



Debate on the Impact of *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families* **2 November 2017**

Summary

On 2 November 2017, the House of Lords is due to debate a motion moved by Lord Farmer (Conservative) “that this House takes note of the impact of *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*, published on 6 September 2017”.

A Manifesto to Strengthen Families: Policies for a Conservative Government to Strengthen Families was drafted by Fiona Bruce (Conservative MP for Congleton) and Lord Farmer. It is supported by 51 Conservative MPs and eight Members of the House of Lords. Taking figures from the Relationships Foundation’s [Cost of Family Failure Index 2016](#), the manifesto contends that the financial cost of family breakdown in the UK is an estimated £48 billion, with costs contributing to lone parent benefits, and emergency housing following domestic violence, amongst others.

To tackle these issues, the manifesto makes several policy recommendations. For example, it proposes that every government department should have a minister responsible for ensuring that policies aimed at strengthening and supporting families are included in the department’s policy-making process. In addition, the manifesto promotes the role of fatherhood in strengthening families, which it argues could be achieved by expectant fathers being personally invited to antenatal appointments and fatherhood preparation classes, for example, to provide them with support at the early stages of parenthood.

The manifesto also calls on the Government to encourage every local authority to deliver family hubs, which would provide support for families with children and young people to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships. The manifesto also proposes incentives to marriage, such as increases to the Marriage Allowance. Additionally, the manifesto considers the impact that a parent in prison can have on a child, recommending measures to make prison visiting areas more child-friendly, and the effect of mental health on a family unit, calling for an extension of the provision of couple therapy for conditions such as depression. Lastly, the manifesto places an emphasis on the role of relationship education in strengthening family units, calling on the Government to include fatherhood and marriage in relationship education curriculum.

Successive governments have introduced policies aimed at strengthening families, including measures such as the introduction of shared parental leave and the provision of free childcare and legislating for relationship education to be taught in schools. A number of these are identified in this briefing.

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I. A Manifesto to Strengthen Families

A Manifesto to Strengthen Families: Policies for a Conservative Government to Strengthen Families, published on 6 September 2017, was drafted by Fiona Bruce (Conservative MP for Congleton) and Lord Farmer (Conservative). It is supported by 51 Conservative MPs and eight Members of the House of Lords, who “work together [in Parliament] to support the Government in delivering policies aimed at strengthening families, as part of its wider ambition for social reform”.¹ The Leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom, has described it as “a very important piece of work”.² However, the Government has not explicitly expressed its support for the publication to date.

The manifesto puts the financial cost of family breakdown in the UK in 2016 is £48 billion. This figure was taken from the Relationships Foundation’s report *Cost of Family Failure Index 2016*, which examined government expenditure on benefits such as tax credits, and is an increase from £39 billion, the cost identified when the exercise began in 2009.³ The authors also contend that family breakdown directly impacts on children, who will “fare badly” in families where there is no stability.

Successive governments have introduced several measures aimed at supporting families. In April 2015, the Government, then led by David Cameron, rolled out the current Troubled Families Programme in England. To be eligible to enrol, families needed to have at least two of the following problems:

- Parents or children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.
- Children who are not attending school regularly.
- Children who need help; that is children of all ages, who need help, are identified as in need or are subject to a child protection plan.
- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion or young people at risk of worklessness.
- Families affected by domestic violence or abuse.
- Parents or children with a range of physical and mental health problems.⁴

The Programme pairs teams in local councils with families to address their problems. In turn, local authorities are paid up to £4,000 on a payment-by-

¹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 2.

² [HC Hansard, 7 September 2017, col 316](#).

³ Relationships Foundation, [Counting the Cost of Family Failure: 2016 Update](#), 11 February 2016.

⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, [‘Troubled Families Programme Annual Report Published’](#), 4 April 2017.

result basis for turning around troubled families.⁵ According to the Programme's annual report, published in April 2017, there were 185,420 families in England funded on the Programme at December 2016.⁶

On 10 January 2016, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that the Government would be doubling funding for relationship support for couples, which he argued would help keep families together, to £70 million over the course of the next five years. In his announcement, Mr Cameron set out the importance of strong families in "helping to prevent poverty and give children the best start in life".⁷ He stated that:

Families are the best anti-poverty measure ever invented. They are a welfare, education and counselling system all wrapped up into one. Children in families that break apart are more than twice as likely to experience poverty as those whose families stay together. That's why strengthening families is at the heart of our agenda.⁸

In April 2017, the Government published a policy paper, entitled *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*, setting out initiatives to improve outcomes for children who grow up in workless families. These included: setting out the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme and reducing parental conflict through a "new programme to support evidence-based interventions delivered by specialist organisations at a local level".⁹ Alongside the policy paper, the Government announced that it would be giving £30 million to the programme aimed at reducing parental conflict outlined in the policy paper.

Although the manifesto does not mention the Troubled Families Programme, it proposes several recommendations to tackle many of the problems which make families eligible for the Programme. The manifesto contains 18 policy recommendations seeking to strengthen families. These include: proposals on supporting families; promoting fatherhood; creating family hubs; financial support; home affairs; mental health; and relationship education.

1.1 Supporting Families

The manifesto makes several recommendations to "create a Government focused on supporting families", which go beyond current policy measures.¹⁰ Firstly, it suggests that the Government appoints a Cabinet minister with responsibility for families. The manifesto suggests the role should go to a

⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, '[Troubled Families Programme Turning 117,000 Lives Around](#)', 29 October 2014.

⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government, '[Supporting Disadvantaged Families—Troubled Families Programme 2015–20: Progress So Far](#)', 4 April 2017, p 56.

⁷ Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister: Families Are the Key to Ending Poverty](#)', 10 January 2016.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Department for Work and Pensions, '[Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#)', April 2017, p 4.

¹⁰ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, '[A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#)', 6 September 2017, p 4.

Secretary of State with a cross-governmental brief, for example, the Secretary of State for Education, who also holds the equalities brief. However, the manifesto notes that this would also require an equivalent body based in a government department, a dedicated budget and a civil service team who would “enable the prioritisation and coordination of family policies across government”.¹¹ The manifesto also proposes that every government department has a minister responsible for ensuring that policies aimed at strengthening and supporting families are included in the department’s policy-making process. At present, the number of ministers that can be paid is regulated by statute.¹² Consequently, were this policy to be put in place, there could be implications for the departments currently represented at cabinet-level.

In addition, the manifesto calls on the Government to support Lord Farmer’s private member’s bill in the House of Lords, the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill [HL], which was introduced on 29 June 2017 and is currently awaiting a date for second reading. The Bill seeks to replace Family Tests, which assesses the impact of policies on family, with statutory Family Impact Assessments. Family Tests were introduced by the Coalition Government in 2014 to assess whether policy makers consider the impact that a policy can have on families and are administered by government departments.¹³ At present, Family Tests are not statutory. However, the manifesto states that if Lord Farmer’s Bill passes, every minister with a departmental remit for families would also be responsible for ensuring Family Impact Assessments were applied to departmental policy development.¹⁴

In June 2015, the Assessment of Government Policies (Impact on Families) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons and sought to require ministers to carry out an assessment of the impact of government policies on families by giving statutory effect to the Family Test. However, the Bill did not proceed beyond second reading. In the second reading debate, the then Minister for Employment, Priti Patel, outlined that the Government opposed the Bill. Ms Patel stated that placing the Family Test on a “legislative footing”, would result in turning the test into what she argued would be a “tick-box exercise across government departments”.¹⁵

As part of its recommendations for the Government to support families, the manifesto also calls for the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 to be amended to mandate the Government to make an annual statement on the progress it is making in strengthening families and in developing statutory family stability measures.

¹¹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 4.

