

Young Persons' Guide to the Munro Review of Child Protection

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Helpful

Continuity

Protection

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Involving
Dedicated
Listening

What is this guide about?

A Personal Message from Professor Eileen Munro



In June 2010, Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Education, asked me to conduct an independent review of child protection in England.

My report makes recommendations that I believe will help to change the child protection system from too much paperwork and reliance on doing everything 'by the book'. We need people to keep their focus on keeping children safe, and giving them the help they need, when they most need it.

We need better management of front line people working to keep children safe, to give them greater professional confidence and freedom. There has been a lot of interest in this review, and the comments I have received make me feel confident that there are many people out there who are both keen and able to take on this responsibility. What many of them have told my review was thoughtful and of great value to me.

It is clear from the many responses from local authorities, local leaders, managers, and frontline practitioners that there is a commitment to learn, to listen and to improve professional practice. That is very important in helping to create a system open to change.

The review has worked closely with the Office of the Children's Rights Director and the Office of the Children's Commissioner to hear children's views and experiences of the child protection system.

Many children and young people have themselves given important evidence to this review, many expressing their own concerns that the child protection system is not working properly.

I am particularly grateful to the children and young people who told me stories about what has happened to them and how professionals could improve the help they give. I have thought very carefully about what people have said, and this has strengthened my belief in the need for change. I know that you will share my ambition to see the child protection system become centred on the child.

I have asked for this Guide to be written especially for children and young people, so that you can see what I am telling the Government needs to change. A list of my recommendations can be found at the end of this Guide.

I hope that you find it interesting and helpful.

Finally, I would like to thank the Children's Rights Director, Roger Morgan, and his team for writing this Guide on the review's behalf.



Professor Eileen Munro
London School of Economics and Political Science

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR ADULT READERS

Whilst this Guide has been written for children and young people it is likely that some professionals and managers working with them may want to use it as a quick guide. That is fine, but they will also need to read the main report as that will have some other important messages that are meant for them.

Why is this guide important to children and young people?

For a while now there has been concern that we have not been as good at keeping children safe as we need to be. Much effort has gone into trying and there have been some improvements. But, the simple truth is that **many of the same problems are happening over and over again.**

So, Professor Munro has looked again at what is wrong with the present system and at why many of the other reports that have been written do not seem to have made the difference for children that they were supposed to.

This is a major opportunity to get the child protection system right. Professor Munro is keen to make sure that her review really does make a difference, which means that **it has to work for children.**

What the report said

Chapter One: Introduction

This review found that there are **four main things** that influence how we go about protecting children:

1. **the importance that members of the public attach to children and young people's safety and welfare and the strong reaction when a child is seriously hurt or killed**
2. **that the unpredictable nature of child protection work can be removed if procedures are followed**
3. **the reaction to child abuse deaths and the tendency to think that professionals have made mistakes without looking deeply enough to find out the causes, and**
4. **the importance of performance targets and process over the quality of help given**

Over the years these **four main things** have led to changes in the system. Each change taken on its own can make a lot of sense. Sometimes though, when taken together, changes can get in the way of good practice and lead to new problems.

For instance, concern about managing things that we cannot be certain about is not helped by the public outcry that happens whenever mistakes are made. Practice becomes more defensive and the concern for keeping children safe can become lost by people looking to justify their actions.

The problem with the current system

- If 'good' practice was only about following procedures and keeping records well, then these are things that people know they have some control over. Doing this though rather ignores the point that 'good' practice should mean that children, in contact with the child protection system, are actually safer from harm. When a concern is reported about a child there can be many meetings taking place, assessments done and reports written about it. But it is not recording something or talking about it that keeps a child safe. The system sometimes gets so caught up in doing other things (*like having meetings, doing assessments and writing reports*) that it forgets that **to keep children safe it is very often a case of 'actions needing to speak louder than words'**.
- Sometimes, these **four main things** can get in the way of each other, with no clear focus on helping children. Professionals are often worried by how they will be judged. But, while process and targets are important ways of measuring what they do, these can be given higher value by managers than the quality of any direct work being done with children.
- There are problems in **getting help to children quickly enough** once concerns are known. Some children can wait a very long time for any service to be provided. However, many simply can't wait, and endless assessments do not get children who are being harmed the help they need at the time when they most desperately need it.
- **Spending time with children is given too low a priority.** Workers always seem to be too busy doing other things to have the time to help children make sense of what is going on, or find out their wishes and feelings.
- **When children need help then they need this in a timely manner**, not just when they are being assessed, but for their ongoing needs. Meeting timescales for seeing the child early on is good, but the same care should be taken to give them further help, to make them safer in their family or supporting them when being taken into care.

The aims of the review

Professor Munro was asked to make recommendations or suggestions, to the Government, **that she thinks will help improve social work.**

Many social workers now say that they no longer have time to work with children and families themselves, but just assess and refer them on for the help they need. This is because they are now so involved in administrative tasks (*such doing assessments, making referrals, writing reports, keeping records up to date and spending time in meetings*). This is far from the view that many have of what social work should be about. Those going into social work say that they are doing so because they want to help people. This review wants **social worker's priorities to be spending more time with children**, young people and families.

