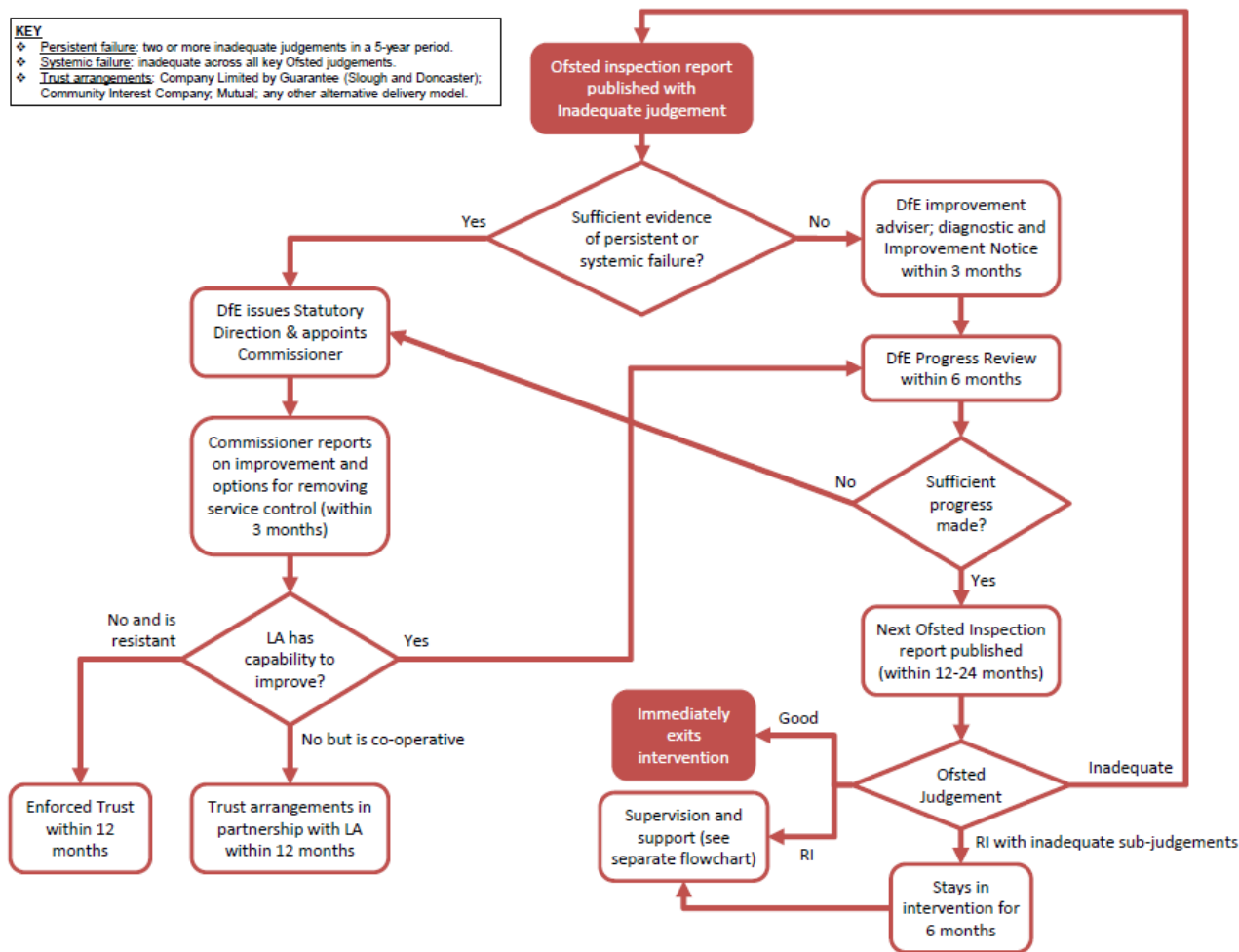
119. The proposed new local arrangements will put a duty on the three key agencies to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and jointly identify and respond to emerging needs and priorities. They will also be required to produce and publish a plan which will set out how they will carry out this duty. They will need to decide, among other things, how they will work with other agencies, what the resourcing for the arrangements will be, how to share information and data, and how they will ensure there is independent scrutiny of their decisions. They will also be responsible for undertaking local child safeguarding practice reviews. Some details will be included in associated regulations, and there will be statutory guidance to support the agencies. We will consult on the regulations and statutory guidance in due course.

