



Briefing for Peers – May 2025 Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill House of Lords Committee Stage

About Family Rights Group

We are the leading specialist charity working to ensure children can live safely in their family, and children in the care system have loving relationships they can turn to throughout life. For 50 years, we have worked to shape the child welfare system to make that a reality. We are unique in combining legal and social work expertise with advice giving, policy and campaigning, and direct work with families.

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Introduction

This briefing sets out Family Rights Group's proposed amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This includes:

- Clause 1 – Family Group Decision Making
- Clause 5 – Kinship Care
- New clauses on relationships for children in care and care leavers
- Support for parents following child removal to prevent further removals (with Pause)

We also cover Clause 11 regarding use of accommodation for deprivation of liberty.

Clause 1: Family Group Decision Making

The Bill introduces a new mandate on local authorities to offer families a family group decision making meeting when the local authority is considering whether they need to make an application for care proceedings.

Family group decision making (FGDM) is “an umbrella term to describe voluntary family-led meetings that allow a family network to come together and make a plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside professionals.” ([House of Lords Bill Briefing](#))

No family is without its problems. If something goes wrong affecting a child in our family or friends network who we love and care about, most of us would want to be in driving seat in finding a solution. Currently, when there are concerns about the care or protection of a child, the insights and support that the child's relatives and friends network can provide, is not consistently explored by children's services. Therefore, the help the child's family network could provide to the parent, for the children to remain safely at home, may be overlooked. Similarly, potential kinship care options may not be considered. As a result, there are children in the care system who did not need to be. They could be safely at home with their parents or raised by relatives and friends in kinship care, instead of with strangers.

The Government's intention is that FGDM will provide families with the opportunity to come up with solutions for their children's welfare, to safely avert children entering the care.

However, the Bill needs to be strengthened for it to have the desired impact.

1. Defining key principles of effective family group decision making

The Bill leaves family group decision making open to wide interpretation. It is a generic terminology, without clear principles and standards about what families can expect.

Yet the Government's rationale for introducing the policy is based on the strong evidence base around family group conferences (FGC)(see further background on FGCs below). Our concern is that if the legislation does not specify what is expected, then what we will see is some authorities taking short cuts, renaming what they are already doing or pursuing practices unsupported by evidence. We are already seeing evidence of this, with some local authorities claiming to use FGDM approaches, including reference to 'family-led decision making' to describe meetings which are in reality led by professionals and where family involvement is minimal.

Furthermore, learning from Scotland, where legislation introduced in 2016 [references family group decision making](#). While it looks like a mandate for ensuring that FGDM is offered in every local authority, it is not clear and precise enough in what it is asking for. As a result, ten years on and a third of local authorities in Scotland still have no FGDM offer at all.

We propose that key principles from the family group conference approach are defined in the legislation to ensure all family group decision making meetings are child centred, and family led. In particular, the independence of the coordinator and the provision of private family time.

- a) A skilled coordinator facilitates the process, and because they are independent from decision making they can generate trust both from the family network and the state;
- b) Private time allows the family to have open, tough conversations to come up with a plan in their own way.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment to define the key principles of effective family group decision making

Clause 1, page 2, line 7, after "welfare" insert new subsection:

"The family group decision making meeting shall:

- a) be facilitated by a trained coordinator, who has no decision-making responsibility for the child, and*
- b) include private time for the family network members attending the meeting and the child, if in attendance, to draw up their proposal to address concerns about the child's welfare."*

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Armstrong](#), with the support of colleagues.

2. A process, not a one-off meeting

The Bill makes provision for the offer of a family group decision making meeting. However, family group decision making should be a process with rigorous preparation, not a one-off meeting. This includes allowing the time to identify all who are important to the child and their family, and ensuring safety planning given the concerns being addressed. We are concerned that the offer of a single meeting could become a box ticking exercise that does not effectively explore and engage the child's family and friends. Amendment (i) below would clarify on the face of the Bill that a more substantial process is expected.

