

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Response to the Department for Education consultation on its Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard

May 2023

[Become](#) is the national charity for children in care and young care leavers. Our vision is that care-experienced people have the same chances as everyone else to live happy, fulfilled lives. Our mission is to help children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow and unleash their potential. We work alongside them to make the care system the best it can be.

Introduction

Our response is informed by the voice, views, insights and experiences of the care-experienced children and young people we work with, including from:

- Ten workshops that we have carried out over the past year to hear the views of care-experienced young people about the recommendations of the Care Review, the reforms that they think are needed to the care system, and the Government's proposed reforms;
- Our [Sky's the Limit](#) project;
- The [APPG Spotlight Inquiry](#) by the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, which we provide the secretariat for;
- Our recent [Gone Too Far campaign](#); and
- Numerous sessions that we ran to ensure that the views, experiences and insights of care-experienced young people were able to inform the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

A number of quotes are provided throughout our response. These quotes are anonymised, but all quotes are from care-experienced children and young people, aged between 13-27 years of age.

Our focus is on improving the experiences, opportunities and outcomes for children in care and young care leavers. Consequently, we have only answered the questions in this consultation that relate directly to how social work practice, data and evidence could be improved to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of care-experienced children and young people.

Our response

1. What is your name?

Matt Blow

2. What is your email address?

Matt.blow@becomecharity.org.uk

3. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

As a charity

4. We know that some individuals will respond on behalf of their organisation.

Yes - I am responding to this consultation on behalf of my organisation, which is Become – the national charity for children in care and care leavers in England.

5. As government analyses the consultation findings and develops and publishes a response, we may want to quote you.

a. In producing a government response to the National Framework consultation, may we quote your response?

Yes

b. May we contact you if we have any follow-up questions on your response to this consultation?

Yes

6. In processing your data and meeting legal duties, government may be expected to share information about your consultation response. In line with the privacy notice, would you like your response to be kept confidential?

No

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

Agree.

The document is clear and relatively easy to understand. As the National Framework describes the outcomes and national direction for children’s social care, we think that it is important that an age-appropriate version of the final National Framework and dashboard is published for children and young people to ensure transparency, as well as accessible versions of the document.

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

N/A

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

N/A

10. The Dashboard is being created to support learning and bring transparency to the system so that the impact of what happens in practice can be understood. It will contain a series of indicators providing information on what is happening in practice and how the outcomes and enablers described in the National Framework are being achieved. Are there additional ways that we can ensure the Dashboard supports continuous learning and improvement?

N/A

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

Quarterly

Outcome and Enabler questions:

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

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

N/A

c. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

In terms of the proposed indicator for the rate of children entering the care system, we propose that this evidence and data should be further disaggregated by protected characteristics and by

the primary reason for entering care. This would provide better information and data about who is entering the care system and enable local authorities to adapt strategies for Family Help and early-intervention accordingly in response to this information.

We also recommend that data should be collected of the rates of children leaving the care system and the reasons for leaving care to capture data and learning about the children who leave the care system to return to live with their families.

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

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

N/A

b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

N/A

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

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

N/A

b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

N/A

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

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

We think that should be a greater focus on what leaders and practitioners should do to ensure that children in care are able to live as close as possible to their home area, friends, family, school and wider support networks. Our [research](#) has shown that, on average, children in care in England live more than 18 miles from home, and the number of children living far from their home community continues to increase each year. This can have a significant impact on children in care's wellbeing, development and relationships.

We think that the framework should explicitly make reference that:

- Leaders undertake sufficiency planning to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation in the local area to meet the needs of the children under the care of the local authority; and that
- Leaders prioritise making sure that children are able to live in a home that meets their needs, and is close to home – in line with the existing duties in Section 22C of the Children’s Act.
- Leaders publish up-to-date sufficiency plans, in line with their requirements under [statutory guidance](#), which set out how they plan to meet the requirements of the sufficiency duty.