## **Intervening strongly in cases of failure**

120. Keeping children safe is one of the most important things councils do, but one in four recent Ofsted reports shows councils failing to deliver adequate children's social care services. The government will take whatever action is required to ensure children receive the services they deserve.

121. We are strengthening our approach to intervening when councils fail to provide adequate services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after, or care leavers as follows:

- whenever Ofsted finds children's social care services to be inadequate, we will provide expert scrutiny to diagnose problems and support the council to produce an effective improvement plan within three months
- we would expect most of those councils to improve with support and challenge from experts, but councils' progress towards improvement will be reviewed every six months
- if these reviews find that insufficient progress has been made, we will appoint a children's services Commissioner to review whether services should be removed from council control
- we will also immediately appoint a Commissioner wherever council failure is systemic, with a presumption that the service will be placed outside of the council's control, unless the Commissioner identifies good reasons not to do so, and where we judge that failure has become persistent we will take the same approach
- where councils do not have the capacity or capability to improve children's social care services in a reasonable timeframe, we will remove those services from council control for a period of time and transfer them to a different organisation (usually a Trust) in order to secure sustainable improvement



## Supporting improvements through Trust delivery arrangements

122. There are often three main challenges which lead to a failure to turn services around. Firstly, some local authorities, through poor political or officer leadership, are unable to turn around poorly performing services, even over a long period of time. Secondly, the size of the improvement task has sometimes seemed too large for one organisation, resulting in one area of work improving while another falls back, or in ineffectual progress across the piece. Thirdly, insufficient capacity can mean that concentration on the basics cannot be combined with innovation. Putting in place a Trust in these circumstances can provide fresh leadership, additional improvement capacity, clarity of purpose and a more stable operating environment.

123. We have done this already in Doncaster and Slough by setting up new independent children's social care Trusts and we are already seeing signs that the new Trusts in these areas are beginning to have a positive impact. The Trusts mark a new stage in innovation and improvement for the children, families and social workers in these areas.



124. This chance for a fresh start is one that we are keen to offer to more councils that are struggling to deliver effective children's services and recognise that they need to try a different approach. We have been working collaboratively with Sunderland City Council to establish a voluntary Trust there that is similar in design to Achieving for Children (Richmond and Kingston) and will take over delivery of children's services there from April 2017. We are also working with Birmingham and a number of other councils to establish whether voluntary Trusts are the best option for rapidly accelerating improvements to children's social care services in those areas.

### **Investing in improvement, supervision and support**

125. Driving improvement in children's social care services needs to be locally led and delivered to meet the needs of our different communities and of individual children and families. Each local area has a clear responsibility to its own children and families. The role of central government is to intervene in cases of failure, and to create a national infrastructure which enables and supports the pursuit of excellence and innovation. But that should not detract from the core, local responsibility for effectively helping and supporting local children.
126. Those councils that are not failing but still require improvement to be good can access support to do so through the sector-led support offers from the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Children's Services, who have an important role to play in driving continuous improvement in children's services. ADCS are, for example, planning to publish shortly a set of key "must do's" that need to inform any successful improvement journey. More generally, ADCS regional arrangements will continue to be key to improvement and to spreading best practice.
127. At a national level, central government will support sector led innovation through our Innovation Programme as well as through the reforms to the Ofsted inspection regime. We will also help to embed peer-to-peer learning, make success replicable and drive improvement across the social care system by working with our Partners in Practice and investing in the What Works Centre. The Local Government Association's peer review system and work for their Children's



Improvement Board will operate alongside these approaches and we will work together to ensure we complement one another.

128. Where Ofsted returns a “requires improvement” judgement on a previously inadequate council, central government will continue to provide supervision and support for 12 months to ensure that improvements are sustained. We will also place those councils, whose adoption and care leavers’ services are inadequate, under supervision and provide them with support to improve rapidly.
129. Over time, we would want the balance of government activity to shift away from intervening where there is failure, towards supporting the spread of excellence, in a system which is more likely to challenge us to enable innovation than to seek our support to improve.

