

Who is this document for?

This plan sets out some principles and initial methods which will inform our engagement with those of you that have lived experienced of children's social care.

This includes children's social care experienced children, adults, parents and families. Within this document we have made a commitment to 'bring the review to you'. However, if you are reading this and know someone with lived experience of children's social care who might not see this plan or feel that their voice does not need to be heard as part of the review, then please encourage them to get involved in a way they feel comfortable with. Alongside this plan, we will set out opportunities for those working in children's social care during the next few weeks. There will be lots of opportunities for those who work in this field to shape the review.

Our plans for engagement

Fundamental to getting this review right is making sure that the voices and experiences of those with lived experience of children's social care are at the centre. Our engagement will be broad, comprehensive and offer a place for people with any type of children's social care experience, of any age, to contribute.

Some children have had a positive and reaffirming experience in children's social care. Some parents get timely help when they need it. And there are excellent social workers, adoptive parents, foster families and kinship carers who make a huge difference to children's lives every day. However, there are also children and families who have a poor experience, and too many who continue to feel the impact of their poor experience throughout their lives. Those of you who have experienced this personally, with a full spectrum of positive and negative experiences, are uniquely placed to tell us what needs to change or remain as a result of this review. We hope that many of you with children's social care experience will be able to play an active role in the review - not only through participating in workshops and events but, with our support, by starting conversations about the review in your own communities.

Josh set out his '[early plans for the review](#)' and appointed the [Experts by Experience Board](#) on 1st March. The Board has now discussed and decided on this plan, which sets out how we will hear your voices during the initial months of the review. If you want to know more about these initial plans for contributing to the review - we want to invite you to a webinar, hosted by Josh and our Experts by Experience Board, at 4pm on 26 March, so you can hear more.

Our commitments to you

We have listened intently to what you have already told us; we have received thousands of messages since the review announcement on 15 January, looked closely at reviews which have taken place in Scotland and New Zealand and have, primarily, been led by the Experts by Experience Board. This input has allowed us to form ambitious plans for engaging with children's social care experienced individuals, which can be summarised in one simple commitment to you: **everyone who wants to, will be able to have their voice heard by, and contribute to, the review.**

Between 2012-2018 we know that 1 in 10 children had a social worker, and there are many children and adults that have experience growing up in the care system, parents with social care involvement and families who look after children as foster carers, kinship carers or adopters. We therefore make this commitment with our eyes open, and with an understanding that there will be many who want to speak to us proactively, but crucially, many who will not be aware a review is taking place or perhaps even recognise they have children's social care experience. We want to make a second commitment to those individuals, that: **we will do our best to 'bring the review to you'**. This will include designing methods with others that have lived experience of children's social care and working closely with specialist organisations that can help the review hear the voice of who are often not heard, for example children's social care experienced prisoners or homeless people.

This document sets out some of the methods of engagement the Experts by Experience Board have decided we should prioritise during our first few months. Some initial events have been included in our events calendar, and many more engagement opportunities will be available for you to sign up to during the next few days and weeks. **When you speak with us, we will want to hear your thoughts about what already works well in children's social care, what does not, and what needs to improve immediately as well as over the long-term. This engagement will always centre around the review's 'big question' : "How do we ensure children grow up in loving, stable and safe families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations?"**. To do that you may need to draw upon your past experiences, and we will support you to do that by having a trained professional on hand and a service you can access before and after speaking with us. At no point during any of our workshops, events or one-to-one meetings will you be expected to share your personal experience of children's social care, though you may wish to.

Q: Is this review a chance for me to report my personal experiences of children social care failing me or my family?

A: **The review is future focussed and is not a historical inquiry. It will not be able to remedy the individual poor experiences individuals may have faced.**

To summarise simply, if willing, we want you to use your experiences to help us build a better system for future generations and tell us about what we can fix now for those of you that already have children's social care experience. We will support you to contribute to the review by providing specialist and professional support, or you might want to access support by speaking to someone you already trust.

If you have concerns about a child there is more information about what you should do [here](#).

Finally, through the work this review does over the coming months, building upon various children's social care experienced led initiatives and work done day in, day out by organisations, we hope that: **the review will leave a legacy which provides solutions, recommendations and reasoning that individuals with children's social care experience can champion, and offer a large number of you to connect and amplify your voice.** We know that those of you reading this document with children's social care experience – whether as an adult that grew up in care, a foster carer, birth parent or any other type of experience – have much to offer the review. So, we will provide some of you that already have the time and expertise with tools and support

to start conversations in your own communities to inform the review – as well as the opportunity for you to and tell us directly what you think.