This review then is all about the changes that will be needed so that the overall effect will be a **system that is focused on the needs of children.**

The second aim of this review is to **make sure that we keep a much more watchful eye on the new system**, so that if problems do arise in the future they will be easier to spot and deal with.

What children have said

Of all the rights that children now have the one they rate the most is **the right to protection from abuse**.

Children and young people have told the review that **what they value most are good relationships with professionals they can trust** and practice that focuses on their needs. Building a trusting relationship with professionals is seen as important as it provides children with ways of getting information, knowing about their rights, having their say and making choices, and finding out how decisions about them are being made.

Children and young people have also said that they don't want social workers who keep leaving them. They want social workers who are there for them, who talk to them on their own, and who listen to and respect them. They want to deal with professionals who they trust (*that is someone who is honest, reliable and who the child can depend on*). They want someone who can get them the support they need at important times of change in their lives. But, above all, they want social workers who are able to treat them as individuals, with their own unique needs, views and interests.

They have also said that other professionals are well placed to help and support a child who may be at risk. Teachers, school counsellors, support workers, advocates, children's rights officers and many others, can all play a vital role in **creating the right environment for a child to feel that it is "safe to tell"**. Children have talked about the importance of school based services and how they support them in knowing where to go for help.

Children and young people have themselves made a vital contribution to the Munro review. What they have told the review has highlighted that **the child protection system is not working as well as it should be**.

Who the review has worked with

The review has worked closely with the **Office of the Children's Rights Director** and the **Office of the Children's Commissioner** to hear about children's views and experiences of the child protection system. Professor Munro has met over 250 children and young people at a number of consultation events. Children have shared some painful experiences with her and also made some very useful comments about how the child protection system can be improved.

Children and young people have been involved throughout, so as to keep the rights and experiences of children and young people right at the heart of this review. Two young people, Daniel Defoe and Lucy Sofocleous, and a foster carer, Avril Head, who has more than 25 years of fostering experience, were members of the review team.

Professor Munro and her review team are very grateful to everyone who took time to respond or attend one of the events.

Chapter Two: The principles of an effective child protection system

It is important to explain some of the thinking behind what makes for a good child protection system. The review has used **the following eight principles** in making its recommendations for change:

1. **The system should be centred on the child:** everyone involved in child protection should focus on children and young people, respecting them as individuals with rights, including having a say in decisions about them whenever they are capable of giving their views.
2. **The family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people,** but sometimes difficult judgments are needed in balancing this with their right to protection from abuse and neglect.
3. **Helping children and families involves working with them** and therefore the quality of the relationship has to be good if the help given is to make a difference.
4. **Early help is better for children:** it stops problems getting worse, helps get over bad experiences more quickly and improves outcomes for children.
5. **Children's needs and circumstances are not all the same** so the system needs to offer them very different responses.
6. **Good professional practice needs up to date knowledge** of the latest thinking and research.
7. **Child protection work involves some uncertainty and risk:** managing risks well can only reduce these, not get rid of them completely.
8. **The measure of success is whether children feel and are actually safe** because of the help they got.

In the past, **we thought that the answer to failure was more control.** But this has led to a system that can now no longer cope with the sheer number and complexity of rules and guidelines that have to be followed. In 1974, the first government guidance on child protection was just seven pages long. In 2010, the latest guidance ran to some 385 pages (*with references to another 200+ pages of guidance elsewhere*).

A very different view is that **unexpected things will happen whatever you try to do.** We need to remember that it is 'bad' people who do harm to children, not people working in the system.

Whilst both of these points are worth listening to, perhaps a better way of getting the improvement we want to see is for government to set out exactly what it expects from the child protection system, and then leave professionals to get on with the business of keeping children safe. **So what should government set out?**

The system should be centred on the child

Since the child protection system was first put together, the world has changed a lot to now recognise that **children themselves have rights.** The system should therefore respect the fact that children and young people have views, wishes and feelings and an interest in their own protection. This means that the system should not be just about adults going off and doing whatever they think is best. It has to become more sensitive to the wishes and feelings of children and young people and the things that they are worried about.

Communication with children

The UK's agreement, in 1991, to follow the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** was a big start in beginning to recognise children's rights. These include such important rights as the right for children to have their own say in decisions that affect them. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says that:

(1) States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child.

The right of children to have their say is also found in many of our laws (like the Children Act 1989, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Children Act 2004 and, more recently, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008). Some of these laws say that a local authority should ask children what their 'wishes and feelings' are, when providing them with services.

Children have different experiences of this in practice. Some told the review about the positive impact that professionals can have by finding time to spend with the children they are helping and keeping a clear focus on their needs.

