



Children's Social Care - National Implementation Board

Minutes of meeting held on 12 September 2023, 10:00-11:30.

Minister's Boardroom, and virtually via MS Teams.

Attendees

- David Johnston OBE MP - Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing. **Chair.**
- Amanda Spielman - His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted
- Angela Frazer-Wicks - birth parent/parent, Chair of Trustees of Family Rights Group
- Sir Anthony Finkelstein CBE, FREng - President of City, University of London. Data science advisor.
- Isabelle Trowler - Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for England
- Jill Colbert OBE - Chief Executive of Together for Children and Director for Children's Services in Sunderland
- John Pearce - President of the Association for Directors of Children's Services
- Juliette Cammaerts – Director, Policy, Planning and Delivery, Office of the Children's commissioner
- Lisa Pascoe - Ofsted Deputy Director for Social Care Policy
- Dame Rachel De Souza DBE - England's Children's Commissioner
- Tom Riordan CBE - Chief Executive of Leeds City Council

Officials in Attendance

- Graham Archer (Director-General of Families Group and Senior Responsible Officer of Children's Social Care Reform Programme)
- Fran Oram (Director, Children's Social Care Strategy and Care, DfE)
- Shazia Hussain (Director, Children's Social Care, Safeguarding and Workforce, DfE)
- Hannah Smith (Deputy Director of Children's Social Care Strategy Unit, DfE)
- Dan Foster (Deputy Director, Adoption, Family Justice and Alternatives to Care, DfE)

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. Minister Johnston welcomed members of the Board and introduced himself as the new Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing.
2. The Minister emphasised his strong commitment to the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* reform agenda, his excitement for the positive changes it will bring, and noted his

previous work on social mobility and improving life chances for children and young people.

Item 2: Delivery Update

1. The Board was updated on delivery since the meeting in June. Key updates included:
 - Extensive engagement on three consultations which launched alongside the Implementation Strategy (on the strategy itself; the children's social care national framework and dashboard; and social worker agency working). These have concluded with high levels of engagement.
 - Reforms to unregulated supported accommodation; introducing mandatory national standards; and Ofsted registration and inspection requirements for providers who accommodate 16-17 year-old looked after children and care leavers all go live in October 2023. The Department is closely monitoring levels of registration nationally and regionally, to help ensure every part of the country has sufficient capacity, and putting in place additional support where necessary.
 - Several areas of work have now moved into delivery following announcements of local authorities taking forward key areas of work. This includes three initial areas who will deliver the Families First for Children programme (Lincolnshire, Dorset, and Wolverhampton). The programmes are now being co-designed with these local authorities.
 - The recent issuing of a section 114 notice in Birmingham highlights some of the challenges facing local government. The reform programme seeks to enhance sustainability over the longer term, recognising delivery is within a challenging context.
 - The Department is working across government, with the Ministry of Justice and Department of Health and Social Care, to improve provision and partnership working for children and young people with complex needs.
 - Experts by Experience continue to be engaged with policy teams on the Early Career Framework and how we better involve the voice of families.
2. Members agreed there had been good progress overall, including around Regional Care Cooperatives, the Families First for Children pathfinders, and the Early Career Framework.
3. The Board noted that further consideration of regulating the agency market was needed to help address workforce challenges. Members also noted that a future conversation on the external placements market would be welcome.
4. With the start of the new school year, members challenged the Department to keep working on improving school attendance, particularly for vulnerable children. The Board was assured that officials are working closely with schools, local authorities, and NHS England on this.

5. The Board noted positive progress has been made in driving forward an improved data strategy, but noted the need to have people with the appropriate skills to increase the pace of transformation.
6. The Board agreed the importance of ensuring discussions on children's social care transformation considered the full cohort of those interacting with the system and didn't focus too narrowly on those becoming looked after.
7. The Board emphasised the importance of engaging families, ensuring the voices of children, young people, and parents continue to feed into the work at all levels and at the appropriate times.

Item 3: Kinship Strategy

8. The Board discussed the Kinship Strategy, looking at the series of upcoming announcements, the progress made to date, and considered how to strengthen and address any gaps.
9. The Minister noted that the strategy demonstrates this government's recognition of the importance and value of kinship carers. This is the first time a government has published a strategy for kinship care and there has been a significant increase in investment in this area.
10. The Board was updated on the Department establishing a Kinship Carers Reference Group, which has twenty-three kinship carers among its members. This will ensure that people with direct experience of kinship care are working with government on developing the strategy.
11. Members urged the Department to ensure children living in kinship arrangements have their voices heard.
12. The board were updated on proposals for the kinship strategy, which is due to be published by the end of 2023.
13. Members noted the current variation in support offered across the country. Specific gaps in current practice highlighted by the Board included access to independent, specialist advice to help ensure prospective carers are informed about the realities of undertaking kinship care. It was also noted that children and young people in kinship care need access to both educational and mental health support.
14. The Board agreed that the kinship strategy was a positive component of the overall *Stable Homes, Built on Love* reform agenda and noted the need to be ambitious for improving support for this group.

Item 4: Forward Look

15. The Board suggested items for discussion at future meetings.

16. The Minister thanked everyone for their time and contributions, noting the next meeting will take place in December.

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