

## **Briefing from The Fostering Network regarding the independent care review in England, February 2020**

### **Introduction**

The Fostering Network welcomes the commitment from the Government to review the care system in England. At present, there are more children in care in England than there ever has been. An independent, rigorous and evidence-based review of the care system, accompanied by sufficient funding, has the potential to create long-term positive change for children in care. Three-quarters of children in care are in foster care, meaning that fostering must take a central part in the review.

Previous reviews, which were focused on individual aspects of the care system missed opportunities to transform children's services to improve children's lives. The same mistakes must not be repeated with this review. The forthcoming holistic care review should be ambitious and brave to improve the experiences, outcomes and life chances of all care experienced children and young people and to deliver meaningful and lasting change.

However, it is important that a review does not delay any urgent reforms to the care system and there must be a process built in to fast track decisions when urgent need for reform is identified.

### **Our expertise**

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. Our views are informed by our 55,000 foster carer and 370 fostering service members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

We have worked closely with the independent care review in Scotland, having influenced the process at multiple stages and continuing to do so following the publication of the recommendations.

We have also worked closely with the Department for Education and the Education Select Committee on the most recent inquiries into foster care in England through providing written and oral submissions and gathering the views of foster carers and children and young people.

### **Principles of a review**

#### **1. Funding**

The review of the care system should be given the time and funding needed to carry out a rigorous and evidence-based review; and there must be a commitment to fund any approved recommendations. The cost-neutral starting point of the Government's 2018 review of fostering

resulted in largely superficial recommendations which have failed to address the current issues in the sector and have seen no significant reform in the last two years.

## **2. Evidence-based**

It is essential that the review is based on solid evidence, building upon the existing literature and taking the time to listen and give voice to care experienced people and the wider social care workforce, including foster carers, and the families of children with experience of care. Care experienced people's voices from across the country and all types of care arrangements should be at the heart of this review.

## **3. Wide in scope**

The review should have a strong vision and ambition to make the care system in England better for children and young people. It therefore needs to be wide and comprehensive in its scope and not siloed by Government department or care setting. It must consider the multitude of connected and overlapping issues that impact the lives of care experienced people. The care review should also be inclusive of those children and young people on the fringes of care who often fall through the cracks.

The review should not only consider the care system up until the age of 18 but rather recognise the journey from child to adulthood and aim for a smooth continuum of care for young people. It must seek to address the issues created by the current legislative framework, policies and structure of local service delivery teams that prevent services continuing post-18 years, for example the implementation of Staying Put. The role of the corporate parent ought to continue throughout a care experienced person's life and the review must consider how that can become a reality.

The review should make concrete recommendations which will result in better outcomes for care experienced children and young people, rather than simply identify the challenges within the current system.

Decisions about children's care should not be resource-led but instead, have the child's best interest at heart and be focused on improving outcomes.

## **4. Independent**

It is imperative that the review is fully independent and led by a chair with no stake in the outcomes of the review. The chair should have expert knowledge of the sector to fully capture the complex nature of the care system and the nuanced, lived experiences of those who have come into contact with it.

## **5. Government commitment**

The Government must commit sufficient time and resource to this review. The review needs sufficient time to fully consider the complexities of the care system. There must be a clear and shared understanding of a timeline for Government response, implementation and funding.

## **Conclusion**

As the UK's leading fostering charity, representing the voices of tens of thousands of foster carers and hundreds of fostering services we look forward to working closely with the Government, care experienced people and others in the sector to deliver a meaningful review that implements lasting change for children and young people.