"Is this the time people are actually going to listen?"
Executive Summary

In December 2019, the government committed to a Care Review for England. In March 2020, the Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson, restated the manifesto commitment to carry out a review which “presents a singular opportunity to start by looking at the whole system, and the children and young people it supports”.

Importantly, he also said: “To hear the voices of children, young people and adults that have received the help or support of a social worker or have been brought into care, is of utmost importance. This will be at the heart of the review”.

Scotland’s Independent Care Review, which took three years and found that the system was in need of radical overhaul, also went to great lengths to engage with children in care and with care experience so expectations are high.

The Care Review is an important opportunity to look at how things have been working and make recommendations to government about what should be done differently in future. It is anticipated that there will be many different submissions to the chair of the review each offering a perspective about how the review might be managed and the reforms that might be sought. This report sets out the first hand views of a wide range of care experienced people of all ages and makes a significant contribution to inform how the review is carried out.

In October 2020, a survey was devised to collect the views of care experience people about how the Care Review in England should be run and the important issues it should consider. The survey was completed by 163 care experience people of all ages. An event was organised in November attended by 76 people to enable more in-depth discussion of the issues highlighted by the survey.

The survey was devised to allow individuals to rank in order of importance certain aspects of a care review as well as providing space to provide narrative comments and the Event discussion followed the same agenda.
We asked the following questions:

- How should care experienced people be involved in the care review in England?
- What other ideas do you have about positively influencing how the Care Review in England is done?
- What are your concerns about how the Care Review in England may be conducted?

We then asked individuals to rank the importance of a series of statements related to

- Before Care
- In Care
- After Care

We provide space for individuals to provide narrative comments in the survey and carefully captured views from the Event.

In relation to how the review should be run care experienced people felt strongly that involving and consulting a wide cross-section of care experienced people should be integral to the review, importantly this must involve people over the age of 25. Many wanted to see care experience people central to leadership and decision-making in the review team. Front line professionals should also be closely involved. How the review communicates with and engages with people is very important and there much can be learned from the care review in Scotland and other countries.

People expressed a number of fears about what could go wrong. Primarily people were concerned that the views of people with direct experience of the system would be overlooked or marginalised or that engagement would turn out to be tokenistic. There are also fears about lack of openness and secrecy associated with how the review might run. Importantly, there were also concerns about the potential for the scope of the review and its ambition to be limited by financial or political constraints, the review would not be transformational and the recommendations would be ignored. There was a real feeling that there was a history of recommendations for improvement already being ignored over time.

In relation to the issues which care experience people felt the review should address these were captured according to phases of the care experience: before care, in care and after-care.

**Before care** people felt having someone trusted to talk to and having decisions properly explained is vital. Help should be available when it is needed and given early to prevent situations worsening, together with a strong feeling that more can be done to help struggling families. The resources of the wider family, friends and
communities should be drawn upon more. Recognising the harm caused by maltreatment or abuse was felt to be important, coupled with being able to get mental health treatment or therapy to deal with the long-term consequences of adverse experiences.

In care the overriding focus was on the importance of love and stability. The ability to live with people who care and not to be moved around is very important. Continuity and the ability to build and sustain personal relationships throughout the care journey was critical. Maintaining relationships with siblings was particularly highlighted. People did not want to feel treated like being part of a process or part of a business and called for more sensitivity to the distress being experienced and more respect – use of kind language and not being treated in a discriminatory way was very important. Getting specialist psychological help when the time is right for the individual is vital.

After care the strongest view was that stopping support at the age of 25 was wrong. Being care experienced is viewed as a lifelong experience and therefore should attract lifelong support. Many care experienced people come later in life to educational, mental health and other issues, so support should be ongoing. The system should be better attuned to the needs of people with care experience; particularly, better understanding and support from mental health and therapeutic services. Better and more flexible support to children leaving the care system and more consistency in what is available in different places is needed. Making sense of their lives is important to older care experience people and there is no age limit, so getting access to health and care records should be better supported.

Overall respondents to the survey and participants in the event wanted to see more real responsibility taken by public authorities for the welfare of children in care and care experienced people throughout their lives. Parallels were drawn with the relationship of the state to those who are in, or who have previously been in, the Armed Forces. A better understanding of the experiences the needs of these people in the population is needed and the system needs to be better equipped and more responsive.
There was much debate about the use of the term ‘corporate parent’: for some this has become discredited by what is viewed as a lack of ownership and accountability by those in power who carry this responsibility; beyond the local authority, extending to all support services and to the role played by national government.

It is hoped by all those who contributed to the survey and event that the views set out in this report will inform the way in which the Care Review in England is conducted and the areas in which it will focus attention. Care experienced people of all ages stand ready to help and are committed to making this a meaningful review. Above all, they want to see things improve and want to play a part in making that happen.

“If it is not good enough for you then it is not good enough for us”
Key Messages

**HOW THE REVIEW SHOULD BE RUN:**
- Involve and consult a wide cross section of care experienced people
- Learn from the care review in Scotland and other countries
- How the review communicates with and engages with care experienced people is really important

**FEARS FOR THE REVIEW:**
- The review will be a tokenistic exercise that is rushed and shrouded in secrecy
- Nothing will change and the review will not be transformational
- It will be money driven and ambitions will be limited by money

**IMPORTANT ISSUES BEFORE CARE:**
- Be asked and listened to and have decisions and things that are happening properly explained
- Recognise the harm caused by maltreatment or abuse and being able to get help
- Harness support from family and friends and wider social networks

**IMPORTANT ISSUES IN CARE:**
- Love and stability, the ability to live with people who care and not be moved around
- Access to mental health and therapeutic support
- Maintaining relationships with family and friends

**IMPORTANT ISSUES AFTER CARE:**
- Help should not be limited by age or timelines - Corporate Parents need to be there for their child
- The long-term effects of trauma need to be recognised
- Leaving care should not be a cliff edge