



HOUSE OF LORDS

Public Services Committee

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Claire Coutinho MP
Minister of State (Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing)
Department for Education
20 Great Smith ST, London SW1P 3BT

cc: Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education; and Robin Walker MP, Chair of the Education Committee in the House of Commons.

26 January 2023

Dear Claire,

Support for vulnerable children

Welcome to your role as Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing. As you know, the Public Services Committee, appointed to consider public services including education and health, maintains a keen interest in support for children and families. The Committee notes the changes to the ministerial portfolios following reshuffles, with your role now focusing on support for children and families. We look forward to working constructively with you.

Thank you for your letter dated 16 November 2022 regarding children's social care. I am writing today to respond to that letter.

Implementing reviews on children's social care

This Committee's report '*Children in crisis: the role of public services in overcoming child vulnerability*', published in November 2021,¹ called for a national strategy on child vulnerability, with cross-departmental funding and targets. It is positive that the Government recognises the importance of collaboration across government to support vulnerable children,² and we welcome the Government's commitment in your letter to publish an "ambitious and detailed implementation strategy" in response to the *Independent Review of Children's Social Care*; the *National Panel's reviews into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson*; and the *Competition Markets Authority report into children's social care placements*.

¹ Public Services Committee, House of Lords, 1st Report of Session 2021-22, p.3
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7881/documents/81834/default/> [accessed 11 January 2023]

² Lords Public Services Committee report: '*Children in Crisis: the role of public services in supporting Vulnerable Children*' – Government Response, [Microsoft Word - LPSC government response FINAL \(002\) \(parliament.uk\)](#) [accessed 24 January 2023]

The cost-of-living crisis is likely to compound the challenges facing vulnerable children. In 2020-21 3.9 million children – 27% - were living in poverty.³ These children are more likely to be exploited by criminal gangs and marginalised, and the final report of the Commission on Young Lives argued that the cost-of-living crisis would exacerbate the risks of exploitation and harm.⁴ It is therefore vital that support for vulnerable children and reform of children's social care remain a priority.

- I. Please provide an update on the publication timeline for the Government's implementation strategy responding to the Independent Review on Social Care?

Early intervention and family hubs

This Committee has repeatedly stressed the importance of early intervention and preventative services, which can be extremely effective in addressing problems for vulnerable people before they become complex and entrenched. We have previously found that cuts to early intervention services since 2010 have led to worse outcomes for vulnerable children in England, particularly those in the most deprived areas, and cost the taxpayer more due to the need for costlier, later interventions.⁵

Our report recognised that the Family hubs play an important role in improving early intervention support, facilitating integration and data sharing among public services,⁶ while also better enabling partnerships with the voluntary sector, which can play a key role in delivering such services. We called for the Government to urgently publish a strategy for delivering the national roll-out of its Family Hub programme recommending this strategy prioritise the 20% of local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty and include a long-term funding settlement.⁷

We were pleased to hear the Minister for the School System and Student Finance, Baroness Barran, stress the importance of Family Hubs in supporting families.⁸ We also note the commitment in your letter to publish information about the work taking place in local authorities which have received funding for Family Hubs, and that an external evaluation will be published in 2025-26. While effective evaluation is important, innovations, learning, and good practice should be shared across services both within and beyond the local authorities with Family Hubs over the next two to three years.

However, it is deeply concerning that the Government does not appear to have a plan to roll out Family Hubs beyond those authorities which have already received support and we were disappointed that your letter gave no update on when the programme would be rolled out

³ Department for Work and Pensions, *Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2020/21*, (24 May 2022) [Households below average income: an analysis of the income distribution FYE 1995 to FYE 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/104444/Households_Below_Average_Income_-_an_analysis_of_the_income_distribution_FYE_1995_to_FYE_2021_-_GOV.UK.pdf) [accessed 24 January 2023]

⁴ Commission on Young Lives, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A national plan of action to support vulnerable teenagers to succeed and to protect them from adversity, exploitation and harm* (November 2022) p. 73. See also pp. 5, 40 <https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/COYL-FINAL-REPORT-FINAL-VERSION.pdf> [accessed 11 January 2023]

⁵ Public Services Committee, House of Lords, 1st report of the Session 2021-22, pp. 17-24 [Children in crisis: the role of public services in overcoming child vulnerability \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/publications/2022/1/children-in-crisis-the-role-of-public-services-in-overcoming-child-vulnerability) [accessed 24 January 2023]

⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

⁷ Ibid, p. 45.

[Childcare - Hansard - UK Parliament](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-services-committee/children-in-crisis-the-role-of-public-services-in-overcoming-child-vulnerability)

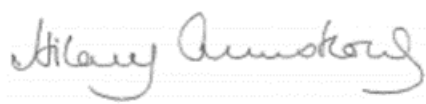
nationally. To meet your commitment to families getting the right, coordinated early help, Family Hubs, and access to preventative services are crucial.

2. What is the Government's plan to support the introduction of Family Hubs beyond the 75 areas already identified? When do you predict that every child in England will be able to access a Family Hub if they need one?
3. What additional funding support for Family Hubs will be put in place in light of inflationary pressures and the cost-of-living? How will local authorities not participating in the Family Hubs programme be supported?
4. Please provide an update on the timelines for the publication of activity taking place in local areas, and on how effective practices in Family Hubs will be highlighted and shared with both participating local authorities and local authorities who have not received funding for Family Hubs.
5. Please provide an update on the commissioning and terms of reference for the external evaluation of Family Hubs.

We look forward to a reply to this letter by 13 February 2023.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education; and to Robin Walker MP, Chair of the Education Committee in the House of Commons.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Armstrong', written over a series of horizontal dotted lines.

Rt Hon Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Chair, House of Lords Public Services Committee