



Department  
for Education

# **The Government's response to Lord Carlile's report on the Edlington case**

**March 2013**

## Foreword by Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education



I welcome the thorough, candid approach which Lord Carlile has taken to the review of the ‘J’ children case in Edlington. The Edlington case involved a horrific assault on innocent young victims by two children who had themselves suffered chronic neglect. It caused a public outcry and prompted demands to learn the truth about what happened and why. Sadly, the Serious Case Review which followed was highly unsatisfactory. It did not provide answers to the questions at the heart of the case – namely, why no-one acted sooner to address the damage being caused by the offending children’s faulty upbringing. I therefore asked Lord Carlile CBE QC to look at the case afresh and to provide a clearer analysis of the problems underlying the case.

Lord Carlile’s report is particularly timely given the recent work of the Education Select Committee. On 7 November 2012 the Committee published a penetrating and far reaching report on the state of child protection in this country. Lord Carlile has highlighted a number of the concerns which were raised by the Committee. In essence, both reports tell us that we must get better at responding to the needs of children who are suffering neglect. We also need to be convinced that local areas are setting the right thresholds for intervention, including for decisions over when children should be taken into care or adopted. Lord Carlile has issued a series of challenges to central Government which I welcome. He has also made recommendations for improvements locally in Doncaster.

Unfortunately, since the Edlington case in 2009, there has been insufficient progress in Doncaster to improve services for children. In order to speed up progress, the Government has decided to appoint Professor Julian Le Grand to consider the most appropriate structure and governance arrangements for delivering those improvements. Professor Le Grand will be supported in this investigation by Alan Wood, Director of Children’s Services for the London Borough of Hackney.

There are no easy answers which would allow us to prevent such dreadful cases from happening again, but we all have a responsibility to try to make the system work better. We are starting to implement some of Lord Carlile’s recommendations through the revised statutory guidance which was published on 21 March 2013. I have also asked officials to take forward specific pieces of work on neglect and the application of thresholds for intervening in the lives of vulnerable children. Officials will work with interested organisations including the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, the Medical and Nursing Royal Colleges, the police and voluntary sector bodies to make progress on these important issues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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# 1. Introduction

In March 2012 the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, asked Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE QC to conduct an independent review of the case of the 'J' children in Edlington. The 'J' children had committed a very serious assault on two young victims in April 2009, having assaulted another young victim the previous weekend. This was an appalling case which caused public outrage at the time, not only because of the suffering of the victims, but also because of failures by local services to manage the needs of the young perpetrators who had suffered a history of chronic neglect.

Doncaster Local Safeguarding Children Board commissioned a Serious Case Review (SCR) on the case and published the executive summary of the SCR in January 2010, in line with the statutory guidance which was in force at that time. The public outcry about the case led to pressure for the full SCR to be published but this was not done. In order to bring greater transparency into the SCR process the Coalition Government announced in June 2010 that it would be making arrangements for the overview report to be published, and also that it was amending statutory guidance so that the overview reports of all future SCRs would be published in full.

On 29 March 2012, when the SCR overview report of the Edlington case was published, the Secretary of State said:

***The redacted overview report published today does not meet my expectations. It is an example of how the current model of SCRs is failing. It documents everything that happened but with insufficient analysis of why and what could have been done differently. In the future we want SCRs to focus on why professionals acted the way they did, and what was getting in the way of them taking the right action at the right time.***

***Today's SCR report puts a good deal more information into the public domain on the 'J' children case and it is right to publish it. However, I am not satisfied with the position we have reached. In particular, I want to be confident that all the necessary lessons and improvements have been identified. I have therefore asked Lord Carlile CBE QC to carry out a further independent review of the issues and the action taken and improvements made. In order to ensure that this builds on the progress already made under Doncaster's new leadership, we will be linking this with the wider review of progress already planned for this summer, as part of the Department's formal, statutory intervention.***

The purpose of Lord Carlile's further review was to look not only at the issues raised by the case and the action taken in response locally, but also to consider where there may be a need for improvements more widely in the child protection system.

The final report of Lord Carlile's review was published on 16 November 2012.<sup>1</sup> The report pointed to some areas where Doncaster had made progress, for example in strengthening leadership and partnership working locally. However it highlighted continuing weaknesses in the arrangements for protecting children in Doncaster, which had also been uncovered during an unannounced Ofsted inspection, the report of which was published on the same day.<sup>2</sup> In the course of his review Lord Carlile also explored issues of wider relevance for local authorities and for national policy.