¹² House of Commons Library, [Limitations on the Number of Ministers](#), 10 August 2017.

¹³ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Legislation: Families](#)’, 18 April 2016, 33911.

¹⁴ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 4.

¹⁵ [HC Hansard, 4 December 2015, cols 673–9.](#)

The manifesto also recommends that parenting and relationship support be made available for military families, who would obtain such help from family support services external to the military, offered under the Armed Forces Covenant. The manifesto argues that this would “send a strong signal about our enduring commitment to the families of our servicemen and women”.¹⁶

The Armed Forces Covenant states that members of the armed forces should “enjoy the same standard of, and access to, healthcare as that received by any other UK citizen in the area they live”.¹⁷ Currently, according to the Ministry of Defence, there are specialist mental health services for serving members of the armed forces primarily delivered through 16 military Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMHs) located in large military centres both in the UK and overseas. These DCMHs are staffed by clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health nurses and social workers.¹⁸ For veterans experiencing mental health issues, there is the Veterans and Reserves Mental Health Programme, which is run in partnership with the National Health Service and is staffed by both military and civilian clinicians with “extensive military experience and knowledge”.¹⁹

1.2 Promoting Fatherhood

Regarding the promotion of fatherhood in a child’s life, the manifesto outlines that over one million children have “no meaningful relationship” with their fathers, which the manifesto contends “can be very painful”.²⁰ The figures are taken from the think tank Centre for Social Justice’s report, *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters*, published in June 2013.²¹

In 2016, the Centre for Social Justice, conducted a survey on fatherhood in the UK. It found that 25 percent of fathers surveyed felt there was enough support for them to “play a positive role in family life”, whilst 78 percent of fathers agreed there was more support available for mothers than fathers.²² In addition, the survey found that 45 percent of fathers responded that there was either not much or no practical support given to men on becoming a father. To tackle this, the Centre for Social Justice called for a senior MP or Member of the House of Lords to be appointed as a Fatherhood Champion, tasked with responsibilities including ensuring all government policy was assessed for the impact it had on fathers, using the Government’s Family Test.

Successive governments have introduced policies aimed at strengthening families, particularly, in attempting to promote the role of fathers in families.

¹⁶ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 4.

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence, [Mental Health Support for the UK Armed Forces](#), updated 11 January 2016.

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *ibid*.

²⁰ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 2.

²¹ Centre for Social Justice, [Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters](#), June 2013, p 13.

²² Centre for Social Justice, [Annual Fatherhood Survey 2016](#), 17 August 2017.

This includes through the introduction of shared parental leave. In November 2013, the Coalition Government introduced shared parental leave, which presently allows working parents to share up to 52 weeks of leave and up to 39 weeks of pay in the first year of a child's life, should they choose to. According to the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, "we [society] need to challenge the old-fashioned assumption that women will always be the parent that stays at home—many fathers want that option too".²³ In April 2015, shared parental leave came into effect. In a debate on the role of fathers on 1 March 2017, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, Caroline Dinenage, stated that shared parental leave "gives mothers and fathers the opportunity to equalise care and work responsibilities".²⁴

Believing that fathers should play a prominent role in a child's life, the manifesto also calls on the Government to bring into force schedule 6 of the Welfare Reform Act 2009, requiring all fathers to be included on birth certificates. It argues that this would improve child maintenance arrangements and enable local authorities to identify all fathers in their local area, which in turn, would ensure that support could be offered to fathers at an early stage.²⁵ In June 2008, the then Labour Government published a white paper setting out changes to the law in England and Wales to make joint birth registration a legal requirement for all unmarried parents, unless this is decided by a registrar to be "impossible, impracticable or unreasonable".²⁶ This requirement has not yet come into force. The Government has said this remained under review. In 2015, the Government stated that "the legislative provisions to introduce mandatory joint registration remain on the statute and we will continue to consider how joint registration can support fathers' involvement as part of a wider package of support".²⁷

