

A child-centred system

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

July 2011

Foreword



Few things are more important than helping and protecting vulnerable children and young people. That is why the Munro review of child protection was the very first review established in the Department for Education – on 10th June last year – underlining the enormous priority this Government places on getting child protection right.

While the vast majority of our children enjoy a safe, happy childhood, there are still too many who do not. Over the years, individual child tragedies have prompted national reviews and inquiries, resulting in calls for action. In response, legislation has been passed; rulebooks have expanded; more procedures and processes have been introduced and structures have been changed.

But the fundamental problems have not gone away. Despite the very best of intentions, hard-working social workers, foster carers and other front line professionals are, too often, still not able to make the difference they want to for vulnerable children and families. Day in day out they are up against a system that simply does not help them to do their best for children.

So, from the start, we wanted the Munro review of child protection to be different. Unlike its predecessors, it was not commissioned as an immediate response to a specific crisis. That is why it is recommending that regulation and prescription are reduced rather than increased. And – most importantly of all – that is why it was focused on the child, rather than the system.

Professor Munro's final report, *A child-centred system*, looks not just at the problems, but also the underlying environment that allows, indeed sometimes inadvertently encourages, such problems to occur. The review takes a holistic approach to child protection and bases its proposals on evidence and experience.

I am extremely grateful to Professor Munro for undertaking a wide-ranging and in-depth review. I am also grateful to all the organisations in the sector, the child protection workforce and the wider public, including children and young people themselves, who contributed to the work. Their experience, insights and expertise have helped make her final report, published in May, so well informed and so widely welcomed.

The Government commends Professor Munro's thorough analysis of the issues and accepts her fundamental argument that the child protection system has lost its focus on the things that matter most: the views and experiences of children themselves. We believe we need to move towards a child protection system with less central prescription and interference, where we place greater trust and responsibility in skilled professionals at the front line.

This Government response to Professor Munro's review is the first step on that journey. It adopts the principles she proposes for an effective child protection system and responds to the fifteen areas she identifies for reform.

There is now a significant opportunity to build a child-centred system that:

- values professional expertise;
- shares responsibility for the provision of early help;
- develops social work expertise and supports effective social work practice; and
- strengthens accountabilities and promotes learning.

This is also a significant challenge and, of course, it is not one for Government alone. Just as Professor Munro conducted her review openly and collaboratively, the Government has worked with the sector to develop this response. An Implementation Working Group, drawing on expertise from local authority children's services, the social work profession, education, police and the health service, advised on the Government's response to Professor Munro's recommendations. Professor Munro will continue to advise the Government and will undertake an interim assessment of progress in spring 2012.

The Government is committed to continuing to work in partnership with local government and leaders of children's services, the College of Social Work, the Association of Chief Police Officers, health service organisations' leaders, the education sector and children's organisations in the voluntary and community sector, the Inspectorates and others. This response is not a one-off set of recommended solutions to be imposed from the centre. Rather it is the start of a shift in mindset and relationship between central Government, local agencies and front line professionals working in partnership. Change will evolve and best practice will be informed by experience, innovation and evidence. Our aim will be to create the conditions for sustained, long term reform which enables and inspires professionals to do their best for vulnerable children and their families.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Tim Loughton', with a long, sweeping horizontal line underneath.

Tim Loughton MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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A system focused on helping children and families

1. Professor Munro's final report challenges us all to work towards a child protection system that is centred on the child or young person. The Government agrees with Professor Munro that the system has become too focused on compliance with rules and procedures and has lost its focus on the needs and experiences of children and young people. Frontline professionals tell us that this has skewed attention away from providing timely, high quality and effective help to children, young people and their families. Children and young people themselves tell us they find the system confusing, that too often their voices and/or experiences go unnoticed and that their relationships with professionals change too frequently.

2. The system is, therefore, not helping professionals to do their best for children and young people. That has to change. The Government is determined to work with all involved with safeguarding children to bring about lasting reform. Together, we want to build a child protection system where the focus is very firmly on the experience of the child or young person's journey from needing to receiving help. That means reducing central prescription and interference and placing greater trust in local leaders and skilled frontline professionals in accordance with the principles set out in the Government's Open Public Services White Paper. It means a system characterised by:

- 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.

3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides the framework within which to build a child-centred system. The UNCRC recognises children and young people as individuals with rights, including their right to participate in major decisions about them in line with their age and maturity. Crucially, the UNCRC establishes that a child's right to protection from maltreatment means designing a child protection system that does not just react when things go wrong but also provides support to children and families to prevent maltreatment happening in the first place.

4. Building a system centred on children and young people also means building even stronger partnerships between government, local authority children's services, the voluntary and community sector, social work, education, police and health services. Given the tighter financial climate, it will be ever more important for the range of agencies involved in child protection to work together effectively to get the most out of resources.

5. The Government's reforms of public services are critical if there is to be a transformation of local practice to improve the experiences of children and young people:

