Social work reform – Commons Education Committee

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Summary
The House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry and report on social work reform provides a useful overview of government policy and recent developments, and raises a number of significant concerns, which are addressed in the report’s recommendations.

This briefing will be of interest to a broad range of elected members, local authority officers and staff in partner agencies who are responsible for, or work in, children’s social care.

Overview
Following a speech in September 2015 by the (then) Prime Minister in which he described improving the quality of children and families social workers and children’s services as a key reform priority for the Government and “a big area of focus over the next 5 years”, the Education Select Committee was ‘prompted to launch an inquiry into social work reform by the lack of clarity on how the Government intended to achieve its aim’.

The Committee asked the DfE to set out:

- the Government’s overall strategy for the reform of children and families social work
- the specific problems this strategy is seeking to address and the evidence behind it
- the action being taken by the Government to avert the recruitment and retention crisis in children and families social work
- how new initiatives in reforming children and families social work build on other recent reforms
- the impact upon children’s social care of reductions in funding to local authorities and other employers of social workers.

The Department’s response, summarised in a memorandum to the Committee, focused on three core aims: improving the skills and capacity of the workforce; creating working environments in which quality, innovation and efficiency are key to developing the best work with children and families; and streamlining governance and accountability.

Since the launch of the Committee’s inquiry, the Government published Children’s social care reforms: a vision for change in January 2016 and a more detailed paper, Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care in July (see ‘Relevant briefings’). It also published the Children and Social Work Bill in July, two of the stated purposes of which are to
enable better learning about effective approaches to child protection and children’s social care, and to enable the establishment of a new social work regulatory regime.

Briefing in full

The Committee published the DfE memorandum alongside a call for written evidence in January 2016. It received 47 written submissions, took oral evidence from a range of witnesses (including Children Minister Edward Timpson and Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler), and held a private meeting/seminar with representatives from the social work sector.

The report’s Introduction says the number of children who became the subject of a child protection plan rose from 44,300 in 2010 to 62,200 in 2015, and comments, ‘Against this background of increasing demand, funding constraints have put local authority spending on children’s services under severe stress. In view of these pressures, it is critical to look at the role of children and families social work and what can be done to ensure the profession copes with ever-rising demand.’

The Select Committee acknowledges that the proposed reforms have the potential to make some significant improvements, but warns of some concerns about particular aspects. The report – which concentrates on those areas of concern – is divided into six main parts; these are summarised below with recommendations shown in italics.

2: The role of central government

The implementation of reforms

‘The last decade has seen a large number of reports, reviews, and reforms of social work.’ Following the death of Peter Connelly (‘Baby P’) in 2007, the Government established the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) to improve the overall quality and status of the profession. Its 2009 report made 15 recommendations (all accepted by the Government), focused particularly on a national college for social work, a national career structure, professional supervision, continuing professional development (CPD), and social work education. Responsibility for implementation was given to the Social Work Reform Board. In 2011, Prof. Eileen Munro’s report was published of her review of the child protection system in England; this was critical of the bureaucracy in social work and emphasised that relationships with children and families should be at its centre; its recommendations (almost all of which were accepted) included the introduction of a Chief Social Worker, Principal Social Workers in each local authority (LA) and a national college for social work.

Several pieces of evidence to the Committee suggested that previous reforms should be given more time to ‘bed in’, and contributors to the private seminar, and others, expressed concern at the lack of consultation with the sector on the new reform agenda.

‘We are concerned that the pace of the new reforms could compromise their effectiveness, especially without proper assessment of the degree to which previous reforms have embedded at a local level. Despite the publication of a more detailed policy paper on the new reforms, the implementation timelines are still unclear and there is no reference to previous reforms. The children’s social care sector has been in continuous transformation over recent years without the
necessary time to reflect, assess and embed. The latest reforms need to be conducted in partnership with the sector. Local authorities and other employers require sufficient time to understand what is being asked of them and to put in place the necessary changes.

**Recommendation**

‘The Government should publish a single national reform implementation plan, with clear expectations for local authorities, employers and educators of what needs to be introduced along with achievable timescales. This plan should cover delivery of both previous and new reforms, and a clear mechanism should be put in place to assess the success of the reform agenda by the end of the Parliament.’

