

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

Cc – Vicky Ford MP, Minister for Children and Families

20 February 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the undersigned, are organisations and groups who work with and represent care-experienced children, young people and adults across England.

In 2020, too many young people in and on the edges of care find themselves without the love, support and stability they need to heal and thrive. As you know, over 78,000 children are looked after by local authorities in England today, a record number, and many more are being raised in kinship care by relatives or friends or have left the care system through adoption.

Yet at the same time, local authorities are facing significant financial pressures, there is a lack of safe and secure places for children to live, and too many families find themselves without the support they need to care for children who have experienced trauma and adversity.

We were delighted therefore to see the commitment in the Conservative Party manifesto to a review of the care system and your subsequent confirmation that the review will be “bold and broad... independently led... with the aim of better supporting, protecting and improving the outcomes of vulnerable children and young people”. It is crucial that the views and experiences of care-experienced people and their families remains the central focus of any review.

Such a review is urgently needed. It offers an incredible opportunity to truly transform the experiences, outcomes and life chances of care-experienced children and young people in England, which for too long have lagged behind their peers. We hope this will lead to a renewed focus on the development of loving, nurturing relationships, improved ways of listening to and acting upon the voices of care-experienced young people, and support that recognises how the impacts of care last throughout a person’s lifetime.

In order to achieve this we have set out in the enclosed document what we believe the aims, scope and principles of the review should be. By adopting a comprehensive outlook that listens closely to those with lived experience, and with government commitment to act on its conclusions, we believe that a review has the potential to deliver meaningful and lasting change for children and their families.

This is an important opportunity that must not be wasted. We urge you to ensure that planning for the review considers the principles we have outlined. Our children and young people deserve nothing less.

We look forward to receiving your response and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can work together to deliver a meaningful review. To arrange this, please note the contact for correspondence details below.

Yours sincerely,

Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive, Become

Carol Iddon, Acting Chief Executive, Action for Children

Sue Armstrong Brown, Chief Executive, Adoption UK

Carolyn Willow, Chief Executive, Article 39

Javed Khan, Chief Executive, Barnardo's

Dr Cat Hughman and Jamie Crabb, The Care Experienced Conference

David Graham, National Director, The Care Leavers' Association

Kathy Evans, Chief Executive, Children England

Dr Carol Homden CBE, Chief Executive, Coram

Brigid Robinson, Managing Director, Coram Voice

Kevin Lowe, Managing Director, CoramBAAF

Martha Wansbrough, Chief Executive, Drive Forward Foundation

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive, Family Rights Group

Lucy Peake, Chief Executive, Grandparents Plus

Sylvia Duncan, Chief Executive, Institute of Recovery from Childhood Trauma (IRCT)

Enver Solomon, Chief Executive, Just for Kids Law

Ben Kernighan, Chief Executive, Leap Confronting Conflict

Paul Smart and Jon Fayle, Co-Chairs, National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO)

Lynsey Burridge, Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH)

Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau (NCB)

Felicity Dunworth and Arron Pile, Co-Chairs, National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL)

Rita Waters, Chief Executive, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)

Peter Wanless, Chief Executive, NSPCC

Jonathan Whalley, Chief Executive, St. Christopher's Fellowship

Andy Elvin, Chief Executive, TACT Fostering and Adoption

Kevin Williams, Chief Executive, The Fostering Network

Mark Lee, Chief Executive, The Together Trust

Contact for correspondence:

Sam Turner, Voice and Influencing Manager, Become

sam.turner@becomecharity.org.uk