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The ‘Munro Review’ of Child Protection
Part 2: The Child’s Journey

This briefing note considers the main points from the Munro Review Interim Report: ‘The Child’s Journey’.

Links to the Interim Report can be found on our website www.trixonline.co.uk (follow links to ‘News’ – Policy Briefing #11 The Munro Review Interim Report ‘The Child’s Journey’).

Introduction

This is the second interim report of the Munro review, entitled ‘The Child’s Journey’. By this the title means the journey for a child from needing help to receiving it. The final report is due to be completed at the end of April when it is to be considered by ministers. This report analyses what an effective child protection system is like and what would need to change to maintain a focus on the child. The report opens with a concise Executive Summary that outlines its findings.

The report is clearly written and it recognises the current constraints that multi-agency child protection services face. The review has developed a clear understanding of the challenges that all services (but social work in particular) face. However it identifies a clear vision of services to children and families that are based around social workers who can develop their professional judgement and move towards a future where their ability to exercise expertise grows as they become more skilled and empowered. Tri.X welcomes the opportunity to contribute towards this through the simplification and separation of practice rules from professional guidance. Tri.X is eager to develop its support to Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) and Children’s Services from the provision of procedures and guidance to a role that makes a greater contribution to the learning and development of professionals. Children’s Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards (NMS), issued in December 2010.

The report is broken into four main sections:
1. **Getting Help Early**

This section of the report has been written in the context of the recent reports on poverty and life chances (lead by Frank Field) and the report on the early years foundation stage (Dame Clare Tickell) and it considers issues around prevention and early intervention and the identification of children who are at suffering (or are likely to) significant harm.

The report endorses a single system of assessment that with parental consent can be shared by all agencies. The report also advocates for a better universal service that refers fewer, more appropriate children and families to Children’s Social Care (CSC) Departments. For example, the report supports the development of community based, multi-agency teams that include social workers and which allows universal support to families and which also enable discussion between the levels of services which offer support. It is suggested that this would result in better services and fewer referrals to CSC.

2. **Child and Family Social Work**

In the first report the review suggested that there was too much attention paid to satisfying the regulators and not enough to the needs of children. This report starts to consider what managers would do if they were more focussed on the needs of children and less on the bureaucratic elements of the job. This section of the report goes on to consider how social workers can exercise expertise in their work with children and their families. The report says that there has been too much weight given to the explicit, logical aspects of reasoning in social work and that the intuitive reasoning and emotions have been undervalued and that this has skewed the management framework. Social workers need professional support and this is linked to retention issues (see below). The development of relationships by social workers, particularly with children is promoted by the report as opposed to a ‘managerialist’ approach, which has over-emphasised the need for collecting information, and making plans.

The report suggests that the current career progression for social workers (unlike teachers and nurses) is over dependent on them becoming managers and therefore removed from practice. A system of progression that encourages workers to be better supported through professional supervision (See below) and to remain involved in frontline practice is suggested with the aim of creating higher levels of expertise in social workers. The report proposes that measures such as these would also help with problems of recruitment and retention.

3. **Managing Frontline Social Work**

In this chapter, the report considers these areas:

- **Managing time.** The review considers how social workers and their managers can stream line their work by reducing duplicate recording and prioritising work. The suppression of demand is referred to in chapter 2 and the involvement of greater administrative support to social workers is examined. Heavy workload and the retention of experienced staff is referenced.

- **Supervision.** The report explains that there are two major functions for supervision: managerial oversight of caseloads (which predominates) and professional support. The second is vital in developing practice and retainingstaff. The separation of these two essential functions is suggested by the review so that both can be done properly.
• **Professional Development.** The report goes beyond this issue being a function for supervision and looks at ways in which research findings and methods of evidence-based social work can be enhanced in professional development to enhance professional reasoning through the application of the best use of evidence to help families to change. Specialist training in intervention such as parenting should be an integral and ongoing part of the development of social workers.

• **Tools.** The use of technology is explored in this section and the Tower Hamlets (draft) record for understanding families is sited as an example of a tool that is derived from the needs of those using the tool as opposed to the ability of the tool to collate information. For example it captures the child’s story more accurately. Inefficient tools (like some current assessment tools) enhance the likelihood of workers making mistakes whereas tools that works well (For example by helping to achieve a clearer understanding of family history thereby dealing with the problems of the family’s past) lead to workers being more likely to do the correct things and therefore enhance the protection of children.