One very good reason for speaking to children and young people is that they are a key source of information to understand the problems they and their families have, and the impact this is having on them. It makes sense to include children more in child protection work.

What Ofsted found (these are inspectors of schools, children's homes, foster care and other services for children)

A common criticism in reports of inquiries/reviews into child deaths is that people did not speak to the children enough. And, **the importance of listening to the child continues to be repeated in serious case reviews** (these are reviews that are usually carried out when a child has died or been badly hurt as a result of abuse or neglect): *'The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews A thematic report of Ofsted's evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April to 30 September 2010'*¹, highlights **five main messages with respect to the voice of the child**:

1. The child was not seen often enough by the professionals involved, or was never asked their views and feelings
2. Agencies did not listen to adults (such as advocates or teachers) who tried to speak up on behalf of the child and who had important information to give
3. Parents (or carers) stopped professionals from seeing and listening to the child
4. Workers paid too much attention to the needs of the parents, and not enough on the needs of the child
5. Agencies did not understand well enough what was going on to protect the child

Many of these findings support what both research and children and young people have been saying, that **their needs and rights to protection should be at the heart of practice, that they should have a voice and be listened to**. But, whilst some involve children very well, others are very poor at it and, quite frankly, there are those who just don't get it.

¹ Ofsted, (2010), *Learning lessons from serious case reviews 2009–2010* (available online at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/content/download/11643/136464/file/Learning%20lessons%20from%20serious%20case%20reviews%202009%E2%80%932010.pdf>).

What children told the Children's Commissioner

Children told the Children's Commissioner about **the importance of being heard separately from their parents** and being listened to. They spoke about how confusing they had found the process of being helped, and how the system was not very clear. They wanted better information, honesty, and help for what they are going through emotionally (*how they are feeling*). **What they valued most was help from the same social worker, being treated respectfully and be able to use services that do not get withdrawn as soon as the 'crisis' is passed.** They also spoke very highly about advocacy services, which they saw as critical to helping them talk about abuse and harm.

Much of the work looking at children's contact with social workers continues to show that **many children are not seen alone**, are not seen often, do not see or discuss reports written about them and are not told why decisions have been made about their future².

What children told the Children's Rights Director

Research by the Children's Rights Director for England asked for the views of children and young people who had only recently come into care³. Most of them thought that, looking back, **going into care was the right thing for them** and their lives were generally better than they were before. Their comments included:

'Being in care has given me a life'

'I have had a better life than I ever would have got at home with my family'.

However, on the actual day of going into care children felt scared, sad and upset. They said that being told what was happening to them, and not being split up from their brothers and sisters, were things that would have made that first day in care easier.

Most children said they did not get a choice of where they were going to live and were not able to visit their first placement before moving in.

'Meeting the carers before would have helped'.

More than half the children had not known they were even going into care until it actually happened.

'Someone could have explained things so I could understand what was happening'.

A quarter of the children expected to leave care once things got sorted out at home. One of the key messages from the children to the government was;

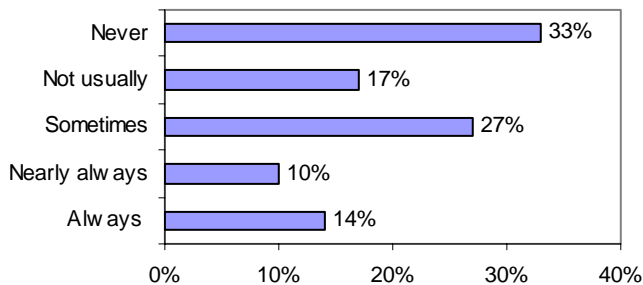
'Being in care can be OK, even a good experience if you have the right placement and a good social worker. I think the care system's main priority should be making sure both those things are OK'.

² The Office of the Children's Commissioner, (2011), *Don't make assumptions – Children and young people's views of the child protection system and messages for change* (available online at http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/force_download.php?fp=%2Fclient_assets%2Fcp%2Fpublication%2F486%2FChildrens_and_young_peoples_views_of_the_child_protection_system_.pdf)

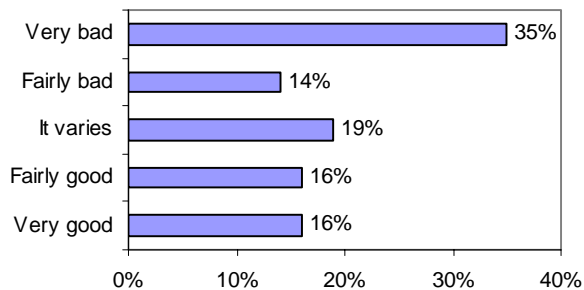
³ Ofsted, (2010), *Before Care – a report of children's views on entering care by the Children's Rights Director for England* (available online at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Care/Children-s-rights/Before-care>)

You may be interested in the charts below⁴. These are taken from an event run by the Children’s Rights Director, for 150 children and young people, for this review.

