

Education Committee

Children's social care

Fourth Report of Session 2024–25

HC 430

Education Committee

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Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 2 July 2025, to be printed. It was published on 10 July 2025 by authority of the House of Commons.
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Summary

Children's social care comprises a set of vital services which support some of our most vulnerable children. This inquiry was launched by our predecessor Education Committee in December 2023 and aimed to take a broad look at the system as a whole, assessing the current state of children's social care and making recommendations for reform. Following the 2024 General Election and the establishment of the new Committee, we agreed to take forward this work and conclude the inquiry.

Our inquiry follows several reviews of and reports into the state of children's social care, most notably the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which published its final report in 2022. The evidence we heard demonstrates that many of the problems highlighted by the Review persist. Increases in need coupled with stretched budgets and a lack of serious attention to reform have resulted in a system characterised by spiralling costs to local authorities and poor experiences and outcomes for children. The Department must issue a comprehensive response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care setting out which recommendations have already been taken forward and a timeline and funding estimate for those which have not. It should ensure that it is engaging with care-experienced young people in all areas of its work on children's social care and encourage local authorities to do the same.

Rising need

There has been rising need for children's social care over the past decade, with the number of looked-after children standing at 83,630 in 2024—an increase of over 20% since 2014. There are a number of reasons for this rise in need, including reduction in support for early intervention; an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; rising poverty and cost-of-living pressures; and an increase in referrals for extra-familial harms. The Government must address the factors outside the care system which are contributing to the rise in need and take action in its forthcoming Child Poverty Strategy to significantly reduce the number of children growing up in financial hardship. The Government must ensure that a significant majority of the new funding announced in the Spending Review is allocated to early intervention programmes and work towards bringing the level of funding for early intervention back to 2010 levels.

Supply of placements

There are severe shortages of appropriate placements for children in care, leading to rising numbers of children being placed far from their local area. In 2024, 45% of looked-after children were placed outside of their local authority, and 22% were placed over 20 miles from home, which had distressing impacts on the children involved. The Department for Education must publish a national sufficiency strategy for children's social care, require all local authorities to develop and publish strategies for reducing the number of out-of-area placements, and work with local authorities to share and scale up examples of good practice.

We heard concerning reports of excessive profits being made by some providers and the risk of financial failure among large providers, leading us to conclude that the children's social care market is not delivering for children or for local authorities. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes a number of provisions to reform the children's social care market which we hope will help to address this; the Department for Education should set out how it will monitor the impact of these reforms and commit to updating Parliament on an annual basis on the impact they are having. If the Department decides to introduce a cap on profits for providers of children's social care, it must consult this Committee on the draft regulations before they are laid before Parliament.

The care system

The inquiry looked at all forms of children's social care, including foster care, adoption, kinship care and residential care, as well as care for disabled children. We heard that there are serious shortages of foster carers, with an additional 6,500 needed to fill the gaps. The Department for Education must put in place a national fostering strategy to complement the existing strategies for adoption and kinship care and should work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that housing policy is designed to support the recruitment of foster carers.

Kinship care is an essential part of the care system and kinship carers must have enough support so that they are not left to struggle as a result of taking children into their care. The Department for Education should ensure that the financial support available in its forthcoming kinship allowance pilot is on a par with that given to foster carers, and it should legislate for entitlements to kinship leave at the earliest opportunity. The Department for Education should also review the educational support available to adopted children and make funding for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund permanent to end the annual cliff-edge of uncertainty faced by families as they wait for funding to be renewed.

The Department for Education's focus is on supporting children to live in kinship or foster care, rather than in children's homes; we agree that this focus is the right one, but this should not come at the expense of developing and maintaining high-quality residential care for children who need it. We heard that some children had been placed in unsuitable supported accommodation such as barges and caravans with little or no support, which is clearly unacceptable. The new regulation and inspection regime is an important step in the right direction, but the Department must develop universal standards of care that apply to all homes, including supported accommodation. There is a serious problem with recruitment and retention in the social care workforce, with high turnover and overstretched staff exacerbating the instability experienced by children in care and increasing the risk of safeguarding concerns being overlooked. The Department for Education should develop a workforce strategy for children's social care setting out how it will address this.

Many of the issues we heard about within the broader children's social care system were echoed in the evidence relating to disabled children's care. We heard about lack of access to short breaks and respite care, parents struggling to understand and navigate the system, and inappropriate assessments being conducted by social services which focus on child protection rather than on support for parents. The Department for Education must set out how it will implement the proposals in the Law Commission's review of disabled children's social care and introduce national eligibility criteria for disabled children's social care, which should be clearly communicated to families.

It is essential that there is a strong system of mental health support for children in care. Children in care have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, and they are over four times more likely to suffer from emotional or mental health problems than their peers, but the support available is falling far short of what is needed. The Department for Education should work with the Department of Health and Social Care to pilot setting up co-located mental health services between children's social care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and must strengthen the role of mental health in health assessments of children in care. The Department for Education must also take forward the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to introduce an opt-out model of independent advocacy for all children in care.

If appropriate for the child and done carefully and effectively and with a primary focus on safeguarding, reunification of children with their birth families can be a positive way of supporting children to leave care, but we heard that there is currently not enough of a focus on reunification within

Government or local authorities. The Department for Education should evaluate existing reunification practice and publish national guidance on reunification.

Keeping children safe

The number of children on child protection plans has been falling slowly since 2019; however, we heard that this does not reflect a reduction in the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. In particular, neglect is on the rise and the Department for Education does not appear to have a clear strategy for addressing it. The Department for Education should make funding available for a national survey on the prevalence of the different types of abuse and neglect and put in place a national neglect strategy to set out how it will reduce the incidence of neglect. There is also an urgent need to take forward the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

The Department for Education has made some welcome steps towards increasing Ofsted's powers of intervention in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, but some key gaps in regulation remain, most notably the worrying practice of using handcuffs to transport children between settings. We are concerned that fear of negative Ofsted ratings is causing providers to refuse children with complex needs, putting more pressure on an already overstretched sector. Ofsted and the Department for Education should ensure that the inspection system that replaces single-word judgements does not penalise providers who take on children with complex needs.

Leaving care

We heard disturbing evidence regarding the poor outcomes for care leavers across a range of measures. 39% of care leavers aged 19–21 are not in education, training or employment and a third of care leavers become homeless within two years of leaving care. We spoke to care-experienced young people who told us of experiencing homelessness, struggling financially, and having to reduce time spent in education in order to support themselves after turning 18. This is unacceptable. The state has a grave responsibility to the children it takes into its care, and these outcomes are simply not good enough.

The Department for Education must develop a National Care Offer and work with other departments to review and improve the financial and housing support available to care leavers. The Department for Work and Pensions must exempt care leavers from its proposed plans to reduce Universal Credit support for those aged under 22 and ensure that care leavers are prioritised for access to support through the Youth Guarantee.

1 The state of children's social care in England

Our inquiry

1. Children's social care is the vital suite of services which support some of our most vulnerable children, including early help and support, child protection, support for disabled children, foster care, children's residential care, adoption services, and support for kinship carers. Over the last few years, increasing concerns have been raised about the state of children's social care, with a significant increase in the number of children entering the care system, funding for early help and support services in decline and a sharp increase in spend on crisis interventions. At the same time, and despite the commitment and dedication of many professionals who work in children's social care, the outcomes for care-experienced young people are shockingly poor. This is clearly demonstrated in the high proportion of people who become homeless or enter the criminal justice system in the years after leaving care, in poor education and employment outcomes, and poor mental health outcomes. It is in this context that the previous Education Select Committee decided to undertake an inquiry into children's social care, and why the new Committee decided to continue this work.
2. The inquiry into children's social care was launched by our predecessor Education Committee in December 2023 during the last Parliament. The inquiry aimed to take a broad look at the system as a whole, assessing the current state of children's social care and making recommendations for reform. The previous Committee held four oral evidence sessions focusing on a wide range of issues including rising need for care; funding and supply of foster care and residential home places; issues within different types of care; disabled children's care; and the role of Ofsted. It also conducted a survey of people who had spent time in care and visited Berlin to gather insights from the approach taken in Germany to delivering care.
3. Following the 2024 General Election and the establishment of the new Committee, we agreed to take forward this work and conclude the inquiry into children's social care. We held a further four oral evidence sessions, which comprised sessions focused on safeguarding and child protection, scrutiny of the proposals in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, a session with care-experienced young people, and a final session with

the new Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP. We would like to thank all those who contributed to this inquiry through written and oral evidence. We would like to extend our particular thanks to the care-experienced young people for giving up their time to come and speak to us about these highly personal and emotive issues, and to Barnardo's and Become for their support with arranging the session.

Background

4. Our inquiry follows several notable reviews of and reports into the state of children's social care. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was commissioned by the Department for Education and conducted by Josh MacAlister, founder of Frontline, a graduate social worker training programme. The Review published its final report in May 2022, which it described as a "once in a generation opportunity to reset children's social care."¹ The Review found a "system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise." It concluded that a "dramatic whole system reset" was needed and set out a package of reforms to be delivered over five years. In the same year, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published *Child Protection in England*, a national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson,² and the Competition and Markets Authority published its study into the children's social care market.³
5. In February 2023, the previous Government published its children's social care strategy, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*. The strategy provided a response to the three reviews, saying that the Government "agree[d] with their problem analysis and vision for change" and set out a number of measures it would take over the next two years to "transform" children's social care.⁴ While the evidence received by this inquiry welcomed many of the individual measures in the strategy, we heard concerns about the overall lack of ambition, low levels of new funding, and long timeframe for the reforms. The Children's Commissioner for England said that the Government needed to be "moving much further and faster" and criticised the fact that the strategy "relie[d] heavily on introducing pathfinders in local areas to test out new ways of working, to build an evidence base."⁵ Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, said that many of the

1 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022

2 Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Child Protection in England](#), May 2022

3 Competition and Markets Authority, [Children's social care market study: Final report](#), March 2022

4 Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#), February 2023

5 Children's Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#))

actions in the strategy were “piecemeal” and “delayed” and that there were “serious questions about whether the progress and the ambitions that are set out will be realised.”⁶ Dr Ray Jones, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at Kingston University, criticised the focus on “new short-term initiatives in a small number of areas” and argued that sustained implementation is lacking: “It never gets rolled out. No one sticks with it. A new idea will come on the block.”⁷ We also heard that costs for local authorities continue to rise, which will be discussed in more detail in the section of this report on funding.

6. In November 2024, the current Government published its own policy paper on reforming children’s social care, *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*, which built on many of the measures in *Stable Homes, Built on Love* and set out the Government’s proposals and aims for children’s social care.⁸ The *Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill* was published on 17 December 2024 and included many of the measures set out in *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*.⁹ We conducted scrutiny of relevant aspects of the Bill as part of our oral evidence sessions for this inquiry, as well as in a standalone session focusing on the schools part of the Bill. However, our ability to engage with the legislation was limited due to the compressed timeframe for consideration of the Bill. In February, we published a report with the findings of our scrutiny of the Bill, in which we welcomed the scale of the Government’s ambition but criticised the “rushed and inadequate” timetable of the Bill’s consideration.¹⁰
7. We asked Minister Daby what engagement the Government had had with care-experienced young people in developing its reforms. She told us that she had engaged with care-experienced young people on an individual level since becoming Minister, and Fran Oram, Portfolio Director for Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for Education, told us that the Department had a children and young people’s board that met with officials every six weeks and that the Department “bring[s] different elements of the reform agenda to that board to test them and seek input.”¹¹

6 [Q1](#)

7 [Q88](#)

8 Department for Education, [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#), November 2024

9 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177

10 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2024–25, [Scrutiny of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), HC 732, para 2

11 [Q431](#)

8.

CONCLUSION

Evidence given to the Committee during our inquiry indicates that many of the problems highlighted by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022 persist, and in a significant number of cases have worsened since the Review. Increases in need coupled with stretched budgets and a lack of serious attention to reform have resulted in a system characterised by spiralling costs to local authorities and poor experiences and outcomes for children. The "once in a generation" opportunity provided by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care has not been realised, with the Department for Education focusing on small-scale pilot projects in specific areas rather than comprehensive reform.

9.

RECOMMENDATION

By the end of this year, the Department for Education must issue a comprehensive response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care which was published over three years ago. This should set out which recommendations have already been taken forward and a timeline and funding estimate for those which have not. It must evaluate the impact of the pilot programmes which have already taken place and set out how it plans to scale up those which prove to be effective.

10.

CONCLUSION

We were privileged to hear powerful and insightful evidence from care-experienced young people in this inquiry, and their voices have informed many of the conclusions and recommendations in this report. We are pleased that the Department is regularly hearing from care-experienced young people in its reform programme and would like this to go further to include care leavers' voices at every level of government, including local, national, and through accountability mechanisms.

11.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should ensure that it is engaging with care-experienced young people in all areas of its work on children's social care and should encourage local authorities to do the same. The Department for Education, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission should ensure that care-experienced young people are involved in accountability mechanisms for the quality of children's social care services and care leavers' support.

Rising need for children's social care

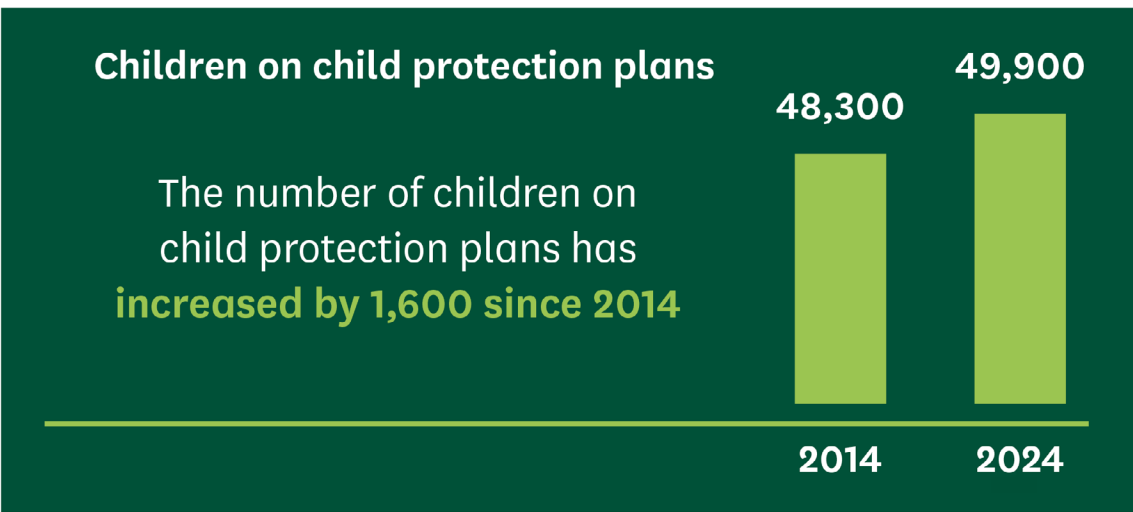
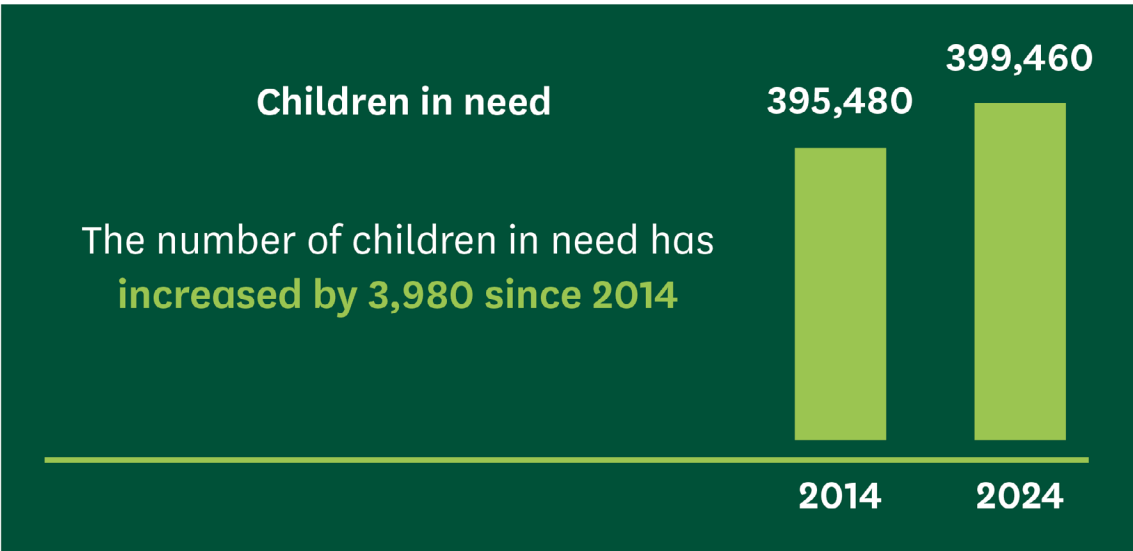
12. There has been rising need for children's social care over the past decade. The latest figures from the Department for Education show:
- The number of looked-after children has risen by over 20% over the last 10 years, standing at 83,630 in 2024. Over the same time period the rate of looked-after children has increased from 60 to 70 per 10,000 children in the population.¹²
 - There were 399,460 children in need in 2024—an increase of 3,980 from 2014.¹³
 - There were 49,900 children on child protection plans in 2024—an increase of 1,600 from 2014.¹⁴
 - The number of section 47 enquiries per year in response to child protection concerns has risen by 57% over the past decade.¹⁵

12 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

13 Department for Education, [Children in need](#), October 2024

14 Department for Education, [Children in need](#), October 2024

15 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))



13. The evidence we received cited a number of reasons behind the overall rise in need. The Department for Education highlighted that population growth accounted for 23% of the rise since 2014 with an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) accounting for 36% (UASC now make up 9% of looked-after children).¹⁶ The Department also cited an increase in case complexity, children staying in care for longer, and “increasing family and neighbourhood needs” as causes of the rise.¹⁷

Early intervention

14. The reduction in support for early intervention services was a key reason cited as a cause of rising need for social care. There has been a shift in funding away from early intervention towards later-stage, crisis intervention. Over the last decade, children’s social care spending on preventative services fell from £3.9bn in 2012–13 to £2.7bn in 2022–23—a fall of 31% in real terms—while the number of children in need has increased and families’ needs have become more complex.¹⁸ We heard that there is strong evidence that early intervention has an impact on reducing the numbers of children coming into care and reduces local authority spend on children’s services. An evaluation of the Supporting Families programme funded by the Department for Education found a 32% reduction in rates of looked-after children two years after joining the programme, and that every £1 spent on the programme delivered £2.28 of economic benefits.¹⁹ An analysis of Barnardo’s family support work service in the Isle of Wight estimated that for every £1 invested in the service, the saving in costs to the state was £2.60.²⁰ John Pearce, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, told our predecessor Committee that cutting spending on early intervention was a “false economy” which “stores up costs further down the line.”²¹
15. The Government’s children’s social care strategy, *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*, states that “wherever possible, children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system in the first place.”²² The Government has launched the Families First Partnership programme, which provides £500 million in 2025/26 to support local authorities to deliver preventative programmes including family help, multi-agency child safeguarding, and family group decision-making.

16 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

17 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

18 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

19 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

20 Barnardo’s (Barnardo’s at Barnardo’s) ([CSC0107](#))

21 [Q96](#)

22 Department for Education, [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#), November 2024

This includes £270 million of new funding through a Children’s Social Care Prevention Grant.²³ Fran Oram, Portfolio Director of Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for Education, told us that the Department’s intention was to “flip the profile of spend” further towards early intervention. She also highlighted that investment in early intervention would result in a “period of double running”, as funding for later-stage services could not be reduced immediately, and that the Department was “advocating strongly” with the Treasury for funding to support this.²⁴ In the Spring Statement 2025, the Government announced the creation of a £3.25 billion Transformation Fund to support public service reform.²⁵ At the 2025 Spending Review, the Government announced that £555 million would be allocated from the fund to support children’s social care reform over the next three years, which will “help more children stay with their families, ensuring families have timely support and fixing the broken care market.”²⁶

16. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill requires local authorities to offer a family group decision-making meeting (FGDM) to the child’s parents, or any other person with parental responsibility, before applying to the court for a care or supervision order.²⁷ An FGDM brings together parents and the family network to make a plan in response to concerns about a child’s safety and wellbeing.²⁸ Witnesses to our inquiry welcomed this requirement and described FGDM as an effective intervention.²⁹ Lynn Perry, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s and Anna Edmundson, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), both suggested that the stage before applying for a care order was too late in the process to have an impact and that it should be offered earlier, as well as being extended to reunification to allow children to leave care when appropriate.³⁰ We received evidence from the Family Rights Group expressing concerns that the evidence of the benefits of FGDM relate to a specific model, and that unless that model is specified, local authorities may deliver a model of FGDM that has not been proven to have an impact.³¹

23 Department for Education, [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#), March 2025

24 [Qq446–447](#)

25 HM Treasury, [Spring Statement 2025](#), 26 March 2025

26 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), 11 June 2025

27 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clause 1

28 Department for Education, [Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), October 2024

29 [Q396](#) [Sam Turner]; [Q398](#) [Roger Gough]; [Q361](#) [Lynn Perry; Anna Edmundson]

30 [Q361](#)

31 Written evidence received for the Committee’s inquiry into the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, Family Rights Group ([CWS008](#))

17. Claire Throssell, a survivor of domestic abuse and ambassador for Women’s Aid and the Independent Domestic Abuse Service, warned of the risk of perpetrators of domestic abuse being involved in FGDM, as they could “bully, harass or manipulate the situation” to put children in danger.³² Minister Daby told us that there would be training for professionals in carrying out FGDM and that there was “an entire process where it needs to have consent from the family itself as to who needs to be engaged and be part of those meetings.”³³ In our recent report into the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, we concluded that local authorities should draw on the advice of specialist domestic abuse charities in coming to a decision on whether FGDM is in the child’s best interests where domestic abuse has occurred.³⁴ In its response to the report, the Department stated that it would be publishing guidance for local authorities to support the safe delivery of FGDM and that it would work with specialist organisations, including those with expertise in domestic abuse, in developing that guidance.³⁵

18. **CONCLUSION**

The Government’s focus on early intervention is the right one and long overdue. The additional £270 million provided through the Children’s Social Care Prevention Grant is welcome but falls far short of the £1.2 billion that has been removed from early intervention services since 2012, an even greater gap in the context of an increasing population. We welcome the additional funding provided through the Transformation Fund and look forward to seeing further details of the proportion of funding that will be allocated to early intervention programmes. It should be seen as a first step towards a wholesale rebalancing of the system towards early help and support for families, with an urgent need to identify further resources.

19. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must commit to making the Families First Partnership programme permanent if it demonstrates a positive impact. The Government must ensure that a significant majority of the new funding announced in the Spending Review is allocated to early intervention programmes and, in future, work towards bringing the level of funding back to 2010 levels, taking into account changes in the population since then.

32 [Q361](#)

33 [Q435](#)

34 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2024–25, [Scrutiny of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), HC 732, para 41

35 Education Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2024–25, [Scrutiny of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response](#), HC 925, para 42

20.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should publish annual data on the proportion of children's social care funding allocated to early intervention programmes compared with later-stage interventions so that progress on this can be monitored.

21.

RECOMMENDATION

We welcome the Department's commitment to working with domestic abuse charities when developing its guidance for family group decision-making (FGDM). The Department should monitor the impact of the new requirement and, after one year, report back to this Committee as to whether FGDM should be extended to an earlier stage as well as to family reunification.

22.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should clarify the specific model of FGDM in statutory guidance to ensure that best practice is followed in all local authorities.

Further causes of rising need

23. We heard that rising poverty and cost-of-living pressures are further drivers of the increase in need. In 2023/24, 4.5 million children (31%) were in poverty, defined as relative low income after housing costs. This is an increase of 900,000 children since 2010/11 and the highest since current records began in 1994/95.³⁶ Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, told our predecessor Committee that “there is quite clear evidence that there are links between a rise in poverty in the population and a rise in children in care, because we know that poverty puts pressure on families and is linked to rises in abuse and neglect.”³⁷ Research has found that between 2015 and 2020, an estimated 8.1% of care entries were linked to rising child poverty—equivalent to 10,351 additional children entering care over those 5 years.³⁸ Poverty and neglect are also closely linked to parental mental health, which is now the most identified factor leading to a child in need assessment.³⁹ Dr Ray Jones of Kingston University told our predecessor Committee:

36 House of Commons Library, [Poverty in the UK: Statistics](#), Research Briefing 7096, 4 April 2025, p18

37 [Q8](#)

38 Foundations - What Works Centre for Children & Families ([CSC0171](#))

39 NSPCC ([CSC0111](#))

The big growth has been in children who are of concern because of neglect and emotional abuse [...] If you are poor, if you are worn down, if it is hard to get up in the morning because you are so anxious and depressed and cannot face getting through the day, if you are running out of money for food during the week, if you cannot clothe your children and you feel bad about it, that is how we have seen this growth in concerns about neglect and emotional abuse.⁴⁰

24. In March 2025, the Government announced a set of changes to the social security system focused on addressing unemployment, reforming disability benefits and support for those aged under 22.⁴¹ The Department for Work and Pensions' impact assessment of these reforms showed that an additional 50,000 children will be in relative poverty after housing costs in 2029/30 as a result of these changes—an increase of 0.4 percentage points.⁴² Following changes to the proposals, this was later updated and the reforms are now expected to increase child poverty by 0.1 percentage points.⁴³ The Secretary of State for Education (Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP) wrote to us stating that she “share[d] the Committee’s concerns about levels of child poverty” and that the Government would be bringing forward a Child Poverty Strategy, where it is “looking at all available levers to drive forward short and long-term actions across government to reduce child poverty.”⁴⁴ We held a joint session with the Work and Pensions Committee in May where witnesses explained that, while an increase of 0.4 percentage points would be a relatively small rise in child poverty, it was unlikely that the reforms would result in increases to employment which would be large enough to offset the reductions to social security.⁴⁵ At the end of May 2025, it was reported that the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy, initially expected in spring 2025 would be delayed until autumn 2025.⁴⁶
25. Some charities additionally highlighted the need to reform responses to extra-familial harms to reduce the pressure on the care system. Extra-familial harms occur when children experience abuse or exploitation outside the home, including at school, within peer groups, community spaces and online and includes criminal exploitation such as county lines activity. The Government’s statutory guidance states that, in cases of extra-familial harm, children’s social care assessments should determine whether a child

40 [Q82](#)

41 Department for Work and Pensions, [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working](#), March 2025

42 Department for Work and Pensions, [Spring Statement 2025 health and disability benefit reforms - Impacts](#), March 2025

43 Department for Work and Pensions, [Spring statement social security changes – Updated impact on poverty levels in Great Britain](#), June 2025

44 [Letter from the Secretary of State on Child Poverty Strategy](#), 1 May 2025

45 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, [Q23](#) [Tom Waters]

46 BBC News, [Government delays publication of child poverty strategy](#), 23 May 2025

is in need or whether an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is needed to determine whether a child is suffering harm.⁴⁷ Barnardo's stated that there had been an increase in referrals for children experiencing extra-familial harms such as trafficking and gangs, which had partly contributed to the rise in need for social care.⁴⁸ The Children's Society said that early help needed to include more of a focus on enabling families to have a "better understanding of issues such as criminal and sexual exploitation and other forms of harm outside the family home, and knowledge of where to seek help if they are concerned."⁴⁹ The Children's Society also argued that a social care response to extra-familial harms needed to "go hand in hand with a multiagency disruption activity aimed at perpetrators" with a greater contribution from law enforcement.⁵⁰ Reports by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel have questioned the value of placements away from home as a response to child sexual abuse or exploitation, with some reviews suggesting that this causes children to feel isolated and does not effectively reduce their exposure to harm.⁵¹

26. CONCLUSION

The pressure caused by rising numbers of children coming into care is putting serious strain on the system. The only way to effectively reduce these numbers is to address the factors outside the care system which are contributing to this demand, including poverty, poor parental mental health, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and extra-familial harms. This will require the Department for Education to work closely with other relevant departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions; the Department of Health and Social Care; the Home Office; and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

47 HM Government, [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#), December 2023

48 Barnardo's ([CSC0107](#))

49 The Children's Society ([CSC0163](#))

50 The Children's Society ([CSC0109](#))

51 Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Annual Report 2023 to 2024](#), December 2024 and [Annual Report 2020](#)

27.

CONCLUSION

We are deeply concerned about the Government's planned reforms to social security set out in the Green Paper Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working, which are set to drive up child poverty and will further increase pressure on the care system. We are also concerned that delaying the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy until the autumn of 2025 will prevent parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's welfare reforms in tandem with proposed child poverty reduction measures with an understanding of the impact of both sets of proposals in the round.

28.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must put in place a strategy for supporting children and young people at risk of extra-familial harm. This should include: better training for professionals to spot and respond to extra-familial risks; ensuring that young people and their families know where to go to access support; and improving approaches to ensuring that families can stay together as much as possible, for example by supporting them to move home when needed.

29.

RECOMMENDATION

We urge the Government to be bold in its upcoming Child Poverty Strategy and take wide-ranging action to reverse this trend and significantly reduce the number of children growing up in financial hardship.

30.

RECOMMENDATION

Following the changes agreed to the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill on 1 July 2025, we recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions ensures the involvement of organisations working with disabled children, young carers and care leavers in the co-production of the Timms Review.

Funding

31.

Children's social care in England is financed through local government expenditure. The amount that local authorities have been spending on children's social care has been rising quickly: annual local government expenditure on children's social care increased from £8.1 billion in

2014/15 to £12.8 billion in 2022/23—a 30% increase in real terms.⁵² The Department for Education described the cost of children’s social care as “financially unsustainable.”⁵³ The Local Government Association (LGA) said that children’s social care is “increasingly cited by councils with this responsibility as their key source of financial pressure and overspend”⁵⁴ and Councillor Arooj Shah, Chair of the Children and Young People Board at the LGA, told us that most local authorities are “at the brink of falling off the cliff edge” regarding funding.⁵⁵

32. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care recommended in 2022 that implementing the comprehensive reform programme would require £2.6 billion of new spending over four years, comprising £46 million in year one, £987 million in year two, £1.257 billion in year three and £233 million in year four, plus an additional estimated £50 million on other interventions over this period.⁵⁶ The previous Government’s 2023 children’s social care strategy, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, set out plans for £200 million in additional investment over the next two years.⁵⁷ The evidence we heard criticised this “significant” disparity with the amount recommended by the Review⁵⁸ and research by the Children’s Charities Coalition estimated that delaying investment in children’s social care would result in the Government spending an additional £1bn over ten years.⁵⁹
33. The current Government increased overall funding for local authorities by £4.4 billion in 2025/26, an increase of 6.8% in cash terms or 4.3% in real terms.⁶⁰ This includes an £880 million increase to the Social Care Grant, which covers both adult and children’s social care, and the new £270 million Children’s Social Care Prevention Grant. At the Autumn Budget 2024, the Government also announced £40 million in new investments to support children in kinship and foster care, £4 million for fostering hubs, and £90 million of capital investment in children’s homes.⁶¹ Witnesses to our inquiry welcomed the additional investment, but expressed doubts as to whether it would be enough: Matthew Horne, Chief Executive of Innovation Unit, said that it was “a lot of money, but it is nowhere near sufficient” and Councillor

52 House of Commons Library, [Reform of children’s social care in England](#), Research Briefing 9818, 21 March 2024, p9

53 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

54 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

55 [Q317](#)

56 The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022

57 Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#), February 2023

58 [Q1](#) [Katharine Sacks-Jones]; [Q5](#) [Lynn Perry]

59 Action for Children, Barnardo’s, National Children’s Bureau, NSPCC, The Children’s Society ([CSC0051](#))

60 House of Commons Library, [Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26](#), Research Briefing 10184, 4 February 2025, p4

61 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

Shah said that “there are still huge concerns, issues and pressures that we have to address to ensure that we are able to provide the support that our communities need.”⁶² We asked Minister Daby whether the Department for Education had conducted an assessment of the amount of spending that would still be needed to reform children’s social care and whether the Department for Education was working towards the Review’s figure of £2.6 billion. The Minister said that negotiations were taking place as part of the Spending Review and that she would be able to share the outcomes of this in the future.⁶³

34. As discussed above, the Government announced at the 2025 Spending Review that £555 million would be allocated from the Transformation Fund to support children’s social care reform over the next three years, which will “help more children stay with their families, ensuring families have timely support and fixing the broken care market.”⁶⁴ £75 million will be allocated in 2025/26; £271 million in 2026/27; and £207 million in 2027/28. The Government also announced additional funding of £560 million between 2026/27 and 2029/30 to “refurbish and expand children’s homes and foster care placements.”⁶⁵

35. **CONCLUSION**

We warmly welcome the additional funding for children’s social care and capital investment in children’s homes announced at the recent Spending Review, which will be an important step forward in working towards the amount recommended by the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care. It would now be helpful for the Department to set out the level of funding that is still required to fully implement the recommendations of the Review and how it intends to work towards achieving this level.

36. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education should produce an analysis of the level of funding that is still needed to achieve the necessary reforms to children’s social care and set out how it will work towards achieving the level of funding recommended by the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care.

62 [Q316](#)

63 [Q446](#)

64 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), 11 June 2025

65 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), 11 June 2025

2 Supply of social care placements

Sufficiency

- 37.** We received a great deal of evidence highlighting severe shortages of appropriate placements for children in care caused by the rising need discussed in Chapter 1.⁶⁶ Ofsted stated that there are “significant and continuing shortages of children’s homes and foster carers”⁶⁷ and the Children’s Homes Association described an “acute and unprecedented sufficiency crisis,” particularly for children with high needs and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).⁶⁸ However, others argued that there were enough placements across the country overall, but that the challenges were finding appropriate placements to meet children’s needs in the right areas:⁶⁹ research from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) found that only 63% of fostering places were filled, and the homes for the largest children’s homes providers had an average occupancy rate of 83%.⁷⁰ The Local Government Association highlighted the “unequal geographical distribution” of children’s homes and argued that “sufficiency must be seen in terms of suitability, rather than the number, of placements”.⁷¹
- 38.** Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to ensure they have sufficient placements for children in their care.⁷² They are required to set out how they will meet this duty in their relevant commissioning strategies.⁷³ Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, said that

66 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); Together Trust ([CSC0054](#)); Family Action ([CSC0057](#)); NAHT ([CSC0072](#)); Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and the Nuffield Foundation. ([CSC0106](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0109](#)); Nagalro ([CSC0137](#))

67 Ofsted ([CSC0031](#))

68 The Children’s Homes Association ([CSC0095](#))

69 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); County Councils Network ([CSC0033](#)); Marie Tucker (Independent Consultant and Associate at I support and advise several public & independent organisations) ([CSC0087](#));

70 Competition and Markets Authority ([CSC0036](#))

71 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

72 [Children Act 1989](#), Section 22

73 Department for Education, [Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children](#), March 2010

“a significant number of councils do not produce sufficiency plans, even though they are required to”⁷⁴ and research from What Works for Children’s Social Care found that 44% of local authorities did not have a publicly available, up-to-date sufficiency strategy.⁷⁵ We heard recommendations for the Government to develop a national sufficiency strategy setting out what provision was needed across the country and how it would support local authorities to deliver this.⁷⁶

Out-of-area placements

39. We heard a lot of concern about the increasing numbers of children being placed far from their local area as a result of the lack of capacity. In 2024, 45% of looked-after children were placed outside of their local authority, and 22% were placed over 20 miles from home.⁷⁷ Evidence highlighted the distressing impacts this can have on children who have already experienced significant trauma and instability in their lives, including disruption to education and healthcare; separation from people close to them and support networks; an increased risk of sexual or criminal exploitation; and an increased risk of going missing.⁷⁸
40. Many of the care-experienced young people we spoke to had been placed outside their local area at some point during their time in care. Louise Fitt spoke of having experienced racism for the first time when she was placed in an area with a different demographic to her own, and Georgia Sullivan described having to get up at 4am and take long-distance trains to go to school while her local authority were attempting reunification with her birth family.⁷⁹ Lamar Mohsen had been moved 100 miles away for respite placements when her foster carers went on holiday, which she described as a “horrible experience”. She told us:

These frequent moves to respite were often during school term, which affected me in more ways than I can explain. Sitting in reception after school hours, after school was closed, waiting for taxis to come to get us. Sometimes social services never booked them. I remember being told to “Think of it as a holiday for you too”. While they were off to

74 [Q23](#)

75 What Works for Children’s Social Care, [Are local authorities achieving effective market stewardship for children’s social care services?](#), March 2022

76 Become charity ([CSC0096](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0109](#));

77 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), November 2024

78 Become charity ([CSC0096](#)); The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition ([CSC0048](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0109](#))

79 [Q420](#); [Q422](#)

Mallorca, I was off to Luton [...] I have not pursued higher education due to the frequent moves. I cannot. I think another big change is something I would not be able to handle.”⁸⁰

41. Some evidence also highlighted that out-of-area placements can be the right thing for children in some circumstances; for example, those who are at risk in their local area or have had traumatic experiences in an area.⁸¹ The Children’s Services Development Group said that one of their members had “experienced several out-of-area placement requests as a first choice”.⁸² However, John Pearce, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, said that there was only a “very small number of cases” where that applied.⁸³ The Children’s Homes Association argued that “it is unrealistic to expect there to be specialist residential provision within each local authority in the same way as it is not possible to have specialist children’s hospital provision in every area.”⁸⁴ Several witnesses to our inquiry argued that it would be helpful if there was data available to identify what proportion of children were placed out of area because it was in their own interests compared with those placed out of area due to capacity problems.⁸⁵
42. The Minister for Children and Families (Janet Daby MP) told us: “Placing children outside of the 20 miles should not be happening. We recognise how serious this is [...] We are fully aware of this and have an agenda to tackle it.” She stated that the Department was working on building capacity through recruitment and retention of foster carers and through capital investment in children’s homes.⁸⁶ In response to a question about collecting data on the reasons for children being placed out of area, Fran Oram, Portfolio Director of Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for Education, said that she was “not sure if data is always the best way of getting under the skin” of complex cases and that “too many children in care and not enough placements are the two problems and we are acting very strongly on both of those things.”⁸⁷
43. There are some positive examples of local authorities developing programmes to reduce the numbers of children going into care and thereby reducing spending on placements and the numbers of out-of-area placements, both through development of their own in-house provision

80 [Q418](#)

81 Hampshire County Council ([CSC0047](#)); Marie Tucker ([CSC0087](#)); Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) ([CSC0098](#))

82 Children’s Services Development Group ([CSC0043](#))

83 [Q102](#)

84 The Children’s Homes Association ([CSC0095](#))

85 Marie Tucker (Independent Consultant and Associate) ([CSC0087](#)); Q16 [Katharine Sacks-Jones]; Q134 [Lucy Croxton]

86 [Q437](#)

87 [Q442](#)

and through working with the private sector. For example, North Yorkshire County Council developed the No Wrong Door programme which provides support and outreach to adolescents on the edge of care and aims to move those in residential care into family settings, which has reduced the number of children coming into care and those placed out of area.⁸⁸ Plymouth City Council’s programme “Family Homes for Plymouth Children” is taking a number of steps to reduce out-of-area placements, including developing its own in-house residential care, alongside improved support for foster carers and moving children out of residential care into family homes where possible.⁸⁹ Dr Ray Jones of Kingston University, told us that it “amaze[d]” him how well certain areas were doing despite the challenges in rising demand, citing Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Leeds and Essex as examples of local authorities who had achieved good outcomes through local provision of children’s homes, stable leadership and a supportive workforce culture.⁹⁰

44. CONCLUSION

Too many children are being sent many miles from home, which has a traumatic and lasting impact on their lives. We were saddened to hear that a care-experienced young person had chosen not to pursue higher education as a direct result of being placed out of area. However, there are some strong examples of good practice and some local authorities have worked hard to limit the numbers of children placed out of area.

45. CONCLUSION

We disagree with the Department’s view that data on the reasons for out-of-area placements are not needed. While data collection itself may not directly lead to improvements, it is essential to fully understand the nature and scale of the problem in order to effect meaningful change.

46. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must publish a national sufficiency strategy for children’s social care as a matter of urgency and publish data on the extent to which sufficiency requirements are being met on an annual basis. It should also require all local authorities to develop and publish strategies for reducing the number of out-of-area placements and work with local authorities to share and scale up examples of good practice.

88 Innovation Unit, [Scaling and Spreading No Wrong Door](#), accessed 25 April 2025; [Q325](#) [Matthew Horne]

89 Plymouth City Council, [Family Homes for Plymouth Children](#), February 2025

90 [Qq58-59](#)

47.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should collect data on the proportion of children who are placed out of area because it is in their own interests compared with those placed out of area due to capacity issues, so that the situation can be properly monitored and any improvements can be recognised.

