

# The Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children

First annual report to Parliament – 2010

Sir Roger Singleton  
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March 2010

From the office of  
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17 March 2010

Dear Secretary of State,

On 1 April 2009 you appointed me as the Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children. You asked me to advise the Government on the effective implementation of safeguarding policy. As part of this you requested an annual report on safeguarding progress, including my views about the implementation of the recommendations in Lord Laming's report, *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*.

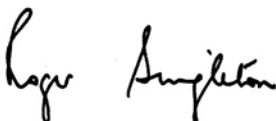
My report is attached.

I welcome *The Government's Response to Lord Laming: One Year On*, published today. I would specifically like to support the plans it sets out for the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit. I believe the Unit has an important role to play in the year ahead in ensuring that safeguarding improves.

In preparing my report I have met with a wide range of leaders, managers and frontline staff to enhance my understanding of the issues that matter to all those working to safeguard children. Earlier this month I met with the members of my Expert Group for a further discussion. I hope that as a result, my report reflects the views of those in the field, as well as providing an independent commentary on, and appropriate challenge to, the Government's progress and future plans.

Over the past year the Government has, I believe, made good progress in implementing many of the recommendations made by Lord Laming. Looking ahead, I hope that Ministers will build on this to go further on the basis of effective conjoint work between the relevant national and local organisations.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Roger Singleton

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# Foreword

I am grateful to the many individuals and organisations whose views have informed this report. Particular thanks go to those who have invited me to speak at their conferences or arranged visits. As part of my preparation for the report I visited Primary Care Trusts, local authorities, Local Safeguarding Children Boards, hospitals, children's residential facilities, a police child abuse investigation team, and Her Majesty's Court Service. This contact with leaders, managers and frontline staff involved in safeguarding children has been invaluable.

I have not published details of the visits I have undertaken. I promised the many people who offered their views and opinions that they were being given in strict confidence and would not be attributed.

Members of the Chief Adviser's Expert Group have also provided valuable advice and comments which I appreciate. A full list of Expert Group members can be found at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/singleton/expertgroup.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/singleton/expertgroup.shtml).

I am also grateful to colleagues from the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit (NSDU) and across Government for keeping me up to date on policy developments. I am particularly thankful for the support provided to me by the NSDU secretariat.

A full list of my responsibilities as the Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children can be found at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/singleton](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/singleton). In addition to these duties, I have been asked to provide other specific pieces of advice to Government that fall outside the issues raised in Lord Laming's progress report. A fuller description of this work can be found at Annex B.

# Executive summary

- The environment in which professionals are working to safeguard children has changed and continues to change. There has been an increased demand for those services most concerned with child protection, expectations of professionals are also increasing, and available resources are likely to decrease.
- There are continuing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of suitably trained and experienced professionals, although some valuable initiatives to address this have commenced.
- The Government has made good progress in its implementation of Lord Laming's recommendations. Government departments, the inspectorates and local delivery agencies have attached much greater priority to promoting safety of children at risk of harm.
- Despite the greater priority afforded to the safeguarding of children, there continues to be a small number of deeply worrying cases where the professionals have failed children.
- There is major concern amongst local partnership agencies that insufficient funds will be available to meet current and future demands for protective services.
- Agencies involved in safeguarding believe that Government activity now needs to change focus from guidelines and prescription, to supporting and helping to improve professional practice.
- There continues to be a need for government departments to work alongside the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit to engage local agencies more fully in efforts to protect our most vulnerable children.

# Safeguarding children: the changing context

1. Since Lord Laming published his report, *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*, in March 2009 the environment in which professionals are working to safeguard children has become more complex and pressured. In making my first annual assessment of progress in safeguarding, I believe it is essential that I reflect the changed and changing context in which safeguarding is now taking place and the considerable challenges this is producing.
2. First and foremost, there has been an increased demand for those children's services that are most concerned with child safety and protection. The Government's own figures up to March 2009 show increases in referrals to children's social care, and initial assessments and core assessments have both risen. There have also been increases in the numbers of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan (from 29,000 as of 31 March 2008 to 34,100 as of 31 March 2009<sup>1</sup>) and in those entering the care system.
3. Published figures for the year to 31 March 2009 showed a 1.6 per cent rise in referrals to children's services and 9 per cent increase in initial assessments completed over the previous year<sup>2</sup>. Cafcass figures show that in December 2008 public law care requests rose to 716 compared with 592 the previous month<sup>3</sup>. These figures are for the period when Lord Laming was commissioned to complete his report and media attention on child protection and safeguarding were high, which could in part explain the increase. However, these new levels have been sustained into 2009, as figures for October to December 2009 show that care demand was up 20.9 per cent (378 cases) over the corresponding period in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

1 DCSF: Referrals, assessment and children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan, England – Year ending 31 March 2009 (available online at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000873/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000873/index.shtml)).

2 Referrals, assessment and children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan, England – Year ending 31 March 2009, Department of Children, Schools and Families, 17 September 2009 (available online at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000873/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000873/index.shtml)).

3 Cafcass Care Demand – Latest Quarterly Figures, Cafcass, 20 October 2009 (available online at [www.cafcass.gov.uk/publications/care\\_demand\\_statistics.aspx](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/publications/care_demand_statistics.aspx)).

