



The independent review  
of children's social care

# bridge THE GAP

Connect- Explore- Create

A series of highly participatory online events for professionals and people with lived experience of children's social care to inform the independent review of children's social care in England.

**EXPLORE** - 27th September 2021

Collective Story Cafe for Social Workers and other children's social care professionals.

# Executive Summary

## 1 The Context

- In 2019, the government committed to review the care system to ensure that children and young adults were provided with the support and care that they need. As a result, an independent review team was commissioned to examine the existing challenges faced by the children's social care system and make recommendations for improvement to the government.



- The review team conducted a preliminary analysis, defined the problem, and published the "Case for Change". The Case for Change sets out the review team's interpretation of the challenges within the system. It is a reflection of the engagement and research conducted in the early stages of the review. The overall purpose of the review is to answer the following 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?"



THEME 1  
WE ARE NOT DOING  
ENOUGH TO  
HELP FAMILIES

THEME 2  
WE NEED A BETTER  
CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM  
THAT SUPPORTS  
GOOD DECISIONS  
ABOUT CHILDREN &  
FAMILIES

THEME 3  
THE CARE SYSTEM  
MUST BUILD  
NOT BREAK  
RELATIONSHIPS

THEME 4  
CHANGE WILL NOT  
HAPPEN WITHOUT  
IMPROVING HOW  
SERVICES WORK

- Bridge the Gap is one of the many forms of engagement used by the review team to gather views, experiences, and ideas from a range of diverse voices to inform the review's recommendations and policy proposals.

## 2 Bridge the gap

- Bridge the Gap is a series of highly participatory online events for individuals from across children's social care who are experts by experience (i.e. kinship carers, foster carers, adoptive parents, birth parents and families, care experienced young people and adults, social workers and other professionals).

Bridge the Gap is a 3-step process with the purpose of engaging people from across the system to:

- 1 **Connect** with each other and the Case for Change, open up a dialogue around it, gather reactions, and identify gaps.
- 2 **Explore** stories of people's experience of children's social care, helping them to move from individual stories into a collective story that identifies key themes.
- 3 **Create** solutions for the whole system by co-creating an agenda of conversations aimed at taking the key themes identified at the Explore event and developing them into solution-focused proposals and recommendations to be fed into the review.



## 3 Explore

- In the explore step of the process, a series of events are held where individual stakeholder groups from across the children's social care system meet. One event was held with kinship carers, foster carers and adoptive parents, another with care experienced young people and adults, another with birth parents and families, and another with social workers and children's social care professionals.



- These events are intended to bring together each participant group to discuss their unique experience of the system in order to reflect on the individual and collective experience, identify key issues and explore possible solutions.
- The methodology is rooted in the Art of Hosting practices, where the Case for Change and supporting data is presented to each group. This is followed by three rounds of collective story cafes, where from the individual stories of the participants, the collective stories of the group are collated; patterns, problems, strengths and possibilities are identified; and based on this, possible solutions are proposed to improve the system.

#### 4 Key Themes & Emerging Ideas for Change from the Explore event with Social Workers & Children's Social Care Professionals

- There is a lack of resources and inappropriate allocation of the resources that are available. The lack of resources could be potentially resolved by focusing investment on Early Intervention.
- Unsustainable workloads, low levels of wellbeing and lack of appropriate support are contributing to high staff and job role turnover. This leads to difficulties in establishing and maintaining internal and external relationships.
- Social work is a relational practice. Difficulties in creating and sustaining effective long-term relationships feedback into the system and create further pressures on workload, wellbeing and support capabilities.
- The profile and status of social work as a profession must be raised. A lack of understanding and misperceptions among the public and partner agencies about the nature of the role are a significant barrier to building effective relationships.

- Pockets of existing good practice, pandemic practices, good practice in comparable services and foreign approaches to social work can all be drawn upon to improve deficiencies in the wider system

## 5 Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank all the Social Workers and professionals who gave up their time to take part in this event. We are particularly grateful to the NSPCC for supporting participants to take part in this event.

## About Community CoLab

The review team commissioned Community CoLab to devise, manage, and facilitate Bridge the Gap.