On the day of publication of Lord Carlile's report, the Secretary of State spoke about the failure of the current child protection system and the need for a fresh start. The Secretary of State said:

***I asked Lord Carlile to look at the situation in Doncaster because there were problems specific to the town which required expert external analysis. But in asking him to take on this work I was keen not just that we should learn lessons specific to Doncaster - but also that he should make recommendations about wider changes we needed to make to improve child protection. Reading his report, I have found his overall argument compelling. There are a series of specific recommendations, many of which I am instinctively drawn to and all of which deserve careful consideration. The Government will respond formally to all the recommendations in due course.***

This document is the formal response to Lord Carlile's report. It is intended to prompt further debate and discussion of the challenges he sets for local authorities and central Government.

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<sup>1</sup> Download [The Edlington Case: A Review by Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE QC](#)

<sup>2</sup> Download [Ofsted's unannounced inspection report on Doncaster](#)

## 2. Direct action to improve children's services in Doncaster

The problems within children's services at Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council identified by Lord Carlile are severe and longstanding. In 2009 the Council was directed to appoint an Improvement Board to advise, scrutinise and challenge the Council in their improvement work and to secure a new leadership team for their children's services.

The problems with child protection are, to an extent, symptomatic of wider failures of corporate governance within Doncaster Council. In 2010, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government appointed three commissioners to ensure that the Council took the measures required to improve corporate governance. Despite these measures, Ofsted found child protection arrangements to be inadequate.<sup>3</sup>

Given the repeated failures to address the shortcomings in children's services and child protection, more radical action is now required. Sustaining improvements in such complex systems requires stability and, above all, consistent, inspirational leadership. The recent history of Doncaster Council suggests these conditions will not be met. Professor Julian Le Grand has therefore been asked to undertake an investigation into the service structures and governance arrangements that could best support the required improvements. He will be supported in this by Alan Wood, Director of Children's Services at Hackney. Specifically, they will review whether an independent organisation, delivering children's social care services outside of Council control, would provide the greatest likelihood of securing improvement. In doing so, they will consult with relevant partner organisations in Doncaster. The Secretary of State will consider whether further action is appropriate following their report.

While this review is underway, the Council will be expected to make immediate improvements to child protection and children's social care. To this end, they will be required to appoint a delivery partner with the capacity and capability required to address the inadequacies in child protection arrangements found by both Lord Carlile and Ofsted.

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<sup>3</sup> Download [Ofsted's unannounced inspection report on Doncaster](#)

### 3. Overview of Lord Carlile's recommendations

Lord Carlile made 20 recommendations in his report. Five of these are aimed at addressing continuing weaknesses in the arrangements for safeguarding children in Doncaster. Until any further action following Professor Le Grand and Alan Wood's review can be implemented, the Department for Education will continue to work closely with Doncaster Council to ensure that each of these recommendations is being addressed. The remaining 15 recommendations highlight a range of issues which have wider relevance for local authorities and for national policy. These issues include:

- deficiencies in the quality and impact of Serious Case Reviews conducted under the current process;
- the need to take a fresh look at how, and at what point, decisions are made to intervene in the life of a child who is at risk;
- arrangements for supporting troubled families;
- action on school exclusions; and
- the role of health services in safeguarding children.

None of these issues lends itself to quick fixes. The Government is, however, convinced by the arguments put forward by Lord Carlile that each of these issues needs to be addressed if we are to provide the best possible child protection system in future.

The Government is therefore committed to exploring each of Lord Carlile's recommendations further. We are considering whether the suggestions he has put forward can be implemented in the way he describes or, if this is not practicable, what other approaches can be taken to address the problems he has identified. In doing so we are also reflecting on the recent thorough report on child protection by the Education Select Committee, which touches on many of the same concerns about our failure to respond adequately and promptly to the needs of children who are at risk of abuse or neglect.<sup>4</sup>

This document describes the Government's latest thinking on each of Lord Carlile's recommendations. This is only the beginning of the wider debate which is needed on these important issues.