4 Quarter Three Care Statistics Released, Cafcass (available online at [www.cafcass.gov.uk/news/2010/quarter\\_three\\_care\\_statistics.aspx](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/news/2010/quarter_three_care_statistics.aspx)).

4. Cafcass' analysis of these figures is that they "...suggest that the rate of increase is stabilising at the new higher level following the publicity surrounding the court case into the death of Baby Peter in November 2008"<sup>5</sup>.
5. My view is that it is still too early to say with any degree of certainty whether the increase in demand across services will be sustained at these levels or for how long. Nonetheless, at present there is no denying the fact that this higher level of demand is placing significant pressure on thousands of professionals working to protect children.
6. In his report, Lord Laming said:

*"It would be unreasonable to expect that the sudden and unpredictable outburst by an adult can be prevented. But that is entirely different from the failure to protect a child or young person already identified as being in danger of deliberate harm. The death of a child in these circumstances is a reproach to us all."*<sup>6</sup>

It is absolutely right that the public should expect consistently high standards from the range of professionals who can be involved when children are thought to be suffering significant harm. When the state intervenes to protect children we expect the professionals who act on our behalf to do so competently and effectively with children's wellbeing and safety being the paramount considerations. Every case of a child suffering abuse or neglect where agency shortcomings are identified highlights the need for improvement. Public interest and concern has not abated over the last twelve months; if anything both have increased, especially in the wake of deeply disturbing cases involving children, such as those in Salford – the tragic death of Demi Leigh Mahon; in Doncaster – the grave assaults perpetrated by two boys on two others in Edlington; and in Sheffield and Lincolnshire – the repeated rape of two daughters by their father.

7. Part of the response to the public's desire to see improvements are the changed inspection arrangements. These have placed much greater emphasis on safeguarding and have increased expectations of improved delivery in this area. The developments in inspection by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation are described in the *Government's Response to Lord Laming: One Year On* report and I will not repeat them

5 Care Statistics Continue to Rise (available at [www.cafcass.gov.uk/news/2009/care\\_statistics.aspx](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/news/2009/care_statistics.aspx)).

6 The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report, The Lord Laming, March 2009, p3. (available online at [http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=product\\_details&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HC+330](http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=product_details&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HC+330)).

here, except to agree that much greater significance is being attached to safeguarding matters.

8. However, this increase in demand and higher expectations of performance is not being matched by the provision of additional resources. Nor is there any suggestion that this situation is likely to change for the better over the next few years. On the contrary, both national and local politicians in all major parties speak of the need for reductions in public expenditure for the foreseeable future. HM Treasury has announced the need for savings of £300 million in the non schools, 16-19 learning and Sure Start areas of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' expenditure.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that children's services related spending will be firmly in the frame when these savings have to be found. I note that in many local authority areas council taxes are being held at their current levels. And the NHS has been challenged to identify ways of delivering high quality care while releasing £15-20 billion of efficiency savings by 2013-14.
9. If these reductions fall on child protection and safeguarding budgets within the various organisations, the capacity of the relevant services to keep children safe will inevitably be diminished.
10. Those who work in safeguarding are acutely conscious of this funding uncertainty and understandably anxious about it. The pressure the media places on safeguarding professionals to be infallible – as the professionals see it – is another contributory factor to this general sense of concern. Professionals often say they feel they are 'damned if they do and damned if they don't'. My field visits have led me to conclude that most professionals are anything but complacent, but are instead often quietly confident and utterly determined to do a good job. But for them, the lack of media and subsequent public recognition that the cases they deal with are rarely clear cut or risk free is demoralising.
11. These issues lie behind many of the difficulties in the recruitment and retention of children's social workers, which have been well documented.

*"At present, however, social work in England too often falls short of [the] basic conditions for success. Weaknesses in recruitment, retention, frontline resources,*

7 This overall figure was announced on the DCSF press office on 10 March 2010. (The full press release is available online at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2010\\_0061](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2010_0061)).



*training, leadership, public understanding and other factors are compounding one another.”<sup>8</sup>*

12. These recruitment and retention difficulties differ across the country but are present, in varying degrees, everywhere. In large metropolitan areas there is frequent ‘churn’. This is in part because it is relatively easy for a social worker to move to another authority, either for higher reward, for better supervision and support in managing the risks of complex child protection work, or for the opportunity to move out of child protection and into another aspect of children’s social work.
13. Work in child protection places exceptional demands on people. The resulting burn-out of many experienced social workers explains why relatively new social workers sometimes end up dealing with some of the most challenging cases, even though everyone agrees this is highly undesirable. The Social Work Task Force found that many Newly Qualified Social Workers “...are often expected to take on unrealistically complex tasks because of the acute recruitment and retention problems of many authorities.”<sup>9</sup>
14. Of course, workforce issues are not unique to children’s social care. In the health sector there are concerns that the health visitor workforce is aging with significant numbers due to retire over the coming years. I understand a similar picture exists in Cafcass with *Guardians ad litem*. In the police service there is evidence that in some forces there are difficulties in attracting officers to Child Abuse and Investigations Teams.
15. High quality safeguarding depends on many things being done well. Ultimately, however, it depends most of all on the skill and resilience of the people on the front line, and on the care and attention of those who manage them.

