

2) INCREASING LIFE CHANCES FOR THE MOST DISADVANTAGED

Children and Social Work Bill

“A Bill will be introduced to ensure that children can be adopted by new families without delay, improve the standard of social work and opportunities for young people in care in England.”

The purpose of the Bill is to:

- Ensure that the state delivers on our collective responsibility to help children leaving care make a good start in adult life, through a new ‘Care Leavers’ Covenant’ underpinned by a statutory duty requiring local authorities to publish the services and standards of treatment care leavers are entitled to.
- Tip the balance in favour of permanent adoption where that is the right thing for the child - helping to give children stability.
- Drive improvements in the social work profession, by introducing more demanding professional standards, and setting up a specialist regulator for the profession.

The main benefits of the Bill would be:

- Ensuring children in care have the support they need as they move into adult life.
- Increasing the number of children being adopted from care to a permanent home when it is in their best interests.
- Giving frontline services more freedom to work together to safeguard children and trial innovative approaches to deliver more effective care.
- This delivers on the manifesto pledge to raise the quality of children's social work and to protect children (p.35).

The main elements of the Bill are:

Looked-after children and care leavers

- Standards for how local authorities should act as a ‘corporate parent’ to support children in care and as they move into adult life.
- A requirement on local authorities to consult on and publish a ‘local offer’ to care leavers, setting out the services they are entitled to.
- An extension to the right to a Personal Adviser, someone who will make sure

care leavers receive the support they need as they transition into adulthood, to all who want one up to the age of 25.

Adoption

- Ensuring courts and local authorities take better account of a child's need for stability up to the age of 18 when making decisions about their future.
- A duty on local authorities and schools to promote educational achievement for adopted children and those in the long-term care of family members or guardians.

Regulation of social workers

- A specialist regulator for social work, to enable a clear focus on standards and effective training and development.

Children's safeguarding

- Better protection of children by ensuring that lessons are learned from serious child safeguarding cases.
- Support for innovation in children's social care by allowing local authorities to pilot new, innovative approaches.

Devolution:

The majority of the Bill covers devolved matters and applies to England only.

The provisions concerning adoption decisions apply to both England and Wales.

Decisions of the court are a reserved matter. Decisions of adoption agencies are devolved matters and we have engaged the Welsh administration on these clauses.

Key Facts:

- One in four prisoners have been in care. 70% of Britain's sex workers have been in care, and a third of people in care become homeless in the two years immediately after they leave care.
- The number of looked after children has been increasing steadily to almost 70,000 last year. 10,000 children leave foster or residential care each year and 39% of former care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2015.
- Currently around 90,000 qualified social workers in England, of whom around 27,000 work in child and family social work. Sir Martin Narey's 2014 review found that too many people were entering the profession lacking the knowledge and skills able to operate effectively.