

Independent Review of Children's Social Care Review - Final Report Recommendations

1. Introduction

This paper presents an abridged outline of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care¹ and Blackpool's Children Principal Social Worker initial reflections regarding Blackpool's current position to deliver these and the potential impact of these on our practice, Blackpool Families Rock culture, our workforce and the wider partnership.

2. Independent Review Recommendations

2.1 'Family Help' Offer

Replace 'Targeted Early Help' and Child in Need' to reduce families experience of 'step up and down' handovers, changing relationships and 'gatekeeping', with a developed S17 single category of '**Family Help Hubs**' offer, multi-disciplinary **Family Help Teams**, including Domestic Abuse and Mental Health practitioners, Health Visiting, School Nurses and Community Organisations and include **Social Workers within the Early Career Development (first 2 years)**. This should be delivered via **Hubs located within local communities**. A **re-designed Single Access Front Door** would determine appropriate access to 3 level Family Help Pathway; Universal and Community Family Support, Family Help, Child Protection. '**Mechanical referral led processes and assessments**' at the front door replaced with '**tailored quality conversations**' between **Family Help, Universal Services and families**, reference is made to Leeds' 'Family Valued Model'. **Timescales for Assessment should be removed** from Working Together and Data Collection, timescales for S47 should remain and the data system be preoccupied with improving family outcomes.

The Government would need to implement £2 billion over the next 5 years to support this development via a ring fenced grant. This recommendation is clearly linked to the current national development of Locality Hubs and Early Help Self-Assessment. Blackpool Early Help Service has led the partnership self-assessment event (16th June) and is well placed to implement this recommendation with our Early Help Strategy Action Plan.

We would need to consider which social workers are within their first 2 years of the 5 year Early Career Framework (see recommendations 7 for detail), as if this recommendation is implemented, this cohort of our workforce would be co-located within the Locality Hub Family Help offer. We would need to review our current Child In Need offer, agree a further developed Request for Support process, update our Working Well with Families document and undertake training across Children Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP), to reflect the changes in national legislation re: S17 of Children Act 1989. This would have an impact on our current Social Care staffing structure if all Child In Need and Child Protection caseloads were removed to be provided via a Family Help Offer, with our 5 yr. Expert Practitioners offering their experience and guidance to the Family Help Teams.

2.2 A Just and Decisive Child Protection System

Over the next 5 years '**Expert Child Protection Practitioner**' roles should be developed, in future **new social workers need to have passed a 5 year Early Career Framework**. They should **work alongside the Family Help Team**, 'cutting our unnecessary referrals', provide reflective supervision, to support better risk management, undertake joint visits, chair Child Protection planning, lead multi-agency professionals input into decisions and have

¹ [Home - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](http://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)

responsibility to make key decisions about children and undertake the role of the current Child Protection Chair, Working Together would need to be revised need to reflect these changes. The report makes reference to **'...by widening the workforce who can undertake CiN (Child In Need) work in Family Help, making reforms to non-case holding roles, such as Child Protection Chair and Independent Review Officer (IRO) experienced social worker will be freed up can undertake the Expert Practitioner role'**.

Family Help Teams would continue to work with families throughout Child Protection processes. Decisions should include Specialist Police Officers and Specialist Paediatricians. **The Social Workers would make best use of their skills via working directly with families, working directly with them, or being managers of Family Help Teams.** Clear reference is made throughout the report to the **Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding Model** and **'...by removing the arbitrary distinction between Early Help and Social Care, we will improve the ability of the system to respond to changing risk, without the inherent weaknesses in hand off points'**.

Parents should have robust independent representation and support to navigate the child protection response, an advocate support offer. The Child Protection System approach referenced within the report is aligned to our Blackpool Families Rock current culture, values and practice principals approach and we currently have invested £70K in advocacy for parents involved within our Blackpool Child Protection Conference system. There should also be more transparency about decisions made and family court outcomes.

The report makes detailed reference to re-purposing Children's Social care via a central aim to ensure help is available, responsive and free from stigma, support should strengthen lifelong relationships and support wider family networks to care for children instead of bringing them into care. **The care experience support offered should help heal trauma, realise identity and achieve potential and birth families must be supported with this loss** via services being available to them, so as to break the cycle.

This recommendation would remove the current role and function of Blackpool's Child Protection Chair Team. These experienced roles, 4.8 Full time equivalent H4 and one H5 manager would require an updated job description and process developed to offer their experience and guidance to the Family Help Offer.