Children's social care placement delivery

48. Children's social care is delivered through a mixed market of private, voluntary, and local authority services. The private sector plays a particularly key role in the provision of children's homes: in 2024, private companies ran 83% of children's homes and provided 77% of places, while local authorities ran 13% of children's homes and provided 16% of places. In the past 5 years, there has been a 70% increase in private-sector homes, a 10% increase in voluntary-run homes and a 7% increase in homes run by local authorities.⁹¹ In fostering, independent fostering agencies account for 44% of fostering households, up from 41% in 2020.⁹² This is in contrast to the system in Germany, which the previous Committee learned about on their visit to Berlin, where a high proportion of services is delivered by non-profit organisations.
49. Evidence to the inquiry expressed mixed views about the role of the private sector in children's social care. The Local Government Association (LGA) said that a mixed market could bring benefits as "a private or voluntary sector provider may have specialist expertise or may be able to focus on delivery of particular placement types."⁹³ John Pearce, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, said that there are "some very high-quality, mainly small, private providers that have a lot to offer in this space"⁹⁴ and Ofsted stated that "private sector providers can offer excellent care and accommodation."⁹⁵ Others expressed stronger views against the role of for-profit provision in the sector: Stuart Ashley, Director of Children's Services at Hampshire County Council, said that he thought it "morally wrong" to profit from vulnerable children,⁹⁶ and Maris Stratulis, National Director of British Association of Social Workers England, said that it was "abhorrent to think that profits are being made from the vulnerabilities of children and young people."⁹⁷

91 Ofsted, [Main findings: children's social care in England 2024](#), July 2024

92 Ofsted, [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024](#), December 2024

93 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

94 [Q119](#)

95 Ofsted ([CSC0132](#))

96 [Q99](#)

97 [Q351](#)

50. There was broad agreement among witnesses that some providers were making higher profits than necessary. Roger Gough, Children’s Services Spokesperson for the County Councils Network, said that there are “elements of the market where there are clearly excess profits”, which had not been followed by investment in new capacity,⁹⁸ and Lucy Croxton, Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager at the Together Trust, said that “excessive profiteering is damaging the relationship [...] between commissioners and providers”.⁹⁹ Dr Mark Kerr, Chief Executive of the Children’s Homes Association (CHA), agreed that the CHA would “never support profiteering”¹⁰⁰ but argued that the largest providers were not representative of the sector as a whole, and that “the small SME [small and medium-sized enterprises] micro-providers that we are relying on are the ones that we need to expand, and they are making much smaller margins.”¹⁰¹ The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published a market study in 2022 which concluded that the largest providers were “making materially higher profits, and charging materially higher prices, than would be expected if the market were functioning effectively”. It also highlighted that some large providers were carrying high levels of debt, which carried a risk of “disorderly failure” which could disrupt the placements of children in care.¹⁰² Minister Daby told us that the “profiteering beggars belief” and pointed to the reforms set out in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill (discussed in further detail in the next section).¹⁰³
51. We heard examples of some extremely high-cost placements in children’s homes. Research from the LGA highlighted the rising numbers of placements costing over £10,000 per week: the number of English councils paying for such placements rose from 120 in 2018/19 to 1,500 in 2022/23, and the proportion of councils paying for at least one placement costing at least £10,000 a week had increased from 23% to 91% over the same period.¹⁰⁴ Witnesses cited a number of reasons for such high-cost placements, including the lack of capacity in the sector; excess profit-making by providers; difficulty among local authorities in engaging effectively with the market; and regulations restricting the numbers of children in a home. We heard about the problem of local authorities being forced into “spot purchasing” of beds, which pushes up the cost of placements: Matthew Horne, Chief Executive Officer of Innovation Unit, described “social workers ringing around dozens and dozens of providers to find any bed in an

98 [Q98](#)

99 [Q140](#)

100 [Q145](#)

101 [Q327](#)

102 Competition and Markets Authority, [Children’s social care market study: Final report](#), March 2022

103 [Q459](#)

104 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

emergency”¹⁰⁵ and Stuart Ashley said that “the provider knows that there are no other available beds, so they can charge more or less what they like.”¹⁰⁶ We also heard that costs can rise due to children with high needs having to be placed alone in a home. Stuart Ashley explained:

In many of my homes I have four beds but often there is only one child in there. Ofsted will come in, do an inspection and rightly say, “This child is very high risk and has high complex needs. You should not place anybody else with this child.” It puts a restriction on it, so my one bed that is costing me £4,000 a week is now costing me £16,000 a week.¹⁰⁷

52. We heard several suggestions that local authorities should develop more in-house provision to reduce reliance on the private sector.¹⁰⁸ In the Autumn Budget 2024 the Government announced that £90 million of capital funding would be made available to renovate and expand the children’s home estate;¹⁰⁹ Fran Oram, Portfolio Director for Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for Education, told us that this would create 200 new places, focused on open (as opposed to secure) children’s homes for children with more complex needs.¹¹⁰ She told us that local authorities will be able to put forward different proposals as to how the homes are run, but that the aim was to “make sure that new entrants to the system are there with the right motivation and the right ethos of caring for the child first and foremost and not profit.”¹¹¹ In the 2025 Spending Review, the Government announced an investment of £560 million between 2026–27 and 2029–30 to refurbish and expand children’s homes and foster care placements.¹¹²

Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill

53. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes a number of provisions to reform the children’s social care market. These include:
- introducing a financial oversight scheme for certain non-local authority providers of children’s homes and independent fostering agencies

105 [Q318](#)

106 [Q99](#)

107 [Q117](#)

108 Hampshire County Council ([CSC0047](#)); Children’s Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#)); Refugee Council ([CSC0182](#)); Barnardo’s ([CSC0107](#)); Q97 [John Pearce]

109 HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2024](#), October 2024

110 [Q479](#)

111 [Q480](#)

112 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), 11 June 2025

- giving the Secretary of State the power to make regulations capping the profits of non-local authority providers of children’s homes and fostering agencies at a set level
- giving the Secretary of State the power to direct two or more local authorities to establish “regional co-operation arrangements” for the purposes of carrying out their functions relating to accommodation for looked after children.¹¹³

54. We heard general support for the proposed financial oversight scheme, although Dan Turnbull, Senior Director for Markets at the CMA, highlighted the importance of ensuring that the “right type of expertise and resource is put into managing” the scheme.¹¹⁴ Witnesses were more cautious about the possibility of a cap on profits. Roger Gough, Children’s Services Spokesperson for the County Councils Network, said that it was “worth having as a power if other measures don’t work”, but that the root causes of high profits should be addressed first, and Dan Turnbull agreed that it was “very sensible to have as a backstop”, but “would not recommend it as the first policy direction to go in.”¹¹⁵ Both warned that there were risks involved with implementing a profit cap, including a risk of restricting the supply of places and in causing providers to exit the market.¹¹⁶ Dr Mark Kerr, Chief Executive of the Children’s Homes Association, told us that “large multibillion-pound corporations will find a way of gaming” any cap, and “it will be the smaller SME micro-providers that struggle because they do not have ways or international corporate structures that allow them to avoid that cap.”¹¹⁷ Minister Daby said that the Department recognised this risk and that they were “looking at how [they] make sure that everything is transparent, open and not hidden” and committed to sharing future updates on the proposed cap as it is developed.¹¹⁸

55. Evidence to the inquiry expressed mixed views about the model of regional care co-operatives (RCCs). RCCs were a key recommendation of the 2022 Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and are currently being trialled in two regions (Greater Manchester and the South East).¹¹⁹ Dan Turnbull said that the CMA were “very supportive” of the proposal, as they had recommended a move to regional commissioning as part of their market

113 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clauses 10, 14, 15 & 16

114 [Q384](#)

115 [Q389](#)

116 [Qq389–390](#)

117 [Q327](#)

118 [Qq461–2](#)

119 Department for Education, [Regional Care Cooperatives \(RCCs\): pathfinder regions](#), November 2024

study of the sector.¹²⁰ Several organisations expressed support for a more regional approach to commissioning in principle and suggested that this would strengthen the position of local authorities in the market and may improve the sufficiency of places.¹²¹ However, we heard that there had been limited consultation and engagement with the sector in the development of the pathfinders and that they risked decision-making being removed from local authorities.¹²² There was some doubt as to whether they would result in real change, with John Pearce, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, suggesting that it would be “four to five years, at best, of pretty challenging structural change and upheaval to get to a model where there is no real evidence that it is going to make any significant difference.”¹²³ The Local Government Association said that RCCs need a “far stronger evidence base” and called for a “test and learn approach” to rolling them out.¹²⁴ Roger Gough said that “the general principle seems to be a sound one”, but that there were “reservations” about the current pilot in the South East, explaining:

Getting the geography right is important. For instance, at the moment the south-eastern co-operative covers all those south-eastern counties running from Kent across to—at least in theory—Hampshire. That may not necessarily make a great deal of sense from the point of view of what your catchment area or area of overlap is. From a Kent point of view, for example, big parts of south London are an important point of overlap. We have many children from London authorities placed in parts of Kent, so there would be significant interest in getting that overlap right. Clearly the geography there is very different.¹²⁵

Fran Oram told us that regional commissioning was “very much at the early stages” and that the Department had commissioned an evaluation of the RCC pathfinders to take place over five years. She said that they would be “watching how the pathfinders go” before using the powers in the Bill to expand RCCs to more areas.¹²⁶

120 [Q386](#)

121 Ofsted ([CSC0031](#)); Children’s Services Development Group ([CSC0043](#)); The Fostering Network ([CSC0068](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0109](#))

122 Children’s Services Development Group ([CSC0043](#)); The Children’s Homes Association ([CSC0095](#)); Become ([CSC0114](#))

123 [Q109](#)

124 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

125 [Q394](#)

126 [Q456](#)

56.

CONCLUSION

The children's social care market is not delivering for children or for local authorities. We are particularly concerned at the reports of excessive profits being made by some providers and the risk of financial failure among large providers. We hope that the reforms set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will address this and expect the Department for Education to provide regular updates on progress.

57.

CONCLUSION

The proposed profit cap has the potential to be a useful tool for the Department if needed, but we do not think it is acceptable for the Department to introduce this significant intervention in the market with only limited opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny and no transparency around how and when the Department will decide if it is necessary to trigger the cap.

58.

CONCLUSION

We are supportive of the move towards regional commissioning but note that the model of Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) being implemented has yet to be evaluated or proven to work. When developing any further RCCs, the Department for Education must consult fully with the sector and pay careful attention to the geography to ensure that RCCs are working as effectively as possible.

59.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should set out how it will monitor the impact of its reforms to the children's social care market and commit to updating Parliament on an annual basis on the impact they are having.

60.

RECOMMENDATION

If and when any further Regional Care Co-operatives are developed, the Department for Education must consult fully with relevant individuals and organisations in the region, particularly as to the areas covered by the proposed RCC. In cases where there is significant overlap in work between the areas within an RCC and the surrounding areas, the Department must ensure that there is appropriate flexibility for local authorities to work across boundaries to ensure that RCCs are delivering as effectively as possible.

61.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must set out how it will assess whether a profit cap on children's social care providers is necessary. If the Department decides to introduce a profit cap, it must consult this Committee on the draft regulations before they are laid before Parliament.

3 The care system

62. Our inquiry has covered all forms of children’s social care, including foster care, adoption, kinship care and residential care, as well as care for disabled children (discussed in chapter 4). Department for Education data shows that, in 2024, 56,390 looked-after children (67%) were in foster care, 8,640 (10%) were in secure homes or children’s homes, and 2,220 (2%) were placed for adoption.¹²⁷ There are no official statistics on children in kinship care, but the charity Kinship estimates that there are more than 141,000 children living in kinship care in England and Wales—three times the number in unrelated foster care.¹²⁸

Foster care

63. Professor June Thoburn, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of East Anglia, told our predecessor Committee that England does foster care “better than most countries”¹²⁹ and that children placed in long-term, well-managed and stable foster families experienced positive outcomes.¹³⁰ The care-experienced young people we heard from had had mixed experiences of being in foster care. One told us that foster care had been “hit and miss”, describing one set of foster parents as “amazing” but that another had made the young person feel that they were a burden.¹³¹ Another care-experienced young person described one of their foster carers as “lovely and great”,¹³² while a third had had a more negative experience of foster carers who had gone on three holidays in the space of six months shortly after they arrived, leaving them in respite care.¹³³
64. The inquiry heard about a number of problems within foster care, most notably difficulties with recruitment and retention of foster carers. James Bury, Head of Policy, Research and Development at CoramBAAF, described a “crisis in fostering” and Ofsted said there was a “national shortage of foster carers” with an 8% decrease in approved foster carers and fostering

127 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), November 2024

128 Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

129 [Q46](#)

130 Professor June Thoburn (Emeritus Professor at UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families) ([CSC0012](#))

131 [Q419](#)

132 [Q422](#)

133 [Q418](#)

places since 2019.¹³⁴ The Fostering Network estimated that 6,500 additional fostering families are needed in England.¹³⁵ Ofsted data shows that, in 2022/23, only 6% of initial enquiries to become a foster carer resulted in an application, and under half (46%) of applications were approved, with 53% withdrawn by the applicant or service.¹³⁶

- 65.** The Fostering Network cited a number of causes of the difficulties with recruitment and retention. These include: the inadequacy of financial support available; the “postcode lottery” of pay between different areas; lack of support from social workers and fostering services; and a lack of value and respect from other professionals.¹³⁷ Housing shortages and the lack of spare bedrooms were also cited by some as barriers to recruitment of foster carers.¹³⁸ The Fostering Network is calling for a national register of foster carers to improve matching children with foster carers and raise the status of foster carers. Sarah Thomas, Chief Executive of the Fostering Network, said:

There is a register for care workers; there is a register for youth workers; there are a number of different registers. That enables services to make sure that they can maintain quality, consistency, ensure learning and development remains of standard practice, give independence to foster carers, and ensure that they feel respected and valued as part of that team around the child. A register of foster carers would also enable local authorities to see where foster carers are, and where services are, and make sure that availability of foster carers was transparent, so that they could make the best, informed matches for children.¹³⁹

- 66.** We also heard calls for a national fostering strategy to sit alongside the national strategies on adoption and kinship care; a national foster carer recruitment campaign; a statutory minimum entitlement to time off work for foster carers who work outside the home as well as fostering; and a national recommended fee framework for foster carers with an inflationary uplift each year.¹⁴⁰ The Minister for Children and Families (Janet Daby MP) said that “foster carers are like gold dust” and that the Department would review the proposal to have a national strategy for fostering.¹⁴¹ Fran Oram, Portfolio Director for Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for

134 [Q315](#); Ofsted ([CSC0031](#))

135 The Fostering Network ([CSC0150](#))

136 Ofsted, [Recruitment and retention in mainstream fostering](#), March 2024

137 The Fostering Network ([CSC0150](#))

138 Coram ([CSC0101](#)); Children’s Services Development Group (CSDG) ([CSC0162](#)); The Fostering Network ([CSC0068](#))

139 [Q159](#)

140 CoramBAAF ([CSC0102](#)); Q319 [James Bury]; The Fostering Network ([CSC0150](#))

141 [Qq463–4](#)

Education, said that the national minimum allowance for foster carers increased by 6.88% in 2024/25, above inflation, and that the evidence suggests that pay is “not the predominant cause of shortages of foster carers.” She also highlighted that the Department is “keen to have people come into fostering because they want to care for children rather than for a financial benefit.”¹⁴²

67. The previous Government committed to improvements in fostering through measures such as regional recruitment hubs and rollout of the Mockingbird model, a programme that builds a community around children, young people and foster families through building six to ten satellite families (“constellations”).¹⁴³ The Department stated that it has committed £15 million to regional recruitment hubs, including £4 million announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, which will allow them to “scale up so that all local authorities have access to a hub.” The Department stated that “each local authority in the programme has also worked with The Fostering Network to implement or roll out ‘Mockingbird’, the well-evidenced retention model.”¹⁴⁴ In the 2025 Spending Review, the Government announced an investment of £560 million between 2026–27 and 2029–30 to refurbish and expand children’s homes and foster care placements; no further information has yet been provided as to what proportion of this funding will be allocated to foster care and what form the funding will take.¹⁴⁵
68. The Fostering Network expressed strong support for the Mockingbird model, citing research finding that foster carers supported by this model were less likely to consider resigning and more likely to recommend fostering than those who were not part of Mockingbird, and recommended that Mockingbird be rolled out to all local authorities.¹⁴⁶ We heard more cautious support for regional hubs: the Fostering Network said that they were a “step in the right direction” but that it was too early to know whether they would improve recruitment in the long term.¹⁴⁷ Dr Mark Kerr, Chief Executive of the Children’s Homes Association, said that he was “nervous about regionalisation being held up as the solution in so many different areas” and suggested that foster carer recruitment was better placed within local authorities to ensure that children were placed locally.¹⁴⁸

142 [Q463](#)

143 Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#), February 2023

144 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

145 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), 11 June 2025

146 The Fostering Network ([CSC0150](#))

147 The Fostering Network ([CSC0150](#))

148 [Q321](#)

69. We also heard strong concerns about sibling separation for children in foster care. Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to place siblings together “as far as is reasonably practicable”, and to promote contact between them if they are not together.¹⁴⁹ However, the Fostering Network stated that 26% of siblings within the care system end up apart from each other in foster placements.¹⁵⁰ Lamar Mohsen, a care-experienced young person, told us about the impact of being separated from her siblings in foster care:

Birthdays and Christmas presents have sometimes gone months without them receiving them. I currently have two Christmas presents under my bed yet to be unwrapped by them. I am arguing that the contact team at social services should also arrange sibling contact for the children. This should be communicated across all foster carers, if applicable, to agree on time and date to have the children see each other. This is because my relationships with some of my siblings are not strained but just awkward. The bonding and communication that should have happened as we grew up just did not. We all became independent at a very young age.¹⁵¹

70. The Children’s Commissioner recommended that legislation should be introduced which would mean that children in care should be placed with their siblings whenever it is in their best interests, and be better supported to have contact with siblings if separated from them.¹⁵² Minister Daby agreed that “sibling contact is extremely important” and said that the Department would be conducting analysis on the implementation of regional care co-operatives on “building the foster care base so that foster carers are able to take more sibling placements.”¹⁵³ She cited the size of foster carers’ homes as one barrier to taking larger sibling groups and referenced a pilot scheme, Room Makers, which supports foster carers to renovate their homes to take on more children.¹⁵⁴ The Minister told us that the Department does not hold data on the extent of sibling separation in foster placements, but agreed that it would be “crucial” to get this data from local authorities.¹⁵⁵

149 [Children Act 1989](#), Section 22C; [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#)

150 The Fostering Network ([CSC0068](#))

151 [Q418](#)

152 Children’s Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#))

153 [Q465](#)

154 [Q468](#); Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Greater Manchester fostering scheme, ‘Room Makers’, wins national award](#), December 2023

155 [Q466](#)

71.

CONCLUSION

The shortage of foster carers is a key cause in the crisis in the supply of placements for children in care, with an additional 6,500 fostering families needed. Yet too many prospective foster carers do not complete the application and approval process, and those who do find themselves left with inadequate support and undervalued for the important work they do.

72.

CONCLUSION

There are many positive examples of innovation and good practice in local authorities to support foster carers. In particular, we heard clear support for the Mockingbird model and were interested to hear of the Room Makers scheme to enable carers to renovate and expand their homes. We welcome the additional funding for foster care placements announced in the Spending Review and look forward to seeing further detail as to how this funding will be spent.

73.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must put in place a national fostering strategy to complement the existing strategies for adoption and kinship care. As part of this, it should consult on introducing a national register of foster carers and review the financial support available to ensure that it is adequate to meet their needs.

74.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should fund the planned recruitment hubs to set up Mockingbird constellations in every local authority. The Department should work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that housing policy is designed to support the recruitment of foster carers. This should include: investing in and scaling up innovative housing programmes such as Room Makers; giving approved foster carers priority for a move to a larger home if needed; enabling local authorities to fund housing extensions and adaptations for foster carers; and enabling local authorities to use the planning system to secure larger social homes for allocation to eligible social housing tenants who are approved as foster carers.

75.

CONCLUSION

Sibling relationships are crucial for many children in care and, for some, may be the only family relationships they have. They must be protected and supported as much as possible. The lack of any data on the extent of sibling separation makes it difficult to understand the main causes of the problem and devise effective strategies to reduce it.

76.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should strengthen the legislation relating to sibling contact to ensure that children in care are placed with siblings whenever it is in their best interests, and that where they cannot be placed together, regular contact between siblings is facilitated and sustained. The Department should collect data on sibling separation in all forms of care and publish this on at least an annual basis.

Kinship care

77. Kinship care is currently defined by the Department for Education as “any situation in which a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member who is not their parent.”¹⁵⁶ Kinship care can occur through a number of routes, including informal arrangements; a Child Arrangements Order; a Special Guardianship Order; or being ‘looked after’ by the local authority and placed with kinship foster carers.¹⁵⁷ The evidence we received highlighted the benefits of kinship care in comparison to other forms of care, with children in kinship care experiencing lower rates of placement breakdown, higher satisfaction, and better educational, health and employment outcomes than children in local authority care.¹⁵⁸ Dr Lucy Peake, CEO of the charity Kinship, spoke of the benefits of “continuity of care, stability, prior relationship with a kinship carer, somebody who knew and loved you already who steps up and says, “I will care for you forever.””¹⁵⁹ Georgia Sullivan, a young person who had experienced kinship care, described her relationship with her kinship carers as “absolutely fundamental to my wellbeing and my mental health. It was a loving, caring, beautiful environment where I felt nurtured and valued, and I felt known, and I felt seen.”¹⁶⁰

156 Department for Education, [Kinship Care: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), October 2024

157 Kinship ([CSC0025](#))

158 Professor June Thoburn (Emeritus Professor at UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families) ([CSC0012](#)); The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

159 [Q157](#)

160 [Q420](#)

78. Evidence highlighted the difficulties faced by kinship carers, particularly financial difficulties, and the lack of parity in support with other forms of care. Kinship’s research showed that kinship carers were four times more likely than other UK adults to have had a bill they were unable to pay in the last month and more than twice as likely to be using food banks,¹⁶¹ and Dr Peake stated that 67% of children in kinship care live in a deprived household.¹⁶² Kinship also highlighted the employment difficulties faced by kinship carers, with many kinship carers leaving their job, taking early retirement or substantially reducing their hours upon taking a child into their care.¹⁶³ Dr Peake told our predecessor Committee:

[Kinship carers] are typically women, and they are often leaving the labour market for the second time—they have raised their own children already. They are forced to turn to the benefits system. I have carers ringing in my ears all the time who will say I would not change that for the world, I did that because I wanted to do it, but I have impoverished myself, today, tomorrow and forever. It is not just their income now that they are struggling around; it is that fear about their pension; the fear about living the rest of their life relying on the benefits system, when they had been people who were working, were saving, were doing everything that they were supposed to do.¹⁶⁴

79. We also heard about differences in the educational support available to children in kinship care compared with children in local authority care. There are a number of policies in place to provide additional support in education for children in care, including through Pupil Premium Plus funding;¹⁶⁵ priority admissions to schools;¹⁶⁶ Virtual Schools;¹⁶⁷ and the designated teacher role for looked-after children.¹⁶⁸ This support differs in its availability for children in kinship care depending on the type of kinship care they are in and whether or not they are considered a previously looked-after child. Kinship described this as a “complex, inadequate and often inaccessible landscape of support”¹⁶⁹ and Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Kinship, told us that the Government needed to “harmonise that patchwork of educational support for all children who have

161 Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

162 [Q186](#)

163 Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

164 [Q186](#)

165 Department for Education, [Pupil premium: overview](#), March 2025

166 UK Government, [School admissions: Admission criteria](#), accessed 30 April 2025

167 Department for Education, [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children](#), February 2018

168 Department for Education, [The designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children](#), February 2018

169 Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

experienced some kind of trauma, separation and loss.”¹⁷⁰ We also heard about the lack of therapeutic and emotional support for kinship families, with kinship carers worried about managing their kinship children’s social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties.¹⁷¹ Georgia Sullivan told us:

My kinship placement eventually broke down because they were not afforded the supports, the emotional and psychological support as well as the funding. Obviously, money is a huge issue in this scenario, but the psychological and social support was actually more important to us as a family [...] Their needs were not met to support me and so they could not meet my needs, and my mental health deteriorated.¹⁷²

80. The Department for Education’s written evidence states “When children cannot live with their parents, we know that a family-based care setting is often the next best alternative.”¹⁷³ It is putting in place a number of measures to improve support for children in kinship care and their families. These include: appointing the first National Kinship Care Ambassador, Jahnine Davis, to advocate for kinship children and their carers; piloting a new kinship allowance in up to 10 local authorities this year; introducing kinship leave for the Department’s staff; and launching new Kinship Care statutory guidance for local authorities.¹⁷⁴ The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill also included measures on kinship care, including: introducing definitions of a child living in kinship care and kinship carers; requiring local authorities to publish a “kinship local offer” setting out the support they provide to kinship families; and extending the role of Virtual School Heads to include children in kinship care.¹⁷⁵
81. Sam Turner welcomed the proposed legal definition and the kinship local offer, but highlighted that “there isn’t a huge amount of point signposting to support which does not exist” and suggested that local authorities should consider what more support they could offer to kinship families.¹⁷⁶ He welcomed the upcoming trial of a kinship allowance, but called for the Government to “go further and to roll out a national minimum allowance that is equivalent to the fostering allowance”, as well as bringing in paid leave for kinship carers.¹⁷⁷

170 [Q404](#)

171 Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

172 [Q420](#)

173 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

174 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

175 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clauses 5 & 6

176 [Q403](#)

177 [Q406](#)

82. CONCLUSION

Kinship care is an essential part of the care system and the evidence is clear that children in kinship care have an overall better experience than children in other types of care. We welcome the Department for Education's focus on kinship care, but this must be underpinned by the right policies to support kinship carers. In particular, kinship carers must have enough financial and employment support so that they are not left to struggle as a result of taking children into their care.

