

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

DECOMMISSIONING CONTACTPOINT

Parliamentary Under Secretary for Children & Families (Tim Loughton MP):

I am today confirming arrangements for closing down the ContactPoint children's database, in line with the Government's longstanding commitment. Instead of a database containing millions of children's details, accessed by hundreds of thousands of practitioners, we are examining the case for a more proportionate approach to supporting frontline professionals to help protect vulnerable children from harm.

I recognise the problem that the previous Government was trying to solve in establishing ContactPoint, and the well-intended efforts that many hard-working practitioners and managers have put into improving the quality and use of data on vulnerable children. Frontline practitioners need to be able to provide support for our most vulnerable children when they move across local authority boundaries or access services in more than one area. Experience shows the potential value of a quick and reliable means of discovering whether another professional has worked with such a child. It is worth considering a national approach to that issue.

However, we have never agreed that ContactPoint was the answer. It has always been our view that it was disproportionate and unjustifiable to hold records on every child in the country, making them accessible to large numbers of people. Accordingly, we are exploring the practicality of a new national signposting service which would focus on helping practitioners find out whether another practitioner is working, or has previously worked, in another authority area with the same vulnerable child. Social workers in particular, and potentially other key services like the police or accident and emergency departments, may need this information very quickly. Such a service must aim to ensure that these children are not 'lost' to social care services when they move. We are working closely with our partners to assess the feasibility and affordability of such an approach.

In the meantime, we have considered carefully whether it is necessary to keep the existing ContactPoint database operating in order to move towards a more targeted approach. It is now clear that it is not and in the light of the coalition Government's clear pledge to end ContactPoint as soon as practicable we will now proceed to shut it down. On 6 August, we will switch the database off and we will subsequently decommission it, safely removing and destroying the existing data.

We are today writing to local authorities and other partners to provide them with the necessary guidance to ensure that ContactPoint is closed down in a managed, safe and controlled way, a copy of this letter will be placed in the House Libraries. As we do so, we shall take all necessary steps to ensure that the investment made to date in developing ContactPoint can so far as possible contribute to the task of protecting our

most vulnerable children from harm. We will continue to draw on views, experience and expertise of frontline staff and managers. Critical to the success of any service must be that it provides a modern, effective tool that supports the frontline and that it supports the broader aims of Eileen Munro's Review to improve child protection and social work practice. It is also important that we keep any development and implementation costs to a minimum and that the service can demonstrate value for money. We shall provide a further update in due course.