Community CoLab is a branch of CoLab International - a global collective of community organisers and facilitators, working with public, private, third sector organisations and international cooperation agencies from across the world to help them improve the quality of their conversations, meetings, events, and maximise the collective potential of their teams through participatory leadership.

CoLab brings together the expertise of their global extended network to support organizations to achieve their goals through dialogue and collaboration, designing and co-creating ad hoc solutions using innovative methodologies and technologies that harness wisdom, creativity, and imagination to tackle daily or strategic problems.

[www.communitycolab.co.uk](http://www.communitycolab.co.uk)

## About Event process

### Bridge the gap

Bridge the Gap is a series of participatory online events for individuals from within different groups involved in the children's social care system. In addition to social workers and other professionals these groups include individuals who are Experts by Experience (e.g., kinship carers, foster carers, adoptive parents, birth parents and family, and care experienced young people and adults). This process aims to move people from discussing the challenges faced by the system into a position of identifying opportunities

The aim of Bridge the Gap is to assist the review team in understanding more deeply the collective experience of those individuals within the system to empower them to explore potential solutions.

Bridge the Gap works across three moments: **Connect, Explore, Create**. This document's focus is to report on the process and results of the Explore event with the group of Social Workers and other children's social care professionals.





## Explore

"Explore", as its name implies, explores the stories of Experts by Experience, first individually and then collectively, to identify in those stories the aspects to improve and the strengths that should not only be maintained, but also promoted, so that, as far as possible, they are spread throughout the system.

From the exploration of stories, supported by the collective intelligence that arises from recognising a peer in the other, reducing the barriers of mistrust and perceiving the possibilities that this offers, a space for co-creation of ideas opens up to receive possible solutions to identified problems.

With that disposition towards the generation of ideas, the event closes by posing three final questions to the participants focused on finding ways to improve the system in a manner that enables all participants to contribute their points of view. These questions were drafted by the review team. They are based on previous stages of the review and are tailored to be relevant to each participant group. For the Social Workers and other children's social care professionals Explore event the questions were:

How do we create a working culture that supports high quality social work and retains experienced and skilled staff?

What are the benefits and challenges of a system that carries out family support and child protection together?

How do we improve collaboration between social workers and other services?



# Methodology

This highly participatory three-hour event is rooted in The Art of Hosting and in particular a process known as Collective Story Harvest which CoLab has blended with another method known as World Café. Our methodology takes into account the purpose of the Explore event and its constraints. The whole process was delivered online using Zoom and Miro (online collaboration and engagement tools). The event was facilitated by CoLab's team with a member of the event team present in each of the Zoom break-out groups and virtual café tables. This support team comprised of CoLab staff, review team members and representatives from their extended network.



The Explore event began with a technical introduction to enable the widest participation of the attendees. Next, contextualisation was carried out through the presentation of the specific part of the Case for Change relating to Social Workers and other children's social care professionals. Then three rounds of collective stories café were held, with the purpose of obtaining the key elements of the individual and collective stories and identifying possible solutions to the problems identified in the stories.

At the end of the event, a space is opened for the participants, to individually contribute their point of view to the three questions posed to the group.

A total of 92 participants including the support team attended this event for Social Workers and other children's social care professionals.

In the first round of the collective story cafe, the attendees were divided into small groups of four. Each small group was assigned to a Zoom breakout room and allocated a virtual table on the Miro board to record their discussions. Facilitated by a member of the event team, the groups were tasked with sharing their personal stories by responding to the prompt "What has helped or hindered your experience of children's social care?"

The majority of responses focused on hinderances. The four most frequently mentioned hinderances identified by the participants related to the interconnected areas of resource allocation, workload, wellbeing, and support.

