
SAFEGUARDING AND THE LAMING REVIEW

**Responsible Cabinet Member –
Councillor Chris McEwan, Children and Young People Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report outlines the key messages from the Lord Laming Review of ‘The Protection of Children in England’ and the national and local implications of its findings.

Summary

2. Following the case of ‘Baby P’ in November 2008, Lord Laming was asked by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, to report on ‘the progress being made across the country to implement effective arrangements for safeguarding children’.
3. Lord Laming considered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including young people and their families. The report considered progress made since his report in 2003 following the Victoria Climbié inquiry, which laid the foundation (via ‘Every Child Matters’) for Children’s Services and Children Trust developments. **Appendix A** contains the 58 recommendations from Lord Laming’s report.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Members :-
 - (a) Note the contents of the Laming Review as summarised within this report;
 - (b) Note the implications for Darlington’s child protection systems; and
 - (c) Refer the report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) Members have responsibilities for ensuring children’s safeguarding; and

(b) Government requires Local Authorities to prioritise safeguarding.

**Murray Rose,
Director of Children's Services**

Background Papers

Lord Laming Review of 'The Protection of Children in England'
Victoria Climbié inquiry
Every Child Matters

Jenni Cooke Ext 2861

S17 Crime and Disorder	The safeguarding agenda is linked to domestic violence and criminal activities related to children.
Health and Well Being	Failure to address child protection and safeguarding issues has implications on the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and adults.
Sustainability	Not related to this report.
Diversity	Safeguarding is an issue for all ethnic groups.
Wards Affected	All wards.
Groups Affected	Children, families, all agencies involved in safeguarding children & the wider community.
Budget and Policy Framework	There are possible budget implications to finance additional resources dependant upon local and national requirements.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The findings of the Laming Review relate to 3 themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy: Safer Darlington; Healthy Darlington; and Aspiring Darlington. Safeguarding is also a feature of the 'Narrowing the Gap' priority in Darlington.
Efficiency	There are possible efficiency implications linked to additional resource requirements.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Summary of Report Findings

6. Appendix A contains the 58 recommendations from Lord Laming's report – the majority are for central government to act upon and local services to implement. The Secretary of State made an initial response, but will provide a detailed response to Children's Services in late April 2009.
7. Lord Laming reinforced the current policy direction within Children's Services – stating the 10 year ECM programme of change has overwhelming support from practitioners and stakeholders. However he calls for a 'step change' in the arrangements to protect children from harm – focusing on leadership and support to frontline services. The report and recommendations (Appendix A) cover 7 main areas:-

(a) Leadership & Accountability (recommendations 1 – 9)

This section and its recommendations, reinforce the need for 'sustained' commitment from both the Council Leader and Lead Member for Children's Service's, in setting out the culture, value system and direction of the organisation, in supporting the importance of safeguarding, and promoting the welfare of children.

Mechanisms of holding services to account, via the Council processes and Children's Trust arrangements, is also examined, in particular the quality of 'front door' services of each agency.

There is recognition within the report, of the difficulties in combining services to create a single 'Children's Service' and therefore the need for Directors of Children's Services to ensure they have individual knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding agenda, and have within their senior management team a role with safeguarding experience. Capacity issues and support for frontline staff are also highlighted.

(b) Support for Children (recommendations 10 - 18)

This section examines the issues of frontline staff having less time to spend in direct contact with children and families, due to the increased requirements arising from new recording and data systems (including ICS – Integrated Children System, a national social care workflow and recording system).

(c) Interagency Working (recommendations 19 – 23)

This section highlights the inherent challenges when individual staff and agencies are working under pressure. The issues of information sharing; clear roles and responsibilities and clear referral processes are examined. A recommendation is the establishment of a National Safeguarding Delivery Unit to develop clear guidance on service thresholds; case load levels and assessment of risk.

(d) Children's Workforce (recommendations 24 – 36)

This section examines the need for extensive remodelling of the children's social care workforce to address recruitment, retention and morale issues. He argues that professionals across a range of children's services are often under appreciated and lack support – the impact of this has been a decline in entrants into these professions, and difficulty in retaining experienced staff.

