

Scrutiny: Update of Childrens social care reforms	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Steve Reddy, Corporate Director of Childrens Services	Classification: [Unrestricted or Exempt]
Government commitment to reform children’s social care	

Lead Member	Councillor Maium Talukdar, Cabinet Member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning (Statutory Deputy Mayor)
Originating Officer(s)	Susannah Beasley Murray – Director of Childrens Social Care Sheleena Powtoo – Improvement Delivery Lead
Wards affected	All
Key Decision?	N/A
Reason for Key Decision	Central government reforms that have an impact on the statutory work and delivery of children’s social care and implications for wider partners and senior leaders – See appendix 1 Ministerial Letter to Local Government.
Exempt information	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Accelerating education, Empowering Communities

Summary:

This cover report accompanies the written update

- To provide an update on progress since the government’s response into the Independent Review into Social Care.

Recommendations:

Scrutiny are recommended to:

1. To note the report which provides and overview of the reforms, intended course of action and an outline of updates, risks and issues.
2. Understand and engage with the reforms to ensure effective communication more broadly across the organisation and amongst relevant agencies.
3. Ensure compliance with the reforms so as to meet statutory obligations and improve the lives of children and families.
4. Engage with any future training sessions covering practical application of the reforms.
5. Engage with regular updates around progress and implementation.

Executive Summary

Following the publication of the 'once in a generation' Independent review of children social care in May 2022, the government outlined a commitment to deliver transformational whole-system reform in children's social care outlined in their response the 'Stable Homes, built on love' strategy.

In December 2023 the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, David Johnstone MP wrote to all local authorities to announce the publication of four key documents/ strategies to support delivery of the commitments made in the 'Stable Homes, built on love'. These are:

- The national kinship strategy, 'Championing Kinship Care',
- The Children's Social Care National Framework
- The multi-agency statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children',
- Digital and data strategy.

The documents outline the changes, actions and plans central government intend to take as well as the expectations of local authorities to support the reforms needed.

This update will provide an overview of the documents and key implications for Tower Hamlets as well as a plan of delivery to ensure effective implementation of the reforms.

Scrutiny overview

Senior Leaders, in both Political and Corporate capacities, must use the guidance actively. As owners of the vision and direction for children's social care, leaders must embrace the outlined reforms and incorporate them into the design and delivery of services. This is crucial for achieving positive outcomes in the well-being of children and families, as well as ensuring compliance with national legislation and expectations.

The reforms will form part of the consideration and assessment of regulatory children's social care inspections by Ofsted, of which the outcome carries a political and reputational risk.

This paper provides an update on our current position with an outline of key risks and issues and an overview of each of the reforms respectively.

1 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

Background:

1.1. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care published in May 2022, led by Josh MacAlister¹ was commissioned by the UK government to independently critically examine, assess and address concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of the children's social care system in England.

¹ a former teacher and founder of the social enterprise Frontline.

- 1.2. The review highlighted issues such as the high number of children in care, variations in the quality of services across regions, and poorer long-term outcomes for children within the social care system. The findings and recommendations played a crucial role in shaping the governments subsequent 'Stable Homes, built on love' strategy, alongside the national reviews into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.
- 1.3. In early 2023 the Stable homes Built of love strategy was published and outlined a commitment by central government to deliver transformational whole-system reform in children's social care backed by £200 million investment.
- 1.4. To support implementation and delivery of the Stable Homes built on love strategy, four key documents and strategies were published, alongside a statement in December 2023:

"All children should be able to live happy, rewarding, and fulfilling lives. We want to transform children's social care, so that families get the help they need when they need it, children are safe and supported by their family network and children in care and care leavers have stable and loving homes.

Children's social care can change lives for the better, but every part of the system needs to work together to achieve this change. We must innovate, learn and reform services to improve the outcomes of children, young people and families.

