

Keeping children safe, helping families thrive

The DfE's new policy paper on children's social care sets out four key principles for reform. This will feed into the new *Children's Wellbeing Bill* due to be introduced shortly. They are:

- 1. Wherever possible children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering care in the first place**, there is lots of learning to draw from here e.g. youth justice teams, SureStart, Supporting Families, Families First for Children
- 2. Support children to live with kinship or foster carers rather than residential care** via the use of family-based decision making, rolling out kinship reforms and recruiting more foster carers
- 3. Fix the broken care market** via a range of measures to improve competition, regulation and commissioning, as well as shining a light on the levels of profit being made
- 4. A focus on key enablers** including better data and information sharing, spreading evidence-based programmes and the workforce.

Legislating to keep families together and children safe, and to remove barriers to opportunity

- Mandating the use of family-based decision making before care proceedings can be initiated
- Legislating for a single unique child identifier (to be introduced in the future)
- Extension of corporate parenting duties to more departments and agencies
- Making "Staying Close" a national entitlement, with government to work with LAs on barriers to delivery over the next three years
- Placing the expansion of VSH role to kinship arrangements on a statutory footing and a new LA duty to promote the achievement of all cohorts represented by VSH
- Consideration will be given to the role of the VSH for children leaving custody
- Schools as the fourth partner in MASAs, and education to be well represented here both operationally and strategically
- Creation of new legal duty for LAs to establish multi-agency child protection teams and requirement on other named agencies to be part of this provisions
- New register for CME and government will allow LAs to take into account the home and other learning environments in assessments of suitability
- If a child is subject to a S47 enquiry or on a child protection plan, LA consent will be required to home educate.

Legislating to make the care system child centred and to tackle profiteering

- Reforms to the planning and registration process for new children's homes, including work with Ofsted on a fast-track route for selected new homes and location to play a larger role in applications
- Work with MHCLG to reform planning regulations to make it easier to open homes when and where they are needed
- Government to support LAs to address capacity concerns with new capital investment and other measures

- Exploration of options to rebalance the placement market away from majority privately owned (currently 83% of providers are private)
- Exploration of a new duty to ensure that new providers in the market are owned and domiciled in the UK
- Amendments to legislation to create a new statutory framework to place children with complex needs in a new type of accommodation that brings together therapeutic care with restrictions
- This new provision will be piloted in conjunction with NHSE and the south east regional care cooperative (RCC)
- New research on the complex needs cohort due in summer 2025, building on research the OCC published earlier this week on this cohort (see link below)
- Improving the quality of residential placements via new enforcement powers for Ofsted where providers are not bringing forward registrations or there are concerns about quality
- Changes to the regulatory framework to allow Ofsted to hold large provider groups to account, requiring an improvement plan if quality concerns arise
- Work with Ofsted on the registration process for children's home managers, including making it easier for a registered manager to move from home to home
- Ensuring expectations for residential care are clear and unambiguous, being ambitious for children in care and working with partners and the sector to this end
- Legislating for groups of LAs to form RCCs to plan and commission placements regionally. Duties include forecasting, writing a sufficiency strategy, market shaping, recruiting foster carers, filling identified gaps
- Two RCC pathfinders are underway and legislation will draw on learning from these experiences, learning from the pathfinders also to be captured and disseminated to support improvements right across the sector
- Legislation will include a backstop power for government to direct LAs to form RCCs
- Greater transparency on the costs of placements to support LAs in commissioning and national government in oversight of the market
- A new financial oversight scheme, led by the DfE, which will include development of a criteria for "difficult to replace" providers, new requirements on cash reserves to support transition to new ownership or closure and reduce the impact on children
- Creation of a mandatory notice period for providers making a commercial decision to exit the placement market
- Backstop power for the Secretary of State to set profit caps if the above measures do not have the desired effect
- Introduction of a regulation making power for future use to govern LA use of agency social workers within children's social care, building on recent work in this area.

Related publications

- [Keeping children safe, helping families thrive - GOV.UK](#)
- [Regional Care Co-operatives: pathfinder areas - GOV.UK](#)
- [Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings: progress report - GOV.UK](#)
- [Children with complex needs who are deprived of liberty - GOV.UK](#)