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<sup>4</sup> Download the Education Select Committee's report ['Children first: the child protection system in England'](#)

## 4. Government response to Lord Carlile's recommendations

**Recommendation 1: I recommend that compliance with the Troubled Families Programme should be the subject of an annual report in Doncaster and elsewhere, with a simple scoring system devised so that comparison can be made of the performance of the local authorities included.**

The Troubled Families Programme was launched by the Prime Minister in 2011 and is led by Louise Casey CB. Troubled families are those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector. The Government wants to ensure the children in these families have the chance of a better life, and at the same time bring down the cost to the taxpayer.

As part of the Troubled Families Programme the Government is working alongside local authorities to:

- get children back into school;
- reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour;
- put adults on a path back to work; and
- reduce the high costs these families place on the public sector each year.

The Government will encourage local authorities to work with families in ways the evidence shows is more effective, such as:

- joining up local services;
- dealing with each family's problems as a whole rather than only responding to each problem, or person, separately;
- appointing a dedicated worker to get to grips with the family's problems and work intensively with them to change their lives for the better for the long term; and
- using a mix of methods that support families and challenge poor behaviour.

The Government agrees with Lord Carlile that it is important to monitor local authority progress in delivering the Troubled Families Programme. That is why we have set up



various systems to gather information on progress in each area towards the national ambition of turning around 120,000 families by 2015. This includes monitoring progress in identifying and working with families in each local authority and monitoring claims under the payment by results scheme. We are also commissioning an external evaluation to understand the impact of the programme and how it is working. As this progresses we will look at whether further action is needed to monitor local authorities' compliance with the programme and the scope to consider this within existing inspection frameworks.

**Recommendation 2: I recommend that Doncaster and all local authority Children's Services should continue to develop the best possible triage arrangements. This will include fast and profoundly co-operative inter-disciplinary co-working, excellent written and electronic document trails, and a demonstrable ability to respond to urgent situations efficiently.**

The Government agrees that any concern about a child should be acted on early so that they get the right help at the right time to prevent a problem escalating. We know that preventative services can do more to reduce the impact of abuse and neglect than reactive services. For a preventative approach to succeed, all professionals who work with children and their families have a role to play in sharing information and working together to deliver coordinated advice and support to children and families. The statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) (Working Together)*, which comes into effect from 15 April 2013, makes clear the responsibilities of professionals and organisations for acting quickly to provide early help to children who need it.<sup>5</sup>

The effectiveness of early help arrangements is now firmly within the scope of Ofsted inspections of local authority child protection arrangements. A key part of the inspection framework looks at how effectively services identify children and young people who may be at risk and how they work together to offer help early without the need for a formal referral to social care.

It is for local authorities to determine how inter-agency cooperation will work at a local level. The Government welcomes the development of innovative triage arrangements, including the development of co-located multi-agency teams, led by social workers, to respond to referrals and decide what action is needed to promote the welfare of the child and keep them safe.

The timeliness of assessments is a critical factor. Within one working day of a referral being received, a local authority registered social worker should make a decision about

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<sup>5</sup> Download [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2013\)](#)

the type of response that is required. The local authority, the police and NSPCC have statutory powers to intervene if a child requires immediate protection. The revised *Working Together* sets out what action should be taken in such circumstances and it is the responsibility of all professionals to be clear on what action they may need to take.

*Working Together* also makes clear that at a local level all organisations, supported by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), should establish a culture that supports information sharing between and within organisations. This should include mechanisms for identifying and resolving potential issues and opportunities for reflective practice.

**Recommendation 3: I recommend that the links between children's services generally and CAMHS should be developed to achieve the potential effectiveness of full assessments of Conduct Disorder and available treatment.**

The Government agrees that it is essential for services to link together to provide high quality care to drive improvements in outcomes for children and young people's mental health.

The main way in which we can achieve a better join up between children's social care services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is through the focus on local commissioning of services and assessment of need which is at the heart of the current health reforms. The new local health and wellbeing boards will bring together all the key partners with an interest, including children's social care and CAMHS, to develop local health and wellbeing strategies. These strategies will provide important linkages between services so that there is an integrated approach to health and social care services for children and young people.

To support this, the Government is investing £54 million over the current Spending Review period on the Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (CYP IAPT) programme. This programme aims to transform the services offered through CAMHS through improving the skills of the workforce and embedding the best evidence-based therapies and practice which have been approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). The programme provides training in cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety and depression; and in delivering parenting programmes for 3-10 year olds with conduct disorder. The programme is being extended to include Systemic Family Therapy and Interpersonal Psychotherapy.