At present, a father in the UK has parental responsibility if he is married to the mother at the time of the child's birth. However, if the father is not married to the mother, fathers assume parental responsibility if they are named on the birth certificate. This has applied since April 2002 in Northern Ireland, since December 2003 in England and Wales, and since May 2006 in Scotland.²⁸ The Office for National Statistics (ONS) report that in 2015, 84 percent of births were to parents who were either married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting, with a further 10 percent of births registered jointly by parents living at separate addresses. In contrast, approximately 5.3 percent of births were registered by the mother alone. The ONS has not

²³ Deputy Prime Minister's Office, '[Government Outlines How Mums and Dads Can Use New Shared Parental Leave System](#)', 29 November 2013.

²⁴ [HL Hansard, 1 March 2017, col 150WH](#).

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, '[Joint Birth Registration: Recording Responsibility, June 2008](#)', Cm 7293, p 3.

²⁷ House of Commons, '[Written Question: Fathers](#)', 1 December 2015, 8276

²⁸ Gov.uk, '[Parental Rights and Responsibilities](#)', accessed 23 October 2017.

supplied figures for births registered by the father alone.²⁹

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights charity, Stonewall, has argued that “families come in all different shapes and sizes, from the conventional nuclear family to single parents, adoptive parents and children being raised by grandparents”.³⁰ The charity also note that approximately 20,000 young people in Britain are “growing up with same-sex parents and many children have lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans parents or family”.³¹

1.3 Family Hubs

Writing for Conservative Home, Fiona Bruce contended that “well over a hundred thousand children” affected by domestic abuse, parental drug abuse and neglect were “not getting help to prevent further harm”.³²

To address this, the manifesto emphasises the role that local authorities can perform in supporting families, through the introduction of family hubs. It calls on the Government to encourage every local authority in England to work with voluntary and private sector partners to deliver family hubs. The manifesto defines family hubs as “‘one stop shops’ offering families with children and young people, aged 0–19, early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships”.³³ For local authorities to deliver family hubs, the manifesto suggests that the Government puts in place a transformational fund and national task force to “encourage local authorities to move towards this family hub model”.³⁴ The manifesto also called on the Government to “work with the family hub movement” to develop a “virtual family hub” offering online support and guidance that “mirrors the depth and quality” of websites such as the NHS and links families to local provision.³⁵

The idea of family hubs was previously suggested in 2016 by the Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield, who published a discussion paper examining the prospect of family hubs replacing children’s centres. The discussion paper stated that:

By building on the existing infrastructure of children’s centres and extending their offer to include support for parents, couples and children regardless of age, family hubs deliver holistic, early intervention services to a whole community. Their introduction is a clear next-step to coordinate existing services and support thereby creating better information-sharing networks, ensuring that children

²⁹ Office for National Statistics, [‘Births by Parents’ Characteristics in England and Wales: 2015](#), 29 November 2016.

³⁰ Stonewall, [‘Different Families. Same Love](#)’, accessed 24 October 2017.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Fiona Bruce, [‘Ministers Need a Plan to Reduce Family Breakdown If We Are to Create a Fairer Society](#)’, 4 September 2017.

³³ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 7.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

and families no longer go missing between services and making effective use of funds [...]

Family hubs would coordinate statutory and voluntary approaches to tackling the root causes of intergenerational poverty, family breakdown, and poor outcomes for children. They have social mobility and family support at their core.³⁶

The manifesto also calls on the Government to place a statutory duty on local authorities to make birth registration available in family hubs, subsequently providing families with “an opportunity for early support” by signposting new parents to support services.³⁷

In July 2017, Lord Farmer asked the Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for Education, Lord Nash, what the Government were doing to encourage the development of family hubs. Responding, Lord Nash stated that several local authorities had introduced family hub-type models in England and that he “hope[d] we will see more of them”.³⁸ However, he added that, ultimately, it was the decision of local authorities “to decide the best local solution”.³⁹