Typical comments related to resources included:

*"Our priorities have to be about safeguarding but there is a complete lack of resources."*

*"The system can't afford us - we work so many extra hours."*

*"There is not enough time for social workers and IROs to spend time with families."*

*"My biggest bugbear is lack of true resources. Need to apply more scrutiny to permanent placements. There's greater pressures and less time in these circumstances. Impact of lack of appropriate resources is significant - trying to get a match right at the start."*

*"Not enough resources and funding - lack of sufficient placements re siblings."*

*"We don't always get to invest early enough."*

*"We've lost shared workspaces which pushes people apart - technology doesn't always help."*

*"Hot-desking, and (in my case) the need to pre-book desks at work surrounded by others from all over the council, limits a sense of team space, affects staff retention, emotional containment, team culture."*

*"IFA'S (Independent Fostering Agencies) should not exist -instead pay and supervise foster families. This would make huge savings and focus training where it is needed and will be used."*

*"Minimal vs huge money to be spent. There are no in-between choices."*

*"Placement availability and the 'marketplace'. High turnover of places for individuals - financial pressure on us to move cared for on [to permanent adoption]."*

*"Can be very difficult to tap into partner resources e.g. charities, third sector agencies."*

Typical comments related to resources included:

*"There's so much work to be done, where do you start?"*

*"What's hindered? More processes, ticking boxes, blame, covering your back, you don't have time to do the real work - get sucked into paperwork, we react to issues we are not proactive."*

*"How we're working is unmanageable."*

*"Culture that you get the work done and close it - people's lives aren't like that, what we're trying to do with families is unrealistic."*

*"Should I be more worried about trying to help children or the work I need to do - incentive not to look too closely."*

*"The system would fall over if we worked our hours."*

*"It's not just counselling, we're being asked to do too much."*

*"When I started you did a summary at the end of the week, not writing up every phone call."*

*"Social workers don't have time to slow down and reflect and that reflection time is key to working well with families."*

*"Challenge is time spent writing reports."*

*"80% of time is spent on paperwork and writing 20% on spending time with families."*

*"Paperwork and bureaucracy have increased - less time with families."*

*"Caseloads are too high."*

*"Caseloads are a big challenge for social workers, high caseloads limit the amount of quality time that can be spent with young people and families."*

Perceptions of lack of resources and unsustainable workloads have contributed to the low sense of wellbeing expressed in the following comments from participants:

*"Am I in the right profession - the stress and the profession has a high toll."*

*"Stressful profession." "People sick due to stress. Some kind of supervision is useful." "Overall, positive culture but difficult to stay in due to stress."*



*"Flexible working, hot desking, noisy and really uncomfortable environment."*

*"It's extraordinary that social workers last as long they do."*

*"It is so hard, culture where people are forced to be martyrs."*

*"You're not allowed to be afraid, you're expected to enter situations the police wouldn't alone, lack of honesty on the impact of the work."*

*"The conditions we work in are toxic - unspoken culture that if you go for counselling it's because you're weak - expect us to be heroes" "Being stressed and overworked is a good day - bad days you get abused."*

*"There is no counselling support - we need to recognise vicarious trauma, there should be mandatory monthly counselling."*

*"You carry the stress of the professional network. You have to carry teachers', foster carers' worries as well as your own, it feels impossible sometimes."*

*"Children are given therapeutic input, police are, but social workers are not."*

Participants expressed that they felt inadequately supported in managing their workloads and wellbeing.

*"We used to have so much support (CAMHS, family support). - Now there's just me."*

*"Been in social worker for about 20 years. Supervision is really important and without it - social work is really difficult. This is particularly important for new social workers to support them when things are particularly difficult."*

*"Technology has meant that there isn't a safe space for social workers to discuss the challenges with their colleagues and limits opportunities for support with colleagues."*

*"How are we progressing plans and relationships - it takes commitment and long-term involvement (but this is not happening at the moment)."*

*"Social workers can keep children safe by having a supporting team (informal team) and regular supervision."*

*"A good manager makes a huge difference and not enough resources go into them."*

*"Practice models are great - these ask you to emotionally invest in the work, but without the support to help you do it you burn out."*

*"Regular supervision very beneficial. But not so good is how we're supported - difference in acceptable thresholds for escalation, resilience (how much you're expected "to take")."*

*Many respondents stated that these issues with workload, well-being and support lead to high turnover of staff creating further pressures on the system.*

*"More experienced social workers workloads are massive, and this means new social workers are not supported, but the pressure that experienced social workers are under can mean they leave the practice."*

*"The system should look at retention and not blame social workers and ask them to do mindfulness as a solution or put them in charge of self-care."*

Other significant but less frequently stated hinderances involved issues related to training, the impact of Ofsted inspections, information sharing, and concerns about the review process itself.

