



CordisPulse

April 2026

Welcome to April's edition of the CordisPulse – a monthly digest of key research and policy developments across the sectors in which Cordis Bright provides research and consultancy services, i.e. adult social care and health, children and young people's services, and criminal justice.

This month, we're pleased to share the final report from our national evaluation of the Department for Education's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 (PP+ Post-16) programme, delivered in partnership with the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford.

As the system grapples with how best to support young people beyond compulsory education, particularly those facing the greatest disadvantage, this evaluation offers timely insight into what is starting to work, and where further clarity and investment are needed.

Drawing on our national survey of virtual school heads, in-depth case studies and administrative data analysis, the report highlights the potential of PP+ Post-16 to strengthen support for children in care and care leavers and to drive more coordinated, cross-agency responses at a critical transition point.

At the same time, it underlines the importance of clearer policy intent, more consistent funding, and stronger data to enable effective implementation and meaningful assessment of impact over time.

Across the wider Pulse, this theme of system pressure and reform continues - from health and care systems under strain, to growing demand for mental health support, and persistent inequalities in outcomes. Together, the evidence points to the need for sustained, system-wide responses that are both evidence-informed and practically grounded.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this month's Pulse, please do contact us on 020 7330 9170 or email stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk.



Best wishes,

Dr Stephen Boxford
Director & Head of Research

If you would prefer not to receive future editions of the CordisPulse, please click 'unsubscribe' at the very end of this email. If you would like to discuss anything that arises from the Pulse (or if there are others who you think would like to receive copies) then please contact Dr Stephen Boxford on stephenboxford@cordisbright.co.uk or 020 7330 9170.

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Cordis Bright News

Evaluation of DfE Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 funding for children in care and care leavers

Cordis Bright is delighted to share the final report from our evaluation of the Department for Education's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 (PP+ Post-16) programme. The evaluation was conducted in partnership with the Rees Centre, University of Oxford between 2023 and 2025.

PP+ Post-16 was introduced as a pilot in 2021 to address a gap in funding for children looked after (CLA) and care leavers (CLs) at post-16 in England. Since being rolled out in 2023, £10-14 million has been allocated per year. The funding is managed by Virtual School Heads and is intended to improve attendance, retention, attainment and participation in education, employment and training.

Our final report draws on evidence from qualitative data from in-depth case study sites, a national survey of Virtual School Heads, and analysis of secondary administrative data to understand the use of funding and emerging outcomes.

Key findings:

- **Variation in funding and delivery:** Variation in funding levels alongside flexible funding parameters has resulted in differences in the type and level of support available between virtual schools. While this has enabled flexibility to respond to local needs, there is lack of national consistency or comparability of funding use and outcomes.
- **Direct support to meet young people's needs:** Overall, Virtual Schools are prioritising direct support for young people, with over half of funding allocated to activities such as tuition, equipment, financial support and enrichment. Use of funding is often focused on tailored needs-led support and includes targeted support for CLA and CLs who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- **Investing in joint working across services:** The evaluation highlights the role of the funding in strengthening joint working between education, social care and post-16 providers. Increased post-16 capacity within Virtual Schools has supported improved communication, better understanding of young people's needs and more coordinated support.
- **Early signs of positive outcomes for young people:** Although the programme is still in its early stages, stakeholders reported emerging signs of improved engagement, retention and participation in post-16 education and training among CLA and CLs. These findings are based on perceptions and early evidence, with longer-term impacts expected to emerge over the coming years.



- **Ongoing challenges:** The evaluation identifies a number of challenges affecting how support is delivered locally including funding levels that are often insufficient to meet need, increasing demand and complexity of need, limited availability of post-16 provision in some areas, and uncertainty around future funding.

Overall, the evaluation finds that PP+ Post-16 is beginning to strengthen support for CLA and CLs and improve collaboration between services at this important transition point in the young people's lives and in their education, training and employment pathways.

Further clarity on policy intent, consistent and sufficient funding and improved monitoring data will be important to support consistent implementation and evaluate future impact.

Adult Social Care and Health

Reports

Cabinet Office. UK Covid-19 Inquiry: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems in the four nations of the United Kingdom (Module 3) report

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry's Module 3 report provides an assessment of how the pandemic affected healthcare systems across the four nations.

The report draws on extensive evidence, including over 300 witness statements and hundreds of thousands of documents, examining healthcare capacity, workforce pressures, service delivery, and patient outcomes during the pandemic. It forms part of a wider independent inquiry aimed at understanding the UK's response and identifying lessons for future resilience.

Findings show that the UK entered the pandemic with healthcare systems already under strain, including workforce shortages, limited bed capacity, and ageing infrastructure. As a result, services came "close to collapse" under Covid-19 pressures, with profound impacts on patients, families, and staff.

The report highlights disruption to routine care, significant emotional strain on healthcare workers, and challenging experiences for patients, particularly around end-of-life care and restricted visiting. It also points to weaknesses in preparedness, data systems, and infection control guidance.

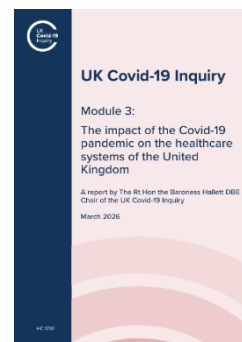
Department of Health and Social Care. Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: interim report

This interim report sets out progress made on the independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism.

The review draws on a wide range of evidence, including national survey data, administrative datasets (such as NHS and education records), and extensive engagement with people with lived experience, clinicians and sector stakeholders. It takes a deliberately broad, cross-system approach, reflecting the complex interplay between health, education and social factors.

Key findings include:

- Psychological distress and common mental health conditions, particularly among young people, have increased over time. The prevalence of common mental disorders, principally anxiety and depression, among adults in England has risen from around 15–16% in the early 1990s to around 23% by the mid-2020s.



- While diagnoses and service demand for ADHD and autism have risen sharply, underlying population prevalence appears more stable, pointing to changes in awareness, help-seeking and system incentives rather than a single explanatory trend.
- The report highlights a system under strain, with long waiting times and access to support often dependent on formal diagnosis.
- It also identifies tensions between under-recognition of need and concerns about over-medicalisation.

