

Long-term strategy launched to fix children's social care

Vulnerable children will be better supported to stay with their families in safe and loving homes, as part of an overhaul of children's social care.

Backed by £200 million over the next two years, a new, ambitious and wide-ranging Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy will transform the current care system to focus on more early support for families, reducing the need for crisis response at a later stage.

The plan responds to recommendations made by three independent reviews by Josh MacAlister, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, and the Competition and Markets Authority. The findings revealed the current care system is often fragmented, siloed, and struggling to meet the needs of children and families across England.

Families will receive local early help and intervention with challenges such as addiction, domestic abuse or mental health, to help families to stay together where possible and overcome adversity. This will start in 12 local authorities and is backed by £45m to embed a best practice model that will then be shared more widely.

Children who grow up in loving, stable homes tend to have better outcomes, which is why the proposals put relationships at the heart of the care system and prioritise family-like placements where a child can no longer live with their parents. Kinship care, where a child is placed with a relative or close family friend, will be prioritised by simplifying the process and providing more support to extended families, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and others. Recognising the transition within a family can be challenging for all involved, the government will also provide training and support to kinship carers.

Foster carers will also see an above-inflation increase in their allowance to help cover the increasing costs of caring for a child in their home, in recognition of the valuable care they provide to children. This is alongside £25 million over the next two years on a recruitment and retention programme, which is the largest investment in recent history, helping to attract more people to offer a loving home for children in need. Depending on local need, foster care recruitment will focus on areas where there is a particular shortage of placements for children such as sibling groups, teenagers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, those that have suffered complex trauma or parent and child foster homes.