With regard to children experiencing **Contextual Safeguarding Harm**, a **bespoke Child Community Safety Plan Pathway should be developed**, so Police, Social Care and others can provide robust Child Protection response. This would replace the current practice of supporting children being exploitation outside of their family via Child In Need or Child Protection Plan. We would need to update CSAP Policies, Procedures and Pathways and train our workforce to implement and practice within as new Child Community Safety Plan Pathway.

2.3 Unlocking the potential of family networks

Before a child is brought into care there should be involvement of wider family and friends into the decision making and develop 'Family Network Plan', via legal right to an FGC offer before reaching PLO, the Local Authority should support wider family members to care for their children and provide the necessary resources to support the plan, **diverting money otherwise spent on looking after a child in care.** We are well placed to further implement this recommendation with our Family Together Service, Connected Carer Team and SGO Support Offer, no changes would be required within our service to evidence we have implemented this recommendation. However, the report recommends that **families** are currently forced to become foster carers **should receive financial allowance support to care for their kin at the same rate as fostering allowance and wider set of kinship careers should receive a comprehensive package of support.** The report makes recommendations for all,

SGO and carers with a CAO should also all receive a national statutory allowance, legal aid and statutory kinship leave with requires the Government's national implementation, a **legal definition of Kinship Care should be introduced. Legal Aid should be provided to family members seeking SGO or CAO as alternative to bringing a child into care and Local Authorities should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers.**

Modernise adoption and bring this into the 21st Century, **contact should be supported by modernised approaches such as 'Letterswap', supported by Adoption Support Fund and plans should be put into place so contact arrangements are reviewed by adopters at regular intervals** and certainly at transition points including when the child becomes a teenager and just before the turn 18. **Support for parents should not end at the point that their child becomes adopted.**

2.4 Fix the broken market and give children a voice

Providing care for children should not be based on profit. **Local Authorities should establish new Regional Care Co-Operatives (RCCs), who take on the responsibility for creating and running a new public sector fostering, residential and secure care via a regional approach** reference is made the RCCs *'Planning, commissioning and running homes'* and **providing Fostering Services, overseeing the recruitment and training of foster carers,** akin to the our Regional Adoption Agency. Local Authorities will have direct involvement in running the RCCs, these **must be mandated by Government** and not a voluntary regional arrangement. It is anticipated that up to 20 RCCs would need to be established across England, in some places could be linked to Mayoral Combined Authorities and **should be driven by the best performing Local Authorities, with Government selecting one or two lead Authorities in each region to oversee the set up of their Cooperatives.**

With regard to **'Unregulated' provision Government should proceed with the speedy introduction of regulation for independent and semi-independent accommodation as a short term step,** before holding these homes to account via a **new set of Care Standards via legislation.**

A Windfall Tax on profits made by the largest Private Children's Home providers and IFAs should be levied and contribute to the costs of transforming the care system.

New and ambitious care standards should be applicable to all homes where children live, rather than prescriptive minimum standards they should focus on defining smaller number of quality standards expected from all homes, and articulate the values to deliver them.

A **'New Deal' with foster carers** must ensure they have the social networks and training. The Government must immediately should launch a **new national Foster Carer Recruitment Programme to approve 9,000 foster carers over the next 3 years,** reference is made to the Ukraine Homes for Families approach.

With regard to children having a voice, the **system of multiple people being involved in their lives must be simplified via a truly independent advocacy offer, via an 'opt out', not an 'opt in' approach. Remove the role of IRO and Regulation 44 visits.** Reference is made to options for the delivery of truly independent advocacy, **via 3 potential approaches; 1) a newly established National Advocacy Service, commissioned by the Local Authority** with a capacity to meet the need of the individual Local Authority's Children in Care cohort, **2) re-purpose CAFACSS to become Children and Family Court Advisory, Advocacy and Support Service, 3) Expand the role of the Children's Commissioner.**

Care Planning Meetings should be chaired by the Manager of the Social Worker allocated to the child, **significant decisions cannot be made without an Advocates view being provided.**

These recommendations would require the removal of our current Independent Reviewing Officer Service role and function. Potential tupe arrangements may be available for our current staff to a new model, or, realign this experienced team of H4 and H5 staff to 'Expert Practitioner' roles as proposed by the report. This recommendation requires statutory legislation change, with regard to the Children Act and Care Planning Regulations. If the advocacy responsibility sat outside of Blackpool Childrens Social Care in any of the 3 proposed models, this function would have a different culture and approach to our Blackpool Families Rock Restorative Practice based Issue Resolution Procedure and would lack the opportunity to provide mentoring and buddy support to our ASYEs (newly qualified Social Workers) and IROs current involvement as experienced Practice Educator Offer for our Social Work Students which would have an impact upon our ability to deliver upon our Childrens Social; Care Workforce Strategy Recruitment and Retention priorities.

