Government response to the Munro review and the Implications for Social Work Practice

tri.x Policy Briefing

Introduction
This is a Policy Briefing, produced by tri.x, on the government response to the Munro Review of Child Protection. The headlines from the response and the full document which contains an overview and a grid with the specific responses to each recommendation can be seen on the Department for Education website: http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/

This comprehensive response by the government speaks for itself.

Encouragingly the Government has accepted all 15 of Professor Munro’s review recommendations.

This briefing is intended to help to identify the impact and the implications of the review, having regard to the government’s response.

Background
Professor Munro produced her final report in May 2011.

Our Policy Briefing on the final report is in Appendix 2: Final Report Policy Briefing below.

In her report, Professor Munro provided an exciting vision of the future of child protection and she identified the components that need to be in place for the vision to become a reality. The differences between where the respective services are now and where they need to be appear great, but the government response starts to break the ‘elephant’ of the vision into bite size pieces.

Timescales
Tri.x have produced a summary timetable setting out the timescales for the implementation of Professor Munro’s recommendations: see Appendix 1: Timetable for Government Response below.

The government has resisted the temptation for knee-jerk immediate but shallow changes in favour of a more measured response and this has caused some controversy, namely from the ADCS (Association of Directors of Children’s Services) who have called, for example, for the guidance on timescales for assessment and the learning from Serious Case Reviews to be urgently reviewed. They have also asked for the regulatory reforms to go further than dealing with the child protection system and to extend to lighter regulation for services to looked after children, fostering and adoption.
What the changes mean for social work practice

Systems theory and thinking is apparent throughout the review and the government have embraced this, seeing a movement from centralised command and control to the development of a competent, professionally capable workforce which is less dependent on prescriptive regulation and guidance in its efforts to keep children safe.

Interestingly, the government, like Professor Munro, recognises that there will be no extra financial resources available to public services and that the changes will need to take place by movement in philosophy, face-to-face practice with children and parents; and the way in which services are organised.

Services to vulnerable children, those in need and those in need of protection (and their families) will need to be managed differently with the Big Society banner of local control being apparent in all these developments.

This will be a daunting challenge for those providing Early Help to children and families before they become entangled in the child protection system. The implications for all such service providers are that they will need to coordinate their efforts to be able to make an ‘Early Help Offer’ to all the families with whom they work. It is envisaged that they will deal more confidently at an early stage with children who are seen as vulnerable, as they will have access to social work expertise on child protection.

Work between the SWRB (Social Work Reform Board), the College of Social Work, Higher Education Institutions and Local Authorities to enhance the skills of newly qualified and experienced social workers will take place through the development of the SWRB’s Professional Capabilities Framework. The effectiveness of these changes is intended to be characterised by the development of the relationship between social workers and the children with whom they work and this is at the heart not just of the Munro Review but the government response. All recognise that these reforms will only mean something if the child’s journey from needing help to receiving services is improved.

To support this move the designation (not necessarily the appointment) of a Principal Child and Family Social Worker whose job it will be to bridge the gap between strategic managers and the children who receive services, will be implemented in each Children’s Services Department. The intention is that managers will be no longer removed from the frontline, as there will be a more direct loop of feedback. This is mirrored in the government appointment of a Chief Social Worker who it is intended will keep government ministers advised through the provision of an annual report to parliament on the working of the Children Act 1989.

Achieving the changes

To achieve these changes, the government will need to take steps to follow Professor Munro’s guidance on the development of public confidence in the way in which children are protected because children can never be safe from abuse and the child protection system must be judged not by whether abuse occurs but by how well it is dealt with. Unless this issue is addressed the reforms may be one tragic, well publicised case away from capitulation to command and control regulation of what will be publicised as a failing system.
For Tri.x and its customers, some great opportunities lie ahead to collaborate on the implementation of these changes through the provision of essential information for practitioners including the communication about good and emerging practice and the avoidance of post-code lottery of service provision. The development of our easy-to-use procedure manuals to become an essential source of information for practitioners and managers, linking customer authorities and raising awareness of how others are responding to change, is envisaged and this can be an integral part of the evolution of the provision of child protection and other services.

**Inspections**

The ‘set piece’ inspection regime will be reformed to be more responsive to feedback from children, their families and other service users. It is intended that this will save organisational time and energy that is currently directed toward inspection preparation at the cost of service delivery. This will be done through unannounced inspections of the services that work together to protect children including the inspection of the Police, Health and Education.

**Serious Case Reviews**

Systems based Case Reviews are a part of a learning organisation and the response endorses the development of this approach. However, the government have not gone as far as to abandon the Ofsted inspection (yet) of Serious Case Reviews (SCR) or to temporarily amend Chapter 8 of Working Together to enable these reviews to be piloted in case which meet the SCR criteria. This transition will be planned more carefully.

