

To: Leaders of Councils  
Local Authority Chief Executives  
Directors of Social Services  
Chief Education Officers/ Directors of Education  
Directors of Housing  
Social Services Chief Inspectors  
Chairs of Social Services Committees  
Chief Executives of health authorities  
Chief Executives of special health authorities  
Chief Executives of NHS Trusts  
Chairs of Area Child Protection Committees  
Governors of Young Offenders Institutions  
Secretaries of Probation Committees  
Chief Probation Officers  
Chief Police Officers

Copies:

NHS Executive Regional Directors  
NHS Executive Regional Directors of Public Health

5 November 1998

Dear Colleague

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDS REVIEW**

**Introduction**

1. We enclose a copy of the Government Response to the Children's Safeguards Review which was published today.
2. This document sets out a comprehensive programme of policy and management changes the Government will make to meet the criticisms made by the Review and to ensure children living away from home get the best society can offer; the care, safety, security and opportunities that all children deserve. It covers the whole range of services for children - social services, juvenile and criminal justice, education and health - across England and Wales.
3. The Response is an important step forward in protecting children. The whole of the document should be of interest to you and should help you to deliver better safeguards for children. This circular cites the items of particular importance for each of the areas which require development. It should not be seen as a comprehensive list and does not include many important areas of policy set out in the Response.

## Background

4. The original Review was carried out in England and Wales by Sir William Utting, following reports of widespread abuse of children in care. In November 1997, the Government published the report of the Review of the Safeguards for Children Living Away from Home (Children's Safeguards Review) and in a statement to Parliament Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, promised to set up a Ministerial Task Force under his chairmanship to draw up a detailed and comprehensive response.
5. The Ministerial Task Force involved ten Ministers, plus advisers from within and outside Government. Their discussions and expert advice assisted the Government in pulling together the response.

## Proposals

6. The Response includes action across the whole range of services for children. This has been based on three key principles:
  - all children must be protected from abuse and neglect
  - when local authorities take on the parental responsibility for a child, carrying out this effectively must be their first priority. They must provide the care and support that any responsible parent would offer their own child
  - all those caring for children must be able to look to education, the health service and other public services for help in ensuring they gain maximum life chances.
7. The programme is clear, affordable and enforceable. As part of the Government's commitment to answer fully all the points raised, it includes a response to every one of the more than 150 recommendations made by the Review.
8. To achieve our ambitious programme of action, we are relying on local authorities to work corporately and to liaise closely with other local agencies to improve the full range of services for children in need. We recognise that we cannot make the changes alone. Co-ordination and co-operation between all agencies are crucial. We will work in partnership with local authorities, other agencies and the staff who provide children's services to deliver the improvements needed.
9. The Government will do all it can to assist with this, including issuing the new *Working Together* guidance with good practice for joint working in the child protection field, and taking forward work to remove boundaries between social services and health.
10. The Ministerial Task Force will continue to monitor the implementation of the programme of action and progress towards achieving the range of targets the Government has set.

11. The key areas of action are set out below.

#### Public Care

12. A range of initiatives will be introduced to reform the public care system. This includes the recently launched Quality Protects programme, a three year initiative designed to transform the management and delivery of social services for children. Working in partnership with the Department of Health, all local authorities in England will be expected to strengthen their management and quality assurance systems to provide safe, effective and high quality children's services. By March 2002, we will expect all local authorities to be able to show that substantial improvements have been made in the management of services and outcomes for children and young people. The Welsh Office is consulting the Welsh Local Government Association on a broadly similar "Quality Assurance" programme for Wales.
13. Action will be taken to improve the skills of foster carers and increase the choice of placements available. This will include local and national foster care recruitment campaigns, new funding for training and new initiatives arising from the publication of a Code of Practice for Recruitment, Selection and Training for Foster Carers and new National Standards for Foster Care in the Spring.
14. The Department of Health and Welsh Office are also increasing both the quality and quantity of training opportunities for all levels of social care staff working with children, including assistance with funding through the Training Support Programme. Local authorities need to consider their workforce needs in order to deliver the services required and use this information to assess the training needs of their child care staff. They then need to put into place a planned programme to ensure that these needs are met as quickly as possible.

#### Care Leavers

15. As part of the "Quality Protects" programme local authorities will be required to improve services for care leavers. We will encourage local authorities to improve assessment of needs, draw up aftercare plans with each young person leaving care and review them at regular intervals. The plans will need to cover the young person's health, accommodation, employment, education and financial needs. This will require close collaboration between all the agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector.
16. As soon as possible the Government will issue guidance to Directors of Social Services to accompany the forthcoming revised Code of Guidance on the Allocation of Housing Accommodation and Homelessness. Both these documents will spell out the responsibilities Housing and Social Services Departments have for care leavers and their need for support to maintain a tenancy.
17. When Parliamentary time permits, a range of legislative changes will be sought to improve the support and care offered to care leavers, including extending the statutory duty to support care leavers. The Government has also begun work on

radical new arrangements which will be introduced incrementally in the longer term. Details will be announced before April 1999.