Many participants questioned the adequacy of social worker training and felt that social workers begin the profession insufficiently prepared for the realities of the role.

*"As a newly qualified social worker, it can be really difficult to get that experience needed for practice."*

*"More training needed for social workers."*

*"Senior management is very important. lots of examples of incompetence; lack of training of how to be a manager. Most CP teams are staffed by newly qualified SWs who learn poor practice from the outset."*

*"Instead of having social workers with specialist knowledge we are asking families to speak to ten different people when they are already under pressure."*

*"I'm ten years qualified. I didn't feel prepared for how to intervene with families. Sometimes I still don't. I'm not sure the current system prepares social workers to be able to intervene properly either. I still feel there's a real gap in preparing social workers to be able to make a real change. We are working with trauma, in a therapeutic way, this often goes unrecognised within our profession."*

Although participants understand the need for inspection and quality assurance, they expressed concern about the impacts of Ofsted inspections on workload and working practices.

*"Ofsted - impact of the inspection + prep and aftermath. Social workers leave because of their experience of inspection."*

*"Challenges as a service manager are trying to deal with DFE and OFSTED performance targets none of which are evidenced based."*

*"We work in ostensibly a relational job yet how we do stuff and measure stuff is not relational. What we are feeding back is for OFSTED not for the people."*

*"Find inefficiencies and bureaucracy shocking. Micro-drains on time and resources. They are there because of pressures like Ofsted."*

*"Innovation happens more in failing areas because they don't have to worry about losing their Ofsted rating."*

In addition to the previously mentioned dissatisfactions centred around the volume of paperwork and the amount of time spent on it, there were also concerns raised about how information was recorded and shared.

*"Social worker code of ethics - we don't always get information from the local authority when supporting very, very traumatised children. Need to improve how information is being passed on."*

*"We don't talk to each service."*

*"Need to better inform voluntary sector and partners to understand role of IRO."*

*"Making sure young people are equipped with information - need for transparency."*

*"Errors in paperwork. Language too technical."*

*"Language is often full of jargon and difficult to work with and a barrier for families."*

*"Lack of communication is a hinderance."*



Despite showing willingness to contribute to the review by volunteering to participate in Bridge the Gap, some participants remained sceptical of whether any change would be brought about as a result of the review.

*"Lots of people who are not social workers designing how social workers should work."*

*"We have had so many reviews what has changed. Scepticism exists around the review - what's the follow through on this process?"*

*"Lack of funding may impact the outcomes of review. Need extra funding to deliver holistic solutions."*

*"Feel that the Case for Change narrative is unhelpful especially [with regard to the] calibre of social workers."*

Some participants shared positive experiences. Many cited instances where the above mentioned hinderances were actually positives or working well in their particular area.

*"We restructured 3 workers to 1 manager, offices where people sit together, talk, hypothesise and getting great feedback from families who are now feeling more supported."*

*"Social practices model, well-structured from top to bottom, retention and management culture are positive."*

*"We have more access to research on the impact of trauma on children, and there is more training to foster carers, why children do what they do."*

This suggests that there is some inconsistency in working practices across the country. For example, at one table a participant from a regional city recounted the problems caused by remote working without access to office space or a central work location. This contrasted with a London based participant who expressed that she felt guilty for having such a well-appointed office and working conditions. This inconsistency was even present in the responses from the same individual with one stating that "there was too much admin" and a "lack of support" but at the same time stated that use of technology over lockdown had reduced the administration burden.

*"Culture - when staff feel supported, they feel safe in their practice. [If you're] not in a supportive structure, you're worried about every decision you make. Have had experience of bad but in a good place now - have worked across 4 LAs."*

In their responses, some participants looked beyond the UK to compare their experience.