## **Chapter 5: Putting the three pillars into action: how will things change for children and families?**

130. This paper has set out an action plan for building the ‘three pillars’ of reform which we think are critical in a social care system that puts children first. By focusing on these three fundamental building blocks, we hope to transform the experiences of children and families across every stage of their journey through the social care system.
131. For individual children and families, this will mean consistently getting support from practitioners who know how to make real, lasting change happen – to make real change in the course of children’s lives, rather than watching, waiting and monitoring. It will mean getting support from a system designed entirely around putting children first, however complex their needs.
132. This chapter sets out some of the ways in which our reforms will change and improve the real-life experiences of children and families, bringing about sustainable change and stability in their lives, and placing strong relationships back at the heart of the system.

### **Putting children first is everyone’s responsibility**

133. All agencies locally – schools, the police, health services, youth services – need to understand and buy into the local arrangements for identifying children at risk and putting in place an appropriate response. This is the key ingredient to ensuring that issues are identified and appropriate referrals made to children’s social care. The strengthened multi-agency arrangements which will replace LSCBs are intended to drive greater levels of partnership and more bespoke arrangements for identifying problems and responding to them.
134. There is of course a role for the wider public too, in spotting and sharing concerns about children at risk. We know that people are often cautious about alerting social care to their worries about children or families, because they don’t feel confident to interpret what they’ve seen or the consequences of making a referral. The government’s new communications campaign “Together we can tackle child

abuse” is designed to help tackle these worries. It was launched earlier this year and **we will run the campaign again in 2017.**

135. The role for the wider public does not stop when a vulnerable child turns 18. Just as other young people continue to receive support from their parents into their twenties and beyond, children who are looked after and supported by the state continue to need help and guidance. To offer this support to young people leaving care, **we are introducing a new voluntary care leaver covenant that organisations can sign up to and make a commitment to support care leavers.** The covenant will provide an opportunity for private organisations, charitable bodies and central government departments to set out the services and support that they will offer to care leavers to ensure that the state continues to support them as they transition into adulthood. We will be engaging with relevant partners over the summer with an intention to launch the covenant in the autumn.

### **Providing help to prevent children needing to enter the child protection system**

136. We are very clear that the children’s social care system is there to provide help and protection to children facing acute social need and risk, or who are disabled – children for whom the state has a moral and legal responsibility to provide additional support and protection.
137. However, it is also important to ensure that help isn’t only available when problems have escalated to the extent that state intervention is inevitable. Since the publication of the Munro Review, many local authorities have developed their ‘early help’ offer to families, and work closely with schools, health services and others to provide holistic support to children and families as soon as a need emerges. But despite this, we are not seeing a reduction in the number of referrals to children’s social care, and *are* seeing a significant increase in the number of families needing the most intensive forms of intervention through child protection plans – up by 27% since the data collection began six years ago.
138. This raises questions about whether the early help currently on offer to children on the edge of the social care system is really working to address their problems. We cannot leave these children and their families to languish until the conditions of

some of them deteriorate to the point that intervention from the state in their lives is inevitable. We see the provision of targeted early support in these circumstances – clearly distinct from broader, more universal early help – as an area where we have not yet determined the right, most effective role for children's social care.

139. The Troubled Families Programme is undoubtedly one programme already adding to our understanding of what works to support complex families to secure better life chances for themselves and for their children, to avoid the need for children's social care to get involved, and to break the cycle of disadvantage, in particular through getting parents into work. The Programme continues to be a key plank of the government's life chances agenda, and will increase its focus on improving parenting, family stability and ensuring pre-school children within the Troubled Families cohort are meeting child development milestones. Some local authorities have brought together their Troubled Families and Early Help services to form one coherent support offer.
140. However, the focus of the Troubled Families programme is not specifically children in or on the edge of needing children's social care services; it works with a broader range of families. Finding out what will work to effectively reduce need and risk for the specific group of children right on the edge or just within children's social care, and what the role of children's social care should be for these children, is exactly the kind of thing our new national learning infrastructure is designed to investigate. **We will work with our Partners in Practice local authorities and use the Innovation Programme to test and develop national understanding, and over time will use the new What Works Centre to bring together learning and spread best practice.**

## Helping children within the child protection system

141. As well as investigating new ways of working with those children at the very edge of, and just within, children's social care, we need to rethink practice in relation to children within the child protection system facing the most serious needs and risks. If we are to effectively support families where children are already at risk of harm, and make genuine and sustained changes to their lives, this will require effective

and sustained interventions. We need not to withdraw services at the first sign of improvement.