Further conclusions and recommendations will be set out in the final report of the review. This will also address the central question of how to better understand why many people who are autistic, have ADHD and/or experience mental health conditions are not getting the support they need as quickly or as early as they need it; and what needs to change to address this.

Department of Health and Social Care. Technology use in adult social care: 2025 survey results

The 2025 survey on technology use in adult social care offers a timely snapshot of digital adoption across the sector.

Conducted by the Department of Health and Social Care, the survey gathered responses from 1,085 CQC-registered care providers in England during February–March 2025. It explored the extent of technology use in care delivery and business operations, alongside barriers to adoption and infrastructure needs.

Findings show growing uptake of digital tools, particularly in business functions. Digital social care records were used by around three-quarters of providers, reflecting substantial progress in sector digitisation. Monitoring equipment and technologies, such as sensors for fall prevention, were the most common care tools, used by 43% of providers.

However, adoption remains uneven. Over a quarter (27%) of providers reported using no care technologies at all, rising to 40% among the smallest providers. Key barriers include cost, workforce skills, and connectivity, with many providers highlighting the need for additional funding and infrastructure support.

Department for Work and Pensions. Apply for PIP Digital Self-Serve: Process and Impact Evaluation Findings

The evaluation of the Apply for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) Digital Self-Serve service provides new evidence on how introducing an online application route is shaping access to PIP and claimant experience.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining impact analysis of administrative data with qualitative interviews with applicants and staff. It compares

outcomes in areas where the digital service was piloted against control areas, tracking the full application journey from registration to decision and appeal.

Findings show that the introduction of Digital Self-Serve significantly increased demand. Registration volumes were around 19–22% higher in pilot areas, alongside increases in assessment referrals and overall awards. However, award rates were slightly lower, suggesting that increased access brought in a broader range of applicants.

Applicants reported greater flexibility, convenience and reduced stress compared to telephone or paper routes, with faster overall journey times (around a week shorter on average).

However, challenges include accessibility. Some groups were excluded from the digital route, and stakeholders emphasised the continued need for non-digital channels.

Local Government Association. Council budget setting survey 2026/27

The Local Government Association's Council Budget Setting Survey 2026/27 highlights mounting financial pressures on English councils, raising concerns about their ability to sustain essential services.

The survey draws on responses from 154 chief financial officers (49% response rate), collected between December 2025 and January 2026. It assesses councils' financial positions ahead of budget setting, including confidence in meeting statutory duties, reliance on reserves, and pressures linked to areas such as SEND and housing.

Findings show that financial strain is widespread. Around 58% of councils reported it would be difficult to set a balanced budget for 2026/27, rising to 69% among those with social care responsibilities.

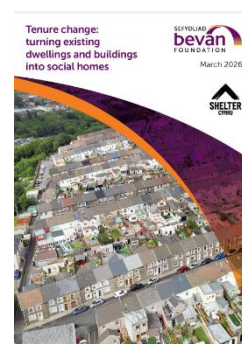
Confidence in meeting statutory duties is also weakening, with 16% of councils unsure they can do so in 2026/27 rising sharply in later years.

Many councils expect to take mitigating action, including increasing rents, reducing capital investment and drawing on reserves.

The Bevan Foundation. Tenure change: turning existing dwellings and buildings into social homes

The Bevan Foundation's 2026 report on tenure change highlights an opportunity to address the social housing shortage by repurposing existing homes and buildings, rather than relying solely on new build.

The report draws on housing data, policy analysis and sector evidence to assess how existing dwellings such as empty homes,



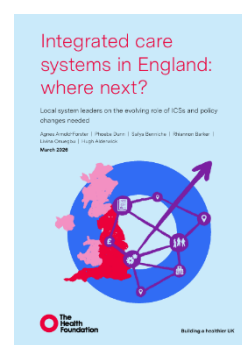
former social housing now in the private sector, and unused buildings could be brought into social ownership. It situates this within a context of rising demand, with one in 14 households in Wales on waiting lists and thousands in temporary accommodation.

Findings suggest substantial untapped capacity. Over 22,000 homes have been empty for more than six months, with an estimated 3,600–4,500 suitable for conversion into social housing. Repurposing existing properties could deliver homes more quickly and at lower cost than new builds, while also offering environmental benefits and making use of existing community infrastructure.

However, the report identifies barriers including funding constraints, regulatory requirements and strict quality standards, which can limit viability.

The Health Foundation. Integrated care systems in England: where next?

The Health Foundation’s 2026 report on Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) explores their evolving role within NHS reform, highlighting both their potential and the significant challenges facing system-wide working.



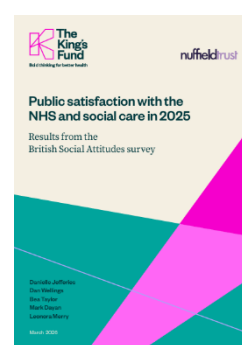
The report draws on in-depth qualitative research, including interviews with senior leaders across four ICSs conducted throughout 2025. It examines how systems are adapting to policy changes, particularly the government’s proposed shift towards prevention, community-based care, and greater system accountability.

Findings suggest broad support for the core aims of ICSs, particularly improving population health and reducing inequalities through more joined-up care. However, there is considerable variation in how these goals are interpreted and implemented locally. Leaders reported ongoing tensions between national priorities and local flexibility, alongside concerns about limited resources and the impact of continued organisational restructuring.

The report also highlights a potential shift away from system-based approaches, with policy signals pointing towards more market-style mechanisms, such as increased provider autonomy and performance comparisons.

The King’s Fund. Public satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2025

The King’s Fund’s 2026 report on public satisfaction with the NHS and social care offers a nuanced picture of shifting public sentiment, suggesting early signs of recovery alongside continued underlying concern.



The analysis draws on the 2025 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey based on responses from over 3,400 adults across Great

Britain. It examines satisfaction with the NHS overall, alongside views on access, service quality and social care.

Key findings include:

- An improvement in public sentiment. Around 26% of respondents reported being satisfied with how the NHS runs, an increase of 6 percentage points from 2024 and the first rise since 2019.
- Dissatisfaction also fell significantly, dropping from 59% to 51%, the largest decrease in over 25 years.
- Satisfaction remains historically low and uneven across groups. Ratings for key services, particularly waiting times and access, remain poor, and younger people report notably lower satisfaction than older groups.
- Despite this, public support for the NHS's founding principles, including free care at the point of use, remains strong

The Care Quality Commission. Good practice in care this living with dementia



This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of what high-quality dementia care looks like, as demand for services continues to grow.

