

Institute of Technology



Document Summary

Every Child Matters

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The death of Victoria Climbié and the cases of others like her expose some serious failings for children in the current system that must be addressed. Poor coordination, a failure to share information, the absence of anyone with a strong sense of accountability, and frontline workers trying to cope with staff vacancies, poor management and a lack of effective training can all cause failure to intervene at the right time. These problems affect not only the children at serious risk of harm or neglect but also those with less serious problems that can escalate if they do not receive help early on.

This Green Paper aims to address the needs of children at risk in the context of services provided for all. It attempts to provide a framework of services that can secure the following key outcomes for every child:

- being healthy
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- achieving economic well-being.

Significant progress has already been made in areas such as education, child poverty, young offenders and teenage pregnancy, but there is still more to do while life chances remain unequal. Poor outcomes are contributed to by factors such as low income, poor parenting, poor schooling, post-natal depression in mothers and individual factors such as intelligence.

To ensure good outcomes **better prevention**, a **stronger focus on parenting and families** and **earlier intervention** are all needed. To deliver these reforms, the underlying challenges of **weak accountability**, **poor integration** and **workforce reform** need to be addressed.

Strong foundations

Strong foundations for all children are to be achieved by:

- **tackling child poverty** through wider opportunities for parents to work and raising the income of working families – involving New Deal, wider access to childcare, national minimum wage and tax credits for working families
- **ensuring children have a 'sure start'** through expansion of Sure Start Centres and increased availability of other forms of childcare
- **raising primary and secondary school standards** through projects to:
 - improve attendance and behaviour
 - improve the attainment of ethnic minority pupils and those with special needs
 - integrate services through extended schools
 - increase incentives to stay in post-16 education
- **increasing access to primary health care and specialist health services** by increasing access and links to communities, and providing better staff training
- **building strong and vibrant communities** by providing safe places to go and positive things to do, investment in young people's services and the Positive Action for Young People Programme

- **reducing offending and anti-social behaviour** by making the system clearer and simpler, and by making use of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme and simpler 'menu'-style community sentences
- **ensuring children are safe** by tackling bullying, supporting victims of crime including sexual exploitation, tackling homelessness and supporting children entering the country, who are often those at greatest risk.

Supporting parents and carers

The bond between parent and child, and other positive relationships with adults, can have immense influence on the quality of outcomes for children. The Government's vision is to improve parental and family support through universal services, targeted and specialist support and compulsory action where needed.

Providing more and better **universal services** for families include initiatives such as:

- a national help line
- information meetings at key points in their child's life
- family learning programmes
- support programmes for fathers
- ensuring schools and other services communicate better and work more closely with parents.

Those with more specialist needs might benefit from more **tailored support** such as home visiting programmes, parent education programmes, family mediation services, and stress and relationship counselling. Those needing particular support are parents and carers of disabled children, young carers and families with a parent in prison.

Some parents may be harder to engage and may condone persistent truanting or anti-social behaviour. In these cases, compulsory action, as set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour White Paper, may be needed to ensure parents meet their responsibilities.

Fostering and adoption services must be improved to ensure all children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care throughout their childhood. Where children may not be returned to their families quickly, 'planning for permanence' is needed, while striking a balance between attempts to return them to their family and the need to find a good alternative.

There is a need to recruit and retain more foster carers, including those who might not have considered themselves eligible, and to offer the training and support they need.

Similarly, the adoption system needs to be modernised to ensure the child's needs are central, as well as recruiting more adopters, improving local authority performance on adoption, and improving the efficiency and clarity of court processes.

Early intervention and effective protection

Victoria Climbié came into contact with a number of services, none of which acted on the warning signs. No one built up the full picture of her interactions with different services. Often children with SEN, with behavioural disorders or suffering neglect can also find that intervention comes too late.

There is a need to:

- **improve information sharing** through local information hubs that list basic details and any cases for concern
- **establish a common assessment framework** to reduce duplication of assessments and improve quality of information
- **identify lead professionals** where children are known to more than one specialist agency to coordinate action and communicate with professionals, children and families
- integrate professionals through **multi-disciplinary teams** to identify and work with children at risk
- **co-locate services** in and around schools, Sure Start Centres and primary care settings to make them more easily available to those who need them
- ensure effective child protection procedures across all organisations through:
 - clear practice standards
 - shared responsibility across all agencies for protecting children
 - someone in charge locally
 - an inspection system that assesses how well agencies work together
 - workforce reform to ensure all people working with children are trained in child protection.

Accountability and integration

Fragmentation of services leads to inefficient provision with duplications and omissions. The Government's aim is for there to be one person in charge, locally and nationally, with responsibility for improving children's lives. Key services for children will be integrated within a single organisation. To achieve this, the Government will:

- legislate to create the post of Director of Children's Services, accountable for local authority education and children's social services
- legislate to create a lead council member for children
- integrate key services for children and young people under the Director of Children's Services as part of Children's Trusts, including:
 - local education authority
 - children's social services
 - certain relevant health services
 - other services such as Youth Offending Teams and the Connexions service
- require local authorities to work closely with public, private and voluntary organisations to improve outcomes for children
- ensure the creation of Local Safeguarding Children Boards as successors to Area Child Protection Committees.

The Government has created a new Minister for Young People and Families in the DfES to coordinate these policies.

The Government will encourage joining up of services locally by:

- ensuring children are a priority across services, with new duties to safeguard children for police and health organisations
- setting out clear practice standards
- rationalising performance targets, plans, funding streams, financial accountability and indicators
- creating an integrated inspection framework for children's services, with assessment of how well agencies work together
- creating an improvement and intervention function to drive up performance by sharing effective practice, and intervening where services are failing.

The creation of an organisation defined by its clients rather than its functions makes it important and useful to involve children and young people, and to listen to their views. For this reason, the Government is creating the role of Children's Commissioner to act as an independent champion for children and young people.

Workforce reform

The children's workforce is extremely important to the delivery and quality of children's services. The Government wishes to improve recruitment and retention in those areas of the workforce that need it, while also improving skills and effectiveness. This will require:

- a workforce reform strategy to improve the skills and effectiveness of the children's workforce (by training workers to do their job well and to know how to work effectively with others), and to make working with children a more attractive career option (by improving image, pay, management, workload, etc)
- a high-profile recruitment campaign
- a comprehensive workload survey
- more flexible and attractive training and routes into social work, including expanding work-based training for graduates
- common occupational standards across children's practice linked to modular qualifications to allow workers to move between jobs more easily
- a common core of training for those who work solely with children and families and those who have wider roles
- a review of the contribution that health visitors and other nurses and midwives can make for children at risk
- a leadership development programme.

The development and delivery of these proposals will be taken forward by two new bodies: a Children's Workforce Unit in the DfES, which will work to establish a Sector Skills Council for Children's and Young People's Services, which will deliver key parts of the strategy.