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**THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ENGLAND ACTION PLAN**

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**SUMMARY REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides an update to the report presented to Cabinet on 28 April 2009 regarding the Laming Report, Government response and the implications for safeguarding in Darlington.

**Background**

2. In November 2008, following the legal case regarding the death of 'Baby Peter', Lord Laming was asked by the Secretary of State to report on 'progress across the country in implementing effective arrangements for safeguarding children'.
3. Lord Laming reported in March 2009, and made 58 recommendations. The Secretary of State made an immediate response, followed by the detailed Action Plan published on 11/5/09. This Action Plan does defer some revisions of policy until autumn 2009.
4. **Appendix 1** provides the summary of both the immediate response and the Action Plan.

**Summary**

5. The report considers the Government response to the Laming Report; the current position and proposed actions within Darlington.

**Recommendations**

6. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) The report be noted;
  - (b) The Members support regional work to address the Action Plan recommendations and improve the child protection system;
  - (c) Members support the prioritisation of child protection services.

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

## Background Papers

Lord Laming Review of ‘The Protection of Children in England’

The Government’s Response to Lord Laming Review of ‘The Protection of Children in England’

Jenni Cooke : Extension 2861

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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 and 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

#### *Implications for Darlington*

7. The Action Plan has a focus on systems and processes, particularly accountability and governance. Within Darlington the relationship between the Children's Trust and LSCB is clear, and the LSCB does not operate as a 'sub-group' of the Trust.
8. The Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Bill, gives the Trust statutory responsibility to strengthen arrangements.
9. Darlington LSCB Chair sits on the current Children's Trust Board and the Director of Children's Services is a member of the LSCB. This arrangement ensures close links and ensures the safeguarding agenda is part of the wider Children's Trust remit.
10. The Lead Member currently receives papers of the LSCB but will become a full member of the Board in line with the Action Plan.
11. The whole area of Board membership and Chairing responsibilities whilst included in the Action Plan will have more detail to its implementation in the revised 'Working Together' guidance (autumn 2009).
12. Locally, discussions are in place to develop reciprocal arrangements for Chairing the LSCB between authorities, to ensure independence from local agencies. A 'person specification' will be developed for 'lay members' of the Board, but a number of questions still remain about recruitment to the role.
13. Darlington LSCB produces an Annual Report which is widely distributed. The Board has a detailed work programme and a number of task-groups that progress the agreed actions.
14. The Policy and Performance Group of the LSCB has completed a revision of local procedures, based on the Government's last review of 'Working Together' 18 months ago. This work will be resumed in the autumn to ensure local procedures are in line with new guidance.
15. The children's social care workforce in Darlington will be fully staffed by 'permanent' social workers by June 2009. The Authority is currently involved in two of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) initiatives already in existence, regarding training and development, and has registered interest in working with the 'Newly Qualified Social Work' programme. There is concern that by June, approximately half of the children's social workers will have less than 2 years post qualifying experience. To reduce impact of this, the service is reviewing skill mix in teams and supporting additional training and development programmes.
16. The central issue of social work capacity has not been addressed by the Action Plan. The Social Work Taskforce will report an increased administrative workloads (ICS particularly) which if reduced will increase social worker time for direct work with families. However, there is no focussed resource, similar to the previous 'Quality Protects' programme (for looked after services) which ensures child protection services are fully resourced and prioritised within Local Authorities.

17. The on-going increase in referrals and consequent assessments and interventions, within DBC children's social care has created pressure within the system. To relieve this an additional social worker post has been created, funding will be met from other parts of the service. A review of the Safeguarding Unit (Independent Chairs of Child Protection Conference) will take place, to ensure the level of challenge and scrutiny is sufficient within the Unit's current structure.
18. In summary, Darlington has a sound child protection system, with good co-operation and information sharing between partner agencies. However, complacency is not an option and the service and LSCB, are reviewing capacity, systems and processes to ensure high quality services are maintained.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

19. Not applicable.

**Immediate Response – March 2009**

1. Sir Roger Singleton appointed as Chief Advisor on the Safety of Children. He will report annually to Parliament.
2. National Safeguarding Unit will be established.
3. Revision of ‘Working Together’ Guidance.
4. Local Safeguarding Children Boards to appoint two ‘lay members’.
5. Increased investment in professional development and leadership training for the children’s workforce.
6. Francis Plowden to review court fees in public law cases.

**Government Response – Action Plan: May 2009**

The Action Plan draws together the response to Laming recommendations and existing DCSF guidance (Working Together; Children’s Plan) and existing initiatives (Social Work Taskforce).

The Action Plan is summarised below:

**(a) National Leadership and Accountability**

- Revision of ‘Working Together’ guidance– autumn 2009
- Chief Advisor 1<sup>st</sup> report – April 2010.  
This will cover progress and remit of new National Safeguarding Delivery Unit. The Chief Advisor has an ‘Expert Group’ to undertake the work necessary.
- Establish a cross-Government National Safeguarding Delivery Unit (NSDU) - July 2009.  
This unit will link to regional Government offices.
- A Leadership programme for new Directors of Children’s Services – autumn 2009/2010, extending to longer serving Directors in 2010/11
- A review of the inspection framework to ensure they robustly address safeguarding.
- Consultation on new (additional) performance indicators for safeguarding – July 2009.

**(b) Local Leadership and Accountability**

- Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Bill, will strengthen Children’s Trust arrangements and give the Trust statutory responsibility to produce the Children and Young People’s Plan for the local area.
- LSCB’s will be responsible for challenging members of the Children’s Trust on their success in ensuring children and young people are kept safe.

- The LSCB and Children’s Trust must be chaired by different people, to ensure the ‘challenge role’ is effective.
- ‘Presumption’ that LSCB is chaired by someone independent of local agencies. No timescale is given to this action and further consultation will take place.
- Revision to the role of Director of Children’s Services and Lead Members – June 2009.

### **(c) Supporting Front-line Services**

- Clear emphasis on early intervention and reinforcement of current strategies and initiatives ie: ‘Think Family’; SureStart Children’s Centres.
- Information sharing and assessment frameworks – Continued support for the implementation of ContactPoint; updated guidance on CAF (Common Assessment Framework) to be produced during the summer 2009.
- Child protection to be a priority in the new strategic framework for delivery of protective services currently being developed by the Association of Police Officers. The Home Office to ensure delivery of specialist training.
- New targets within the Health Service to clarify accountabilities
- Dr Sheila Shribman to lead NHS response to Laming recommendations.
- ***Social Work Reform*** – The Social Work Taskforce will report fully in October 2009.
- ***Integrated Children’s System*** – This is part of Social Work Taskforce remit, but Government has agreed an immediate relaxation of timescales and use of centrally prescribed forms, to reduce administrative burden on front-line staff.
- ***Social Work Transformation Fund*** – An additional £57m to increase the capacity of the system to train and support social workers.

Graduate Recruitment Scheme in place and by 2011 a Master’s scheme available nationally

Newly qualified social work ‘pilots’ will be rolled out in September 2009.

New recruitment campaign targeted at ‘returning qualified social workers’.

### **(d) Reducing delay in care proceeding**

Targets and PI’s to be in place by 2010/11 to reduce delay.