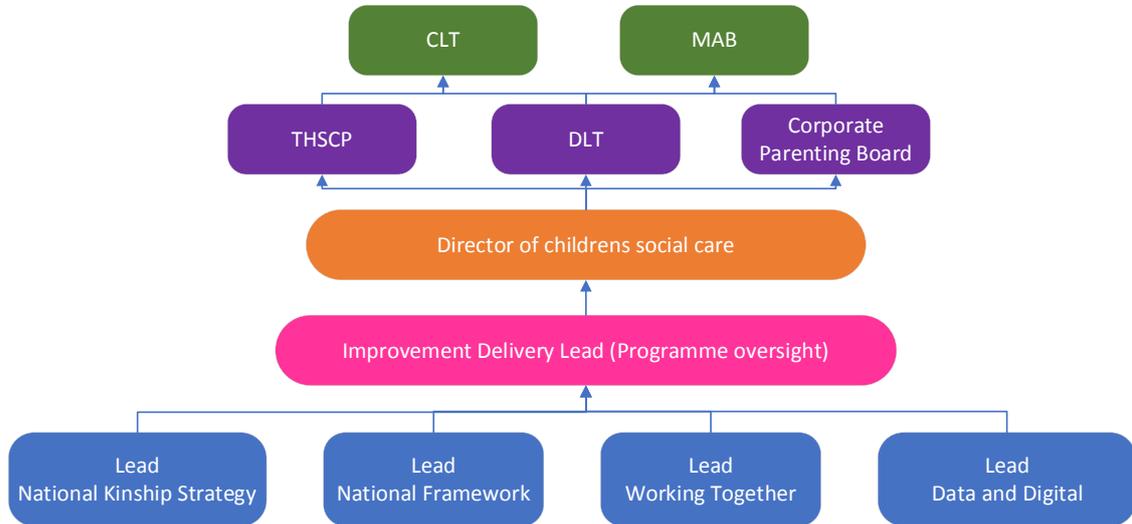
We have published:

- The first ever [national kinship strategy – Championing Kinship Care](#) to set out support for family networks providing loving and stable homes to children
- a new [children's social care national framework](#) to set out the purpose, principles and outcomes that should be achieved in children's social care
- updates to the [Working together to safeguard children](#) guidance which sets out how to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- a [data strategy](#) to set out long-term plans to transform data in children's social care"

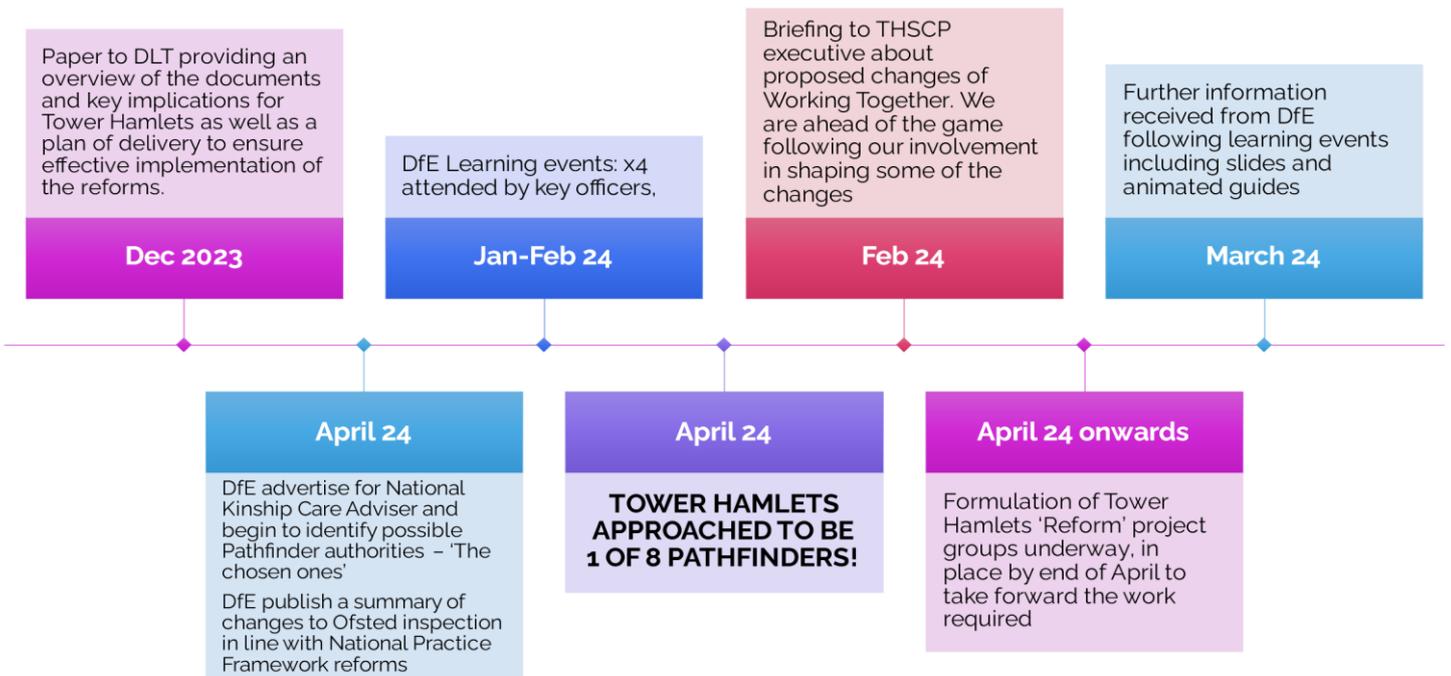
- 1.5. These documents outline transformative reforms and set expectations **for local government leadership, leaders across children's social care, safeguarding partners, relevant agencies (including educational settings and all practitioners)** in supporting and implementing the changes.
- 1.6. It is imperative that Senior Leaders (Political leadership and Corporate Leadership) comprehend and actively utilise the provided guidance to engage in reflective practices, continuous learning, and improvements in their approaches. As responsible owners of the vision and strategy for children's social care, senior leaders are at the forefront of designing and delivering services that effectively address the diverse needs of children and young people. Their commitment to understanding and applying the outlined reforms is integral to achieving positive outcomes for the well-being of children and families within the community.