2.5 Five 'missions' for care experienced people

Corporate Parents should have 5 ambitious missions; loving relationships, quality education, a decent home, fulfilling work and good health should be set out as the foundations for a good life. Central Government, employers the NHS, Education providers should secure these foundations for all care experienced people.

In Blackpool we are well placed to reflect the implementation of this recommendation in terms of the work our Adolescent Service is undertaking to develop and implement our Care Leaver Offer, our Care Leaver Covenant and our Corporate Parent Strategy and our recently revised 5 Promises we have made to Our Children.

2.6 Realizing the potential of workforce

The report proposes a radically new offer for social workers, **develop a 5 year Early Career Framework linked to national pay scales** to support the workforce to remain in practice, specialise and be rewarded via higher pay that reflects their expertise. Reference is made to the Teaching Early Career Framework endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation, the proposals made are clearly modelled on this pathway. **Remove current 12 month ASYE Programme and replace with a 2 year element of the Early Career 'Expert Practitioner' 5 year Pathway, include a Common National Assessment at the end of year 2. During years 3-5 practitioners should have a choice from a set of modules that count towards the full 5 year Early Career Pathway.**

Identify and remove barriers that divert social worker spending time with families via reducing administrative tasks and embedding multidisciplinary teams (akin to Family Safeguarding Model) at the heart of the local communities who deliver, not commissioned, the help needed.

Reduce number of agency social workers to ensure families supported via stable professional relationships via smaller caseloads, more knowledge and skills and more time and resources available **via developing new rules and regional staff banks.**

The Department should work with an **independent review body of experts, to set and introduce national pay scales, brining greater coherence to workforce plans across Local Authorities.**

The DfE and Social Work England should work together to ensure initial education lays foundation for practice and that the Early Career Pathway does not become a 'catch up' programme for social workers not offered the right learning opportunities as students.

Family Support Workers and Children's Home staff should not be forgotten, first step is to **develop Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) for Family Support Workers**, a **Leadership Programme and Professional Registration for Children Home Managers** and a **Leadership Development Programme for Children's Social Care leaders**, aligned to the **Review Reforms and increase diversity in leadership**.

2.7 System relentlessly focused on children and families

The report makes reference to a lack of direction about purpose of social care and national government involvement is uneven. A **National Social Care Framework** is needed, supported via meaningful indicators which bring transparency and learning. A **National Practice Group should be appointed to build practice guides which set out known ways to achieve the National Framework objectives**.

Local safeguarding partnerships (CSAPs) should have **Education a statutory safeguarding partner**.

Government should update funding formula for Children's Social Care to better direct resources where they are needed. Inspections should be more rounded to focus on being 'child focused'. Government should intervene more decisively via **permanent Regional Improvement Commissioners** to oversee progress across regions. **National Data and Technology Taskforce** should oversee 3 priorities; drastically reducing social worker time spent on recording cases, enabling frictionless sharing of information and improving data collection and its use in informing decisions.

3. National Review Recommendations implementation

The Independent Review proposed that a 5 year Reform Programme should be led by a Reform Board which includes people with lived experiences. Government senior official should receive quarterly progress reports. Secretary of State should hold other Government Departments to account and report progress directly to Parliament. The system change would require £2.6 billion over 4 years; £46 million 1st year, £987 million year 2, £1.257 billion year 3 and £233 million year 4.

During June 2022 the Government announced a **Childrens Social Care National Implementation Board**² had been established, in response to:

- the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#)
- the Independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's [review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#)
- the Competition and Markets Authority's [report into the children's social care market](#)

The National Implementation Board's role is to advise Ministers on the implementation of reform across Children's Social Care. The Board is chaired by a DfE Minister, Board Members will include those with experience of leading transformational change in the Children's Social Care sector as well as those with lived experience of the care system. The current members are:

- Chief Executive of Together for Children and Director for Children's Services in Sunderland

² [Children's Social Care National Implementation Board - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

- Care Leaver, working within participation at Action for Children
- President of the Association for Directors of Children's Services
- England's Children's Commissioner
- President of City, University of London. Computer Scientist
- A birth parent/parent, Chair of Trustees of Family Rights Group
- An adopter and kinship carer
- His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted
- Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for England
- Chief Executive of Leeds City Council

The Implementation Board's Terms of Reference are currently being developed.