*"Is social work training adequate? In other countries it's more of a therapeutic profession."*

*"German model is person-centred and not based on a philosophy that permanent adoption is best".*

*"Worked in US and UK, striking working much better in UK - multi-agency, ability to choose who to work with. US is only investigative model, no intervention models available."*

There is evidence from this first round of the collective story café that responding to the challenges of the pandemic may have led to improvements. One respondent found that a "pandemic learning culture" helped to increase flexibility. Others reported that they had increased productivity because they were now "suddenly allowed to use 'risky' tools such as WhatsApp and video calls".

*"Covid has taught us a lot about ways of working: used to drive 2-3 hours for a meeting to talk to other professionals."*

“Helpful: flexibility through pandemic, learning culture, supportive managers, have some amazing practitioners.”

“Supportive managers are for staff to feel safe and learning cultures. Flexibility has been really helpful, which we have shown during the pandemic.”

In the second round of the collect story café, a facilitator at each table highlights the relevant aspects identified by the group in the previous round, and those who have come from other tables bring in and comment on key aspects identified in their groups during round one. This nurtures the collective history and expands the scenarios in order to clearly define problems, strengths, and possibilities within the stories.

The strengths and possibilities found were:

- Despite the issues of high workload, poor wellbeing and lack of appropriate support raised above, participants felt that social workers tolerate these conditions due to their human strengths.
- Coordinated working focusing on the young person has proved successful.
- Reflective practice.
- Good outcomes possible with multi-disciplinary teams (especially when mental health professionals are embedded in the team).
- There are some outstanding LAs and pockets of good practice. These could be used a learning resource for the rest of the system.
- There are many examples of technology being used well to enable SWs to perform better. Many examples of effective IT use arose during the pandemic. How can these be retained and developed post-pandemic?

- IROs frequently cited as performing well, staying in role and building good relationships with colleagues and families. What changes to other SW roles can be made based on the IRO way of working to help with staff retention and long-term relationship building?
- ASYE, apprenticeships and other “grow your own” social worker schemes believed to give newly qualified staff a strong start in the profession.
- Child and family centred ethos can have positive impacts.
- Legislation related to children’s services is thought to be robust and could be provide clear direction for driving improvements.

Specific suggestions arising out this second collective story café included:

“Breakdown placements to 30 days, then 70 days and then 100 days.”

“More apprenticeships to make social work more accessible and to increase diversity that reflects the communities that are supported.”

“Contextual safeguarding needs its own part in the system.”

“The case management systems need to be the same across different LAs.”

“Regular personal supervision (provided by a different role?)-counselling/therapy for social worker.”

“Greater focus on wellbeing - recognising that relationships between staff matter.”



"Greater focus on preventative Early Help rather than funding to CP processes / court."

"Multi-agency, nationwide IT database for more efficient information-sharing."

"Focus on relationship-based practice."

"More support for newly qualified social workers."

"[There needs to be a] debate about whether social work should be within the local authority or not. A national system could avoid 152 LAs reinventing the wheel; but would need to remain alive to local needs."

"Learn from how health services share responsibility rather than working in silos."

"Joint case holding for social workers, working in teams like police do."

"Rewarding social workers to stay in frontline practice. E.g. Non-traditional career path. Step up for social work for pay rise, if declining to apply for management positions."

"Other services and parts of system need to understand the SW role. This would make us more effective when working with other agencies. This may mean us going into schools etc and talking about our role (what we can and can't do)."

"SW's should have a 4 day week - 5 days frontline is too much. Would this space help us be more resilient and more effective in the 4 days we do work?"

"Provide time off casework – time for reflection and supervision."

In the final round of the collective story café, participants were asked to consider the strengths, possibilities and ideas that they had previously discussed. With the help of their facilitator each group was tasked with deciding which solutions or suggestions could have the biggest impact on the system. Each group was asked to select up to three high priority solutions to be shared in the closing plenary.

The groups' priority solutions reflected key issues raised in previous rounds with potentially high impact solutions related to the following themes proposed:

### **Workload, support and supervision.**

"Regular clinical supervision for social workers to help with wellbeing, and to improve retention."

"Less Bureaucracy / better business support - let social workers be social workers."

"Creating safe and supportive spaces for social workers, including clinical supervision and alleviating blame culture."

