



The independent review of children's social care

Dear Parents, Carers, Guardians and Families,

My name is Josh MacAlister and 14 months ago the government asked me to do a review of the children's social care system in England. Today I have published my final report which includes a set of recommendations and a costed plan for reform that I am asking the government to implement. I believe it will radically improve the lives of children and families by better supporting families who are in need to keep children safe and to support them to thrive. As I make clear in my full report, I believe that realising the rights of families is often the surest way to securing children's own rights.

More help for families in need


It is normal for families to struggle, or to need help sometimes. Most of the time we will turn to other family members, friends or to our communities for that help and support, without the need for the state to be involved. But sometimes, that help is not enough.

I have asked that services provide better help for families who need it by making sure that the support you're offered is stigma-free, intensive and meets the needs of you and your family. This will need big investment which I set out the case for in the review. I want help to be provided locally, in your schools and community centres, to be tailored to meet the needs of children and families in your local communities, and for your views and feedback about the help offered to be central in developing the services that are available.

If you have accessed help from your local authority before, you might have experienced having lots of assessments and plans, but professionals might not have had enough time to spend with you and your family to give you the help you hoped for. I want that to change. I am recommending that we have fewer categories and thresholds and that, instead, new 'Family Help Teams' have the range of professionals in your community to meet your needs. These teams would have the time and skill to work intensively and build a relationship with you, and help you to make changes with whatever you may be struggling with. This might be getting help from a trained mental health support worker, family support worker, domestic abuse worker, or other types of support, depending on the sorts of things you need help with.

Supporting disabled children and their families

For parents and carers of disabled children, I know you face specific challenges and that this is a time of particular change for you - as a consultation on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Green Paper is currently live. I have said that it is important that you are engaged and listened to as the government implements both sets of changes. You have also told me throughout the review how difficult and complicated it is to access support. Our new offer of Family Help aims to make it easier for you to get the support you need. I've also been told time and again that the outdated legal framework can be a barrier. I have therefore recommended that



the Law Commission should undertake a review of this legislation to make sure it works for families. In doing this, I want the Government to work with parent carer forums and other SEND stakeholders to decide how to do this work. I have also recommended the government improve how transitions work into adult services.

Better protection for children who are at risk of harm

When there are concerns that a child is not safe at home, the most important thing is that families get the help they need so they can thrive with their family. However, there are some cases where parents cannot make changes quickly enough and a very small number of individuals who seek to cause harm to their children. In situations where there are concerns about children experiencing significant harm, there needs to be a more skilled and expert response. That is why I'm recommending a new Expert Child Protection Practitioner role so that we make the right decisions about what should happen to a child in these situations.

Many of you have also told me that engaging with child protection can be scary and overwhelming. This is why I am recommending that parents have access to parental representation in child protection, to provide advocacy and support, make sure you understand what is happening and that your voice is heard.

Keeping children in their communities and family networks

I am asking government to make changes that mean more children will be able to live safely within wider family networks instead of moving to a foster home or children's home. Our recommendations are designed to help services ask: "If we used some of the money from care to help support a family solution, would it be in the child's best interests?"


Before asking the court to place a child in care, I am asking government to change the law so that local authorities must ask the child's parents and family if they are able to provide an alternative safe arrangement. Social workers will still play a role in making sure these arrangements are safe and that children will be well cared for. I am asking that the government support these arrangements with financial assistance where needed and that only when no alternative arrangements are suitable or safe, that a child will instead go into care.

Until now, family and kinship carers have often had to register as foster carers to receive support, training or financial assistance to care for a child who needs them. I am asking government to provide these kinship carers with legal aid, support, training and an allowance that matches the fostering allowance, so that they can care for children without their children needing to be in care. This will not always be right for all children and carers, but I believe for many it will mean children are loved, cared for and safe from harm in family networks where the sense of identity and belonging is strong.

This open letter has an offer and ask of each of you.

Our 'ask' is that you continue to help your friends, family and communities to be healthy, happy and safe. That you see each and every child in your communities as a person who deserves to be safe, loved and well cared for and that you play an active role in their lives wherever you can. Whether that's caring for your nieces, nephews,





grandchildren, or taking a friend's child to the park to give them a rest, or something more formal in your local community.

If you're worried that a child or young person is at risk or is being abused contact the children's social care team at their local council. Call 999 if the child is at immediate risk. You can find out more information at: <https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse>.

I want to thank the many parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles who spoke to me throughout the last 14 months. I am very grateful for your time and honesty, and I hope that you can see your experiences and views have been heard and are reflected in what I am asking government to do.

You can read the final report on our website here <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk> alongside supporting documents which include more information on the recommendations, a children and young people's version of the report and a children's rights impact statement.



Josh MacAlister

Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

