



**The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education**

Department for Education Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

18 November 2024

Chair of the Public Services Committee
Baroness Morris of Yardley

Dear Baroness Morris,

Our plans for children's social care reforms: publication of *Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*

I am pleased to share that we have published [*Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive*](#). This statement sets out our plans to reform children's social care and our proposals for legislative change, when parliamentary time allows. Our plans will break down barriers by shifting the focus of the children's social care system to early support to keep families together. We will ensure children can remain with their families, support more children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families and fix the care market to tackle excessive profiteering and put children's needs first.

Our statement today marks the first steps of this government's journey towards a children's social care system that delivers the best start in life for the children who most need it. It builds on the additional funding for children's social care secured at the budget. This included £44m of investment to support children in kinship care and foster care and £90 million to maintain capacity and expand provision in secure and open residential children's homes to provide safe and suitable homes for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

In July, we also committed to a Children's Wellbeing Bill at the King's Speech. The Bill will ensure our education and children's social care systems transform lives for millions of children and young people in England. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the Bill with you, and my officials will be in touch to discuss the best time to do so.

I wanted to take this opportunity to write to relevant Chairs of Select Committees to provide an overview of the publication today, and to thank you for all your dedication and involvement to champion outcomes for children who access children's services, including as the Chair of the Public Services Committee. I am grateful to the Committee for all its valuable work so far on children's social care and look forward to working with you as we progress with reform.

Today we have set out how we will rebalance the children's social care system to improve outcomes for children in care, care leavers, and families. Our plans are guided by four key principles.

- Children should remain with their families and be safely diverted from entering the care system.
- Where children cannot remain at home and it is in their best interests, we should support most children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care.
- We fix the care market and tackle excessive profiteering in the placement market.
- We invest in the key enablers which underpin the children's social care system – including the workforce, better data and information sharing and to scale and spread evidence-based, proven approaches.

We also set out how we intend to use legislation to deliver the government's manifesto commitments, to ensure that all children can thrive in safe, loving homes:

Chapter 1: legislating to keep families together and children safe; and remove barriers to opportunity:

- We will help more families stay together by mandating the offer of Family Group Decision Making with every family at the point before it is necessary to initiate care proceedings for a child.
- To keep children safe, we plan to improve the sharing of information across and within agencies by enabling the use of a single unique child identifier. To better protect children from harm, we plan to strengthen the delivery of a local decisive multi-agency child protection model and put a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- We will remove barriers to opportunity for children and young people in care by extending the corporate parenting duty for children in care to relevant government departments and certain public bodies.
- We will also extend the duty on local authorities to promote educational outcomes for all children with a social worker and those in kinship care through the Virtual School Head role. To reduce the risk of homelessness, we will require all local authorities to offer a 'staying close' offer for care leavers.

Chapter 2: legislating to make the care system child-centred and to tackle profiteering:

- To give the most vulnerable young people the right care we plan to legislate for new community and multi-agency driven provision for children with complex needs that are deprived of their liberty.
- To make the care system more child-centred we will improve the quality and safety of children's homes through strengthened regulation. We plan to increase Ofsted's regulatory powers so it can hold provider groups to account for quality issues in the provision of care. To keep children safe, we intend to bring forward legislation to strengthen Ofsted's powers to allow them to act quickly against unregistered provision.
- We will also rebalance and stabilise the children's social care placements market so that it works for children and local authorities. We will deliver

wholesale reform at national, regional, and local levels to reshape the market so that it is more transparent and empowers local authorities to work together to deliver places for children's care (including through Regional Care Cooperatives). We will ensure that meeting the needs of every child is the driver for care, and not profit.

- We intend to set clear standards to limit the use of agency workers by local authorities in children's social care by giving the Secretary of State the power to make new regulations. This will enable us to drive the right conditions on the use of agency workers in children's social care.

This important new statement marks the first steps of this government's journey, articulates our vision for the system and sets out our legislative agenda for this new decade of reform. I want to thank you and everyone for their commitment to support children and families across the country. Children in social care are too often left feeling forgotten, powerless, and invisible, and this government is committed to ensuring they can thrive in safe, loving homes.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Bridget Phillipson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Bridget" and last name "Phillipson" clearly legible.

Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education