



Submission to the Social Care Review in England: Response to the review's themes and questions

The [National IRO Managers Partnership \(NIROMP\)](#) is the national leadership group representing Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and IRO Managers. NIROMP welcomes the opportunity to respond to the themes and questions set out in the Social Care Review Terms of Reference. NIROMP would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our advice.

- 1. Support:** what support is needed to meet the needs of children who are referred to or involved with social care, in order to improve outcomes and make a long-term positive difference to individuals and to society?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Address the social determinants of health inequalities

The review should be informed by the recommendations of Sir Michael Marmot. He has meticulously documented the need to reduce social determinants of health inequalities as a matter of social justice. The six policy objectives outlined by Marmot are straightforward and simple:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention (1)

2. Strengthening families: what can be done so that children are supported to stay safely and thrive with their families, to ensure the exceptional powers that are granted to the state to support and intervene in families are consistently used responsibly, balancing the need to protect children with the right to family life, avoiding the need to enter care?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Learn and take a lead from people with lived experience

A whole system approach to inclusion, co-construction, and participation must be better understood and implemented. We see this as a major area for focused learning, development, and system change.

IROs will continue to call for leaders and advisors with influence over guidance and legislation to listen to the voice of those with a lived experience of the care and welfare system. We are committed to creating connections with people and using the impact of our role to improve services for children in care and care leavers; we work in partnership and if children and families need a voice we speak up and act.

b. Introduce a social model of wellbeing

We want to see sharp focus given to a social model of wellbeing and creating the building blocks for increased community resilience. Social and economic investment alongside cultural change and a sharing of power is needed. National and local policy objectives should integrate a golden thread of kindness; mutuality; and relationships promoted through a language that both respects and appreciates reciprocal power and the strengths and agency available within and across different communities (2).

c. Create a joined-up approach to keep families together

For lives and futures to change, there should be a refocused investment in helping families stay together safely and happily. The wider societal determinants that support family wellbeing should be prioritised. A coherent strategy to support joined-up approaches to social welfare including, for example, the determinants of income, employment, housing, school inclusion, and poverty in all its forms (health, digital, economic, educational, cultural, and social) is required.

By tackling the wider societal determinants of inequality and inequity, we should in time see significantly enhanced family and community wellbeing, prosperity, and resilience. Getting care right is not only a matter for social care; the issues are intersectoral and cross-government. Therefore, positive reform demands joined-up solutions and a whole-system approach.

3. Safety: what can be done so that children who need to be in care get there quickly, and to ensure those children feel safe and are not at risk of significant harm?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Revisit how child protection is conceptualised and managed

The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 aimed to improve services for children by promoting family support and help. There should be a move away from ‘muscular authoritarianism’ (3) in favour of help, compassion, respect, and recognition of the strengths and assets available within families and communities. And where permanence for children cannot be secured within family networks, swift and skilful practice must lead to court action without delay but in all other circumstances court should be avoided.

The ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 7 shows poverty has a significant determinant on factors such as parental mental ill health, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and child neglect (4). As well as investing in community based universal services for lower level need, families must have access to sufficient and effective services for higher level need based on a more sophisticated understanding of support provision (5).

Shared care and work with family and friendship networks should be developed and incentivised, so that where safety allows, parents and extended family in partnership with support services, are fully enabled to care for children with help from their own family networks.

There should be deeper listening and learning from people who have lived experience of the social care system. Children, families, and the workforce need the scaffolding of help, support, and accountability necessary to cultivate trust and a different type of conversation. People who are experiencing multiple disadvantages need to be listened to but more than that, they need to be seen and treated as equal partners and this should filter through to the principles informing service design, delivery, regulation and inspection.

