

# Policy Briefing

## WAKEFIELD & DISTRICT safeguarding children board

### Safeguarding Children Board

## The Government's response to the Munro review of child protection

#### Introduction

The Government's response to the Munro review as published in July 2011. In the foreword, Tim Loughton (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families) commends Eileen Munro for her thorough analysis of the issues, and indicates that the Government accepts her fundamental argument "that the child protection system has lost its focus on the things that matter most: the view and experiences of children themselves".

The response adopts the principles proposed by Eileen Munro for a more effective child protection system, and responds to each of her fifteen recommendations.

#### Executive Summary

Although the Government has broadly accepted all fifteen of Eileen Munro's recommendations, only 9 are accepted fully and without reservation.

Five recommendations are accepted in principle, with the broad premise being accepted, but with variations in relation to delivery.

Recommendation 9 relates to Munro's proposal to change the guidance on Serious Case Reviews, in order to require Safeguarding Children Boards to adopt the methodology proposed by Munro in her Learning Together (SCIE) model (the model currently being used in Wakefield for a case review). The government have accepted that the Learning Together model should be used when Serious Case Reviews are undertaken, and recognises that currently it is often used to review cases that do not meet the Chapter 8 criteria for a Serious Case Review. The Government indicate that there should be a group of accredited reviewers to support the local use of the model. Further consideration needs to be given in terms of some of the detail of this recommendation e.g. the question of whether the accredited reviewers are recruited and allocated by a central body and to whom they would be accountable.

The role of Ofsted in evaluating Serious Case Reviews seems likely to end but there is no timescale for this, and the need for careful transition is stated.

In summary, the Government have indicated the goal of a system with:

- children and young people's **wishes, feelings** and **experiences** placed at the centre
- a relentless focus on the **timeliness, quality** and **effectiveness** of help given to children, young people and their families
- the availability of a **range of help and services** to match the variety of needs of children, young people and their families
- recognising that **risk and uncertainty** are features of the system where risk can never be eliminated but it can be managed smarter
- trusting professionals and giving them the scope to exercise their **professional judgment** in deciding how to help children, young people and their families
- the development of **professional expertise** to work effectively with children, young people and their families
- truly valuing and acting on **feedback** from children, young people and families; and
- **continuous learning and improvement**, by reflecting critically on practice to identify problems and opportunities for a more effective system.

### **Timescales**

The proposed timescales for implementation are complex, involving multiple actions and stages under each Recommendation. It should be acknowledged that Recommendation 13, relating to the review and re-design of children's social care services is to be determined and implemented locally and no timescales are given. Some key deadlines include:

- All local leaders (Council Chief Executives and Leader, cluster NHS Chief Executives and Chief Police Officers) should receive the LSCB Annual Report immediately, until a suitable legislative vehicle is identified.
- Consideration to be given to ending the evaluation of Serious Case Reviews in their current form
- In autumn 2011 the Government will undertake further consultation on the replacement of the current Serious Case Review model with the Learning Together model
- Government will consult on revised statutory guidance on the role of the DCS and Lead Member in Autumn 2011
- Amendments to Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 to be published by December 2011 in relation to the removal of the distinction between Initial and Core Assessments.
- A new suite of local data sets to be confirmed by the government by December 2011 and published by July 2012
- A new joint-agency inspection framework to be in place by July 2012
- Local authorities must designate a Principal Social Worker by July 2012
- Government will employ a Chief Social Worker by end of 2012

### **What will the changes mean for practitioners?**

Systems theory and thinking is apparent throughout the review and the government have embraced this, seeing a movement from centralised command and control to the development of a competent, professionally capable workforce which is less dependent on prescriptive regulation and guidance in its efforts to keep children safe.

Interestingly, the government, like Professor Munro, recognises that there will be no extra financial resources available to public services and that the changes will need to take place by movement in philosophy, face-to-face practice with children and parents; and the way in which services are organised.

Services to vulnerable children, those in need and those in need of protection (and their families) will need to be managed differently with the Big Society banner of local control being apparent in all these developments.

This will be a daunting challenge for those providing Early Help to children and families before they become entangled in the child protection system. The implications for all such service providers are that they will need to coordinate their efforts to be able to make an 'Early Help Offer' to all the families with whom they work. It is envisaged that they will deal more confidently at an early stage with children who are seen as vulnerable, as they will have access to social work expertise on child protection.

Work between the SWRB (Social Work Reform Board), the College of Social Work, Higher Education Institutions and Local Authorities to enhance the skills of newly qualified and experienced social workers will take place through the development of the SWRB's Professional Capabilities Framework. The effectiveness of these changes is intended to be characterised by the development of the relationship between social workers and the children with whom they work and this is at the heart not just of the Munro Review but the government response. All recognise that these reforms will only mean something if the child's journey from needing help to receiving services is improved.

To support this move the designation (not necessarily the appointment) of a Principal Child and Family Social Worker whose job it will be to bridge the gap between strategic managers and the children who receive services, will be implemented in each Children's Services Department. The intention is that managers will be no longer removed from the frontline, as there will be a more direct loop of feedback. This is mirrored in the government appointment of a Chief Social Worker who it is intended will keep government ministers advised through the provision of an annual report to parliament on the working of the Children Act 1989.

**The full response to the Munro review can be accessed at:**

**<http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview>**