



Tim Loughton MP

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To: LSCB Chairs
Directors of Children's Services

Cc: Lead Members
Chief Executives

10th June 2010

PUBLICATION OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEW OVERVIEW REPORTS AND MUNRO REVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION

Dear colleague

I am writing to inform you about a change to the statutory guidance set out in Chapter 8 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)* relating to the publication of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and to inform you of an independent review to improve child protection at the front line.

Publication of Serious Case Review overview reports

This section of this letter is guidance to local authorities and their Board partners on Local Safeguarding Children Boards issued under section 16(2) of the Children Act 2004. In exercising their functions relating to a Local Safeguarding Children Board, local authorities and their Board partners must have regard to any guidance given to them for the purpose by the Secretary of State.

The Coalition Programme for Government launched on 20 May confirmed the Government's commitment to publishing Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) with identifying details removed.

We recognise that the publication of Serious Case Reviews is a sensitive and complex matter. Serious Case Review overview reports contain personal information and it is vitally important that published Serious Case Reviews are appropriately redacted and anonymised to protect the privacy and welfare of vulnerable children and their families. There is an important balance to be struck between transparency and openness so that lessons can be learned, and the protection and welfare of individuals. We believe that publication to the extent that we are proposing is reasonable and in the greater public interest.

The key purpose of undertaking Serious Case Reviews is to enable lessons to be learned from cases where a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is known, or suspected, to be a factor. In order for these lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in each case, and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future. Only by publishing Serious Case Reviews will this greater level of transparency and accountability be achieved. Our aim in publishing SCR overview reports is to restore public confidence and improve transparency in the child protection system, and to ensure that the context in which the events occurred is properly understood so relevant lessons are learnt and applied as widely as possible.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards should publish overview reports of all new SCRs initiated on or after 10 June 2010. Overview reports should be published together with the executive summaries unless there are compelling reasons relating to the welfare of any children directly concerned in the case for this not to happen. Both the overview report and the executive summary should be anonymised and should not contain identifying details. This means preparing SCR overview reports in a form suitable for publication, or redacting them appropriately before publication.

For all new SCRs initiated on or after 10 June 2010, references to publication of the executive summary in Chapter 8 and Flow chart 7 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2010) should be read as meaning publication of both the overview report and the executive summary. In particular, the fourth bullet point in paragraph 8.44 should be read as referring to publication of the executive summary and the overview report; and the last sentence of paragraph 8.50 should be read as meaning that the IMRs should not be made publicly available (but the overview report should be published). There is no change to the guidance on the content of the executive summary.

SCR overview reports contain personal information relating to surviving children, family members and others. The content of the SCR overview report should be suitably anonymised in order to protect the identity of children, relevant family members and others, and should comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 when published. LSCBs should also be mindful of other restrictions on publication of information, for example Court orders, and should take independent advice if in any doubt on compliance with the law.

There is no change to the guidance contained in *Working Together* in respect of Serious Case Reviews initiated prior to 10 June 2010.

Independent review to improve child protection

I am also announcing today the formal appointment of Professor Eileen Munro to conduct an independent review to improve child protection. The review will be wide ranging and Professor Munro will complete it in three stages, supported by a reference group and consulting widely.

Among the issues we have asked Professor Munro to consider are how Serious Case Reviews could be strengthened including improving the quality of authors and reports and whether there are alternative learning models that could be more effective and efficient.

Professor Munro is due to submit her final review report by April 2011. I attach a copy of the Secretary of State's letter to Professor Munro, which sets out the terms of reference for the review.

If you have any queries relating to this letter, please contact Jeanette Pugh, Director, Safeguarding Group, Level 1, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3B.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Loughton', with a large, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

TIM LOUGHTON