We will also be undertaking a review into schools, behaviour and the relationship between schools and their local mental health services to ensure children get the right support, from the right people, at the right time, in order to meet their needs.

**Recommendation 4: I recommend that Ministers and local authorities consider steps to ensure that the knowledge held by housing providers becomes a standard part of developing intelligent systems for dealing with casework and is recognised by other agencies as an important source of early warning information about families facing problems.**

Housing officers are often on the frontline in communities and are well placed to spot emerging problems and bring them to the attention of children's social workers and others. Housing and homelessness services in local authorities are subject to section 11 of the Children Act 2004 which places a duty on them to carry out their services with regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. In addition, under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004, authorities must take account of the impact of health and safety hazards in housing on vulnerable occupants, including children, when deciding on the action to be taken by landlords to improve conditions.

The revised statutory guidance *Working Together* sets out the responsibilities of housing authorities and their important role in safeguarding children and vulnerable young people. Involving housing providers in assessments of children in need should be happening already. It is certainly best practice for housing providers to be part of the investigative stage of a child in need assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. A good quality assessment, as described in *Working Together*, will look at the housing needs of children and families as part of a wider picture of examining the impact and influence of wider family, community and environmental circumstances on the needs and any risk faced by the child.

From April 2013 we will be requiring local authorities to collect information on the source of a referral to children's social care including whether the referral is from housing. Publishing this information nationally for all local authorities will enable individual local authorities to understand better the levels of referrals from different agencies. This will enable them to benchmark with other local authorities and understand who is referring or not referring and what action is taken as a result. This should help commissioning and better knowledge of different agencies' responses to children and families in need of children's social care support or protection.

**Recommendation 5: I recommend that a radical look be taken at the way interventions are assessed and dealt with. For example, for cases where there have been 3 police reports of criminal behaviour (or comparable trigger events) on the part of a child in a given period, consideration should be given to placing the burden on the parents and the child's legal representatives in any ensuing Court proceedings to show that the child's welfare and best interests are served by leaving him/her in the family home.**

The Government believes that the child protection system is often too slow to act when children are at risk of significant harm in the home. Too many children are allowed to stay too long with parents whose behaviour is unacceptable. Parents should be offered effective help to support them in resolving their difficulties which may be impacting on their child's development. Where there is clear evidence that parenting capacity cannot be turned around, and the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a local authority must act immediately to make the child safe. We want social workers to be more assertive with abusive and neglectful parents, setting clear measurable outcomes for the child and expectations for the parents; courts to be realistic about the parents' inability to care for the child; and the care system to be able to deal with the consequences with high quality care.

Care orders made on the free standing grounds of a child committing an offence were introduced in the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 and repealed by the Children Act 1989. The Review of Child Care Law which preceded the 1989 Act considered that the operation of this provision had proved arbitrary and had drawn too many children into compulsory care.

While antisocial and/or criminal behaviour may be a consequence of abuse and neglect, it may not always be due solely to the parents' failure to care for the child. Effective social work practice in the early identification of abuse and neglect should lead to swift action to assess the level of need and risks faced by the child and provide the right help to improve their outcomes, which may include action to remove the child where improvements cannot be made. Social workers should be aware of the evidence about the benefits of care so that it is not solely used as a last resort but considered as part of a range of positive options where there are significant concerns about a child's welfare.

The Government will be undertaking a review into the application of thresholds so we are clear on what action must be taken when children's circumstances warrant statutory intervention, including taking them into care.

**Recommendation 6: I recommend that all agencies involved in child safeguarding in Doncaster be required to demonstrate compliance with at least the standards described in the Learned Lessons Review of January 2012; and to respond effectively to the Ofsted report on its inspection of October 2012.**

The Government gives its full backing to Lord Carlile's recommendations to improve children's services in Doncaster. As part of their review, Professor Le Grand and Alan Wood will assess progress towards addressing the issues identified in Ofsted's inspection report and the Learned Lessons Review.<sup>6</sup> They will include this in their report to the Secretary of State.

**Recommendation 7: I recommend the production of SCRs in two forms, open and closed: the open version would be a fully informative document, without redactions.**

Ensuring that Serious Case Review (SCR) reports are published is one important element of the Government's approach to reforming the child protection system. It is only by putting the findings from these reviews into the public domain that it will be possible to improve transparency, increase public confidence in the child protection system and ensure that the context in which events occurred is properly understood so relevant lessons are learned and applied as widely as possible.