Moreover, as drafted, there is no expectation set out that the local authority must support families to implement any proposals they make, so long as they are safe and reasonable in the context. Again, there is a risk that families are asked for their views but are not truly partners in a family-led process. Our second amendment here would require the local authority to work with the child and family to implement the proposal, subject to it being safe and reasonable.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendments to make clear that FGDM is a process not a one-off meeting, and the local authority should work with the family to implement the plan.

- i) *Clause 1, page 2, line 3, insert after "is a meeting" –
"process including preparation"*

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Armstrong](#), with the support of colleagues.

- ii) *Clause 1, page 2, line 7, after "welfare" insert-
"and (4)(c) the local authority shall work with the child and their family network to implement the proposal, where it addresses the local authority's concerns about the child's welfare."*

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Armstrong](#), with the support of colleagues.

3. Family taking the lead

The Bill does not make provision for a family-led process. As drafted, the Bill defines the child's family network as those the local authority considers appropriate to attend. Yet key to the principles of family group conference meetings, is that those attending include those most important to the child and their parents as determined by them. Currently in social work practice, relatives, and particularly paternal family often describe feeling excluded from discussions about their children. Similarly, non-familial relationships such as friends and other sources of support may not be well known to the local authority, but be important to the child and their parents. For example, Azariah Hope, a care experienced young parent on our parents' panel, describes her frustration that how she was not offered a family group conference because the local authority presumed she did not have a family or friends network to draw on. Our proposed amendments seek to ensure that a child's family network is not limited to those who the social worker happens to be aware of and deems to be important. The local authority can still determine if it's in line with the child's welfare.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment to ensure families take the lead who takes part in their FGDM process, subject to local authority safeguards

- i) *Clause 1, page 2, line 9, leave out "as the authority considers appropriate to attend the meeting having regard to the child's best interests"*
- ii) *Clause 1, page 2, line 14, after "the child" insert new subsection (6)
(6) A family group decision-making meeting may only be attended by such members of the "family network" as are agreed by those persons listed at section (1) and subject to (3).*

These amendments have been tabled by Baroness Armstrong – see [i\)](#) and [ii\)](#)

4. Child participation

The Bill gives the local authority the discretion to decide if the child is invited to be involved in the FGDM process or not. This is unsatisfactory and does not make for a child-centred process. This approach differs to elsewhere in the child welfare system, for example looked-after children reviews, where there is a presumption in favour of the child taking part. The Bill should ensure children are invited to take part in their family-group decision-making meeting process, if safe and consistent with their welfare to do so. This could be facilitated in a variety of ways including participating in some or all of the FGDM meeting or sharing their views in another form. Local authorities can be creative in how children are supported to communicate their views and wishes, including through activities conducted with the child by the co-ordinator before the meeting, such as drawing pictures or writing their wishes out on paper.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment to establish a presumption in favour of inviting the child

Clause 1, page 2, line 21, leave out from "Where" to end of subsection 8 and insert-

"The child should be invited to be involved in their family-group decision-making meeting, where consistent with their welfare."

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Armstrong](#), with the support of colleagues.

Baroness Tyler has also [tabled an amendment](#) on this issue with the Children's Charities Coalition, which Family Rights Group also supports.

The Bill makes provision for the offer to be made to the child's parents or anyone with parental responsibility but currently makes no reference to the offer being made to an older child. Yet when a child reaches the age of 16, they can agree to their own care plan. It is therefore important that the provisions for family group decision-making meetings reflect that the offer of a meeting should, for those children aged 16 and over, also be made to the child.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment to ensure the FGDM offer is also made to older children:

Clause 1, page 1, line 9, leave out after "parents" to the end of the subsection, and insert

"and any other person with parental responsibility for the child, or the child, if they have reached the age of sixteen."

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Stedman-Scott and The Earl of Effingham](#).