- in transforming **health services** we expect the NHS to continue to improve arrangements for protecting children. We will require clinical commissioning groups and the NHS Commissioning Board to make arrangements to safeguard and promote children's welfare, and will maintain providers' responsibilities for safeguarding. We will continue to explore with our partners how best to ensure that professional leadership and expertise for safeguarding are promoted in the new system, including the continuing key roles of named and designated safeguarding professionals. The Department of Health will work with the Department for Education, NHS bodies, local authorities, professional bodies and practitioners to develop a co-produced work programme to ensure child protection remains a central consideration for the NHS through the current period of transition and as the reforms take shape;
- reforms in **the foundation years** to be set out in a forthcoming policy document are ambitious in promoting effective early intervention so that families, particularly those in greatest need, receive effective help as early as possible. An expanded health visitor workforce and a vibrant network of Sure Start Children's Centres - with greater collaborative working (particularly with health professionals and social workers), increased professional autonomy, and stronger accountability arrangements - sit at the heart of these reforms. Health visitors working with families from pregnancy and infancy onwards, in their homes and other settings, together with children's centres will provide high quality services for a healthy start to all families and extra services when needed. These services will secure strong foundations for high quality support and education in pre-school settings to build resilience and nurture wellbeing at an early age. More two years olds in early education and timely support and advice for parents will mean more opportunities for families to access help when they most need it;
- in reforming the **schools** system to tackle educational inequality and re-establish the highest standards of teaching and discipline, schools will continue to be required to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils. Schools should be places where trusted adults, who know children and young people well, notice when there may be problems and respond appropriately, liaising with other services. Teachers should feel confident to create a secure and supportive environment in which children are able to express themselves, experience stability, success and order, and ask for help. The school nurse programme of development will provide the opportunity to focus on early help for school-aged children. School nurses are well placed to ensure there is a continuation of the help initiated in early years settings;
- the **Police** Reform and Social Responsibility Bill 2010-11 will reduce central bureaucracy and make the police service more accountable to local communities through new Police and Crime Commissioners. A powerful new crime-fighting agency - the National Crime Agency (NCA) - will lead the UK's fight against serious and organised crime such as child abuse. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) will continue its important role as a Command in the NCA to tackle child sexual exploitation and develop its vital work educating children and their carers on how to protect themselves online. From 1 July 2011 CEOP assumed the national lead on missing children, recognising that there are clear links with grooming and sexual exploitation. CEOP will bring its considerable child protection expertise to bear on this important issue and will ensure, for the first time within the UK, a dedicated team of experts solely focused on missing children issues;
- the **family justice** system plays a vital role in children's safeguarding and is currently the subject of a wide-ranging review. The review is examining how the system can be shaped to deliver more effectively for children and families. Its work to date including on care proceedings, in which local authority social workers play a particularly important

part, has been developed in close collaboration with the Munro review. The Family Justice Review's final recommendations are due in the autumn.

6. The Government agrees with Professor Munro that her recommendations need to be considered in the round and in partnership with local authority children's services, the voluntary and community sector, social work, education, police and health services. The Children's Improvement Board, comprising the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Local Government Group and DfE, considers safeguarding improvement a priority and are discussing how best the Boards work can contribute to the reform of the child protection system.

7. The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) will continue to bring together representatives of social workers, leaders and managers, service users and educators to work collaboratively to create consensus and build on existing good practice. The Board is driving long term sector-led improvements to social work, strengthening social work practice through: improving the social work degree and practice education; enhanced career structures linked to the Professional Capabilities Framework and keeping senior practitioners at the front line; and more effective professional development.

8. Taken together, Professor Munro's recommendations represent a system-wide response to reforming the child protection system. This document, therefore, sets out the Government's response to each of Professor Munro's four reform themes, before responding in turn to each of the fifteen recommendations for reform and their phased introduction to support local transition arrangements.

Theme 1: Valuing professional expertise

Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4

9. While well intentioned, attempts in the recent past to improve the child protection system have not secured the improvements children and young people deserve. Professional practice with vulnerable children and families has been driven too much by compliance with regulation and rules. Professor Munro's review found that frontline social workers in particular operate within an over-standardised framework that makes it difficult for them to prioritise time to form relationships with children and to understand their needs. In parallel, it has become more difficult to provide the range of help and services to respond to the wide variety of needs and circumstances presented.

10. The Government will oversee a radical reduction in the amount of regulation, working with partners to see a corresponding reduction in locally designed rules and procedures. Revision of the statutory framework will enable the system to place greater emphasis on the value of direct work with children, young people and their families and for practice to draw on the latest research and evidence of what works. Shared local arrangements will need to be developed for robust management at the front line of:

- **timeliness** – across the whole of the child's journey from needing to receiving help – not just the early stages of assessment;
- the **quality of understanding** developed to inform next steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; and
- the **effectiveness of the help provided**.

11. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) have a crucial part to play and the Government believes that their role and impact should be strengthened. We agree with Professor Munro that LSCBs are well positioned to ensure local attention is given to the effectiveness of the help provided to children and their families. We will work with local partners so that performance information is used more intelligently, mindful of Professor Munro's caution that data should not be seen as an unambiguous measure of good or bad practice. Instead, performance information should be interrogated locally to understand what lies behind it.
12. The Government also agrees with Professor Munro that there will continue to be an important role for external inspection. Ofsted is designing a new inspection framework that will focus on the effectiveness of help given to children and young people, putting the experiences of children, young people and their families at the heart of the inspection system. In line with Professor Munro's recommendation, the new inspections will be conducted on an unannounced basis to minimise the bureaucratic burden associated with preparation for inspection. We will explore with the Inspectorates how to develop arrangements that make best use of available resources and effectively examine the contribution of all local services including health, education, police, probation and the justice system to the protection of children. Inspection, together with the sector-led improvement work of the Children's Improvement Board, will consider the robustness of local arrangements to promote timeliness, the quality of understanding of the child's needs and the effectiveness of help provided.
13. Effective information sharing between agencies is essential if children and young people are to receive the help they need. The Government agrees with Professor Munro that information which could help to protect children is not always appropriately shared between key professionals and agencies. Decisions about what information to share, and when to share it, can require difficult and complex judgments. Having additional data and IT systems does not always make these decisions easier.
14. Professor Munro concluded that there is currently no compelling case for a national database to give access to information about whether a child is subject to a protection plan or is looked after. The Government accepts this position, but will keep under review the question of how best to help professionals who work with vulnerable children to cooperate and share information to keep children safe.
15. The Government also endorses Professor Munro's view that local authorities should look at maximising the efficiency of their 24 hour access service, so that professionals who are concerned about a child's safety can obtain any relevant information. We will continue working to try to capitalise on any opportunities for existing IT systems to be used to improve practice around child protection.

