

The principal concerns that my ECLCM colleagues and I hope the Children's Homes Review to be conducted by Sir Martin Narey will address as a matter of urgency are listed below.

These bullet points reflect a "back to basics" approach to the provision and are not in order of importance or all inclusive.

We identify 23 vital areas for attention, which are listed as bullet points with brief additional notes under each one for your assistance. These points will form the basis for the ECLCM submission to the Children's Home Review.

1. Equality of ALL children

All children in care, irrespective of placement, are people of equal worth and equally frightened and vulnerable. The best interests of each child are paramount. All need to be treated and regarded as individuals, and their needs addressed and met individually. ECLCM see little evidence of this happening for every looked after child as local authorities are cash strapped and poorly supported by government- How will the Review address this?

2. Consultation with young people about their care and future

Children and young people in the care system are still not appropriately consulted or listened to. There is overwhelming evidence nationally of placing authorities and providers failing to attach sufficient weight /overriding young people's views - how will the Review address this?

3. Multiple moves of children in care

In spite of years of promises to reduce/eliminate unnecessary moves within care, which often critically disrupt relationships and fracture local links and any sense of belonging for young people in the care system, looked after children still experience multiple moves, some almost as a routine part of the "care experience". How will the Review address this?

4. Failure by planners and regulators to consider and factor in the impact on young people and placements of a young person's cumulative care experience

Children in the care system are people, and their lives cannot be reduced to placement 'chunks'. It is recognised by research and practice that children in the care system are affected by the cumulative experience of all their placements, and the cumulative effects of all previous placements impact on their current one. The inability to reflect this is a weakness of the Ofsted regulatory system and of social workers and placing authorities in planning and resourcing support for placements and young people. This can lead to even more stress on placements, placement breakdowns and moves for young people. In reviewing children's homes, how will the Review reflect the impact that multiple previous placements can have on the success of placements in residential care?

5. Separating siblings in care.

Siblings in the care system are still being separated to facilitate placement rather than because of sibling rivalry/safeguarding issues. This can cause irreparable damage to future family relationships. What will the Review do to address this?

6. Lack of therapeutic input to children across the care system.

In spite of often "ambitious" care plans, a large percentage of young people in the care system still do not receive any qualified one - to -one work/therapy. Time alone cannot heal emotional wounds. How will the Review address this inertia?

7. Lack of clinical supervision and recognised basic standard for individual and group therapy for children and young people in care.

ECLCM believe that the availability of therapeutic support and intervention either via CAMHS services or independently commissioned therapists is essential to meet the emotional needs of children and young people placed in residential settings. This should include the provision of individual and/or group therapy. ECLCM believe that children's homes should provide a therapeutic environment which is supported and potentially clinically supervised by a suitably qualified and accredited professional. Will the Review consider establishing a basic standard of therapeutic support for children in care?

8. Criminalising children in care.

Children and young people are still being criminalised and receive an accelerated entry into the juvenile justice system whilst in foster and residential care. This is often for normal adolescent behaviour rather than criminal behaviour and reflective of the inadequacies of the carers and care system rather than the children. How will the Review address this?

9. Poor preparation for Independence for all children in care.

ECLCM believe that young people are still poorly prepared for living and coping in semi independent living when they leave care. They remain emotionally and practically unprepared for living in the community. The "Pathway Plans" that are supposed to address this are very frequently inadequate. What will the Review do to address this?

10. Inconsistent behaviour management and use of restraint across the care system.

There is no single accredited and effective school of behaviour management or restrictive physical intervention fully backed by law, with clear stipulated methods, minimum staffing requirements, clear quality control/monitoring/safeguards to ensure children are not mistreated in care. What will the Review do to address this?

11. Poor recognition of critical importance of positive professional relationships.

The most powerful tool in introducing positive change and accelerating the healing process is positive professional relationships. These are still paid scant regard by practice which moves children around, forces them to cease contact with significant people from their past and does not recognise, promote or safeguard such relationships throughout the care career. What will the Review do to address this?

12. Contact with siblings and significant others.

Contacts with siblings and families are not afforded sufficient importance in the lives of young people in the care system. Kinship care is also seen as a 'poor relation' of foster/residential care. What will the Review do to address this?