1.7. This briefing will review each of the documents, providing an overview and examining the requirements for local authority leaders, partners and practitioners as well as the governance arrangements to ensure delivery.

Governance to ensure delivery of reforms:



High level update:



Risks and Issues:

Ref	Risk/ Issue	Mitigation	Impact following mitigation	Complete by
RI.01	THSCP Board Manager leaving impacting the delivery of Working Together changes. The current board manager has also been heavily involved in shaping the work ahead of the launch of the reforms	Recruitment underway, action plan in place and to be developed further prior to departure. This to be taken forward by new Manager, current coordinators and project team.	Medium	May 2024
RI.02	Ofsted inspection to take account of new reforms – need to ensure readiness. A publication in April outlined intended changes to the Ofsted inspection framework in line with the national framework.	Has been reviewed as senior manager 'Better Together' where practices and inspection preparation is discussed. Key changes relate to language, and we continue to monitor.	Low	Complete – but retain under review
RI.03	Challenging timeframes for pathfinder launch – As a prospective pilot authority testing the matched allowances for kinship carers, we have a tight turnaround to promote and launch (if it is agreed that we are progressing	Brief senior leaders on key requirements as a participant of the pilot and ensure that there is appetite and buy in form key areas such as comms to support promotion of the new scheme.	Medium	July 2024
RI.04	Senior leadership capacity (internally and within the partnership) to undertake and fulfil extended duties and roles under new arrangements outlined in the reforms	Ensure senior leaders are regularly briefed and receive guidance and updates on their roles through the project delivery.	Low	Ongoing

The reforms explained:

Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care strategy:

- 1.8. This strategy aims to enable more children who cannot live with their parents to stay with people who are known to them and love them. Kinship carers are often a lifeline to vulnerable children who can no longer live at home. By stepping in, they allow children to grow up within their families and communities.
- 1.9. Kinship care (sometimes known as family and friends care) is the most prevalent form of alternative care for children. Children who grow up in kinship care often have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care. Evidence shows that, compared to these groups, children in kinship care:
- are more likely to have stable, permanent homes
 - achieve higher levels of employment later in life
 - have better social and emotional wellbeing and better long-term physical health compared to children in foster or residential care
 - are more likely to be kept with their siblings compared to those in foster care
 - are more likely to report that they feel loved.
- 1.10. Kinship carers provide love, protection, and stability to our most vulnerable children. Despite this, becoming a kinship carer can often be at great personal expense. It is an unfortunate reality that people who provide such vital support to their families often receive very little support themselves.
- More than 40% of kinship carers who were in employment had to leave work permanently and 45% needed to reduce their hours.
 - Over a third of kinship carers experienced an income drop of over 50%.
 - 28% of participants were dependent on welfare benefits due to changes in their employment status.
 - 68% of kinship carers said that their employer didn't offer support to kinship carers.
- 1.11. The new National Kinship Care strategy promises £20m additional investment (on top of the £200m allocated to deliver the Stable Homes built on love strategy) to minimise the barriers kinship carers face, so that they can more easily provide stable, loving homes for children. This includes strengthening guidance and support for local authorities, so they can improve the experiences of carers and children.
- 1.12. The strategy explicitly aims to ensure that children's services regulators, Ofsted, update their inspection training and guidance to consider kinship care. Tower Hamlets eagerly anticipates a forthcoming full inspection by Ofsted in the new year. It would be helpful to demonstrate our support, offer and plans to enhance relations with kinship carers as part of the inspection.
- 1.13. A project team will be formulated to include the key representative identified to drive forward the work which is expected to be implemented by December 2024.
- 1.14. In April, we were invited by the DfE to participate as a pathfinder pilot authority for championing kinship care. This presents an exciting opportunity for us to explore the

potential impact of prioritising kinship care arrangements. Our aim is to provide children in our care with the stability they deserve by facilitating living arrangements with familiar individuals. We have supplied the DfE with supplementary details and are currently awaiting confirmation of our participation.

National Framework

- 1.15. The government has launched new statutory guidance on the purpose, principles by which children, young people and families should be supported by children's social care. It details the enablers that should be in place so the system is effective, and the outcomes that should be achieved so that children and young people can thrive.

- 1.16. The National Framework sets out important information to create a common, shared understanding of what children's social care should achieve, which may help children, young people, and families to understand what to expect from children's social care when a local authority offers help, protection or care. It describes how practitioners listen, communicate with and support families.

National Framework – one page summary

Purpose of children's social care

Children's social care exists to support children, young people and families, to protect them by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Principles of children's social care

- Children's welfare is paramount.
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to.
- Children's social care works in partnership with whole families.
- Children are raised by their families, with their family networks, or in family environments wherever possible.
- Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families.
- Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances which may impact children, young people and families.

Enablers

- **Enabler:** Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- **Enabler:** Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- **Enabler:** The workforce is equipped and effective

Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
- **Outcome 2:** children and young people are supported by their family network
- **Outcome 3:** children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
- **Outcome 4:** children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

- 1.17. The National Framework puts the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of practice, so they can have a say in how they are supported. An accessible version of the framework has also been published and can be provided to children and families we work with. [Accessible version of the national framework](#)

- 1.18. While the guidance is about local authority children's social care it is the responsibility of all agencies (Police, Health and schools and other partners) to ensure they also contribute to effective multi agency working, highlighted as the first enabler to good outcomes.
- 1.19. Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies should consider the National Framework when developing local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, how local authorities will approach their duties, and identify what local authorities will need from partner agencies.
- 1.20. The national framework is statutory and should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise.

What does this mean for Local Authorities?

- 1.21. Senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners should use this guidance to understand what is expected of their work with children, young people and families. It should be used in the design and delivery of services, and should underpin the interactions between practitioners and children, young people, and families. This guidance should be used to reflect, learn, and improve practice to achieve good outcomes.
- 1.22. In a blog by National Director for Ofsted Yvette Stanley, we know that the Ofsted ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Childrens Services) framework, continues to set out what good looks like and the overall definition of good has not changed. However, there some 're-balancing' of ILACS to reflect the reforms. This will be about language and emphasis rather than wholesale change. Yvette says:

“The National Framework describes the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children, young people and families. This fits well with how ILACS already describes positive experiences and progress for vulnerable children and their families. So, we will not be measuring compliance with the framework, but hope it helps you to deliver good services.”²

Measuring success and impact:

- 1.23. The National Framework will be supported by the Children's Social Care Dashboard (the Dashboard), which will bring children's social care data together in one place to understand progress towards the outcomes of the National Framework.
- 1.24. The Dashboard will include indicators, which will provide information on what is happening in practice.
- 1.25. The first version of the Dashboard will be published in 2024 to support learning and help bring transparency to the outcomes in children's social care, this will be developed from existing indicator sets.

