



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2016/0002 , 4 January 2016

# Children in care

Backbench Business Committee debate  
Commons Chamber,  
Thursday 7 January 2016

The Motion:

*That this House calls on the Government to take steps to help reduce the number of children entering the care system by bringing forward measures to support more children to remain safely at home with their family or extended family.*

This debate will be opened by Lucy Allan MP.

[Watch Parliament TV: MPs debate children in care](#)

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

Alex Adcock  
Tim Jarrett

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# 1. Background

Under the *Children Act 1989* as amended:

- A child is a looked after child if it is subject to a care order or is provided with accommodation by a local authority for more than 24 hours;
- A local authority can apply to the courts for a section 31 order in order for a child to be placed into its care, under a care order;
- A child can be classed as a “child in need” under section 17 of the Act, although the level of local authority support is generally lower than for a looked after child.

The Department for Education (DfE) notes that “The number of looked after children has increased steadily over the past seven years. There were 69,540 looked after children at 31 March 2015, an increase of 1% compared to 31 March 2014 and an increase of 6% compared to 31 March 2011”.<sup>1</sup> The DfE was reported as saying that the figure of 69,540 was “higher than at any point since 1985”.<sup>2</sup>

Looking ahead, there are concerns that “care application could reach record levels this year if current trends continue”, based on data from the Children and Families Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS).<sup>3</sup> The latest data shows that “there were 1,020 care applications received in November [2015], the highest ever for the month, and a 15% increase on demand compared to the same point last year”.<sup>4</sup>

The Education Select Committee, in its 2012 report [Children first: the child protection system in England](#) noted that the death of Peter Connelly, known as Baby P or Baby Peter, in 2008 caused a marked increase in the number of children taken into local authority care:

[In regard to] the recent increase in the number of care applications ... the single most important factor is likely to be the response to the death of Baby P (Peter Connelly) in 2008. There is clear evidence that levels of Section 31 [of the Children Act 1989 as amended] applications made by English local authorities [for a care order to be made by the courts in respect of a child] rose in the wake of the publicity around this case. Research by Cafcass identified a “sharp increase” of 37% across England during the three weeks immediately following publication of the Serious Case Review in November 2008. However, Section 31

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, [Children looked after in England \(including adoption and care leavers\) year ending 31 March 2015](#), SFR 34/2015: 1 October 2015, p1

<sup>2</sup> [“Number of looked-after children at 30-year high, government data reveals”](#), *Community Care*, 1 October 2015

<sup>3</sup> [“Care demand could reach highest ever levels this year, figures indicate”](#), *Community Care*, 12 October 2015

<sup>4</sup> [“Record care applications for November, figures reveal”](#), *Community Care*, 10 December 2015

applications had already begun to rise in the period from July to September 2008.<sup>5</sup>

Research from the University of Lancaster, reported by the BBC found “there has been a ‘huge’ rise in the number of newborns who are subject to care proceedings in England, according to figures compiled for the first time”, adding “some 2,018 babies were involved in such cases in 2013, compared with 802 in 2008”. The study noted that “about half were taken from mothers with other children in care ... and a third were from women who became mothers as teens”.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of preventative measures, the National Audit Office in its November 2014 report *Children in Care* noted that:

**Early intervention by government could support children, before they are placed away from home and incur costs.** The Department has good experience of making such interventions, such as Sure Start children’s centres. The Department for Communities and Local Government’s Troubled Families Programme also shows how central and local government working together effectively on early intervention helps to keep children with their families, rather than enter care. As part of its Innovation Programme, the Department is seeking to support projects that provide services for children before they are placed away from home.<sup>7</sup>

The Government’s “Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme” has “been allocated an additional £100 million funding for 2014-15 and 2015-16, targeted at supporting vulnerable children and those on the edge of care”. Lord Nash, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, explained that:

the programme was launched in order to enable local authorities, charities, social enterprises and private organisations to test new methods of delivery in order to achieve higher quality and better value for money. The programme covers 50 projects and involves 72 local authorities. The Department will be working closely with all projects to support implementation and build a strong evidence base.<sup>8</sup>

