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7 February 2003

To Chief Executives

cc: Directors of Social Services

Dear Colleague

AUDIT OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN NEED IN RESPONSE TO THE PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VICTORIA CLIMBIÉ INQUIRY REPORT

When Alan Milburn, the Secretary of State for Health, wrote to you about the publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry report on 28 January, he said that I would be sending you a self audit tool for completion within three months. I attach a copy of the audit framework that should be used to assess your council's current position. It covers the recommendations of the Inquiry report relating to good professional practice and management and governance arrangements. You will need to be satisfied that you have appropriate arrangements in place in your council to ensure the quality of services to children in need, particularly those children requiring protection. They should include quality assurance arrangements to identify any deterioration in services at an early stage and ensure that they are rectified.

The audit framework groups the Inquiry report recommendations under broad standards, provides statutory references where relevant for each of the recommendations and sets out criteria describing the arrangements that your council will be expected to have in place. It covers all except one of the social care practice recommendations that have timescales of three and six months. Recommendation 62 has not been included because it will be covered by the national guidance for all professional staff dealing with children that will be produced within the next three months.

An electronic form is being prepared in spreadsheet format (Microsoft Excel 97) for you to record your responses and return to SSI by 30 April 2003. **This document should not be used for that purpose**, but it will enable you to start the self audit process. The electronic form will be available by the end of February, and will be e-mailed from your local SSI office. The forms will enable SSI to collate and analyse quickly the responses at national and regional levels.

SSI will validate the evidence gathered from the audit. We will use the audit to assess whether councils need additional assistance to improve their services.

We will follow up the audit within our ongoing performance discussions with councils, and through planned inspections of children's services. We will also undertake additional visits to check aspects of services in a sample of councils. Validated evidence will be used as part of the process of determining the performance ratings for social services in the autumn of this year, and will be reported to the Secretary of State.

The content of the audit complements the material on children's services that we will collect through the 2003/04 Delivery and Improvement Statement (formerly the Position Statement). I will be sending a further letter to Directors of Social Services shortly to explain the PSS performance assessment and improvement process for 2003 and beyond.

This exercise is complementary to that being carried out in the police services and health services (by Commission for Health Improvement).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennie Peck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.