83. RECOMMENDATION

In its upcoming pilot of a kinship allowance, the Department for Education should ensure that the financial support is on a par with that given to foster carers. It must evaluate the pilot at the earliest opportunity and roll it out across the country once it has proven to be effective.

84. RECOMMENDATION

It was a missed opportunity not to include statutory kinship leave in the recent Employment Rights Bill. The Government should ensure that entitlements to kinship leave are included in its forthcoming review of the parental leave system and legislate for this at the earliest opportunity. As part of the review, the Government should critically evaluate whether kinship carers should receive the same entitlements to paid leave as adoptive parents when a child comes into their care.

85. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should extend Pupil Premium Plus funding and priority school admissions to all children who meet the new statutory definition of living in kinship care.

Adoption

- 86.** Adoption is the legal process by which a child or a group of siblings who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent and legal members of a new family. The adoption process can take place if a child is removed from their birth parents due to a risk or reality of significant harm, if their birth parents cannot be found, or if their birth parents consent to an adoption.¹⁷⁸ Adoption services are delivered through 33 regional adoption agencies (RAAs) who work together as Adoption England.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ UK Government, [Child adoption: Overview](#) (accessed 30 April 2024)

¹⁷⁹ The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

- 87.** Evidence highlighted that adopted children have better outcomes across a range of measures than children growing up in care and adoption placements rarely break down; however, adopted children can still experience the impact of early childhood trauma following adoption and require ongoing support throughout their childhoods.¹⁸⁰ We heard about the ongoing impact of abuse and trauma that adopted children have suffered in their early lives: Emily Frith, Chief Executive of Adoption UK, told our predecessor Committee that eight out of 10 adopted young people experienced neglect or abuse before they were adopted and cautioned against the “myth that adoption is a happy ending.”¹⁸¹
- 88.** Adoption UK highlighted the importance of additional support for adopted children in education as a result of this, stating that adopted children are more likely to be excluded from school, more likely to have social, emotional and mental health difficulties and are more likely to leave school with no qualifications. Their research found that three quarters of adopted young people and adults said they needed more support than their peers while they were in school, yet more than half felt they didn’t receive the support they needed.¹⁸² Support in education through Pupil Premium Plus, Virtual Schools and the designated teacher role have been extended to include previously looked-after children; Emily Frith described this as a “really positive” change, but suggested that an evaluation of their impact would be helpful to assess whether support is reaching the children who need it.¹⁸³ Adoption UK also recommended introducing a statutory framework for previously looked-after children and requiring local authorities to publish a “local offer” for previously looked-after children.¹⁸⁴
- 89.** Evidence to the inquiry raised concerns about a shortage of adopters, which is causing long waits for children to be adopted. Adoption UK stated that adopter registrations declined by 14% between the second quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023 and that adopted children are waiting on average two years and five months to be adopted, two months longer than the previous year and up from two years in 2019.¹⁸⁵ James Bury, Head of Policy, Research and Development at CoramBAAF, said that there were “significant challenges in finding adopters and finding homes for children who are the hardest to place”, in particular children over five, children with

180 Professor June Thoburn (Emeritus Professor at UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families) ([CSC0012](#)); Adoption UK ([CSC0126](#))

181 [Q174](#)

182 Adoption UK ([CSC0126](#))

183 [Q175](#)

184 Adoption UK ([CSC0076](#))

185 Adoption UK ([CSC0076](#))

disabilities and children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁸⁶ Minister Daby told us that she “recognise[s] that more needs to be done in this space and [is] determined that it absolutely does happen.”¹⁸⁷

90. Evidence to the inquiry highlighted the importance of adequate support for adoptive families both before and after adoption. Emily Frith said that many adopters “feel like the biggest challenge for them is fighting the system to get the support their child needs”¹⁸⁸ and Adoption UK is calling for every child to receive a multi-disciplinary assessment of support needs before placement, which is used to inform a support plan with a duty on the local authority to deliver the support required.¹⁸⁹ We also heard some concerns about families’ access to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF), which provides funds for therapeutic services for adoptive and special guardianship families. We heard that the fund is a “lifeline” which “really makes a difference” to children and families¹⁹⁰ but that families face delays in accessing support.¹⁹¹ Emily Frith highlighted that, as the funding is renewed on an annual basis, there is a “cliff edge” every year, and called for the fund to be made permanent.¹⁹² This year, the continuation of the fund was confirmed on 1 April in response to an urgent question in the House—one day after the funding was due to end. Minister Daby told the House that she “regret[ted] the delay in making this announcement” and recognised that the delay had had an impact on children, families and providers of therapy.¹⁹³ The funding limits are now set at £3,000 per child per year, a reduction from £5,000, which has caused concern among many stakeholders.¹⁹⁴ The Minister told the House that she had “had to make some really difficult decisions, but [had] chosen the fairest approach to manage tight resources in the face of increasing demand for support.”¹⁹⁵
91. The previous Government put in place a National Adoption Strategy in 2021, which intended to improve adoption services through recruitment campaigns, removal of delays, and improvements to staff training. The current Government’s 2024 social care strategy, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive, included a commitment to provide funding for Adoption England to “support Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to improve recruitment, matching and post adoption support while promoting

186 [Q323](#)

187 [Q475](#)

188 [Q180](#)

189 Adoption UK ([CSC0076](#))

190 [Q175](#) [Emily Frith]

191 Adoption UK ([CSC0076](#))

192 [Q175](#)

193 HC Deb, 1 April 2025, [col 170](#)

194 [DfE makes huge cut to Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund payments](#), Community Care, 14 April 2025

195 HC Deb, 28 April 2025, [col 21](#)

consistency by setting national standards in adoption practice across the country.”¹⁹⁶ The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill does not contain any measures relating to adoption.

92. CONCLUSION

There is too little recognition of the impact of the early trauma and separation experienced by adopted children, and of the support they need to thrive in education and beyond, with over half of adopted children feeling that they didn’t receive the support they needed at school.

93. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should review the educational support available to adopted children, assessing the impact of the extension of policies to previously looked-after children and whether any further extensions are needed. This review should include: the introduction of a statutory framework for previously looked-after children; requiring local authorities to publish a local offer for previously looked-after children; and expanding the role of Virtual School Heads to include previously looked-after children beyond the provision of information and advice.

94. CONCLUSION

It is unacceptable that the continuation of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund was not announced until 1 April 2025, leaving families and children uncertain about the future of their support. We also note many concerns about the new funding limits and the impact this will have on children and families. We are concerned that this is an example of the Government making a consequential change in one part of the system without introducing the reforms and mitigations in other parts of the system that are urgently needed. In this case, there is an urgent need to make mental health support available for adopted children, which could reduce pressure on the ASGSF, but the Government has not laid out how this will be achieved, leaving adoptive families very anxious that they will find it harder to access support.

¹⁹⁶ Department for Education, [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#), November 2024

95.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department must end the annual cliff-edge of uncertainty faced by adoptive families and make funding for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund permanent. It should monitor the impact of the reduced funding limits after 12 months of the reduced personal limit and engage with organisations representing adoptive families to assess whether there have been significant negative effects and commit to increasing the limits in the future if so. The Department must also consult on introducing a support plan for adopted children with appropriate duties to ensure that support is provided.

Residential care

96. As well as the issues relating to the cost of residential care outlined in Chapter 2, the inquiry also heard concerns about the quality of residential care and workforce shortages. Professor June Thoburn, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at University of East Anglia, told our predecessor Committee “we do residential childcare, particularly what I call ordinary children’s homes, less well than most European countries.”¹⁹⁷ We heard many criticisms of the perception of children’s homes as a “last resort” for placing children in care: Professor Thoburn said that this meant that “we let children, teenagers and young people who need to be in residential care fail two or three or more times”¹⁹⁸ and the Care Leavers Association argued that “stable and well-resourced residential care offers a solution to some of the current problems of the care system.”¹⁹⁹ Several submitters suggested that this perception had led to a lack of incentives for local authorities and providers to invest in and develop high-quality residential provision.²⁰⁰ There were also concerns about difficulties recruiting and retaining staff for children’s homes, and the lack of training and support for staff. Ofsted highlighted that 12% of children’s homes do not have a registered manager, which is “the factor that is most likely to lead to a decline in quality for children.”²⁰¹ Professor Thoburn suggested that there should be an apprenticeship for residential childcare workers and said:

197 [Q46](#)

198 [Q46](#)

199 The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#))

200 Marie Tucker (Independent Consultant and Associate) ([CSC0087](#)); Professor June Thoburn (Emeritus Professor of Social Work at UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families) ([CSC0127](#)); Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); Children’s Services Development Group ([CSC0043](#))

201 Ofsted ([CSC0031](#))

We should be ashamed of what we have done about the training of residential childcare workers. We have no training for them. We do not go out into schools and say, “You should think about being a residential childcare worker”, as the Europeans do, or train our residential care workforce properly [...] People move from all over the place into residential care, unqualified. We need the knowledge, the values and the skills. They move in and they train on the job.²⁰²

97. The Department for Education’s children’s social care policy paper, *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*, stated that “we should support children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care”, as this would improve outcomes for children and reduce costly spending on residential care.²⁰³ The Department’s written evidence acknowledged that there “will continue to be a need for high quality residential care which meets the needs of the children, including those dealing with complex trauma” and highlighted that the Government had committed £90 million of capital funding in the Autumn Budget 2024 to renovate and expand the children’s home estate.²⁰⁴ It also states that “making sure that residential settings are staffed by a skilled and sufficient workforce is key to ensuring children are protected and cared for” and said that it had launched a children’s home workforce census in September 2024 to improve understanding of the challenges.

98. **CONCLUSION**

We agree that, for most children, a focus on supporting them to live in a family setting is the right one; however, this should not come at the expense of developing and maintaining high-quality residential care for children who need it. We urge the Department for Education to focus on the quality of provision as well as capacity and take steps to improve recruitment, retention and training of the children’s home workforce.

99. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department for Education must ensure that all children’s homes are led by a registered manager and set out the steps it intends to take to achieve this. Additionally, it should launch a recruitment campaign to raise the profile of residential care staff and encourage more entrants into the sector.

202 [Qq69-71](#)

203 Department for Education, [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#), November 2024

204 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

100.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should use its children's home workforce census to review the levels of qualifications currently held by residential staff. It should also consult on introducing minimum qualification standards for residential childcare workers and work with local authorities to assess what initial action can be taken to upskill the existing workforce.

Supported accommodation

101. We heard a great deal of concern about the rise in the number of children placed in supported accommodation, also termed semi-independent accommodation. Children aged 16 and 17 can be placed in this type of accommodation by local authorities, where they receive “support” rather than “care”. Barnardo's said that the number of children living in this type of provision increased by over 100% since 2019, with almost half of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children living in these placements.²⁰⁵ Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, said that this accommodation “might be a hostel or a B&B or even a barge or caravan”²⁰⁶ and Lucy Croxton, Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager at the Together Trust, told our predecessor Committee that she had heard “harrowing” stories of children “living in a caravan for multiple months at a time.”²⁰⁷ Georgia Sullivan, a care-experienced young person, had had mixed experiences of living in supported accommodation. She described her first placement as “fantastic” with a “high level of support,”²⁰⁸ but was then moved to a placement with a lower level of support. She told us:

Those following placements, I was one of the few that had their head down in school. I was in a flat with someone else, another care leaver, with no support, no staff on site. It was just a flat share. Many of the people that I lived with had difficulties with substance misuse. They had involvement with gang-related activity. There was a lot of exploitation happening. There was county lines involvement, and this was the environment that I had to live in and move between.²⁰⁹

102. Since April 2023, Ofsted has been required to register and inspect providers of supported accommodation. Guidance and quality standards were published by the Department for Education in March 2023.²¹⁰ The Department told us that there are 258 registered providers and that Ofsted

205 Barnardo's ([CSC0107](#))

206 [Q27](#)

207 [Q150](#)

208 [Q420](#)

209 [Q420](#)

210 Department for Education, [Providing supported accommodation for children and young people](#), March 2023

has carried out 50 full inspections, with a further 500 to be completed in 2025/26.²¹¹ The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill also gives Ofsted more powers to fine unregistered provision.²¹²

- 103.** The evidence we received welcomed this, but there were some suggestions that it has not yet had an impact on reducing the numbers of unsuitable placements: the Children’s Society said that “evidence shows that children continue to be placed in unsuitable and at times illegal placements”²¹³ and Katharine Sacks-Jones said that the situation had “got worse since the introduction of a new regulatory regime.”²¹⁴ Some suggested that children under 18 should not be placed in semi-independent accommodation at all,²¹⁵ and Lucy Croxton told our predecessor Committee that “the £145 million initial investment in helping providers of semi-independent accommodation register would have been better spent in helping them get to the regulatory standard to become regulated children’s homes.”²¹⁶ The Children’s Commissioner recommended that universal care standards should be introduced, aligning regulatory frameworks across care settings.²¹⁷ The 2022 Independent Review of Children’s Social Care recommended that the Government develop a new set of Care Standards which should apply to all homes where children live, including semi-independent accommodation.²¹⁸

104. CONCLUSION

It is unacceptable that vulnerable children are being placed in unsuitable homes such as barges and caravans with little or no support. The new regulatory and inspection regime is an important step in the right direction, but the Department for Education needs to go further and ensure that all children under 18 receive care where they live, rather than simply support.

²¹¹ Letter from the Minister for Children and Families to the Chair, [8 April 2025](#)

²¹² [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clause 17

²¹³ The Children’s Society ([CSC0163](#))

²¹⁴ [Q27](#)

²¹⁵ British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#)); Together Trust ([CSC0054](#)); The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#)); Become charity ([CSC0096](#)); Centre for Young Lives ([CSC0154](#))

²¹⁶ [Q150](#)

²¹⁷ Children’s Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#))

²¹⁸ The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022

105.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must follow the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and develop universal standards of care that apply to all homes, including supported accommodation, ensuring that children in all settings receive care where they live.

The social care workforce

106. Our evidence describes many serious issues affecting the social care workforce, including high turnover and recruitment and retention difficulties. The Local Government Association (LGA) reported “significant concerns” around the social care workforce, with 83% of councils reporting difficulties recruiting social workers.²¹⁹ Witnesses to our inquiry said that high staff turnover is having an impact on the experiences of children in care by exacerbating the instability they experience. Katharine Sacks-Jones spoke of children “constantly having to rebuild relationships, the revolving door of professionals who make huge decisions about their life, and having to tell their story repeatedly is a massive challenge.”²²⁰ Georgia Sullivan, a care-experienced young person, said that she had had eight social workers or personal advisers between the ages of 16 and 25.²²¹ We also heard that high turnover can mean that safeguarding concerns are not dealt with effectively: Annie Hudson, then Chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, explained that high workforce churn “undermines the quality of decision-making” and means that agencies do not communicate and share information effectively.²²²
107. Evidence cited a number of different causes of the difficulties in recruiting and retaining social workers. In particular, we heard about:
- *Pay*: the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) said that social workers had had the “worst pay growth in the past decade” compared with other public sector professions.²²³ Family Action said that the salaries offered “do not attract people to make a career in family support or social work as people can earn a similar wage in less complex, responsible and stressful jobs.”²²⁴ BASW called for a national pay review and for social worker salaries to keep pace with increases in other public sector professions.²²⁵

219 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

220 [Q338](#)

221 [Q421](#)

222 [Q380](#)

223 British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#))

224 Family Action ([CSC0057](#))

225 British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#))

- *Workload:* Frontline said that 54% of social workers struggle to manage their high caseloads and 47% do not have enough time to spend with the families they work with.²²⁶ Maris Stratulis, National Director of BASW England, told us that BASW heard from social workers “dealing with far too much work, dreading coming into work, not sleeping at night because they are worried about the children and young people on their caseload.”²²⁷
- *Lack of understanding of and respect for the role:* Matt Clayton, Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers at Coventry City Council, described a perception of social workers as “someone that stole babies”²²⁸ and Annie Hudson said that there was “weak public understanding about what social workers do” and that their work “comes into the public limelight only when something goes drastically wrong.”²²⁹ We heard calls for a national recruitment campaign for social workers to improve public understanding of the role.²³⁰
- *Student bursaries:* BASW stated that social work student bursaries had been frozen for eight years and that the number of bursaries available had been capped since 2013, which was affecting recruitment of students and causing students to drop out of courses.²³¹ The Association of Professors of Social Work stated that applications to social work qualifying courses had been declining for several years.²³²

108. We also heard concerns about the increase in the use of agency social workers in response to the difficulties with recruitment and retention. According to the LGA, social workers are leaving to join agencies due to increased pay, more flexibility and a different working culture, and highlighted that the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care estimated that the additional cost of employing agency staff was £26,000 per worker per year.²³³ Matt Clayton told our predecessor Committee that he was now seeing CVs from agency workers who were “basically just newly qualified social workers” who had “not had the time and investment in a local authority with a CPD to get to a level that you need to be at to come in.”²³⁴

226 Frontline ([CSC0067](#))

227 [Q352](#)

228 [Q211](#)

229 [Q382](#)

230 [Q206](#) [Mary Jackson]; [Q211](#) [Matt Clayton]; [Q219](#) [Lucille Allain]; British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#)); Frontline ([CSC0067](#))

231 British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#))

232 Association of Professors of Social Work ([CSC0037](#))

233 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

234 [Q219](#)

- 109.** There are some signs that the situation is beginning to improve: the latest Department for Education data shows that, in 2024, there were 34,300 children and families social workers—an increase of 3.7% from 2023 and the highest since the data series started in 2017. There were 7,200 vacancies, down 6.9% from 2023, and 6,500 agency social workers in post, down 9.2% after peaking in 2023. The average caseload was 15.4, the lowest since the data series started in 2017.²³⁵
- 110.** While difficulties recruiting social workers were most frequently referred to in the evidence we received, we also heard about recruitment and retention difficulties across a wide range of other social care professionals. These included residential care workers, personal advisers, educational psychologists, health visitors, and personal assistants for disabled children.²³⁶ Ofsted also said that there was a “national shortage of high-quality senior leaders” with “too many interim leaders moving from local authority to local authority.”²³⁷
- 111.** The previous Government developed and began to test a five-year early career framework (ECF) for social workers in response to a recommendation from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care.²³⁸ This was welcomed by witnesses, who described it as a “fantastic starting point” which would provide helpful structure and support for newly qualified social workers.²³⁹ The current Government has replaced the proposed five-year ECF with a two-year social work induction programme, which is currently open for consultation.²⁴⁰ The Government is taking steps to reduce the use of agency workers through the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which allows the Secretary of State to make regulations about the use of agency workers in children’s social care. The regulations could require agency workers used by local authorities to meet specified requirements; make provision about the way agency workers are to be managed; and make provision about the terms under which agency workers may be supplied, including the amount that may be paid.²⁴¹ Fran Oram, Portfolio Director for Children’s Social Care

235 Department for Education, [Children’s social work workforce](#), February 2025

236 Together Trust ([CSC0054](#)); [Q338](#) [Katharine Sacks-Jones]; Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); [Q382](#) [Andy Smith]; Contact (for families of disabled children) ([CSC0023](#))

237 Ofsted ([CSC0031](#))

238 Department for Education, [Apply to join the social work early career framework](#), March 2024

239 [Q201](#) [Mary Jackson]; [Q204](#) [Matt Clayton]

240 Department for Education, [Children’s social work post-qualifying standards and induction](#), March 2025

241 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clause 19

Reform at the Department for Education, also told us that the Department had set up a National Workload Action Group to look at workload pressures for social workers.²⁴²

112. CONCLUSION

There is a serious problem with recruitment and retention in the social care workforce. High turnover and overstretched staff are exacerbating the instability experienced by children in care and increase the risk of safeguarding concerns being overlooked. The Department for Education has begun to address this with the planned induction programme and regulations on the use of agency workers, but a wholesale review of the workforce is needed.

113. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should develop a workforce strategy for children's social care setting out how it will improve recruitment, retention and training across the children's social care workforce, including social workers, residential care workers, personal advisers, educational psychologists, health visitors, and personal assistants. This should include measures such as increased pay, bursaries for studying and training, and improving awareness of the different roles within children's social care.