The NAO noted that “the Department aims to learn and share what works. The programme will run until March 2016 and the Department has set aside funds to evaluate its impact”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Education Committee, [Children first: the child protection system in England](#), 2012–13, HC 137, 7 November 2012, p72, para 202

<sup>6</sup> [“‘Huge rise’ in newborn babies subject to care proceedings”](#), *BBC News*, 13 December 2015

<sup>7</sup> National Audit Office, [Children in care](#), 2014–15 HC 787, 27 November 2014, p8, para 8

<sup>8</sup> [PO HL5719 25 March 2015](#)

<sup>9</sup> National Audit Office, [Children in care](#), 2014–15 HC 787, 27 November 2014, p17, para 1.12

More information can be found in the [Overview report – Department for Education Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme](#) published in April 2014 by the Coalition Government.

In an October 2014 article for *The Guardian*, the Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson, said:

Over the last seven years there have been more than 7,000 mothers with 22,790 children considered for removal by the family courts. This is devastating for those mothers, and for the babies involved the damage has often already been done, even when social workers and the courts act swiftly after birth.

The Hackney-based project Pause, which I have agreed to fund and extend as part of our social care innovation programme, aims to put a stop to this. Pause has proven to be effective in interrupting cycles of repeat pregnancy, giving women the chance to turn their lives around.

It’s exactly this sort of radical, disruptive thinking which the Innovation Programme wants to fund.<sup>10</sup>

The Government also funds a number of intervention programmes, for example, MST-UK: “Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is an intensive family and community based intervention for young people aged 11-17yrs, where they are at risk of out of home placement in either care or custody due to offending or severe behaviour problems”.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the Government’s “Troubled Families” programme aims to “turn around the lives” of those targeted by the scheme. A July 2014 report entitled [Understanding Troubled Families](#) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (where the Troubled Families Unit is based) stated that, on its definition of “troubled families”:<sup>12</sup>

The data shows that 6% of troubled families have children who are being looked after by the local authority – 482 children in this sample were in care. The data does not provide enough information to identify when these children went in to care but is unlikely to encompass children who were taken into care many years ago (as they would no longer be considered part of the household for the purposes of the family monitoring data).<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that in regard to the definition of troubled families, local authorities have discretion to include those families that meet two

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<sup>10</sup> [“Radical thinking to break cycle of repeat children taken into care”](#), *The Guardian*, 20 October 2014

<sup>11</sup> National Implementation Service, [Evidence Based Interventions](#), webpage [taken on 18 December 2015]

<sup>12</sup> “To be targeted for help under the Troubled Families Programme, families have to meet three of the four following criteria: Are involved in youth crime or anti-social behaviour; Have children who are regularly truanting or not in school; Have an adult on out of work benefits; Cause high costs to the taxpayer” [Department for Communities and Local Government, [Understanding Troubled Families](#), July 2014, p7]

<sup>13</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, [Understanding Troubled Families](#), July 2014, p22

of the eligibility criteria and “are a cause for concern”, where this might include “Families containing a child who is on a Child Protection Plan or where the local authority is considering accommodating them as a looked after child”.<sup>14</sup>

When a child might be taken into local authority care, an alternative is to seek an informal placement with kinship carers (although even after a care order has been made, a local authority may place the child with kinship carers).<sup>15</sup> During a recent Lords debate on kinship carers, Lord Nash said:

We know they [kinship carers] need better information and support. That is why, during the previous Parliament, we issued family and friends care statutory guidance for local authorities. This makes clear that every council should publish a family and friends care policy, setting out how it will support the needs of children living with kinship carers, whether or not they are looked after. In particular, we made a commitment to increase the number of local authorities that have published their policies for supporting family and friend carers. Following national sector learning days organised by the DfE with local authorities, 83% of English local authorities have now published a policy, compared with 42% in 2012. We intend to write again to councils on this issue.<sup>16</sup>

However, Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top who tabled the question “what assessment they have made of kinship care as a means of support for vulnerable children” that was the subject of the short debate, noted that “the challenge is ... to ensure that they [kinship carers] are properly supported so that they can improve even more the outcomes for the children they are caring for”.<sup>17</sup> Statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education states that: “The guidance makes it clear that children and young people who are unable to live with their parents should receive the support that they and their carers need to safeguard and promote their welfare, whether or not they are looked after”.<sup>18</sup>

