

## Coram Voice response to the Children's social care national framework and dashboard consultation

May 2023

### General National Framework and Dashboard questions

7 To support local authorities in delivering the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework we have sought to make the document user-friendly and easy to understand. We have tried to be concise, use plain language and provide clear explanations of what is required of leaders and practitioners.

Disagree

8 What do you think of the expectations for practice described in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on the expectations in the Framework:

A greater focus on well-being and on the actions needed to ensure youth voice is at the heart of children's social care would improve the framework. Make the overarching pillar/outcome for children in care and care leaver to promote the well-being by providing the support children and young people need to flourish and grow up to live full and successful adult lives (grounded in what children and young people say makes their lives good). We would like a distinct mission to give children and young people a voice in their own care and in the development of children's social care.

9 The National Framework describes the role of children's social care in achieving outcomes for children, young people and families. Existing statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), describes the expectations for how other agencies, such as education, health and the police, should meet their duties to work with local authorities, and safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It would not be appropriate to duplicate content across both pieces of guidance, but it is important that the National Framework reflects the importance of multi-agency working.

Please provide your thoughts on the expectations for multi-agency working:

The framework is written for children's social care and places responsibilities on leaders and practitioners in these services. The broad principles within the framework could simultaneously be applied to multi-agency partners.

However, in our experience the framework risks being overlooked by multi-agency partners who are more likely to seek advice through their own guidance. One approach would be to ensure the guidance and regulations that place duties on partner agencies align with the Framework (explicitly cited) to place responsibilities on all partners to work together.

Overall we would like to see a greater focus on the role of the charity sector in supporting Children's Social care. There is inconsistency in mentioning different partners in different sections whilst civil society and a wider range of partners are mentioned under Outcome 3 fewer partners are highlighted under Outcome 4.

10 The Dashboard is being created to support learning and bring transparency to the system so that the impact of what happens in practice can be understood. It will contain a series of indicators providing information on what is happening in practice and how the outcomes and enablers described in the National Framework are being achieved.

Please provide your thoughts on the ways the Dashboard can support learning:

All local authorities should ensure they have mechanisms for capturing how their children in care/care leavers feel about their lives in the areas that are important to them. These may be captured through the day-to-day conversations workers have with the young people they support, through effective participation groups or through gathering the views of children in care through local authority wide surveys.

To enable real learning outcomes indicators should not be looked at in isolation. They helpfully point you in direction of things to explore further and respond to, but without further detail they do not tell you how and what to do to address them. For example, if children and young people do not feel safe where they live is this disproportionately affecting particular groups (e.g. young people in supported accommodation or residential care); why do young people not feel safe and how do they feel they could best be supported to feel safer?

We should use data that is already collected to get further insights into children and young people's experiences. There is significant scope to further analyse and explore the Bright Spots data set and use this on an ongoing basis to inform learning and development.

## 11 How often should data be published to support learning and understand how practice is making a difference to children, young people and families?

More regular datasets should only be produced if there is quality real time data available. Indicators need to be embedded in case management systems and practitioners must be consistent in the way they record information, so that significant data cleaning is unnecessary.

Some data collection exercises, like cohort wide surveys of children's views could not be collected more frequently than annually. To get good response rate requires significant staff time and focus and children may feel over-surveyed if asked too frequently without seeing changes made in response to their feedback.

To enable for frequent reporting and real time data on well-being indicators some Bright Spots indicators could be embedded in direct work with children and young people and incorporated into case management systems. To identify these indicators a dedicated project with a small number of local authorities to explore how and which Bright Spots questions could be embedded in care planning and case management systems is needed. An aligned but separate project should look at how Bright Spots indicators could be embedded in national guidance, inspections and government strategy to encourage a greater focus on the things that children and young people say are important to their well-being.

## Outcome, enabler and indicator questions

### Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

12 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please describe your views and limit your response to 200 words:

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

More work is needed to identify indicators that capture youth voice. This cannot be done without the structures and systems to listen to and act on children and young people's views. This work is particularly under-developed in early help and a distinct project would be needed to map and understand how this is currently done and what could helpfully be done in the future. It is essential that children and young people themselves are involved in developing any proposed framework.

