

**Select Committee on Children's Services**

**Thursday 21 January 2009**

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Briefing on Baby P case in Haringey**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To provide Select Committee on Children's Services with a briefing on the Baby P case in Haringey and implications for the Authority.

**Background**

2. On 11 November 2008 two people were convicted of causing or allowing the death of the 17 month old Baby P. The trial has led to concerted government action to address a widespread loss of confidence in the child protection system in Haringey where the tragedy occurred and more widely. There has also been huge media coverage and comment regarding the case.
3. Baby P was born on March 1 2006 and died on 3 August 2007. From December 2006 until his death there was extensive contact between agencies and the family as well as action when the child sustained injuries. The boy was on Haringey's child protection register and subject to a child protection plan. After he was taken to hospital by his mother in December 2006 and throughout 8 months of abuse prior to his death during which time he sustained 50 injuries. His family had been seen 60 times by agencies.

**Government Action**

4. Ministers have announced a national child protection review headed by Lord Laming who led the enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. This will cover
  - Current practice in implementing safeguarding procedures, interagency working, ensuring effective public accountability and developing workforce capacity
  - Key barriers including in the legal process that may impede efficient and effective work with children and families

- Specific action which should be taken by Government and national and local agencies to overcome these barriers

In addition it will also incorporate previously announced reviews of serious case reviews and local safeguarding children boards.

5. The Minister also ordered OFSTED, the Healthcare commission and the Police Inspectorate to conduct an urgent JAR (Joint Area Review) of safeguarding in Haringey and report by 1 December 2008.
6. On 1 December 2008 the JAR was completed along with an initial statement from Lord Laming. Ed Balls issued a public statement which said that the JAR had revealed a catalogue of failing in Haringey including:
  - A failure to identify children at risk of immediate harm across all agencies and to act on evidence
  - Agencies working in isolation from each other
  - Poor gathering, recording and sharing of information
  - Inconsistent quality of frontline practice across all agencies and insufficient evidence of supervision
  - Insufficient strategic leadership and management oversight of safeguarding by Elected Members, senior officers and others within the strategic partnership
  - Failure to comply with the requirements of the Laming enquiry
  - Insufficient arrangements for scrutiny of performance across the Council and partnership
  - Insufficient challenge by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to its members and frontline staff
  - An over-dependence on performance data that was not always accurate
  - Poor child protection plans
7. The leadership of Haringey has been overhauled. A new Director and an independent chair of the LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children Board) have been appointed. OFSTED had found that the LSCBs original serious case review, which reported on 12 November 2008, was inadequate. A further review has been commissioned to report by February 2009.

8. The minister wrote to all Councils on 1 December 2008 identifying the key issues from the JAR and identifying key findings. All Local Authorities with their partners are required to take stock of the effectiveness of their safeguarding practice and specifically to go beyond the headlines of performance management information and scrutinize the quality of day to day practice with children and joint working between professionals.
9. Lord Laming in his initial response said that he was struck by the robustness of the foundation on which current children's services are based and that there was no need to change the legislative base of child protection. He also rejected calls for a public enquiry saying it could set back progress made since his enquiry reported in 2003.
10. Alan Johnson has asked the Healthcare Commission to urgently review whether NHS bodies were applying national child protection standards as vigorously as they should be and has asked the commission to report on the role of the four NHS Trusts involved in events leading to Baby P's death.
11. All authorities that have undertaken Serious Case Reviews, which have been judged by OFSTED to be inadequate, have been asked to review them.

### **Local Action**

12. The Dudley Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB) has written to all partner agencies requiring them to consider the Haringey serious case review and the Haringey JAR and to assess their agency practice against the recommendations of both reports and take remedial action if required. In addition those agencies that undertook an audit against Lord Laming's 2003 enquiry have been asked to audit compliance against those recommendations.
13. An executive group of the DSCB involving the key agencies – Children's Services, (PCT) Primary Care Trust, Dudley Group of Hospitals and Police has been convened to coordinate activity across the partner agencies of the DSCB and Children's Trust.
14. The training sub group of the DSCB has been tasked with incorporating any learning from the JAR into training courses with immediate effect.
15. All Elected Members have been written to identifying actions to be taken by DSCB and Children's Services. The Director of Children's Services, Chair of DSCB and Cabinet Member have met with the Chief Executive to agree key actions.
16. An internal assessment of Dudley's practice against the recommendations of the Haringey JAR Serious Case Review and Laming review compliance is being led by

the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services with the support of an external consultant. The findings will be reported to the Cabinet Member and the Select Committee for Children's Services.

### **Implications and context**

17. In Dudley we currently have 170 children with a child protection plan. Children's social care are dealing with around 2000 open children in need cases and are averaging 240 referrals a month. In addition we have 526 children looked after.
18. It is inevitable that in the wake of such a tragic case professionals will be cautious in the management of risk and CAFCASS (the court agency) are already reporting an increase in the numbers of applications for children to be in care. Anecdotally authorities around the region are seeing an increase in referral activity that in turn will add pressure to already stretched services. There is real concern that recruitment into the profession, which has continued to be a national issue, may be further adversely affected by the media coverage of this case.
19. The issues reported in the Haringey JAR are specific to that Authority and whilst they may not be unique we need to guard against a negative view of services in Dudley. We need to have a balance between over-reaction and complacency. As a responsible authority we need to ensure that we seek to continue to improve our services but focus our activity to ensure that it does not reduce capacity at the front line.

### **Finance**

20. There are no direct finance implications arising from this report. However, there is likely to be further guidance from Government following Lord Laming's enquiry and Local Authority's assessment of their safeguarding arrangements which may result in the need for additional resources to respond to requirements to ensure that children are safeguarded.

### **Law**

21.
  - Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 place duties on organisations and individuals to ensure that their functions are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
  - Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty to co-operate to improve the well-being of children

- Working Together to Safeguard Children is issued as guidance under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 and provides a national framework within which agencies and professionals at local level – individually and jointly – draw up and agree on their own ways of working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

### **Equality Impact**

22. The safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of all children is a duty placed on the local authority and partners through the Children Act 2004. The robustness and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements across all agencies is critical in ensuring that the most vulnerable children are identified and services put in place to ensure that they are protected from harm. In doing so the opportunities for children to achieve positive outcomes will be enhanced.

### **Recommendation**

23. That Select Committee on Children's Services note the content of the report and agree the actions to be taken.
24. A further report is provided to Select Committee on Children's Services following the internal review of safeguarding arrangements.



.....  
**Director of Children's Services**

Contact Officer: Pauline Sharratt  
Telephone: 01384 815803  
Email: [Pauline.sharratt@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:Pauline.sharratt@dudley.gov.uk)