Where a child is placed into the care of a local authority, the Government is keen that an adoptive family can be found for the child – the Prime Minister said in October 2015: “we need to speed up adoption processes. We should be reducing the number of children in care by ensuring that they can find loving family homes”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *The Troubled Families programme – Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme’s payment-by-results scheme for local authorities*, 28 March 2012, p5

<sup>15</sup> For the different types of kinship care arrangements, see University of Bristol, *The Prevalence and Characteristics of Children Growing Up with Relatives in the UK*, October 2015, p2

<sup>16</sup> [HL Deb 8 December 2015 c1522](#)

<sup>17</sup> [HL Deb 8 December 2015 c1510](#)

<sup>18</sup> Department for Education, *Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*, 2011, p5, para 1.2

<sup>19</sup> [HC Deb 14 October 2015 c309](#)

Measures in the *Education and Adoption Bill*, currently before Parliament, propose giving the Government powers to merge the functions of local authority adoption agencies in order to increase the pool of prospective adoptive parents and so increase the likelihood of an adoption match. For more information, see the [Library briefing paper on the Bill](#) (last updated before Commons Report Stage).

## 2. Press articles

**BBC news, 14 December 2015**

['Huge rise' in newborn babies subject to care proceedings](#)

**Guardian, 3 November**

[Why it's time for new ideas on children's residential care](#)

**Children & Young People Now, 28 October 2015**

[Cameron announces review of children's residential care system](#)

**Guardian, 2 June 2015**

[Are children's care homes still needed?](#)

**Guardian, 2 June 2015**

[Children's care homes are seen as a last resort, but they can be a safe haven](#)

**Guardian, 20 October 2014**

[Radical thinking to break cycle of repeat children taken into care](#)

## 3. Press releases

Department for Education

### **Children's residential care review to transform lives**

28 October 2015

Prime Minister and Education Secretary announce root-and-branch review of children's residential care.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron and Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan have today (28 October 2015) announced a comprehensive review into children's residential care to help put an end to a life of disadvantage for some of the most vulnerable children in care.

There are currently over 8,000 children and young people in children's homes up and down the country, with councils spending over £1 billion a year. Yet these vulnerable children are less likely to do well at school, more likely to be absent or excluded, and more likely to take part in risky behaviour than their classmates - in part because of the past neglect and abuse they have suffered, and at a great cost to the taxpayer.

The independent review - headed up by Sir Martin Narey, former Head of the Prison and Probation Services in England and Wales and CEO of children's charity Barnardo's - will look at which children should be in residential care, how it can be improved and how government can achieve the very best for every single child in their care.

Announcing the review at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister said:

We need to make sure that our residential care homes are doing the best possible job they can.

That is why I can announce that I have asked the former Chief Executive of Barnardo's, Sir Martin Narey, to conduct an independent review of children's residential care, reporting to the Education Secretary and myself, so we can take every possible step to make sure these children get the best start in life.

Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, said:

I am crystal clear that only the very best should be acceptable for children and young people in care.

I want to shine a spotlight on what works, identify barriers to success and end those practices that are holding these children back from a life full of opportunity.

It is our moral duty to create a care system where all children have access to high-quality care that meets their specific needs. I am confident that Sir Martin's review will help make this ambition a reality.

Sir Martin's comprehensive review into residential care homes will look at:



- the role of children's homes within the care system, exploring when - and for which children - homes should be used
- what works within residential care, and how to improve outcomes for the young people who live in them
- what improvements could be made to the way that residential care homes are commissioned, delivered, regulated and inspected

Sir Martin said:

I am delighted to accept this commission. Some of the best social work I've seen has taken place in residential homes, carried out by some outstanding staff. And yet there are doubts about whether we use residential care for the right children and frequent disquiet about children's transitions to adulthood.

I am anxious to hear from staff, children, care leavers and those with experience of this sector.

Since leaving Barnardo's in 2011, Sir Martin has advised the government on its adoption reforms and other children's issues, including the reform of social work education.

Today's announcement is the latest step in the government's programme to improve the outcomes of children in residential care so that all children have the best possible start in life - no matter their background or starting point.