"Give social workers time to be social workers, need manageable caseloads, reduce paperwork/bureaucracy time and realistic assessment timeframes."

"Regular preventative therapeutic support for all social workers."

"Be Realistic. We all need to define what is realistic. What can we manage. Being realistic about workload enables space for good practice mentioned in the ideas (peer reviews rather "audit")."

"Support workers to have better work-life balance, e.g. meetings via Teams/online, being able to work from home, using tech more efficiently."

## **Improve training at all levels of the system.**

"Guarantee of statutory placement for social work students (not DfE definition placement but a frontline social work setting)."

"Update SW training to bring in more lived experience perspectives and specific training e.g. poverty awareness."

"Provide leadership training - people management and strategic mindset - big picture view."

## **Practice, approach and systems-based solutions.**

Within this theme, early intervention and resource allocation were frequently addressed.

"Multi-agency, nationwide IT database for more efficient information-sharing."

"Multi-agency child protection plans are contributed to directly by health, education, police (rather than social workers completing for other agencies)."

"More focus and resources for early intervention focused on help (including community and voluntary services)."

"Embedding social workers in the community and particularly in schools to better develop knowledge of and relationships with children and families."

"Stop children's homes, social work agency providers, fostering agencies being run for profit (by venture capital or by local authorities)."

"Remove arbitrary timescales and league tables because children and families need more time to make changes."

"Create non-profit based systems within national ethical framework."

"Performance markers to get away from paperwork-based to better reflect the work done with people - more about the outcomes."

### **Raising the status of social work**

Conversations during this process suggested that raising the profile of social work could positively impact many of the issues raised in the earlier stages. Suggestions based around raising public perceptions of the status and nature of social work included:

"Active push back against public narrative about social workers."

"Government to take a more supportive stance, recognising the specialism of the social work profession. Assurances against contamination of so called 'experts' and 'independent' advisors."

"Increase value and recognition of SW role/ increasing incentives for social work career - government to prioritise them and respect them and lead that portrayal, reclaim the role of social work back to therapeutic, supportive and relationship focus not signposting/care management focus."

At the end of this round a plenary where a spokesperson from each of the groups shared their ideas for high impact solutions. Whilst this was happening audience reactions, comments, and questions were welcomed in the Zoom chat.

The event closed with an invitation for all participants to reflect on their collective exploration through the event. Based on this reflection, they were invited to propose concrete individual responses to the three key questions set by the review team.

Each question along with its corresponding responses are presented below.



How do we create a working culture that supports high quality social work and retains experienced and skilled staff?

### **Welbeing & support**

"Quality supervision."

"Feeling valued in the workplace- e.g. parking, set team spaces, visibility or upper management."

"The social care system needs to be more accountable for the wellbeing of its workers, and stop putting resilience just on the worker. It is abusive in some cases.."

"Stop the blame and fear culture."

"Look after the hardworking social workers and don't let them burn out."

"Clinical supervision and ensuring a national pay and progression framework like other professions have. Supportive systems that allow for actual social work and not having to work til midnight to keep up with paperwork after having spend an hour doing direct work."

"Protect the mental health support of social workers."

"A system that supports social workers through dealing with daily trauma, enabling space for reflection on impact and effective trauma informed support, not just casework supervision."

### **Training & experience**

"More practice focus in SW education."

"Master's training for all staff if they want it (modules)."

"Better transfer from university to workforce - ASYE is not fit for purpose it is a box ticking exercise and ASYE's are exploited to fill vacancies."

## **Management**

"Pod team structure- co-located with other professionals, group supervision."

"Good inclusive senior leadership that listen to the experienced and skilled staff."

"Reduce agency staff."

"Put in more support staff e.g. family support workers, admin, social work assistants."

"Reward experience & outcomes not just progression to management."

"Frontline is not a great programme - too elitist, SWs do not stay."

## **Working conditions**

"Key worker housing."

"Manageable caseloads."

"Embed teamworking e.g. joint caseholding, joint visiting."

"Join a union!"

"UNIONISE!"

"Realistic caseload sizes."

"Greater focus on team work, and reducing workload to more manageable (in respect of time) situations."

"Improve office working conditions and admin support."

