

Children's Social Care - National Implementation Board

Minutes of meeting held on 25 January 2024, 13:00 -14:30
Wolverhampton Civic, and virtually via MS Teams.

Attendees

- David Johnston MP, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing.
Chair.
- Anne-Marie Connelly – care leaver, working at Action for Children
- Angela Frazer-Wicks MBE - birth parent/parent, Chair of Trustees of Family Rights Group
- Sir Anthony Finkelstein CBE, FREng - President of City, University of London. Computer Scientist
- Janet Kay OBE - adopter and kinship carer
- John Pearce – President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Jill Colbert OBE - Chief Executive of Together for Children and Director for Children's Services in Sunderland
- Isabelle Sherlock - Policy Team - Children's Commissioner's Office (deputising for Rachel De Souza)
- Yvette Stanley - Ofsted National Director for Social Care (deputising for Sir Martyn Oliver)

Officials in attendance

- Hannah Smith (Deputy Director, Children's Social Care Strategy, DfE)
- Helen Waite OBE (Deputy Director, Flexible Childcare & Supporting Families Division, DfE).
- Justin Russell (Director General, Families Group, DfE)
- Shazia Hussain (Director, Children's Social Care, Safeguarding and Workforce, DfE)
- Sophie Langdale (Director, Children's Social Care Strategy and Care, DfE)

Apologies

- Sir Martyn Oliver - His Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted
- Isabelle Trowler CBE - Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for England
- Tom Riordan CBE - Chief Executive of Leeds City Council
- Dame Rachel De Souza DBE - Children's Commissioner for England

Item 1: Introductions

1. The Minister thanked everyone for attending the meeting, hosted by City of Wolverhampton Council.
2. Congratulations were given to those members of the Board and attendees who had been recognised in the New Years Honours List 2024.

Item 2: Delivery Update

3. The Board discussed the latest delivery information, which included progress updates, risks, issues, milestones, and successes.
4. Since the September meeting, there has been considerable progress including:
 - Government is now asking everyone working in children's social care to make system change, to realise the vision we set out in *Stable Homes, Built on Love*.
 - In December 2023, the government published four key documents – a national kinship care strategy, a data and digital strategy, revised statutory guidance on Working Together to Safeguard Children, and a national framework for children's social care.
 - Senior leaders across safeguarding partners have signed up to upcoming engagement sessions with the Department for Education on the published documents, with some events attracting over 1000 attendees.
 - New national standards for supported accommodation are in force and the implementation has proceeded better than anticipated.
 - The FosterLink programme has been launched, working with all local authorities who are not part of the fostering pathfinder, which helps them review their fostering services and identify where improvements can be made.
 - The Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring programme is now supporting 51 programmes across 45 local authorities, helping care leavers connect with important people in their lives.
 - Setting up two Children and Young People's Advisory Boards (one for those children aged 11-17 and the other young adults between 18-25), to ensure government is hearing from some of those most directly impacted by the children's social care system and the reforms we are implementing.

5. Delivery across the portfolio is impacted by:
 - Ensuring there is sufficient capacity in the system regarding placements for looked after children.
 - Challenging financial circumstances for some local authorities.
6. Members welcomed the publication of the four key documents, referenced above. It was noted that the Kinship Strategy marks strong progress towards raising awareness of the role kinship carers play in society. The training and support package for kinship carers was particularly welcomed. Although it is good to see government encouraging employers to provide parental leave for kinship carers, there is space to go further on this issue.
7. The Board welcomed progress on the work to improve data and digital services, but noted that more specialist resource was required for this work to proceed at pace.
8. Members noted that the Northeast Pathfinder on recruitment and retention of foster carers is showing early indicators of success. There has been positive feedback on the quality of the training provided as part of this. Buddying schemes, whereby experienced foster carers can mentor others, has been well received.
9. The Board noted that government has made good progress in engaging people with lived experience as part of its work on reforming the children's social care system, but recognised it could go further and highlighted the continuing need to ensure such engagement is meaningful.

Item 3: Embedding New Practice

10. It was noted that December 2023 marked the first-time government has started to change the framework and rulebook for the Children's Social Care system across England.
11. Members were asked for their reflections on how the new documents have been received by the sector and what further steps can be taken to help embed the changes.
12. The Board noted that, where pathfinders are being rolled out, it is important for the information and learning from them be shared with other local authorities in real time.
13. It was also noted that there was an opportunity to bring regions together, to collectively test and challenge thinking. Members highlighted that we

should use, where possible, the existing governance frameworks of local authorities.

14. Members recognised the positive engagement from the sector, as evidenced by the high degree of interest in attending learning events run by the government, but that government should seek to include children and young people in these to a greater extent.
15. The Board also noted that more engagement with children who are in, or experienced, kinship care arrangements would be a positive step.

Item 4: Stocktake

16. Members were informed that, between now and the next meeting of the Board, they would each be asked to review their time on the Board and suggest ways to continually refine and improve its function.
17. The Minister brought the meeting to a close by thanking the members for their input and Wolverhampton for hosting.

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