We have:

- introduced brand-new quality standards for children's homes, so for the first time ever, homes will be required to clearly demonstrate just how they are supporting children to achieve positive outcomes
- changed the regulations so new homes only open in safe areas, run by competent providers, and ensuring homes already open in less safe areas demonstrate that they can keep children safe
- improved the quality of care by requiring staff and managers in homes to be suitably qualified within a strict timeframe
- worked with Ofsted to strengthen their inspection and intervention powers so 'good' is the only acceptable standard, and unsafe homes close unless they can evidence swift improvement
- put much greater information on the quality and location of children's homes into the public domain

Notes to editors

The review is due to report in spring 2016.

Read the [terms of reference and call for evidence](#).

Norfolk County Council

**Norfolk receives £1m of investment to develop pioneering new project to reduce number of children in care**

16 February 2015

A pioneering Norfolk project that could prevent up to 180 children coming into care each year has received government backing.

Norfolk County Council, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, the Benjamin Foundation and the Short Stay School for Norfolk have been awarded more than £1m from the Department of Education to develop the joint project, which combines educational support and therapy.

The project could save £3m a year by reducing the number of children in care and the number being educated out of county in specialist provision, by improving placement stability.

Working with children with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and their families, the project will help to provide education placements, therapy, short-breaks provision and parenting support.

Known as the Compass Approach, it will build upon the success of The Compass, which is one part of the Short Stay School for Norfolk\*. The Compass, which opened in Great Yarmouth in 2009 has recently been extended to support children in King's Lynn and Norwich.

The school works with children with challenging behaviour, giving them access to all of the services they need in one place and helping them to stay in education.

Evidence suggests that providing consistent education is key to keeping families together, as parents and carers can be overwhelmed when trying to meet the needs of children who are permanently excluded from schools.

Since The Compass was developed, the attendance rate has been 90% and none of its pupils have been permanently excluded.

The new project would create a so-called 'Virtual Residential School' for children with behaviour, social and emotional difficulties who are at risk of coming into care.

Children will be based in Norfolk's Short Stay School, as well as the county's mainstream schools, with services from across agencies provided to the children and their families.

Norfolk County Council will provide residential placements and short breaks, giving respite to families – as well as access to its 24-hour outreach service, which supports families in crisis.

Meanwhile, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust will provide therapeutic support to the young people and their families to help them understand and address the cause of their behaviour.

The Benjamin Foundation will provide family and parent mentoring support in the community and positive activities to help keep families together.

The approach will also support children who are already in care, to prevent their foster care placement from breaking down.

All services for the child and family will be coordinated from within the school environment by health, social care, voluntary sector and education partners, so that vulnerable children do not fall through the gaps.

James Joyce, Chairman of the Children's Services Committee at Norfolk County Council, said: "Children and young people with behavioural difficulties are among the most vulnerable in the county and need a range of specialist support.

"Behavioural issues can be the result of trauma they have suffered in their lives and can lead to families breaking down. Some needs are so complex that children find themselves being educated out of county.

"We want these children to stay in Norfolk, wherever possible, and to give their families the package of support they need to stay together.

"This approach, which combines therapy, education and respite, is aimed at helping children to overcome their difficulties and access education, as well as providing the outreach services that can help to reduce the number of children coming into care."

Michael Scott, Chief Executive at Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, said: "We are delighted that the government has recognised the importance of The Compass and is enabling our Trust, Norfolk County Council and the Benjamin Foundation to provide it to even more vulnerable young people in the county.

"The Compass is an excellent example of the quality of services our Trust provides with its partners and was praised in a recent report by the Care Quality Commission for helping reduce the number of admissions of young people to hospital.

"We have also received very positive feedback from young people at The Compass Centre, their parents and carers, which further highlights that by working together, we are able to provide excellent services that make a real difference."

Sarah Jones, Deputy Chief Executive at The Benjamin Foundation said: "We are delighted to be working in partnership to deliver this service for Norfolk. Our experience of working with families will help provide a 'front door' for young people and families to access this support."