Good Practice in Care for Those Living with a Dementia: Literature Review

© IFF Research, in partnership with Leeds Beckett University, on behalf of the Care Quality Commission

March 2024



Commissioned by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the study synthesises evidence from 2,700+ academic and sector publications, with 61 selected for in-depth analysis. It is complemented by expert discussion groups involving professionals, regulators and people with lived experience, offering both research-based and practical insight into effective care approaches.

Findings emphasise the importance of person-centred care. High-quality support is characterised by involving individuals and families in care planning, maintaining choice and control, and supporting people to continue meaningful activities and relationships. Smaller, homelike environments and culturally appropriate care were also identified as key to preserving identity and wellbeing.

The review highlights that good dementia care depends not only on frontline practice, but also on system-level factors such as workforce skills, leadership and service design.

With the number of people living with dementia expected to rise significantly, the report underscores the need for consistent standards and a shared understanding of “what good looks like” across health and social care.

Public Health Wales. International Health Insights: Dementia Prevention

This report from Public Health Wales uses a rapid review methodology, synthesising international research, policy and practice examples from countries including Finland, Japan and South Korea. It draws on both academic and grey literature to identify effective approaches to reducing dementia risk and improving brain health.

Key findings suggest that there is growing evidence that dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing and that substantial prevention is possible through action across the life course.

Up to 45% of dementia cases could be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors such as physical inactivity, smoking, social isolation and unmanaged health conditions.

The most effective approaches combine individual behaviour change with multi-component interventions and wider structural policies, including environmental and public health measures.

Public Health Wales. A place to thrive: Creating healthier homes for children and families in poverty across Wales

New report from Public Health Wales highlights the role of housing in shaping the health and life outcomes of children and families living in poverty.

The report combines lived experience research with stakeholder engagement across housing, health and policy sectors. It brings together qualitative insights from families alongside evidence and expert perspectives to develop a shared understanding of what constitutes a “healthy home” and identify practical solutions for improving housing conditions.

Findings show that many families in Wales continue to live in poor-quality housing (characterised by damp, overcrowding, high costs and insecurity) which has direct negative impacts on physical health, mental wellbeing, educational outcomes and long-term opportunities.

The report identifies four priority areas for action: embedding health and wellbeing within housing strategy, involving affected communities in decision-making, improving cross-sector collaboration and data sharing, and strengthening the use of Health Impact Assessments



Public Health Wales. Abuse and other adversities in community-dwelling older adults in Wales: associations with health and well-being

The Public Health Wales report on abuse and other adversities in older adults highlights the scale and impact of harmful experiences in later life, with important implications for health and wellbeing.

The study is based on a national household survey of 1,085 adults aged 60+ in Wales (February–May 2025). It examines experiences of abuse, loneliness, financial strain, barriers to care, and caregiving pressures, and analyses how these relate to a range of physical and mental health outcomes.

Findings show that adversity in later life is common. Around 12.5% of participants reported experiencing abuse since age 60, while 30% had been unable to access health or social care and over one in five reported loneliness.

These experiences were strongly associated with poorer outcomes, including low mental wellbeing, higher anxiety, reduced life satisfaction and increased risk behaviours.

Briefings

The Health Foundation. Socioeconomic disadvantage and self-reported health

The Health Foundation's 2026 analysis on socioeconomic disadvantage and self-reported health highlights widening health inequalities among the UK's working-age population, with deprivation playing a significant role in declining health.

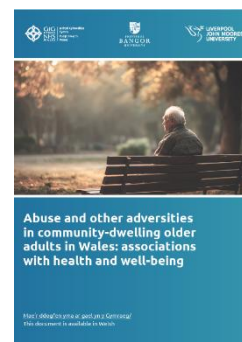
The study draws on large-scale modelling by the Office for National Statistics, analysing changes in self-reported health among people aged 16–69 between 2011 and 2021. It examines how health outcomes vary across areas with different levels of socioeconomic deprivation over time.

Findings show that people living in the most deprived areas experienced significantly greater declines in health. Around 18% of working-age adults in these areas no longer reported good health after a decade, compared with 13% overall. Even after adjusting for demographic factors, those in the most deprived areas faced at least a 43% higher risk of deteriorating health.

The Health Foundation highlights the need for policy action on the wider determinants of health to prevent further widening of inequalities.

Public Health Wales. How home temperatures affect health and well-being in low-income households: Evidence from temperature monitoring and lived experience

This briefing from Public Health Wales highlights the significant impact of cold homes on physical, mental and social wellbeing during a period of rising energy costs.





The study combines objective temperature monitoring with in-depth interviews with 15 adults living in low-income households (under £20,000), all with long-term health conditions. Conducted during winter 2023, it captures both measured indoor temperatures and lived experiences of managing home heating.

Findings show that average daytime living room temperatures were below the recommended 18°C in nearly half of homes, with many participants lacking awareness of official guidance. Regardless of temperature, most reported negative impacts of cold on their health, including fatigue, reduced mobility and poorer mental wellbeing. Financial pressures were central, with participants describing cutting back on essentials such as food or limiting social contact to afford heating.

Tools and Guidance

NHS England. Fit for the future: towards population health delivery health delivery models

This guidance from NHS England sets out how the NHS will operationalise a major shift towards population-based, community-focused care.

The document provides implementation guidance linked to the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, outlining how Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and providers can organise services around defined populations. It focuses on new delivery and commissioning models designed to improve routine care, better manage long-term conditions, and reduce reliance on hospital-based services.

Central to the approach is a move towards integrated, neighbourhood-level care. The report introduces three core contractual models (Single Neighbourhood Providers, Multi-Neighbourhood Providers and Integrated Health Organisations) which are intended to work together to deliver coordinated services across different population scales.

Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England. Neighbourhood health framework

The government's 2026 Neighbourhood Health Framework sets out a major shift in how health and care services in England are organised, aiming to deliver more joined-up, community-based care centred around people and place.

The framework draws on national policy development linked to the NHS 10-Year Health Plan, alongside existing pilots and best practice. It provides guidance for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), local authorities and wider partners, outlining shared goals, governance approaches and a phased implementation plan over the next three years.