Any outcomes framework should take a well-being approach with indicators co-designed with children and young people to capture the things that they feel make their lives good. Once the key areas have been identified these could be embedded in day to day case work as well as considering wider mechanisms to capture these views (see our paper on embedding youth voice for more detail). Similar, but distinct, approaches and focus are needed to ensure wider family (adult) views are captured e.g. parents, relative

### Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network

13 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on this outcome:

A family first approach should be focused on how children can be supported to live with family and friends, but also consider how else families and friends can be supported to play an ongoing role in the child's life. Where family members cannot look after children fulltime, they can still potentially play a role; assessments should be used to inform these plans, e.g. grandparents having children regularly for sleepovers, aunty taking siblings for a day out together. Family should be defined widely with input from the child.

The focus on mechanisms to hear the voice of children and young people; leaders listening to children and young people and practitioners seeking out perspectives of children and young people highlighted in Outcome 1 should be replicated here.

It will be important that children and young people have opportunities to be heard if arrangements are not working for them. Access to advocacy would be important part of this framework as well as clarity about who to turn to if there are issues. An active offer of advocacy should be made to children

from the outset and continue to be available if issues arise at a later date.

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

More work is needed to identify indicators that capture youth voice. This cannot be done without the structures and systems to listen to and act on children and young people's views. We have produced a more detailed paper on mechanisms for embedding children and young people's voice (shared alongside this response).

This work is particularly under-developed in kinship care and a distinct project would be needed to map and understand how this is currently done and what could helpfully be done in the future. It is essential that children and young people themselves are involved in developing any proposed framework.

Any outcomes framework should take a well-being approach with indicators co-designed with children and young people to capture the things that they feel make their lives good. Once the key areas have been identified these could be embedded in day-to-day case work as well as considering wider mechanisms to capture these views (see our paper on embedding youth voice for more detail)

### Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes

14 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on this outcome:

Leaders should ensure that children have access to advocacy in the Child protection process. Coram Voice has developed and delivers a highly successful "opt out" Child Protection Advocacy service model which has seen in some instances a Child Protection Advocate supporting children in up to 97% of conferences and reviews.

As the guidance for advocacy and child protection explains independent advocacy for children in child protection is essential as it:

- a) Empowers children who are going through very difficult times
- b) Safeguards children within child protection procedures and actions
- c) Ensures a fuller picture emerges of the child's life, wishes and concerns and therefore a more credible assessment of their best interests
- d) Increases the child's engagement in child protection processes and outcomes
- e) Provides the child with an additional trusted mechanism for raising concerns
- f) Ensures the child remains everyone's focus
- g) Increases parents' engagement in child protection processes and outcomes
- h) Brings about wider changes in policy and practice
- i) Helps local authorities demonstrate compliance with domestic and international law.

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

More work is needed to identify indicators that capture youth voice. This cannot be done without the structures and systems to listen to and act on children and young people's views. We have produced a more detailed paper on embedding children and young people's voice which we have shared alongside this response.

This work is particularly under-developed in child protection and a distinct project would be needed to map and understand how this is currently done and what could helpfully be done in the future. It is essential that children and young people themselves are involved in developing any proposed framework.

Any outcomes framework should take a well-being approach with indicators co-designed with children and young people to capture the things that they feel make their lives good. Once the key areas have been identified these could be embedded in day to day case work as well as considering wider mechanisms to capture these views (see our paper on embedding youth voice for more detail)

### Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

15 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this outcome which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on this outcome:

The framing of this outcome means that the proposed indicators and activities do not all align with the overarching goal, e.g. supporting children's aspirations and providing educational opportunities is important to children flourishing, but not necessarily linked to love, relationships and a stable home. You could have one without the other.

The outcome aims should be for state intervention and care to give children a better childhood than they would otherwise have had. To do this care must focus more on what children and young people say improves their well-being.

Make the overarching pillar/outcome for children in care and care leaver to promote the well-being of children in care and care leavers by providing the support they need to flourish and grow up to live full and successful adult lives. The wording used by Hull in their corporate parenting strategy encapsulates this:

"We want every child and young person in our care, and all of our care leavers, to achieve the best possible outcomes with the opportunities to enjoy life, be safe from harm and to have the support they need to help them be successful adults." (Hull Corporate Parenting Strategy - <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Hull-Corporate-Parenting-Strat.pdf>)

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

More work is needed to identify indicators that capture youth voice. This cannot be done without the structures and systems to listen to and act on children and young people's views. We have produced a more detailed paper on embedding children and young people's voice which we have shared alongside this response.