The children’s charity, Kids Matter, welcomed the family hubs recommendation. In a press release, the charity said it was “delighted” to read the “call for local authorities to work with the voluntary and private sectors to deliver family hubs”.⁴⁰ However, it stated that its experience was of “excellent work being done across all sectors but little communication between them and too many gaps for parents to fall between”.⁴¹

1.4 Financial Support

The manifesto noted the importance of financial support. It suggested that by the age of five almost half of children in low-income households have seen their families break apart, in comparison to only 16 percent of children in higher income households.⁴² In June 2016, the organisations, Relate, Relationships Scotland and Marriage Care conducted a survey of more than 5,000 people across the UK into the state of the UK’s relationships at work, with partners and families. Their findings revealed that the biggest external strain on relationships was money worries, with 26 percent of people surveyed experiencing such pressures.⁴³

³⁶ Children’s Commissioner, [Family Hubs: A Discussion Paper](#), October 2016, p 5.

³⁷ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 7.

³⁸ [HL Hansard, 17 July 2017, col 1399](#).

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Kids Matter, ‘[A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#)’, accessed 23 October 2017.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 2.

⁴³ Relate, Relationships Scotland and Marriage Care, [It Takes Two: Couple Relationships in the UK](#), 20 March 2017, p 5.

To incentivise marriage, the Coalition Government in 2015/16 introduced the Marriage Allowance. The allowance permits people to transfer £1,150 to their partner, if they earn more money than them, subsequently reducing their tax by up to £230 in the tax year. However, for couples to benefit, the lower earner must earn £11,500 or less per year, whilst the higher earner must earn between £11,501 and £45,000.⁴⁴ As of April 2017, approximately 1.8 million people had claimed the allowance. The Government has estimated that the initial cost to the Exchequer for the allowance in 2016/17 will be approximately £425 million, once all backdated claims are considered.⁴⁵

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats opposed the allowance. Prior to the introduction of the allowance, the then Shadow Chancellor, Ed Balls, described the allowance as “perverse and unfair”,⁴⁶ whilst the then Liberal Democrat Leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, attacked the allowance, stating that his Party did “not agree” with its coalition partners that “the state should use the tax system to encourage a particular family form”.⁴⁷

The Government has also introduced measures in relation to childcare to support families. At present, if a parent receives benefits, such as Income Support, they are eligible to receive free childcare for their child aged two-years old.⁴⁸ Similarly, parents who do not receive benefits and have children aged three and four in England, are also entitled to receive 15 hours of free childcare per week. As of September 2017, working parents of children aged three and four in England are entitled to 30 hours free childcare per week, as long as both parents are working or the sole parent is working in a lone-parent family. In order to be eligible for 30 hours free childcare per week, parents must be earning a minimum of the equivalent of 16 hours per week at the national living or minimum wage and less than £100,000 a year.⁴⁹

In addition to the Marriage Allowance and the free childcare entitlement, the manifesto makes several recommendations which the authors contend will help those on low incomes “form lasting couple relationships”.⁵⁰

The manifesto calls on the Government to work towards reducing what it describes as “couple penalties” for couples in receipt of tax credits, which it contends “means it often pays more to live apart than together” as a result of the tax and benefit system.⁵¹ Consequently, the manifesto proposes

⁴⁴ Gov.uk, [‘Marriage Allowance’](#), accessed 20 October 2017.

⁴⁵ House of Lords, [‘Written Question: Married People: Tax Allowances’](#), 5 April 2017, HL6306.

⁴⁶ Matthew Holehouse, [‘Lib Dems Will Scrap Married Couples’ Tax Break and Offer Child Care’](#), *Telegraph*, 3 September 2014.

⁴⁷ Nick Clegg, [‘Speech on the ‘Open Society’](#)’, *New Statesman*, 19 December 2011.