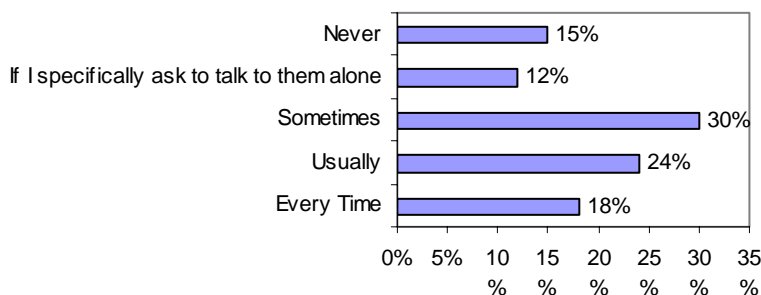
Does your social worker, or caseworker, take notice of your wishes and feelings?



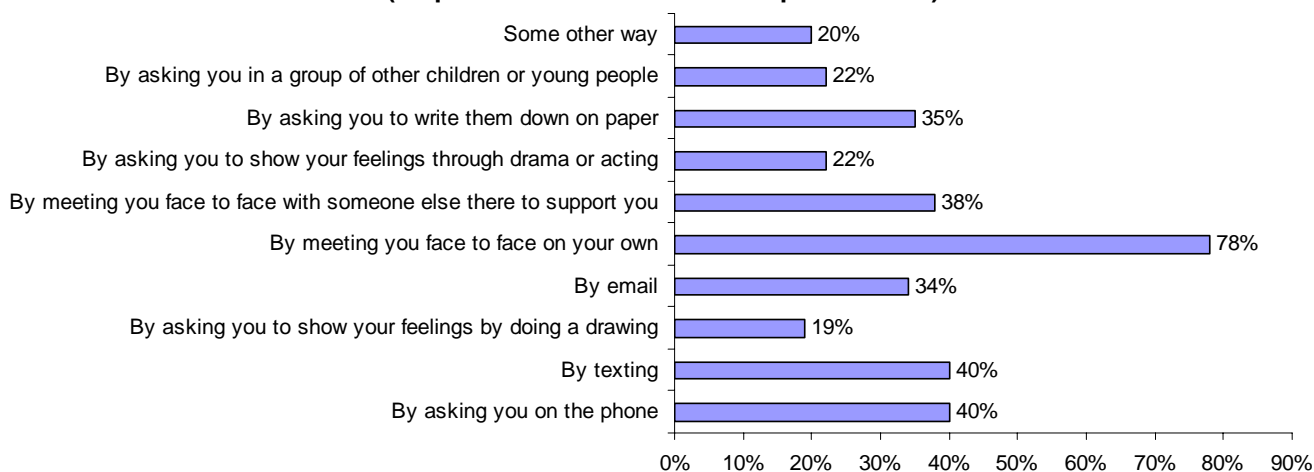
How good is your social worker, or caseworker, at giving you information you need from them



Does your social worker or caseworker talk with you alone, without anyone else listening to what you are saying?



What would be good ways for professionals to find out your wishes and feelings? (respondants could select multiple answers)



Relationships with children

A clear message from children (and their parents) is that they value relationships with workers that last. For them to talk openly about personal and often painful problems requires trust in the professional, and **many changes of worker means the child always having to put their trust in someone new.**

⁴ ‘Messages for Munro: a children’s views report’, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, June 2011

For some children, there is also an issue with the sheer number of people who seem to get involved in their lives. Children can find this all too much and would like to be given more of a say about who should be involved. Recent cases studies show that big changes in the way services are provided might be needed or many children, as now, will simply choose not to go along with what is happening to them.

The family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the laws in this country (like the Children Act 1989) both recognise that **the family is the best place to bring up children**. In most cases, it is the family that keeps children safe. So, sometimes people question whether too many children are taken away from their families and put into care. But Professor Munro says that this is the wrong question to be asking. It is not about 'numbers', but more about the quality of help that can be given to each child and their family.

Helping children and families involves working with them

Very few children are taken away from their parents. The main part of child protection work is about helping parents to provide better and safer care for their children. This work isn't easy. Professionals need to ask parents many difficult questions about their family life. At the same time they also have to build good relationships so they can work with them to help them become better parents. Working well with parents is one way of providing help that we know works.

Early help is better for children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear that the state has a duty not just to help children who are abused and neglected, but to work with children and families so as to make these incidents less likely. When problems first start, the earlier that help can be given the better.

Children's needs and circumstances are not the same

Children and young people are not all the same ... and you cannot deliver protection to them in the same way as you can deliver pizzas.

A child protection system needs 'variety' in order to respond to the many different needs that children and young people have. But the review has been told, by many working in the system, that there is no flexibility. This means that **there might be only one response** (dictated by the system) to cover many different situations and need. This makes it difficult for professionals to respond to the individual needs of each child they work with.