8 Building a safe, confident future: The Final Report of the Social Work Task Force, Nov 09 (available online at <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-01114-2009>), page 65.

9 Building a safe, confident future: The Final Report of the Social Work Task Force, Nov 09 (available online at <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-01114-2009>), page 16.

# Positive developments during the last 12 months

## Progress in understanding workforce challenges and responding to them

16. In his report, Lord Laming reinforced the message that ‘safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility’. One of the clearest and most welcome messages I have heard over the last 12 months concerns the heightened awareness of the importance of safeguarding across all sectors, often coupled with a real desire to get involved. Government and others need to harness this goodwill to strengthen the overall capacity of the workforce to safeguard children well.
17. The creation of the Social Work Task Force, chaired by Moira Gibb, was a significant and very welcome step forward. The Task Force, which was concerned with adult as well as children’s social workers, provided the opportunity for some important issues to be surfaced and properly discussed. Most important of all, the Task Force provided a clear steer about the actions needed to strengthen the profession significantly. The Task Force’s Final Report showed how it may be possible to attract the brightest young people into social work and offer them the training and support they will need to succeed in practice. The Social Work Reform Board Implementation Plan, published today, sets how the Task Force’s ideas will be put into action.
18. Many of these reforms are necessarily medium to long term measures but there are some promising shorter term steps too. In particular, I would single out the planned establishment of an Independent College of Social Work, to promote high standards and a stronger sense of professional identity, and the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services’ DCS Leadership Programme.
19. I also welcome the action taken to encourage people to enter social work and attract returners, and the financial investment made alongside it. The ‘*Be the difference*’ campaign run by the Children’s Workforce Development Council appears to have been very successful, generating over 48,000 registrations to date. Figures produced by UCAS show there were 52,238 applications to study for a degree in social work (as of 22 January 2010), an increase of 41.3% compared with last year. This is

immensely encouraging and suggests social work has a bright future, provided the momentum is maintained.

20. In other professions, phase 2 of the Action on Health Visiting Programme and the recently developed National Policing Improvement Agency training for specialist staff and senior leaders are important initiatives.

### Promising improvement activity

21. Inherent time lags in the collection and validation of data make it difficult to prove that sustainable improvements have been made over the last year, but there are some encouraging signs. For example, the numbers of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) assessed by Ofsted as inadequate have substantially fallen. The latest statistics published by Ofsted on their website in January 2010 show significant and sustained improvements in the quality of SCRs, with a 29 per cent decrease in the number of inadequate SCRs and a 25 per cent increase in the number of SCRs rated 'good' since evaluation began in April 2007.
22. A clear and coherent approach in the health service to improving safeguarding has also been a welcome development. David Nicholson, Chief Executive of the NHS in England, has written to all NHS Trusts and Primary Care Trusts. In addition to asking them to ensure all necessary improvements to safeguarding arrangements are made in time for their registration with CQC in April 2010, he emphasised the leadership responsibility of chief executives and other senior staff to model the behaviours necessary to bring about consistent and positive improvements in safeguarding children. Extensive staff training programmes are taking place in many parts of the health service.
23. The inclusion of safeguarding as a limiting judgement in the new school inspection framework, introduced in September 2009, has generally been welcomed. Initially, there was a perception that minor safeguarding shortcomings could result in an inadequate judgement in an otherwise competent school. However, the publication by Ofsted of their evaluation framework has alleviated some of these early anxieties, and the first set of results certainly appear to show the suggestion that schools would be penalised for small safeguarding issues was misplaced. Ofsted's analysis shows that no school in the autumn term (2009/10) was placed in special measures simply because of minor safeguarding issues and that of the 2,140 inspections carried out, only 17 schools were given a notice to improve for issues related to safeguarding, care and

leadership alone.<sup>10</sup> This reflects well on the appropriately high priority given by heads, teachers and other school staff to safeguarding children effectively.

24. Improvements have also come about through the development and sharing of innovation and good practice. I would like to commend the work of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO), the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and of the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IdeA) in this respect.
25. Within the police service the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in partnership with the Home Office, has developed a set of national child protection key performance indicators (KPIs) for police force child abuse investigation units, which are currently being piloted.
26. The police-led Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has continued to develop its work tackling child trafficking at home and abroad. Its intelligence collection systems, expertise in on-line abuse and training initiatives demonstrate what a specialist centre and multi-professional approach can contribute to tackling child sex abuse.
27. Early feedback from practitioners in the early adopter phase of ContactPoint has been good. The lessons learned report<sup>11</sup> published in November 2009 reported over 75% of early adopter users as saying they believe ContactPoint will be helpful in their future work.

### Progress in implementing the Laming action plan

28. The Government accepted all 58 of Lord Laming's recommendations and explained how it intended to implement them in a detailed action, published in May 2009.<sup>12</sup> Over the past year the Government has started to deliver the action plan and *The Government's Response to Lord Laming: One Year On* reports on that in detail. The issues include:
  - The establishment of the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit, which I return to later in this report.

10 New inspection framework promoting improvement for schools and children (available online at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/News/Press-and-media/2010/March/New-inspection-framework-promoting-improvement-for-schools-and-children](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/News/Press-and-media/2010/March/New-inspection-framework-promoting-improvement-for-schools-and-children)).