In line with the proposed changes to local area connection in the Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy, we think that the framework should also make clear that young people placed outside the local authority boundary should be supported to stay in the area that makes most sense for them when they become care leavers. Local authorities should liaise and work together to ensure that care leavers do not have to face a change of area as well as leaving care.

b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this outcome?

Despite obligations on local authorities to accommodate children near to home, a higher number and proportion of children in the care system each year are living more than 20 miles away from home. For children, this can mean being disconnected and separated from their friends, family, school and the people and places that matter to them the most. Our [Gone Too Far](#) report highlights the various ways that this can negatively impact on children’s lives and life chances – damaging their relationships, negatively impacting on wellbeing and compounding trauma that they may have faced before entering the care system.

Too often the reason that children are moved miles from home is due to a lack of appropriate local homes that can meet their needs. Yet, data is not recorded at a national or local level about how many children are moved miles from home due to a lack of appropriate local options.

We think it is really important that the indicator of “distance of placements from home” in outcome 4 is extended to include data about:

- the number of children living more than 20 miles from home due to a lack of appropriate care placement options close to home that could meet their needs and best interests; and
- the number of children who are living more than 20 miles from home due to a purposeful decision to meet the child’s needs, best interests, or wishes.

This would provide information to help understand the true scale of the problem, and to better enable evidence-based policy-making at both a local and national level. It would allow for more effective evaluation of strategies designed at reducing children being placed miles from their home area, which is essential to the overall fulfilment of the purpose of children’s social care.

In addition to the other indicators proposed for outcome 4, we also recommend the following additional indicators or changes:

- Data should be collected and published about the % of 16- and 17- year old children who are living in supported accommodation to provide a greater understanding and oversight of

the impact of the forthcoming regulatory regime on accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds.

- The data collected about the % of children living in residential care, foster care and supported accommodation should be disaggregated by protected characteristics to provide a clearer picture of which children are more likely to experience different care placement types.
- Data should be collected on the rate of care leavers who are homeless, to benchmark and assess the impact of strategies designed at reducing care leaver homelessness.
- Data should be collected about the number and % of children in care who are separated from their siblings, as an important indicator of stability for children in care.

16. Enabler 1: the workforce is equipped and effective

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this enabler which are not specified in the National Framework?

N/A

b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this enabler?

Linked with the wider direction of travel and proposals included in the [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) strategy and the overall purpose of children's social care as specified by the National Framework, there should be indicators that measure the efficacy of the workforce in providing stability and stable relationships for children in care.

Our recommendation would be for the inclusion of an indicator that measures the average length of time that a child works with the same social worker for; or how many children have one, two, three or more social workers within a year for children who are in care continuously for 12 months.

17. Enabler 2: leaders drive conditions for effective practice

a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this enabler which are not specified in the National Framework?

N/A

b. Would you recommend any other existing indicators or evidence to support learning around this enabler?

Local authorities are already supposed to develop sufficiency plans, setting out how they will provide sufficient appropriate accommodation in their local area for children in care, in line with statutory guidance. Yet, the [What Works Centre for Children's Social Care reported](#) in 2022 that 44% of local authorities had not published a sufficiency strategy or demonstrated publicly how they planned to provide sufficient suitable accommodation to meet the needs of children under their care.

We recommend that there is an additional indicator for enabler two, which records whether a local authority has a published and up-to-date sufficiency plan. [Research](#) has shown that some practitioners have been unaware of their local authority's wider strategy regarding sufficiency, and individual placement decisions made by practitioners have not been in line with the local authority's sufficiency strategy. Having a published, and well-shared sufficiency plan, could drive conditions for effective practice by ensuring consistency in the way that placement decisions are made, which reflect the authority's wider strategy for sufficiency.

From the perspective of care-experienced children and young people, living in homes that are able to meet their needs and best interests, and, in the case of most children, are close to their family, friends, schools and support networks, are essential to ensure that they can grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Contact

For further information, please contact:

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