**Departmental co-ordination**

Responsibility for social work comes under the Department for Health (DH) for adult social care and the DfE for children and families social care; social work is delivered via LAs, so the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) also has a role. Responsibility for child protection covers a wider spectrum of Departments, including Work and Pensions (welfare policies) and the Home Office (which leads on preventing child sexual exploitation and domestic violence). The Child Protection Taskforce, comprising twelve Ministers and chaired by the Secretary of State for Education, was created in June 2015 to co-ordinate the work of Departments, with a remit to extend and accelerate reforms to the quality of children and families social work.

The Committee heard concerns that the Government was focusing on child protection to the detriment of other aspects of children and families social work. Several pieces of evidence expressed concern that the DfE and DH were pursuing different agendas, with examples of how the future for children and adult social work appeared to diverge from each other – though the Minister and Chief Social Worker sought to reassure the Committee that this was not the intention.

The Munro Review recommended the creation of a national Chief Social Worker spanning children and adults (‘[Benefits] include recognising the interconnectedness of issues facing children and families as well as not unintentionally dividing the social work profession’). The Government instead created two Chief Social Worker positions, one for children and families reporting to the Education Secretary, the other for adults reporting to the Health Secretary; the Minister said that this decision followed an unsuccessful attempt to appoint to a single post.

‘Despite the confidence of the Minister and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, we are concerned that the DfE and DH agendas are not coordinated, and the profession is being pulled in two different directions. There is a pressing need for greater coordination within Government on the future of social work in England… In addition, Government policy prioritises child protection… [which] risks marginalising wider issues in children and families social work such as domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health and learning disabilities.’

‘We recommend that there be one Chief Social Worker sitting outside departmental structures, as proposed by the Munro Review. One Chief Social Worker would unify the profession at a national level and encourage joined-up thinking within Government.’
3: Initial training

Initial education

‘In 2003, the qualification route for social workers became an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, replacing the previous two-year diploma. The degrees cover social work for both adults and children, with specialism after the first year. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approves Higher Education Institutions to deliver social work degrees and grants approval for individual courses. Following completion of the degree, graduates must register with HCPC to practice as a social worker. ‘Qualifying routes’ were expanded with the creation of Step Up to Social Work in 2010 and Frontline in 2013. The Department invested £35m in both over the 2010-2015 period, and announced in January that they would expand these approaches by investing a further £100m.’

Specialisation in initial education

In 2013, the DfE commissioned Sir Martin Narey to review initial social work education for children and families social workers; his report concluded that there were major deficiencies in preparing students for social work practice and that ‘social work should remain a single profession but with specialised degree programmes’. In 2014, DH commissioned Prof. David Croisdale-Appleby to review social work education for adult social workers; his report concluded that social work degrees should remain generic so that all social workers ‘have the capability to work with all individuals, groups and communities and to do so in all settings and institutions’.

The majority of evidence to the Committee was in favour of a generic social work qualification. Frontline and Step Up to Social Work specifically produce children and families social workers, rather than a standard qualification. An independent evaluation of Frontline reporting in March 2016 said that its model inherently moved away from generic social work, but that concerns over Frontline narrow focus on child protection were not borne out. Others said that accelerated schemes were narrowing the range of learning to the detriment of a family approach to social work, and participants in the private seminar unanimously favoured a generic start.

‘We are persuaded of the need for a generic initial qualification for children and families social workers, as they should have a broad understanding of issues affecting both children and adults. Specialisation should primarily occur in post-qualifying training. We recommend that the Government increase generic elements in both Frontline and Step Up to Social Work curricula as we are concerned that at present they focus primarily on children and families social work.’

Frontline

Despite a DfE-commissioned evaluation of Frontline concluding that the ‘initial evidence is mostly positive’, the Committee received mixed evidence on its merits, with the primary concern about the lack of evidence supporting its teaching model. It was suggested that the DfE was prematurely celebrating the virtues of an approach that was still untested, and that the programme must be subject to robust evaluation, and needed to be sufficiently flexible to respond in line with future evaluations.

The financial implications of Frontline and Step Up’s expansion were recurring themes in evidence to the Committee. Academics were especially concerned at the disparity in funding between fast-track programmes, where trainees receive a bursary of around £19,000 and have their course fees
paid, and university social work courses, for which some lower value bursaries are available, but numbers are capped and their future is unclear – partly as a consequence of spending cuts to university based programmes.

'We recommend that the Government commission an extended research study of Frontline alongside university routes to establish comparative long-term outcomes. The Government will then have a stronger evidence base to make decisions on any future changes to the funding and structure of qualification routes.'