11 ContactPoint: Lessons Learned from the Early Adopter Phase (available online at <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-01043-2009&>).

12 The protection of children in England: action plan – The Government's response to Lord Laming (available online at <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+7589>).

- A greater focus on safeguarding in the National Health Service, including through support for health visitors designed to raise their profile, better define their roles and disseminate good practice; the announcement that from 2010 -11, Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities will be required to monitor and publish health visitor numbers and caseload sizes; and the completion of work to promote the commissioning and implementation of the Healthy Child Programme for 0-5 year olds.
- Intensive support through the Family Nurse Partnership for vulnerable first time young mothers and their families, now being delivered to over 3,400 families.
- Updated training for police forces.
- Revisions to the ACPO guidance on investigating child abuse and safeguarding children.
- Changes to the Health and Social Care Act (2008) to make it a requirement for all NHS providers of health and adult social care services to register with the Care Quality Commission from April 2010.
- The introduction of a new and strengthened inspection programme for children's social care.
- Revisions to Chapter 8 of *Working Together to Safeguarding Children*, emphasising the need for SCR executive summaries to reflect accurately the full overview report and include information about the review process, key issues arising from the case, the recommendations and the action plan.
- Revisions to the full version of *Working Together to Safeguarding Children*, published today.
- A training programme for SCR chairs and authors designed to support them in their role.
- Practice guidance for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), published today for consultation.
- The abolition of court fees in care proceedings.

29. These achievements in dealing with workforce challenges and improvement activity, as well as the progress made in implementing the Laming action plan, are welcome first steps. The Government needs to continue to build upon these developments in order to bring about long lasting changes at the frontline which in turn will make a real difference in keeping children safe.

# Concerns expressed by the sector

30. In this section I aim to reflect the concerns I have heard from professionals, those in governance roles, the public and the members of my Expert Group. This part of my report is also informed by feedback from three major conferences run by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit in February. The concerns could be summarised as ‘we feel we are being required to respond to greater needs and work to higher standards and expectations, but with fewer resources.’

## Funding needs to match a higher level of demand

31. The increase in demand in all the services closely involved with safeguarding is clear and I have already presented the available data that demonstrates it. The view from the frontline at present is that neither the system as a whole, nor in many cases individual practitioners, have sufficient capacity to respond to demand. Unfortunately, this means that reductions in caseloads brought about as the result of well designed local initiatives are often being overtaken by increased demand.
32. Judges and Cafcass officers agree that the increase being seen in care proceedings is not a result of an inappropriate lowering of thresholds, made as a result of undue risk aversion by practitioners in the field. This suggests that in the period before 2008 some children were not coming into care who probably should have done. From that point of view the recent rise in care proceedings can be seen as positive rather than negative; however, the resource implications need to be taken into account.
33. The tight fiscal climate combined with increased demand undoubtedly places great pressures on everyone in the system. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) have recently said that they believe the cost of implementing Lord Laming’s recommendations was underestimated by the Government, suggesting that this in itself has created a funding gap. In addition, they have called for Government to inject additional resources into children’s services to take account of the higher level of demand.

34. It is not just the increased demand at the ‘front door’ that exacerbates the financial situation – the costs involved in looking after a child and those associated with a protracted period in the care system are very significant. The increase in the number of children being looked after places a very real financial burden on authorities. At the same time, within local authorities, children’s service departments are often competing for scarce resources with other departments and services at a time when the demands on councils in general are increasing, because of the economic downturn.
35. There are serious financial constraints on other services whose work is crucial for effective safeguarding too. Practitioners and managers in health and the police are clear that compared to the rest of their organisations, funding for children is usually a small budget that is vulnerable to cuts when reductions have to be made.
36. Many staff have told me that the cases they are now dealing with are often more complex than in the past and therefore demand more resource and capacity over a longer period of time. When such children need to come into care it is sometimes difficult to find appropriately skilled foster carers. Some professionals have also commented on the complexity of local systems of services within which they are working and the additional difficulties this brings for them.
37. The funding of LSCBs has been a recurring theme in my discussions with local managers and leaders. Particular concerns have been the lack of a consistent approach to funding across partners, and the burden caused by the decision that LSCBs should have independent chairs to provide greater challenge.

### Policy needs to be better designed and directed

38. Lord Laming’s report stated that *Working Together to Safeguard Children* needed to be clarified and strengthened in a number of areas, and that this had to happen quickly. However, recent government consultations on *Working Together to Safeguard Children* have generated criticism from the field.
39. One such criticism is that the Government devotes too much attention to process – some of it unhelpfully prescriptive – and not enough to strengthening professional practice. Guidance documents are often said to be too long and not sufficiently informed by a real understanding of the pressures on the frontline. Some professionals have said they would like the opportunity to influence guidance at an earlier stage in its development, rather than being consulted when it is already in an advanced draft form with limited scope for changes.



