Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Department of Health

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the mental health of looked-after children with the Education Select Committee on 3 February 2016. I am particularly pleased that Minister Timpson and I were able to give evidence together. It is only by continuing to work together across organisational boundaries at national and local level that we will ensure looked-after children get the best possible support. I hope that this clear demonstration of the close working between the Department of Health and the Department for Education helps to reassure the Education Select Committee of our joint commitment to improving standards of mental health and social care for this group of children and young people.

The Committee asked me to write with further details of the expert group which I announced last week and of the National Mental Health Services Data Set.

Expert Group

1. *Future in mind* argued for the development of care pathways that suggest evidence based models of care for vulnerable children. Care pathways will provide a framework and guide to inform the commissioning and delivery of mental health care and the interventions offered to these vulnerable children, young people and their families.

2. Using the methodology tried and tested by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health as part of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), we intend to set up an expert group to take this work forward. This will involve bringing together a wide range of experts, drawing on evidence from children and young people and those who care for them, to develop the pathways and models of care.

3. The experts will come from across the health, social care and education sectors. We are exploring how we can ensure effective engagement of children and young people.

4. The aim of the expert group will be to design care pathways and flexible integrated models of care that can be used by all bodies and individuals involved in meeting the mental health needs of looked-after children, care leavers and children adopted from care as well as those who leave care under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.

5. The expert group will give consideration to such issues as:

   - the way in which the needs of these children and young people are assessed on entry to care;
   - the availability and type of interventions that will be required after any further assessment of the child’s needs;
• methods of measuring progress and outcomes and ensuring quality of provision;
• how the pathways might be presented so that children and young people, their carers and families as well as social workers and personal advisers\(^1\) can clearly understand the support and interventions they may be offered;
• the level of support and type of workforce development required for professionals, including those who refer/commission services and those who deliver services, to enable them to achieve the best for the child during their journey of care.

6. It is important that children can understand what this care pathway\(^2\) might mean for them. In future communication with children and young people, we will say that this care pathway could mean that you better understand:

• how you can access mental health care and what might be involved if/when you are referred;
• what care you can expect and how it might be delivered;
• the professionals who might work in partnership with you and your carers to help you get better and stay well;
• how you will be involved in decisions about your care, along with your corporate parents, carers and/or family (as appropriate).

7. We have begun work on setting up the expert group as a matter of priority and putting in place the arrangements to support the project.

Data

8. Collecting data and intelligence on children and young people’s mental health to improve transparency and drive improvement is a top priority for me and was a key element of the vision set out in *Future in mind*. We have invested in new data sources on service use in the form of our National Mental Health Services Data Set (MHSDS) and have also commissioned a new prevalence survey for children age 2-19, since the last prevalence survey was published in 2004. From January 2016, the new MHSDS started to collect data for both adults and children on the source of referral, location of appointment, length of treatment, outcomes and demographic information. There are currently some concerns about data quality and coverage as this is the first time national data has been collected on children and young people’s mental health. NHS England and the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) are working actively with providers to address these.

9. In March 2016, the HSCIC will publish a report on data quality alongside some information on Early Intervention in Psychosis. In April 2016, a small number of key headline measures will be reported. Where possible these will

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\(^1\) Personal advisers are responsible for supporting care leavers by co-ordinating services identified in the pathway plan that all care leavers should have.

\(^2\) For looked-after children, care leavers, children adopted from care as well as those who leave care under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.
be broken down by age or CAMHS service. The Department of Health, NHS England and the HSCIC are working closely to tailor further analysis and reporting so that data from the MHSDS informs commissioning decisions, drives further service improvements and highlights positive experiences and good treatment outcomes for all children and young people.

**Point of clarification**

10. Towards the end of our time with the committee Mr Ian Mearns, Member of Parliament for Gateshead, asked a question (Q213) recorded in Hansard as 'We see you have to beef up the statutory gains, particularly in mind of that aspiration but also bearing in mind the “Future in Mind” report as well’. To which I replied ‘Yes’. I believe Mr Mearns was asking whether we would beef up the statutory guidance; ‘Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children’. I should clarify that we are waiting for the outcome of your inquiry before making any firm decision on amending the statutory guidance and I am sorry if that was not clear in my response. The expert group will also play an important role in deciding the best way to achieve the clarity requested by the sector on mental health and well-being services for looked-after children. This is an area that both Minister Timpson and I are happy to revisit, and we remain committed to reviewing the guidance in light of your recommendations.

11. Please contact me if you require any further information. I look forward to reading the committee’s report in due course.

**February 2016**