At its core is a move towards "neighbourhood health", bringing together GP services, community care, social care and voluntary sector support to serve defined local populations. Key aims include improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities



through prevention, delivering more personalised and coordinated care closer to home, and reducing pressure on hospitals by shifting activity into community settings.

Department of Health and Social Care. 2026 to 2027 revised financial direction to NHS England

The government's 2026–27 Financial Directions to NHS England set out the funding envelope and financial controls for the NHS in the year ahead, providing a baseline for system planning and accountability.

Issued by the Department of Health and Social Care, the directions are a statutory requirement and define how NHS England must manage its resources. They specify overall spending limits, alongside detailed budgetary controls and accounting rules aligned with HM Treasury guidance.

For 2026–27, the total revenue resource limit is set at £215.4 billion, with a capital spending limit of £5.0 billion. These limits apply across NHS England, integrated care boards and NHS providers, covering the full range of health service expenditure.

The directions also introduce a series of sub-limits and technical adjustments to ensure consistency with national budgeting rules, reinforcing tighter financial discipline across the system

Department of Health and Social Care. Adults assessed and supported year in employment for newly qualified social workers: a guide for employers

The Department of Health and Social Care's 2026 guidance on the Adults Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) sets out how employers can access funding to support newly qualified social workers in adult social care.

The guidance outlines eligibility criteria, funding arrangements and evidence requirements for employers delivering the ASYE programme. It applies to organisations across statutory, private and voluntary sectors and reflects updated arrangements, with the NHS Business Services Authority taking on administration of the scheme from April 2026.

ASYE is a non-statutory, 12-month framework designed to support newly qualified social workers as they transition into practice. Funding can be used to cover activities such as supervision, assessment and professional development, helping employers provide structured support during this critical first year.

Local Government Association. Supporting NHS Strategic Commissioning and Neighbourhood Health

The Local Government Association's 2026 guidance outlines how public health teams can play a central role in delivering the NHS's shift towards more integrated, community-based care.



The guidance is grounded in the NHS 10-Year Health Plan and sets out how local authority public health teams can support Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in their evolving role as strategic commissioners. It frames strategic commissioning as a continuous, evidence-based cycle of understanding population need, planning services, allocating resources and evaluating impact.



Children and Young People's Services

Reports

Evaluation of DfE Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 funding for children in care and care leavers



Pupil Premium Plus Post-16
evaluation
Final report

March 2026

Dr Georgia Hyde-Dryden, Emma Andersen,
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Leon Feinstein and Dr Stephen Boxford



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Key findings:

- **Variation in funding and delivery:** Variation in funding levels alongside flexible funding parameters has resulted in differences in the type and level of support available between virtual schools. While this has enabled flexibility to respond to local needs, there is lack of national consistency or comparability of funding use and outcomes.
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- **Investing in joint working across services:** The evaluation highlights the role of the funding in strengthening joint working between education, social care and post-16 providers. Increased post-16 capacity within Virtual Schools has supported improved communication, better understanding of young people's needs and more coordinated support.
- **Early signs of positive outcomes for young people:** Although the programme is still in its early stages, stakeholders reported emerging signs of improved engagement, retention and participation in post-16 education and training among CLA and CLs. These findings are based on perceptions and



early evidence, with longer-term impacts expected to emerge over the coming years.

- **Ongoing challenges:** The evaluation identifies a number of challenges affecting how support is delivered locally including funding levels that are often insufficient to meet need, increasing demand and complexity of need, limited availability of post-16 provision in some areas, and uncertainty around future funding.

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Further clarity on policy intent, consistent and sufficient funding and improved monitoring data will be important to support consistent implementation and evaluate future impact.

NHS England. Children and Young People Patient Experience Survey 2024: National Qualitative Report

The 2024 Children and Young People's Patient Experience Survey provides a detailed picture of how young patients and their families experience hospital care across England.

The study analysed written responses from a nationally representative sample of over 25,800 children, young people (aged 0–15) and their parents or carers, following hospital stays between March and May 2024. Using thematic analysis, the research identifies recurring patterns in patient experience, complementing the survey's quantitative findings and offering deeper insight into what matters most to families.

Overall, experiences were largely positive. Many respondents expressed strong gratitude towards NHS staff, particularly where care was compassionate, communication was clear, and treatment plans were well explained. High levels of involvement in decision-making and perceptions of being well cared for were also widely reported.

However, the report also highlights key challenges. These include inconsistent responses to concerns raised by parents, gaps in emotional support, and instances where children's individual needs or anxieties were not fully addressed.

The Bevan Foundation. A new approach for eradicating child poverty in Wales 2026 – 2030

The Bevan Foundation's 2026 Child Poverty Strategy report sets out a case for a more ambitious and coordinated approach to tackling child poverty in Wales, arguing that current policies have failed to deliver meaningful reductions.

The report draws on analysis of existing policy, modelling of potential interventions, and a review of current Welsh Government strategies. It takes a cross-sector perspective, examining how housing, education, childcare and social security interact to shape poverty outcomes, alongside evidence on the depth and persistence of poverty among families.



Findings highlight that child poverty remains both widespread and entrenched, with limited progress over recent years.

While UK-wide policy changes, such as removing the two-child benefit limit, are expected to reduce poverty levels modestly, many families are likely to remain below the poverty line, underlining the importance of addressing the depth of poverty as well as headline rates.

The report calls for a cross-government strategy with clear targets, alongside practical measures such as reducing the cost of the school day, improving childcare access, and strengthening income support.

Ofsted. How schools and colleges support the academic and personal progress of children in care

This Ofsted report on how schools and colleges support children in care provides insight into what effective educational support looks like for one of the most vulnerable groups in the system. The research draws on surveys, interviews and visits to primary, secondary and further education settings across England

Findings highlight the importance of strong, relational practice. Effective settings prioritise stability, high expectations and consistent adult support, alongside a deep understanding of trauma and its impact on learning and behaviour. Staff training, close multi-agency working and tailored pastoral support were key features of successful approaches.

However, support remains variable. The report identifies gaps in staff expertise, inconsistent use of personal education plans, and challenges in meeting complex needs, particularly during transitions between settings.