40. I have also often heard concerns about targets and indicators. There appears to be a widespread feeling among professionals that these are often not capable of describing ‘the whole story’ and that they lack context and can sometimes lead to unintended, perverse outcomes. For example, I was told that sometimes core assessments are rushed in order to ensure they are carried out within the required 35 days and thus meet the national indicator target. However, this can be at the expense of their quality so that in care proceedings judges find the assessments to be inadequate which leads to requirements for improved reports and delays the cases.
41. In his report, Lord Laming commented on the delays in care proceedings. This is a concern that I have heard repeatedly throughout the last twelve months – not just delays in the court process, but from when the local authority makes its first safeguarding decision. The length of time it is taking for the care process to be completed seems to have been increasing over the last year. If so, this is probably because of pressures within children’s social care services, Cafcass and the judiciary, exacerbated in some areas by a lack of suitable court space.
42. Initiating care proceedings is not a decision that can be taken lightly; however, I am concerned that through a combination of unmanageable caseloads for social workers, and the complexity of care proceedings, some children have been accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act (1989) as a means of securing safe, low risk decisions. Whilst the intention is sound, there are growing concerns that permanency decisions for these children when made are not being acted upon in a timely way unnecessarily prolonging the period of time a child is in care, even with a system of independent reviewing officers, and that the future options for these children once entering the court process, where and with whom they should grow up, have been reduced.
43. There is still concern about the Integrated Children’s System (ICS), particularly among frontline social workers. The main complaint I heard was that the ICS led to them spending too long working on a computer, particularly when it was time spent inputting information on a child’s case. Some managers and technical staff were more positive. They pointed to the potential gains from a well functioning ICS, and they welcomed Baroness Morgan’s letter of 22 June 2009 in which she confirmed that the government;



*“...agreed to act on the [Social Work] Task Force’s advice that the long term vision should be that ICT systems which support children’s social care services should be locally owned and locally implemented, within a simplified national framework of guidance and specifications.”<sup>13</sup>*

44. There was a general view that computer based systems were preferable to paper based ones, and local authority staff welcomed the freedom to adapt systems to local needs. Further improvements for ICS have been announced in the Social Work Reform Implementation Plan.

### Multi-agency working and communication still need more work

45. Inter-professional communication, or the difficulties of it, have been identified repeatedly in successive reviews of child deaths since the case of Maria Colwell in the early seventies. Over the last twelve months I have seen and heard examples of excellent inter-agency working, often supported by co-location of services and leaders who work closely together. Unfortunately, I have also heard concerns that “schools refer anything and everything – usually at 3pm on Fridays”; that “social workers never let you know the outcome of referrals”; and that “GPs won’t engage.” Multi-agency working and good information sharing therefore continues to be a challenge for many professionals.
46. There is a concern that because inter-professional communications are not as strong as they should be in some areas, children’s social care could become overwhelmed by ‘automatic’ referrals which could result in it becoming harder to identify those children who are most likely to suffer harm. In the health field concerns have been raised with me that Mental Health practitioners are focusing solely on the individual they are working with, without due consideration to the wider family and any children who may be in the household. Health visitors have pointed to difficulties in getting colleagues to agree to the sharing of relevant information. Co-locating services was seen by some as part of the solution to these problems.

### Inspection and development processes

47. There is widespread professional agreement that inspection is crucial. However, there have been some criticisms from local partners that some inspection approaches are crude in their methodology leading to a lack of support for the resulting outcomes. There have also been concerns about how the outcomes of

13 Letter from Baroness Morgan to Director’s of Children’s Services, dated 22 June 2009 (available online at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/integratedchildrenssystem/ics/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/integratedchildrenssystem/ics/)).

unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment arrangements by Ofsted play into the annual ratings.

48. It is inevitable that at times tensions will develop between inspectorates and the inspected. But I have been encouraged to learn that the dialogue is improving and that greater understanding on all sides is developing. The quality of the advice, challenge and support provided by Government Offices and Strategic Health Authorities on safeguarding matters is also said to vary from region to region. The arrangements in Government Offices have undergone changes during the past year and it will be important for the new deployments and relationships to be established quickly.

# My views and comments

49. I do not believe it would be helpful for me to make a set of recommendations which would then require formal monitoring and reporting against. Instead, I have set out for comment areas which, I believe, require further attention. They are as follows:

- Professionals – their commitment, support and public image
- Funding
- Serious Case Reviews
- Performance management
- Inspection and development
- Accountability
- Policy development
- Contribution of the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit

## Professionals – their commitment, support and public image

50. At a time of increased demand, tightening budgets and heightened expectations a workforce inevitably comes under considerable pressure. In the face of the difficult context described in this report I have been immensely impressed by the continuing commitment of the professionals I have met during the last year to doing a good job and to safeguarding children as effectively as is humanly possible.

51. But such commitment is not enough on its own. Health visitors, social workers and police officers have all spoken of the value they place on regular case supervision. They also value ready access to managers and more experienced colleagues. I have been struck by the enormous difference this makes to the confidence of both frontline practitioners and their immediate managers. The support these key staff desire is not cost free, but there is a clear case for services being organised in ways that ensure it is consistently on offer. The benefits are likely to be more resilient and confident frontline staff, and the exercise by them of calm and effective professional judgement when and where it matters the most.

52. Some local authorities are providing career opportunities which enable the most experienced staff to continue to work with, or be readily available, to less skilled workers. These initiatives deserve to be sustained and enhanced and I do not believe that they need be held up until the new national career structure for social workers is in place.
53. There is a continuing need to publicise the work of teachers, health visitors, paediatricians, social workers, police officers and court staff, among others, in successfully protecting many thousands of children every day. This is a necessary counterbalance to the extensive media coverage of the far fewer deeply concerning cases, when things have gone wrong. The morale of those working in child protection services must be maintained. We cannot allow legitimate criticism of those who have failed children to blight the reputations of whole professions, to the point at which good people are put off from entering the profession or experienced staff members seek early opportunities to leave it.