5. Timing of the offer

The offer is to be made at the point the pre-proceedings letter is issued. This refers to the period of time and formal process where children's services are considering starting care proceedings in the Family Court. The concerns in relation to a child's welfare will already be serious. The local authority should be working with the family to try to avoid care proceedings, but will also be undertaking assessments to consider who the child may live

with if those concerns cannot be allayed. By waiting until this stage, opportunities to bring families together earlier, addressing difficulties before they have escalated and while there is still the possibility of the family supporting the parents as primary carers, could be missed. This includes early in pregnancy, when there's still sufficient time to address identified concerns, through a plan drawn up at a family group conference. It would also exclude, for example, teenagers who are at risk of entering the care system, due to exploitation, through a voluntary arrangement. There is no letter before proceedings in such situations.

Research shows that family group conferences can be effective whenever the time is right for the family, and the sooner the better. Some local authorities are already successfully offering family group conferences earlier on the continuum of child welfare system involvement. Our proposed amendment would require the local authority to also offer a family group decision making where the authority's Director of Children's Services is satisfied that it would assist in formulating a plan to help meet the needs of the child. This would encourage use in situations not currently covered by the Bill as drafted.

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment on the timing of the offer would provide encouragement in legislation for FGDM to be offered earlier than pre-proceedings.

Clause 1, page 2, line 20, after "child" insert new subsection:

"(8) Where a local authority is not intending to make an application under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, or issue a letter before proceedings in relation to a child, but where a Director of Children's Services is satisfied that holding a family group decision-making meeting would assist in formulating a plan to help meet the needs of the child the Director must arrange for an offer of a family group decision making meeting to be made to:

- (a) the child's parents*
- (b) any other person with parental responsibility for the child, and*
- (c) the child, if they have reached the age of sixteen"*

This amendment has been [tabled by Baroness Armstrong](#), with the support of colleagues.

Further background detail

What is the evidence on family group conferences?

The Government's rationale for introducing this duty is based on the strong evidence base on the positive impact of the family group conference approach to deliver better outcomes for children, including averting from the care system.

Family group conferences are a family-led process underpinned by clear principles and standards. Family group conferences draw on the strengths and knowledge of the family network to make decisions and plans for the child. The process is supported by a skilled independent coordinator who helps the family prepare for the family group conference and facilitates the meeting. Children are usually involved in their own family group conference, often with support from an advocate. It is a voluntary process, and families cannot be forced into one.

Family group conferences are a family group decision making approach which is family-led and has strong evidence of diverting children from care and supporting children to remain safely in their family. The approach originated in New Zealand where it is a mandatory offer to families where there are care or protection concerns. It now has one of the lowest rates of children in care ([41 per 10,000](#)) and more children living in kinship care (39% of children in care). In England, [71 per 10,000](#) children are in care. Of whom only 16% are raised in kinship care. Family group conferences are now used in over 30 countries worldwide. They are the most prevalent family group decision making approach used in the UK.

[82%](#) of local authorities in England have an FGC service, however often at small scale. Examples of local authorities with well-established family group conference services are: Kent CC, Bath and North East Somerset Council, LB Tower Hamlets, Hertfordshire CC, LB Islington, Leeds City Council, Somerset Council, Lancashire CC, Kirklees MB, East Sussex CC, Coventry City, LB Camden, Wirral Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Blackpool, Salford City, Birmingham City Council, LB Southwark.

A randomised control trial led by Foundations found that over 2000 children per year could avoid going into care and instead safely remain with their families if family group conferences are rolled out across England. With an estimated cost saving of £150 million over two years.

[More detail](#)

Family group decision making has to be done right, so the process is truly child-centred, family-led, and safe. This matters because the quality of the process impacts the strength of the outcome, for the child, the family and society. There's a very real implementation risk – one we are already seeing play out in overwhelmed children's services departments – that the features which make family group conferences a success are watered down and the benefits lost.

Real life examples

Kevin Makwikila – a young father raising his son following a family group conference:

“As a father, I often felt like the ghost in the room when children's services were involved with my family. When my family were able to be together in one room during the family group conference, it was so much easier to see who could help with what and it was clear and easy for me to understand what and whom I could rely on in any given situation. Some of my family members offered to provide temporary housing to my son and I until our housing issues could be resolved. Others offered to care for my son at weekends to give me a break and some offered food and financial support.”