Frontline originally delivered its teaching programme with the University of Bedfordshire, but brought the provision of training in-house as part of its plans to expand. ‘The current lack of co-operation between Frontline and universities is unhelpful. Both routes will continue to run alongside one another in the future and it is important that they share knowledge and experience. As universities are the major source of research evidence, they should be able to influence the development of Frontline to ensure the programme remains evidence-based. We recommend that any future contract with Frontline to deliver social work education include a university partner to collaborate in the design and delivery of the academic programme. In the meantime, we encourage Frontline and the university sector to co-operate more closely. We ask Frontline and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee to write to us setting out how they propose to work together.’

4: Post-qualifying training

‘In October 2014, following advice from the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, DfE announced three levels of social work practice: Approved Child & Family Practitioner; Practice Supervisor; and Practice Leader. Subsequently, the Department published a statement of knowledge and skills for each social work level. These statements will form the basis of a new national assessment and accreditation system for each level, which the Government hopes will provide a career pathway for social workers, public assurance on the quality of practice and expertise, and improve the quality of leadership … The Department told us accreditation will be only for children and families social workers, with no plans to extend it to adult social workers.’

The DfE memorandum emphasised its continued support of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), introduced to increase a newly qualified social worker’s (NQSW) specialisation, and ensure they can develop their practice skills in a supported environment with reduced caseloads. ASYE is voluntary for employers, but the DfE pays £2,000 for each NQSW they support and participation has increased over time.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

Children and families social workers are required to participate in CPD throughout their career to stay registered and be able to practice. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the current social work regulator, annually select a random sample of 2.5% of children and families social workers to be audited for CPD, by submitting a profile which demonstrates how their CPD activities contribute to their practice and service delivery (this arrangement will require overhaul due to the Government’s intention to change the regulator by 2020). Several submissions to the Committee spoke of the importance of improving access to, and quality of, post-qualifying training, and expressed concern that the new reforms did not sufficiently prioritise this; one observed that the DfE memorandum lacked even a paragraph on post-qualification training.
The Committee’s evidence suggests that improving access to quality CPD will assist in retaining quality staff, and it was told that in exit interviews a key reason for leaving was limited professional development. The report contrasts the current position in England with the stronger offering in Wales, and comments, ‘We recognise that the Government’s approach may trigger some local authorities to improve CPD, but there are wider issues relating to resourcing and quality assurance that the accreditation scheme will not resolve. We are not convinced local employers will “inevitably” expand their CPD training given the financial pressures on budgets, and there could be significant variances in quality.’

‘The current offer for CPD and post-qualifying specialisation is inadequate, variable and diffuse. We recommend that the Government work with the sector to create a robust, national post-qualifying framework to give a coherent shape to the continuing professional development of children and families social workers throughout their career. The Government should develop a rigorous endorsement process for the new post-qualifying framework in collaboration with the social work profession. Re-registration as a social worker with the regulator should be dependent on some current or recent participation in endorsed courses, rather than only generic CPD activity.’

**Accreditation and assessment**

‘It is the Secretary of State’s ambition to have every children and families social worker fully assessed and accredited by 2020. The Chief Social Worker for Children and Families said in January 2016 that there would be a consultation on whether accreditation would be mandatory or not “within weeks”. When we asked her about this, she said the consultation was pending the results of the year-long pilot and that the “plan is to go to consultation as soon as possible.” There are still no details about the planned consultation.’

Evidence was mixed about the benefits of accreditation and assessment, and concerns were raised about the vagueness of the Government’s plans and the lack of communication with the sector over the issue. ‘We recognise that the proposed accreditation and assessment system is in development, but there are still too many unanswered key policy questions for a programme which has the potential to destabilise an already fragile workforce. Subjecting social workers to rapid reform and possible upheaval may have severe consequences.’

‘We recommend that the Government bring forward its consultation on accreditation. This consultation should set out proposals on what will happen if social workers fail the process, and how it will ensure social workers can continue to move between statutory and non-statutory positions and different types of social work. It should also seek views on the principles behind accreditation and whether it constitutes the best use of resources.’

**Assessed and Supported Year in Employment**

‘We received several pieces of evidence suggesting the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) was an effective programme for new social workers and should be made mandatory… [and] that, before any move to make ASYE mandatory, it needed to be quality assured across the country.’