Theme 2: Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help

Recommendations 8, 10 and 13

16. The Government's vision for a child-centred system includes providing effective help when a problem first arises at any stage in life, since this is what matters to children and young people. Evidence shows that preventative services do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services. As part of this help, we are committed to ending child poverty in order to promote the life chances of our children. The Government wants to work with partners to create a radical change in the way local agencies coordinate their work to maximise existing resources

and increase the range and number of preventative services on offer to children and families. The vision is for transparent local arrangements that set out:

- the prevalence of need in a given locality;
- the range of professional help available to local children, young people and families, through statutory, voluntary and community services, against the local profile of need;
- mechanisms within such services for identifying those children and young people who need referral to children's social care and in particular those who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm;
- the availability of social work expertise to professionals working with children, young people and families, who are not being supported by children's social care services;
- the training available locally to support professionals working at the front line of universal services; and
- local resourcing of the early help services for children, young people and families.

17. This means that practitioners - such as teachers - who have everyday contact with children will be better placed to act when they have cause for concern. Well briefed and alert practitioners will, in future, be able to access professional expertise so that the right judgments can be made quickly on how to respond to concerns.

18. Greater coordination and transparency of local arrangements should lead to the identification of the early help needed by a particular child or young person and their family, and to the provision of 'an early help offer' where their needs do not meet the criteria for receiving children's social care services. Sure Start Children's Centres working closely with health visitors, primary care and other local services, are ideally placed to realise Professor Munro's vision of 'early help' and can continue to build on the good work some centres already do in this area. Identifying children and families' needs and providing help is the core purpose of children's centres. The Government's new health visiting service family offer sets out clearly the levels of service from universal services delivering the healthy child programme to additional services when people need it to enable rapid and early help too be offered.

19. Children in all age groups can be vulnerable so it is important that such services also address the needs of older children to provide a timely offer of help to teenagers. The importance of early help for this age group is as vital as it is for young children. The Government is working with stakeholders from across the youth sector and young people to develop a Positive for Youth vision for young people and a series of discussion papers have been developed. These papers include an overarching document setting out a vision that emphasises the importance of targeted help and support for those young people who are at greatest risk of negative outcomes and highlights the benefits of early help. The views received will shape a cross-Government policy statement which will be published in the autumn.

20. The reviews conducted by Graham Allen MP, the Rt Hon Frank Field MP and Dame Clare Tickell, stressed the importance of the first years of life in determining life chances. The Government has made available a non ring-fenced early intervention grant worth over £2 billion in each of 2011-12 and 2012-13. The Government is committed to helping families early through Sure Start Children's Centres, an extra 4,200 health visitors and doubling the number of places on the Family Nurse Partnership Programme by 2015, and through the Families with Multiple Problems Programme.

21. The policy on Community Budgets, established in October 2010 by the Government, is an important element in securing significant improvements in provision for families with multiple problems. Evidence shows that early and intensive coordinated interventions with families in difficulty can result in them being better able to respond to help that is offered, their

experiencing less disruption in the trusting relationships that they need to develop; and substantial savings in public expenditure.

Theme 3: Developing social work expertise and supporting effective social work practice

Recommendations 11, 12, 14 and 15

22. Professor Munro stressed the importance of social workers forming relationships with children, young people and families to understand their needs. The Government wants social workers to be more concerned with the effectiveness of the help they provide rather than compliance with procedures.

23. Building on the work of the SWRB, the Government wants to improve radically the knowledge, skills, and expertise of social workers from initial training through to continuing professional development. Social workers should be able to make best use of evidence about what works to resolve problems in children's lives, and have more time and space to exercise professional judgment effectively. They should be able to work effectively with other practitioners - in schools and children's centres, for example - to ensure their colleagues are confident to recognise and refer to children's social care children and young people who need such services.

24. The Government is working with the SWRB to incorporate the development of the specific capabilities, identified by Professor Munro as being necessary for child and family social work, into the SWRB's professional capabilities framework. We will work with higher education institutions, employers, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and, from 2012, the Health Protection Council so that these capabilities explicitly inform social work training, professional development and performance appraisal.

25. The Government will continue to work with the SWRB and the College of Social Work as the sector takes responsibility for developing the profession's own knowledge and skills. A career path that allows for ongoing direct work with children and families is needed as well as a stronger voice for practitioners in management and government. To this end, the College and ADCS will promote the introduction of Principal Child and Family Social Workers in each local authority. The Government will, in parallel, establish a Chief Social Worker to advise Government on social work practice and the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and young people.

Theme 4: Strengthening accountabilities and creating a learning system

Recommendations 5, 6, 7 and 9

26. The Government agrees with Professor Munro that effective multi-agency working across a wide range of professionals is critical to building an accurate understanding of what is happening in the child or young person's life, so that the right help can be provided.

27. Clear lines of accountability, and roles such as the designated and named professionals, are vitally important. The Government also agrees that the child protection system will need to become better at monitoring, learning and adapting. Therefore:

- the Government will retain the existing statutory status of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for children's services. The Department is working with local government, SOLACE and ADCS to revise the statutory guidance on the role of the DCS and the Lead Member. While final structures are matters for local determination, it is likely that the guidance will make very clear that in reviewing the span of responsibilities, there should be a local test of 'assurance' so that whole councils and corporate teams are able to consider the merits and possible risks of planning additional duties on the DCS; and
- the Government agrees that systems review methodology should be used by LSCBs when Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) are undertaken, and that there should be accredited reviewers to support the local application of this methodology and to disseminate learning. The Government also accepts in principle that Ofsted SCR evaluations should end, but believes it is important to plan the transition to new arrangements carefully. Further consideration will be given over the summer to ending the evaluation of SCRs in their current form.

28. The police play an important part in local safeguarding children arrangements. They have a statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in England and to investigate child abuse and other crimes committed against children. There are now dedicated child abuse teams in every police force and good work is being driven locally to enhance safeguarding through stronger partnership working.

29. The Government recognises the potential of the ACPO risk principles referenced in Professor Munro's final report, and will consider how these can be further embedded in the professional practice of the police and local partners. We will explore further how to disseminate local good practice of closer working between children's services and police public protection units, as well other local public protection arrangements, such as Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences.