Home Office. Deep dive exploration of safeguarding partnership responses to county lines and youth violence

This report provides a detailed examination of how effectively multi-agency safeguarding partnerships across England respond to serious youth violence and



county lines exploitation. The study combines a rapid review of over 100 policy documents with qualitative research involving around 160 professionals across safeguarding partnerships in England.

Findings highlight that, while awareness of child criminal exploitation has improved, safeguarding responses remain inconsistent and fragmented. Partnerships often rely on short-term, reactive interventions focused on high-risk individuals, with limited emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

The report also identifies challenges in translating policy into practice, including gaps in data sharing, unclear governance arrangements and difficulties applying existing frameworks, such as the National Referral Mechanism, to complex, cross-boundary exploitation.

Recommendations call for a unified child exploitation strategy, improved integration of health and education sectors, a national youth drug response, and investment in universal services.

The report advocates for a whole-systems approach, recognising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and must be underpinned by collaborative, well-resourced, and trauma-informed practice.

Department for Education. Family Routes: educational outcomes for children in long-term foster care

This new report from the Department for Education provides insight into how placement stability and early experiences shape later attainment.

The study uses linked administrative data from education and children's social care records, tracking around 1,100 children who entered care before age 8 and remained in long-term foster placements. It analyses both placement stability and educational outcomes from early years through to age 24.

Findings show that educational outcomes for this group remain significantly below those of their peers. By age 16, only 17% achieved key GCSE benchmarks compared to 55% of all pupils, with attainment gaps emerging early and widening over time.

Placement stability is a critical factor: just over half remained in the same placement to age 16, and those experiencing multiple moves had markedly poorer outcomes.

However, many young people continue to make progress beyond school age, often achieving qualifications later through further education.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of early support, stable placements and sustained educational engagement to improve long-term outcomes for children in foster care.

Department for Work and Pensions. Workless households and educational attainment statutory indicators 2026



Workless households and educational attainment statutory indicators 2026

The 2026 Workless Households and Educational Attainment report provides an updated national picture of the relationship between parental employment and children's outcomes.

The report draws on official statistics, including Labour Force Survey data and Key Stage 4 attainment measures. It fulfils a legal requirement under the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 to track both the prevalence of workless households and educational outcomes for all pupils and those considered disadvantaged.

Findings highlight persistent inequalities. Children in disadvantaged circumstances, often linked to parental worklessness, continue to achieve significantly lower outcomes at Key Stage 4.

In 2024/25, the average Attainment 8 score was 34.9 for disadvantaged pupils compared to 50.4 for their peers, illustrating a substantial attainment gap.

Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care. Screen use by children aged under 5

Commissioned by the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, the report synthesises quantitative and qualitative evidence, including a review of 60+ systematic studies alongside input from parents, practitioners and stakeholders. It examines patterns of screen use and their impacts across a critical developmental period from infancy to age five.

Findings suggest a complex and mixed evidence base. While high-quality, interactive content (particularly when used with caregivers) can support learning and development, excessive or passive screen use is associated with poorer outcomes, including impacts on sleep, physical activity and language development.

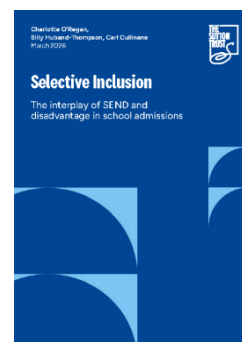
The report emphasises that risks often relate to "displacement" where screen time replaces key activities such as play, social interaction and movement.

The report also highlights significant evidence gaps, particularly for very young children and those with additional needs and adopts a precautionary approach in its recommendations.

The Sutton Trust. Selective Inclusion

The Sutton Trust's report examines how socioeconomic disadvantage and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) intersect in school admissions, highlighting persistent inequalities in access to high-performing schools.

The analysis draws on national pupil data and a survey of over 2,000 school leaders, exploring patterns in school intakes alongside perceptions of inclusion and admissions practices.



Findings show that high-performing secondary schools consistently under-represent both disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, particularly those who are both low-income and have additional needs. For example, top schools admit significantly fewer pupils eligible for free school meals and lower rates of SEND pupils than exist in their local catchments.

The report also highlights systemic issues shaping these patterns. Over 40% of school leaders reported that some schools actively discourage applications from pupils with SEND, while differences in school reputation, resources and support capacity further influence admissions.

Action for Children. 360,000 missed opportunities to support families earlier

The analysis from Action for Children is based on Freedom of Information data from 137 local authorities, covering 2.2 million children in need (CIN) assessments between 2020 and 2025.

It examines what happens when assessments are closed, particularly whether families are referred to early help services designed to provide preventative support.

Findings show that early intervention is frequently missed. Around 88% of closed CIN assessments did not result in a referral to early help, equating to an estimated 360,000 missed opportunities over five years around 72,000 children annually. More than one in five of these children were referred back to children's social care within a year, suggesting needs were not adequately addressed.

The report also identifies wide variation between local authorities, indicating that access to early help depends heavily on where families live.

Overall, the findings underline the importance of strengthening early help services, with calls for greater investment, clearer national expectations and improved data to ensure families receive timely support before reaching crisis point.

Education Policy Institute. Babies and screen time: recent evidence from the national children of the 2020s cohort study

This report provides new evidence on how digital exposure is shaping early childhood experiences in England, drawing on one of the most recent national cohort studies.

The analysis uses data from the Children of the 2020s study, covering over 8,000 families with infants aged around nine months. It examines patterns of screen use, differences across demographic groups, and how screen time relates to other activities in the home environment.

Findings show that screen exposure is widespread but typically moderate. Around half of babies experience up to one hour of screen time per day, while 28% have none and only a small minority (around 2%) experience more than three hours.

Screen use is socially patterned, with higher levels among families with lower incomes or educational attainment and linked to household characteristics such as number of siblings.

Importantly, the report finds that heavier screen use is associated with reduced engagement in activities such as reading, play and outdoor time, while lower levels show little or no clear relationship.

Overall, the findings suggest that the context and intensity of screen use, rather than simple exposure, are key, highlighting the need for nuanced guidance to support families in balancing digital and developmental activities.

Briefings

NSPCC Learning. Statistics briefing: neglect

The NSPCC's 2026 statistics briefing on neglect provides an overview of the scale, characteristics and impact of child neglect in the UK, highlighting it as a persistent and often under-recognised safeguarding issue.