The purpose of the review is to gain an enriched and deeper understanding of the practices that exist within children's social care and use that to develop a plan for change. We hope that by adopting the following overarching principles the review and its final recommendations will lead to meaningful change and you are clear about the scale of our ambition:

- everyone who wants to, will be able to have their voice heard by, and contribute to, the review. We will provide feedback throughout and demonstrate the ways in which your voice has shaped the review's early findings and final recommendations.
- we will bring the review to you and ensure our engagement plans include ways to hear from the thousands of children, adults and families that cannot or will not proactively come and speak with us. We will be flexible in the format of these plans to reflect national Covid-19 restrictions – but will hold events face to face where possible and necessary.
- we will ask you to tell us about issues that have affected, and are currently affecting, children's social care experienced people today, and which do not need to wait until the conclusion of the review to be addressed; however
- the review is future focussed and not a historical inquiry. It will not be able to remedy the individual poor experiences anyone has faced.
- the review will leave a legacy which - through consultation and engagement - provides solutions, recommendations and reasoning that individuals with children's social care experience can champion and provide support so you have the ability to champion those outcomes.



Angela Frazer-Wicks

Experts by Experience Board Member

There will be a great many people out there who may feel like their voice is not important or that they have nothing constructive to offer.

As a birth parent I understand this completely, often shame guilt or trauma can stop us speaking out. However if we don't hear the full range of experiences, we cannot ensure that the changes the Review are recommending are properly representative, inclusive and fair. Every voice matters and every voice will be listened to so please don't stay silent, speak up and be heard.

One voice may be quiet but together we can roar!



Sean Geoghegan

Experts by Experience Board Member

Care experiencing and experienced young people are supposed to be “involved in every decision that affect their lives”. But too many have been badly let down and appallingly treated. The Care Review desperately needs to hear from them. Especially the hardest to reach.

Everyone really needs to express their views. Including social work practitioners involved in the process – from entry into the care system (to assess if young people get a choice of placement) right through to independence. It is important to assess the effectiveness of each and every stage; that in my view must surely include a fundamental review of the ‘transition’ process.

Older #cep (care experienced people) are a special asset and resource. And hugely important in providing ‘big’ or bold solutions – as we are also Parents, Foster Carers, Kinship Carers and Adopters. We hold the solutions and the context to fundamentally question ‘fixed’ and accepted practises within social work practice.

How we will hear your voice

No single format for sharing views or contributing to conversations about children's social care will work for everyone and reaching people with lived experience who won't be aware a review is taking place, is going to need to be central to our plans. Meeting that aim within the next 12-15 months means we need to offer a variety of methods to reach out and hear your views.

We think many of you, and particularly those with lived experience who are furthest from the review, may find it easiest to share your views with someone you already trust. The review will make available resources, tools and support, to allow individuals and organisations with children's social care experience to facilitate discussions on our behalf. Alongside those discussions, many of you will also feel comfortable, or find it preferable, to share your views with the review team directly and find well designed workshops or large events a good way to share ideas, build on other's experiences, and come up with innovative solutions.