Mental health support

- 114.** Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children they look after, which includes the promotion of the child's physical, emotional and mental health and statutory guidance sets out responsibilities for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England.²⁴³ Local authorities must arrange for the child to have a health assessment by a registered medical practitioner and ensure that the child has an up-to-date individual health plan. The assessment should include physical, emotional and mental health.²⁴⁴
- 115.** The evidence we received highlighted mental health as a key issue for children in care and care leavers. We heard that many children in care have experienced significant trauma and abuse, and that care-experienced

²⁴² [Q491](#)

²⁴³ [Children Act 1989](#); Department for Education and Department of Health, [Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children](#), March 2015

²⁴⁴ Department for Education and Department of Health, [Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children](#), March 2015

young people are significantly more likely to have a mental health problem than the general population: in 2021, 45% of care-experienced children aged 5 to 15 had emotional and mental health problems, compared to a rate of 10% for those who were not care-experienced.²⁴⁵ The care-experienced young people we spoke to all described experiences of poor mental health and emphasised the importance of strong mental health support: as Louise Fitt explained “You will not be okay if you are going into care; there is a reason why you are there.”²⁴⁶ Lamar Mohsen said that she had had “no mental health support” on entering care²⁴⁷ and said that she thought that “mental health check-ins are equally as important—if not more important—as physical check-ins for children in care.”²⁴⁸

116. We heard concerns about difficulties accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), a lack of specialist services for children in care, and a lack of joined-up working between local authorities and CAMHS.²⁴⁹ Georgia Sullivan, a care-experienced young person, described the waiting lists for CAMHS as “horrific” and suggested that looked-after children should have fast-track access to CAMHS and that specialist services for children in care should be available.²⁵⁰ A recent report by CoramBAAF and University College London highlighted the benefits of co-locating CAMHS and children’s social care professionals into a single mental health team, either through CAMHS staff seconded into a social care team or social care professionals seconded into a CAMHS children in care team. The report recommends that all local authority areas should have a co-located mental health service between children’s social care and CAMHS, which is commissioned to provide direct and indirect evidence-based support.²⁵¹
117. Dinithi Wijedasa, Associate Professor at Bristol University, said that while most local authorities do fulfil the duty to assess the mental health of children in their care, “this data is then not used by all local authorities to provide the support that children need” and some “do nothing at all.”²⁵² However, evidence from the young people suggested that emotional and mental health is not always being included in health assessments: Lamar Mohsen said “growing up it was only physical assessments, we didn’t have

245 The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition ([CSC0048](#)); Triple P UK & Ireland ([CSC0167](#)); The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#)); The Children’s Homes Association ([CSC0095](#)); Become ([CSC0114](#))

246 [Q429](#)

247 [Q418](#)

248 [Q429](#)

249 The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#)); Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); Kinship ([CSC0146](#))

250 [Q429](#)

251 CoramBAAF, [Increasing access to evidence-informed mental health service provision for children in care in England](#), May 2025

252 [Q77](#)

mental health check-ins at all.”²⁵³ In our recent report into the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, we concluded that strong mental health support is crucial for children in care, and that there is scope to strengthen the requirement for the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in the care system to be assessed.²⁵⁴ In its response to the report, the Department for Education stated that it had heard similar feedback and agreed that this was concerning. It stated that the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care were reviewing and updating the current statutory guidance and that, as part of this review, they would “consider what changes are needed to further ensure that children in care and care leavers receive the support they need for their mental health and wellbeing.”²⁵⁵

118. Evidence highlighted the importance of professionals understanding the impact of trauma and care experience when working with young people. The Care Leavers Association said that “most CAMHS services are too generic and do not fully meet the needs of children in care” and called for specialist trauma CAMHS services for children in care, as well as better support from children’s social care.²⁵⁶ Will McMahon, Project Worker at Care Leavers’ Association, said that “we do not see a sufficient response of specialist care to those who have post-traumatic stress”,²⁵⁷ and Lynn Perry, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s, highlighted that the impact of trauma was particularly acute for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.²⁵⁸ Jake Hartley, a care-experienced young person, said that he “d[id] not think there is much knowledge around care experience for young people in terms of the trauma that they go through, and how to help them” and Louise Fitt said “a lot could be explained if [professionals] understood the experience of trauma.”²⁵⁹
119. Minister Daby told us that the Department was “committed to making sure there are mental health provisions in school” and that it was “looking at how [it] can work more closely with the Department of Health [and Social Care] to make sure that children’s mental health needs within children’s social care are being addressed and met.”²⁶⁰

253 [Q429](#)

254 Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2024–25, [Scrutiny of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), HC 732, para 23

255 Education Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2024–25, [Scrutiny of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response](#), HC 925, para 22

256 The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#))

257 [Q29](#)

258 [Q25](#)

259 [Q429](#)

260 [Q497](#)

120. CONCLUSION

Children in care have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, and they are over four times more likely to suffer from emotional or mental health problems than their peers. It is therefore essential that there is a strong system in place to support them. Currently, the support available is falling far short of what is needed.

121. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should work with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that children in care and care leavers are prioritised for mental health support and improve training for mental health practitioners on the impact of trauma. This could be achieved by setting up co-located mental health services between children's social care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Department should work with the Department for Health and Social Care to pilot this approach.

122. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should take forward this Committee's recommendation to strengthen the role of mental health and emotional wellbeing in health assessments of children in care, ensuring that there is proper, effective accountability for meeting the current requirements.

Independent advocacy

- 123.** Children in care have a right to request an independent advocate at any time.²⁶¹ Advocates ensure that children are receiving the support they are entitled to and that their views are heard and their rights respected when decisions are being made about their lives. Evidence to this inquiry highlighted the importance of having an advocate and the difference it can make to children's lives: the Children's Commissioner cited research showing that 16- and 17-year-olds who presented as homeless to their local authority and accepted their offer of an advocate were statistically significantly more likely to be given care than children who declined it.²⁶² The National Youth Advocacy Service said that advocacy was a "fundamental way of ensuring the views, wishes and feelings of care-experienced children and young people can be heard by professionals around them."²⁶³

261 Department for Education, [Effective Advocacy for Looked-After Children, Children in Need and Care Leavers](#), September 2023

262 Children's Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#))

263 National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) ([CSC0156](#))

- 124.** However, take-up of advocacy services is low: research by the Children’s Commissioner in 2023 found that there was an average referral rate for advocates of 5%, and a wide range in referral rates (from 0% to 42%) across local authorities, and that only 65% of children received support from an advocate after being referred.²⁶⁴ The 2022 Independent Review of Children’s Social Care recommended that advocacy should be made an opt-out model and that the Children’s Commissioner should oversee advocacy services, with the powers to refer children’s complaints and concerns to the court.²⁶⁵ We heard strong support for this proposal from many organisations,²⁶⁶ and the National Youth Advocacy Service said that they were “disappointed” that the Government had not committed to any advocacy reforms in its children’s social care policy paper or in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill.²⁶⁷
- 125.** We also heard about the importance of advocacy for disabled children and their families.²⁶⁸ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s report into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings, which looked at the factors leading to the abuse in the Hesley Group in Doncaster, found that there was “little evidence” that advocacy was provided to children in the homes and recommended that all children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings should have access to independent advocacy.²⁶⁹ The National Youth Advocacy Service also expressed disappointment that the Government had not taken this forward and urged the Government to accept this recommendation.²⁷⁰

126. CONCLUSION

It is essential that children in care have a voice when important decisions are being made about their lives. Currently, too few children are accessing the advocacy support they are entitled to, with an average referral rate of just 5% across local authorities. It is also essential that disabled children and children with special educational needs, particularly those in residential care, have access to this support.

264 Children’s Commissioner for England, [The state of children and young people’s advocacy services in England](#), December 2023

265 The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022

266 The Children’s Society ([CSC0163](#)); Coram Voice ([CSC0169](#)); Become ([CSC0114](#)); Children’s Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#))

267 National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) ([CSC0156](#))

268 Challenging Behaviour Foundation ([CSC0188](#)); Q284 [Tina Emery]

269 Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, [Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings: Phase 2 report](#), April 2023

270 National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) ([CSC0156](#))

127.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must take forward the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care to introduce an opt-out model of independent advocacy for all children in care. It must also act on the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s recommendation for all children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings to have access to independent advocacy.

Reunification

128. We received some evidence highlighting the key role of reunifying children with their birth families when safe and appropriate. In 2024, 26% of children leaving care returned to live with parents or relatives—the most common route to leaving care.²⁷¹ June Thoburn, Professor of Social Work at University of East Anglia, told our predecessor Committee that that “carefully planned and resourced specialist support for children’s return to parents is as essential as it is for children leaving care for adoption or guardianship”.²⁷²
129. However, we heard that there is currently not enough of a focus on reunification within Government or local authorities. Research from the NSPCC and Action for Children found that 56% of 75 local authorities surveyed did not have a reunification policy or strategy, with only 19% having a standalone reunification team, despite 78% stating they would “like to provide more pre-reunification support than is currently offered”.²⁷³ Matt Clayton, Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers at Coventry City Council, told our predecessor Committee that the lack of focus on and support for reunification was a “real failure of the whole system” and that there was “a real role for the Government in sharing good practice”.²⁷⁴ The NSPCC and Action for Children recommended that the Government develop national reunification guidance, fund and implement a national initiative to deliver Family Help to reunified families, and evaluate and share good reunification practice.²⁷⁵
130. During its visit to Germany, the previous Committee saw a system with a strong emphasis on maintaining links between parents and children in care, which supported reunification. The previous Committee visited an innovative children’s home where parents and children were able to live together as a family within the home, supported by professionals for a defined period, and

271 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), November 2024

272 Professor June Thoburn (Emeritus Professor at UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families) ([CSC0012](#))

273 NSPCC ([CSC0111](#)); Action for Children ([CSC0160](#))

274 [Q227](#)

275 NSPCC ([CSC0111](#))

where that was not possible, parents visited children up to five times per week and engaged in the daily life of the home. This meant that reunification rates for these families were much higher and almost all children returned to their birth families after a period of time in the home.

- 131.** However, we also heard some concerns about the risks of reunification and the need to ensure that it is done with caution. Roger Gough, Children’s Services Spokesperson at County Councils Network, highlighted that reunifying children with their families can be difficult where family circumstances have changed and families “may not be in a position where they are used to sharing their lives with children”.²⁷⁶ Dinithi Wijedasa, Associate Professor at Bristol University, said that “some 40% of reunifications break down within the first five years because the parents do not have sufficient continued support over the years to maintain these reunifications.”²⁷⁷ Georgia Sullivan, a care-experienced young person, spoke of the additional instability created by the local authority attempting reunification with her birth family although she did not want this and was “actively advocating against” it.²⁷⁸ When asked about introducing national guidance for reunification, Minister Daby said that she would take it away and discuss it with relevant groups.²⁷⁹

132. CONCLUSION

When done carefully and effectively, reunification of children with their birth families can be a positive way of supporting children to leave care.

133. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should evaluate existing reunification practice and publish national guidance on reunification, drawing on the good practice that already exists in many local authorities.

276 [Q114](#)

277 [Q50](#)

278 [Q422](#)

279 [Q493](#)

4 Disabled children's care

- 134.** Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, all disabled children are classed as “children in need”. Families with disabled children are entitled to a number of services including short breaks from care (respite care), holiday play schemes, care at home, aids and adaptations, financial help and a ‘needs assessment’ where a social worker will discuss their health, social care and education needs.²⁸⁰ The Department for Education commissioned the Law Commission to conduct a review of the legal framework governing children’s social care, as recommended by the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care. They published a consultation paper setting out initial proposals in October 2024 and are due to conclude the review in summer 2025.²⁸¹ The Minister for Children and Families (Janet Daby MP) told us that the Department would review the recommendations and follow up with a response.²⁸²

Sufficiency and access

- 135.** Many of the issues we heard about within the broader children’s social care system were echoed in the evidence relating to disabled children’s care; in particular, problems around sufficiency of provision. In response to the question of whether the level of provision for disabled children is sufficient, the Disabled Children’s Partnership said that “the answer is a resounding ‘no’”, citing research that found that only one in seven families had the correct level of support from social care.²⁸³ We heard about a lack of availability of short breaks and respite care: research by Sense found that 57% of parents were not able to access all the short breaks and respite services that they needed²⁸⁴ and Contact said that “few overnight respite centres for disabled children remain.”²⁸⁵ Harriet Edwards, Head of Policy, Public Affairs and Research at Sense, told us that “a lot of areas are just a desert for holiday provision” and that “in some areas there is nothing that disabled children can access in the summer holidays and similar for wraparound care.”²⁸⁶

280 [Children Act 1989](#), Section 17

281 Law Commission, [Disabled children’s social care](#) (accessed 2 May 2025)

282 [Q499](#)

283 Disabled Children’s Partnership ([CSC0066](#))

284 Sense ([CSC0129](#))

285 Contact (for families of disabled children) ([CSC0023](#))

286 [Q351](#)

- 136.** Witnesses also said that parents struggle to navigate the system and to understand what they are entitled to, with families getting “bounced around the system” when trying to access support.²⁸⁷ Jo Harrison, Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums CIC, described a “postcode lottery” of support, with “little transparency” over which services were available in which areas.²⁸⁸ The Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) stated that “there is currently a national threshold for assessment, but thresholds for support remain locally determined, sometimes unlawfully.”²⁸⁹ Sense, Contact and IPSEA recommended that national eligibility criteria be introduced for disabled children’s care and that these be clearly communicated to parents so that they are aware of their entitlements.²⁹⁰

Assessment processes

- 137.** Evidence stated that disabled children’s care is often deprioritised by local authorities as capacity constraints mean that they focus on child protection:²⁹¹ Harriet Edwards said that “time and again, disabled children are being overlooked by the social care system.”²⁹² We heard worrying reports of inappropriate assessments being conducted by social services which focused on child protection rather than on support for parents. Jo Harrison, Co-Chair of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums CIC, told us that parents report being “viewed through a safeguarding lens rather than with a person-centred view” and “feel that they are blamed and fear social care engagement for fear of child removal.”²⁹³ Stephen Kingdom, Campaign Manager of the Disabled Children’s Partnership, told our predecessor Committee that “social workers are going into families where there is no evidence of abuse or evidence of safeguarding issues [...] and doing the same sort of assessment with the same assessment forms that they would for families where there were concerns about neglect or abuse.”²⁹⁴
- 138.** IPSEA and Contact suggested that social workers should receive training on the legal entitlements and particular challenges faced by disabled children and their families, and Contact called for specialist disabled social worker teams in local authorities to be established, who should lead separate

287 [Q258](#) [Tina Emery]

288 [Q334](#) [Jo Harrison]

289 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([CSC0050](#))

290 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([CSC0050](#)); Sense ([CSC0129](#)); Contact (for families of disabled children) ([CSC0023](#))

291 Disabled Children’s Partnership ([CSC0066](#)); Sense ([CSC0129](#))

292 [Q334](#)

293 [Q334](#)

294 [Q244](#)

assessment processes to reflect the distinct needs of disabled children.²⁹⁵ The Law Commission has proposed introducing a single duty to assess the social care needs of a disabled child that is set out clearly in legislation, and a statutory requirement that an assessment is proportionate and appropriate to the circumstances of the child and their family.²⁹⁶

Personal budgets

- 139.** Families of disabled children may be eligible to receive a ‘personal budget’ from their local authority to help with the costs of social care and support. As part of this, direct payments can be made to parents and carers to allow them to manage the support themselves; for example, to employ a care worker or personal assistant.²⁹⁷ The evidence we received was supportive of personal budgets but raised some concerns about how they worked in practice. The Disabled Children’s Partnership said that the amount of money available was “insufficient to meet costs”²⁹⁸ and Stephen Kingdom described local authorities putting “strong constraints” on how the money could be spent, which meant that parents could not always use it for what they needed.²⁹⁹ Harriet Edwards said that workforce shortages meant that families could not always get the staff they needed, and that the funding often came in “small packets” of support for, for example, two hours per day.³⁰⁰ Witnesses criticised the administrative burden placed on parents when employing personal assistants themselves. Tina Emery, then Co-Chair of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums, told our predecessor Committee:

Being an employer—having liability insurance, paying tax and insurance and national insurance for your worker—is really difficult [...] Even when you use a third party, as a local authority will sometimes offer, to pay these workers through, the system itself can be very complicated. You think it would be simpler. Families often get in a mess and feel like it is not worth claiming for because the worry of not paying somebody the right amount of tax or not having the right amount of money in their account to pay somebody is a bit nerve-racking for some families.³⁰¹

295 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([CSC0050](#)); Contact (for families of disabled children) ([CSC0023](#))

296 Law Commission, [Disabled Children’s Social Care Consultation Paper](#), October 2024

297 NHS, [Personal budgets and direct payments](#), accessed 2 May 2025

298 Disabled Children’s Partnership ([CSC0066](#))

299 [Qq265–266](#)

300 [Q335](#)

301 [Q266](#)

140. The Law Commission’s consultation set out two proposals on personal budgets: direct payments should be set at an amount that is sufficient to secure the provision needed, as opposed to an amount that is estimated to be reasonable; and that they should be kept under review, so that their sufficiency can be monitored, and alternative arrangements made if they are not working.³⁰² Minister Daby highlighted that this was a cross-departmental matter.³⁰³ The Department later wrote to us to state that individual local authorities are responsible for setting personal budgets, and that all local authorities are receiving an increase in funding in 2025 to 2026 through the National Funding Formula, and the total high needs budget for 2025 to 2026 will be £11.9 billion.³⁰⁴

141. CONCLUSION

Too often, disabled children are overlooked in the social care system. Parents struggle to understand and access the support available and face a confusing “postcode lottery” of support between local authorities. There is an urgent need to improve access to short breaks, respite care and holiday provision; it is unacceptable that over half of parents are unable to access the short breaks and respite services that they need.

142. CONCLUSION

It is deeply concerning to hear that parents of disabled children are being treated with suspicion and undergoing inappropriate assessment processes when reaching out for help. The Department for Education must address this as an urgent priority and ensure that it fully implements the Law Commission’s proposals relating to assessment processes once they have been published.

143. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must set out how it will implement the proposals in the Law Commission’s review of disabled children’s social care no later than two months following the publication of the review, which is expected shortly. This should include a clear timeframe and assessment of any spending required to implement the proposals.

144. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should introduce national eligibility criteria for disabled children’s social care and ensure that local authorities are clearly communicating these to families.

302 Law Commission, [Disabled Children’s Social Care Consultation Paper](#), October 2024

303 [Q498](#)

304 Letter from the Minister for Children and Families to the Chair, [8 April 2025](#)

145.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should conduct a review of the availability of short breaks, respite care and holiday provision for disabled children to understand where the shortages are most acute. It should work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to fund local authorities to be able to offer this provision to all families who are entitled to it.

146.

RECOMMENDATION

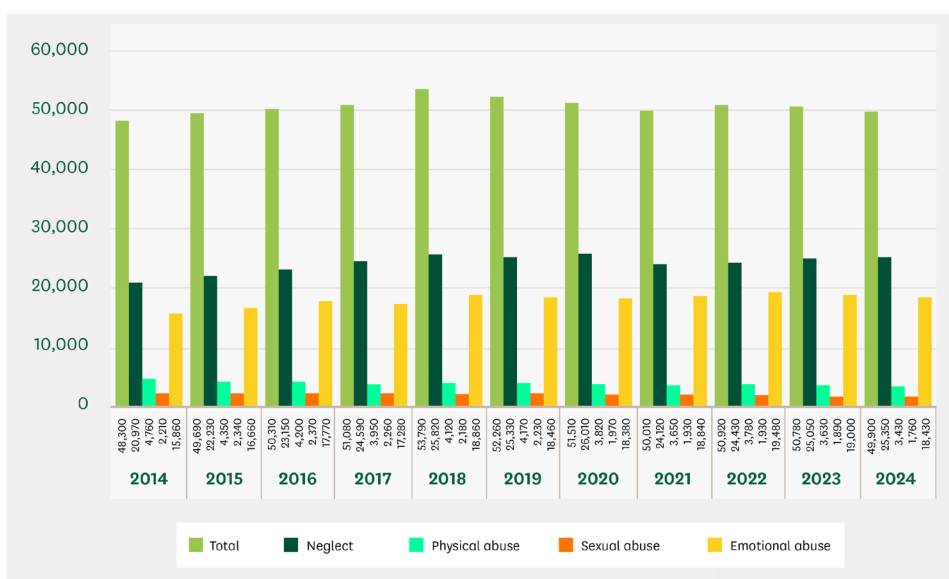
The Department should ensure that the specialist workforce for disabled children is included in the children's social care workforce strategy that we have recommended. The Department must review the training provided to children and families social workers and ensure that social workers are being adequately trained in the specific needs of disabled children and their families and the distinct type of assessment processes that are needed for this group.

5 Keeping children safe

Child protection

- 147.** Under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, a child protection investigation will be triggered when a local authority suspects a child is suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm at home.³⁰⁵ The Government’s statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, sets out the steps that must be taken in response to Section 47 enquiries, which may include putting the child on a child protection plan and taking the child into local authority care.³⁰⁶
- 148.** In March 2024, there were 49,900 children on child protection plans in England. This represents a slight fall from 50,780 since the previous year and an increase from 48,300 in 2014. The number of children on child protection plans rose between 2014 and 2019 and has been falling slowly since then.³⁰⁷ The chart below sets out the numbers of children on child protection plans broken down by type of abuse and neglect since 2014.