⁴⁸ Gov.uk, [‘Help Paying for Childcare’](#), accessed 19 October 2017.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 8.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

increasing the value of the Marriage Allowance for low income couples or civil partners with children. In 2012, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation examined whether there was a systematic penalty in the tax and benefit system for couples with children on low incomes who stay together. The organisation concluded “that the clear answer to this question is no”.⁵²

In addition, the manifesto proposes that the Government automatically enables those on Universal Credit and entitled to Marriage Allowance, to receive the latter allowance automatically. Regarding the financial barriers to marriage, the manifesto calls for the waiving of Marriage Registration Fees for couples who participate in an accredited marriage preparation course.

The manifesto also calls on the Government to combine parenting support with free childcare entitlement. To do this, the manifesto suggests that parents taking part in a weekly ‘Stay and Play’ session with their two-year old child should be a requirement of accepting free childcare provision when the parent is not in work.⁵³

1.5 Home Affairs

In the manifesto, it is argued that keeping families together will help reduce reoffending, highlighting statistics which suggest men who have family visits being 39 percent less likely to reoffend when they leave prison.⁵⁴ The manifesto also contends that society “cannot underestimate the difficulties children face” in keeping in contact with their parent in prison, which the authors claim has “profound and lasting negative implications” for both parent and child when this does not happen.⁵⁵

The Government has recently examined the role of the family in reducing reoffending. In September 2016, the Secretary of State for Justice, David Lidington, commissioned a review to be undertaken by Lord Farmer to investigate how supporting prisoners in England and Wales to engage with their families can both reduce reoffending and address intergenerational crime.⁵⁶

Prior to the manifesto’s publication, on 10 August 2017, Lord Farmer published a report following his inquiry. The inquiry comprised of people with first-hand experience of the prison system, which gathered and examined responses from: prisoners; the family of prisoners; the prison service; organisations; and academics. Summarising, Lord Farmer stated in

⁵² Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Does the Tax and Benefit System Create a ‘Couple Penalty?’](#), June 2012, p 28.

⁵³ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 3.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Justice, [Landmark Review Places Family Ties at the Heart of Prison Reform](#), 10 August 2017.

⁵⁵ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 10.

⁵⁶ Lord Farmer, [The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime](#), August 2017, p 7.

his report that:

[C]onsistently good family work, which brings men face-to-face with their enduring responsibilities to the family left in the community, is indispensable to the rehabilitation culture we urgently need to develop in our penal system and has to be integral to the changes sought. It helps them forge a new identity for themselves, an important precursor to desistance from crime, based on being a good role model to their children, a caring husband, partner and friend and a reliable provider through legal employment.⁵⁷

As a result, his report made a number of recommendations to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. They included the Ministry of Justice developing an action plan on how the proposals will be taken forward, and report progress to the review twice a year.⁵⁸ In addition, Lord Farmer called on the Government to make a fund available so that prison governors can bid to trial innovations that engage with families to prevent prison suicides.⁵⁹ This included the prospect of virtual visits—using video technology—being made available for the small percentage of families who cannot visit prisoners often or at all due to distance, medical issues or other factors.⁶⁰

Expanding on the recommendations outlined in Lord Farmer’s report, the manifesto sets out several proposals with regard to home affairs. This includes the role of family in reducing reoffending. To do this, the manifesto calls for “better training” for new and existing prison officers about the importance of family.⁶¹ In addition, the authors propose that families should always be able to pass on concerns about prisoners through a direct hotline to the right prison staff. It also calls for visitor facilities in prison to be made child-friendly. According to the CEO of the charity Clinks, and Deputy Chair of Lord Farmer’s review, Anne Fox, “quality family services will help people turn away from crime and it will support families to cope”.⁶²

The manifesto also considers the role of the family in the Government’s drug strategy, which it notes already recognises the “important role of peer support” in aiding recovery.⁶³ Therefore, the manifesto contends that involving family members in an individual’s recovery should be considered a part of that process. As a result, the manifesto suggests that the future National Recovery Champion’s remit be expanded to report annually on how families are involved in the recovery process. Similarly, the manifesto recommends that the Drug Strategy Board examines how parents can be

⁵⁷ *ibid*, pp 7–8.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p 41.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 76.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 95.