There were many examples given to the review of how **particular groups of children** (*such as children with disabilities, or older children*) **were not getting the care, protection or services in a way that their needs required**. The National Deaf Children's Society drew attention to the widespread failure to meet the special communication needs of deaf children. We know that it is hard enough for children to speak out about abuse and neglect. But, for them to have any chance, **we have to at least be able to communicate with them**.

Good professional practice needs up to date knowledge

It is important that professionals involved in child protection work continue to learn from the best evidence available and use their expert knowledge to help children and families.

Child protection work involves uncertainty and risk

We can never be entirely sure what will happen in child protection. Because of this, **the system over the past 40 years has been trying to take more of the risk out of what professionals have to decide.** But you can't take out risk completely, and no-one can predict with any certainty what could happen. The problem with this though is that the public and the media expect the child protection system to know about and put a stop to all the bad things that could happen to children.

Risk assessments themselves are only a guide to what could happen, and may themselves over-estimate or under-estimate the danger to a child. A good assessment could show that harm to the child is not very likely. However, **unlikely things do still happen** and sometimes a child dies or is seriously harmed. Professionals, in particular social workers, currently face criticism whether they take the child into care or leave them with parents who could abuse them: they are **'damned if they do and they are damned if they don't.'**

If we are to make accurate judgements about whether social workers have done something wrong or not, it is important to get a more accurate picture of their work. We have to learn to understand that sometimes a child may die even though the quality of professional practice could not have been bettered.

The measure of success of the child protection system, both national and local, is whether children are receiving effective help

In such a complicated system as child protection, you can be sure that anything new that is tried will have results that are not always expected. Whilst previous changes meant well and were well-informed; they still sometimes led to negative results that nobody saw or intended.

It is therefore important that the system becomes better at paying attention to when things are going wrong. There is a need for better feedback at all levels in the system, from workers getting feedback from children and families to government getting feedback from local services.

Chapter Three: A system that values professional expertise

Previous attempts at improving the child protection system have focused on staff training, the need for good information, how cases are managed, getting better value for money, and managing public concerns that either children are left at risk or too many are taken into care. The most recent answer to these challenges has been for ever more rules setting down what professionals have to do. This has led to managers setting ever more targets for staff to meet, and checks to make sure that they have met them.

Despite the hard work of these professionals, inquiries into the deaths of children show that the same mistakes keep happening over and over again. Basically, **the more that mistakes happen the more that procedures have been put in place** to try to prevent them from happening again.

It was felt that procedures would make things more certain but all they have done is make it more difficult for professionals to know what best to do to help children and families. By focusing on what is easy to measure, managers and officials have moved further away from what really matters. And, sometimes, **doing it ‘by the book’ has not proved to be the same as doing it right for children** or their families.

There have been many attempts, over a long period of time, to improve the child protection system. Although each of these have meant well, they have only had limited success in bringing about the improvements that were expected. And, in some ways, they have actually made things more difficult for staff on the frontline when dealing with child abuse. So, **Professor Munro has used an important way of thinking about our entire approach to child protection, called ‘systems theory’** (*we in the office of the Children’s Rights Director also found it a little scary at first!*).

So what is ‘systems theory’?

To keep things nice and simple, let’s just say it is about making it harder for people to do something wrong and easier to do it right. To do this the system must become better at checking how it is doing, learning about problems as they crop up, and responding creatively to put them right. The aim is to have a system which is better at learning and improving. **It is important to remember what happens in one part of the system will affect what happens in another part of the system.**

We can therefore, think about the systems approach in the following way:

Everything will be fine just as long as we all follow the same procedure (like for keeping children safe)

That is fine, but **we need to be able to tell if the system is doing what it is supposed to** (like keeping children safe), and do something different if it isn’t

When faced with tragic failings (like not keeping a child safe) the whole system must be able to ask itself; **‘Are we doing the right thing’?**

Because there will always be uncertainty and risk **you need be able to vary or change what it is that you do**

How we choose to do things has many consequences, some of which we might not actually want or intend (*like people who aren't trained in keeping children safe telling people who are what they have to do*)

So why is 'systems theory' so important when it comes to keeping children safe?

Put simply, sometimes mistakes happen because people mess up. In child protection, it is very usual and easy to blame individuals when things go wrong. But blaming individuals each time something goes wrong can get in the way of seeing that the system was (also) at fault.

Following what a procedure tells you is not necessarily the same as doing something that keeps a child safe. And that is what is wrong with the present system; it doesn't ask enough questions like; 'ARE WE ACTUALLY DOING THE RIGHT THING?'

In the year from April 2009 to March 2010, there were over half a million assessments carried out on children referred to children's services. Around 39,000 of these led to a child protection plan, and just under 28,000 were admitted to care (some of these as part of their child protection plan).