Figure 1: Number of children on child protection plans by category of abuse, 2014–2024



Source: Department for Education, [Statistics: Children in need](#)

³⁰⁵ [Children Act 1989](#)

³⁰⁶ Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), December 2023

³⁰⁷ Department for Education, [Statistics: Children in need](#), October 2024

- 149.** Although the number of children on child protection plans has decreased, we heard that this is not reflective of a reduction in the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. Witnesses from Barnardo's and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) said that they were seeing rising need across their services and said that there was a discrepancy between the numbers of children on child protection plans and those in need of support.³⁰⁸ Anna Edmundson, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the NSPCC, called for the Government to put in place funding for a national survey on the prevalence of the different types of abuse and neglect.³⁰⁹

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

- 150.** The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces a number of measures to improve the system of child protection. These include:
- introducing a Single Unique Identifier to improve information sharing across agencies
 - including childcare and education agencies in safeguarding arrangements
 - establishing multi-agency child protection teams in every local authority area
 - introducing a duty on local authorities to have and maintain registers of children not in school
 - introducing a requirement for local authority consent to home educate a child if they are subject to a Section 47 enquiry or on a child protection plan.
- 151.** The witnesses we heard from were broadly supportive of these measures. There was general agreement that the single unique identifier (SUI) would help information-sharing between agencies and witnesses praised the "sensible" approach taken by the Department for Education in piloting the policy; however, they also highlighted the importance of ensuring that data protection was carefully managed and that the IT systems were in place for the SUI to be compatible across agencies.³¹⁰ There was also support for the inclusion of education in safeguarding arrangements, with Annie Hudson, then Chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, stating that it was "beyond doubt" that the sector should be included.³¹¹

308 [Q354](#) [Lynn Perry; Anna Edmundson]

309 [Q354](#)

310 [Qq374-5](#) [Andy Smith; Rob Williams]

311 [Q377](#)

- 152.** Multi-agency working in safeguarding was a key theme highlighted in evidence to this inquiry. Evidence received prior to the publication of the Bill raised concerns about poor joint working between different agencies and professionals. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) described a “dysfunctional approach” to co-operation between services, which meant that “children’s needs are not being sufficiently met”.³¹² Annie Hudson told us that the design of the multi-agency system was “problematic” and created “silos” for assessment and decision-making, which means that “the timely and robust decision making that you need, particularly when children are at risk of significant harm, too often does not happen.”³¹³
- 153.** Witnesses therefore welcomed the provision for multi-agency child protection teams in the Bill. Lynn Perry, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s, said that working across agency boundaries was “critical to achieving better outcomes for children”³¹⁴ and Annie Hudson said that it had “real potential for a real sea change in how we protect and safeguard children”.³¹⁵ However, several witnesses highlighted that there was still detail to be worked out as to the implementation of the teams. Lynn Perry said that there would be a need for “real leadership to make sure that that is embedded on the ground, that there is good challenge and support between agencies and that it has real impact for children” and highlighted the importance of learning from the family first pathfinders to help inform implementation.³¹⁶ Rob Williams, Senior Policy Adviser at NAHT, and Andy Smith, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS), emphasised the need to consider the impact on workload and workforce wellbeing, and Andy Smith also highlighted that the Bill does not mandate other agencies to engage with the teams, meaning that “it is not clear yet whether other Government Departments will sign up”.³¹⁷ The Minister for Children and Families (Janet Daby MP) told us that the measures in the Bill would be “reviewed and continue to be reviewed, but we need to make sure that various Departments and professionals are all working together with a determined effort so that we are keeping children safe and protected.”³¹⁸

312 NAHT ([CSC0072](#))

313 [Q288](#)

314 [Q366](#)

315 [Q370](#)

316 [Q366](#)

317 [Q370](#)

318 [Q500](#)

154. CONCLUSION

The Department for Education's reforms to child protection through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill are welcome and go some way towards alleviating many of the concerns we have heard in this inquiry. There will be a need for careful testing and monitoring to assess the impact they are having and make any necessary changes as they are rolled out. However, there is a need for better data to fully understand the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect.

155. RECOMMENDATION

Multi-agency working is crucial in child safeguarding processes. Where there is disagreement between children's social care and other agencies such as health, police and education on a safeguarding matter, there must be clear processes in place to review and escalate concerns providing a clear line of accountability and decision-making.

156. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should make funding available for a national survey on the prevalence of the different types of abuse and neglect, to improve its understanding of these issues and inform the development of future policy interventions.

Neglect

- 157.** The Department for Education's statutory guidance defines neglect as "the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development."³¹⁹ Neglect is the most common form of harm for children subject to a child protection plan and has been rising since 2014, with 25,350 children currently on a child protection plan for reasons of neglect compared with 20,970 in 2014. Neglect was the only category of harm which saw an increase between 2023 and 2024.³²⁰
- 158.** The NSPCC expressed concerns that the child protection system is not well set up to respond to neglect, highlighting difficulty among professionals in identifying signs of neglect; slow responses to neglect referrals; and difficulty in identifying where neglect is "persistent" in a system focused on individual "incidents".³²¹ Much of the evidence also highlighted the relationship between poverty and neglect, and we heard some concerns about children being taken into care on the grounds of poverty, defined as

319 Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), December 2023

320 Department for Education, [Statistics: Children in need](#), October 2024

321 NSPCC ([CSC0111](#)); NSPCC ([CSC0133](#))

neglect.³²² We heard calls for “non-stigmatising” early help and support for families to tackle the issue,³²³ and the NSPCC recommended that the Government put in place a national neglect strategy, improve guidance for tackling neglect, and consider neglect as part of its Child Poverty Strategy.³²⁴ Minister Daby suggested that the Department’s work on family hubs and family group decision-making would help to improve this.³²⁵ However, witnesses told us that the current proposals on family group decision-making mean that it would come too late in the process to have a significant impact for many families.³²⁶

- 159.** Fran Oram, Portfolio Director of Children’s Social Care Reform at the Department for Education, told us that new Department data showed that the leading cause of a child coming into care is parental mental health, and highlighted the “real overlap” between neglect and mental ill health. Department data shows that concerns about a parent’s mental health was the most commonly identified factor in child in need assessments in 2024, identified in 165,480 cases out of a total of 506,370.³²⁷ She stated that the Department’s strategy and legislation was focused on “supporting the parents to do a good job to look after the child” in cases of neglect, rather than removing the child if this was not necessary.³²⁸

160. CONCLUSION

Neglect is sadly on the rise in England and is clearly linked to poverty and poor parental mental health. The Department for Education does not appear to have a clear strategy for addressing neglect and there are concerns that the social care system is not set up well to respond to neglect referrals.

161. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must put in place a national neglect strategy to set out how it will reduce the incidence of neglect.

322 Support Not Separation, Disabled Mothers’ Rights Campaign ([CSC0071](#)); Roma Support Group ([CSC0074](#)); [Q82](#) [Dr Ray Jones]

323 [Q356](#) [Lynn Perry]; [Q82](#) [Dr Ray Jones]

324 NSPCC ([CSC0133](#))

325 [Q502](#)

326 [Q361](#)

327 Department for Education, [Statistics: Children in need](#), October 2024

328 [Q502](#)

162. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should ensure that measures to reduce neglect and support parents with poor mental health and drug and alcohol addictions are considered as part of its Child Poverty Strategy and recognise that poverty is not the only circumstance in which neglect takes place and take a broader approach to tackling neglect.

Child sexual abuse

- 163.** The Department for Education’s statutory guidance defines child sexual abuse as “forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.”³²⁹ The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse estimates that 500,000 children were abused in England and Wales in 2023/24, but only 101,000 child sexual abuse offences were recorded by police in that year.³³⁰
- 164.** The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was established in 2015 to look at the extent to which institutions in England and Wales had discharged their duty to protect children from sexual abuse. Their final report was published in 2022 and made 20 recommendations to the Government, with three “centrepiece” recommendations of focus:
- introducing a mandatory reporting duty for child sexual abuse
 - establishing a national redress scheme for victims of child sexual abuse who have been let down by institutions in the past
 - creating a Child Protection Authority with powers to inspect any institution associated with children.³³¹
- 165.** On 9 April 2025, the Home Office published a progress update on tackling child sexual abuse. It sets out a number of IICSA’s recommendations that have already been acted on or are in progress, in particular the introduction of a mandatory reporting duty, and sets out a detailed timetable for implementing the remaining recommendations.³³²
- 166.** We did not take detailed evidence on child sexual abuse or IICSA’s recommendations as part of this inquiry. However, we did receive evidence regarding the proposal for a mandatory reporting duty and its possible impact on the sector. The Crime and Policing Bill published in February 2025 introduces a duty on individuals in certain roles to report child sexual

329 Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#), December 2023

330 CSA Centre, [Data Insights Hub](#), accessed 11 April 2025

331 Independent Inquiry Into Child Sexual Abuse, [Final Report](#), October 2022

332 Home Office, [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse: Progress Update](#), April 2025

abuse in the case of a disclosure from a child or perpetrator or if they have witnessed it in person or in an image, video or audio recording. There is no criminal sanction for failing to report, but the Bill creates a new criminal offence of obstructing an individual from making a report under the duty.³³³ By contrast, IICSA recommended a duty that included an individual observing “recognised indicators” of child sexual abuse, and that it should be a criminal offence for mandated individuals to fail to report abuse if they have witnessed it or in the event of a disclosure.³³⁴

167. Evidence we received prior to the publication of the Bill expressed concerns about the risk of overwhelming an already stretched system with increased reports, or about professionals becoming overly fearful of discussing sexual abuse. Rob Williams suggested that “to err on the side of caution, all those tiny little bits of information would be reported into social care and would overwhelm the system. That could create a situation where children are at increased risk because of the huge amount of information to wade through and those important ones are not picked up as quickly as they could be.”³³⁵ Andy Smith said that there was a “worry about reorientation and refocusing resources on handling reports rather than the change work with children and families that we need to do”, and Annie Hudson suggested that there was a risk that “people could potentially avoid thinking about a child being sexually abused and asking some of the open questions that might enable a child to talk”.³³⁶ We were not able to gather further evidence on this issue following the publication of the Bill.

168. When questioned on this matter, Minister Daby stated that she was unaware of the issue.³³⁷ Fran Oram told us that the Department was engaging with the Home Office to ensure that there were no adverse consequences from the policy, and that they were “working closely with the Home Office to ensure that things like Childline can continue to operate in a safe and supportive way for children where they need that support.”³³⁸ The Minister later wrote to us to state that she expects the duty to come into force 12 months after the Bill receives Royal Assent, and that the Department would be “working with the Home Office ahead of the duty coming into force to ensure successful implementation.”³³⁹

333 [Crime and Policing Bill](#) [as introduced], Bill 187 (2024–25), clauses 45–53

334 Independent Inquiry Into Child Sexual Abuse, [Final Report](#), October 2022

335 [Q383](#)

336 [Q383](#)

337 [Q507](#)

338 [Q508](#)

339 Letter from the Minister for Children and Families to the Chair, [8 April 2025](#)

169. CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need to take forward the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. The introduction of the mandatory reporting duty is an important step forward, but it is limited in scope to instances of a disclosure or witnessing abuse, which are rare occurrences. We were concerned that, when asked, Minister Daby was unaware of this despite the significant implications it will have for the social care sector and child protection.

170. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should improve training and guidance around reporting of child sexual abuse and work jointly with the Home Office towards implementing the more robust mandatory reporting duty recommended by IICSA, ensuring that the sector is well-prepared for this.

The role of Ofsted

- 171.** Ofsted is responsible for assessing the performance of children's social care as delivered by local authorities, through its inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) frameworks, and regulates and inspects children's social care providers using the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).³⁴⁰ Ofsted has a range of powers which include the power of entry into a regulated children's social care setting, and enforcement powers enabling Ofsted to refuse, suspend or cancel the registration of a children's services provider, as well as to carry out a criminal investigation leading to prosecution.³⁴¹ Inspections carried out under both frameworks currently result in judgements using a four-point scale of outstanding, good, requires improvement, and inadequate. Ofsted is currently in the process of replacing single-word judgements across its inspections; Sir Martyn Oliver, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, told us that this would happen later for children's social care than for education, estimating that the process would start in April 2026.³⁴² During its visit to Berlin, the previous Committee heard that Germany's decentralised system offered more flexibility in approaches to inspection processes, but lacked the uniformity and public reporting transparency of Ofsted.

340 Ofsted, [Inspecting local authority children's services](#), April 2025; Ofsted, [Social care common inspection framework](#), April 2025

341 [Care Standards Act 2000](#)

342 Oral evidence taken on 7 January 2025, [Q15](#)

- 172.** The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces a number of measures strengthening Ofsted’s powers of regulation and enforcement. It gives Ofsted the power to issue an improvement plan notice to a provider where it reasonably suspects there are grounds for cancelling the registration of two or more of the group’s settings, and allows Ofsted to issue a monetary penalty if the provider does not comply. The Bill also gives Ofsted the power to issue fines for breaches of the Care Standards Act 2000; for example, for operating an unregistered children’s home.³⁴³ The written evidence we received, including from Ofsted itself, was broadly supportive of these measures.³⁴⁴
- 173.** We heard some concerns that providers were reluctant to accept certain children, particularly those with complex needs, out of a fear that it would negatively affect their Ofsted rating. The Local Government Association said that, despite assurances at a national level, “local Ofsted inspectors can appear to penalise children’s homes where they are supporting children with particularly complex needs” and Hampshire County Council said “too often we see inspection outcomes downgraded because of the complexity of need that residential homes are dealing with”.³⁴⁵ Yvette Stanley, National Director for Regulation and Social Care at Ofsted, said that Ofsted was “tackling that perception head on” and Sir Martyn Oliver highlighted the need for caution, saying, “We must never allow people to use Ofsted as an excuse not to take vulnerable children, but neither must we allow vulnerable children to be placed in settings where they do not have the skillset to look after them”.³⁴⁶ Fran Oram agreed that this “absolutely does happen and is very problematic” and said that the Government’s capital investment into children’s homes would allow local authorities to develop more specialist provision so that children with complex needs could have their needs met.³⁴⁷
- 174.** We received some concerning evidence highlighting the practice of using handcuffs to transport children in care between placements or to school, court or hospital appointments. Written evidence from Hope instead of Handcuffs stated that “shockingly, many of these children are automatically put in handcuffs or subject to other forms of restrictive interventions by their secure transportation provider”, if they display “even the slightest sign of distress risks”.³⁴⁸ Yvette Stanley said that she was aware of the practice and that it was a “gap in regulation”, suggesting that “there are better

343 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clauses 12, 13 & 17

344 Ofsted ([CSC0132](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0163](#)); Mr Matt Blow (Policy and Public Affairs Manager at Become) ([CSC0191](#));

345 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); Hampshire County Council ([CSC0047](#))

346 Oral evidence taken on 7 January 2025, [Q29](#)

347 [Qq511-12](#)

348 Hope instead of Handcuffs ([CSC0005](#))

ways to support children in managing moves and helping them to self-regulate”.³⁴⁹ Minister Daby agreed that this was concerning and said that the Department was looking into it.³⁵⁰

175. CONCLUSION

The Department for Education has made some welcome steps towards increasing Ofsted’s powers of intervention in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. However, some key gaps in regulation remain, most notably the worrying practice of using handcuffs to transport children between settings. We are also concerned that fear of negative Ofsted ratings is causing providers to refuse children with complex needs, putting more pressure on an already overstretched sector.

176. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must act to strictly limit the use of handcuffs to those cases where it is otherwise unavoidable or necessary for the child’s own safety, and work with Ofsted to ensure that local authorities and transport providers are held accountable on this.

177. RECOMMENDATION

Ofsted and the Department for Education should ensure that the inspection system that replaces single-word judgements does not penalise providers who take on children with complex needs, while also ensuring that children with complex needs are placed in settings with the appropriate skills to provide a high quality of care and support, and that guidance is clearly communicated to providers.

349 [Q303](#)

350 [Q513](#)

6 Leaving care

Support for care leavers

178. There is a range of support available to young people when they transition out of the care system into adult life. Local authorities are required to put certain measures in place to support care leavers, including:

- Appointing a personal adviser to help care leavers transition to adult life
- Carrying out an assessment of what support the young person needs and putting a plan in place to ensure they receive this support
- Publishing a “local offer” setting out care leavers’ legal entitlements and the support available.³⁵¹

Local authorities are required to provide financial support to enable young people in foster care to remain living with their former foster family to age 21 through the Staying Put scheme. A similar scheme for residential care, Staying Close, is being piloted. There are also a range of grants and bursaries available, including for care leavers staying in full-time education, taking up apprenticeships, and a leaving care grant to enable them to set up their first home.³⁵²

179. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill places Staying Close on a statutory footing by requiring local authorities to assess whether care leavers aged under 25 require Staying Close support and placing them under a duty to provide it if so. It also requires local authorities to publish their arrangements for supporting and assisting care leavers in their transition to adulthood and independent living, as part of their local offer, and prevents care leavers under 25 from being classed as intentionally homeless.³⁵³

180. The inquiry received a great deal of evidence highlighting poor outcomes for care leavers across a range of measures, and the difficulties young people face on leaving care and transitioning into adulthood. The Department for

351 Department for Education, [Leaving foster or local authority care](#) (accessed 23 April 2025)

352 Department for Education, [Leaving foster or local authority care](#) (accessed 23 April 2025)

353 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [as amended in Public Bill Committee], Bill 177, Clauses 7–9

Education’s own written evidence describes the “long shadow” of leaving care and states that “care leavers have some of the worst long-term life outcomes in society across health, housing, education and employment”.³⁵⁴ Some of the disturbing statistics we received regarding outcomes for care leavers include:

- 39% of care leavers aged 19–21 are not in education, training or employment, compared to 13% of all young people aged 19–21.³⁵⁵
- 15% of care leavers go to university by age 19, compared to 47% of children who have not been in care,³⁵⁶ and care leavers are 38% more likely to drop out of university.³⁵⁷
- A third of care leavers become homeless within two years of leaving care, and it is estimated that a quarter of homeless people have been in care.³⁵⁸
- Almost a quarter (24%) of the prison population have spent some time in care.³⁵⁹

354 The Department for Education ([CSC0141](#))

355 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), November 2024

356 Department for Education, [Widening participation in higher education](#), October 2024

357 Unite Foundation ([CSC0177](#))

358 Unite Foundation ([CSC0177](#))

359 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#))

One third of care leavers become homeless within **two years** of leaving care.



15% of care leavers go to university by age 19, compared to **47% of children** who have not been in care, care leavers are **38% more likely** to drop out of university.

An **estimated quarter** of homeless people have been in care.



Financial and housing support

- 181.** We heard strong criticisms of the reduction in support when a young person turns 18 and the difficulties they face in navigating the adult world and transitioning to financial independence. Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive of Become, spoke of the “care cliff”, describing it as a “very abrupt transition to adulthood that is forced upon them, often well before they are ready”.³⁶⁰ The care-experienced young people we heard from spoke movingly about their experiences of this transition and the difficulties they faced in having to become financially independent at a young age, particularly while in full-time education. Lamar Mohsen, a care-experienced young person, said:

Last year I turned 18, which inevitably meant I am no longer a child in care. As I previously stated, I am on a staying put agreement, so with only three months until my A-levels, everyone’s attention shifted on to rent, universal credits and DBS checking. Navigating this with A-levels and my part-time job was extremely stressful.

For the first couple of months, I had to pay £580 per month in rent and when I had to reduce my hours that I worked in order to study for A-levels, I could not afford the rent. I remember being on the train to college realising I could not afford it. I started crying. Was this what it was going to be like from now on?³⁶¹

Louise Fitt, another care-experienced young person, had had to move out of foster care on turning 18 as her carers did not want to participate in Staying Put. She told us:

I was not working at the time because that was not my focus; my focus was: let me study, let me get this, I want to go to university [...] Then it got to a point where I could not even juggle my A-levels and working, I had to drop A-levels because I had to afford to eat and live. I was on universal credit at the time, but I have always wanted to work. I always wanted an education, but I had to sacrifice that because I have to eat, I have to have a roof over my head; that is so important. We should not have to choose between that. We should be allowed to study if we want to. We should not have to worry about, “No, drop that, and try to go to work”.³⁶²

- 182.** Evidence to the inquiry expressed strong concerns about the risk of homelessness among care leavers. Katharine Sacks-Jones said that there had been a “significant increase in the rates of homelessness among young

360 [Q35](#)

361 [Q418](#)

362 [Q428](#)

care leavers over the last five years” and that this is an “area that absolutely needs attention”.³⁶³ Jake Hartley, a care-experienced young person, had experienced homelessness three times in the past year.³⁶⁴ Georgia Sullivan, another care-experienced young person, had had to declare herself as homeless after turning 16 in order to receive support, which she said “had an extremely profound impact on me emotionally and on my mental health”.³⁶⁵ She had also had to give up her right to social housing in order to go to university outside her local area, and said that she is now “trapped in private renting, which is not just a financial issue, but it is a housing security issue emotionally.”³⁶⁶

- 183.** The evidence we received was strongly supportive of the Staying Put and Staying Close schemes and welcomed the extension of Staying Close in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill; Katharine Sacks-Jones described them as “good schemes” which were “showing real promise and [...] reducing the levels of homelessness among young people leaving care.”³⁶⁷ Many organisations suggested extending Staying Put to the age of 25 and the charity Become recommended making both schemes opt-out legal entitlements to improve take-up.³⁶⁸ The Fostering Network also highlighted “inadequate” levels of funding for Staying Put and called for the Government to review the policy and ensure that it is properly funded.³⁶⁹ The previous Committee, on its visit to Germany, learned that the average age of leaving care there is 21, with support being extended up to age 27 in certain situations.
- 184.** We received a variety of recommendations as to how to improve the financial and housing support for care leavers to improve the transition to adult life. In particular, there were recommendations to give care leavers entitlement to the over-25 rate of Universal Credit from the age of 18; council tax exemptions; free bus travel and driving lessons; requiring local authorities to offer rent deposit and rent guarantor schemes; giving all care leavers under 25 priority access to social housing; and for universities to offer care leavers year-round accommodation.³⁷⁰ The Minister for Children and Families (Janet Daby MP), told us that there had been a cross-

363 [Q348](#)

364 [Q421](#)

365 [Q420](#)

366 [Q427](#)

367 [Q349](#)

368 The Fostering Network ([CSC0068](#)); The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#)); Become charity ([CSC0096](#)); Centre for Young Lives ([CSC0154](#));

369 The Fostering Network ([CSC0068](#))

370 Local Government Association ([CSC0014](#)); Children’s Services Development Group ([CSC0043](#)); Become charity ([CSC0096](#)); Barnardo’s (Barnardo’s at Barnardo’s) ([CSC0107](#)); Children’s Commissioner for England ([CSC0112](#)); Centre for Young Lives ([CSC0154](#)); Action for Children ([CSC0160](#)); The Children’s Society ([CSC0163](#)); Unite Foundation ([CSC0177](#))

departmental ministerial meeting on care leavers, chaired by the Secretary of State for the Department for Education and the Deputy Prime Minister, and that “all Departments have been tasked with coming back with saying what they are doing in this space, and it is being followed through.”³⁷¹