Services need to develop ways to get alongside and build trust with families, to genuinely understand what matters to them, listening with purpose and humility to make a difference through a different type of relationship that is more reciprocal. There must be sufficient social work skill, curiosity, organisational capacity, capability, and support services to effectively build helping relationships over time. And senior leaders must create the cultural and operant conditions necessary to bolster professional judgement. For a cultural shift to happen, people in leadership and professional positions need to be brave enough to challenge, to listen, to try different approaches, to make and learn from mistakes, and to have the humility to share power.

b. Build the infrastructure to support parent and child participation and advocacy

Promoting parent and child participation is central to achieving children’s rights. A review by the Better Care Network and the International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN) shows the importance of the role of parent advocacy in achieving better outcomes of children and their families in child welfare, and provides encouragement to parents and their allies to work together to

transform child welfare systems (6). Positive change demands that parents as well as children with lived experience of child welfare systems have an increased role and influence in the development of better social care systems.

c. **Build on good practice to support improvements to mental health**

National policies require effective local delivery systems that give value and emphasis to mental health and wellbeing. The South East Clinical Review and Practice Guide for all staff working with Children in Care, provides a practical overview of best evidenced practice in recognising, understanding, and supporting the improved emotional wellbeing of our Children in Care. The guide will be rolled out nationally. It is a good example of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency collaboration to improve the effectiveness of delivery systems (7).

4. Care: what is needed for children to have a positive experience of care that prioritises stability, providing an alternative long-term family for children who need it and support for others to return home safely?

NIROMP recommends:

a. **Extend the ban on the use of unregulated accommodation**

The ban that comes into effect this September will require all 16 and 17 year olds to be placed in a setting that guarantees them 'care'. But, this leaves 16 and 17 year olds vulnerable to being placed in accommodation that is prevented by law from providing care. The ban on unregulated care should be extended to include 16 and 17 year olds. National policy should promote and support the language and principles of 'Care' irrespective of age. Regulatory reform is essential in addressing the issues and improving standards for all children in care. No child should be placed in unsafe, unsuitable accommodation and the messaging of social care policy should endorse 'care for all'.

b. **End all profiteering from the care of vulnerable children in care**

The examination by the Competition and Markets Authority into whether profits for private providers are coming at the expense of quality of care is to be welcomed. The motive for operating and providing care for children should be quality and sustainability, not profit, which in itself, changes the dynamic of why and how care is provided and includes influence on provision not solely focused on the needs of the child. Private companies should not be able to generate significant profits on the back of vulnerable children. Systems for providing care must be driven by children's needs, not maximising profits.

5. Delivery: what are the key enablers to implement the review and raise standards across England, such as a strong, stable and resilient workforce, system leadership and partnerships, and what is needed so that this change can be delivered?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Explicitly address Racial and Ethnic Disparities

Professional institutions cannot maximise social justice and human wellbeing without advocating to reform the racist and oppressive systems that social workers still work within and beside (9). The Social Care Review should fully consider the role of racism and ethnic disparities within institutions and systems that have affected social care for generations.

Explicit attention should be given to anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice in the Social Work England Education and Training Standards. The review should consider why social work institutions have continued to regulate Black, Brown, and ethnic minoritised social workers more rigorously (10).

IROs and their managers have an ethical duty to oppose racism, both personally and professionally, and to demonstrate what it means to be anti-racist along with wider public servants; directly confronting racism at the individual, agency, and institutional levels. We should be held accountable to this anti-racist mandate (11).

NIROMP rejects the conclusion of the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (Cred) (12). The Cred report denies the extent and effects of institutional racism in the UK. In contrast to the landmark inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (13); the Lammy Review (14); the McGregor-Smith Review (15), the Cred report was not peer reviewed and has been extensively discredited by health professionals (16), academics (17), business chiefs (18) and criminal justice experts (19).

There exists a plethora of quantitative and qualitative data evidencing institutional racism. The evidences includes but is not exhaustive to the Covid-19 Marmot Review (20), the Runnymede Trust (21), the Resolution Foundation (22), and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (23) documenting the existence of 'lived' racisms and racialisations endured by individuals in the UK today across most sectors of industry as well as academia, education, the healthcare system and the criminal justice system.