⁶¹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*, 6 September 2017, p 10.

⁶² Ministry of Justice, ‘[Landmark Review Places Family Ties at the Heart of Prison Reform](#)’, 10 August 2017.

⁶³ *ibid*, p 4.

supported to prevent addiction to alcohol and drugs in young people, with the extent of family involvement being a “reportable annual metric”.⁶⁴

In a debate in the House of Lords on the Farmer report, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, on behalf of the Government, said that the Government had “welcomed” Lord Farmer’s findings and that it was “committed to taking forward the review’s recommendations”.⁶⁵ In addition, Baroness Vere stated that the Government had committed to recruiting an extra 2,500 prison officers by the end of 2018.⁶⁶ Baroness Vere also outlined that the Department of Health and NHS England were working together to develop a new health and justice protocol, so that courts can “increase their use of treatment requirements for mental health, alcohol and drugs as part of a community sentence”.⁶⁷ She contended that this measure would result in earlier intervention for mental health and substance misuse issues.⁶⁸

1.6 Mental Health

The manifesto states that the “escalating mental health problems” of children and young people today “frequently have their roots in poor family relationships”.⁶⁹ Children who experience family breakdown, it suggests, are more likely to experience behavioural problems and have “poorer physical and mental health”.⁷⁰

On 9 January 2017, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced a package of reforms to improve mental health support, with an emphasis on early intervention for children and young people. Delivering the annual Charity Commission lecture, she stated:

What I am announcing are the first steps in our plan to transform the way we deal with mental illness in this country at every stage of a person’s life: not in our hospitals, but in our classrooms, at work and in our communities.

This starts with ensuring that children and young people get the help and support they need and deserve—because we know that mental illness too often starts in childhood and that when left untreated, can blight lives, and become entrenched.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice, ‘[Landmark Review Places Family Ties at the Heart of Prison Reform](#)’, 10 August 2017.

⁶⁵ [HL Hansard, 11 October 2017, col 281](#).

⁶⁶ *ibid*, col 283.

⁶⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁸ *ibid*.

⁶⁹ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 13.

⁷⁰ *ibid*.

⁷¹ Prime Minister’s Office, ‘[Prime Minister Unveils Plans to Transform Mental Health Support](#)’, 9 January 2017.

The measures included the following:

- New support for schools with every secondary school in the country to be offered mental health first aid training and new trials to look at how to strengthen the links between schools and local NHS mental health staff;
- a thematic review of children and adolescent mental health services across the country, led by the Care Quality Commission, to identify what is working and what is not and a new green paper on children and young people's mental health to set out plans to transform services in schools, universities and for families; and
- a new partnership with employers to improve mental health support in the workplace.⁷²

On 31 July 2017, the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, launched a mental health workforce plan for England. As part of the plan, the Government committed £1.3 billion to transform mental health services. This included pledges to:

- Treat an extra one million patients by 2020 to 2021;
- provide services seven days a week, 24 hours a day; and
- integrate mental and physical health services for the first time.⁷³

In its workforce plan, the Government also outlined that occupational therapists consider an individual's environment, including employment, education and family, "within the framework of the wider determinants of health".⁷⁴

The manifesto's suggested approach to tackling mental health issues is through the promotion of healthy relationships. It calls for the Government's strategy on improving childhood mental health problems to recognise the "importance of improving family relationships" and work towards the development of a family mental health service.⁷⁵ Additionally, the manifesto attributes couple conflict with young people's mental health problems and as such, calls on the Government to make couple counselling available for parents through children and young people's mental health teams.

The manifesto also recommends that the NHS and local public health commissioners recognise the "importance of interpersonal dynamics to good mental health" by extending the provision of couple therapy for mental

⁷² Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister Unveils Plans to Transform Mental Health Support](#)', 9 January 2017.