Lord Carlile's recommendation reflects the current concern that Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) sometimes struggle to publish SCR reports. This is generally because the reports contain confidential information about the child and family members that may be picked up by local media. The Government recognises that SCR report publication is a sensitive matter, particularly when, despite the requirement in existing statutory guidance to publish reports, the report has not been written from the outset with publication in mind. However, when considering publication the LSCB must balance the welfare of the children concerned against the substantial public interest in sharing findings so that lessons can be learnt from the case to improve the child protection system for the future.

Lord Carlile has made a strong case but we need to be careful not to revert to the previous, unsatisfactory, arrangement whereby only an executive summary of an SCR was published. The development of new options for the content of published reports would be welcome. The revised guidance *Working Together* allows LSCBs flexibility to take new, creative approaches to SCRs which should result in reports which are more

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<sup>6</sup> Download [Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board's Learned Lessons Review](#)

suitable for publication.

The Government has decided to make expert advice available to LSCBs to support them in making decisions about SCRs. We are establishing a new national panel of independent experts to provide impartial expert advice to LSCBs about application of the criteria for SCRs, the appointment of reviewers and also on the issue of SCR report publication. The panel will also report to the Government on how the SCR system is working and they may make recommendations for further improvements. The revised statutory guidance *Working Together* makes reference to the work of the panel and the advice and challenge it will provide to LSCBs.

We are also conscious that the individuals who write SCR reports need a good understanding of how to write documents which are suitable for publication. The Government has decided to invest in the skills of SCR report writers to make this a reality. A contract has been awarded to a consortium of the NSPCC, Action for Children and Sequeli Ltd to develop and deliver a support programme for SCR authors in 2013. This programme will train up to 50 reviewers in the skills needed to conduct SCRs and write reports which meet the requirements of the new statutory guidance. The programme will complement the work already supported by the Government to train individuals in the Social Care Institute for Excellence's 'Learning Together' model, which is one of the systems methodology approaches available for use in child protection case reviews.

**Recommendation 8: I recommend that a designated family judge should be asked to participate as an adviser in every SCR.**

We see the merit in Lord Carlile's recommendation that SCRs could benefit from the skills which judges bring, including impartiality, analytical skills and an understanding of relevant court processes.

Lord Carlile's recommendation is consistent with recommendations made in the final report of the Family Justice Review which sought to establish a system of case reviews of process to help establish reflective practice in the family justice system.<sup>7</sup> We are working closely with the Judiciary on the implementation of the Family Justice Review and we will consider Lord Carlile's recommendation further in that context.

Of course, the Judiciary is independent of Government and so the roles and responsibilities of members of the Judiciary are matters for consideration by the Lord Chief Justice and the President of the Family Division. The Government is working with

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<sup>7</sup> [Family Justice Review final report](#)

the Judicial Office on how and whether this recommendation can be implemented in full or in part.

The new national panel of independent experts (see recommendation 7 on page 13) will provide us with an additional opportunity to invite individuals with suitable skills and experience to provide scrutiny of SCRs.

Another way in which the Government is promoting good quality SCRs is by supporting financially the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs to strengthen the work of LSCBs nationally. One of the areas the Association is focusing on is providing peer advice, support and challenge to improve the quality and publication of SCR reports.

**Recommendation 9: I recommend that under the guidance of the relevant Minister there should be established a Digest of open versions of SCRs. This is likely to lead to improved and recognised formats for such reports, a reduction in their length, and a significantly increased capacity for lessons from one SCR to be learned and applied by the material statutory services in other locations.**

Lord Carlile rightly observed that the findings from SCRs are an important source of knowledge for practitioners. SCR reports must be shared so that organisations can learn and adapt their practice, and so reduce the likelihood of similar cases happening again. Until now the Department for Education and Ofsted have taken responsibility for sharing lessons from SCRs nationally. The Department for Education has done this by commissioning a biennial research programme which has provided an analysis of themes and case characteristics in SCRs. The most recent report of this research was published in July 2012.<sup>8</sup>

We know that this research has been well received. Many of the responses to the consultation on new statutory guidance on SCRs made specific reference to the value of the biennial research. However the Department has not yet commissioned a further round of the research. This is because we want to reflect on whether it provides the best approach to enable organisations to learn from SCRs and we want to explore wider options for supporting the learning process at a national and local level. We have tendered for a two stage study which will look firstly at the barriers getting in the way of organisations learning from SCRs, and secondly at ways of breaking down those barriers. The study will report later this year and will directly inform future policy on national learning from SCRs.