142. We need to deepen our understanding of how best to support families facing such entrenched challenges to become stronger, through skilled assessment of parental capacity and sustained intervention. We need to know how to draw more effectively on family strengths and resilience, and on support from wider social and community networks. We need to develop ways of working with families where children are at risk of harm which enable them to work together with professionals to quickly reduce immediate risks and work out long term strategies for changing their lives more fundamentally. We also need to build on and test emerging evidence which suggests that the longer a child is kept on a child protection plan, the more improvement we see in their outcomes.
143. Identifying the sorts of interventions that really work to make lasting change happen for children on child protection plans – and prevent the need for children to become looked after – **will be a key focus for the Partners in Practice local authorities, Innovation Programme and What Works Centre.**

## **A safe and stable home for every child**

144. Where a child's birth family cannot meet their needs, it is the role of the children's social care system to create the safe, stable and nurturing relationships and home environment that children need, whether through adoption, foster care, family and friends care or residential care. For these children, the state becomes their 'corporate parent'. In recognition of the gravity and importance of this role we are currently legislating to set out in law, for the first time a set of 'corporate parenting principles', which will guide the way in which the whole local authority – not just children's social care – acts as any good parent would for children in care and care leavers.
145. Our success in finding safe, stable homes for all children who need them has improved in recent years. Children are now finding permanence through adoption four months more quickly than they were in 2012-13; three quarters of residential homes are now rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted; and we have funded councils to find new ways to attract and retain foster carers from a broad range of

backgrounds. But we still see too much instability in placements for looked after children, including for disabled children, and too much of a focus on making a single placement decision which works right now, rather than really working out what is needed to meet the complex and evolving needs of a particular child for the long term.

## **Foster placements that work**

146. Some local authorities are better than others at matching the right child with the right placement to fully meet their needs, now and for the long term. Early findings from some of the projects that have been funded through the Innovation Programme, such as North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door programme and the Mockingbird programme, have started to show us how stability in a family environment can be achieved even for children with the most challenging backgrounds when foster carers are properly trained and supported, and young people have access to proper respite and therapy. We will use the new national learning infrastructure we are putting in place to learn from the best authorities and providers. In addition, **we will undertake a national stocktake of foster care to give us a richer understanding of how placements are made**. This will have as its central focus the question of what different foster carers need – skills, expertise, support – in order to meet the diverse needs of today's looked after children.

**Extract from Sir Martin Narey's review of residential care in England, July 2016**

“Although fostering does not seem to work for some children, particularly adolescents, I believe that residential care can sometimes be used to make fostering a success, even when it might have failed previously. And evidence suggests this can be achieved with the most challenging of older children – those who might be very resistant to the notion of being fostered – as demonstrated by the excellent No Wrong Door (NWD) initiative in North Yorkshire.

“Two children's homes in this geographically vast county act as hubs. Each hub provides placements in mainstream residential care; emergency beds; community foster family placements; supported accommodation and supported lodgings with outreach support. Children often move from one type of placement to another, but the key element of the NWD approach is ensuring that each adolescent has one key worker who works with him or her throughout. The quality of residential care provided in North Yorkshire is of exceptional quality (one of the two hubs had a full Ofsted inspection as I was completing this report) and the Ofsted commentary – alongside the Outstanding rating - is remarkably positive.”

# What Makes a Good foster Carer



Jaden\*, Essex

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## The role of residential care

147. Sir Martin Narey's review shows us that residential care remains an important part of the care system. His report reminds us that, for some children, a residential care home is absolutely the right place for them – either to manage a crisis or, in the short term, to provide intensive support and help prepare them for moving into a family home as part of a fostering arrangement. And, for some children, residential care is their best long term option.
148. Sir Martin's report highlights a number of ways in which residential care could be used in a more dynamic and creative way to support children – as we see in excellent projects such as No Wrong Door. We therefore intend to introduce a specific stream of the Innovation Programme to test these ideas and take to scale those that have already shown their effectiveness through the first stage of the programme.