Poppy – a mother who was pregnant and whose older children had been removed from her care. Her social worker said:

“There is a clear family network around the unborn child and they have all come together to create their own realistic plan. They commented they had not had this support before, and given the extensive history, they were worried about the next steps. It was positive to hear they felt supported now (following the FGC). The baby can live with their mum and be kept safe. They will always have someone visiting and supporting.”

Clause 5: Kinship care

Kinship care is when a child is being raised in the care of a friend or family member, who is not their parent. This can be temporary or long term. Kinship care has many important benefits for children who cannot live at home with their parents, including for identity and belonging, mental health, stability, and outcomes throughout life (see our [second reading](#) briefing).

Defining kinship care in primary legislation for the first time, and requiring local councils to publish a local kinship care offer, is a historic step toward recognising and supporting more than [153,000](#) kinship children in England. They are foundational measures which could help establish an effective kinship care support system.

However, the expectations on councils to involve families in shaping and promoting their local kinship offer are minimal and could be strengthened. Furthermore, the list of types of support the offer should cover, where available, overlooks legal support which is a critical omission. We propose two amendments to address this.

Developing the kinship local offer with children and families

We are concerned that the Bill sets low expectations regarding the involvement of children, kinship carers and others in the development of kinship local offers, as well as in respect of publication and transparency. This is in contrast to the SEN and disability local offer, for example, established in section 30 of the 2014 Children and Families Act. That legislation gives the Secretary of State the power to set out in regulations how the offer should be published, when it should be reviewed, and how children and families are involved in developing it.

Consistent with the SEN and disability local offer, our proposed amendment would give the Secretary of State explicit power to set out in regulations how that offer should be published, when it should be reviewed, and how children and families are to be involved in developing it. It also includes provisions on publishing and responding to feedback.

Given the long and troubling history of poor compliance with kinship statutory guidance it is imperative that government does not simply take the approach that these matters can be attended to in guidance alone.

The comparison to the SEN and disability offer is particularly important given that over half (54%) of kinship children have additional educational needs or disabilities, yet the support available to kinship children often depends on whether the child has been looked-after in the care system.¹

¹ First Thought Not Afterthought: Report of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care (2020). Published by Family Rights Group [here](#).

Family Rights Group's proposed amendment would give the Secretary of State explicit power to set out in regulations how that kinship local offer should be published, when it should be reviewed, and how children and families are to be involved in developing it:

Clause 5, page 10, line 5, insert

8) A local authority must from time to time publish—

(a) comments about its kinship local offer it has received from or on behalf of children, kinship carers and others with lived experience of aspects of kinship care;

(b) the authority's response to those comments (including details of any action the authority intends to take).

(9) Comments published under subsection (8)(a) must be published in a form that does not enable the person making them to be identified.

(10) Regulations may make further provision about—

(a) information to be included in an authority's kinship local offer;

(b) how an authority's kinship local offer is to be published;

(c) who is to be involved and consulted by an authority in developing, preparing and reviewing its kinship local offer;

(d) how an authority is to involve children, kinship carers and others with lived experience of aspects of kinship care in the development, preparation and review of its local kinship offer.

(e) the publication of comments on the kinship local offer, and the local authority's response, under subsection (8)(b) (including circumstances in which comments are not required to be published).

Lord Hampton has tabled [this amendment](#).

Information on legal support and family group decision making

The Bill includes a list of categories of services available in the authority's area that the kinship local offer should include. We are concerned by the omission of legal support and family group decision making from this list. These categories already appear in statutory guidance but not on the face of the Bill. Our proposed amendment corrects this.

The child welfare and family justice system is complex. Early specialist advice, including legal advice has a crucial role to play in helping families navigate that system, understand their rights and responsibilities, and avert children from care. Kinship families often face expensive legal fees in the process of taking on the care of their children. This leaves some in significant debt. In other cases they decide they can't afford to get the legal advice they need, despite this potentially having long term consequences for the child and their family.