The briefing synthesises data from multiple national sources, including child protection plans, police records, surveys and helpline data. It brings together the latest available evidence to support practitioners and policymakers in understanding patterns of neglect and informing service responses.

Findings show that neglect remains the most common form of child abuse. Around half of children subject to a child protection plan or register are there due to neglect, and police-recorded child cruelty offences, including neglect, are increasing

The Health Foundation. Why are a growing number of young people who are NEET reporting work-limiting health conditions?

The analysis draws on Labour Force Survey data, examining trends among 16–24-year-olds over the past decade. It explores changes in both the number of young





people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the prevalence of self-reported health conditions limiting their ability to work.

Findings show that NEET numbers have risen to around 957,000 (12.8% of young people), up by around 200,000 since 2021. At the same time, the proportion of NEET young people reporting a work-limiting health condition has increased sharply, from 26% in 2015 to 44% in 2025. This rise is largely driven by increased reporting of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions, alongside a weaker labour market.

Young people with such conditions are significantly more likely to be NEET, around one in three, compared to one in ten without.

Local Government Association. Must knows for elected members: The Healthy Child Programme

The guidance summarises the national programme and its delivery, drawing on updated Department of Health and Social Care frameworks. It explains how councils commission and oversee services delivered by health visitors (0–5) and school nurses (5–19, or up to 25 for some groups) and outlines key components such as mandated health reviews and targeted support.

The briefing emphasises that the programme is a cornerstone of prevention and early intervention. It supports child development, identifies risks early and helps reduce health inequalities through a proportionate universal approach, offering additional support to those with greater need.

Tools and Guidance

Department for Education. Children's social care national framework

The Department for Education's 2026 Children's Social Care National Framework updates statutory guidance and sets out the purpose of children's social care, alongside core principles, outcomes and enablers needed for effective delivery. It is intended for local authorities and all safeguarding partners, reinforcing a whole-system, multi-agency approach.



Department
for Education

Children's Social Care National Framework

Statutory guidance on the purpose,
principles for practice and expected
outcomes of children's social care

March 2026

At its core is a shift towards earlier intervention and family support. The framework emphasises helping families stay together where safe, protecting children from harm, and ensuring those who cannot remain at home experience stable, loving care. It also places strong emphasis on listening to children and involving them in decisions.

Key enablers include effective multi-agency collaboration, a skilled workforce, better use of data, and evidence-based practice.

Department for Education. Working together to Safeguard Children 2026

The Department for Education's 2026 Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance sets out the legal framework and expectations for how organisations collaborate to protect and promote the welfare of children in England.



UK Government

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

A guide to multi-agency working
to help, protect and promote the welfare
of children

March 2026

The guidance brings together legislation, policy and best practice, outlining the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, health services, police, education providers and other partners. It requires safeguarding partners to work jointly across agencies to provide early help, identify risk and take action where children may be harmed

The 2026 update strengthens expectations around multi-agency accountability, data sharing and consistent practice. It also places greater focus on tackling inequality, recognising complex and overlapping harms, and improving support for vulnerable groups, including babies and children experiencing multiple disadvantages.

The Department for Education has also published a summary of changes [here](#).

Department for Education. Supporting local areas to embed working together to safeguard children and the national framework

The Department for Education's 2026 guidance on supporting local areas to embed Working Together and the national framework provides practical direction on how to translate national safeguarding reforms into local systems and day-to-day practice.

The guidance is non-statutory and complements the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance and the Children's Social Care National Framework. It is aimed at local authorities, safeguarding partners and practitioners, supporting implementation of wide-ranging reforms backed by significant national investment and focused on shifting the system towards earlier help and prevention.

The guidance emphasises improving consistency, strengthening multi-agency collaboration and aligning local systems, processes and decision-making with national expectations. It highlights the importance of using data, evidence and feedback from children and families to drive continuous improvement and better outcomes.

A key feature is the structured Explore, Prepare, Deliver, Sustain (EPDS) cycle, which supports reflective practice and system-wide learning across practitioners, teams and leadership.

NSPCC Learning. Key changes introduced in working together to safeguard children 2026

This guidance summarises key updates to the government's statutory guidance, setting out strengthened expectations for how agencies collaborate to protect children.

The briefing distils changes introduced in the March 2026 update, replacing the 2023 guidance. It highlights revisions across policy and practice, drawing on the full statutory document and accompanying implementation materials to support practitioners in understanding what has changed and why.



Key updates include a stronger emphasis on inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice, with clearer expectations for identifying and addressing racism and disproportionality. The guidance also enhances recognition of specific and overlapping harms, such as domestic abuse, online risks and exploitation, and places greater focus on the needs of babies and children experiencing multiple vulnerabilities.

There is also a shift towards more integrated, family-centred support through the "Family Help" model, alongside clearer accountability and expectations for information sharing across safeguarding partners.

NSPCC Learning. Domestic abuse in pregnancy: expert insight videos

The resource draws on expert knowledge and practice-based insight, presented through a series of short films aimed at those working with families. It explores why the risk of domestic abuse can increase during pregnancy, how to recognise warning signs, and how practitioners can respond effectively.



Department for Education. Improving the attendance of children with a social worker

The guidance draws on national policy, case studies and practice examples, and is aimed at social workers, senior leaders and wider safeguarding partners.

It provides non-statutory advice on promoting attendance across key groups, including children in need, those on protection plans, looked-after children and care leavers.

The guidance highlights the role of social workers in building relationships with families, understanding underlying barriers and working collaboratively with schools and local authorities to provide tailored support.

Department for Education. Child and Family Adults Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE): programme resources

The Department for Education's 2026 Child and Family Adults Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme resources provide a comprehensive suite of tools to support the delivery of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment for newly qualified social workers.

The guidance brings together templates, assessment materials and structured review points covering the full 12-month programme. It is designed for employers, supervisors and newly qualified social workers, supporting consistent implementation across statutory, private and voluntary sectors.

This guidance is specifically for the child and family ASYE programme.

Department for Education. Fostering programme: new hubs expression of interest

The guidance outlines the application process, eligibility criteria and programme expectations for groups of local authorities, children's trusts and non-profit fostering agencies. It builds on existing regional "fostering hubs", which bring partners together to deliver coordinated recruitment and support. Applications opened in March 2026, with a requirement for partnerships covering at least four areas and led by a local authority or children's trust.