• **The Integrated Children’s System (ICS)** The importance of recording data is explained in the report and it does not suggest that ICS could be removed. However the inability of ICS to support professional judgement and that it inhibits efficient working is identified. For example ICS cannot help to create effective chronologies and genograms. Local Authorities told the review that they fear revising ICS because of their perception of Ofsted expectations.

• **Procedures (see Section 4: Procedures)**

• **How Social Work is portrayed in the media.** The review is working with the College of Social Work to help the public to a greater understanding of the complexities and emotional challenge that is an integral part of working in the arena of protecting children. It also suggests that the social work profession should improve its response to public debate about the work especially at times of crisis to create a clearer account of professional practice. It is hoped that in the future, better understanding will lead to less referral spikes in the wake of crisis.

The review sites seven examples of local Authorities where evolving practice demonstrates the sort of systemic learning which it encourages. Five of these authorities (subject to ministerial approval) will be allowed an increased flexibility in their approach to assessment for an experimental period.

4. **Procedures**

The review highlights the essential elements that are provided by procedures:

• They formulate best practice and disseminate practice wisdom.
• They assist new workers and are a useful training tool.
• They can provide experienced workers with a valuable checklist.
• They enable people to work together better as they can predict what one another are going to do - especially when they are not used to working together – the review sites the example into enquiries of allegations of child abuse.

Problematic areas that are identified in procedures are:

• They have become long and complicated.
• They have dominated practice.
• There is a view that compliance with procedure is the desired outcome as opposed to the application of professional judgement.
• Procedures cannot deal with all situations.
It sites the example of the way that Working Together has evolved over the years from a much smaller document (It is 55 times longer than the original document) as an example of the way that statutory guidance has become intertwined with professional guidance and it suggests that these should be separated, one from the other to simplify practice rules from professional guidance.

The review suggests that a culture ‘where procedural compliance is expected and where deviation is met with blame’ has developed and that this has discouraged workers from building expertise.

Tri.x welcomes the opportunity to utilise its knowledge and experience in this area to enable workers to use procedures in a way that will enhance their knowledge and to compliment their learning with the latest professional guidance.

5. Shared Learning and Accountability.

The review says that the role of the Local Safeguarding Children Boards is going to become even more vital in providing leadership, learning and adaptive practice.

The review says that the role of the Director of Children’s Services should not be diluted or weakened. In terms of collecting data, it is recommended that there is a reduced and focused set of national data that is accompanied by discretionary data published in local areas to enable comparisons, benchmarking and public accountability. This would include feedback from children families and partners.

The importance of external inspection is recognised but the report suggests that this should be unannounced and that the inspection should cover a broader remit across services that work towards the protection of children. This is intended to reduce the bureaucratic burden that is created by preparation for inspection would be reduced by these measures.

Learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCR’s) is considered alongside the LSCB’s remit for training. The review recommends that the role of Ofsted in evaluating SCR’s should end and that learning overall should have greater consideration in the inspection process. The report considers the establishment of a national body that would support national and local learning and which would provide training for reviewers. The better alignment of the child death overview review process with the SCR process is considered.

The separation of rules and guidance is also considered in terms of SCR’s (see Section 4: Procedures) The report also considers the factors that are in the remit of Local Authorities which would improve the timeliness of Care Proceedings, including: Social Workers being better prepared; processes to give children a voice; continuity of social workers; parallel planning and panel processes and good quality legal advice being made available to social workers.
How can we help?

If you’re one of our customers, we have you covered! We’ll be collaborating with you to review these Regulations in detail and to agree the necessary changes in your organisation or agency. For more detail about how this will be achieved, see Policy Briefing No 5: go to our website and follow links to News/Policy Briefings.

If you are not a customer, we’ll be glad to help. We have a large team of child care specialists and lawyers who can help you review your procedures, organisational and training requirements. We are cost effective and passionate about improving outcomes for children and families. To find out more, visit our website or contact us.

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