



Children England respond to the consultation on a national framework for assessing children and young people's continuing care

Introduction

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Children England is the leading membership organisations for the children, young people and families' voluntary sector. First established in 1943, the organisation continues to provide a platform for the collective voice of the sector, campaigning for change nationally to create real change on the ground for children and families.

With member organisations working in all parts of the country ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this key document. The Department of Health's ambition to bring coherence to the assessment of continuing care for children and young people is welcome. The advantages of having a common framework for services within the UK are numerous. In particular it enables the setting of standards expected from services, and should ensure greater equity in access to services and more consistency in the supports that would be available to children and their families.

This brief response has been informed by comments from our members, in particular from ACT and The Children's Society following their policy roundtable with the Council for Disabled Children.

Key Points

- Safeguarding. The current document is poor on safeguarding. It does not evidence how a child or young person with continuing care and safeguarding

needs would be supported. Nor does it mention how to ensure that the assessment process for continuing care appropriately identifies safeguarding concerns and responds to them.

- Children living away from home. The current framework does not address the needs of children living away from home, including those who live in specialist accommodation often far away from their own local authority. How would the assessment process work for this group?
- Commissioning. It would be helpful to see more specific links to commissioning in the report and to understand how the framework links to commissioning guidance and how commissioning strategies will be informed by the process.
- Funding. There is a lack of reference in the document to funding. Continuing Care packages can be costly and comprehensive funding is necessary. There needs to be specific reference as to how multi agency funding is to be agreed. This should also be accompanied by Government investment in the sector.
- Engagement with young people. The active engagement and role of disabled young people is underplayed in the document. More emphasis on consulting disabled young people and the need for their active involvement in the planning and delivery of their own care services is important.
- Joint working. Throughout the document there are numerous references to joint working and assessment between the local PCT and local authorities with social service responsibilities. Yet, Statement 5 states that the PCT only needs to take 'reasonable' steps to consult the social services authority. This is not acceptable. The PCT should consult the local authority should reach a joint decision to meet the families needs.
- Timing of assessments. Assessments should reflect the child's schooling and the needs of the parents, especially lone parents or working parents.
- Principles of Assessment. There is an assumption that parents will always be able to cope. It needs to be clear that this is not always the case. It would also be helpful to understand the lines of accountability in the process, given the number of professionals involved.
- Engagement with the voluntary sector. It is essential that voluntary organisations involved in providing continuing care or supporting the families of children with continuing care needs are fully engaged with and supported. Children England would be happy to work with the Department of Health to look at ways of engaging most effectively with the children, young people and families voluntary sector.

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