(e) Improvement & Challenge (recommendations 37 – 49)

This section calls for a renewed focus on improvement in practice and a balance with the existing focus on process. Laming is critical of the current inspection process which looks at a 'snapshot' rather than a development process for improvement.

He recommends that Serious Case Review Panels should have an independent chair and an independent author for the final report. This is seen as essential to ensure improvement and challenge is built into the process.

(f) Organisation & Finance (recommendations 50 – 56)

This section considers the role of Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) in challenging standards of practice. He examines the relationship between the Children's Trust and LSCB in addition to membership of the two bodies.

The report examines funding for child protection services and expresses a concern that new preventative initiatives have detracted from funding child protection services.

(g) Legal (recommendations 57, 58)

This section examines the new court fees structure and the impact of this on practice. Laming also calls for increased awareness and understanding of legal processes.

Government Response to the Laming Recommendations

8. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools & Families gave an immediate response, but a more detailed action plan will be issued by the end of April.
9. The initial response includes:
 - (a) Sir Roger Singleton (Chair of the Independent Safeguarding Authority) has been appointed as the new Chief Advisor on the Safety of Children. He will report annually to parliament.
 - (b) A new Cross-Government National Safeguarding Unit will be established.
 - (c) Revision of 'Working Together' Guidance (key document for Child Protection Policy & Processes).
 - (d) Strengthen the role of LSCB and clarify relationship with Children's Trust.

- (e) Every LSCB to appoint two members of the public onto the Board.
- (f) Professional development and leadership training to develop the children's workforce.
- (g) Improve support to frontline workers.
- (h) Francis Plowden to review court fees in public law cases.

Reaction and Implications of the Report

10. The following areas highlight the reaction and implications to the Laming Review:

(a) Nationally

Lord Laming's report has been well received by Children's Services. The reports confirmation that integrated services and a focus on Every Child Matters' outcomes for children is the right context in which to deliver child protection services, has been received positively. Practitioners anxieties that the massive changes and improvements over the past 5 years would be swept away, have been unfounded. The recommendations have been acknowledged as realistic and supportive, emphasising the key issues of leadership, performance, accountability, frontline staff pressures and resources. However, the detail of the government response is still awaited.

(b) Darlington

Lord Laming's report highlights issues which are recognised by Child Protection and Safeguarding Services locally.

The key areas are:-

(i) LSCB independence and relationship to the Children's Trust and Council.

This has been examined and the reporting framework is currently being reviewed.

Annual reports and scrutiny are central, but only one mechanism – in addition detailed briefings (formal and informal) take place with the Lead Member for Children's Services.

Council has expressed support for an Independent Chair of LSCB. This has been costed and presented to the Board. A final decision will be made by the Board when the detailed government guidance is issued.

(ii) Social Work Capacity

The 3 months, November 2008 to January 2009 have seen an increase on the same period November 2007 to January 2008 of 55 (average) referrals per month. This increase comes primarily from police (proactive approach to domestic violence and anti-social behaviour); schools and extended family. Whilst this increase is welcomed as evidence of increased safeguarding awareness, it is creating a pressure on social work staff.

The increase in referrals, has lead to an increase in children with a child protection plan and this is (over the next few months) likely to translate into an increase in children looked after, as some plans do not result in reduced risk to children.

The capacity to respond safely and in a timely manner, is fundamental to a child protection service. A detailed paper will be produced on the capacity issue to ensure the service has sufficient ability to respond.

(c) Increased Admin and Bureaucracy

The position in Darlington mirrors the national picture. The introduction of ICS and additional recording tasks, has created additional pressure on social workers.

A review of admin requirements in social work will be guided by Government response in April.

(d) Quality Assurance

The Report calls for an increased focus on quality of practise within social work. The Team Manager role is central to this and currently a monitoring exercise is taking place, of supervision and regular QA systems to ensure compliance with policy. The role of the safeguarding manager (an 'arm's length' QA role) is currently part of a broader role. This is being reviewed and will be informed by Governments' response, as separate roles may be required to meet new requirements.

Outcome of Consultation

11. No consultation was required in the preparation of this report.