“When I first moved to the children's home I did not like it. It was hard having all the people. It taught me about respect for other people and this has been really helpful for me in everything I do. Some of the people have become my best friends and I have just moved into a shared house with one of them. Living in a children's home helped me achieve my goals and they helped me learn to cook and budget and so I was ready to leave. Even though it was very different to being in a family home, I felt cared for and I made proper relationships while I was there. It was a big part of my life and made me who I am.”

**Craig\*, 19**

## **Sir Martin Narey's review of residential care – the government's initial response**

We are hugely grateful to Sir Martin Narey for his insightful report and for the significant contribution it makes to our understanding of children's homes in England. We are pleased that he has concluded that the quality of the care they provide – to some of our most vulnerable children – is often very good and that residential care is the right placement choice for some children, not a last resort.

We accept his analysis and findings and welcome the recommendations that Sir Martin has made and which highlight the areas where further action is needed to ensure that all children's homes, and the wider system in which they operate, deliver the highest quality care. We will respond more fully in the autumn. However, some immediate actions are clear and we will take them forward now:

- we will use the Innovation Programme to test innovative ways in which residential care could be used in a more dynamic and creative way to support children and to link seamlessly with other care placements and with other services
- we are committed to introducing Staying Close for those leaving residential care – similar to the Staying Put arrangements which exist for children in foster care. We are going to pilot variations of the scheme, through opening a specific stream of the Innovation Programme, in order to understand the costings, practicalities and impact first
- we will invite local authorities to come together to bid through a new round of Innovation Programme funding, to pilot new larger scale, regional commissioning arrangements that will test the options for wider placement choice and better outcomes for children
- we will undertake a national stocktake of foster care to better understand current provision, how needs are matched with skills, where this works really well, and what can be learned nationally from good practice
- we will clarify the steps that residential care workers can take to protect children, as any good parent would

## **A new, permanent family for every child who needs it**

149. 'Adoption: a vision for change', published in March 2016, sets out the government's plans for a radical redesign of the adoption system. In line with our wider strategy for children's social care, our plan for adoption is to create the workforce, practice systems and delivery structures needed to provide a permanent home through adoption for every child whose interests are best served by this. Our professional development programme 'Achieving Permanence' will provide adoption social workers with the specialist skills they need for this area of work; our adoption-specific Practice and Improvement Fund will stimulate the spread of excellent practice on the front line; and our plan to regionalise the adoption system will mean services are delivered on a scale and in a way which will better serve the needs of children and adopters.

## **Supporting and empowering carers to care**

150. In order to settle and prosper, and achieve real stability in their lives, children need, above all else, the backing of strong, consistent and resilient relationships they can depend on. That is why we will consider with Partners in Practice the legislation, regulation and guidance which underpins work with looked after children and care leavers, to identify where greater freedom and flexibility will help put relationships at the centre of practice. It is vital that foster carers have the freedom to care, and the delegated authority to make day to day decisions for the children in their care. We want foster carers to be actively involved in decisions about the children they are looking after, for example in relation to their schooling, agreeing the additional support they need, and decisions about care planning. We want to empower foster carers to stand up for and look out for the children they look after as any good parent would.
151. Sir Martin Narey's report also reminds us that, just as foster carers sometimes feel unable to make day to day decisions on behalf of the children in their care, staff in children's homes sometimes feel unable to take the kind of action to protect children that any good parent would take when putting the needs of their child first. Day to day acts, such as setting curfews or locking the doors at night, are exactly the sorts of things that good carers do. Setting boundaries is one of the most important tasks of a parent.

