

The Munro Review of Child Protection

July 2011



About this briefing:

- To inform the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) about the Munro review of child protection
- To Analyse the key recommendations
- To look at the challenges of this report and implications for the VCFS in the implementation of the recommendations

Introduction

In June 2010, the government announced a national review of child protection, to be led by Eileen Munro, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and a prominent academic in the field of safeguarding and child protection.

She produced two reports which focussed on a different aspect of child protection and then the final report: **The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report - A child-centred system.**

The third and final report from the Munro Review of Child Protection was presented to Ministers on 11 May 2011, delivering a range of recommendations that are likely to have significant implications for the way that child protection services are run at a local level. Serious case reviews, early intervention, the role of Ofsted and reforms to the health economy all feature strongly, alongside a more general shift away from central prescription and towards individual discretion in local decision making – with quality assurance measures strongly focussed on providing the very best outcomes for children.

Professor Munro's final report has been broadly welcomed by the children's sector. There has been general acceptance that Professor Munro has produced a detailed and well evidenced set of recommendations which have the potential to make a significant improvement to child protection arrangements in England.

The government has also received the report well, Children's Minister Tim Loughton said:

"This is the first review of child protection that hasn't been initiated in the wake of a child death or serious case. This has allowed for a wide-ranging and in-depth review with some radically different proposals for reform. It is clear that Professor Munro has taken a long hard look at what is preventing child protection services from working as well as they should in this country and I welcome her thorough analysis of the problems"

The First Report

This report was produced from evidence gathered from Munro and described a defensive system focussed on procedures rather than practitioner expertise and said we had become too prescriptive in our practice.

The Second Report

This second report produced in February 2011 considered the child's journey through the child protection system and instead of "doing things right" (i.e. following procedures) the system needed to be focussed on doing the right thing (i.e. checking whether children and young people are being helped)

The Final Report

This final report sets out a call for major culture change right across children's services and child protection, **including 15 key recommendations** aimed at ensuring that the system develops professional expertise and empowers practitioners to make best judgements about the welfare of children and young people.

Analysis of the key recommendations

Local practice and reducing prescription

One of the recommendations urges the government to revise both the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children and The Framework for the assessment of Children in Need and their Families. Working Together has become too large to be useful, being 55 times longer than in 1974. Munro comments there is a bureaucratic burden on practitioners and managers and that practice is more focused on compliance with guidance rather than providing support to families. Munro concludes that services have become so uniform that they cannot respond to the variety of presenting need.

The review calls for a shift from compliance in practitioners to a learning culture where practitioners have the freedom to use professional expertise in assessing need and providing help.

Throughout the report Professor Munro argues that increased prescription, while intended to improve practice, has had the opposite effect.

The review notes the important role that Local Safeguarding Children's Board's (LSCBs) have to play in monitoring local arrangement and calls for a particular focus on the provision of multi-agency training, which it fears may be cut due to budgetary pressures. The report also discusses the new Health and Wellbeing Boards and their relation to safeguarding. In Manchester this will be chaired by the leader of the council and it will be essential to have a mechanism to feed into this, not just around the safeguarding agenda but for wider VCFS issues.

Challenges and Implications for VCFS

- What impact will removing statutory guidance have at the time when local authorities are making significant reductions to their budgets?
- How can the government ensure that guidance isn't removed before the workforce is sufficiently well trained to exercise personal judgement
- With less prescriptive guidance it will be essential for the safeguarding lead in each organisation to ensure proficient safeguarding practice
- Welcome the emphasis on training as the training offered by MSCB is free to the VCFS and essential to ensure a safe workforce in the city
- The review alludes to the dangers of over-reacting and under-reacting but no clear thresholds of what constitutes suspicion of significant harm

Role of senior leaders

The review calls for the protection of the discrete roles of Director of Children's Services (DCS) and Lead Member for Children's Services and their links to the LSCB.

Given the governments removal of a statutory duty to have Children's Trust arrangements its welcome that there is an emphasis on the existing requirement for the local authority Leader and Chief Executive to produce an annual assessment of local safeguarding arrangements should remain in place, even in the absence of a statutory Children's Trust. Munro acknowledges the difficulty of creating a system that enables professionals from a wide variety of agencies to work well together and identifies the development of clear lines of accountability as the key to the task. It notes that this is particularly important during this time of major public service reform and when increased localism will lead to local accountability structures varying significantly between different areas.