## Funding

54. Earlier in this report I explained the acute anxieties on the part of many professionals and their managers about the funding of safeguarding, especially as they look forward to the months and years to come.
55. Despite the difficult economic climate, both central and local government need to face up to the financial realities of delivering safeguarding improvements against a backdrop of what appears at present to be a level of significantly increased demand, compared to the period before 2008. It will, of course, be important to find every means of smarter working to squeeze out waste, prioritise work appropriately and use all staff time effectively. But when that has been achieved it will still be necessary to make sufficient funding available for services to carry out their tasks and ensure an adequate level of protection.
56. Decisions about how much funding is 'sufficient' need to be informed by careful and objective assessments of what it really costs local agencies and Cafcass officers to protect vulnerable children who are living in risky circumstances. It ought to be possible for such assessments to be made.

## Serious Case Reviews

*"We have got to learn from these serious case reviews, but we don't seem to learn from them."* – Professor Pat Cantrill

57. Since the publication in 2008 of the executive summary of the first Serious Case Review (SCR) into the tragic death of Peter Connelly the SCR process has been the focus of much debate.
58. I welcome research commissioned by DCSF to look at alternative methodologies that might be used for conducting reviews of serious incidents. Part of the review process must involve piloting of innovative ideas, such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence model, *Learning together to safeguard children: a 'systems' model for case reviews*, and the comparison of these ideas with existing processes.
59. It is certainly clear from Ofsted's review of SCRs<sup>14</sup> published last October that lessons are not being learned as systemically as they should be. I understand that ACPO has reviewed the role and participation of the police in the SCR process, and has examined how learning is captured nationally within the service and the most effective ways of disseminating this to forces. However, more needs to be done.
60. Clearly, the fundamental requirement is to ensure that the lessons from SCRs are embedded into frontline practice so that children are better protected and the need for future SCRs is reduced.
61. I believe that the arguments advanced for publishing full SCRs are outweighed by the disadvantages. But claims that executive summaries do not always reflect the key points of the main report worry me. The statutory guidance on SCRs, chapter 8 of *Working Together*, was revised in December 2009 and further changes have been made in the version published today to strengthen the guidance in relation to the need for full and frank executive summaries. I welcome that.
62. I understand that Ofsted will shortly be issuing their revised SCR evaluation framework for consultation. I will be interested to see whether the changes will help to ensure that there is a strong cultural shift towards learning valuable lessons. I consider it very important that this happens.

## Performance management

63. I have been concerned to hear occasional accounts of so much obsession with meeting targets that the primary purpose of the process being measured is frustrated. I do not underestimate the difficulties in developing indicators which measure significant processes and outcomes. We need both. But, as Her Majesty's

14 Learning lessons from serious case reviews: year 2 (available online at <https://ofsted.gov.com/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Thematic-reports/Learning-lessons-from-serious-case-reviews-year-2>).

Chief Inspector of Probation says of inspection methodology in *The Government's Response to Lord Laming: One Year On*, we need indicators which assess whether the right thing, was done by the right individual, in the right way, at the right time. In the field of child protection this means we need an approach which is able to assess the impact of more than one factor and the interplay between factors. This could lead indicators to become more difficult to measure and there will be scope for greater debate and argument. But this is a price worth paying in my view; I believe the approach is at least worth trying. Another constructive step would be to place greater emphasis on local partners working to the same indicators across all the professional disciplines.

## Inspection and development

64. I am pleased by the work that Ofsted, HMI Constabulary, HMI Probation and the Care Quality Commission are doing to deliver a more co-ordinated approach to inspection, and in due course I will be interested to hear how that is received by professionals.
65. There are some concerns about the lack of a 'development' role in social care inspections, which I understand was not carried forward when responsibility for the inspection of children's social care transferred from the former Commission for Social Care Inspection. Ofsted's position is that it is remitted as an inspection not a development agency. It seems to me however that in such a sensitive and complex area as child protection the inspection agencies must play a critical role in ensuring that the lessons from inspections are learned and acted upon at the frontline, as well as being used to influence policy. I think this should be further discussed by Ofsted, the Government and representatives from the field.
66. I understand that a 'peer review' element to inspections has been proposed, whereby staff from other agencies would take part in safeguarding inspections. I hope that this idea can be developed because it seems to me to have real merit. The inspection team would be enriched and peer inspectors would gain valuable insights to take back to their own agencies, providing adequate safeguards are put in place to assure the independence and objectivity of the process.
67. I recognise the increased investment Government has made to strengthen the safeguarding support and challenge function of the Government Offices. I would like to see this utilised as envisioned by Lord Laming, giving the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit (NSDU) a strong regional presence. The value of this approach may need to be reviewed, both in the light of subsequent experience and

in the course of any discussions about what an enhanced development role for Ofsted might entail.