It may be the case that not all children referred were in fact being harmed or neglected at home; and, some who were might have got help in other ways. But, **there does seem to be a lot of time spent on assessments for very little activity that leads to help and protection for the child.**

It has often been said of the child protection system, that it is more about protecting itself, and the people within it, than it is about protecting children. 'Systems theory' then is all about trying to find ways of **making it much harder for people to be focused on doing the wrong sort of things, and far easier for them to be doing the right thing.** So, where the 'wrong thing' might be spending lots of time in meetings, finishing off assessments and filling in lots of forms, the 'right thing' to do might be to get out of the office and go see if the child is alright.

Doing things differently

'Systems theory' tells us that **it is not acceptable to use the system as an excuse for not having done the right thing.**

The review has heard from some managers who have gone against the trend. They have supported their staff by removing or relaxing some of the many rules that get in the way of their getting on with the job of keeping children safe. **This has resulted in their work being more focused on the child.** Professor Munro has been impressed with what she has seen when professionals are free to use their own judgement, and not bogged down by endless rules and paperwork. The review therefore suggests:

- i) **removing some rules and inspection requirements**, when these get in the way of

professionals getting on with the job of keeping children safe;

- ii) **changing inspection to make sure that it focuses on what really matters to children** [see 'A new inspection system' table below];
- iii) a new approach **helping professionals from different agencies and backgrounds to learn together** about keeping children safe; and
- iv) **improving the careers that social workers can have** so that they don't have to give up working directly with children and families in order to get promotion.

A new inspection system should:

- drive child-centred practice and improved outcomes for children
- look at children's experiences through the system
- focus on improving frontline practice and making staff better at using their professional judgment and providing help
- show how improvements in services might best be made, including pointing out where good practice exists
- look at how effective help to children and families has been, not just in cases of abuse or neglect, but also in providing early help to improve the children's wellbeing
- look at whether services provided match local need
- look at how local agencies work together to protect and help children
- look at how local authorities and the agencies they work with are learning, changing and improving

The Munro review is making suggestions here which, if accepted, would go a long way to **giving back social workers some ownership of their profession**. This would then allow social workers to do all the things they are trained to do, and most want to do, including more direct work with children.

The review wants current guidance changed (that is '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*', and '*The Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*') to speed the system up, make it more focused on the child, encourage assessments that look at the whole needs of the child, support local learning about best practice and **remove things that currently get in the way of professionals doing the right sort of things for the child**.

The review understands that giving greater control to professionals for deciding what to do in child protection cases can be a big step. However, the review believes this is needed if the system is to improve in ways the review would like to see.

But, relying more on professionals making their own judgements will mean the system will need to be better at noticing when things aren't right. This means better information about

what is happening for children, young people and their families. **Being able to see where things are going wrong, and doing something quickly to put them right, is what much of this review is all about.**

In order to keep children safe it is vital that all the different professionals (*like social workers, GPs, police, probation officers, teachers, health visitors and early years' staff*) work together well.

Links between poor mental health, domestic violence (*that is violence in the home*), addiction to drugs and alcohol, and child abuse and neglect are well-known. So too is the harm done to children who witness or get caught up in domestic violence. Whilst it is mainly social workers and healthcare staff who pick up on these types of concern, people working in early years and teachers see children on a daily basis. This means that they are well-placed to see the harm being done to children through emotional abuse (*like seeing someone in their family being treated badly*) and neglect, and the effect this is having on them.

Each new idea for improvement often makes an awful lot of sense at the time. However, when so many new ideas are introduced, one after the other, soon all that they do is make everyone's task more complicated than it needs to be. Also, **so many changes can have consequences that are not expected or wanted.**

When child protection is managed from the top the less personal and sensitive it becomes at meeting the very varied and complex needs of children and young people. In fact, many children and young people have pointed this out to the review, from their own experiences of the child protection system.

Guidance and procedures need to be easier to understand and follow. They also need to be very clear about what they are saying must be done to keep children safe, and not get this confused with suggestions for good practice.

Inspection must change in order to look at the contribution that is made by all local services to the protection of children (*for example health, police, education, youth service, probation, and the justice service*). **It should look at what is happening for the child, and question how their rights, wishes, feelings and experiences have informed and shaped the help and services they receive.** The review would like to see all inspections carried out unannounced without the service knowing when these are taking place.

Chapter Four: Clarifying accountabilities (or who does what?) and improving learning

- In saying what it expects of the system, **government should make clear who exactly is responsible for doing what, and who is accountable if it doesn't happen.** The review wants local authorities to keep Directors of Children's Services (*this is the person who is in charge of running children's services in the area*) and a Lead Member for Children (*this is a councillor responsible for children's services in the area*) as key people responsible for ensuring the delivery of quality services to some of the country's most vulnerable children. In the past, it has been too easy for people to pass on responsibility to others. It is all well and good having a system where everybody works together, but there comes a point where somebody has to take responsibility for ensuring that the right things are getting done.
- Professor Munro thinks that we need to change the way we do serious case reviews (*these are reviews that are usually carried out when a child has died or been badly hurt as a result of abuse or neglect*). This is because we do not learn enough from them at the moment, as they spend too much time looking at **what** went wrong and not **why** it went wrong. She also believes we need to learn from the whole child protection system, not just when things go wrong but also when things go well. To help make this happen we need to train people to work on serious case reviews.
- To support these changes, each Local Safeguarding Children Board should write a report each year for the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, the local Police and Crime Commissioner and to a Health and Well-Being Board (if brought in by new laws).