30. The following section sets out the Government's response to each of Professor Munro's recommendations. Further work needs to be undertaken, with a variety of partner organisations, to inform implementation. For this reason, the impact these proposals might have on the public, private or civil society sectors will be assessed through a series of Impact Assessments in relation to each distinct regulatory change. The Government will consider what research is needed to examine the state of the child protection system going forward.

Table of Responses to Recommendations

Theme 1: Valuing professional expertise

Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4

Recommendation 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 to:

- distinguish the rules that are essential for effective working together, from guidance that informs professional judgment;
- set out the key principles underpinning the guidance;
- remove the distinction between initial and core assessments and the associated timescales in respect of these assessments, replacing them with the decisions that are required to be made by qualified social workers when developing an understanding of children's needs and making and implementing a plan to safeguard and promote their welfare;
- require local attention is given to:
 - timeliness in the identification of children's needs and provision of help;
 - the quality of the assessment to inform next steps to safeguard and promote children's welfare; and
 - the effectiveness of the help provided;
- give local areas the responsibility to draw on research and theoretical models to inform local practice; and
- remove constraints to local innovation and professional judgment that are created by prescribing or endorsing particular approaches, for example, nationally designed assessment forms, national performance indicators associated with assessment or nationally prescribed approaches to IT systems.

Munro's argument

A radical reduction is required in the amount of central prescription and

Government response – Accept

The Government agrees that there needs to be a better balance between professional judgment and central prescription. The Government also agrees that the purpose of assessment is to

<p>unnecessary bureaucracy to help professionals move from a compliance culture to one of learning. Social workers need more professional space to assess the needs of children and young people, and they need to spend more time with children to understand them and to provide the right help. Their work to understand children, young people and their families must be informed by evidence based research and theoretical frameworks.</p> <p>The process of assessing families and children is driven by compliance with timescales and associated targets. This means there can be too much focus on initial activity resulting in 'drift' later on that draws attention away from the quality and impact of the help provided to children, young people and their families.</p>	<p>understand the needs of children, young people and families and to provide timely and effective help to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Targeted timescales for assessment have distorted the focus onto one small part of the child's journey rather than the whole journey from needing to receiving help.</p> <p>Emerging evidence from the four trial authorities will be collated in autumn 2011 to develop the Government's revised policy for assessment. These trials will be extended until December 2011. The Secretary of State for Education is minded to extend this trial to a further five authorities who have asked for flexibilities under the community budget programme subject to their agreement to the conditions of the trial. Subject to evidence emerging from the trials, an amendment to <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i> will be made ahead of a full revision to the statutory guidance, to remove the prescription of timescales and the distinction between core and initial assessments. The parameters for good assessment set out in Professor Munro's recommendation will be included in the amendment to make clear that timeliness, quality of assessment and the effectiveness of help offered must be in place in all local frameworks, with arrangements clearly understood between partners. The revised Inspection Framework should seek evidence to demonstrate that these arrangements are in place.</p> <p>Moving away from a culture of compliance by reducing central prescription and placing a greater emphasis on the appropriate exercise of professional judgment represents a fundamental system-wide change. It will take time for the necessary skills and knowledge to develop and for experience of new ways of working to become fully embedded and effective. The Government will support the sector-led improvement work being undertaken by the Children's Improvement Board (a partnership board set up by the Local Government Group, ADCS, SOLACE and the Department for Education) as we work with them to redress the balance between prescription and the exercise of professional judgment so that those working in child protection are able to stay child-centred.</p>
<p>Timescale:</p> <p>The Government will work in partnership with local government and leaders of children's services, the College of Social Work, the Association of Chief Police Officers, health service organisations' leaders, education and early years sectors, children's organisations in the voluntary and community sector, the inspectorates and others to revise <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i> and <i>The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families</i> by July 2012. A young person's guide to the statutory guidance will also be produced. An interim amendment (timescales, removing distinction between initial/core assessments and articulating the parameters</p>	

for good assessment) will be made to *Working Together* by December 2011.

Recommendation 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.

Munro's argument

The report focuses on child-centred practice and considers the child's journey from needing to receiving help. Inspection should examine the experiences of children, young people and families from the point of needing help to the offer of that help. This would include the role of all agencies engaged in helping and protecting children and families. Judgments on effectiveness should be based on outcomes.

This recommendation reinforces the report's emphasis on the importance of the provision of early help and the need for external challenge to test the effectiveness of help.

The final report also reaffirmed the recommendation in the interim report that the new inspection framework should be conducted on an unannounced basis.

Government response - Accept

The Government accepts that inspection should examine the contribution of all relevant local agencies to the protection of children. Further work will take place over the summer, involving the inspectorates and Government, to consider how the inspectorates could work together to achieve this within the available resources. This will take account of the sector-led improvement work being undertaken by the Children's Improvement Board and the work on quality improvement being taken forward as part of the NHS reforms.

The Government also agrees with Professor Munro that the new inspection framework should be conducted on an unannounced basis. Ofsted will include proposals for unannounced inspections in their forthcoming consultation.

In parallel, the Education Bill is taking forward provisions for the reform of school inspections – the safeguarding of pupils will continue to be considered under the 'leadership and management' theme of the revised school inspection framework.

Timescale

Ofsted intends to develop a new framework informed by consultation in July 2011 in order to draw on the sectors' expertise. Ofsted intends to have the new framework in place by May 2012.

Recommendation 3

The new inspection framework should examine the child's journey from needing to receiving help, explore how the rights, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people inform and shape the provision of services, and look at the effectiveness of the help provided to children, young people and their families.

Munro's argument

This recommendation is at the heart of the review's call for a child-centred system and one that focuses on the **effectiveness** of help provided rather than more procedural or organisational issues.

Government response - Accept

The Government agrees that the experiences of children and young people, the quality and timeliness of response to them, and the effectiveness of help given, should be at the centre of a new inspection framework which itself should be informed by the sector-led improvement work of the Children's Improvement Board, and other relevant quality improvement work by partner organisations.