NIROMP could document many more examples of credible evidence. The knowledge base that exists on the extent and effects of racism and the impact in the UK, particularly on the educational outcomes and life chances of young people from racial / ethnic minoritised backgrounds which includes children currently living in the care system and those with experience of living in the care system is undeniable.

b. Introduce a more inclusive education system

There must be effective measures to end the systematic exclusions and inequalities in secondary and higher education. Digital poverty must be addressed (1) (24) and more must be done to address what campaigners are referring to as the 'PRU-to-prison' pipeline (25). Financial and pastoral resources should support everyone to reach their potential. The creation of a tertiary education system that enables all learners to access different types of learning throughout their lives is needed.

c. Implement the recommendations of the Public Law Working Group

The recommendations of the Public Law Working Group (PLWG) address concerns about the impact of proceedings on the growing number of families involved, as well as increasing workload pressures on social workers, lawyers and judges. Longer term, the report recommends extending the role of independent reviewing officers (IROs) and conference chairs to offer additional oversight outside of proceedings to aid more consistent decision-making, prevent drift in pre-proceedings and help promote the voice of the child. This is to be broadly welcomed so long as IRO workloads are manageable.

6. Sustainability: what is the most sustainable and cost-effective way of delivering services, including high-cost services, who is best placed to deliver them, and how could this be improved so that they are fit for the future?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Return to the principles of the Equality Act 2010

Recent review carried out by researchers at the University of Bristol (26) found that there are some protected characteristics that are associated with an increased risk of poverty in the UK: race, sex (in the case of single mothers), and disability. In relation to age, younger workers are much more likely to be in poverty than other age groups. They also found that intersectionality plays a large role; the more protected characteristics a person has, the more risk they bear including increased likelihood of incurring poverty premiums, even compared with low-income households as a whole.

There should be a commitment across all public bodies to attend to the socio-economic inequalities as much as personal ones. Considering the inequality laid bare by Covid, this should be the opportunity to start taking measures to address the social determinants of poverty on an intersectoral basis (27) (20). Action should therefore attend to the original intention of the Equality Act 2010 (28), recognising intersectional disadvantage, would help to address prevailing inequalities.

NIROMP urges the review to consider the need for a national equity-based plan and long-term investment to address the range of complex, health and welfare disparities demands the building of partnerships across sectors, industries, communities, and institutions to allow all forms of knowledge and social value to flourish.

7. Accountability: what accountability arrangements are necessary to ensure that the state can appropriately, balancing the need to protect and promote the welfare of children with the importance of parental responsibility, and what is needed to ensure proper oversight of how local areas discharge those responsibilities consistently?

NIROMP recommends:

a. Listen deeply and act to the voices of people with lived experience

NIROMP worked as collaborators with the 'Our Care Our Say' group, a collaboration between the Care Experience Conference team, The Care Leavers Association and care experienced friends from across the wider community. The key messages from people with a lived experience of the care system are summarised in "Is this the time people are actually going to listen?" (29). It outlines how the review should be conducted and where attention should be focussed. This information has been shared with Josh MacAlister in order to inform the review and its outcomes.

NIROMP will also be working with groups such as [A National Voice](#) to support more children and young people to contribute to the review.

NIROMP's support of the review will not exclude us from being critical of its findings. If we find that the voice of children in care and care leavers has not been reflected in the outcomes we will speak up and raise issue.

b. Build on Independent Reviewing Officers examples of good practice

Robust conversations and disagreements are an important aspect of active collaboration involving relational and strengths-based approaches towards shared goals for the benefit of children, young people, families, and communities. NIROMP's Strategic Vision and Priorities (31) are based on the key principles of working collaboratively towards a better understanding and a better future for all children and young people with care experience. The strength of our Communities of Practice (32), regional networks (33) and approach to sharing of good practice resources (34) continues to be highly valued. The positive benefits of relationships, help and support is evidenced repeatedly both in research and in the expressed views of children and adults.

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