

Delivering a meaningful review of the care system

Aims

The aim of a review of the care system should be to improve the experiences, outcomes and life chances of care-experienced children and young people.

The ambition of the review should be to deliver meaningful and lasting change. It should seek not only to assess the problems with the current system but to identify solutions.

Scope

The parameters of the review should allow for a vision of bold and radical reform, and its ambitions cannot be limited by the need to be cost-neutral in the short-term. However, a commitment must be made to protect the basic legal infrastructure of the Children Act 1989. Children and young people should only gain additional rights, not be at risk of seeing existing rights weakened or removed.

The review should be wide and comprehensive in its scope and look across government departments at the range of issues that impact on the lives of care-experienced people.

It should consider the 'care system' as the experiences of children and young people and their journeys into adulthood. This should include those not legally 'looked after' such as those cared for under a Special Guardianship Order or as part of an informal kinship arrangement, and those who have left care through adoption. It must recognise that the outcomes for care-experienced young people cannot be disentangled from their lives before they entered care.

The review should consider the importance of practice and culture as well as policy, legislation and guidance. It should consider sufficiency of funding and value for money in how it is spent.

An exact scope should be determined organically in the early stages of the review by listening to those with lived experience of care.

Principles

1. Independent

The review should be genuinely independent, led by a Chair with no conflict of interest, strong understanding of the children's social care system, and who can command confidence and demonstrate integrity and empathy with children, young people and care-experienced adults.

2. Care-experienced people at the heart

Lived experience must be at the heart of the review and the principle of equality of participation for care-experienced children, young people and adults must be embedded. The review should support the building of a care-experienced community as part of its process, respecting and listening to the voices of a significant number and diverse range of care-experienced children and adults, including those less often heard from. Care-experienced people must be meaningfully included and represented at all levels of the review's lifecycle.

In addition, the experiences of parents and families affected by the care system, carers, and professionals must be heard.

Given the context of media reporting and public perceptions of the care system, the review should seek to create a positive public narrative about those who have experienced care.

3. Evidence-based

The review should recognise and build on the existing evidence base, particularly that which has engaged with the views and experiences of care-experienced children and young people. This includes previous system review work (such as the [Care Crisis Review](#), [The Care Inquiry](#), [Achieving emotional wellbeing for looked after children: A whole system approach](#) and the [Blueprint for a Child-centred approach to Children and Young People in Public Care](#)), reviews undertaken across other sectors and internationally (such as the [Independent Care Review](#) in Scotland), insights from the [2019 Care Experienced Conference](#), and work within the academic and research communities.

4. Sufficient time and resource

The review should not be rushed, but given sufficient time and resource to report with a clear shared understanding of a timeline for government response and implementation.

Urgent reforms to the care system must not be delayed by the review process. The review team must alert Ministers and Ofsted where legislation and guidance in its current form are not being adhered to and when new issues are identified where urgent action is required.

5. Government commitment

There should be cross-government commitment to act upon the review's recommendations within an appropriate timeframe, including a mechanism for monitoring initial progress 1-2 years following publication. To enable this, HM Treasury should make contingency for the potential need to invest additional resources. The review should additionally seek to achieve cross-party consensus.

The principles above are supported by the following organisations and groups:



