

**Briefing Paper**  
**The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report**  
***A child-centred system***

This is the final report of a review commissioned by the Government in June 2010. The report proposes changes to the current child protection system which are intended to create the conditions in which professionals can focus on the safety and welfare of children and their families and make the best professional judgments about the help they need.

The first report (*Part One: A Systems Analysis*) described how the current system had evolved, shaped by key driving forces:

- The importance of children and young people's safety and welfare to society as a whole;
- The uncertainty inherent in the work;
- Hindsight bias, which focuses on professional error rather than its causes; and
- The performance management culture which focuses on process and targets rather than outcomes for children and families.

That report sought to analyse why previous reforms had failed to achieve their goals, and concluded that these driving forces had produced a defensive system emphasising procedures and recording at the cost of developing the skills needed to work effectively with families.

The second report (*Part Two: The Child's Journey*) looked at how the system could be reformed to keep a focus on the child's experiences from needing help to receiving it.

This final report's recommendations are based on the following key principles of a good child protection system:

- **System should be child focused** - this means talking to children and young people and their families.
- **The family is usually the best place to bring up children** - sometimes difficult judgments have to be made about the right to protection from abuse and the right to be with the family.
- **Helping children and families involves working with them** - the quality of the relationships between the child, the family and professionals has a direct impact on the effectiveness of help.
- **Early help is better for children;**
- **Children's needs and circumstances are varied so the system should be flexible and offer variety;**

- **Good professional practice is informed by knowledge of the latest theory and research;**
- **Uncertainty and risk are features of the work** - risk management can only reduce risks not eliminate them;
- **The measure of success of child protection systems is whether children receive effective help.**

The review proposes the following areas for reform:

**Valuing professional expertise** by

- Removing barriers to professional judgment. This means a radical reduction in regulatory prescription - timescales, paperwork, inspection, performance indicators - to a focus on principles that underpin good practice
- Move away from standardised services to professional judgement and local partnerships
- Move away from a compliance culture to a learning culture with more freedom to use professional expertise and skills.

**Clarifying accountabilities and creating a learning system** by

- Removing the statutory requirement for Children's Trust Boards, possibly replacing its function with the new health and wellbeing boards which allow for local variability;
- LSCBs should maintain their scrutiny function and encourage multi-agency training;
- The discrete role of the DCS and Lead Member should be protected
- SCRs should be based on a systems learning methodology rather than a scrutiny model; reports should not be evaluated by Ofsted.

**Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help** because

- Preventative services do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services;
- Prevention improves children's life chances as well as reducing abuse and neglect;
- Early help minimises adverse experiences, and damage done is hard to reverse; it's cost effective compared to the cost of later more serious problems;
- Coordinated services maximise efficiency, and can identify children who need services from children's social care at an earlier stage.

**Developing social work expertise** because good practice is not sufficiently widespread. Social workers need formal training and high intelligence to achieve the level of critical reasoning needed to make sound judgments and decisions about complex family situations. The professional skill of developing relationships which facilitate change has been gradually replaced by a focus on collecting information and making plans - the "rational-technical approach". The requisite expertise for children and family social work is based on

1. Relationship skills;
2. Intuitive understanding and emotional responses; and
3. Using evidence, both from assessment and analysis, information received, and research.

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) is developing a Professional Capabilities Framework which will set out what is required in terms of a social worker's knowledge, skills and capacity, which this review considers must include a sound knowledge base, the ability to undertake critical reflection and analysis, and skills in intervention.

**The organisational context: supporting effective social work practice**

The ability of social workers to provide effective protection and support for children is significantly dependent on how secure and contained they feel by the organisation. The review considers that organisations should review the way that children's social work services are delivered locally. The *Reclaiming Social Work* model of Hackney is described as a case study. There is a need for career pathways that keep good practitioners in front-line practice. There should be a Chief Social Worker nationally to advise the Government on social work practice. There is a need to develop a more positive image for social workers.

**Implementation** of the proposals within the report will come about through the following **recommendations**:

1. The Government should revise both the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and their associated policies.
2. The inspection framework should examine the effectiveness of the contributions of all local services, including health, education, police, probation, and the justice system to the protection of children.
3. The new inspection framework should examine the child's journey from needing to receiving help, explore how the...experiences of

- children ...inform and shape the provision of services, and look at the effectiveness of the help provided.
4. Local authorities and their partners should use a combination of nationally collected and locally published performance information to help benchmark performance, facilitate improvement and promote accountability.
  5. The existing statutory requirement for LSCBs to publish an annual report... should be amended to require its submission to the Chief Executive, Leader of the Council, ...local Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chair of the health and wellbeing board.
  6. ..*Working Together*...should be amended to state that ... LSCBs should...assess the effectiveness of help provided to children and families, including early help services and the effectiveness of multi-agency training...
  7. Local authorities should give due consideration to protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of a DCS and Lead Member ... before allocating additional responsibilities to the roles....
  8. . The Government should work collaboratively with (health organisations) and others to research the impact of health reorganisation on effective partnership arrangements and the ability to provide effective help for children.
  9. The Government should require LSCBs to use systems methodology when undertaking SCRs...
  10. The Government should place a duty on local authorities and statutory partners to secure the sufficient provision of local early help services for children and their families.
  11. The SWRB's Professional Capabilities Framework should incorporate capabilities necessary for children and family social work...
  12. Employers and higher education institutions should work together so that social work students are prepared for the challenges of child protection work.
  13. Local authorities and their partners should ....review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered...
  14. Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice...and still actively involved in frontline practice...
  15. A Chief Social Worker should be created in Government...

Hilary Corrick  
Independent Member