Critically, inspection must examine the effectiveness of help provided at all stages including initial contact, early help, protection and longer-term help.

Safeguarding peer reviews led by LGG are now well established. As LGG works with DfE through the Children's Improvement Board on the sector-led improvement offer, the positioning of peer review in the performance framework, particularly in relation to self evaluation and external inspection, will be developed further.

Timescale

Ofsted intends to develop a new framework informed by consultation in July 2011 in order to draw on the sectors' expertise. Ofsted intends to have the new framework in place by May 2012.

Recommendation 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. It is crucial that performance information is not treated as an unambiguous measure of good or bad performance as performance indicators tend to be.

Munro's argument

Performance information and associated targets have been given a disproportionate focus that has skewed the focus of management and professional practice. They have been over interpreted as evidence of good or bad practice and used without deep analysis about changes in the data. Most measures concern themselves with compliance and process and tell us little about the quality of practice, the workforce, children's experiences or their outcomes.

Government response - Accept

The Government accepts that performance information should be used as an important but not exhaustive measure of effectiveness. Data should be used locally to indicate where questions should be asked, and care must be taken to establish the nature and quality of frontline practice interaction with children and young people.

The draft Munro dataset included in the final report provides a good basis for further work on outcomes. The SWRB is already making progress on data collection tools to help with workforce planning and other workforce data collection instruments are also available. Work on the Public Health Outcomes Framework will also be relevant.

The Government will work with the Children's Improvement Board to finalise the draft data set which LSCBs, practitioners and managers will want to consider.

Timescale

The Government plans to work with the sector to confirm by December 2011 what the suite of locally published performance information should be, taking account of the Public Health Outcomes Framework (due to be published Autumn 2011). The aim is for publication of the suite of new nationally collected performance information by May 2012 with data then coming on-stream after that depending on individual collection arrangements and lead-in times.

Theme 2: Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help

Recommendations 8, 10 and 13

Recommendation 8

The Government should work collaboratively with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of General Practitioners, local authorities and others to research the impact of health reorganisation on effective partnership arrangements and the ability to provide effective help for children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Munro's argument

There is a risk that local health reforms fragment leadership and professional responsibility locally for safeguarding and child protection. The recommendation that government researches the impact of potential changes is designed to provide robust early evidence of any difficulties and to enable account to be taken of that feedback.

Government response - Accept in principle.

The Government accepts the spirit of this recommendation, but wants to go further and establish a co-produced work programme, to ensure continued improvement and the development of effective arrangements to safeguard and promote children's welfare as central considerations of the health reforms. The Department of Health will work with the Department for Education, NHS bodies, local authorities, professional bodies and practitioners to agree a co-produced work programme. We anticipate that this will include:

- developing shared understanding of future roles and responsibilities;
- ensuring professional leadership and expertise are retained in the new system, including the continuing key role of designated and named professionals;
- clarifying future arrangements for partnership working, including the relationship between LSCBs and health and wellbeing boards;
- developing clinical commissioning groups;
- the NHS contribution to early help;
- future arrangements for training in safeguarding and child protection;
- the implications for the NHS of the proposed new inspection framework; and
- drawing on health sector learning on systems approaches to improving patient safety.

Timescale

The Department of Health and the Department for Education will work with NHS bodies, local authorities, professional bodies and practitioners to will publish a joint programme of work by September 2011.

Recommendation 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, young people and families. The arrangements setting out how they will do this should:

- specify the range of professional help available to local children, young people and families, through statutory, voluntary and community services, against the local profile of need set out in the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA);
- specify how they will identify children who are suffering, or who are likely to suffer, significant harm, including the availability of social work expertise to all professionals working with children, young people and families who are not being supported by children's social care services and specify the training available locally to support professionals working at the front line of universal services;
- set out the local resourcing of the early help services for children, young people and families; and, most importantly
- lead to the identification of the early help that is needed by a particular child and their family, and to the provision of an 'early help offer' where their needs do not meet the criteria for receiving children's social care services.

Munro's argument

Preventative services do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services. Coordination of services is important to reduce confusion, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in service provision. Help offered needs to be set in the context of known community need. For example, the number of parents with mental ill health, known to be violent or in treatment for substance misuse. There is a moral argument for minimising adverse experiences for children as early as possible.

Evidence to the review, found that the increasing demand for children's social care services and

Government response - Accept in principle

The Government recognises the State's duty to protect children from abuse and neglect and help to prevent it happening in the first place. Government also agrees that, from the perspective of a child, it is best if they receive help before damaging experiences cause them further harm or they are exposed to greater risks from that harm. But it also means that there should be clarity among all professionals working with children, young people and families about local arrangements to understand, make assessments of and help families who do not receive social care services, but who do require help. Common and shared assessment processes should be agreed and established locally among practitioners and agencies. Professional practice should drive and characterise the development and implementation of local agreements and processes about helping families early and there should be explicit and clear alignment with arrangements to make referrals to children's social care services. That is why the Government agrees with the principles of this recommendation. This means encouraging practitioners in everyday contact with