13. Failure to recognise importance of home community of looked after children.

Young people are still being moved to placements long distances from their home base for reasons other than risk posed by family and others if they remain in their own community. What will the Review do to address this?

14. Poor access to independent advocacy and transparent complaints systems for looked after children across the care system.

It remains rare to find access to independent advocacy and transparent complaints systems for children and young people which do not depend on carers/staff in placement and/or local authority social workers to access. Truly transparent and independent advocacy and complaints procedures are still not routine for all children and young people in the care system. How will the Review address this?

15. Multiple changes in social workers for looked after children.

Young people still face constantly changing social workers during their care career, adding to their difficulties in trusting those with authority and officialdom. How can the Review address this?

16. Cost over quality in commissioning services

ECLCM recognise that pressures on resources in recent years have led to growing concern that commissioning of residential and fostering provision is increasingly based on cost to the placing authority and not quality of care provided to children and young people. How will the Review address this?

17. Inadequate regulation, inspection and quality monitoring systems for foster care and children's homes.

Young people are still not appropriately consulted or their views properly considered and taken into account by the regulatory systems in force in care settings. Ofsted inspections do not involve young people from care and are NOT child centred. In spite of their claims, they often measure short term outputs not outcomes for young people in the care system. Young people are rarely "tracked", visited or spoken with individually across their care career and following leaving care. "Quality of care" is measured in 'chunks' based solely on current placement. Inspection and regulation remain irrelevant for many looked after children. Similarly, "Regulation 44" visits still do not involve or consult young people effectively. How will the Review address regulation/quality assurance in care settings?

18. 'Placement bias' – Assumption that family based care is the better option for all young people when initial placements are considered.

ECLCM consider that government policy has led practice into a generally accepted belief that family placement is the best option for children needing care. ECLCM take the view that this should be led by the child's individually assessed needs and wishes. We recognise that the view that 'family placement is best' is not the view of all looked after children, many of whom prefer the different care environment provided by residential care. How will the Review reflect that a child's initial placement in a residential setting may be a better option than foster care?

19. Different quality standards being used for children placed in different care settings

Different quality standards are being used to monitor the quality of care for children and young people placed in residential and foster care. Given these are the same children with the same needs, aspirations and fears, ECLCM cannot see why they are regarded differently. How will the Review consider the disparities in these two sets of standards? Will the Review consider introducing single national child care standards to cover all children's care settings?

20. Poor and inconsistent mental health support and provision for looked after children and young care leavers.

CAMHS support and mental health services for children and young people in the care system are recognised by most professionals to be inadequate. What will the Review do to address this?

21. Quality of individual aftercare support workers for young care leavers.

ECLCM believe that the training, qualification experience, numbers, availability and accessibility of pathway plan/personal advisors is inconsistent and inadequate nationally to meet the demands of their work with young care leavers. What will the Review do about this?

22. Quality of housing, accommodation and practical support for young people leaving care.

The percentage of young care leavers represented in every disadvantage statistic - custody, homelessness, mental health, teenage pregnancy, suicide, etc is disproportionately high as support to this vulnerable group nowhere near approaches demand. What will the review do to address this?

23. Discriminatory leaving care policies - "Staying Put" for young care leavers.

ECLCM firmly believe that young people from all care placements are still required to leave their care settings at best when they reach 18 and often earlier. Many are ill prepared emotionally or practically to cope. In spite of 'Staying Put', many local authorities are not offering extended care in foster care to age 21 because of inadequate funding or provision. Young people in residential care and other care settings are excluded from 'Staying Put' rights by discriminatory legislation. ECLCM argue that only centrally government funded Staying Put aftercare support for ALL care leavers to age 21, enshrined in legislation and including a 'right of return' for young people who may have ill advisedly left care at 18, will address the crippling disadvantages faced by care leavers and reflected in national statistics. How will the Review address this?

These are bullet points of the concerns of the ECLCM campaign team which we would want to see addressed by Martin Narey in his Children's Home Review. However, we take the view that it is neither possible nor sensible to seek to review children's homes without looking at the wider issues that impact on looked after children, their carers and care leavers.