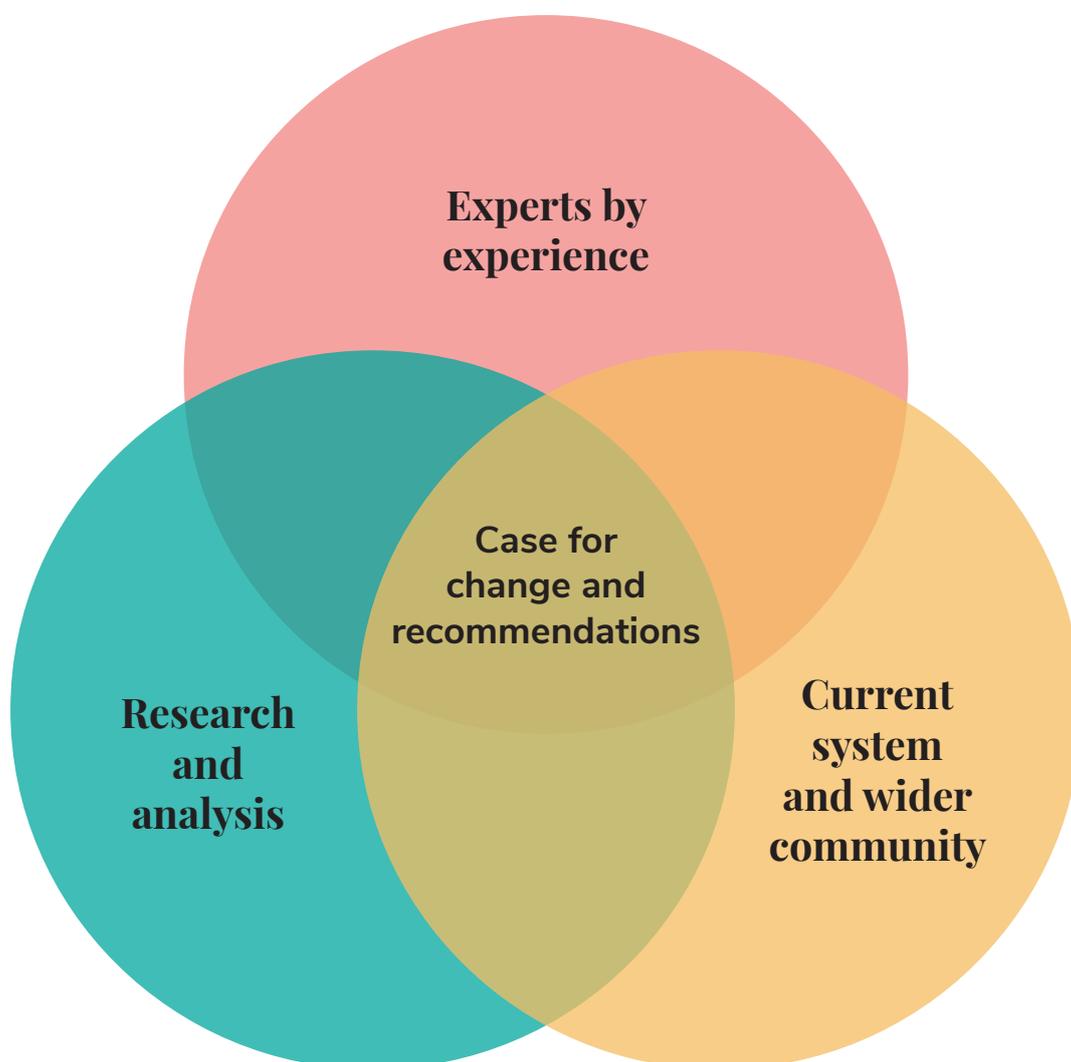
Others might find participating in large events daunting or uncomfortable and would prefer to have an informal one-to-one conversation. Others might prefer not to share their views verbally at all or to do so anonymously - and would prefer to complete online surveys, provide written thoughts, or express their views through more creative media such as poetry, music, and art. Finally, referring back to our second commitment to you – some will be unable to contribute at all unless we make arrangements for them to do so – and so this will be a priority during this first phase of the review.

The review's Experts by Experience Board thought deeply about which mix of methods the review needs to prioritise, and determined that these should be:

- **Local discussions led by individuals with children's social care experience:** The Board recognised that there are large numbers of children's social care experienced people that would like to play an active role in the review and are well placed to help it by facilitating conversations in their local communities. This includes many of the 995 people who applied for the Experts by Experience Board. Recognising that some children's social care experienced people would feel more comfortable sharing information with someone who has a shared experience – the review will prioritise methods which allow for conversations about key review topics to take place amongst an established community where the relationships are strong. These conversations will be enabled by the review providing tools, resources and support materials which individuals or organisations can use to gather views on our behalf.
- **Workshops and events led by the review and delivered in partnership with charities and other organisations.** In order to hear the widest range of voices as we possibly can, the Experts by Experience Board agreed that the review should focus its efforts on setting up a roadshow of events and workshops (online and, when possible, face to face). These will be designed with specific cohorts of children's social care experienced people in mind, for example younger children, adolescents, parents, as well as those who might require extra support to participate such as disabled children and adults, or children and adults who need the support of an interpreter. The Board agreed that the review should also partner with charities and organisations which already have networks and trusted relationships with children, young people, adults and families.
- **Focus groups and one to one conversations:** Alongside an offer which allows individuals with children's social care experience to contribute in larger groups at workshops and events, the Board also decided that there should be a specific offer for those that would rather speak in very small focus groups, or with the review team on a one-to-one basis. The review will prioritise making available an offer which allows individuals to book a slot to share their views in smaller groups, or on a one-to-one basis, if that is their preference.
- **Online Surveys:** Finally, the Board decided that the review should prioritise the use of online surveys when seeking views on particular topics or issues. This reflects the view that some people will prefer to share their thoughts in writing or anonymously.

