

Written evidence submitted by Frontline (CWSB156)

Background

1. [Frontline](#) is England's leading social work charity. Our core aims are to make life better for children who need a social worker, to help keep them safe from harm and to give them every possible chance to fulfil their potential. We do this through recruiting and training social workers and supporting leadership and innovation development in the sector.

Commentary on the Bill

2. **Clause 1 – kinship; family group decision-making meeting:** We agree this is the right approach to take. It is far too common for children living in kinship care to slip through the cracks, and it is essential that they can get the support that they need – whether through social workers, pastoral care in schools or from youth workers. Having a more holistic approach that involves all individuals connected with the child would strengthen the support available to them and ensure that decisions are made that prioritise the child.

3.1 **Clause 3 – child protection; multi-agency child teams:** We know that strong multi-agency working is crucial to improve outcomes for children and families. This has been a recurring theme of every major review for decades, at this point, and yet we have seen only limited success so far.

3.2 In our recent [Snapshot of Children's Social Work](#), three-quarters (74%) of social workers said they were only able to collaborate effectively “to some extent” with other agencies. Thankfully, there are local authorities where multi-agency is working really (22% of respondents told us they could collaborate “to a great extent”). Learning from these examples should be a top priority for services leaders.

3.3 For multi-agency working to be successful, there needs to be drastic change in training, understanding and expectation across all agencies, so that professionals come together as collaborators with a shared understanding of child protection, instead of individuals with competing agendas and priorities. Training for all these professionals should make child protection a central focus throughout, so that safeguarding is always a priority. When professionals raise concerns with another agency, it is vitally important that those concerns are taken seriously and acted on.

4. Clause 4 – child protection; single unique identifier: We welcome these new duties around data sharing. Agencies cannot work together effectively if they are not able to access the same information. Using a single unique identifier would positively improve data sharing, so long as all agencies involved are reporting frequently so that vital information is always up to date. All these agencies are already responsible for handling highly sensitive information, so information security should not be an unsurmountable barrier.

5.1 Clause 18 – children’s social care workers; use of agency workers: There is a serious recruitment and retention problem in children’s social work system, with significant implications for the children and families it supports. What families need is stability and consistency, and the very best from their social workers. This cannot be delivered under pressure like this, with such high vacancy rates and an over reliance on agency staff. Spending on agency workers is at an all-time high which reflects what we have been hearing from our social workers for some time.

5.2 The use of agency staff is not always a negative. Agency workers play an important role in helping to meet temporary demand for social workers, but when used to fill a long-term shortfall in staffing this approach can cause significant financial strain on councils, in addition to the lack of consistency for families described above. We know that leadership and professional development play a key role in creating a more sustainable workforce which enables reduced reliance on agency workers and ensure better outcomes for children in need.

6.1 Clause 24 – children not in school; local authority consent mechanism for the withdrawal of certain children: We agree that there needs to be an added layer of safeguarding when it comes to withdrawing children from school. We welcome the suggestion to include teachers within this decision.

6.2 The sharing of responsibilities between professionals is essential – so that the responsibility and accountability for the young person is shared, instead of solely sitting with the social worker. And there is an urgent need for a shared system, potentially in the form of the single unique identifier, that allows all professionals to access recent safeguarding concerns for that child so that they are aware of the full context of the situation. Without this, effective multi-agency working will continue to fall short.

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