152. Building on Sir Martin's recommendation to strengthen the government's guidance, we want to make sure that all those who look after children in care have, and feel that they have, the power to parent. They need to feel confident and able to act decisively when protecting children from risks – as any parent would. It is a legally complex area, and it is critical that we maintain all the current safeguards which prevent any abuse of power by adults in a caring role. **But to provide more certainty for carers and to give them the power to parent, we will take the best and most up-to-date advice from experts to create practical advice and guidance for residential care workers.**
153. Adoptive parents and special guardians need support to nurture resilient relationships with their children and to meet their often complex needs. This support has been in place since May 2015 for adoptive families through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) which has supported almost 7,000 families with over £23 million of therapeutic support. From 1 April 2016, in recognition of the often similar challenges these children and their carers face, the ASF was extended to families where the child left care through a Special Guardianship Order.
154. 'Adoption: a vision for change' set out our intention to continue strengthening the evidence base of 'what works' in terms of preventive and therapeutic adoption support. In the short term, this involves consulting with and securing views from a wide group of experts to inform proposals for commissioning research. In the longer term, the What Works Centre for children's social care will become the repository for this learning.

### **Safety, stability and relationships to depend on into adulthood**

155. The need for nurturing, consistent relationships does not stop at age 18. As will be set out in more detail in our forthcoming Care Leavers Strategy, we need to apply the very same principles of reform to support for care leavers as we are to the rest of the children's social care system. Every young person needs a foundation of safe, stable and nurturing relationships in order to have the resilience to cope with the challenges life will throw at them, and thrive.
156. When a young person leaves care they continue to receive support from a local authority personal adviser who helps them to make a successful transition to

adulthood and independence through providing advice and identifying the support the young person needs. We will carry out a review of the role to better understand how personal advisers spend their time and identify ways to maximise the support that personal advisers offer the young people they are working with. Through the Children and Social Work Bill, we are extending personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25. But we are also keen to test out approaches that look beyond the personal adviser model, drawing on other sources of support so that care leavers have a wider, more resilient support network around them.

157. We also recognise that, whilst young people in foster care can now ‘Stay Put’ in their placement to age 21, there is still too much of a cliff edge for children in residential care. In response to Sir Martin Narey’s specific recommendation, we are committed to introducing Staying Close for young people leaving residential care. Staying Close – similar to the Staying Put arrangements which exist for children in foster care – will enable young people to live independently, in a location close to their children’s home with ongoing support from that home. As Sir Martin recommends we are going to pilot variations of the scheme, through opening a specific stream of the Innovation Programme, in order to understand the costings, practicalities and impact first.
158. Finally, we will look to free up local authorities to deliver services in new ways and in partnership with the voluntary sector, such as through testing specialist Care Leavers Trusts – new organisations that would be focused entirely on improving the life chances of care leavers aged 16-25, putting the care leaver at the centre and better providing them with the holistic, all round support they need.

## Chapter 6: Our vision for the future

159. We want families to have more confidence in turning to professionals for help; for the help and protection we provide to be timely, enduring, flexible and thoughtful. We want families to work with professionals to quickly reduce immediate risks and work out long term strategies for changing their lives more fundamentally. Families will be supported to think through the impact of what happens now and to be made central to planning the future together.
160. We want every local children's social care service in England to have a workforce – at every level – with the knowledge and skills to do this highly challenging work to the highest possible standards. This needs to be verified through robust assessment and accreditation. The social work qualification must have credibility and mean professionals are equipped to deal with complicated situations and the highest levels of risk while striving for the best standards of practice.
161. We want those who care for children – foster carers, residential care home staff – to have the freedom to make decisions on behalf of the children in their care, and the power to parent in the way any good parent would. We want those who care to have the support and specialist skills they need to love and nurture our most vulnerable children.
162. To support this innovation and drive for excellence, by 2020 we want to see a more diverse range of children's social care organisations, operating over new geographical areas, supported by meaningful data and an inspection regime that supports high-quality evidence-based front line practice, with strongly supportive partners and local arrangements that best support coordination across agencies. And crucially, the performance of these new organisations must be driven by challenging, sharp and practice-focused accountability.
163. The future we want to see is one where excellent professionals do not shape their practice purely to comply with legal requirements, or guidance from Whitehall, but rather they form a confident profession, resilient when faced with new challenges, mindful of the role our society asks them to play in people's lives, and prepared to

learn from each other and redefine what works when ideas are tested and evidence is shared and understood.

164. Making this vision a reality is what it means to put children first.



Department  
for Education

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