Chapter Five: Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help

Government should say that it wants to see help provided much earlier to children, with local authorities spelling out:

- i) **the help available** to children, young people and families;
- ii) **how they will identify children at risk**, or who are being harmed; and
- iii) **how they will make resources available** (like money, staff and time) to see that children, young people and families get the early help that they need.

Professor Munro is also calling for changes in national guidance to require:

- i) Local Safeguarding Children Board partners to **develop a common policy for making sure that families get the early help they need**, including those not needing child protection services; and
- ii) These arrangements for providing early help **take account of the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people**.

Chapter Six: Developing social work expertise

The review has identified some **key skills (or capabilities)** that social workers should have when working with vulnerable children and families. Although there are others these are the ones the review found were most important in child and family social work:

- 1. KNOWLEDGE:** this means learning from research and experts about:
 - child development and how they form relationships; and how social workers should use this knowledge to understand the stage the child is at;
 - how problems such as domestic violence, mental ill health, and substance misuse affects children's health and development; and
 - how child abuse and neglect affects children.

- 2. CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS:** which means:
 - being able to look thoroughly at evidence about a child and family's circumstances and to make good decisions, including when a child cannot remain living in their family; and
 - being able to look in a balanced and fair way at what is happening in a child's life and within their family, and seeing where things change over time.

- 3. INTERVENTION AND SKILLS:** which means:
 - being able to see and act on signs of child abuse and neglect;
 - being able to build good relationships with children, parents and carers and families;
 - being strong, but compassionate, when it comes to taking action to keep children safe;
 - being able to understand how different families work, taking account of the family's history when making decisions about a child's safety and welfare;
 - being able to understand thinking about social work and use this to help children;
 - being able to understand and use up-to-date ideas from research about what works with children and families and, in particular, where there are concerns about abuse or neglect;
 - being able to understand what they and others are responsible for, and how social workers can use their role to help other professionals; and
 - being able to explain their reasoning, including to children and judges.

Chapter Seven: The organisational context: supporting effective social work practice

- To help social workers do the best they can for children and families they have to work in an organisation that helps them to get on. This includes giving social workers the chance of moving into more senior jobs (*like a Principal Child and Family Social Worker*), but in a way that still means they can work with children and families. Normally if social workers want to get on they become managers which means they stop working with children and families. Professor Munro believes that the Principal Child and Family Social Worker would be an important role with responsibility for leading front line social work practice (see recommendation 14).
- It will take good managers to change the child protection system to one that better helps children and families. Managers will need to think carefully about who does what so that social workers can spend more time helping children and families.
- **The review wants the views of children, young people and parents to be used more to show how well services are working for them.** It also wants to see some agencies doing more to hang on to their staff. Many children and young people rightly complain about the high turnover of staff, like social workers. This means that they hardly get to know their social worker before they're off and the child has to form a relationship with one social worker after another.
- The review would like to see **a chief social worker** appointed to raise the profile of social work, and advise government on how well the child protection system is doing at keeping children safe.
- National forms and IT systems have made it harder for local authorities to do something different when the need to keep a child safe requires this. If their own local systems can make it better for agencies to work with each other, and develop services to help families that are having problems, then this would be a good thing.
- The review also wants **to improve the media's understanding** of child protection work so that they are better able to report cases in a way that recognises the difficulties involved.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The Munro report has tried to address a lot of concerns, such as:

- **How different influences on child protection sometimes aren't helpful to keeping children safe**
- **How we don't get help to children quickly enough**
- **How professionals spending time with children is a low priority**
- **How we get too focused on the system's needs**
- **How we respect that children have rights too and learn to listen to them**
- **How we give social workers back their profession**
- **How we get different professionals working towards the same aims**
- **How we support families in bringing up children**
- **How we make the system flexible enough to respond to the varied and different needs that children have**
- **How we manage risk without fear of constant public criticism, and**
- **How we get the system to learn and improve more quickly from its own mistakes**

The review has also looked at what in the system has worked in either helpful or harmful ways, and asked what obstacles sometimes get in the way of us doing the right thing.

A vital part of improving the system is to get it paying more attention to finding how well it is doing so that it can learn and change. The most important feedback is whether children have actually been helped by professional intervention in their lives.

Summary of recommendations

Chapter three: A system that values professional expertise

Recommendation 1: The Government should change the guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, and *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* to:

- make clear what are the essential rules for effective working together, and what is given purely as advice;
- say what the thinking is behind the guidance;
- getting the balance right between assessments and decisions that have to be taken by qualified social workers when a child needs to be kept safe;
- require local areas to give attention to:
 - how quickly they identify children's needs and get help to them;
 - how good assessments have to be for helping decide next steps to safeguard and promote children's welfare; and
 - whether the help provided has done what it was meant to do;
- make local areas responsible for making sure that practice is learning from research and

- new ideas; and
- allow local areas and professionals the freedom to create more of their own ways of doing things. In future, they will be under less pressure to have to do things the way that has been decided by government (*like with forms they have to use, targets they have to meet and IT systems they have to share*).