We do, however, recognise that we cannot wait until this study reports before taking

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<sup>8</sup> Download [SCR biennial research 2009-11](#)

action to make SCR findings more easily accessible to practitioners and the general public. This is another area where we expect the new national panel of independent experts on SCRs to make an important contribution, by reflecting and advising on the lessons emerging from SCRs.

We are discussing with the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs the possibility of creating a central repository of SCR reports which will be available online. We will also consider further with the Association and other relevant bodies such as the Children's Improvement Board how best to ensure that the findings from these reports are shared to best effect.

**Recommendation 10: I recommend that steps be taken urgently to ensure that Doncaster Councillors are given far more opportunity to understand and scrutinise those services. This will involve training. There should be regular and detailed briefing sessions to the full Council, with papers in advance. Social workers and senior staff should be encouraged to discuss the service with Councillors where it would assist Members to be briefed in that way. In summary, every Councillor should be given the opportunity to develop a questioning and critical faculty about the services.**

**Recommendation 11: I recommend that the Doncaster Scrutiny Panel should receive enhanced training, so that it can provide Council colleagues with better informed views and a more rigorous critical faculty.**

Professor Le Grand's report will consider the role of politicians in driving improvement in Doncaster.

**Recommendation 12: I recommend that there should be consensus nationally about the most appropriate form of threshold guidance. It should then be adopted nationally for all councils and children.**

The Government agrees that there is variability in the application of thresholds at all levels. As set out in the Secretary of State for Education's speech of 16 November 2012,



this can result in interventions taking place too late, or not at all, with the needs of adults being prioritised over the needs of children. What cannot be allowed to happen is that children are left for too long without any help or with inappropriate support which leave them in vulnerable situations. Children have to be able to get the help they need at the right time to improve their life chances.

Inconsistency in the application of thresholds also causes confusion for professionals working in universal services including teachers, health visitors, midwives, GPs and the police about what to refer when. It is important that there are clear criteria for when and how professionals should take action which is applied consistently so that services are commissioned effectively and the right help gets to the child at the right time.

LSCBs are responsible for developing, with the local authority and partners, safeguarding policies and procedures including thresholds for intervention. In the revised statutory guidance *Working Together* the Government clarified these responsibilities and emphasised the importance of intervening early.

The Education Select Committee's report '*Children first: the child protection system in England*', published on 17 November 2012, also called for further research into the way in which thresholds operate.<sup>9</sup> Given the importance of the issues raised both by the Committee's report and by Lord Carlile, the Government is reviewing the application of thresholds.

**Recommendation 13: I recommend that, nationally, there be a continuous learning programme on the subject of sharing information in the interests of child safeguarding: this could be achieved by e-learning.**

Time and again, poor information sharing between practitioners has been highlighted in SCRs. The revised statutory guidance *Working Together* makes clear that misplaced fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Effective information sharing between agencies and among practitioners is critical to providing early help when problems are emerging and is essential for effective child protection. Partners and agencies often assume that the law prevents the sharing of data relating to individuals. While the Data Protection Act 1998 contains legal requirements about processing personal data, it is crucial that partners and agencies understand how the Act applies and do not simply assume that it prohibits all information sharing, as this is not the case.

*Working Together* states that all organisations should have arrangements in place which

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<sup>9</sup> Download the Education Select Committee's report '[Children first: the child protection system in England](#)'

set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information between and within organisations, with other professionals and with the LSCB. No professional should assume that someone else will pass on information which they think may be critical to keeping a child safe. In addition, the LSCB should play a strong role in developing mechanisms for supporting information sharing between and within organisations and addressing any barriers. This should include monitoring how well relevant guidance is understood and how far it supports information sharing; that multi-agency training covers information sharing; and that a culture of information sharing is developed. It is for local areas to decide how they develop their information sharing mechanisms and how they train their workforce on appropriate information sharing arrangements. The presumption should be that information is shared wherever possible in the interests of safeguarding children.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that training on information sharing takes place on a regular basis for all organisations which safeguard children. We urge LSCBs to consider what more can be done in this area.