[A recent FoI-based survey showed widespread variation in implementation.]
‘The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is an important programme. The Government should develop, in conjunction with the sector, a quality assurance system to ensure that ASYE is delivered at a consistently high level across the country and that caseloads are protected. It should also explore options for fully-funding the cost of the ASYE to ensure that employers have the necessary resources properly to support newly-qualified social workers. We recommend subject to these conditions that ASYE be made mandatory for all newly-qualified social workers. In addition, registration as a social worker should remain provisional until the ASYE is satisfactorily completed.’

5: Retention

‘As of September 2015, there were 28,570 children and families social workers in statutory settings, or a full-time equivalent of 26,500. There were 5,470 FTE vacancies, or 17% of the workforce, an increase of over a quarter since 2014. There were large local variations in the vacancy rate … These retention problems are not new: the interim report of the [SWTF] in 2009 found that widespread staffing shortages were compromising the quality of social work. Shortages of experienced social workers have increased reliance on the locum social work market, with the majority of vacancies filled by agency workers.’

The DfE memorandum conceded that there were retention concerns – with the average career in social work lasting less than eight years, compared with 16 for a nurse and 25 for a doctor – but suggested that it would tackle these through its reform agenda. But a recurring theme in the Committee’s evidence was the lack of focus on retention in the reforms, especially in comparison to recruitment.

‘The Government must prioritise fixing endemic retention problems in children and families social work. Its current strategy is too dependent on Frontline and Step Up to Social Work improving retention, when these programmes are too new to provide sufficient evidence they can have an impact. Furthermore, the Government is clear that Frontline and Step Up will only produce a minority of children and families social workers. There needs to be as strong a focus on keeping experienced social workers in the profession as there is on improving the quality of entrants.’

Improving working conditions

In the Committee’s private seminar, the morale of social workers was described as “extremely low”. Excessive workloads were identified as a primary reason, ‘and evidence suggest caseloads are at dangerously high levels’. The Standards for employers of Social Workers in England is a voluntary framework developed by stakeholder partners (in response to a SWTF recommendation) to act as a ‘health check’ of caseloads and other working conditions.

‘We recommend that the Government reinforce the use of Standards for employers of Social Workers in England. ‘Health checks’ of working conditions should be made mandatory. The Government should also consider making the entire framework binding for local authorities. Without better working conditions for frontline social workers, who are facing ever-rising demands, the entire reform programme will be put at risk.’
Fixing the ‘blame’ culture

‘The two most significant recent reports on the state of social work in England – Building a Safe and Confident Future, by the Social Work Task Force, and The Munro Review of Child Protection – both highlighted the sustained negative media images of social work, compounded by a lack of understanding about the profession… In the past, The College of Social Work took a lead role through its Policy and Communications Unit to promote a more balanced public view of social work. Following the closure of the College in 2015, it is unclear who will continue this work.’

‘In co-ordination with the social work profession, the Government should consider how successes in social work can be measured and promoted. We recommend the launch of a national public awareness campaign celebrating the positive aspects of social work, and explaining its complexities, to boost the profile of the profession.’

Creating a learning culture

‘The Government’s memorandum stated that “sometimes social workers operate in a spirit of defensive, process-oriented compliance.” Our evidence suggested the fear of blame within children and families social work is counter-productive to the retention of social workers. We heard in our private seminar that the negative rhetoric from central Government about social workers, and the fear of being blamed for mistakes, was contributing to high stress and low morale in the workforce… We are concerned that a ‘blame culture’ appears to exist within social work, which can be exacerbated by the way the media reports on social work cases. This culture is a significant reason why experienced social workers are leaving the profession. Tackling the blame culture needs to be higher on the Government’s reform priorities.’

‘The Government should examine the benefits of a ‘just reporting culture’, as recently announced by the NHS, to move the sector towards a learning culture as recommended by the Munro Review.’

Workforce planning

‘Several submissions to our inquiry raised the issue of poor data and lack of workforce planning.’

‘High vacancy rates and retention problems in social work have existed for far too long, especially in specific geographic regions. We recommend that the Government, working closely with local authorities, the regulator, and the social work sector, establish a national workforce planning system to tackle these issues. The system should include national and regional models for forecasting supply and demand, and give employers the ability to influence the supply of graduates.’