- 185.** In March 2025, the Government announced a set of changes to the social security system focused on disability benefits. As part of this, the Government is consulting on delaying access to the health element of Universal Credit until the recipient is aged 22, “on the basis that the savings generated would be reinvested into work support and training opportunities for this age group.”³⁷² This comes alongside a new Youth Guarantee which provides targeted support to 18–21-year-olds to help them to access employment, education and training, and is currently being trialled in eight areas in England.³⁷³ We wrote to the Secretary of State expressing our concern at the impact this could have on care leavers aged under 22 and asked for her analysis of the likely impact.³⁷⁴ Her response highlighted the number of care leavers not in education, employment or training and stated that, under the current system, young people who are categorised as unable to work are usually left with no engagement or support.³⁷⁵

Awareness and consistency of support

- 186.** We heard that, despite the requirement on local authorities to publish their local offer, there was not always good awareness among young people about the support available to them on leaving care.³⁷⁶ The young people we spoke to had had mixed experiences of the support and advice given to them by professionals such as personal advisers and jobcentre staff. Jake Hartley said that his first personal adviser “did not communicate” with him and that he had had to use food banks and borrow money because he had not been told that his leaving care allowance would stop; however, a subsequent personal adviser was “absolutely amazing” and was “always making sure that I knew about the care leaver local offer, what I was entitled to, and always going above and beyond making sure I had everything in place”.³⁷⁷ Louise Fitt told us:

371 [Q494](#)

372 Department for Work and Pensions, [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working](#), March 2025

373 Department for Work and Pensions, [Thousands of young people set to benefit from new support into work and training](#), 23 May 2025

374 [Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State](#), 25 March 2025

375 [Letter from the Secretary of State on Child Poverty Strategy](#), 1 May 2025

376 [Q348](#) [Katharine Sacks-Jones]

377 [Q428](#)

When I had gone to the jobcentres they were very ill-prepared. They did not know any support for care leavers. There were certain grants I could have had to get back into education; they did not inform me, in fact, everything that I have done now is from me Googling it basically or asking people. That should not be the case. I was not prepared for the adult world; I was scared, I was ill-prepared, and there could have been a different turn.³⁷⁸

187. We also heard that there is significant disparity in entitlements between different local authorities. Denise Rawls, Executive Director of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL), told us that the allowances received by young people are “all incredibly different”, giving examples of differences in support with bursaries to pay for university accommodation, access to wi-fi, and access to ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers in local authorities.³⁷⁹ Georgia Sullivan told us that “the postcode lottery is profound”.³⁸⁰ Witnesses supported the idea that a national offer for care leavers would help with this, as long as it did not remove any existing entitlements in any areas: Denise Rawls emphasised that “we do not want anyone to miss out from that, so we do not want people to make that less than it is”.³⁸¹

188. The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care recommended making care experience a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.³⁸² We heard mixed views on this in the evidence we received. While several organisations expressed support for this,³⁸³ others expressed reservations about the likely impact of the measure. Katharine Sacks-Jones said that it “might bring some advantages” but was “not a silver bullet” and Will McMahon, Project Worker at the Care Leavers’ Association, said that members were broadly in favour but “do not think of it as a panacea.”³⁸⁴ Katharine Sacks-Jones and Professor June Thoburn, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at University of East Anglia,, both highlighted that some local authorities had already adopted this voluntarily and that more work needed to be done to understand how this had worked in those areas before legislating on a national basis.³⁸⁵

378 [Q428](#)

379 [Q410](#)

380 [Q430](#)

381 [Q410](#)

382 The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, [Final Report](#), May 2022

383 Centre for Young Lives ([CSC0154](#)); British Association of Social Workers ([CSC0045](#)); London Improvement and Innovation Alliance on behalf of Association of London Directors of Children’s Services ([CSC0070](#)); Adoption UK ([CSC0126](#))

384 [Q348](#); [Q37](#)

385 [Q348](#); [Q80](#)

Corporate parenting duties

- 189.** Corporate parenting is the term used to describe the local authority’s role in caring for and supporting children in care and care leavers. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a requirement on local authorities to have regard to a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising functions in relation to children in care and care leavers.³⁸⁶
- 190.** The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill extends corporate parenting responsibilities to all government departments, schools and colleges, Ofsted, NHS England and NHS trusts, integrated care boards, the Care Quality Commission, and the Youth Justice Board.³⁸⁷ It does not apply to immigration and asylum functions. Minister Daby wrote to us to explain that this exemption was because the Home Office is already subject to existing statutory duties to safeguard children through Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act.³⁸⁸ The evidence we received welcomed the extension of corporate parenting duties,³⁸⁹ although there were some suggestions that the terminology felt “cold” to care leavers and that the requirements needed to be better enforced.³⁹⁰

191. CONCLUSION

Care leavers have some of the poorest outcomes in society across a range of measures, and the support available to them falls far short of what is needed. The state has a grave responsibility to the children it takes into its care, and these outcomes are simply not good enough. We were disappointed at the limited range of measures regarding care leavers in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill and urge the Department for Education to prioritise this in its work.

386 [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

387 [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) [HL] [as brought from the Commons], Bill 84, Clauses 21–25

388 Letter from the Minister for Children and Families to the Chair, [8 April 2025](#)

389 Ofsted ([CSC0132](#)); Centre for Young Lives ([CSC0154](#)); Children’s Services Development Group (CSDG) ([CSC0162](#)); Mr Matt Blow (Policy and Public Affairs Manager at Become) ([CSC0191](#)); Mr James Holden (Senior Corporate & Public Affairs Advisor at The County Councils Network (CCN)) ([CSC0192](#))

390 The Care Leavers Association ([CSC0080](#)); [Q31](#) [Will McMahon]

192. CONCLUSION

It is unacceptable that young people are left to support themselves financially on turning 18 while still in full-time education and face having to reduce time spent in education or drop out completely to support themselves. No responsible parent would allow this and the state in its role as parent should be no different. All care leavers deserve to have the same opportunities to stay in education as their peers without enduring financial hardship as a result.

193. CONCLUSION

We welcome the new Youth Guarantee and the focus on supporting young people to access employment, education and training. However, we are deeply concerned about the proposal to reduce support through Universal Credit for those aged under 22. This is likely to have a disproportionate impact on care leavers, who already face significant financial hardship.

194. RECOMMENDATION

As a priority, the Department for Education must develop a National Care Offer to harmonise the postcode lottery in entitlements and ensure that care leavers receive a minimum level of support, wherever they live.

195. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should work with other relevant departments, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, to review the financial and housing support available to care leavers and improve it where needed to ensure that care leavers are not left to struggle financially after turning 18. This should be published by the end of 2025 and include: increasing the levels of Universal Credit for care leavers aged under 25; increasing education bursaries; council tax exemptions; and introducing rent guarantor schemes. There should be no cliff-edge on turning 18.

196. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Work and Pensions must exempt care leavers from its proposed plans to reduce Universal Credit support for those aged under 22, if these reforms go ahead, and ensure that care leavers are prioritised for access to support through the Youth Guarantee.

197.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should commission an independent evaluation of the impact of designating care experience a protected characteristic in those areas where local authorities have adopted this, to assess the impact of this on the extent and quality of support for care leavers in those areas.

Conclusions and recommendations

The state of children's social care in England

1. Evidence given to the Committee during our inquiry indicates that many of the problems highlighted by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022 persist, and in a significant number of cases have worsened since the Review. Increases in need coupled with stretched budgets and a lack of serious attention to reform have resulted in a system characterised by spiralling costs to local authorities and poor experiences and outcomes for children. The "once in a generation" opportunity provided by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care has not been realised, with the Department for Education focusing on small-scale pilot projects in specific areas rather than comprehensive reform. (Conclusion, Paragraph 8)
2. By the end of this year, the Department for Education must issue a comprehensive response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care which was published over three years ago. This should set out which recommendations have already been taken forward and a timeline and funding estimate for those which have not. It must evaluate the impact of the pilot programmes which have already taken place and set out how it plans to scale up those which prove to be effective. (Recommendation, Paragraph 9)
3. We were privileged to hear powerful and insightful evidence from care-experienced young people in this inquiry, and their voices have informed many of the conclusions and recommendations in this report. We are pleased that the Department is regularly hearing from care-experienced young people in its reform programme and would like this to go further to include care leavers' voices at every level of government, including local, national, and through accountability mechanisms. (Conclusion, Paragraph 10)
4. The Department should ensure that it is engaging with care-experienced young people in all areas of its work on children's social care and should encourage local authorities to do the same. The Department for Education,

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission should ensure that care-experienced young people are involved in accountability mechanisms for the quality of children's social care services and care leavers' support. (Recommendation, Paragraph 11)

5. The Government's focus on early intervention is the right one and long overdue. The additional £270 million provided through the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant is welcome but falls far short of the £1.2 billion that has been removed from early intervention services since 2012, an even greater gap in the context of an increasing population. We welcome the additional funding provided through the Transformation Fund and look forward to seeing further details of the proportion of funding that will be allocated to early intervention programmes. It should be seen as a first step towards a wholesale rebalancing of the system towards early help and support for families, with an urgent need to identify further resources. (Conclusion, Paragraph 18)
6. The Department for Education must commit to making the Families First Partnership programme permanent if it demonstrates a positive impact. The Government must ensure that a significant majority of the new funding announced in the Spending Review is allocated to early intervention programmes and, in future, work towards bringing the level of funding back to 2010 levels, taking into account changes in the population since then. (Recommendation, Paragraph 19)
7. The Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should publish annual data on the proportion of children's social care funding allocated to early intervention programmes compared with later-stage interventions so that progress on this can be monitored. (Recommendation, Paragraph 20)
8. We welcome the Department's commitment to working with domestic abuse charities when developing its guidance for family group decision-making (FGDM). The Department should monitor the impact of the new requirement and, after one year, report back to this Committee as to whether FGDM should be extended to an earlier stage as well as to family reunification. (Recommendation, Paragraph 21)
9. The Department should clarify the specific model of FGDM in statutory guidance to ensure that best practice is followed in all local authorities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 22)
10. The pressure caused by rising numbers of children coming into care is putting serious strain on the system. The only way to effectively reduce these numbers is to address the factors outside the care system which are contributing to this demand, including poverty, poor parental mental health, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and extra-

familial harms. This will require the Department for Education to work closely with other relevant departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions; the Department of Health and Social Care; the Home Office; and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (Conclusion, Paragraph 26)

11. We are deeply concerned about the Government's planned reforms to social security set out in the Green Paper Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working, which are set to drive up child poverty and will further increase pressure on the care system. We are also concerned that delaying the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy until the autumn of 2025 will prevent parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's welfare reforms in tandem with proposed child poverty reduction measures with an understanding of the impact of both sets of proposals in the round. (Conclusion, Paragraph 27)
12. The Department for Education must put in place a strategy for supporting children and young people at risk of extra-familial harm. This should include: better training for professionals to spot and respond to extra-familial risks; ensuring that young people and their families know where to go to access support; and improving approaches to ensuring that families can stay together as much as possible, for example by supporting them to move home when needed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 28)
13. We urge the Government to be bold in its upcoming Child Poverty Strategy and take wide-ranging action to reverse this trend and significantly reduce the number of children growing up in financial hardship. (Recommendation, Paragraph 29)
14. Following the changes agreed to the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill on 1 July 2025, we recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions ensures the involvement of organisations working with disabled children, young carers and care leavers in the co-production of the Timms Review. (Recommendation, Paragraph 30)
15. We warmly welcome the additional funding for children's social care and capital investment in children's homes announced at the recent Spending Review, which will be an important step forward in working towards the amount recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. It would now be helpful for the Department to set out the level of funding that is still required to fully implement the recommendations of the Review and how it intends to work towards achieving this level. (Conclusion, Paragraph 35)

- 16.** The Department for Education should produce an analysis of the level of funding that is still needed to achieve the necessary reforms to children's social care and set out how it will work towards achieving the level of funding recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. (Recommendation, Paragraph 36)

Supply of social care placements

- 17.** Too many children are being sent many miles from home, which has a traumatic and lasting impact on their lives. We were saddened to hear that a care-experienced young person had chosen not to pursue higher education as a direct result of being placed out of area. However, there are some strong examples of good practice and some local authorities have worked hard to limit the numbers of children placed out of area. (Conclusion, Paragraph 44)
- 18.** We disagree with the Department's view that data on the reasons for out-of-area placements are not needed. While data collection itself may not directly lead to improvements, it is essential to fully understand the nature and scale of the problem in order to effect meaningful change. (Conclusion, Paragraph 45)
- 19.** The Department for Education must publish a national sufficiency strategy for children's social care as a matter of urgency and publish data on the extent to which sufficiency requirements are being met on an annual basis. It should also require all local authorities to develop and publish strategies for reducing the number of out-of-area placements and work with local authorities to share and scale up examples of good practice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 46)
- 20.** The Department for Education should collect data on the proportion of children who are placed out of area because it is in their own interests compared with those placed out of area due to capacity issues, so that the situation can be properly monitored and any improvements can be recognised. (Recommendation, Paragraph 47)
- 21.** The children's social care market is not delivering for children or for local authorities. We are particularly concerned at the reports of excessive profits being made by some providers and the risk of financial failure among large providers. We hope that the reforms set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will address this and expect the Department for Education to provide regular updates on progress. (Conclusion, Paragraph 56)
- 22.** The proposed profit cap has the potential to be a useful tool for the Department if needed, but we do not think it is acceptable for the Department to introduce this significant intervention in the market with

only limited opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny and no transparency around how and when the Department will decide if it is necessary to trigger the cap. (Conclusion, Paragraph 57)

23. We are supportive of the move towards regional commissioning but note that the model of Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) being implemented has yet to be evaluated or proven to work. When developing any further RCCs, the Department for Education must consult fully with the sector and pay careful attention to the geography to ensure that RCCs are working as effectively as possible. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)
24. The Department for Education should set out how it will monitor the impact of its reforms to the children's social care market and commit to updating Parliament on an annual basis on the impact they are having. (Recommendation, Paragraph 59)
25. If and when any further Regional Care Co-operatives are developed, the Department for Education must consult fully with relevant individuals and organisations in the region, particularly as to the areas covered by the proposed RCC. In cases where there is significant overlap in work between the areas within an RCC and the surrounding areas, the Department must ensure that there is appropriate flexibility for local authorities to work across boundaries to ensure that RCCs are delivering as effectively as possible. (Recommendation, Paragraph 60)
26. The Department for Education must set out how it will assess whether a profit cap on children's social care providers is necessary. If the Department decides to introduce a profit cap, it must consult this Committee on the draft regulations before they are laid before Parliament. (Recommendation, Paragraph 61)

The care system

27. The shortage of foster carers is a key cause in the crisis in the supply of placements for children in care, with an additional 6,500 fostering families needed. Yet too many prospective foster carers do not complete the application and approval process, and those who do find themselves left with inadequate support and undervalued for the important work they do. (Conclusion, Paragraph 71)
28. There are many positive examples of innovation and good practice in local authorities to support foster carers. In particular, we heard clear support for the Mockingbird model and were interested to hear of the Room Makers scheme to enable carers to renovate and expand their homes. We

welcome the additional funding for foster care placements announced in the Spending Review and look forward to seeing further detail as to how this funding will be spent. (Conclusion, Paragraph 72)

29. The Department for Education must put in place a national fostering strategy to complement the existing strategies for adoption and kinship care. As part of this, it should consult on introducing a national register of foster carers and review the financial support available to ensure that it is adequate to meet their needs. (Recommendation, Paragraph 73)
30. The Department for Education should fund the planned recruitment hubs to set up Mockingbird constellations in every local authority. The Department should work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that housing policy is designed to support the recruitment of foster carers. This should include: investing in and scaling up innovative housing programmes such as Room Makers; giving approved foster carers priority for a move to a larger home if needed; enabling local authorities to fund housing extensions and adaptations for foster carers; and enabling local authorities to use the planning system to secure larger social homes for allocation to eligible social housing tenants who are approved as foster carers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 74)
31. Sibling relationships are crucial for many children in care and, for some, may be the only family relationships they have. They must be protected and supported as much as possible. The lack of any data on the extent of sibling separation makes it difficult to understand the main causes of the problem and devise effective strategies to reduce it. (Conclusion, Paragraph 75)
32. The Department should strengthen the legislation relating to sibling contact to ensure that children in care are placed with siblings whenever it is in their best interests, and that where they cannot be placed together, regular contact between siblings is facilitated and sustained. The Department should collect data on sibling separation in all forms of care and publish this on at least an annual basis. (Recommendation, Paragraph 76)
33. Kinship care is an essential part of the care system and the evidence is clear that children in kinship care have an overall better experience than children in other types of care. We welcome the Department for Education's focus on kinship care, but this must be underpinned by the right policies to support kinship carers. In particular, kinship carers must have enough financial and employment support so that they are not left to struggle as a result of taking children into their care. (Conclusion, Paragraph 82)

34. In its upcoming pilot of a kinship allowance, the Department for Education should ensure that the financial support is on a par with that given to foster carers. It must evaluate the pilot at the earliest opportunity and roll it out across the country once it has proven to be effective. (Recommendation, Paragraph 83)
35. It was a missed opportunity not to include statutory kinship leave in the recent Employment Rights Bill. The Government should ensure that entitlements to kinship leave are included in its forthcoming review of the parental leave system and legislate for this at the earliest opportunity. As part of the review, the Government should critically evaluate whether kinship carers should receive the same entitlements to paid leave as adoptive parents when a child comes into their care. (Recommendation, Paragraph 84)
36. The Department for Education should extend Pupil Premium Plus funding and priority school admissions to all children who meet the new statutory definition of living in kinship care. (Recommendation, Paragraph 85)
37. There is too little recognition of the impact of the early trauma and separation experienced by adopted children, and of the support they need to thrive in education and beyond, with over half of adopted children feeling that they didn't receive the support they needed at school. (Conclusion, Paragraph 92)
38. The Department for Education should review the educational support available to adopted children, assessing the impact of the extension of policies to previously looked-after children and whether any further extensions are needed. This review should include: the introduction of a statutory framework for previously looked-after children; requiring local authorities to publish a local offer for previously looked-after children; and expanding the role of Virtual School Heads to include previously looked-after children beyond the provision of information and advice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 93)
39. It is unacceptable that the continuation of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund was not announced until 1 April 2025, leaving families and children uncertain about the future of their support. We also note many concerns about the new funding limits and the impact this will have on children and families. We are concerned that this is an example of the Government making a consequential change in one part of the system without introducing the reforms and mitigations in other parts of the system that are urgently needed. In this case, there is an urgent need to make mental health support available for adopted children, which could reduce pressure on the ASGSF, but the Government has not laid out how this will be achieved, leaving adoptive families very anxious that they will find it harder to access support. (Conclusion, Paragraph 94)

40. The Department must end the annual cliff-edge of uncertainty faced by adoptive families and make funding for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund permanent. It should monitor the impact of the reduced funding limits after 12 months of the reduced personal limit and engage with organisations representing adoptive families to assess whether there have been significant negative effects and commit to increasing the limits in the future if so. The Department must also consult on introducing a support plan for adopted children with appropriate duties to ensure that support is provided. (Recommendation, Paragraph 95)
41. We agree that, for most children, a focus on supporting them to live in a family setting is the right one; however, this should not come at the expense of developing and maintaining high-quality residential care for children who need it. We urge the Department for Education to focus on the quality of provision as well as capacity and take steps to improve recruitment, retention and training of the children's home workforce. (Conclusion, Paragraph 98)
42. The Department for Education must ensure that all children's homes are led by a registered manager and set out the steps it intends to take to achieve this. Additionally, it should launch a recruitment campaign to raise the profile of residential care staff and encourage more entrants into the sector. (Recommendation, Paragraph 99)
43. The Department should use its children's home workforce census to review the levels of qualifications currently held by residential staff. It should also consult on introducing minimum qualification standards for residential childcare workers and work with local authorities to assess what initial action can be taken to upskill the existing workforce. (Recommendation, Paragraph 100)
44. It is unacceptable that vulnerable children are being placed in unsuitable homes such as barges and caravans with little or no support. The new regulatory and inspection regime is an important step in the right direction, but the Department for Education needs to go further and ensure that all children under 18 receive care where they live, rather than simply support. (Conclusion, Paragraph 104)
45. The Department for Education must follow the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and develop universal standards of care that apply to all homes, including supported accommodation, ensuring that children in all settings receive care where they live. (Recommendation, Paragraph 105)
46. There is a serious problem with recruitment and retention in the social care workforce. High turnover and overstretched staff are exacerbating the instability experienced by children in care and increase the risk of

safeguarding concerns being overlooked. The Department for Education has begun to address this with the planned induction programme and regulations on the use of agency workers, but a wholesale review of the workforce is needed. (Conclusion, Paragraph 112)

47. The Department for Education should develop a workforce strategy for children's social care setting out how it will improve recruitment, retention and training across the children's social care workforce, including social workers, residential care workers, personal advisers, educational psychologists, health visitors, and personal assistants. This should include measures such as increased pay, bursaries for studying and training, and improving awareness of the different roles within children's social care. (Recommendation, Paragraph 113)
48. Children in care have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, and they are over four times more likely to suffer from emotional or mental health problems than their peers. It is therefore essential that there is a strong system in place to support them. Currently, the support available is falling far short of what is needed. (Conclusion, Paragraph 120)
49. The Department for Education should work with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that children in care and care leavers are prioritised for mental health support and improve training for mental health practitioners on the impact of trauma. This could be achieved by setting up co-located mental health services between children's social care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Department should work with the Department for Health and Social Care to pilot this approach. (Recommendation, Paragraph 121)
50. The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should take forward this Committee's recommendation to strengthen the role of mental health and emotional wellbeing in health assessments of children in care, ensuring that there is proper, effective accountability for meeting the current requirements. (Recommendation, Paragraph 122)
51. It is essential that children in care have a voice when important decisions are being made about their lives. Currently, too few children are accessing the advocacy support they are entitled to, with an average referral rate of just 5% across local authorities. It is also essential that disabled children and children with special educational needs, particularly those in residential care, have access to this support. (Conclusion, Paragraph 126)
52. The Department for Education must take forward the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to introduce an opt-out model of independent advocacy for all children in care. It must also act

on the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s recommendation for all children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings to have access to independent advocacy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 127)