⁷³ Department of Health, '[Thousands of New Roles to Be Created in Mental Health Workforce Plan](#)', 31 July 2017.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, '[A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#)', 6 September 2017, p 8.

health conditions such as depression.⁷⁶ This, it asserts, is “likely to offer better results” than existing treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy.⁷⁷

It also calls for police and crime commissioners to work with schools in their local area to ensure that any child living in a household where domestic abuse is present is “automatically offered early support”.⁷⁸

1.7 Relationship Education

Section 34 in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 makes provision for relationship education. Section 34 outlines that:

- All primary schools in England to teach age-appropriate ‘relationships education’; and
- all secondary schools in England to teach age-appropriate ‘relationships and sex education’.⁷⁹

In a policy statement on relationship education published on 1 March 2017, the Government announced that it would enshrine in regulations:

- The parents’ right to withdraw their child from sex education but not from relationship education at primary school; and
- the provision of relationship and sex education (RSE) appropriate to the age of pupils and their religious background.

In addition, the regulations would ensure that the Secretary of State issues guidance on delivering RSE, including setting out that pupils are taught: safety in forming and maintaining relationships; the characteristics of healthy relationships; and how relationships may affect mental and physical health. The regulations will also ensure that schools must publish and make available a policy on RSE.⁸⁰ The regulations have yet to be made.

Relationship advice for care leavers is also legislated for under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which provides for a “local offer” from local authorities to care leavers.⁸¹ It states that a local authority in England must publish information about:

- Services which the local authority offers for care leavers because of its functions under the Children Act 1989; and

⁷⁶ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 8.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ House of Commons, ‘[Written Statement: Sex and Relationships Education](#)’, 1 March 2017, HCWS509.

⁸⁰ Department for Education, [Policy Statement: Relationships Education, Relationship and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education](#), 1 March 2017, p 4.

⁸¹ Children and Social Work Act 2017, s 2.

- other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.⁸²

The 2017 Act provides that services which may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living include “services relating to [among other things] relationships”.⁸³ This section has yet to come into force.

The measures introduced by the Government regarding compulsory relationship education have been welcomed by several organisations. According to the chief executive of Barnardo’s, Javed Khan, the charity was “thrilled” by the Government’s measures, stating that it would “give children the knowledge and skills they need to help prevent them being groomed and sexually exploited”.⁸⁴ The co-director of the charity End Violence Against Women Coalition, Sarah Green, stated that the measures were “a real step forward” in ending violence against women and girls. Ms Green also contended that it was “a chance to talk with young people about how men and women treat each other, and to challenge the attitudes which minimise or make excuses for abuse of women and girls”.⁸⁵

The manifesto also focused on this policy area, arguing that relationship education should promote a culture that supports stronger families. In order for the Government to “normalise discussion of relationships and change the narrative on family breakdown”, it argued that concepts such as commitment, respect and safety should be embedded within a new curriculum.⁸⁶ It also called for fatherhood and marriage to feature in any future relationship education curriculum to emphasise the importance of both concepts. In addition, the manifesto proposed that relationship education be extended online with a dedicated platform for young people and care leavers—those aged 16 and 18 and are no longer in the care of local authorities—to access and engage with.

2. Further Reading

- Department for Communities and Local Government, ‘[Support for Families](#)’, accessed 23 October 2017
- Fiona Bruce, ‘[Ministers Need a Plan to Reduce Family Breakdown If We Are to Create a Fairer Society](#)’, Conservative Home, 4 September 2017
- House of Commons Library, [Role of Fathers in the Family Unit](#), 28 February 2017; and [The Family Test](#), 1 February 2017

⁸² Children and Social Work Act 2017, s 2.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Department for Education, ‘[Schools to Teach 21st Century Relationships and Sex Education](#)’, 1 March 2017.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Fiona Bruce and Lord Farmer, [A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), 6 September 2017, p 10.