"No hotdesking, small teams, high level of management support and good admin support."

"Right to work from home (on a hybrid basis)."

"Right to flexible working and part time/compressed hours."

"Clear, manageable and respected progression for frontline workers (not just into management)."

"Give social worker autonomy over their work and allow them to use creatively in their practice."

"While ensuring social workers are accountable, it is essential the the barriers to performance are addressed and managed by supervision."

"Clinical supervision is needed as discussed for all."

"Debriefs after critical incidents."

What are the benefits and challenges of a system that carries out family support and child protection together?

### **Benefits**

"Same social worker which prevents miscommunication."

"Families have one consistent point of contact."

"Allowing relational practice and work with people to resolve issues as the key factor in work."

"enabling social work skills to permeate the work across both early help and child protection move practice away from a case management focus to a intervention and trauma informed relational response."

"Benefits - no GDPR issues, less repetition for families, smoother transitions through EH/CIN/CP (as much as possible), better team and organisation of understandig of family journey, access to the same IT systems and history. Negatives - funding is focused on CP/CLA and not EH/CIN."

"The level of trust in judgements by providing both aspects if increased due to witnessing first hand the impact of support and intervention."

"Benefit- coherence of role, not many different new faces for 'support' and 'protection'- this is already an issue."

### **Both challenge & benefit**

"Child Protection is family support - whilst managing risk."

"The 2 issues of family support and child protection are not mutually exclusive."

### **Challenges**

"There remains a great deal of difficulties around providing support and having a non judgemental approach to support while at the same time making judgements about risk and safety. families regularly feel judged by this balance which can alienate the family and the ability to provide meaningful support.

"No one has mentioned this idea of separation- could lead to further tinkering with no underlying change."

"CP workers don't have the skills or resources to support."



How do we improve collaboration between social workers and other services?

"Top down culture."

"Better multi-agency integration through training - e.g. start joint training early - have safeguarding training at degree level that involves police, health, education. SW etc as an integral part of the curriculum across all professions."

"Absolute clarity on roles."

"Co-location in buildings."

"Time to get to know other teams."

"Ensuring role of social worker is clear and understood."

"Have a multi agency database with levels of access. a single database for education, police, health and social care."



## Reflections on Process:

### Event process

Through Zoom chat messages and verbally in breakout rooms and during plenary discussions, participants expressed that they found participating in the event to be a highly valuable experience. Many stated that they appreciated the opportunity to share and learn from each other's stories and experiences.

"Thank you everyone I've found the session today really useful! Loads of fantastic ideas."

"Thank you, very interesting session with lots of creative ideas."

"Thank you well run event!!"

"Thanks all - good to be part of this session."

"Thank you and nice to meet people from other LAs!"



## Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on the contributions from the participants of the Explore Event for Social Workers and Children's Social Care Professionals, this report finds that the system requires change in five broad areas:

- There was a clear consensus among participants that social work is relational. They identified significant and widespread issues in three interrelated areas (workload, staff wellbeing, and support) that contribute to high staff turnover. This high rate of turnover damages the system's potential to create and sustain the strong long-term internal and external relationships that are essential to effective social work practice.
- Lack of resources or inappropriate allocation of available resources was cited as both a cause of and a symptom of high staff turnover.
- There is a strong feeling that Early Intervention should be prioritised. Allocating more resources to this area would produce better outcomes and potentially save resources in the long-term. Early intervention is also the key to building positive relationships with children, families and caregivers.
- Training needs to more closely reflect the realities of the Social Worker role. In addition to training in evidence-based best practice, initial and ongoing training needs to draw on the experience of senior social workers and those with lived experience of care. Currently, workload, wellbeing, support, and high turnover of experienced staff impede efforts to adequately prepare and develop social workers for their role.

- The profile and status of the profession needs to be raised. Better understanding of social work among the public and partner agencies would enable social workers to perform their varied roles more effectively. Internally, the practice of social work should be reframed as a career. Currently the system encourages career progression as a move into management roles and away from the frontline provision of specialist social care.

Reclaim the role of social work back to therapeutic, supportive and relationship focus, not signposting and care management.

(Explore participant 27/9/2021)