6: Professional body, regulation and leadership

The report relates the short history of The College of Social Work, which was set up with Government support in 2012 following a recommendation by the SWTF, and closed in 2015 following financial difficulties as membership failed to reached the level required for the College to be self-sustaining. The Committee heard evidence of a strong need to fill the gap left by the collapse of the College, with different opinions on how a new professional body should be developed. This included some evidence which pointed to the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) as the natural replacement (a view supported by the Chief Executive and
Registrar of HCPC), but support for this position was ‘far from universal’, with evidence suggesting formation of a new body. The College’s former Chief Executive, Annie Hudson, wanted a new body “independent of government... fully committed to ensuring effective and consistently strong practice standards”, and told the Committee it would need “a clear and explicit mandate and set of functions, together with a sustainable business plan”.

“Our evidence was clear that there was a need for a new body. How that should be delivered matters less than securing the clear support of the sector and individual social workers, and including strong incentives for membership such as having responsibility for professional accreditation.’

“We are concerned about the absence of a professional body for social work to provide high profile leadership for the profession following the closure of The College of Social Work. We accept that a top-down approach to its replacement may not be suitable but the Government must do much more to help the profession recover from the loss of the College... We recommend that the Government facilitate the development of a professional body for social work, working in partnership with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), other social worker representatives and the wider sector. It is imperative the proposed body is widely supported, and that its functions are clearly mandated and not shared with other bodies. It is important that there is a single, unified solution and that BASW and the professional body do not find themselves in competition.’

The new regulator

‘Social workers are required to register with a regulator to ensure that only qualified and competent practitioners are able to practice. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) has regulated social workers in England since 2012, following the closure of the General Social Care Council (GSCC). HCPC is an independent multi-profession regulator, covering 16 health professions ... In its January 2016 paper, A vision for change, the DfE announced it would “set up a new regulatory body for social work” with “a relentless focus on raising the quality of social work, education, training and practice in both children’s and adult’s social work.”

The Minister told the Committee the Government wanted a body focused purely on social work, with a wider remit than HCPC to look at post-qualification, accreditation and potentially CPD. The Children and Social Care Bill currently before Parliament includes provision for setting up a new body, but includes little detail of how the system will work. Other evidence to the Committee argues that giving the new regulatory body powers over improving education and standards was not the right move, as its role should be protecting the public by ensuring that standards are met.

‘A regulator should concentrate on public protection by upholding standards and should not stray into defining professional standards for qualifying and post-qualifying education which we consider to be the role of an independent professional body. The Government’s proposals for a new regulator to have power in these areas will further marginalise the voice of social workers in influencing the standards of their profession. Our proposals for a successor for The College of Social Work should be the Government priority rather than changing the regulatory system once again... We are unclear as to why a change of regulator is needed, and call on the Government to rethink its plans. The Government has already spent too much money changing regulatory bodies. Another change will either require further injection of significant public funds or place an unfair financial burden on individual social workers.’

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The future of Principal Social Workers

The Munro Review recommended each local authority designate a principal child and family social worker to advise on enhancing practice skills and take responsibility for “relating the views of social workers to those whose decisions affect their work”, and most have done so. In 2015, the Government created Practice Leader status as one of the levels of accreditation, and the Committee heard evidence about the confusion that exists around these two roles. Principal Social Workers at the Committee’s private seminar were concerned that their position might be eliminated in the new reforms, before it was even embedded in the system.

“We have heard that the role of principal social worker is valued. It should be retained so long as local authorities and frontline social workers find it useful. The current confusion over what the principal social worker position should be is not conducive to the role’s success. We recommend that the Government commission research on the role of principal social workers to establish best practice and that it produce guidance based on this evidence. The Government should include in this guidance clarity over how principal social worker and Practice Leader roles interrelate in current structures.’

7: Structural change and innovation

“We cannot… ignore the proposed changes to the wider context in which [the social work profession] operate. In this Chapter, we consider the Government’s plans to reform the structure of children’s services and stimulate innovation in the system, and discuss the concerns we have heard about this approach.’

‘Different ways of working’: innovation in children’s social care

‘Clause 15 of the Children and Social Work Bill is entitled Children’s social care: different ways of working. Its stated purpose is “to enable a local authority in England to test different ways of working with a view to achieving better outcomes under children’s social care legislation or achieving the same outcomes more efficiently.”

Under the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme, launched in 2014 and expanded in 2016, LAs are encouraged to try new approaches and learn from best practice through the allocation of funding for new projects which ‘take bold new approaches’. A ‘What Works Centre’ for child protection is intended to provide a permanent mechanism for identifying and disseminating excellence, alongside which is a ‘Partners in Practice’ system (with the best-performing LAs working together) to provide a “blueprint for excellence that the whole system will be able to learn from”.