Department for Education. Apply to set up a regional care cooperative

The Department for Education's 2026 guidance on applying to set up a Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) outlines the next phase of reforms to children's social care, aiming to improve placement availability, quality and coordination across regions.

The guidance is designed for local authorities and partners, including health and youth justice services. It sets out the application process, eligibility criteria and funding arrangements for establishing new RCCs, with up to six cooperatives to be created as part of a phased national rollout.



RCCs are regional bodies that bring together partners to plan and commission homes and support for looked-after children. The guidance outlines a three-stage development model (foundation, development and delivery) alongside expectations on governance, commissioning, data sharing and financial planning.



Criminal Justice

Reports

Ministry of Justice. Women's Justice Board report

The Women's Justice Board's 2026 report sets out a comprehensive set of recommendations to reduce the number of women in prison, arguing for a more gender-responsive and preventative approach to justice.

Commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, the report draws on expert input from across the criminal justice, health and voluntary sectors. It synthesises existing evidence, policy reviews and practitioner insight to identify systemic issues and propose a "whole system" reform agenda.

Findings highlight that women in contact with the criminal justice system often face complex and overlapping needs, including trauma, domestic abuse, poor mental health and socioeconomic disadvantage. The report argues that prison is frequently ineffective in addressing these drivers and can exacerbate harm, particularly for women who are primary caregivers.

It proposes a shift towards prevention, diversion and community-based support, including expanded use of women's centres, improved access to health and housing services, and a stronger focus on early intervention.

Key recommendations include developing a cross-government reform programme, adopting trauma-informed and anti-racist approaches, and significantly reducing the use of custody, particularly for pregnant women and those with dependent children.

Ministry of Justice and Lord Timpson OBE. Impact of Social Visits in Prison

This report provides new evidence on how maintaining family and social contact affects key outcomes for people in custody.

The study uses linked administrative data covering April 2019 to December 2022 and applies propensity score matching to compare individuals who received visits (including video calls) with similar individuals who did not. It examines three outcomes: reoffending within one year of release, incidents of self-harm in custody, and accommodation status on release.

Findings show that social contact is associated with improved outcomes across all three areas. Prisoners who received visits were less likely to reoffend, had fewer self-harm incidents, and were more likely to secure settled accommodation immediately after release compared to matched counterparts without visits.

The analysis also highlights variation in impact depending on frequency of visits and demographic factors, suggesting that sustained and meaningful contact may be particularly important.



Analysis of the impact of social visits in prison on reoffending, self-harm, and accommodation outcomes

As for statistical tables

March 2023

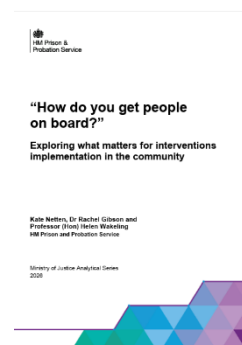
Analysed by: James Jones and Anna Hopwood

Overall, the findings reinforce the role of family and social relationships in rehabilitation, highlighting prison visits as a potentially important lever for reducing reoffending and supporting successful reintegration.

HM Prison and Probation Service. How do you get people on board? Exploring what matters for interventions implementation in the community

This report explores what drives successful implementation of behaviour change interventions in community criminal justice settings.

The study uses qualitative research methods, including interviews and case studies focused on two accredited programmes (Horizon and Building Better Relationships). It applies an implementation science framework, the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), to identify factors influencing how interventions are delivered in practice.



Findings highlight a consistent gap between how interventions are designed and how they are delivered on the ground. Nine key themes were identified as critical to effective implementation, including organisational culture, leadership support, staff capacity, and the quality of communication and relationships between teams.

The report emphasises the importance of frontline staff engagement, appropriate training, and selecting skilled facilitators to support participant engagement. It also highlights the role of practical enablers such as adequate resources, clear processes and aligned systems in determining success.

Ministry of Justice and Department for Health and Social Care. Pathways between probation and addiction: a follow-up study

This report presents new insight into how effectively individuals on community sentences engage with substance misuse treatment, and how this relates to reoffending outcomes.

The analysis links Ministry of Justice probation data with national drug and alcohol treatment records, covering people given Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) or Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs) between 2018 and 2023. It combines probabilistic data linkage with Natural Language Processing (NLP) of probation case notes to better capture treatment engagement not recorded in structured datasets.

Key findings include:

- Up to 90% of ATRs and DRRs were estimated to involve some form of treatment engagement.
- Reconviction was less common following ATRs and DRRs linked to structured treatment.

- Characteristics associated with being more likely to be linked to structured treatment included being aged over 50, female, in settled accommodation, engaged by treatment services within 3 weeks of an ATR or 3-6 weeks of a DRR.
- Reconviction outcomes varied by treatment outcomes:
 - Reconvictions associated with ATRs and DRRs were lowest when they remained in structured treatment at the end of the observation period (13% for ATR; 26% for DRR).
 - Reconvictions associated with ATRs and DRRs were highest when they dropped out of structured treatment (41% for ATR; 60% for DRR).

HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Hardly working out: barriers to physical education in prisons

HM Inspectorate of Prisons examines access to physical education (PE) and exercise in prisons, highlighting its importance for wellbeing and rehabilitation alongside significant gaps in provision.

The report draws on a year of inspection findings and prisoner survey data across the prison estate in England and Wales. It combines quantitative survey results with qualitative inspection evidence to assess access, quality and consistency of PE provision.

Findings show that access to exercise is uneven and often limited. Around 18% of men, and up to 25% in local prisons, reported being unable to use the gym or take part in sport, rising to 28% in women's prisons. Weekend provision is particularly restricted, with fewer than half of prisoners able to exercise.

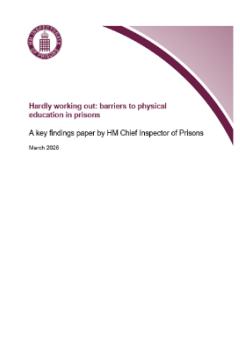
Barriers include staff shortages, regime pressures and inadequate facilities, meaning sessions are frequently cancelled or unavailable. Provision also often fails to meet the needs of specific groups, such as older or disabled prisoners.

