

16 June 2022		ITEM: 7
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
The Care Review of Children's Social Care and the National Safeguarding Panel review of child protection		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Janet Simon: Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Assistant Director: As above		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director for Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview to Children's Overview and Scrutiny of the key significant National Reviews undertaken in children's social care and child protection practice and both published during the last week of May.

The care review ([Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](#)) and its final recommendations (eighty recommendations) are presented as a once in a generation opportunity for radical change. The review calls on the government to be ambitious for children and to play a more active role in creating the conditions for success both in the design and delivery of services and for children's rights and outcomes.

The National Safeguarding Panel published its national learning review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. ([National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) A set of chronic challenges that get in the way of child protection work were identified during the review, these relate to practice and practice knowledge; system processes; leadership and culture; and wider service context.

A series of recommendations are put forward in the report, including: the creation of child protection units; development of a new set of multi-agency standards for child protection; greater clarity around the role and responsibilities of MASAs; changes to inspection; peer review; improved use of data and information sharing; a multi-agency leadership programme; and, a new National Child Protection Board, which is accountable to a cross-ministerial group.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee are involved in discussing the Review(s) proposals and recommendations and the impact these will have on service delivery over the next few years.**
- 1.2 **Overview & Scrutiny to provide challenge and input into the development of the recommendations through the government consultation, and to be involved in the reshaping of children's social care services in the next five years.**

2. Introduction and Background:

The Care Review

2.1 The Care Review is a very detailed document running to over 270 pages. There are over eighty recommendations. This will be a complex review to put into practice, likely to require legislative changes, financial investment and major changes to practice in children's social care and early help services. The review author has suggested a five year timescale to make the reforms and changes he is suggesting. This is a very new report and the contents are still being worked through, however, the following are the main recommendations being put forward:

- Focus on 'family help' (to replace current early help and child in need/section 17 support)
- More support for kinship carers to help children stay with extended families, including allowances and legal aid
- Recommendation that schools should be statutory safeguarding partners
- Calls for government to better align it's policies and funding streams
- Focussed action on improving data quality and sharing (including reviewing all the data collected from councils to ensure it's actually useful)
- More advocacy for parents and children
- Powers for Ofsted to oversee finances of private providers and take action where there is significant financial risk
- Reducing bureaucracy for social workers
- Investment in expanding and professionalising the children's homes workforce

2.2 The recommended investment to deliver the review's ambition is £2.6billion over four years (£46 million in year one, rising to £233 million in year four). That breaks down to:

- £2bn in family help
- £23 million to bring parity between support for foster carers and kinship carers (those with formal court orders only)
- £76 million to recruit 9,000 more foster carers over three years
- £253 million investment in workforce

2.3 Key elements of the review's suggestions are:

- A comprehensive reform programme called *Relationships Protect*, overseen by a National Reform Board including sector leaders and those with lived experience
- A National Children’s Social Care Framework, which would outline the objectives, principles and outcomes expected of children’s social care, and would sit alongside a ‘balanced scorecard’ of indicators for learning and improvement by councils, and a series of practice guides outlining evidence-based approaches to achieving the outcomes (similar to NICE guidelines in medicine)
- The Early Career Framework, which all social workers would go through – a five year programme in which social workers work in family help but take modules of increasing specialisation until they can become “Expert Child Safeguarding Practitioners” after five years, which includes higher pay and the ability to take on child protection cases.

2.4 Some of the more radical suggestions are:

- Introduction of up to 20 Regional Care Cooperatives, owned and run by councils, to take over all commissioning and running of children’s placements including foster care and secure provision. (The review does not recommend eliminating profit-making, though says that ideally we shouldn’t have profit-making and in an ideal world the RCCs will build so much of their own provision we won’t need private provision anymore)
- Removing the roles of Independent Reviewing Officer and Regulation 44 visitors, replacing these with independent, opt-out advocacy for children in care.
- Making care-experience a protected characteristic in equalities legislation
- Legislating that all placements for children in care provide “care” – that is, ruling out what is currently “unregulated” for all under 18s rather than just under 16s, though building in flexibility to the regs to allow for more independence for older children
- Move youth justice policy to the DfE and eradicate use of Young Offender Institutions and Secure Training Centres within a decade (replace with secure children’s homes and secure schools)
- Introduction of national pay scales for social workers

2.5 Some key things that are missing from the review report include:

- The role of health. Mental health in particular is woven throughout the report but it’s very light on actual recommendations, especially when it comes to health’s role in the provision of placements for children with complex needs.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers – there’s a lot on redesigning training and career development for social workers, but the proposed Early Career Framework is seen as a bit of a blanket answer to actually keeping people in the profession

- Anything on the employment status of foster carers

2.6 Government has done its initial response – it lists key initial plans as:

- Setting up a National Implementation Board of sector experts and people with experience of leading transformational change, and with experience of the care system;
- Working with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, ensuring children have access to the right placements at the right time;
- Reframing and refocusing the support social workers receive in the early part of their careers, particularly to enhance their skills and knowledge in child protection;
- Joining up data from across the public sector to increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and to the wider public, setting out more detail later this year; and
- Developing a National Children’s Social Care Framework, which will set direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence to support families and protect children.

3. The National Child Safeguarding Review into Child Protection

3.1 The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its review into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson on 26 May 2022.

3.2 The report makes a number of local and national recommendations. It also contains a set of important practice issues that all Safeguarding Partners need to consider and assure themselves that they are being dealt with effectively in their local area. These are:

- Robust multi-agency strategy discussions are always being held whenever it is suspected a child may be at risk of suffering significant harm.
- Sufficient resources are in place from across all agencies to allow for the necessary multi-agency engagement in child protection processes e.g., strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries, Initial Child Protection Conferences.
- There are robust information sharing arrangements and protocols in place across the Partnership.
- Referrals are not deemed malicious without a full and thorough multi-agency assessment, including talking with the referrer, and agreement with the appropriate manager. Indeed, the Panel believes that the use of such language has many attendant risks and would therefore discourage its usage as a professional conclusion.
- The introduction of multi-disciplinary teams to work together on child protection referrals, assessments and through to child protection conference and proceedings if required.

4. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Both of these reviews will be developed in conjunction with each other as the recommendations overlap. The proposed changes to children's services are far reaching. There will be opportunity for debate and input into the final recommendations over the coming three months. These will lead to significant change in how services are delivered to and with vulnerable children and families going forward for the next generation. Committee will need updating papers over the coming municipal year.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To ensure that Children's O&S is kept informed of the changes to the children's social care landscape both within Thurrock and across the country.

6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 6.1 The Government will consult on both Reviews and their recommendations over the coming three months. This will allow opportunity to input into the final outcome for the recommendations and any funding decisions to support the recommendations.

7. Impact on Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact

- 7.1 There will be an impact on Council Policies and performance as and when the Reviews recommendations are agreed by the Government and are then developed into legislation and guidance.

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance - Schools & DSG

At this stage no financial implications. This will be kept under review.

8.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer

The review sets out wide ranging recommendations and findings for national government and safeguarding partners to give greater protection to children at risk of serious harm. The government intends consult widely on the findings of the review to directly inform reform and any legislative, policy or practice

changes which would impact on the Council. Once the consultation gets underway, the Council will have the opportunity to provide views to government on issues included in the consultation.

8.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

There are no direct diversity and equality implications within this report. The development of the recommendations will reshape children's social care in a way that should benefit children and families, particularly those that are vulnerable.

8.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

9. Appendices to this report:

Appendix 1: [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](http://independent-review.uk)

Appendix 2: [National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

These appendices can be found online at the above web addresses, but have not been included in the agenda due to their size.

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