The work of the Bright Spots programme and its indicators can helpfully be used to inform this work and we would be happy to work with the Department to explore how this could be applied and the data we already collect can be used to support learning around this outcome. This could include embedding elements of the Bright spots indicators in day-to-day practice with children as well as encouraging cohort wider surveys.

## Enabler 1: the workforce is equipped and effective

16 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this indicator which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on this enabler:

From the Bright Spots programme young people consistently tell us that they want workers that they can 1.) trust, 2.) who don't change, 3.) involve them in decisions and 4.) are easy to contact.

As set out in ANV's response to the care review

(<https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/What-children-and-young-people-want-to-tell-the-care-review-report.pdf>) young people feel the best social workers are the ones that spend time with you, get to know you and explain what is happening. Social worker changes can be difficult especially when they happen quickly or with no warning. When changes happen you have to start to trust a new person and tell them about your past which can be frustrating and unsettling. When a new social worker has different opinions to the last social worker this can feel disorientating. Young people wanted social workers to have training in dealing with the bad things that may have happened in the past (trauma informed) and mental health as well as understanding issues around identity 'what makes you, you' such as LGBTQ+, belief, culture. Training around understanding what it is like to be in care and how to listen was also important to the young people we consulted. Hull partnered with their children in council to work on this issue <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/managing-changes-of-social-worker/>

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

Linked Bright Spots indicators there should be a focus on:

- frequency of changes in social workers (this is not just organisational turn over but how often they have changed for an individual child)
- Whether children and young people know who their social worker is and how to contact them (this is often particularly an issue for younger children)
- Do children and young people feel that they can easily get in touch with workers when they need to (including diverse ways to keep in touch e.g. mobile phone messaging, apps online)?
- Are children and young people seen on their own by workers?
- Do children and young people feel that they have a say in the decisions that social workers make about their lives?
- Is there evidence that children and young people's views are heard and inform decisions about their individual care?

## Enabler 2: leaders drive conditions for effective practice

17 a. Are there any other ways leaders and practitioners should work towards this indicator which are not specified in the National Framework?

Please provide your thoughts on this enabler:

Leaders should be committed to putting in place the structures and processes for children and young people's voice, making sure:

- Children and young people's views are heard and inform decisions about their individual care.
- Children and young people have opportunities to have a say in and co-produce local service developments.
- Children and young people have the opportunity to be leaders/engage in functions associated with leadership (e.g. Sheffield's reverse scrutiny panel <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/sheffield-young-peoples-scrutiny-panel/>)

There is not one specific activity that can embed youth voice, instead the important thing is to provide a range of different opportunities to be heard and taking action in response. A strategic commitment to co-production and voice is essential, taking a child rights perspective. Youth engagement should be led by the Lundy model of participation.

We have provided more detail of how what should be included in this in our Enabling youth voice paper accompanying this response.

Please provide your thoughts on the indicators :

To embed a greater focus on well-being into all the work of children's social looking at wider well-being measures in the child population as a whole, e.g. the Children's society on their Good Childhood Index (<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood>) and the BeeWell (<https://gmbeewell.org/>) project in Manchester; ONS work on children's well-being indicators

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrenswellbeingindicatorreviewuk2020/2020-09-02>). Rather than developing distinct measures collected by children's social care it may be better to use population wide data sets where you can drill down into the experience of particular groups. .

Other work that could be of relevance includes:

- Office for Statistics Regulation work on involving children and young people in official statistics

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Visibility-Vulnerability-Voice-importance-including-children-young-people-official-statistics.pdf>

- the Promise work on data <https://thepromise.scot/the-promise-scotland/what-the-promise-scotland-does/change-projects/data/>

- Human Learning Systems <https://realworld.report/>

In addition it will also be important to look at how Ofsted's inspection framework aligns with any data set and national framework. They may be better placed to collect more qualitative data around children and young people's views inform their individual care, whether are care experienced young people part of the governance structures such as corporate parenting forum; local authorities have examples of how care experienced young people have influenced services and how are young people involved in monitoring progress etc.