### **Notes for editors**

\* <http://www.theshortstayschoolfornorfolk.co.uk/>

## 4. Parliamentary debates and questions

### 4.1 Debates

#### [Vulnerable Children: Kinship Care](#)

Lords question for short debate on what assessment they have made of kinship care as a means of support for vulnerable children.

08 Dec 2015 | Questions for short debate | 767 cc1509-1524

#### [Forced Adoptions](#)

25 Nov 2015 | HC Deb | 602 cc396-404WH

#### [Education and Adoption Bill](#)

17 Nov 2015 | HL Deb | 767 cc1-54GC

### 4.2 PQs

#### [Kinship Carers](#)

**Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con):** What support her Department offers to kinship carers. [901762]

**The Minister for Children and Families (Edward Timpson):** Let me begin by welcoming the new shadow Front-Bench team to their respective roles, and in particular the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), whom I look forward to working with on the whole of my portfolio, as we did on special educational needs in the past. I am sure she, along with the rest of the House, would agree that kinship carers play a pivotal role in caring for many children who cannot live with their parents. That is why during the previous Parliament we issued family and friends care statutory guidance for local authorities, which makes it clear that every council should publish a family and friends care policy setting out how it will support the needs of children living with kinship carers, whether or not they are looked after. Some 83% of English local authorities now have a published policy, compared with 42% in 2012, and I intend to write again to councils on this issue.

**Mark Spencer:** I know the Minister will recognise the important role that kinship carers are taking, many of whom are the grandparents of those for whom they have responsibility. Their caring responsibilities prevent them from working full-time. What assistance can my hon. Friend give to grandparents who happen to be kinship carers to support them further in their caring duties?

**Edward Timpson:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the important and often crucial role that working grandparents play in providing childcare and supporting working families. As a Government we recognise that fact. That is why we have announced plans to extend the current system of shared parental pay and leave to cover working grandparents, thereby providing much greater choice for families trying to balance childcare and work. We will bring forward legislation to enable this change with the aim of implementing it by 2018.

**Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab):** Carers save the taxpayer a great deal of money, as well as often being the best option for the children they are looking after, so in addition to the publication by local authorities of their practice, will the Minister ensure that those local authorities have the resources they need to support kinship carers, both to save the taxpayer money and to do what is right for the carers and the children in the short as well as longer term?

**Edward Timpson:** We have taken such a strong interest in these issues for all the reasons that the hon. Gentleman set out, because kinship carers are performing a role that would otherwise have to be performed by the state. That is why, whether through the discretionary housing fund or through the work that we are doing with the Family Rights Group and others to encourage family group conferences, we are trying to help those families where at all possible to keep children living with them, thereby helping to save not only taxpayers' money, but those children's futures.

**Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con):** Given the significant financial pressure from placement breakdown on the formal fostering system, will the Minister support a kinship reform grant, similar to the adoption reform grant, which has a significant impact, to show that the Government are matching the intent with the money to support kinship care?

**Edward Timpson:** My hon. Friend will be aware of the already impressive impact the adoption support fund has had on helping families trying to care for some of the most vulnerable children in our society. It is clear that such a positive approach across the board will help many other families struggling in similar circumstances to bring about those excellent outcomes. The special guardianship review, which is under way, and the improvements to social work reform will help to deliver better pre- and post-placement support for all those children who need it.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** At my last surgery I had two families who were taking on kinship responsibilities. They have less ongoing support than adoptive parents. Will the Government ensure that they get support equal to that which adoptive parents receive?

**Edward Timpson:** In the previous answer, on the support that we have offered on adoption, I touched on some of the other support that is available to kinship carers in their own local authority area. That is why through Ofsted inspections of local authorities and through the family and friends statutory guidance we have made sure that there is a

greater emphasis on the support that we know works for kinship carers. More importantly, the announcement on shared parental leave will help many of those families who have a grandparent who works and who is helping with childcare, by providing the flexibility they need to have a much better balance between having a family and having good childcare in place.

**Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab):** I was privileged to meet a group of kinship carers, along with the Family Rights Group, in Parliament a couple of weeks ago. They told me that the Government's changes to welfare might have an unintended consequence by deterring people from taking up kinship care, because many look after more than three children. What assessment has the Minister made of the likely impact of changes to tax credits on this group of people, who are doing such fantastic work?