² [How the children's social care reforms will affect inspection - Ofsted: social care \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.blog.gov.uk/2023/07/12/how-the-childrens-social-care-reforms-will-affect-inspection-ofsted-social-care/)

Proposed/ Potential Indicators

Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

- number of children receiving early help support following an Early Help (EH) assessment
- percentage of families receiving support and where children remain in the family
- children and family experience and wellbeing

Outcome 2: Children and young people are supported by their family network

- children in contact with family networks
- number of families receiving Family Group Conferencing
- number of evidence-based programmes families are accessing
- number of young people in kinship care placements (of any sort)
- pre-proceedings information
- children feel happy and settled where they live
- children placed with siblings
- percentage of children with supervision orders who do not subsequently return to court within a given number of years

Outcome 3: Children and young people are safe in and outside of their home

- extra familial harm categories
- Child Protection Information Sharing data (children on CPP presenting at hospital)
- how safe children feel / whether they have an adult they can trust.
- access to advocacy services
- EH plans that result in no further plans.
- health of the child
- percentage of s47 involving police and health

Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

- children's experience of their home
- percentage of placements that match what was requested

- reason for distance of placement from home
- wellbeing of care leavers
- care leaver views on quality of and satisfaction with housing

Enabler: The workforce is equipped and effective

- social worker stability, measured by how many social workers a child has had
- expand current measures to broader definition of workforce
- length of tenure, years of experience
- quality of relationship between practitioners and children and young people
- time use of social workers
- indicators on training and development
- social worker supervision frequency
- number of CIN who have a lead practitioner who does not have a social work qualification

Enabler: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

- leaders creating learning and improvement environment for services to succeed
- percentage of social workers who believe their employer delivers the eight social worker employer standards
- experiences of workforce in local authority / staff satisfaction

Next steps for us:

- To communicate and share widely the National Framework and corresponding dashboard and data set (staff and partner agencies identified in the guidance) particularly through the THSCP
- Revisit our improvement plans to reshape, reconfigure and align activity to the new framework
- For the Learning academy to deliver sessions tailored sessions aligned to the detailed guidance for staff understand what is expected from them and a children's social care service.
- Learning academy to consider how this aligns with our Better together framework and quality assurance framework
- Revision of management information reports to incorporate new indicators
- Revising some of our policies and procedures to reflect amendments where necessary
- Monitor delivery and progress through the project group established to deliver the reforms.

Working Together to Safeguard Children

1.26. Working Together to Safeguard Children (usually just referred to as Working Together) is statutory guidance produced by the government that outlines how practitioners working with children, young people and families should work together in order to make sure that children and young people remain safe from harm.

1.27. In December 2023 the government updated the statutory Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance which sets out new child protection standards and advocates for a multi-disciplinary workforce to support the diverse needs of children and families when safeguarding children. Specific changes include:

- A new chapter bringing together new and existing guidance to emphasise that successful outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency partnership working across the whole system of help, support and protection including effective work from all agencies with parents, carers, and families.
- Substantive changes to strengthen how local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (local authorities, integrated care boards and the police) work to safeguard and protect children locally, including with relevant agencies. No statutory roles or functions have been removed from the guidance.
- a renewed focus on how organisations and agencies provide help, safeguarding and protection for children and their families. There are three sections: Early help, Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and Child protection.
- Changes to the Prison and Probation sections highlights the mutual benefits of exchanging information with children's social care which strengthen and clarify processes and responsibilities for child safeguarding.
- Clarification of the expectation for keeping in touch with care leavers over the age of 21, and the non-mandatory reporting of care leaver deaths up to age 25 to improve learning and outcomes for this group of young people.

- A full summary of the changes have been published:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65803ff395bf65000d7191a2/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_summary_of_changes.pdf

1.28. As part of the support package to help local areas embed and implement the new ways of working set out in the revised Working Together and new National Framework within their Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs), additional capacity funding of £47,300 has been issued to Tower Hamlets. This funding must then be shared directly with the partnership itself and is to assist local areas in system transformation, implementing the reforms in Working Together, and embedding National Framework practices.

