

NORTH YORKSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST

Agenda Item Cover Sheet

TITLE OF PAPER: National Safeguarding Priorities: Update

DATE OF MEETING: 20 September 2010

ORGANISATION/SUB GROUP: LSCB

RELATED CYPP IMPROVEMENT PRIORITY: 2.1 Safeguarding Children

RELATED PERFORMANCE INDICATOR(S): All safeguarding indicators

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF PAPER:

The Board:

(i) Notes the update on national safeguarding priorities

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NORTH YORKSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD

20 September 2010

NATIONAL SAFEGUARDING PRIORITIES: UPDATE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update the Board on recent developments in national safeguarding priorities

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Board notes the update on safeguarding national priorities

3.0 PUBLICATION OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS

3.1 Background

Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) are undertaken when a child dies (including death by suspected suicide), and abuse or neglect is known or suspected to be a factor in the death. Additionally, LSCBs may decide to conduct a SCR whenever a child has been seriously harmed in the following situations:

- a child sustains a potentially life-threatening injury or serious and permanent impairment of physical and mental health and development through abuse or neglect;
- a child has been seriously harmed as a result of being subjected to sexual abuse;
- a parent has been murdered and a domestic homicide review is being initiated under the Domestic Violence Act 2004;
- a child has been seriously harmed following a violent assault perpetrated by another child or an adult;

and the case gives rise to concerns about the way in which local professionals and services worked together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This includes inter-agency and inter-disciplinary working.

3.2 The prime purpose of a SCR is for agencies and individuals to learn lessons to improve the way in which they work both individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

3.3 Publication of SCRs

From 2010 June all Serious Case Review Overview Reports will be published, appropriately redacted and anonymised. In the past only Executive Summaries of SCRs have been published. The published reports will be placed on LSCB web-site.

- 3.4 The government has allowed LSCBs to decide not to publish a report if there is potential for its publication to place surviving siblings at risk.

4.0 DECOMMISSIONING OF CONTACTPOINT

4.1 Background

Section 12 of the Children Act 2004 provided a legal basis for establishing a national directory of children and young people, this as part of the integrated working and information sharing aspects of the Every Child Matters framework.

- 4.2 The purpose of this directory, subsequently named ContactPoint, was to enable practitioners who work with children and young people to identify whether other professionals are working with the same child. It was believed that this would facilitate improved information sharing between practitioners and lead to more coordinated support between agencies. It was expected that professionals and practitioners throughout England would use ContactPoint to assist them in the delivery of their services to children, young people and their families.

- 4.3 The project to implement ContactPoint was controlled by central government through a network of regional and local structures. In North Yorkshire the project was led by the Integrated Processes Team located in CYPS Performance and Outcomes. Throughout the project the North Yorkshire team met all milestones and received a 'green' implementation status for every monthly progress report submitted to government. By April 2010 the system was in place, successful pilots had been completed, and some practitioners had been trained and were beginning to use the system.

4.4 Change in Government Policy

In their respective general election manifestos both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party pledged to discontinue ContactPoint. The Coalition Agreement published in May 2010 included the commitment to decommission ContactPoint. On 22 July 2010 the government confirmed its intention to 'switch off' the ContactPoint system and permanently decommission the database.

- 4.5 ContactPoint was shut down at noon on 6 August 2010. From this point onwards the system was no longer accessible to any users. The permanent deletion of data held in ContactPoint is being carried out by the Department of Education. This process started within 24 hours of system closure and will be completed within eight weeks of commencement. Other decommissioning tasks are the responsibility of local authority ContactPoint Management Teams. These tasks include stopping local data feeds into ContactPoint, collecting the electronic tokens used by users to access the system, and managing the closure of any relevant contracts with suppliers. The North Yorkshire team have completed these tasks.

- 4.6 Many policies and processes implemented for the purposes of ContactPoint have had broader benefits. These include improvements in data quality and refinements to internal processes and procedures covering, for instance, data security and information sharing. Locally, a 'lessons learned' report has been produced as a means of capturing good practice, highlighting key achievements, and identifying barriers and challenges relevant to the ContactPoint project. This information will be fed into the regional group in order to produce a Yorkshire and Humber ContactPoint lessons learned report.

4.7 Next Steps

The government has assured local authorities that the investment made in ContactPoint, in terms of professional expertise and technical infrastructure, will not be wasted and will be used to support future measures. Although the idea of a single national database of children is now redundant, the government has signalled its intention to develop alternatives to support key practitioners to help protect vulnerable children. One option being considered is a national 'signposting' system which would help a strictly limited group of practitioners to identify whether a colleague elsewhere is working with, or has previously worked with, the same vulnerable child. The government is assessing the feasibility and affordability of such an approach and will provide an update in the autumn.

5.0 **REVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION**

5.1 Background

In June 2010 the government announced that Eileen Munro, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, has been commissioned to lead a review of the child protection system. This review will build on the work of Lord Laming's Report on Child Protection in England (March 2009) and the recommendations of the Social Work Task Force (December 2009), drawing on the evidence submitted to these reviews and the extensive analyses undertaken. Professor Munro will also keep close links with the continuing work of the Social Work Reform Board.

5.2 By initiating this review, the government intends to reform frontline child protection practice, strengthening the profession so that social workers are:

- better placed to make sound judgements, based on first hand evidence, in the best interests of children, and free from unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation.
- clear about their responsibilities and are accountable in the way they protect children.
- are sufficiently confident to challenge parents when they have concerns about the circumstances in which children are growing up, and to know they will be supported by the system in doing so.

5.3 Remit of the Review

The government has asked Professor Munro to identify the obstacles preventing improvements and the steps required to bring about better social work practice. This includes considering how effectively social workers and professionals in other agencies work together. Three organising principles inform the review's key lines of enquiry: (i) early intervention; (ii) trusting professionals and removing bureaucracy, and (iii) greater transparency and accountability.

(i) Early Intervention

- How can interaction between social work teams and universal services for children and families be improved?
- In particular, how can Sure Start children's centres and health visitors make sure that the families who need the specialist input of social workers are identified effectively?
- What are the barriers to consistent good social work practice? How can other agencies help social workers undertake more effective practice?

(ii) Trusting Professionals and Reducing Bureaucracy

- How could regulation be simplified and bureaucracy reduced so social workers can spend more time with vulnerable children and their families?
- How have targets got in the way of good practice? What are better ways of using data to improve social work practice?
- How can recording of cases contribute to supporting the work of professionals and improving the service experienced by children? How can ICT contribute to strengthening good practice?
- How could social workers be given greater professional freedom and how could support for social workers be improved? How can social workers be supported to have the confidence to challenge difficult families when that is what is needed to protect children? What role might social work practices, new models of social work delivery and volunteer social workers play? What can be learnt by what happens in other countries?
- How could poor performing areas come up to the standard of the best? How could councils most effectively share best practice with each other, including sharing information about how good outcomes can be achieved in a cost-effective way?

(iii) Transparency and Accountability

- How can greater transparency in the system be achieved in a way which commands public confidence and protects the privacy and welfare of vulnerable children and their families?
- It is the Government's intention to publish anonymised full serious case reviews. How could reviews be strengthened? Are there alternative ways of learning from experience that could be more effective? What might be learnt from other sectors?
- How can risk be managed so that agencies do not develop a blame culture and their focus remains on protecting children?
- What approaches to inspection would better capture the quality of frontline practice and lead to better services for children?
- How could the system champion the profession, raising its status? Is there a role for a chief social worker?

5.4 What Can We Expect from the Review?

Prior to the 2010 general election the Conservative Party commissioned Professor Munro to develop its child protection policy. A policy document, 'Child Protection: Back to the Frontline' was published by the Party in February 2010. This document sets out ten broad proposals for reform of the child protection system. These are:

1. Reduce bureaucracy for frontline social workers
2. Help experienced practitioners stay at the frontline
3. Recruit top graduates and offer ongoing training at all levels
4. Allow social workers to run their own practices like GPs
5. Create a Chief Social Worker to give the profession a public face
6. Focus inspections on face-to-face frontline practice, not just data analysis
7. Publish Serious Case Reviews in full so that lessons can be learnt
8. Replace ContactPoint with a signposting system for genuinely vulnerable children
9. Instigate a universal Health Visitor scheme
10. Promote voluntary social worker schemes