**Edward Timpson:** The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the importance of ensuring that we have the right support in place for kinship carers and that any changes are thought through carefully, and that is exactly what we have done. He will know that the two-child policy is not being introduced until April 2017, and that any extra support that kinship carers receive from their local authority is disregarded when it comes to the benefit cap. Extra support is available in exceptional circumstances to protect kinship carers from those changes from April 2017. All these things have been thought through, but of course we are happy to consider them as they are implemented.

26 Oct 2015 | House of Commons | 901762 | 601 cc1-3

### [Children in Care](#)

**Asked by:** Lucy Allan

[...]

With increasing numbers of children entering the care system, and with rates in my constituency significantly above the national average, what will the Minister do to ensure that all alternatives to adoption are fully explored before children are put up for adoption, resulting in permanent family break-up?

**Answered by:** Edward Timpson

[...]

A key principle of the Children Act 1989 is that children are generally best looked after within their families, save where that is not consistent with their welfare. That was reiterated in the Children and Families Act 2014. Of course, where concerns arise it is right that the local authority takes the appropriate action, but the point of having an independent court system is to ensure that that is proportionate and that in children's upbringing their welfare and their best interests are of paramount consideration. That should remain at the heart of all the work we do with vulnerable children and I am happy to work with my hon. Friend to achieve that.

15 Jun 2015 | House of Commons | 597 c9

[Kinship Carers](#)

**Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to support grandparents and other kinship carers.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Edward Timpson):** We know the vital role many thousands of grandparents and other kinship carers play in looking after children who cannot be cared for by their birth parents. In 2011, we issued statutory guidance, “Family and Friends Care”, making it clear that every council must develop a publicly available policy that sets out its approach to assessment and the support available for children living with family and friends. We also fund a dedicated helpline and the increased use of family group conferences.

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the Minister for his response. With research showing that more than 80% of grandparents who become carers would like to stay in some form of work, what plans do the Government have to assist kinship carers in this area?

**Mr Timpson:** The hon. Gentleman’s point is a very important one in the lives of many grandparents, and I have recently discussed this issue with family groups that represent grandparents to see what more we can do. They were fruitful discussions. This is an area we need to look at, and I will continue to work with them.

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** Most grandparents who take on the formal responsibility of raising their grandkids just want to keep them in the family, but taking on full-time caring in their 50s or 60s can come at a high price, often without any proper recognition. Policy guidance is fine, but does the Minister agree that much of the same recognition and support that is available for foster carers and adopting parents really ought to be there for grandparents who take on this role?

**Mr Timpson:** I do agree that we need to ensure that where grandparents take on what is a huge responsibility, often through the kindness of their hearts—and which has a huge effect on their own lives—we should ensure that it has every chance of being a success, not just for them but, most importantly, for the children they are caring for. Whether it is to do with pay and conditions or more holistic support, we need to ensure that the whole-family approach, which the legislation we recently introduced tried to articulate and embed, has a chance to flourish more in future. I believe there is a recognition across the House that we need to do more.

19 Jan 2015 | House of Commons | 907034 | 591 cc3-4

[Children in Care](#)

**Asked by:** Stuart, Mr Graham | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she will publish her Department's response to the consultation, Improving Permanence for Looked After Children; and if she will introduce an entitlement to support for all children returning home from care.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Timpson | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Education

A robust assessment of the needs of a child and their family and how these needs will be met through ongoing support from the local authority is crucial if children are to return home safely and successfully from care. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 are clear that the child's care plan must provide details of the advice, assistance and support that the responsible authority intends to provide after the child has returned home. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 sets out the principles and parameters of a good assessment. [1]

Improving practice when children return home from care is a priority for the Government. In 2013, we consulted on a range of proposals to improve permanence for looked-after children. Department for Education officials convened a meeting of the relevant Expert Group on 9 September 2014 to discuss these issues and the consultation response. The Government's formal response will be published later this year.

[1] [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children)

13 Oct 2014 | Written questions | 208987

[Children in Care](#)

**Asked by:** Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department's response to the consultation on Looked-after children: improving permanence, will include undertaking to strengthen regulations to provide that a robust assessment takes place to ensure that children only return home from care when it is safe to do so.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Timpson |

The Improving Permanence for Looked-after Children consultation included proposals to amend the processes local authorities must undertake when children return home from care.