## Accountability

68. An issue that arose frequently in my discussions, especially with local managers, was the question of where exactly the accountability lies between Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and Children's Trust Boards. One Detective Inspector on an LSCB told me he would find it very difficult to challenge his Borough Commander on the Children's Trust Board. The distinction between the responsibilities of Children's Trusts and LSCBs is a complex yet critical issue if LSCBs are going to make a practical difference.
69. The Government is publishing revised practice guidance for LSCBs. The test of LSCBs will be whether multi-agency working improves and the issues identified time and again in SCRs occur less frequently. Clearly, it is too early to tell what the effect of independent LSCB chairs will be or whether the Children's Trust guidance and the LSCB practice guidance will have a positive impact on relationships and accountability.
70. Going forward I would like to see some systems developed to encourage and permit resources to be shared across local boundaries. LSCBs are a key element in the structure of safeguarding and I also look forward to reviewing the effectiveness of the LSCB/Children's Trust mechanisms in the coming year.

## Policy development

71. I have already set out the concerns I have heard from the field about how the Government has responded to Lord Laming's report by producing guidance, including the revised draft of Working Together, that is considered by many to be too long and overly detailed and prescriptive.
72. In my view, these concerns reflect a feeling, on the part of many professionals, of a wider lack of engagement in the development of policy by the centre. I have considerable sympathy with those frontline practitioners and managers who said to me, "I wish the policy people would come and talk to us before making changes".
73. I want to endorse that statement and suggest that the NSDU offers a real opportunity to develop a new and better approach to policymaking on safeguarding in the future. The Unit will need to develop a strong, open relationship with its partnership network. The depth and breadth of the network means it has the potential to add tremendous value to the process of policymaking – but only if its

members are involved right from the start. Of course there will sometimes be disagreements, and in the end it is Government that has the responsibility to lead. Nonetheless, my view is that it should be possible for there to be more practitioner involvement in policy development work so that policy is grounded in good practice and supports it.

### The leadership role of central government

74. Lord Laming saw the need for the Home Secretary and the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families, Health and Justice to collaborate in the setting of explicit priorities for the protection of children. As the Government has reported in *The Government's Response to Lord Laming – One Year On*, a ministerial sub-group of the Cabinet's Families, Children and Young People Sub-Committee was established which has overseen the creation of the NSDU, the content of its initial work programme and the revisions to *Working Together* – the key statutory safeguarding guidance.
75. The focus of the ministerial sub-group on delivering these results was necessary in order to drive forward those Laming recommendations to which the Government had attached an especially demanding timescale. But now that much of that initial work is underway, I hope that Ministers will be able to take a more considered and strategic approach to improving safeguarding.
76. Collective decisions by the four Secretaries of State on the safeguarding priorities to be pursued by all four government departments would be a powerful force for positive change, particularly if they were centred on supporting improved practice at the frontline. This would be a departure from the more conventional approach in government, whereby activity is largely departmentally driven. A strategic approach from the Secretaries of State such as I am proposing could be carried forward by the existing Laming Implementation Programme Board – a group of senior officials from the relevant departments and inspectorates – with the NSDU engaging directly with regional and local stakeholders to strengthen the quality and co-ordination of frontline work.
77. In my view the concept of the NSDU is sound and I strongly endorse the ideas outlined today in the *Government's Response to Lord Laming – One Year On*, which focus the Unit's work firmly on supporting the frontline. I think that organising the work of the Unit around six priority areas established with the close involvement of national stakeholders, partnership network colleagues and frontline practitioners, is the right approach. This should give a strategic focus to the work, as well as



maintaining momentum in implementing Lord Laming's recommendations. The NSDU has great potential to 'ginger up' the system, but it will only be able to achieve this if it is successful in bridging the gap between policy and practice and engaging in work that is helpful to local agencies in ensuring that frontline staff and their managers have the resources, knowledge and skills to protect children effectively.

# Concluding remarks

78. The Government has made significant progress towards implementing Lord Laming's recommendations. Its report '*The Government's Response to Lord Laming: One Year On*', published today, sets out this progress in detail. Meanwhile the environment in which safeguarding professionals work has become more demanding due to the increased expectations of improved performance, the increased demand for child protection services and the prospect of reduced resources to carry out the work.
79. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families invited me to challenge, where necessary, the performance of central government in doing all it could to improve the effectiveness of our safeguarding services. In order to do this I have drawn on the views of the major stakeholders engaged in safeguarding children and these are reflected in this report. I have also suggested some ways in which further progress can be made.
80. But the challenge to improve applies to all agencies – central government departments, local government, the health service, the police, the inspectorates, the development agencies and relevant third sector bodies, and to staff within those agencies whether they are leaders, managers or frontline staff. The improvement responsibility cannot be parked at any one door. We must all step up to the plate.
81. In the year ahead I will continue to work with all concerned to press for continued improvements to arrangements in the safeguarding and protection of children.

# Annex A:

## Terms of reference

From the Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children

The Rt Hon Ed Balls  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

5 May 2009

Dear Secretary of State

Thank you for inviting me to contribute towards improving the protection of children at risk of harm in the role of Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children. As Chief Adviser I envisage working alongside the new National Safeguarding Delivery Unit to implement the action plan you are announcing tomorrow. I have been pleased to advise on the development of the plan and grateful that my comments have been taken into account. I believe it is a comprehensive and robust response to Lord Laming's recommendations.