The APPG on Kinship Care legal aid inquiry² found many families do not have access to the legal advice they need to make informed decisions about their kinship arrangements – something which has lasting consequences for their entitlement to support, and who can make key decisions about the child. For example:

² APPG on Kinship Care (2022), 'Lost in the legal labyrinth: How a lack of legal aid and advice is undermining kinship care', published by Family Rights Group

- a. *82% of kinship carers surveyed did not feel they knew enough about their legal options to make an informed decision about the best options for their kinship child.*
- b. *Fewer than half of respondents (48%) were satisfied with their current legal arrangement for the child. 35% said they were not satisfied and this mostly related to the support they were able to access under the current arrangements.*
- c. *Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) of the kinship carers surveyed had NOT received any legal advice about their rights and options for their kinship child.”*

Further, [analysis of Family and Friends Care Policies](#) conducted by Family Rights Group in 2023/4, found that only a fifth of the policies reviewed address support with the legal expenses that kinship carers may incur, such as the legal costs of applying for a special guardianship or child arrangements order. Unless the Bill is explicit as to what is required, it is highly unlikely that local authorities in England will consistently and clearly address the question of legal support in their local kinship offer.

Similarly, given the Clause 1 provisions around family group decision making, information on this should be included in the kinship local offer. In addition to being used before care proceedings, family group decision making meetings can also be offered to address issues including contact arrangements and planning for return home.

Family Rights Group’s proposed amendment would require local authorities to include in its kinship local offer, information on available legal support and when family group decision making is offered.

Clause 5, page 9, line 26, change full stop to semicolon, and insert

e) legal support;

f) family group decision making.

Lord Hampton tabled [this amendment](#).

The local offer and definition are foundational measures which could help establish an effective kinship care support system. Alongside this, the Government must invest in the practical, emotional, and financial support families need. To that end, we welcome amendments tabled by Lord Storey on [extending pupil premium to children subject to a kinship care arrangement](#), a [kinship care allowance](#), [kinship care employment leave](#), and a [review of the adoption and special guardianship support fund](#).

Relationships for children in the care system and care leavers, including contact with brothers and sisters

Family Rights Group is supporting three amendments to strengthen the responsibility of local authorities to promote maintaining, building and strengthening important, positive relationships for children in the care system and care leavers.

We all need people to turn to in our lives, for support, encouragement and love. However, the care system can be a lonely place for children. Important relationships are often broken

when children enter care or have to move from their foster home or children's home. Many have to change school, or move far away from family and friends.

18 miles is the average distance a child in care in England is living away from their family and friends, according to analysis from [Become](#). Young people leaving care are often left further isolated, as their professional support network falls away.

The relationship between brothers and sisters is one of the more enduring that many of us will have. [Research](#) by the Children's Commissioner for England found that an estimated 37% of children with a sibling – that is 20,000 children - are separated from a brother or sister when placed in care. For some children, the chance of being separated is far greater: 93% of older children in semi-independent accommodation are separated from their siblings. The report highlighted how siblings are not always supported to stay in touch. Family Rights Group's experience from Lifelong Links is that children in care often speak of their desperate wish to see their brother or sister in particular (See below).

For children deprived of their liberty, many are living very far from home with limited contact with their family and friends. [Research by the Children's Commissioner for England](#), including speaking to children living in such situations, found the majority were clear that contact with family and friends was very important to them, and they wanted to be living closer to home. In-person family contact varied between children and was often influenced by geographical distance and travel costs for their family. This was particularly the case for the children living outside their local authority area, some over 100 miles from home, in areas difficult to reach by public transport.

[Many care leavers](#) feel 'alone' or 'isolated' when they left care and did not know where to get help with their mental health or emotional well-being. Many report having no one they can talk to about how they were feeling.

[Research](#) indicates young people having more stability and better transition to living independently where they have enduring supportive relationships.

The absence of positive relationships in children's lives can increase the likelihood that they experience longer term difficulties – such as poor mental health, a tougher time at school, unemployment and homelessness. Research by [Crisis](#) found that a quarter of homeless people are care experienced. Care leavers are also 10 times more likely to not be in education, employment or training at 21, compared to peers, according to research by the [Rees Centre](#).