Any reforms must strike the right balance between clarity in the statutory framework and professional judgement on the part of social workers and local authorities in meeting the needs of children. Some respondents questioned how these proposals would fit with existing statutory guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013. The Government is grateful for these comments and is looking again at some of the proposals. Department for Education officials have



convened a meeting of the relevant Expert Group on 9 September to discuss these issues.

11 Sep 2014 | Written questions | 207520

### [Children in Care](#)

**Asked by:** Carmichael, Neil

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's report on Improving Permanence for Looked After Children, published in September 2013, what assessment she has made of the evidence from case studies cited on page 40 of that report, that local authorities can make significant financial savings through effective support for a child returning home from care; and if she will take full account of that evidence in her forthcoming response to the consultation on looked-after children.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Timpson

In 2013 the Department for Education consulted on a range of proposals to improve permanence for looked after children. The Department will take into account a range of evidence, including the financial case for improved practice in local authorities, to deciding how best to proceed and will publish a formal response later this year. The Government has also commissioned the National Children's Bureau and the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University to deliver an action research project. The project is working with frontline practitioners and families to support improved practice in returning children home, and includes a focus on developing cost-effective services that help support children to return home successfully from care.

10 Sep 2014 | Written questions | 208352

### [Children in Care](#)

**Asked by:** Austin, Ian

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to tackle the damaging effects of moving in and out of care for looked-after children.

**Answering member:** Mr Edward Timpson

Permanence is achieved through a successful return home, however, we know far too many children re-enter care. The Government is seeking to address this through a better understanding of data, undertaking research to improve practice and strengthening the statutory framework where necessary.

In September 2013 the Government published the 'Improving Permanence for looked-after children' data pack[1], which encourages local authorities to consider their own systems and processes for returning children home and to improving their rate of success.

In 2013 the Department for Education consulted on a range of proposals to improve permanence for looked-after children. Departmental officials have convened a meeting of the relevant expert group on 9 September to discuss these issues and the Government's formal response will be published later this year.

The Government has commissioned the National Children's Bureau and the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University to deliver an action research project. The project is working with frontline practitioners and families to support improved practice in returning children home.

This project is complemented by research we have commissioned from the NSPCC and the University of Bristol. Their approach is 'top down', working with senior practitioners to implement a specific model of support for children returning home, developed and tested by NSPCC. This research will build on earlier work by NSPCC and includes a focus on implementation science, identifying savings and efficiencies, and developing a practice model that can be used by local authorities without the need for specialist support from the NSPCC.

Both these research projects will report in 2015.

[1][www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-permanence-for-looked-after-children-data-pack](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-permanence-for-looked-after-children-data-pack)

04 Sep 2014 | Written questions | 207514

## 5. Further reading

### **Department for Education**

[Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

Statistics on looked-after children at both national and local authority levels for the financial year 2014 to 2015.

National Statistics, First published: 1 October 2015

Last updated: 10 December 2015

### **Public Accounts Committee**, 11 March 2015

[Children in Care](#), Forty-Fourth Report HC 809

### **Centre for Child and Family Research**

[Taking Care: Practice Framework for Reunification](#)

[Evaluation report](#)

January 2015

### **National Audit Office**, November 2014

[Children in care](#)

HC 787 SESSION 2014-15 27

### **Department for Education**

[Consultation on looked-after children: improving permanence](#)

[Government response](#)

October 2014

### **Department for Education**, April 2014

[Overview report](#)

[Department for Education Children's Social Care Innovation Programme](#)

### **Department for Education**, March 2014

[Children in care. Research priorities and questions](#)

**The Kinship Care Alliance**

[Response to the Department for Education's consultation on Improving Permanence for Looked After Children](#)

Prepared by Family Rights Group on behalf of the Kinship Care Alliance  
Endorsed by BAAF Grandparents Plus NAGALRO PAC The  
Grandparents' Association

November 2013

**Fostering Network**

[Findings and recommendations of the Care Inquiry](#)

April 2013

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