<p>the increased formal assessment activity is, in part, due to both a lack of understanding locally about what other help can be given if not social care and fear that a case of abuse or neglect will be missed. Child protection social work expertise at the boundary of universal or targeted services and social care is critical in helping other professionals to make decisions about what is safe for a child and what becomes too dangerous, therefore warranting a statutory response.</p> <p>This recommendation is also designed to help create a local system where there is shared accountability for the early help offered to children and families whose needs do not meet the threshold for a social care service. The review found that the provision of early help is often an assessment with little direct help provided in response. The needs of those families very often escalate and a child protection response is then required, the children being further damaged during the wait. An offer of help is central to any attempt to support a child and family when a need is first identified.</p>	<p>children – such as teachers in schools – to create an environment in which children feel secure, able to express themselves and know where to turn to for help; and to have greater confidence to refer on to skilled social workers children who cause concern.</p> <p>Government therefore accepts all the principles of this recommendation that will promote transparency about local arrangements to help children, young people and families early, with improved coordination among statutory partners, support from local practitioners and clarity about local services available to help families. In making these local arrangements, there should be in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient provision of early help informed by the local profile of need; • arrangements to identify children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, harm; • access to child protection social work expertise for those professionals providing early help and at the boundary of statutory social care services; • effective training accessible locally for those professionals providing early help; • clear resourcing of local arrangements; and • provision of an ‘early help offer’ to individual children and families. <p>During summer 2011 further consideration will be given to how best to achieve these goals, and whether an additional statutory duty to secure early help for children and families is needed or whether alternative approaches would be more effective in securing an increase in the range and number of preventative services on offer to children and families. The Government will also consider the opportunities offered by the health reforms, including the emergent roles and responsibilities of health and wellbeing boards, the work underway on sector-led improvement. We will also consider the contributions of public health services; adult services providing support to families where poor mental health, domestic violence and substance misuse is a factor; and the role that universal services such as early years settings and schools should play in the provision of early help.</p>
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Timescale

The Government will work with partners to identify the appropriate route to effect the responsibility for the provision of early help. To be identified by September 2011. Implementation will be dependent on the approach identified.

Guidance on JSNA and joint health and wellbeing strategy to be published once the Health and Social Care Bill gains Royal Assent.

New inspection framework to test efficacy of these arrangements will be in place from May 2012.

It will be for local partners to determine at what pace early help offer frameworks should be in place locally, with plans quality assured by LSCBs.

Recommendation 13:

Local authorities and their partners should start an ongoing process to review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered, drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families

Munro's argument

As central regulation and prescription is reduced, local leaders need to set about creating a delivery system which supports continuous improvement in the quality of help to vulnerable children and families. Involving service users in this process will be critical. Leaders and managers also need to support their workforce through evidence-based skills development and practice-focused supervision, and create conditions in which practitioners can spend most of their time involved in effective direct work with children and families.

Government response - Accept.

The Government accepts the case for redesigning the way in which child and family social work is delivered and recognises that this is already happening in a number of local areas. Local attention should be given to creating conditions which value the continuity of relationships with children and families, and promotes effective evidence-based social work practice. In parallel, managerial, procedural and bureaucratic processes are limited to those which enhance front line practice. It is a matter for local discretion, taking account of the views of service users, how redesign is taken forward and subsequently reviewed to test its ongoing effectiveness. The new inspection framework should ascertain independently the extent to which effective relationships with children and families form the basis of local help and protective services.

DfE will work with the Children's Improvement Board to ensure that this remodelling is supported through the self-assessment and improvement tools that are being developed.

Timescale

It will be for local leaders to undertake self-assessment, taking account of the views of service users, and consider whether child and family social work services are appropriately configured so that they meet the needs of children and families. Changes will inevitably have to be made, at a realistic pace determined locally, and kept continually under review.

Theme 3 – Developing social work expertise and supporting effective practice

Recommendations 11, 12, 14 & 15

Recommendation 11

The Social Work Reform Board's Professional Capabilities Framework should incorporate capabilities necessary for child and family social work. This framework should explicitly inform social work qualification training, postgraduate professional development and performance appraisal.

Munro's argument

This recommendation underpins the further development of social work expertise and the quality of help and support that is given to children and families. It builds on the work of the SWRB. The report recommends that the specific capabilities for working in child protection and with families should be incorporated into training, professional development and appraisal. The criteria for excellence at each level of progression should also be clear, including the requirements for knowledge, critical reflection, analysis, intervention and skills.

Government response - Accept.

The Government agrees that the skill base and competence of social workers working in child protection must be both explicit and a force for improving practice, training and professional development. Detailed work will need to be done with key partners, including the SWRB, the HPC (which is expected to take over responsibility for the regulation of social workers in 2012) and the College of Social Work to explore how best child and family specific capabilities will fit within the wider capabilities framework, and how to make effective links between the capabilities, initial education, CPD and performance management.

Timescale

The SWRB has already developed the Professional Capabilities Framework and is in the process of populating the various levels and capabilities. It is also developing an associated CPD framework. Ownership of both is expected to transfer to the College of Social Work around November 2011 with a view to implementing by Autumn 2012.

Recommendation 12

Employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) should work together so that social work students are prepared for the challenges of child protection work. In particular, the review considers that HEIs and employing agencies should work together so that:

- practice placements are of the highest quality and – in time – only in designated Approved Practice Settings;
- employers are able to apply for special ‘teaching organisation’ status, awarded by the College of Social Work;
- the merits of ‘student units’, which are headed up by a senior social worker are considered; and
- placements are of sufficiently high quality, and both employers and HEIs consider if their relationship is working well.

Munro’s argument

Newly qualified social workers often emerge from degree courses without the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise and they are especially unprepared to deal with the challenges posed by child protection work. Evidence suggests that degree courses are not consistent in content, quality and outcomes for child protection and there are crucial elements missing in some courses, such as detailed learning about child development and attachment. Theory and research are not well linked to practice and there is a failure to align what is taught with the realities of contemporary social work practice. The Social Work Task Force identified a number of areas in education and training needing urgent attention which are being taken forward by the SWRB.

Government response - Accept.

The Government agrees that effective partnership working between employers, the professional regulator and HEIs is key to securing effective social work education including the good quality placements that are necessary to set the highest standards for a career in social work.

Significant development is in train to ensure that social work students are adequately equipped to deal with the challenges of child protection work. The SWRB is working with HEIs to improve the calibre of entrants to the profession and the quality of the education they receive. Government is exploring the benefits of new models of social work education such as the ‘Step Up to Social Work’ employer-led scheme, and will continue to monitor the range of available qualifying routes to ensure an adequate supply of quality practitioners.

The Government is proposing through the Health and Social Care Bill to transfer the responsibility for setting professional standards for social workers to the HPC. In preparation for this, the HPC has established a Professional Liaison Group, including key stakeholder representation, to review standards.