I welcome the clear cross-Government commitment to the action plan and the independent status you have given me. The latter will be enhanced by my responsibility to make an annual report to Parliament. I will use that independence and the resources of the new Unit to advise, monitor, challenge and report on the coherence of Government departments' strategic priorities, policies and approaches to safeguarding children especially as they impact on practitioners working at the front line. In addition, I hope to promote better collaborative working between the professionals at all levels; encourage the development of fresh ideas and new thinking; and enhance public understanding of what safeguarding vulnerable children involves and the complex judgements to which it gives rise.

I particularly appreciate the opportunity to have the benefit of a small advisory group of experts to contribute ideas, information and advice and be a sounding board for

emerging thinking and new initiatives and I am delighted to announce that Colin Green (ADCS), Moria Gibb (Social Work Task Force), Christine Davies (C4EO), Jim Gamble (ACPO), Jo Webber (NHS Confederation), Roger Shippam (Ofsted), Andrew Flanagan (NSPCC) and Anthony Douglas (Cafcass) have agreed to be members of this group. A judge of the High Court-Family Division will also be invited to join the group. Moreover, I was pleased that you accepted my suggestion of a wider Partnership Network which will give practical effect to my personal wish to ensure that everything is done to enable front line staff to do their work effectively.

I know you attach considerable importance to the Government's responsibility to set clear expectations in legislation and guidance. Accordingly, you wish to see *Working Together to Safeguard Children* revised as a matter of priority. Effective consultation will be essential to ensure coherent, consistent revisions and, in order to meet the timescale, sustained commitment will be required by all parties. I will do my utmost to encourage everyone to participate fully and promptly.

Turning to another priority, the conduct and quality of series case reviews and their inspection have been sources of concern. Serious case reviews are an invaluable means of learning lessons and I strongly endorse the importance which Lord Laming attaches to them. So there is a pressing need to enhance the skills involved in carrying them out and to increase the supply of suitably experienced and competent people to chair them and write over-view reports. I intend to work urgently with the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit, relevant agencies and your officials to achieve some early progress before the summer break.

You have made it clear that my role, where necessary, includes challenging the performance of central Government in facing up to its responsibilities to set strategic priorities, a coherent legal framework and relevant performance assessment of safeguarding practice. That responsibility extends to the performance of the National Safeguarding Delivery Unit itself. Furthermore, regular meetings with ministers will provide a means of assessing progress and keeping us all up to the mark. I will use my annual report to Parliament – the first of which will be presented in April 2010 – to improve the transparency of the safeguarding arrangements, to set out what has been achieved and what still needs to be done; to seek to sustain public, professional and parliamentary interest in safeguarding vulnerable children; and, most significantly, to measure the extent to which Lord Laming's challenges are being met.

Yours sincerely

Sir Roger Singleton

# Annex B:

## Sir Roger Singleton's wider work

As the Government's Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children I am asked to provide specific pieces of advice over and beyond the issues covered in Lord Laming's progress report.

Prior to my appointment I was called upon to review the practical application of safeguarding provisions and procedures in independent schools, non-maintained special schools and boarding schools. The resulting report, *Keeping our School Safe*, was published in March 2009. It highlighted areas for improvement and included 32 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Government. A resulting consultation on amendments to regulations and to National Minimum Standards closed on 11 March 2010.

Government is committed to ensuring appropriate scrutiny of independent schools' safeguarding practices, and is stressing to local authorities and Children's Trusts that Every Child Matters responsibilities apply to all children, irrespective of who provides their education.

On 14 September 2009 I was asked to address concerns that had been expressed about the Vetting and Barring Scheme, concerning in particular the degree of contact with children which should trigger the requirement to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). I was asked to check that the Government had drawn the line in the right place with regard to those people who were required to register. I canvassed opinion from a range of individuals, organisations, voluntary and faith groups as well as taking into account the views of 1,800 parents surveyed by the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations. The resulting report, *Drawing the Line*, was published on 14 December 2009 and made ten recommendations to Government<sup>15</sup> which covered the substantive issue as well as the arrangements between parents and friends for the care of their children and the procedures around exchange visits. I recommended that the Government also give further thought to the need for controlled activity;

15 Sir Roger Singleton, 'Drawing the Line: A report on the Government's Vetting and Barring Scheme', 14 December 2009 (available online at <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?DCSF-01122-2009>).

the minimum age of registration for young people engaged in regulated activity as part of continuing education; and the requirements for criminal Records Bureau checks.

Recently, I advised the Government on the case of two policewomen required by Ofsted to register as childminders in order to look after each other's children for long periods, on a reciprocal basis. I advised that Government should not seek to regulate the sensible and responsible arrangements that parents make between themselves for the care of each other's children, provided that no payment is involved. Taking this advice into account, the Government consulted on its intention to exempt unpaid childcare arrangements between friends from Ofsted registration.

Most recently I have been asked to review the use of physical punishment in part-time education settings and by others acting 'in loco parentis' (in place of parents).<sup>16</sup> The work centres on distinguishing who can credibly claim to be 'in loco parentis' in defence of physically punishing a child. I have agreed to deliver my advice later this month.

16 Letter from Sir Roger Singleton to Rt Hon Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 27 January 2010 (available online at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/pnattach/20100025/1](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/pnattach/20100025/1)).

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