Recommendation 2: Inspection of child protection should look at what all local services do, and how well, to keep children safe (*including health, education, police, probation, and the justice system*).

Recommendation 3: Inspection of child protection should look at what actually happens for the child from the moment of needing help to receiving it. It should look at how children's rights, wishes, feelings and experiences are used to inform what help and services they are given, and whether what is provided to children, young people, and their families is helping to keep children safe.

Recommendation 4: Local authorities and agencies should use local and national information about how well they are doing to help them to see what they need to do differently. It is important that information is not just used to show what is good or bad performance, but helps services improve and be more accountable.

Chapter four: Clarifying accountabilities and improving learning

Recommendation 5: Instead of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) having to write an annual report for the Children's Trust Board, they should submit this instead to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, and, (*if the necessary legislation is passed*), to the local Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Recommendation 6: Guidance (*Working Together to Safeguard Children*) should be changed to say that when looking at arrangements to meet local needs, LSCBs should find out how effective the help being given to children and families has been (*including whether things like early help and early years services have made a difference and given value for money*). They should also look to see what training between different professionals and agencies has done to help them safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their area.

Recommendation 7: Local authorities should consider keeping the role of a Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services as a focus for meeting the needs of local children. The importance of them having specific responsibilities for children's services should not be undermined. Guidance should be issued to say that these roles are so important to the welfare of children that it would not be appropriate to give them responsibilities other than children's services, unless there are very exceptional reasons as to why they must do so.

Recommendation 8: Government should work with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of General Practitioners, local authorities and others to look into what might happen if, as planned, some GP services (and other medical practices) are no longer part of the National Health Service. They will need to make sure that these GPs are still able to provide effective help for children at risk of significant harm.

Recommendation 9: The Government should require LSCBs to use methods based upon

systems theory (see page 12) when doing serious case reviews. Over the coming year, work should be done with those working with children and young people to develop national resources to:

- provide skilled, independent people to work with LSCBs on each serious case review;
- develop tools for learning from practice;
- begin to develop an understanding of what causes problems leading to poor outcomes, so that there is learning across the country; and
- sharing what has been learnt to improve practice around the country and inform the work of the Chief Social Worker (see chapter 7).

Chapter 5: Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help

Recommendation 10: The Government should require local authorities and agencies that work with them to provide enough local early help services for children, young people and families. The arrangements for how they will do this should:

- set out the range of help available to local children, young people and families, through statutory, voluntary and community services;
- say how they will tell if children are at risk of significant harm (*including how social workers will be available to other professionals working with children, young people and families not being supported by children's social care services*). And, say what training is available to support local professionals working in frontline services (*that is with children, young people and families*);
- say how they will make enough local resources available for the early help services that many children, young people and families will need; and,
- identify the early help that is needed by a particular child and their family (*including an early offer of help even where their needs do not meet the criteria for receiving children's social care services*).

Chapter 6: Developing social work expertise

Recommendation 11: The training and supervision of social workers should be clear about the capabilities needed for social work with children, young people and families [see page 16].

Recommendation 12: Employers and higher education institutions (colleges and universities) should work together so that social work students are prepared for the challenges of child protection work. The review thinks that they should work together so that:

- placements are of the highest quality;
- employers can get special status that allows them to teach social work students;
- the idea of 'student units', which are headed up by a senior social worker, are considered; and
- employers and colleges/universities look at whether placements are of the highest quality, and how well their relationship is working.

Recommendation 13: Local authorities, and agencies that work with them, should start look at and change, if necessary, the ways in which child and family social work is delivered. They should rely on evidence of what works to support better ways of working with children and families.

Recommendation 14: Local authorities should have a named Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice. They should still be involved in frontline practice themselves, so that they can report the views and experiences of front line staff working with children, young people and families to all levels of management.

Recommendation 15: Government should appoint a Chief Social Worker to advise on social work practice (and report to the Secretary of State and Parliament each year on the working of the Children Act 1989).

So what happens now?

Government will consider very carefully what Professor Munro has told it about the child protection system in this country. It will bring together a group of people to help it put in place all of the changes that now need to be made. Some of these might need a change in the law, in which case Parliament will have to discuss these first and then vote on them.

As this work is taken forward, government will also be asking the Children's Rights Director and the Children's Commissioner to make sure that the views of children and young people are listened to.

This review started with saying that children and young people should be at the very heart of the system. For that to happen then **children and young people must also be at the very heart of deciding how the system works best for them.**

If you have any views on this Guide, then please tell the Minister at Tell Tim:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/telltim>