Employers also have a major role to play and the Government wants to seek assurance that this will be taken seriously. It is likely that some of this can only realistically be done in the medium- to longer-term and some authorities will face more challenges in delivering this than others, but we are reassured that the SWRB has already developed model arrangements for partnership and that these are already being tested in some areas. Such innovative and collaborative solutions will be key to success. We will ask the SWRB to consider how best to

<p>The review endorsed these and, in addition highlighted remaining issues about how to provide sufficient incentives for employers to help them prioritise the teaching of social work students.</p>	<p>build on their work to take this and other relevant Munro recommendations forward.</p> <p>Government already provides support for practice placements through the Education Support Grant. The Department of Health has asked the College of Social Work to prepare proposals for how to make best use of this resource to improve availability and quality of practice placements and consultation is underway. The College should be well placed to consider the recommendation for 'teaching organisation status'.</p>
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Timescale

The Government will work with employers and HEIs to build partnership arrangements with the aim of having these in place by the end of 2012. The Government will ask the College of Social Work to develop plans for designated approved practice settings and teaching organisation status, and to consider the merits of student units by summer 2012.

Recommendation 14

Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who is still actively involved in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management.

Munro's argument

It takes time to develop practice expertise but many social workers spend only a short time in frontline practice. Those who do stay in practice rarely have more than one or two opportunities to progress into more senior practice roles. The SWRB has stressed the need for an alternative career path to the managerial route. Professor Munro supported the view that experienced social workers should be able to follow a career path that takes them to very senior levels in the organisation without losing their prime focus on developing professional social work expertise.

Further, the need for senior managers to make decisions about budget and resource can often be divorced from the practice implications that those decisions create. Senior and corporate teams need to understand the impact of their decisions on the frontline and therefore on children and families. The role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker is intended to provide a voice on the professional and practice impact of management and leadership decisions. This is described in the review as a fundamental element of the system becoming

Government response - Accept.

Government accepts the need for an explicit link between management and practice. Government recognises that the role of the Principal Child and Family Social Worker is necessary for the system to respond to the needs of children and families and be open to feedback. The Government also supports Professor Munro's view that experienced social workers should be able to follow a career path that takes them to senior levels in the organisation without losing their prime focus on developing social work expertise.

Over the summer, the Government will work with local authorities and the College of Social Work, to determine the relationships between the Principal Child and Family Social Worker and other professionals, the nature of the role Principal Child and Family Social Workers should play in improving practice and challenging poor practice.

Local areas will not necessarily need to construct a new post but designate a professional social worker as practice lead. Strengthening the professional leadership of safeguarding and child protection practice locally is a key improvement priority arising from Professor Munro's review and is strongly endorsed by the Government. A number of localities are already taking forward this model and it may have wider application in the voluntary and other sectors.

The College of Social Work will aim to convey the views and issues of all social workers, including Principal Child and Family Social Workers, to the Chief Social Worker. The College will provide CPD support founded on the Professional Capabilities Framework including a peer mentoring forum to support Principal Child and Family Social Workers in their roles and tasks. We will consider asking the College, with the

open to feedback and adapting in consequence.	SWRB, to provide a framework to guide the appointment of Principal Child and Family Social Workers for local authority, voluntary and private sector employers.
<p>Timescale</p> <p>We envisage most local authorities will choose to designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker by April 2012 and that all will have chosen to so by July 2012.</p>	

Recommendation 15

A Chief Social Worker should be created in Government, whose duties should include advising the Government on social work practice and informing the Secretary of State's annual report to Parliament on the working of the Children Act 1989.

Munro's argument

In addition to change in local systems, the review concluded that there is also a need to develop learning at a national level. The review looked at comparable models in other Government Departments, for example, the Chief Medical Officer in DH, and in other countries. On balance, the conclusion was that the system would benefit from having a Chief Social Worker to provide a permanent professional presence for social work within government. The review describes the importance of central government developing the means to understand how its policies and procedures affect practice at the front line. As with the Government-based advisory roles in other departments or countries, the role of Chief Social Worker would be distinct from that of the corresponding professional body (in this case the College of Social Work).

Government response - Accept in principle.

The Government accepts the proposal for a Chief Social Worker to provide a permanent professional presence for social work within Government. The Government sees this role as being complementary to any corresponding professional body for example the College of Social work

The Government is clear that the scope of this post will be to cover children and adults and will report jointly to the Secretaries of State for Education and Health.

There is underpinning detail that needs to be developed including:

- the comprehensive set of functions for the Chief Social Worker;
- their links with external bodies (including the College of Social Work); and
- how they would be brought into Government, and in which Department the post would be located.

Timescale

The Government plans for a Chief Social Worker to be in post by late 2012.

Theme 4: Strengthening accountabilities and creating a learning system

Recommendations 5, 6, 7 and 9

Recommendation 5

The existing statutory requirements for each Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to produce and publish an annual report for the Children's Trust Board should be amended, to require its submission instead to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, and, subject to the passage of legislation, to the local Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chair of the health and wellbeing board.

Munro's argument

LSCBs remain uniquely positioned and accountable within local areas to monitor how professionals and services are working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. They are also well placed to identify emerging practice challenges and areas for improvement and development.

This recommendation was made to secure the continuation of a proper account, about multi-agency effectiveness for safeguarding, every year to the most senior local leaders. It was also designed to reinforce the leadership priorities for safeguarding and child protection which are at risk of being lost or fragmented in the rapidly changing public service landscape.

Government response - Accept

LSCBs have a unique, system-wide, role to play in protecting children and young people and the Government believes that their role and impact should be strengthened. The Government also agrees that accountability for the safety and welfare of children must start with the most senior strategic local leaders and that the receipt of an annual report from the LCSB about the effectiveness of local early help and protective services is an important element of such accountability. There will be issues to resolve about local health and police leads in the future, but for now, it should be the case that the Chief Officers of Police Authorities and cluster PCT chief executives are considered as those local leaders.

