

**DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION**

**COMMONS NAMED DAY**

**TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2011**

**ANDREA LEADSOM (SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what progress he has made on implementation of the recommendations of the Munro report into child protection.

**(086572)**

**TIM LOUGHTON:**

Good progress is being made across the full range of commitments in the Government response published in July.

We are reducing bureaucracy and making it easier for the front line to use their professional judgment through revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the *Framework of Assessment for Children in Need and their Families*. There will be a formal consultation from early 2012 and we will publish revised statutory guidance by July 2012. A multi-disciplinary professional advisory group is advising us on this work.

Government, Ofsted and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) have come together with a range of other partners to develop and agree local child safeguarding performance information that puts professional expertise, rather than process, at the heart of local quality assurance. This is now published on the

Department's website and we will be consulting in the new year on national performance information.

Over the summer, Ofsted consulted on local authority child protection inspection arrangements that are more child centred. These new arrangements will begin in May 2012. All relevant inspectorates have also now agreed in principle to Professor Munro's proposed model of joint inspection to ensure that the contribution of all local services to safeguarding is examined. The inspectorates are working through what such a model will look like and when it will begin, and will give a progress update by end March 2012.

On 31 October we published a co-produced work programme, *Safeguarding Children in the reformed NHS*. Phase one is underway, led by the Chief Nursing Officer. Stakeholders will be consulted on the draft Accountabilities Framework in January 2012.

We have been working with partners to consider the best route to secure Professor Munro's vision of a transparent and co-ordinated offer of early help for children and families. We have engaged with partners in ADCS, health, police and education and have concluded that we do not need a new statutory duty to deliver early help and that there is sufficient existing legislation to realise Professor Munro's recommendation. We will continue to work with partners to clarify existing legislation to emphasise the importance of early help. In the meantime we encourage local areas to continue to work to provide early help for the compelling arguments that Professor Munro articulated.

We are working with eight local authorities to trial more flexible approaches to assessment. The evidence from these trials is being evaluated now. The emerging findings are encouraging and suggest that both removing the distinction between the initial and core assessments and replacing nationally prescribed timescales for assessment with timely, professional judgments can have the positive impact on practice envisaged by Professor Munro. Some of these trials have been running for only a few months and we need to explore further the impact of these changes, especially for children and young people. For this reason we have extended the trials to run until 31 March 2012 and will be consulting on flexibilities as part of the *Working Together* consultation next year.

After consultation, and a market sounding exercise, we have taken the decision to decommission the National electronic Common Assessment Framework system (National eCAF). This is consistent with Professor Munro's view that we should remove constraints to local innovation and professional judgment that are created by prescribing approaches such as national IT systems. We will work with the current users of the system over the coming months to ensure a smooth transition. As part of the decommissioning process we will consider the options to secure value out of the Government owned assets.

Our reforms of child protection are underpinned by workforce reform, in particular reform of the social work profession which is being led by the Social Work Reform Board and the College of Social Work.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and the College of Social Work are supporting local authorities in designating a Principal Child and Family Social Worker in every local area. These roles will play a key part in redesigning child and family social work. The Department for Education and the Department of Health have been making preparations for the appointment of a Chief Social Worker to advise Government on social work practice and the effectiveness of help being provided to children, families and adults. We are confident that the Chief Social Worker will be in post in 2012, ahead of the timeline envisaged in the Government's response.

We are clarifying and strengthening accountabilities in the system and taking action to improve learning from Serious Case Reviews.

We are currently consulting on new guidance for DCSs and Lead Members so that we have real clarity about their roles. My officials and I have also held discussions with groups of Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs to consider what might be done to strengthen their central role in challenging and monitoring the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and we will be exploring options with stakeholders over coming weeks. This will build on our reforms around learning, early help, inspection and performance information which emphasise the importance of LSCBs.

Improving learning from serious incidents is critical to driving improvements in practice in child protection. Following Professor Munro's recommendation to use systems methodologies for Serious Case Reviews (SCR), we are considering how the Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE) "Learning Together" model can be developed

further for use in SCRs. I announced last month that Coventry LSCB would pilot the SCIE model and we have now agreed that Lancashire LSCB will also carry out a pilot. While the pilots are in progress, my officials are also exploring, learning from sectors such as aviation and health, other ways of ensuring effective, sustained learning from serious incidents embedded in every day practice, with greater transparency and accountability. We will consult formally on new arrangements for SCRs next year.

We have been working with Ofsted to develop transitional arrangements in response to Professor Munro's recommendation to end Ofsted's evaluation of SCRs. From January 2012, Ofsted evaluations of SCRs will be more streamlined with a greater focus on identifying and embedding learning in order to support improvements in professional practice.

Implementing the Munro recommendations requires a shift in mindset. The Government response was not intended to be seen as a one-off set of recommended solutions to be imposed from the centre, but a joint venture between central Government, local agencies, local authorities and professionals. Our reforms are designed to shift the focus of the child protection system on to the things that matter most: the views and experiences of children and young people.