However, the report highlights examples of good practice where prisons offer varied programmes and broader access. Overall, it emphasises that physical activity should be treated as a core part of rehabilitation, requiring greater prioritisation and consistency across the system.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons. 'Everything is after sentencing': The experiences of remand prisoners

This report examines the experiences of remand prisoners, highlighting significant gaps in support for those awaiting trial or sentencing.

The analysis draws on inspection findings from 12 reception prisons and national prisoner survey data collected between April





2024 and March 2025. It combines quantitative survey analysis with qualitative insights to understand how remand prisoners experience custody compared to sentenced individuals.

Findings show that remand prisoners (who make up around one-fifth of the prison population) consistently experience poorer outcomes. Despite often having higher levels of need, including mental health issues and vulnerability, they are less likely to access key services such as resettlement support, accommodation help and purposeful activity.

The report highlights that many prisons lack a clear strategy for managing remand populations, resulting in inconsistent provision and unmet needs. Reception prisons, where most remand prisoners are held, often have some of the poorest conditions, further exacerbating risks such as self-harm and distress linked to uncertainty.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Safety, well-being and hope: The untapped potential of family contact in prison



This report examines the role of family contact in prisons, highlighting its significant but underutilised impact on prisoner outcomes.

The thematic review draws on inspection visits to a range of prisons, focusing on establishments with examples of positive family provision. It combines qualitative evidence from staff, prisoners and families with inspection findings to assess how family relationships are supported in practice.

Findings show that family contact plays a critical role in supporting mental and physical wellbeing, fostering a sense of purpose and encouraging desistance from offending. Strong family ties were found to influence “virtually every aspect of prison life,” including behaviour, safety and rehabilitation outcomes.

However, provision is inconsistent and often treated as a secondary priority. Many prisons struggle with basic processes such as booking visits, enabling communication or involving families in safeguarding concerns. There is also a lack of strategic oversight, with family work not embedded as a core part of prison regimes

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. Criteria for concern: The lasting impact of ABSOs and their replacement by CBOs



The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies' 2026 report examines the long-term impact of antisocial behaviour interventions, questioning whether current approaches effectively address the underlying causes of offending.

The study combines policy analysis with theoretical and empirical evidence, focusing on the legacy of Antisocial Behaviour Orders

(ASBOs) and their successors, including civil injunctions and Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs). It draws on existing research and case-based insights to assess how these tools operate in practice and how their effectiveness should be measured.

Findings suggest that current approaches place disproportionate emphasis on changing individual behaviour, often overlooking the structural conditions (such as poverty, homelessness, substance misuse and poor mental health) that shape antisocial behaviour. Those most likely to receive such orders are typically already experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, raising concerns about fairness and effectiveness.

The report argues that enforcement-led responses risk reinforcing cycles of marginalisation, with limited evidence of long-term impact. It calls for more holistic, evidence-based approaches that address both individual behaviour and wider social conditions, alongside improved methods for evaluating success.

Clinks. State of the Sector 2025

Clinks State of the Sector provides a comprehensive overview of the voluntary sector working in criminal justice across England and Wales, highlighting rising demand alongside ongoing financial and structural pressures.

The research draws on a mixed-methods approach, including an online survey of 160 organisations and 12 focus groups with voluntary sector providers and funders conducted between late 2025 and early 2026. It also incorporates financial analysis using Charity Commission data to understand sector capacity and resilience.



Findings paint a challenging picture. Demand for services continues to increase, with individuals presenting with more complex and overlapping needs. At the same time, organisations face persistent barriers including short-term and insufficient funding, commissioning practices that disadvantage smaller providers, workforce pressures, and delays in vetting processes.

Despite these challenges, the sector remains highly valued and continues to deliver critical support within a criminal justice system described as under strain. The report highlights examples of innovation and resilience, alongside concerns about the ability of organisations to meet future demand without additional resources.

Briefings

Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. Developing measures that matter in the family justice system

This briefing explores how success in family justice could be better defined and measured, with a stronger focus on outcomes for children and families.

The briefing draws on a review of existing outcomes frameworks, internal workshops and analysis of available administrative data. It develops a set of potential indicators, balancing what is feasible in the short term with longer-term ambitions for improved data collection and system-wide measurement.

Findings highlight a fundamental gap in current performance metrics. Existing measures tend to focus on system efficiency (such as the length of proceedings) rather than whether the system improves children's lives. The report proposes a shift towards shared, outcome-based measures across agencies, centred on four key goals: improving children's wellbeing, enabling positive life changes, ensuring fairness, and supporting meaningful participation in decision-making.

It also identifies significant data limitations, noting the need for better-quality, linked data to track outcomes over time and support accountability.

Overall, the briefing calls for a more child-focused, data-driven approach to evaluating family justice, emphasising that meaningful reform will depend on measuring what truly matters to children and families.

Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. AI in the family justice system – 2026

The briefing draws on a review of existing technologies, policy context and emerging practice, building on an earlier 2024 edition. It synthesises examples of AI use across the justice sector and considers how these tools might be applied in family justice, alongside the governance frameworks needed to support safe implementation.

Findings identify three key areas where AI could add value: improving families' experience of navigating complex processes (e.g. through digital tools and guidance), increasing administrative efficiency, and supporting professional decision-making through data analysis.

However, the report emphasises substantial risks, including bias, inaccuracy, lack of transparency and data privacy concerns. Public trust and fairness are identified as critical issues, particularly given the high-stakes nature of family justice decisions.

Overall, the briefing highlights AI as a potentially transformative tool, but stresses that its use must remain "human-led", with strong governance, clear accountability and careful consideration of ethical implications.

Next Generation Leaders: The case for reform through prison leadership

The Prison Reform Trust's 2026 report *Next Generation Leaders* explores how developing reform-minded prison leadership can drive meaningful change within the prison system.

The report presents findings from an evaluation of the Next Generation Leaders programme, which brought together a cohort of 19 senior prison staff. It draws on participant feedback,





programme data and case studies of reform projects delivered in prisons across England and Wales.

Findings highlight the central role of leadership in shaping prison culture and outcomes. The programme demonstrated that aspiring leaders are well placed to drive reform through everyday decisions, relationships and practices, not just through national policy change. Participants reported that structured reflection, mentoring and peer networks helped build confidence and translate reform principles into practical action.

However, the report also identifies significant barriers, including operational pressures, limited autonomy and organisational constraints, which can make sustained reform difficult.