Given the existing statutory requirement, all local leaders will continue to have access to the published reports while the Government identifies a suitable legislative vehicle to amend the requirement to submit the report to the Children's Trust Board.

Timescale

The Government will identify the appropriate legislative vehicle as soon as practicable.

Recommendation 6

The statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, should be amended to state that when monitoring and evaluating local arrangements, LSCBs should, taking account of local need, include an assessment of the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families (including the effectiveness and value for money of early help services, including early years provision), and the effectiveness of multi-agency training to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Munro's argument

This recommendation drives at strengthening the 'challenge role' of LSCBs, making clear that there should be robust and regular monitoring of the effectiveness of help and protective services and the extent of multi-agency commitment and participation in the provision of this help. The role of the LSCB in the provision of multi-agency training is re-emphasised to support the role and function that all agencies locally have in safeguarding and protecting children and young people.

Government response - Accept in principle

The Government strongly agrees that LSCBs are a fundamental aspect of local multi-agency arrangements to help and protect children and young people. They occupy a central position in being able to assess the effectiveness of local help and protective services, and it is important that this role is strengthened. Over the summer, we will work closely with the national LSCB chairs, ADCS and partner organisations, to consider existing and new mechanisms that could be in place locally for them to assess the effectiveness of early help and protective services.

The Government will consider how the resources for training, including joint training, and increased monitoring should be made locally available with responsibility equally shared among statutory partners.

We will also look at the extent to which LSCBs should identify establishments, locations or services in their areas (for example detention facilities, young offender establishments, ports or airports, refuges) that may require particular child protection services, and monitor the effectiveness of such specifically tailored provision.

Timescale

The Government will publish an amendment (role of LSCBs in monitoring effectiveness of early help and protective services) to *Working Together* by December 2011.

Recommendation 7

Local authorities should give due consideration to protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of a Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for children's services before allocating any additional functions to individuals occupying such roles. The importance, as envisaged in the Children Act 2004, of appointing individuals to positions where they have specific responsibilities for children's services should not be undermined. The Government should amend the statutory guidance issued in relation to such roles and establish the principle that, given the importance of individuals in senior positions being responsible for children's services, it should not be considered appropriate to give additional functions (that do not relate to children's services) to Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services unless exceptional circumstances arise.

Munro's argument

Professor Munro expressed concern about the potential compromised accountability for leaders of children's services, through the addition of new responsibilities for major local services. The extent of public service reform around children's services and the attention that will be needed locally to reform the child protection system makes the role of a dedicated leader for children more important at this time. The review called for the spirit of the original legislation to be supported with DCSs only having additional duties in exceptional circumstances.

Government response - Accept in principle

The Government agrees that the roles and responsibilities of the DCS and Lead Member are of fundamental importance in the local leadership structures for children's services. It is important to maintain a clear line of sight through the organisation and for people to be clear on their roles and responsibilities. The Government will retain the existing statutory status of the DCSs and the Lead Member for children's services.

The Department is working with local government, SOLACE and ADCS to revise the statutory guidance on the role of the DCS and the Lead Member. While final structures are matters for local determination, it is likely that the guidance will make very clear that in reviewing the span of responsibilities, there should be a local test of 'assurance' so that whole councils and corporate teams are able to consider the merits and possible risks of planning additional duties on the DCS. The leadership arrangements should be considered by Ofsted, alongside any redesign of services as part of inspections of children's services and the emerging programme of peer challenge and review.

Timescale

The Government will continue working with the sector on how to revise the statutory guidance on the role of the DCS and the Lead Member and will consult formally on the guidance in autumn 2011.

Recommendation 9

The Government should require LSCBs to use systems methodology when undertaking Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and, over the coming year, work with the sector to develop national resources to:

- provide accredited, skilled and independent reviewers to jointly work with LSCBs on each SCR;
- promote the development of a variety of systems-based methodologies to learn from practice;
- initiate the development of a typology of the problems that contribute to adverse outcomes to facilitate national learning; and
- disseminate learning nationally to improve practice and inform the work of the Chief Social Worker (see chapter seven).

In the meantime, Ofsted's evaluation of SCRs should end.

Munro's argument

Current arrangements for SCRs reinforce a prescriptive approach towards practice. Too often, SCRs conclude human error is to blame rather than explain why professionals acted or failed to act as they did, Consequently, SCR recommendations tend to take the form of instructions to professionals of what they 'should', 'need', or 'must' do in specific situations in the future.

Professor Munro's recommended that LSCBs adopt 'systems' methodology in conducting SCRs in order to move beyond identifying what happened to explain why it happened. Systems methodology would improve the current Serious Case Review (SCR) process in areas such as:

- the lack of engagement by, and meaning for, front line practitioners;
- shallowness of learning that does not become

Government response - Consider further.

The Government agrees that systems review methodology should be used by LSCBs when SCRs are undertaken and that there should be a group of accredited reviewers to support the local application of this methodology. Further, it agrees that these reviewers would contribute to national learning and thematic reviews of practice.

Current pilot work includes that taken forward by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and their 'Learning Together' model in a large number of LSCBs for areas of practice that do not meet current criteria for undertaking SCRs. These and other systems review models will inform the transition to systems review methodology.

The Government will give further consideration to this recommendation including:

- which organisation(s) would be able to take responsibility for recruiting the reviewers, accrediting their practice and deploying them to local areas;

<p>embedded;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a lack of consistency in the presentation of findings which makes thematic national learning and sharing of practice more difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to whom the reviewers would be accountable; and • the resourcing requirements. <p>The Government accepts in principle that Ofsted SCR evaluations should end but believes it is important to plan carefully the transition to new arrangements.</p>
<p>Timescale</p> <p>During the second half of 2011 the Government will, working with the sector, consider the evidence and opportunities for using systems review methodologies for Serious Case Reviews and the options for developing the national resources Professor Munro recommends. Further consideration will be given over the summer to ending the evaluation of SCRs in their current form.</p>	