[Lifelong Links](#) is an innovative approach Family Rights Group created with children in the care system, in order that they have a lasting support network of relatives and others who care about them. A trained Lifelong Links coordinator works with the child or young person to find and safely bring together all those who are important in the child or young person's life – relatives they may have lost contact with or never met, and others who care about them, such as a former foster carer or a teacher or sports coach. There is substantial [evidence](#) showing that it increases children in care's positive connections, mental health, sense of identity, stability in where they are living, and a reduced risk of homelessness. Lifelong Links is now available in over 40 authorities across the UK, 22 of which are currently in receipt of Department for Education funding. We propose that it be set out in regulations and guidance that Lifelong Links is an offer to all children in care and care leavers.

Critically, relationships should not be broken in the first place. Local authorities should be supporting children in the care system to maintain positive relationships with those who are important to them, through programmes like Lifelong Links.

Laura, a care leaver, told us:

“One of the things that they did when I went into care permanently was any connections with anyone in my family, except my grandparents, were just cut off altogether.”

Bradley, a young person who has taken part in Lifelong Links, said:

“I had no contact for 16 years with my dad’s family at all. Now I can ring up and go round for a cup of tea and it’s like I’ve always known them. So to me, Lifelong Links has been one of the best programmes.”

Family Rights Group is supporting three amendments to strengthen the responsibility of local authorities to prioritise maintaining important, positive relationships for children in the care system and care leavers, including contact with brothers and sisters

1. New Clause to provide all children in the care system with the same right to reasonable contact with their brothers and sisters, as they currently have with their parents.

(1) In section 34 (1) of the Children Act 1989 after paragraph (d) insert— “(e) his siblings (whether of the whole or half blood).”

(2) In paragraph 15 (1) of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, after paragraph (c) insert— “(d) his siblings (whether of the whole or half blood).”

Consequential amendments will also be required to update wider paragraph references.

Baroness Tyler has [tabled this amendment](#), with the support of colleagues.

2. New Clause to ensure local authorities promote the maintenance of positive family and social relationships for looked after children

In Section 22 (3A) of the Children Act 1989, after “educational achievement” insert “and a duty to promote the child’s family and social relationships in ways which are consistent with the child’s welfare.”

Baroness Tyler has [tabled this amendment](#), with the support of colleagues.

3. An amendment to Clause 8 on the care leaver local offer, to include information about the local authority’s arrangements for supporting family and social relationships

Clause 8, page 13, after line 26 insert

e) enabling care leavers to maintain, strengthen and build family and social relationships.

Lord Farmer has [tabled this amendment](#).

Clause 11: Use of accommodation for deprivation of liberty

What is deprivation of liberty?

A deprivation of liberty (DoL) occurs when restrictions are placed on a child's liberty beyond what would normally be expected for a child of the same age. This may include them being kept in a locked environment that they are not free to leave, being kept under continuous supervision, and being subject to restraint or medical treatment without consent.

The family courts in England and Wales can authorise a child's deprivation of liberty for welfare reasons via:

- a secure accommodation order under s.25 of the Children Act 1989 or s.119 of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014, which authorises the placement of a looked after child in a registered secure children's home; or
- the inherent jurisdiction of the high court, and the making of a deprivation of liberty (DoL) order. The inherent jurisdiction can be used to authorise a deprivation of liberty when none of the other statutory mechanisms apply. A DoL order authorises the deprivation of a child's liberty in a setting that is not otherwise registered to do so. The inherent jurisdiction is intended only as a last resort measure. It can be used to keep a child safe, including from themselves or from others, when no other legal route or type of provision is available.

Children are currently being deprived of their liberty outside of the statutory route, in inappropriate and unsuitable accommodation. Examples have included a [caravan and an Airbnb](#).

"It was like a holding cell... he couldn't function, he couldn't eat" – A quote from Tanya*, a mother whose 17-year-old son became suicidal after being sent to live alone 150 miles away from home. She shared her family's story with LBC [here](#). *Her name has been changed.