5.6 As we have seen, the government has already implemented two of these proposals. From June 2010 all Serious Case Review overview reports will be published in full, albeit anonymised, unless the local Safeguarding Children Board considers that to do so would place children at risk. ContactPoint has been decommissioned, with the system being 'switched off' on 6 August 2010. The Review of Child Protection explores many of the remaining proposals, and so we might expect Professor Munro to recommend the implementation of at least some of these in some form. Professor Munro will produce three reports: an initial evidence report in September 2010, an interim report in January 2011, and a final report with recommendations in April 2011.

5.7 Impact in North Yorkshire

Child protection teams in North Yorkshire have experienced a protracted period of change. This has included the initial implementation and subsequent re-launch of the ICS system, the introduction of new business processes, and the publication of new practice guidance in March 2010 (the latest version of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'). Against this background a further period of change might seem undesirable. Much depends on where the balance lies in the recommendations to be made by Professor Munro. The current framework of statutory guidance for Safeguarding is extensive and voluminous, and if it is possible for it to be streamlined somewhat without losing its rigour then that may be helpful. The same is possibly true of inspection and accountability frameworks.

5.9 That said, evidence shows that the best and most reliable practice tends to be found where practice and standards are clear and consistent. These are particularly challenging in large local authorities (rural or urban) in which there will inevitably be many teams of staff operating in different areas. The management challenges are greater to ensure consistency in what is fairly volatile operational work than in places where there may be only one team or all staff can be co-located.

5.10 Although it has been a difficult period for North Yorkshire in the last two years as it has grappled with implementation of some national initiatives which were not well designed and were overly prescriptive, there have nonetheless been big steps forward as a result which mean that we are now far better placed to achieve the consistency essential to the best all-round standards in Safeguarding. It would be a matter of regret, therefore, if the findings of the Munro Review were to sanction a return to a less structured approach to practice, recording and accountability, however inadvertent that might be.

5.11 It is also essential that the review should not lead to a further increase in costs unless there is to be explicit and real additional funding provided nationally, since other, similarly important services for children and families are already bearing disproportionate funding reductions to help absorb the increased costs of Safeguarding which have been driven by national events in the last two years.

6.0 **INDEPENDENT SAFEGUARDING AUTHORITY**

6.1 Background

The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) was established in 2008 to implement and enforce a new framework of vetting and barring people who work with vulnerable people, including children and young people. The new vetting and barring scheme was introduced in October 2009.

6.2 Review of Vetting and Barring Scheme

In June the Home Secretary announced a review of the vetting and barring scheme. The review is expected to scale back the requirements of the scheme and limit the categories of employees and volunteers who are required to register with the ISA.

6.3 Some aspects of the vetting and barring scheme remain in place, including:

- ISA will continue to maintain two constantly updated lists, one for those barred from working with children, the other for those barred from working with vulnerable adults
- existing requirements concerning Criminal Records Bureau checks will remain in place, and those entitled to such checks can continue to apply for them
- employers are still legally obliged to refer information to the ISA if they have moved or removed an individual because they have harmed or there is a risk of harm to a member of a vulnerable group

7.0 OFSTED UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS

7.1 A new cycle of unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment arrangements is due to commence in September 2010. Ofsted has revised the guidance for these inspections so that an Area For Priority Action does not automatically result in a children's service being rated as Poor/Inadequate overall. Instead, the identification of an Area For Priority Action results in a further inspection at some point in the future. Only if this subsequent inspection finds that the Area For Priority Action has not been resolved does the children's service receive a Poor/Inadequate rating.

7.2 The revised guidance states:

"If an area for priority action is identified in an inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements, and that concern is not resolved by the findings of a subsequent inspection, the overall assessment of the local authority's children's services is unlikely to be better than 'performs poorly'.

The identification of an area for priority action is likely to lead, at an appropriate time, to a further inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements, a full safeguarding inspection, or a full safeguarding and looked after children inspection. If such an inspection takes place before the publication of the annual children's services assessment, the findings and judgement of that inspection will supersede the findings of the unannounced inspection."

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