Focusing on these four broad methods of engagement initially does not mean we will not offer other ways to engage - but we hope this provides some early clarity and will allow you to consider which of the above offers you the best way to contribute. We hope to have all of the above methods up and running during April - and some will be available sooner.

Further plans setting out how we will hear from you in latter stages of the review will follow after the review publishes its case for change in the summer, and we will continue to draw upon the best available data and evidence, the views of individuals with lived experience and those who work to support children, professionally or in their community - to start developing some recommendations.



Esi Cathline

Experts by Experience Board Member

The review is very relationship focussed and therefore the idea of carefully planned and engaging workshops is an ideal opportunity to learn interactively, to brainstorm and to collate ideas through problem solving and relationship building giving a great sense of togetherness.

By working with others not only can the targeted audience be multiplied, this also improves greater exposure. Charities are usually reputable and trusted so are more than likely to be trusted to work to a high standard in an ethical way.



Mags Mulowska

Experts by Experience Board Member

The Board prioritised local / community conversations led by other children's social care experienced people because this will open conversations and sharing that may not otherwise happen. Being led by children's social care experienced people will help those with similar experiences to honestly share their stories and their ideas for how the system can improve. Importantly, it will also build relationships between those in the children's social care experienced community. The system often severs us from our networks and more needs to be done to ensure that we are connected with each other and with our wider communities. These connections will help us advocate for ourselves more strongly. This initiative will give people the chance to build their skills in facilitating and listening. It is important that the process of the review improves the lives of those who take part in ways that will continue after the review process has finished.

Support we will offer you

Earlier in this plan we referred to the support package we will offer so that you feel able to participate in our events and workshops safely. Some of you may already have individuals and organisations in your lives that you trust and who can provide that support, and you may want to access that support before, during and after any event or workshop led by the review. We also know that there is a large cohort of children's social care experienced people living in communities across England who have the training, skills and experience to play a role in supporting other people with lived experience through peer advocacy and mentoring.

Where you already have a trusted relationship with someone in your life or locally, we would encourage you to work with them. However, where this is not the case, the review has partnered with the NSPCC helpline and Childline to provide support to everyone (children, adults and families) participating in the review. Childline offers a free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people. Childline gives children and young people access to confidential support when they need it and ensures they have someone to turn to when they are in distress or danger. The NSPCC helpline provides advice, guidance, and support to adults, and can take action on behalf of a child being abused or at risk of abuse. Both helplines have a skilled and professional staff team of practitioners, counsellors, and volunteers ready to support you throughout the review.

The review's engagement support provided by Childline and the NSPCC helpline is able to provide pre and post event support. These services can support you in the following ways:

- A dedicated helpline, available from 8am to 10pm on weekdays and 9am to 6pm on weekends
- Support by email, web form or the Childline web chat
- Guidance and advice hosted on the NSPCC and independent review websites
- Respond to any safeguarding concerns

In addition, the NSPCC and Childline will be on hand to provide in-person, online or telephone support during workshops and events - or be available on call in case participants at any of our events need to talk.

These services will be made available by the time any review-led events take place in April, and we will provide more information on our website during the next couple of weeks.



Janet Kay

Experts by Experience Board Member

Contributing to this review may involve you in reflecting about your life as a care experienced individual- what your experiences were, how they impacted on you at the time and how they have affected you in the longer term. And what changes could have improved the experience for you and for others in the future. This may involve thinking about difficult times in your life, painful feelings and memories of sadness and loss. It may involve exploring experiences that have affected you throughout your life. Offering expert support is our way of helping you feel safe and able to manage any negative feelings through guidance and advice from skilled professionals and signposting to any continuing services that you may need.



Let us know what you think

If you are reading this and know of groups we should be meeting with to ensure we hear from a diverse range of children's social care experienced individuals - or have views on our initial plans for engagement - let us know by contacting us at review.childrensocialcare@education.gov.uk.