**Recommendation 14: I recommend the continued adoption of Charlie Taylor's recommendations to the Secretary of State on school exclusions.**

The Government is already implementing Charlie Taylor's recommendations and welcomes Lord Carlile's endorsement of them.<sup>10</sup> Charlie Taylor's recommendation that schools take on responsibility for arranging alternative provision for excluded pupils is currently being tested over three years in a national trial involving around 200 secondary schools across 11 volunteer local authorities. The trial is being independently evaluated and the findings will inform the development of policy, and whether the Government should legislate.

**Recommendation 15: I recommend that teachers should be familiarised with the current threshold guidance; and that continuing professional development courses for teachers should be required to include a refresher component on safeguarding at least once in every three years.**

A strong understanding of issues related to keeping children safe is important for all teachers. It is therefore reflected in the new Teachers' Standards which inform the content of training for new teachers and provide the basis for on-going appraisal of

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<sup>10</sup> Download [Improving alternative provision](#), Charlie Taylor March 2012.

teachers' practice and performance.<sup>11</sup> The Government believes that head teachers are best placed to make decisions about the professional development needs of teachers in their schools and we would expect that appropriate training in safeguarding issues should be provided by schools and refreshed at appropriate intervals.

It is important that all teachers understand the process for referral into children's social care and are able to talk to a social worker about any concerns they may have about an individual child. Schools should be part of multi-agency arrangements to ensure that the response to cases is consistent and effective.

The LSCB should agree with the local authority and partners the levels for the different types of assessment and services. *Working Together* states that 'the LSCB should publish a threshold document that includes:

- the process for the early help assessment and the type and level of early help services to be provided; and
- the criteria, including the level of need, for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care for assessment and for statutory services under: section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need); section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (reasonable cause to suspect children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm); section 31 (care orders); and section 20 (duty to accommodate a child) of the Children Act 1989.'

The LSCB has the role of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of training, including multi-agency training, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Research has shown that multi-agency training in particular is useful and valued by professionals in developing a shared understanding of children protection and decision making.<sup>12</sup> As schools will be represented on the LSCB this allows for schools to work with the LSCB on training needs.

We will be consulting imminently on statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. We will review this recommendation when the outcomes from the consultation are known.

**Recommendation 16: I recommend that annual medical examinations at school be introduced for every child up to and including year 11.**

The *Healthy Child Programme* for children aged 5-19 already recommends that every

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<sup>11</sup> Visit the DfE website for information on [Teachers' Standards](#)

<sup>12</sup> Carpenter et al (2009). *The Organisation, Outcomes and Costs of Inter-agency Training to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*.

child at entry to primary school has a health assessment. This programme recommends that all health services should be:

- checking that a child's immunisation status is up to date and that appropriate screening takes place;
- sharing information between health services and the school and reviewing access to primary care and dental records;
- measuring and interpreting height and weight through the *National Child Measurement Programme* and responding to any concerns from the children and their parents; and
- recognising and ensuring appropriate interventions for any physical, emotional or developmental problems and importantly following local safeguarding practices.

The evidence in favour of further health checks or assessments is not sufficiently developed for the Government to be able to recommend at this stage that medical examinations should take place for every child, every year. We must also consider the cost and impact on health services staff to deliver a programme of this magnitude at a time when we are asking the NHS to make £20 billion of efficiency savings.

**Recommendation 17: I recommend that further attention be given to developing a good national standard for school nurse provision.**

The Government has been working in partnership with school nurses, professional bodies and young people to develop a new vision and model for school nursing covering many elements of health and wellbeing for children aged 5-19.<sup>13</sup>

The report and call to action from this programme, *Getting it right for children, young people and families* was published in March 2012.<sup>14</sup> The model will help local areas to shape their school nursing services. We have continued to work with partners to develop a number of products to support implementation of the new model.

The Government will investigate how a 'national standard' might be achieved and will work with local authorities and others to develop this.

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<sup>13</sup> Visit the Department of Health website for information about the [vision and model for school nursing](#)

<sup>14</sup> Download [Getting it right for children, young people and families](#)

**Recommendation 18: I recommend that Doncaster and every other local authority should be able to demonstrate that it is fully aware of and has complied with the April 2012 Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Directors of Children’s Services and Lead Members for Children’s Services.**

The *Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Directors of Children’s Services and Lead Members for Children’s Services* is statutory and all local authorities must have regard to it.<sup>15</sup> They may depart from it only if they can demonstrate a good reason for doing so. Ofsted conducts inspections of local authorities’ arrangements for child protection and, where these are shown to be inadequate, will consider whether a lack of compliance with statutory guidance and best practice is a contributory factor.