Next Steps for us:

1. Communicate the changes to the partnership (THSCP) - Complete
2. Implement a project group to support this work to be managed and monitored by the THSCP. To include:

Action
a) Strengthen multi-agency partnership working.
b) Clarify the roles of Chief Executive and senior leaders
c) Strengthen relationships with parents, carers, and families.
d) Align with the Children's Social Care National Framework.
e) Clarify roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners.
f) Distinguish between Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs).
g) Enhance accountability in information-sharing, scrutiny, funding, and reporting.
h) Consider the role of voluntary, charity, and social enterprise organisations in arrangements.
i) Strengthen the role of education and childcare settings in early help.
j) Emphasise family networks and family group conferences for family engagement.
k) Clarify governance arrangements for practitioners supporting families.
l) Introduce new national multi-agency child protection standards.
m) Strengthen and clarify processes and responsibilities for child safeguarding, especially in Prison and Probation sections.
n) Keep in touch with care leavers over the age of 21.
o) Non-mandatory reporting of care leaver deaths up to age 25 for improved learning and outcomes.
p) Update processes based on factual changes, including new legislation and guidance.
q) Clarify roles and responsibilities of health practitioners in child safeguarding.
r) Incorporate Domestic Abuse Act 2021 legislation and National Framework statutory guidance.
s) Correct factual inaccuracies and update information-sharing references.
t) Include references to young carers recorded in the school census.
u) Reflect changes to existing statutory guidance, ensuring accuracy and clarity.

4. Revise associated and relevant policies and procedures.
5. Coordinate training and learning events to ensure changes are understood.

Children's Social Care data and digital strategy

1.29. The newly published Children's Social Care Data and Digital Strategy aims to leverage data and digital services to their full potential, ensuring appropriate and careful use. It addresses challenges identified in reviews, emphasising the importance of strong multi-agency partnerships, effective information sharing, and leveraging insights from data.

1.30. The strategy responds to identified issues such as poor case management systems, technology barriers to information sharing, and underutilisation of collected data. Aligned with the "Stable Homes, Built on Love" plan, it aims to shift towards meaningful family help, a decisive child protection system, and a continuous learning environment.

1.31. To address the challenges 6 foundations have been set out to act as a guide to improving children's social care. A focus on these areas will be important to for improving services for children, young people, and families.

1.32. Foundations 1 to 4 focus on what needs to change to support the transformation of data and digital services in children's social care. Foundations 5 and 6 are principles for how we approach change.

1. Culture and Leadership

Building a strong, confident culture across local authorities, with the backing of senior leaders, will enable the best use of data and digital tools. A strong culture around data and digital services and effective collaboration between technical and practitioner teams helps create services that best meet the needs of a local authority.

2. Systems and Technology

Ensuring systems and technologies meet the needs of practitioners can support them to make a bigger positive impact in the lives of children, young people, and families. More effective systems and technology can maximise the time practitioners can spend with families and make it easier to get the information they need.

3. Information sharing

Tackling the knowledge-based, cultural, perceived legislative, regulatory, and technological barriers to easier information sharing can help to ensure that decisions are made with the whole picture of the child and family. This will help reduce the worst consequences of the fragmentation of information across agencies and systems highlighted in serious case reviews.

4. Data collection, insights, and analysis

Improving the process around data collection will help to:

- tackle the burden on local authorities.
- address the data lags that currently hamper the information available across the country about the children's social care system

Data that is more relevant to the lived experience of children young people and families can inform decision-making that better meets their needs.

5. Supporting children, young people, and families to tell their story

Across all our work we must be mindful that the systems and data used by practitioners provide a record of a child or young person's experiences. By improving systems, technology, and information sharing, we can improve the experiences of children, young people, and families for example, by reducing the need to repeatedly provide the same information to different practitioners.

6. Trust and confidence in the use of children's social care data

Trust that the data and information generated about children, young and families when they interact with children's social care services is being used appropriately and with care,

will be critical for maintaining support for the transformation of the use of data and digital services. We will seek to be transparent and clear about how data is being used.

1.33. Three strategic objectives have been identified to guide the work the DfE will undertake with the sector between now and 2025 To begin building the foundations for transforming data and digital services. transformation will be a long-term plan requiring action far beyond 2025.

The strategic objectives are:

1. Supporting strong data culture and leadership.
2. Supporting systems and technology to meet sector need.
3. Improving the data we collect, share, and use.