

Charlotte KEIGHLEY  
Assistant Coroner for Cheshire  
Cheshire Coroner's Court,  
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Dear Ms Keighley

## RESPONSE TO REGULATION 28 REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS

I am responding for the Department for Education's (DfE) to the Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths dated 23 July 2024. The report was issued following the inquest into the death of Nathan Tesla George SCANTLEBURY aged 16 who died as a consequence of asphyxia following a ligature on 25th September 2019.

I want to begin by expressing our deepest condolences to Nathan's family and acknowledge the tragic nature of this incident. The Secretary of State is deeply concerned by the seriousness of the issues identified in this case.

I would also like to thank you for your report, which highlights the mounting pressure that local authorities face when seeking to fulfil their obligations to provide suitable placements for looked after children. The Secretary of State recognises the paramount importance of working to improve the situation faced by children like Nathan, through work to effect whole system transformation in children's social care and support local authorities to meet their sufficiency duties. The Secretary of State appreciates that this requires joint working across the Government to solve the issues inherent in the range of different complex systems with which this vulnerable cohort of children interact.

I have seen from your report that Nathan had been detained under the Mental Health Act. The 2024 King's Speech announced legislation to modernise the Mental Health Act and committed to ensuring that mental health is given the same attention and focus as physical health. That work is progressing and being led by the Department of Health and Social Care.

DfE is aware of the long-standing difficulties faced by local authorities in fulfilling their obligations to provide suitable placements for looked after children with complex needs. This is why the 2021 Spending Review announced funding of £259m and the Spring Budget in 2024 announced additional funding of £160m to increase capacity in children's homes, including for highly vulnerable children who need to be deprived of liberty to keep them safe.

We know that capital investment alone will not be sufficient. Since July 2023 officials from DfE and from NHS England ("NHSE") have been jointly leading cross-government work to improve the provision of integrated care and health services for children who are in complex situations and are currently, or are at risk of, being deprived of their liberty, by ensuring that there is an aligned cross-government approach to commissioning and delivering the best possible models of care. The terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group (TFG) established to drive this forward can be found on our Gov.uk page, [Improving cross-sector support for children in complex situations with multiple needs task and finish group](#).

We don't know enough about how services can best work together to help young people with complex needs linked to trauma, and at risk of being deprived of their liberty. We are working to fill this gap. We are currently tendering to commission for research on three areas: to conduct an evidence review, an analysis of case files with a focus on vulnerable children and young people with complex needs and who are currently (or at risk of) being deprived of their liberty, and case studies of three existing provisions in order to build the evidence base and to help identify how we can best help local services to work together to grow good practice for this cohort. This follows research completed on the Voice of the Child, which we commissioned in October 2023 from the Office of the Children's Commissioner, to hear from children and young people with experience of being deprived of liberty, and their parents, carers and professionals, in order to increase our understanding of children's needs and experiences. Findings were presented to the TFG and we plan to publish the final report in the Autumn.

We have undertaken engagement with Local Authorities (LAs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to build our understanding of (a) barriers and enabling factors to providing suitable provision with integrated care that meets the needs of children and (b) what can be learned, in terms of national and local policy making, from LAs which have been successful in setting up and registering such provision. NHSE are currently planning a webinar (postponed from June due to the election), co-chaired with DfE, for/with sector leads, clinicians, children and young people and their parents/carers,

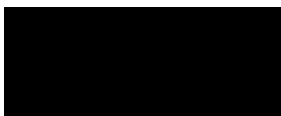
which will set out the ambition to improve outcomes and care and show case emerging models of integrated care.

In addition to suitable places and suitable models of care, we want to see improvements to the way health and social care partners work together for complex and vulnerable children. DfE is undertaking work on how to improve joint working between local systems when considering how to fund and support children with complex needs, to support ways of working required to co-design or commission provision for children like Nathan. NHSE is leading on a new set of Peer Collaboratives, which will bring together LAs/ ICBs with senior commitment to co-design, test and learn the practicalities of implementing integrated pathways. The purpose is to surface and explore common obstacles to system change in order to identify national changes required and begin to test potential solutions to inform the development of future pilots to improve support for this cohort.

We remain committed to the vision of the TFG: to improve how system partners work together to support and improve outcomes for children and young people who are currently (or are at risk of) being deprived of their liberty and who are in the most complex situations, by ensuring that there is an aligned cross government approach to design, commission and deliver the best possible models of care, integrated across children's social care, health, education and youth justice.

Finally, I would like to once again convey our sincere condolences to Nathan's family, following their tragic loss.

Yours sincerely,

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Deputy Director for Looked After Children Placements, Department for Education