

Barnardo's welcomes a number of key proposals in the Queen's Speech, including commitments on supporting families with young children, educational 'catch up', integrating health and social care, improving support for victims, and making the internet safer for children. In each of these areas, we have a number of key questions for the Government in order to ensure the proposals deliver positive change for vulnerable children and young people.

1. Commitment to the Early Years Development Review

It is well-understood that what happens in a child's early years can determine their future life outcomes. Barnardo's has long been calling for a 'family hub' in every community – so that all families can access support – physically and virtually – whenever they need it. This is central to 'levelling up' opportunities for children, and to reversing the rise in numbers of children entering the care system – with 28% increase of children entering care in the last decade¹. Barnardo's currently delivers 72 children's centres and family hubs in local communities, in partnership with councils, health bodies and others.

The commitment to progress in this area is extremely welcome:

- Will funding be available to local areas to provide community-based support for families before they reach crisis point?
- Will the Government incentivise partnership working between local agencies and voluntary sector partners, who are often most trusted by communities?

2. Education Recovery Plan

The Government is right to focus on education, at a time when poorer and disadvantaged children have fallen even further behind their peers. However, in order to ensure every child can fulfil their potential, the Government must also address the mental health and wellbeing challenges children are facing as well. From our frontline experience at Barnardo's, we know that we cannot successfully address the education gap without first addressing the 'trauma gap'.

- Will Ministers consider accelerating plans for a mental health support team in every school? (Currently plan will only reach a third of children by April 2023)
- What steps are Ministers taking to ensure schools have the resource and expertise they need to address the challenges children are facing in light of the pandemic, including heightened mental health issues?

3. Draft Online Safety Bill

We have long supported the Government's intention to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online, especially for children. Despite the welcome publication of the draft Bill this week, we remain concerned about the continued delay in bringing forward vital changes to make the internet safer for children.

- When do Ministers expect these proposals to become law?
- Will the proposals effectively prevent children from viewing online pornography? (including violence and extreme content)

4. Police Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

We support proposals for a duty on local agencies to work together to prevent and reduce serious youth violence.

¹ Local Government Association (2020). [The number of children in care reaches 10-year high.](#)

- Will the Government consider introducing a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation, so that children forced by gangs to commit crimes such as 'county lines' drugs trafficking are treated as victims, not criminals?

5. Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (refresh) & Draft Victims Bill

We welcome the continued focus on protecting women and girls from abuse and to support and protect victims.

- Will the VAWG Strategy include robust action to tackle so called 'peer on peer' child sexual abuse, such as that experienced by victims whose testimonies are published on the 'Everyone's Invited' website? This must include therapeutic support for children who abuse others – to give them the best possible chance of correcting their behaviour and preventing abusive behaviour in adulthood.
- Will the Draft Victims Bill include a guarantee of support for all victims, including children, for example in the context of domestic abuse or sexual abuse/exploitation?

6. Health and Social Care Bill

The Bill rightly promises to lay the foundations for a more integrated and efficient health and care system. However, as drafted, the current White Paper focuses almost exclusively on adults, despite the fact that children have specific health needs, and addressing these early is central to improving future health outcomes.

- How will this Bill improve access to health and social care for children?
- How will the Bill address the 'cliff edge' facing many vulnerable children at 18, when they cease to qualify for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) but may not qualify for adult services either?

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2019/2020 we supported 358,800 children, young people families and carers through more than 800 services and partnerships. For more information contact Claire, UK Public Affairs Manager, claire.stewart@barnardos.org.uk