**Recommendation 19: I recommend that consideration be given to the creation and provision of a concise national Parenting Guide.**

In 2012, the Government launched the NHS Information Service for Parents – a new digital service that sends both mums and dads regular free emails, videos and text messages with advice and information from a trusted source about pregnancy and the early months with a baby. The service includes advice and information covering all aspects of pregnancy and early baby care and includes information on subjects such as how a baby develops, healthy lifestyle advice, breastfeeding, immunisations and bonding. It also points parents towards other sources of information, such as parent and relationship support, benefits advice, and how to find childcare. By April 2013 the service will be expanded to cover content for children up to eighteen months of age.

The CANparent Trial running from April 2012 – March 2014 is seeking to stimulate the market for universal parenting classes so that, in time, potentially any parent could access support with their parenting if they wished. In Camden, Middlesbrough and High Peak vouchers are available to parents of 0-5s giving them access to free classes. In Bristol some marketing support is provided and other funding models, including payment by parents, are being explored. The Department for Education has also recently tendered to contract for a new service for the parents of teenagers and for further support to develop the parenting classes market.

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<sup>15</sup> Download the [Statutory Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Directors of Children’s Services and Lead Members for Children’s Services](#)

**Recommendation 20: I recommend that the following improvements should be made a high priority in Doncaster:**

**The career structure of social workers in Doncaster should encourage workforce stability. This could be achieved in part by motivating the best staff to stay by an encouraging regime of grading and salary promotion.**

**Promotion should not mean the automatic reduction in casework responsibilities. It should be possible to reach a senior grade of management whilst still dealing entirely or mainly with casework.**

**The existing mentoring arrangements should be improved so that every social worker has a partner with whom there should be freedom of discussion about cases and other aspects of work.**

**Every Children's Services manager, without exception and up to Director level, should hold some direct casework responsibilities. One would reasonably expect the most senior staff to be dealing with some of the most difficult cases.**

**Continuous professional development for social workers at all levels should be active, with the occasional possibility for secondment and/or sabbatical leave for the purpose of broadening experience and skills.**

**Partnership with academic institutions, such as a nearby university, should be developed further, to ensure the integrity and appropriate range of CPD.**

These recommendations are targeted principally at Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. The Government will work with the Council through its intervention arrangements to ensure that progress is made against them.

More generally, the Government believes there is a need for continuing reform of the social work profession. We need to improve the skills and capabilities of those coming into social work and also work with those in the profession to improve local practice. Better national and local leadership should help to create a more confident profession which draws effectively on evidence, learns actively from the best practice in the UK and

from across the world and provides a continuously improving service to children and families.

Building on the work of Professor Munro's review and the work of the Social Work Reform Board, the Government is seeking a step change in the quality of the contribution those entering the profession can make.<sup>16 17</sup> We are doing this through:

- the *Step Up to Social Work* programme and, subject to an effective business plan, *Frontline* which will attract the best graduates into the social work profession;
- consideration of social work education by Sir Martin Narey; and
- the high quality induction arrangements supported by the *Assessed and Supported Year of Employment Programme*.
- In addition, the Government is:
  - appointing a Chief Social Worker for children and families to help lead the debate about local practice and, working with Principal Child and Family Social Workers in each local authority and with the Children's Improvement Board, to impact directly on local practice;
  - supporting the College of Social Work in its leading role in the profession and working with the Health Care Professions Council as the Regulator, to be clear about capabilities and standards at each stage of a social worker's career, improving the quality of supervision and of continuing professional development;
  - building on the pilot Social Work Practices, considering whether and how new models for social work delivery can support improvements in the quality of social work practice; and
  - working with Ofsted and the Children's Improvement Board to ensure rigorous examination of the performance of local authority social work services, sharply focused improvement where it is needed and really effective dissemination of good practice.

We recognise that more needs to be done. We will continue to keep the development of social work practice and the health of the profession under review.

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<sup>16</sup> [Munro review final report 'A child-centred system'](#)

<sup>17</sup> Visit the DfE website for information about the [Social Work Reform Board](#)



Department  
for Education

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