Evidence to the Committee generally welcomed introducing more innovation to the system, but there were concerns about the long-term sustainability of programmes and the need for innovation to be evidence based. It was suggested that the What Works Centre should be located within a university or group of universities, and that its focus should not be limited to child protection but should cover the spectrum of children’s services. There was also a warning that LAs which have made considerable progress to improve are still vulnerable to failure (one of the original Partners in Practice withdrew after an Ofsted judgement of ‘outstanding’ was followed by ‘requires improvement’).
‘We welcome the Government’s focus on encouraging innovation but we believe some caution is necessary. The Government needs to ensure that projects are evaluated fully before being applied at a national level. We want to see further details about the What Works Centre, including the strength of its relationships with research active universities, its approach to evidence, and its level of funding. The Centre’s focus should be expanded to all aspects of children and families social work, not just child protection.’

**Intervention and new structures**

‘Another significant element of the Government’s innovation strategy, which ties in with its commitment to increase the robustness of governance and accountability, is the intention to bring in new ways of delivering children’s services other than through the traditional local authority model. The memorandum said the Government would work “with local authorities and others on new models for the delivery of children’s social care, through social care trusts, combined social care systems and city deals.”’

The Children and Social Work Bill proposes exemption for certain LAs from the requirements of social care legislation (similar to current powers for the Secretary of State to exempt LAs from requirements of education legislation). The (then) Prime Minister signalled this policy intent in December 2015 when he announced that poorly-performing children’s services would be taken over in a “formalised academy style system” by high-performing local authorities, child protection experts and charities. After an Ofsted judgement of ‘inadequate’, an LA would be provided with support to diagnose problems, and its progress reviewed after six months. If insufficient progress had been made, or when the failure was considered to be systematic or persistent, a Commissioner would be appointed to review whether services should be removed from council control.

‘Independent trusts currently run statutory services in Doncaster and Slough and it was announced in May 2016 services in Birmingham would be similarly reorganised. A recurring theme in our evidence was the lack of an evidence base to support the Government’s proposals.’ The Committee also heard that six months was not enough time for an LA to turn its services around.

‘We recommend that the Government assess the effectiveness of the existing independent trusts before expanding the model any further. Statutory children’s services should remain in local authority control until there is clear evidence that the independent trust model improves outcomes for children and young people. It appears that charities may not be as enthusiastic about taking on statutory services as the Government is to invite them to do so. Six months is an unrealistic timescale in which to expect substantial improvement. Take-over of a local authority at this point could lead to further disruption and demoralisation and should be a last resort. At the end of the six month period, an assessment should take place to consider a range of options, including whether given more time, and a comprehensive package of support, the local authority could improve its children’s services without them being taken over.’

**8: Conclusion**

‘It is clear that the Government treats social work as an important priority, but its reforms focus on changing structures potentially to the detriment of the people delivering this key public service. There needs to be more co-operation between the Government and the sector, with children and
families social workers given greater input into the future structure, development and regulation of their own profession.

‘The Government needs to take urgent action in partnership with the sector and the social work profession to address issues like poor working conditions and lack of professional development. The most important way to achieve this collaboration is through the establishment, with the Government’s support, of a strong professional body for social work with a clear set of functions. This body, building on the role of the College of the Social Work, but avoiding the pitfalls the College encountered, would play a major role in implementing reforms and the changes we have proposed. With the new body in place, the Government and the profession together would improve children and families social work and deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families across the country.’

Comment
This hard-hitting report was published on the same day that Theresa May became Prime Minister, and the day before Justine Greening took over as Secretary of State for Education. Each of its recommendations either invites the Government to change its mind over a proposed feature of its reforms, or to remedy a significant short-coming. It will an interesting early test to see how Ms Greening approaches her response – and of crucial importance to the future of children and families social work, and to social work and children’s services more broadly.

External links
Commons Education Committee: Social work reform inquiry

Commons Education Committee: Social work reform report

DfE Memorandum to the Committee

Related briefings
DfE Policy: Putting children first (August 2016)

DfE and DH policy – Regulating Social Workers (August 2016)

Social Care Annual Report 2016 – Ofsted (July 2016)

Children’s social care reforms – Government plans (January 2016)

Making the education of social workers consistently effective – DfE report (February 2014)


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