- 53.** When done carefully and effectively, reunification of children with their birth families can be a positive way of supporting children to leave care. (Conclusion, Paragraph 132)
- 54.** The Department for Education should evaluate existing reunification practice and publish national guidance on reunification, drawing on the good practice that already exists in many local authorities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 133)

Disabled children’s care

- 55.** Too often, disabled children are overlooked in the social care system. Parents struggle to understand and access the support available and face a confusing “postcode lottery” of support between local authorities. There is an urgent need to improve access to short breaks, respite care and holiday provision; it is unacceptable that over half of parents are unable to access the short breaks and respite services that they need. (Conclusion, Paragraph 141)
- 56.** It is deeply concerning to hear that parents of disabled children are being treated with suspicion and undergoing inappropriate assessment processes when reaching out for help. The Department for Education must address this as an urgent priority and ensure that it fully implements the Law Commission’s proposals relating to assessment processes once they have been published. (Conclusion, Paragraph 142)
- 57.** The Department for Education must set out how it will implement the proposals in the Law Commission’s review of disabled children’s social care no later than two months following the publication of the review, which is expected shortly. This should include a clear timeframe and assessment of any spending required to implement the proposals. (Recommendation, Paragraph 143)
- 58.** The Department should introduce national eligibility criteria for disabled children’s social care and ensure that local authorities are clearly communicating these to families. (Recommendation, Paragraph 144)
- 59.** The Department should conduct a review of the availability of short breaks, respite care and holiday provision for disabled children to understand where the shortages are most acute. It should work with the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government to fund local authorities to be able to offer this provision to all families who are entitled to it. (Recommendation, Paragraph 145)

60. The Department should ensure that the specialist workforce for disabled children is included in the children's social care workforce strategy that we have recommended. The Department must review the training provided to children and families social workers and ensure that social workers are being adequately trained in the specific needs of disabled children and their families and the distinct type of assessment processes that are needed for this group. (Recommendation, Paragraph 146)

Keeping children safe

61. The Department for Education's reforms to child protection through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill are welcome and go some way towards alleviating many of the concerns we have heard in this inquiry. There will be a need for careful testing and monitoring to assess the impact they are having and make any necessary changes as they are rolled out. However, there is a need for better data to fully understand the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect. (Conclusion, Paragraph 154)
62. Multi-agency working is crucial in child safeguarding processes. Where there is disagreement between children's social care and other agencies such as health, police and education on a safeguarding matter, there must be clear processes in place to review and escalate concerns providing a clear line of accountability and decision-making. (Recommendation, Paragraph 155)
63. The Department for Education should make funding available for a national survey on the prevalence of the different types of abuse and neglect, to improve its understanding of these issues and inform the development of future policy interventions. (Recommendation, Paragraph 156)
64. Neglect is sadly on the rise in England and is clearly linked to poverty and poor parental mental health. The Department for Education does not appear to have a clear strategy for addressing neglect and there are concerns that the social care system is not set up well to respond to neglect referrals. (Conclusion, Paragraph 160)
65. The Department for Education must put in place a national neglect strategy to set out how it will reduce the incidence of neglect. (Recommendation, Paragraph 161)

- 66.** The Department should ensure that measures to reduce neglect and support parents with poor mental health and drug and alcohol addictions are considered as part of its Child Poverty Strategy and recognise that poverty is not the only circumstance in which neglect takes place and take a broader approach to tackling neglect. (Recommendation, Paragraph 162)
- 67.** There is an urgent need to take forward the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. The introduction of the mandatory reporting duty is an important step forward, but it is limited in scope to instances of a disclosure or witnessing abuse, which are rare occurrences. We were concerned that, when asked, Minister Daby was unaware of this despite the significant implications it will have for the social care sector and child protection. (Conclusion, Paragraph 169)
- 68.** The Department for Education should improve training and guidance around reporting of child sexual abuse and work jointly with the Home Office towards implementing the more robust mandatory reporting duty recommended by IICSA, ensuring that the sector is well-prepared for this. (Recommendation, Paragraph 170)
- 69.** The Department for Education has made some welcome steps towards increasing Ofsted's powers of intervention in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. However, some key gaps in regulation remain, most notably the worrying practice of using handcuffs to transport children between settings. We are also concerned that fear of negative Ofsted ratings is causing providers to refuse children with complex needs, putting more pressure on an already overstretched sector. (Conclusion, Paragraph 175)
- 70.** The Department for Education must act to strictly limit the use of handcuffs to those cases where it is otherwise unavoidable or necessary for the child's own safety, and work with Ofsted to ensure that local authorities and transport providers are held accountable on this. (Recommendation, Paragraph 176)
- 71.** Ofsted and the Department for Education should ensure that the inspection system that replaces single-word judgements does not penalise providers who take on children with complex needs, while also ensuring that children with complex needs are placed in settings with the appropriate skills to provide a high quality of care and support, and that guidance is clearly communicated to providers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 177)

Leaving care

- 72.** Care leavers have some of the poorest outcomes in society across a range of measures, and the support available to them falls far short of what is needed. The state has a grave responsibility to the children it takes

into its care, and these outcomes are simply not good enough. We were disappointed at the limited range of measures regarding care leavers in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and urge the Department for Education to prioritise this in its work. (Conclusion, Paragraph 191)

- 73.** It is unacceptable that young people are left to support themselves financially on turning 18 while still in full-time education and face having to reduce time spent in education or drop out completely to support themselves. No responsible parent would allow this and the state in its role as parent should be no different. All care leavers deserve to have the same opportunities to stay in education as their peers without enduring financial hardship as a result. (Conclusion, Paragraph 192)
- 74.** We welcome the new Youth Guarantee and the focus on supporting young people to access employment, education and training. However, we are deeply concerned about the proposal to reduce support through Universal Credit for those aged under 22. This is likely to have a disproportionate impact on care leavers, who already face significant financial hardship. (Conclusion, Paragraph 193)
- 75.** As a priority, the Department for Education must develop a National Care Offer to harmonise the postcode lottery in entitlements and ensure that care leavers receive a minimum level of support, wherever they live. (Recommendation, Paragraph 194)
- 76.** The Department for Education should work with other relevant departments, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions, to review the financial and housing support available to care leavers and improve it where needed to ensure that care leavers are not left to struggle financially after turning 18. This should be published by the end of 2025 and include: increasing the levels of Universal Credit for care leavers aged under 25; increasing education bursaries; council tax exemptions; and introducing rent guarantor schemes. There should be no cliff-edge on turning 18. (Recommendation, Paragraph 195)
- 77.** The Department for Work and Pensions must exempt care leavers from its proposed plans to reduce Universal Credit support for those aged under 22, if these reforms go ahead, and ensure that care leavers are prioritised for access to support through the Youth Guarantee. (Recommendation, Paragraph 196)
- 78.** The Department for Education should commission an independent evaluation of the impact of designating care experience a protected characteristic in those areas where local authorities have adopted this, to assess the impact of this on the extent and quality of support for care leavers in those areas. (Recommendation, Paragraph 197)

Formal minutes

Wednesday 2 July 2025

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Dr Caroline Johnson

Amanda Martin

Darren Paffey

Mark Swards

Dr Marie Tidball

Caroline Voaden

Children's Social Care

Draft Report (*Children's Social Care*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 197 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 8 July 2025 at 9.30am]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 27 February 2024

Will McMahon, Project Worker, Care Leavers' Association; **Lynn Perry MBE**, Chief Executive, Barnardo's; **Katharine Sacks-Jones**, Chief Executive, Become charity [Q1-44](#)

Dinithi Wijedasa, Associate Professor, Bristol University; **June Thoburn CBE**, Professor, University of East Anglia; **Dr Ray Jones**, Professor, Kingston University [Q45-91](#)

Tuesday 26 March 2024

John Pearce, President, Association of Directors of Children's Services; **Roger Gough**, Children's Services Spokesperson, County Councils Network; **Stuart Ashley**, Director of Children's Services, Hampshire County Council [Q92-124](#)

Dan Turnbull, Senior Director for Markets, Competitions and Markets Authority; **Mr Andrew Isaac**, Chair, Children's Services Development Group; **Dr Mark Kerr**; **Ms Lucy Croxton**, Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager, Together Trust [Q125-153](#)

Tuesday 16 April 2024

Lucy Peake, CEO, Kinship; **Emily Frith**, CEO, Adoption UK; **Sarah Thomas**, CEO, The Fostering Network [Q154-197](#)

Mary Jackson, CEO, Frontline; **Matt Clayton**, Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers, Coventry City Council; **Lucille Allain**, Co-Chair, Association of Professors of Social Work [Q198-237](#)

Tuesday 30 April 2024

Stephen Kingdom, Campaign Manager, Disabled Children's Partnership;

Tina Emory OBE, Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums;

Ms Katie Ghose, Chief Executive, Kids

[Q238–286](#)

Yvette Stanley, National Director, Regulation and Social Care, Ofsted;

Professor Michelle McManus, Professor of Safeguarding and Violence

Prevention; Annie Hudson, Chair, Child Safeguarding Review Panel [Q287–313](#)

Tuesday 17 December 2024

James Bury, Head of Policy, Research and Development, CoramBAAF; **Dr**

Mark Kerr, Chief Executive, Children's Homes Association; **Matthew Horne**,

Chief Executive Officer, Innovation Unit; **Councillor Arooj Shah**, Chair of

Children and Young People Board, Local Government Association (LGA)

[Q314–332](#)

Jo Harrison, Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF);

Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive, Become; **Maris Stratulis**, National

Director, British Association of Social Workers England; **Harriet Edwards**,

Head of Policy, Sense

[Q333–352](#)

Tuesday 21 January 2025

Anna Edmundson, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, National Society

for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC); **Lynn Perry MBE**, Chief

Executive, Barnardo's; **Claire Throssell MBE**, Survivor of Domestic Abuse,

Public Speaker, Ambassador for Women's Aid and IDAS

[Q353–369](#)

Annie Hudson, Chair, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel; **Andy**

Smith, President, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS);

Rob Williams, Senior Policy Advisor, National Association of Head Teachers

(NAHT)

[Q370–383](#)

Tuesday 11 February 2025

Dan Turnbull, Senior Director for Markets, Competition and Markets

Authority (CMA); **Mrs Denise Rawls**, Executive Director, The National

Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL); **Mr Sam Turner**,

Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Kinship; **Roger Gough**,

Children's Services Spokesperson, The County Councils Network (CCN)

[Q384–414](#)

Lamar Mohsen, Care-experienced young person; **Georgia Sullivan**, Care experienced young person; **Louise Fitt**, Care experienced young person; **Jake Hartley**, Care experienced young person [Q415–430](#)

Tuesday 18 March 2025

Janet Daby MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families), The Department for Education; **Fran Oram**, Portfolio Director for Children’s Social Care Reform, Department for Education

[Q431–518](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

CSC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	A National Voice: Coram Voice	CSC0168
2	ATD Fourth World	CSC0172
3	Action for Children	CSC0160
4	Action for Children	CSC0113
5	Action for Children; Barnardo's; National Children's Bureau; NSPCC; and The Children's Society	CSC0051
6	Adoption UK	CSC0126
7	Adoption UK	CSC0076
8	AllChild	CSC0180
9	Amberleigh Care	CSC0007
10	Anonymised	CSC0195
11	Anonymised	CSC0175
12	Anonymised	CSC0115
13	Anonymised	CSC0015
14	Article 39	CSC0083
15	Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)	CSC0098
16	Association of Educational Psychologists	CSC0041
17	Association of Professors of Social Work	CSC0037
18	Barnardo, (Barnardo's, Barnardo's)	CSC0107
19	Become	CSC0114
20	Become charity	CSC0096
21	Bernard, Professor Claudia (Professor of Social Work, Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), Goldsmiths, University of London)	CSC0138
22	Better Society Capital	CSC0190

23	Bhatti-Sinclair, Professor Kish (Professor of Health and Social Care, University of Chichester); Machin-Autenrieth, Susanne (Lecturer, Robert Gordon University); Brown, Dr Stefan (Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London); Drew, Isobel (Senior Lecturer, University of Kent); Gupta, Professor Anna (Professor of Social Work, Royal Holloway, University of London); Sangha, Associate Professor Jas (Head of Social Work, Anglia Ruskin University); Khan, Dr Nagina (Senior Clinical Research Fellow in Primary Care, University of Kent); Dake, George (Head of Social Work, Manchester Met University); and Ashiagbor, Richard (Senior Lecturer, London South Bank University)	CSC0123
24	Blow, Mr Matt (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Become)	CSC0191
25	Bridges Outcomes Partnerships	CSC0088
26	British Association of Social Workers	CSC0045
27	Care Leaver Local Offer	CSC0089
28	Carers Trust	CSC0125
29	Carers Trust	CSC0008
30	Centre for Child and Family Justice Research, Lancaster University	CSC0187
31	Centre for Justice Innovation	CSC0176
32	Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)	CSC0064
33	Centre for Young Lives	CSC0154
34	Cerebra	CSC0042
35	Challenging Behaviour Foundation	CSC0188
36	Challenging Behaviour Foundation	CSC0059
37	Cheruvallil-Contractor, Professor Sariya (Professor in Sociology of Islam, Coventry University)	CSC0185
38	Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	CSC0170
39	Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	CSC0086
40	Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB)	CSC0075
41	Children's Commissioner for England	CSC0112
42	Children's Services Development Group	CSC0043
43	Children's Services Development Group (CSDG)	CSC0162
44	Competition and Markets Authority	CSC0036

45	Contact (for families of disabled children)	CSC0023
46	Contextual Safeguarding Programme, Durham University	CSC0159
47	Cook, Mr Nigel D (Retired - P3M Expert, Retired - P3M Expert)	CSC0128
48	Coram	CSC0101
49	Coram Voice	CSC0169
50	CoramBAAF, (CoramBAAF, CoramBAAF)	CSC0102
51	Council for Disabled Children	CSC0110
52	County Councils Network	CSC0033
53	Cripps, Mrs Louise	CSC0082
54	Cumberland Council	CSC0081
55	Davidson, Ella (Student, University of Sheffield)	CSC0079
56	Dawe, Professor Sharon (Professor of Clinical Psychology, Griffith University); and Harnett, Associate Professor Paul	CSC0130
57	Department for Education	CSC0108
58	Derrington, Ms V	CSC0001
59	Disabled Children's Partnership	CSC0066
60	Douthwaite, Mrs Alison (Research Associate and Parent-Carer, University of Bath and Home)	CSC0010
61	Down's Syndrome Association	CSC0165
62	Esmee Fairbairn Foundation Leaving Care Learning Programme	CSC0078
63	Family Action	CSC0057
64	Family Rights Group	CSC0094
65	Finney, Mr Jacob (Senior Lecturer and Social Work (MA) Course Lead, University of Staffordshire)	CSC0151
66	Fitch, Ms Alison	CSC0002
67	Five Rivers Child Care	CSC0061
68	FosterSupport LTD	CSC0131
69	FosterSupport Limited	CSC0084
70	FosterWiki Ltd	CSC0017
71	Foundations - What Works Centre for Children & Families	CSC0171
72	Frontline	CSC0067

73	Goodair, Benjamin (Postdoctoral researcher, University of Oxford); and Bach-Mortensen, Dr Anders (Associate Professor, Roskilde University, Denmark)	CSC0021
74	Hampshire County Council	CSC0047
75	Health Equity North	CSC0105
76	Herlitz, Dr Lauren (Research Fellow, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Social Research Institute, IOE - UCL's Faculty of Education and Society); Zylbersztejn, Dr Ania (Senior Research Fellow, Population, Policy and Practice, UCL Institute of Child Health); Jay, Dr Matthew (Senior Data Scientist, Population, Policy and Practice, UCL Institute of Child Health); Blackburn, Dr Ruth (Senior Research Fellow, Population, Policy and Practice, UCL Institute of Child Health); Mendez Pineda, Ms Rocio (PhD Candidate, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Social Research Institute, IOE - UCL's Faculty of Education and Society); and Woodman, Professor Jenny (Professor of Child and Family Policy, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Social Research Institute, IOE - UCL's Faculty of Education and Society)	CSC0183
77	Holden, Mr James (Senior Corporate & Public Affairs Advisor, The County Councils Network (CCN))	CSC0192
78	Home for Good	CSC0056
79	Home for Good & Safe Families	CSC0136
80	Hope instead of Handcuffs	CSC0005
81	IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice)	CSC0050
82	Innovate Services	CSC0063
83	Institute of Recovery from Childhood Trauma	CSC0104
84	Jones, DR Ray (Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Kingston University)	CSC0020
85	Jones, Ray	CSC0155
86	Kinship	CSC0146
87	Kinship	CSC0025
88	Kinship Care Alliance; and Family Rights Group	CSC0085
89	Knowles, Mrs Amanda	CSC0092
90	Knowles MBE, Amanda	CSC0147
91	LGSCO	CSC0140
92	Local Government Association	CSC0014

93	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	<u>CSC0046</u>
94	London Improvement and Innovation Alliance on behalf of Association of London Directors of Children's Services	<u>CSC0070</u>
95	Léonie Cowen & Associates	<u>CSC0024</u>
96	Maguire, Mr Gerald (Founder/Director, Moderator Consulting Ltd.)	<u>CSC0149</u>
97	Manchester Parent Champions	<u>CSC0011</u>
98	McManus, Professor Michelle (Professor of Safeguarding and Violence Prevention , Manchester Metropolitan University); and Ball, Mrs Emma (Research Associate in Safeguarding and Violence Prevention , Manchester Metropolitan University)	<u>CSC0035</u>
99	Migration Yorkshire	<u>CSC0073</u>
100	Missing People	<u>CSC0135</u>
101	NAHT	<u>CSC0072</u>
102	NASS (National Association Special Schools)	<u>CSC0124</u>
103	NRPF Network	<u>CSC0181</u>
104	NRPF Network	<u>CSC0062</u>
105	NSPCC	<u>CSC0133</u>
106	NSPCC	<u>CSC0111</u>
107	Nagalro	<u>CSC0137</u>
108	Nathan, Miss Susan (Founder and Independent Family Advocate, Reform Advocates)	<u>CSC0093</u>
109	National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Child (NSPCC)	<u>CSC0116</u>
110	National Union of Professional Foster Carers	<u>CSC0099</u>
111	National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)	<u>CSC0156</u>
112	National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)	<u>CSC0044</u>
113	Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers	<u>CSC0166</u>
114	Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers	<u>CSC0103</u>
115	Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and the Nuffield Foundation.	<u>CSC0106</u>
116	Ofsted	<u>CSC0132</u>
117	Ofsted	<u>CSC0031</u>
118	Our Time	<u>CSC0039</u>
119	PAFRAS - Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers	<u>CSC0049</u>

120	Parent and Carer Alliance CIC	CSC0038
121	Parents, Families and Allies Network	CSC0100
122	Pause	CSC0153
123	Pause	CSC0053
124	Pinto, Dr Carmen (Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust); and Woolgar, Dr Matthew (Consultant Clinical Psychologist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust)	CSC0179
125	Project 17	CSC0055
126	Rees Centre, Department of Education, University of Oxford	CSC0193
127	Refugee Council	CSC0182
128	Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium; and Central England Law Centre/KIND UK	CSC0022
129	Revolution Consulting Limited	CSC0152
130	Revolution Consulting Limited	CSC0009
131	Roma Support Group	CSC0074
132	Roma Support Group; and Law for Life	CSC0148
133	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists	CSC0058
134	School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol	CSC0030
135	Schools North East	CSC0003
136	Sense	CSC0129
137	Sense	CSC0019
138	Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)	CSC0139
139	Stanley, Jonathan (Principal partner, National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (England))	CSC0142
140	Support Not Separation; and Disabled Mothers' Rights Campaign	CSC0184
141	Support Not Separation; and Disabled Mothers' Rights Campaign	CSC0071
142	Symons, Danielle (individual, acting as an individual)	CSC0097
143	TACT Fostering	CSC0117
144	The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS)	CSC0164
145	The Care Leavers Association	CSC0080

146	The Centre for Corpus Linguistic Approaches to Safeguarding Studies (CLASS Centre)	CSC0189
147	The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition	CSC0048
148	The Children's Homes Association	CSC0095
149	The Children's Charities Coalition	CSC0194
150	The Children's Society	CSC0163
151	The Children's Society	CSC0109
152	The Commission on Young Lives	CSC0004
153	The Department for Education	CSC0141
154	The Fostering Network	CSC0150
155	The Fostering Network	CSC0068
156	The Innovate Project, University of Sussex	CSC0186
157	The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL)	CSC0029
158	Thoburn, Professor June (Emeritus Professor of Social Work, UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families)	CSC0127
159	Thoburn, Professor June (Emeritus Professor, UEA Centre for Research on Children and Families)	CSC0012
160	Together Trust	CSC0054
161	Tovey, Paul-Brian	CSC0016
162	Triple P UK & Ireland	CSC0167
163	Triple P UK & Ireland	CSC0034
164	Tucker, Marie	CSC0157
165	Tucker, Marie (Independent Consultant and Associate, I support and advise several public & independent organisations)	CSC0087
166	UK Youth	CSC0134
167	Unite Foundation	CSC0177
168	Unite Foundation	CSC0013
169	Whitehead, Ryan (individual, individual)	CSC0118
170	Whitney, Miss	CSC0040
171	Working Together with Parents Network	CSC0052
172	Youthworks Consulting	CSC0077

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627