There has been a sharp rise in the number of children deprived of their liberty under the inherent jurisdiction in the past decade. Between October 2023 and September 2024, 1464 children were involved in applications to deprive them of their liberty, according to data from the Ministry of Justice.

Depriving a child of their liberty is a draconian measure. It can mean they are isolated, subject to high levels of restraint, and have a significant impact on their mental and physical wellbeing. Too often children deprived of their liberty are living in settings which do not meet their needs and are far away from their families and communities.

What does the Bill do?

Children's services departments will now be able to apply for an order to deprive a child of their liberty in "relevant accommodation". This is described as accommodation provided for the purposes of care and treatment of children but that is also deemed capable of being used to deprive a child of their liberty.

How the Bill could be improved

We welcome the Government's move to allow children's services departments to apply for an order to deprive a child of their liberty in "relevant accommodation", but a lot of detail is missing:

- First, the success of these changes hinges on the accompanying regulatory framework. Details about what constitutes "relevant accommodation," its standards, and Ofsted registration requirements remain unclear.

- Part 2A of amendment [124](#) seeks to probe the Government's commitments to regulations and the need for parity of regulatory protection and direction for children under any form of secure order pursuant to section 25.
- We warmly welcome amendments [121](#) and [122](#) which seek to ensure only registered children's homes can be used as relevant accommodation.
- Second, the proposals neglect the critical matter of maintaining children's relationships with family and friends. Many children in such placements face isolation, living far from home with limited contact. Our proposed amendment on promoting family and social relationships for children in care (see above) would apply to any looked after child and as such would apply to looked after children who are also, or who may be, deprived of their liberty.
 - Furthermore, amendment [133](#) tabled by Lord Farmer seeks to ensure reporting responsibilities on local authorities include how they will strengthen and build family and social relationships for children deprived of their liberty.
- Finally, families' access to justice remains a challenge. Current legal aid provision when children are deprived of their liberty often leaves parents unrepresented. The Government has indicated that legal aid under this new provision will mirror that which is available to children and families when an application for a secure accommodation order is made. But we know from evidence that is insufficient. We have [called for](#) legal aid provision to be in line with that which is available to parents and children in care proceedings. This will help families understand what applications may be made and the processes involved and how they can inform decisions and planning for their child.

Support for parents following child removal to prevent further child removals

The number of children entering care each year remains at a record high, and a significant number of these children are removed from parents who have previously had a child removed into care. Without support after a child is removed, parents can become stuck in a harmful cycle of recurrent removals as they are left struggling to cope with the existing difficulties that resulted in the child removal, while facing the additional trauma, grief and stigma of losing a child.

We know that this cycle of repeat removals can be prevented. Evidence shows that with the right support following child removal, parents can stabilise, overcome trauma and sustain lasting, positive change for them and their families, which in turn reduces the number of children entering care and makes significant savings to the public purse.

Family Rights Group has worked with the charity [Pause](#) on an amendment to ensure that local authorities offer evidence based support to reduce the risk of a baby being removed from a mother who has already had a child or children removed from her care.

New clause

(1)Where a child—

(a)is removed from the care of a parent further to any order made pursuant to—

(i)section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders),

(ii)section 22 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (placement orders),

(iii)section 46 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (adoption orders), or

(iv)section 14A of the Children Act 1989 (special guardianship orders), or

(b)becomes a looked after child further to an arrangement or order made pursuant to—

(i)section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (provision of accommodation for children: voluntary arrangements), or

(ii)section 25 of the Children Act 1989 (secure accommodation orders),

the local authority shall provide support to the parent, where the parent is identified as being at risk of experiencing further child removals.

(2)In discharging their duty under subsection (1), the local authority shall provide a range of services, including specialist therapeutic support, appropriate to the particular needs of the parent to reduce the risk of further child removals.”

The [amendment has been tabled](#) by Baroness Barran with the support of Lord Meston and Lord Hampton.