Challenges and Implications for VCFS

- How to ensure that as structures change within the area (e.g. links with school clusters / G.P's) there will be adequate lines of accountability in place
- To ensure that there is adequate VCFS engagement within the LSCB and that changes are communicated effectively to the sector
- Localism, whilst good when it works, can lead to great disparity across local authorities when it comes to setting thresholds

Early help

With increasing evidence that early intervention is cost effective and produces strong positive outcomes for children and young people, the review's emphasis on early help initiatives is welcome.

Professor Munro defines early help as that provided both early in the life of a child and early in the emergence of a problem. Munro provides a summary of the Allan, Field and Tickell reviews and endorses their findings. *(For more information see the reference section)* It also praises the early intervention policies implemented by the current and previous governments as well as the VCFS. The review mentions the community budget pilots, which will see various statutory agencies pooling their budgets to support families with multiple problems, as a promising development. This is welcome news for Manchester who will be developing this approach in certain parts of the city. However, the report also expresses concern that early intervention budgets have been disproportionately cut by local authorities and calls on local authorities and statutory partners to coordinate their services so as to avoid short sighted cuts in one area leading to increased costs in another.

The recommendation states:

"The Government should place a duty on local authorities and statutory partners to secure the sufficient provision of local early help services for children, young people and families."

This is an interesting recommendation which would mean that, if supported; sufficient "early help" services would be made available in Manchester to support the high need.

Challenges and Implications for VCFS

- How will local authorities meet an "early help" duty given the cuts already to early intervention services?
- MACC are working with the partnership around the community budget areas and will work to ensure VCFS organisations in these areas are engaged, as with the city region work
- What should local authorities do when faced with a finite pot of money: promote protective services or fund early intervention?

Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

Professor Munro suggests that local areas should have greater flexibility to make local decisions on revising the Common Assessment Framework form in order to reduce bureaucracy and empower practitioners. Although welcoming the emphasis on and being fully supportive of early help for children young people and families.

Manchester has recently agreed to establish three positions to support CAF to be embedded in the city.

Challenges and Implications for the VCFS

- Given the budget cuts and the high level of need in Manchester how can we ensure that the CAF is used effectively as an early intervention tool?
- How can the VCFS engage with the new CAF coordinators to work to embed CAF across Manchester?

Serious Case Reviews (SCR)

The Munro review recommends that LSCBs should use systems methodology in future reviews of serious cases. This is a far more collaborative approach, involving practitioners from an early stage and focussing on holistic factors rather than seeking to identify individual practitioner errors. The approach is strongly based on the system of root cause analysis that has been established in health for a number of years. Manchester, who have lead in many ways the development of serious case review methodology and who are currently the only authority that has received two outstanding reports from Ofsted will be working to look at how to implement a systems approach using all the good practice learned from previous SCR's.

The DFE, in anticipation of the changes to SCR methodology, will be recruiting and training 30 reviewers who will be accredited to use the systems methodology for SCR's at the point at which the government decides the new SCR model to be implemented.

Challenges and Implications for VCFS

- Has the systems methodology been tested sufficiently in child protection to be used for SCR's?
- How can we ensure adequate support for staff going through the systems approach when they come from small VCFS organisations without a large infrastructure? This is currently done through a small VCFS SCR working group – will this continue?

Ofsted and inspections

Carrying on the theme of reducing bureaucracy the Munro review calls for reduction in the bureaucracy associated with inspections, reiterating the recommendation made in the second Professor Munro report that inspections should be unannounced. Munro suggests that future inspections should be child-centred, focussed on the child's journey through the system and the quality of frontline practice. As child protection involves multiple agencies, the review also calls for separate inspectorates to work together more closely.

Manchester Children's Trust have set up an Ofsted task group to ensure that the partnership is prepared for any unannounced inspections. Manchester VCFS was heavily involved in the last Ofsted inspection and the Munro review puts an emphasis on multi-agency working to these inspections which is particularly helpful. Taking account of the full range of agencies working within local safeguarding partnerships and focussing attention on their contribution to the delivery of strong outcomes for children, young people and families.

Next Steps

Central to the whole review is the move to reshape the child protection system around the needs of individual children and young people which is welcome.

The Department for Education has established an Implementation Working Group (IWG) to help it develop a full response to Professor Munro's recommendations before the summer recess starts on July 19th. We do not know when the detail of the government's response will be released or when Working Together will be revised so systems continue as they were for the time being but there are likely to be big developments within the safeguarding system in the coming year.

References

- For more information about the Munro Review and to see the full list of recommendations please visit:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/>
- For information about the Graham Allen review of early intervention visit:
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf>
- For Information on the Frank Field review of Poverty and Life Chances visit:
<http://www.frankfield.co.uk/review-on-poverty-and-life-chances/>
- For information about the Tickell review on the Early Years Foundation Stage visit:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/tickellreview>

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