18. Our work to improve the public care system and services for care leavers will be supported in England by a new Children's Services Special Grant of £375 million over the next three years.

#### Health

19. The Government is committed to improving the health of looked after children. This will include offering all children entering care a comprehensive health assessment to identify and plan how to address any health needs that the child may have and improving the provision of child and adolescent mental health services.
20. As part of a wide range of action to ensure the suitability of people working with children, NHS employers will be required to review, by April 1999, their recruitment processes for those who work with children admitted to hospitals.
21. Plans will also be drawn up to ensure that the welfare of children in hospitals, nursing homes and hospices is monitored and safeguarded.

#### Education

22. The Government is determined to improve significantly the educational attainment of looked after children. National targets have been issued, and these are being discussed with education authorities in the context of their education development plans (education strategic plans in Wales). They have been urged to set more ambitious targets where locally appropriate. Guidance will be produced, which will stress the need for partnership between all parties involved with the care and education of looked after children. Targeted funding is available in England to support initiatives that will improve the education of these children.
23. Action will also be taken to improve the welfare arrangements in boarding schools. Inspections will be extended to all schools with boarding provision. This will include the introduction of training programmes to heighten boarding school staff awareness of welfare issues and advice to parents on the welfare standards they should look for when choosing a school.

#### Penal Issues

24. The criticisms levelled at the conditions and care of children in custody have informed the radical reforms of the youth justice system which the Government announced in its White Paper 'No More Excuses' and which the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, substantially implements.
25. The Prison Service has also begun a number of reforms including creating an Assistant Director for policy on young offenders, developing new regime standards for under 18 year olds, working closely with the social services and Probation Service, and creating a juvenile estate. To resource developments in the juvenile

estate which will aim to ensure most under 18 year olds can be held separately from other young offenders and from adults, the Government is to provide £51 million over three years.

26. Key features of the new juvenile regimes include:

- arrangements which establish and sustain a safe and secure environment, which begin with a qualitatively different approach to the first night and initial days in custody
- rigorous induction to identify individual needs and aptitudes
- planning to match individual needs to purposeful regime provision based upon the 'what works' research
- review of plans
- pastoral arrangements which centre on the importance of providing a 'significant adult'
- focused and integrated preparation for release, including the appropriate involvement of other agencies and the young person's family;
- all of which will be underpinned by an ethos which reflects the principles of structured, purposeful care achieved through better staff selection, training and management.

#### Criminal Justice Issues

27. The Government's response includes a programme of work covering the following areas:

- the steering group on child evidence which monitors the implementation of child evidence provisions, evaluates their effectiveness and takes forward measures to resolve any problem or issues arising
- relevant research underway
- the *Speaking Up For Justice* report on vulnerable and intimidated witnesses including children which was published for consultation this summer.
- review of the law relating to sexual offences.
- preparing inter-agency guidance on dealing with child prostitution
- developing a National Plan for combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

#### **Next Steps**

28. You should not take any action now, but you should prepare your staff for further announcements to be made in this area. Circulars will be issued shortly giving further information on:

- the requirement for the NHS to review its recruitment practices by April 1999
- the "Quality Protects" programme. This will provide details about the Children's Services Special Grant and will set out requirements for the Quality Protects Management Action Plans which local authorities in England are required to submit.

29. The Quality Assurance programme in Wales will be announced around the end of the year including details of the action plan that will apply to Welsh authorities and additional support to be made available.
30. Further circulars and guidance specific to each area of work will be issued to the timescales set out in the Response.
31. Telephone enquiries about this letter may be made on:
- Department of Health - 0171 972 4841
  - Department for Education and Employment - 0171 925 6319
  - Home Office - 0171 273 2314
  - Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions - 0171 890 3649
  - Welsh Office - 01222 826844

**FRANK DOBSON**  
Secretary of State for Health

**ALUN MICHAEL**  
Secretary of State for Wales

**JOHN HUTTON**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary  
of State for Health

**JON OWEN JONES**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary  
of State for Wales

**PAUL BOATENG**  
Home Office Minister of State

**ESTELLE MORRIS**  
DfEE Minister of State

**HILARY ARMSTRONG**  
Minister of State for Local Government

**ROSS CRANSTON**  
Solicitor General

**GEOFF HOON**  
Minister of State in the Lord  
Chancellor's Department