See Appendices below

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## Appendix 1: Timetable for Government Response

This appendix, produced by Tri.x, summarises the timetable proposed by Government.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Munro Recommendation</th>
<th>July ‘11</th>
<th>September ‘11</th>
<th>December ‘11</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Valuing Expertise, (Recommendation 123 and 4)</td>
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<td>Trials re. targeted times for assessments extension date. Removal of distinction between Initial and Core Assessments, timescales and description of the parameters for good assessments to be included as an amendment to WT2010</td>
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<td>Recommendation 2. Ofsted inspection changes- All agencies, unannounced inspection.</td>
<td>Consultation on a new joint-agency inspection framework to be completed</td>
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<td>New inspection framework to be in place.</td>
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<td>Recommendation 3. Child’s journey to be at the heart of inspection</td>
<td>Consultation on a new joint-agency inspection framework to be completed</td>
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<td>New inspection framework to be in place.</td>
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<td>Recommendation 4. Local data sets.</td>
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<td>Suite of local data sets to be confirmed by government (taking account of PHOF)</td>
<td>Publication of new local data sets.</td>
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| **Theme 2: Sharing the Responsibility for Early Help.**  
(Recommendation’s 8,10 and 13)  
Recommendation 8.  
Improve and develop arrangements for the protection of children as part of Health reforms | | DoH, DfE, LA’s professional bodies and practitioners to publish joint programme of work. and NHS bodies | | |
| Recommendation 10.  
Provision of Early help. | | The Government will work with partners to identify the appropriate route to effect the responsibility for the provision of early help. To be identified by September 2011 | | Inspection framework to test efficacy of these arrangements will be in place from May 2012. |
| Recommendation 13.  
Review and redesign the delivery of child and family social work. | This recommendation to be determined and implemented locally. | This recommendation to be determined and implemented locally. | This recommendation to be determined and implemented locally. | This recommendation to be determined and implemented locally. |
| **Theme 3 Developing social work expertise and supporting effective practice.**  
(Recommendation’s 11,12,14 and 15)  
Recommendation 11.  
Social worker training- pre and post qualification. | | | The SWRB has already developed the Professional Capabilities Framework and is in the process of populating the various levels and capabilities. It is also developing an associated CPD framework. Ownership of both is expected to transfer to the College of Social Work around November 2011 | Implementation Autumn 2012 |
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<td>Recommendation 12.</td>
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<td>The Government will work with employers and HEIs to build partnership arrangements with the aim of having these in place by the end of 2012. The Government will ask the College of Social Work to develop plans for designated approved practice settings and teaching organisation status, and to consider the merits of student units by summer 2012.</td>
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<td>Student practice placements</td>
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<td>Local Authorities to designate Principal child and family social worker by April 2012 to July 2012.</td>
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<td>Principal Social Worker to link practice and management.</td>
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<td>Practitioner career path.</td>
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<td>Recommendation 15.</td>
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<td>The Government will identify the appropriate legislative vehicle as soon as practicable.</td>
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<td>Appointment of Chief Social Worker</td>
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<td>The Government will identify the appropriate legislative vehicle as soon as practicable.</td>
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<td>Theme 4 Strengthening accountability and creating a learning system (Recommendation’s 5, 6, 7 and 9) Recommendation 5. LSCB annual report to Chief Exec, Leader of Council, Other Agency Leaders.</td>
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<td>Recommendation 6.</td>
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<td>The Government will publish an amendment (role of LSCBs in monitoring effectiveness of early help and protective services) to Working Together by December 2011</td>
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<td>LSCB’s to assess the effectiveness of help provided to families and the effectiveness of training.</td>
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<td>Recommendation 7.</td>
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<td>The Government will continue working with the sector on how to revise the statutory guidance on the role of the DCS and the Lead Member and will consult formally on the guidance in autumn 2011</td>
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<td>Role of the DCS and Lead Member</td>
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<td>Recommendation 9.</td>
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<td>Further consideration will be given over the summer to ending the evaluation of SCR’s in their current form.</td>
<td>During the second half of 2011 the Government will, working with the sector, consider the evidence and opportunities for using systems review methodologies for Serious Case Reviews and the options for developing the national resources</td>
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<td>Systems methodology for SCR’s as part of LSCB learning. Ofsted evaluation to end.</td>
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Appendix 2: Final Report Policy Briefing

About this Policy Briefing

This is a copy of Policy Briefing 31, written by one of our Consultants, Nick Lister, summarises the final Munro Review Report: ‘A Child Centred System’.

Access to the Final Report: Can be found at www.education.gov.uk/munroreview

Extracts from this Policy Briefing: This Briefing has been created in MS Word; we would appreciate an acknowledgement if extracts are taken.

Summary:

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1. Introduction

This is the third and final report of the Munro review of child protection which started its work in June 2010. This report stands alone and it has been presented to ministers; the government is due to respond to its findings and recommendations later this year. It is unlikely that the review will lead to immediate changes to the child protection system but the philosophy of the review indicates a significant move from a centralised system that has become over-bureaucratised and focussed on compliance, to a localised one that values and develops professional expertise and which is focussed on the safety and welfare of children and young people.

The themes and thinking in the final report are in keeping with the first two interim reports but there is much more detail of the review’s findings and the 15 recommendations included in the final report are more specific. The report identifies that Working Together to Safeguard Children will need to be rewritten so that there is a distinction between the multi-agency practice rules and the guidance that aids professional judgement.

‘Helping children is a human process. When the bureaucratic aspects of the work become too dominant, the heart of the work is lost’. (P10)

National Performance indicators and forms are seen as an inhibitor to local adaptability to service user needs and the ability of workers to exercise professional judgement.

Professor Munro seeks to harness the progress that has been made in the protection of children in the last two decades but she has indicated that there are no quick fixes and that even when the quality of professional practice is high, the death or serious injury to children may still follow.

‘The measure of the success of a child protection system, both local and national, is whether children are receiving effective help’. (P23)

The review warns against cherry-picking recommendations and recognises that devolving greater discretion to local agencies to fulfil their statutory duties can only be accomplished once they have the expertise to do this. Government will have to take a risk to allow local agencies to demonstrate that they have the required expertise and structures in order to have authority delegated to them.

Throughout the review and in its appendices, models and examples of good practice are illustrated.

2. The principles of an effective child protection system

The review report identifies the following principles for effective child protection:

- The system must be a child centred
- The family is the best place for children to be brought up, but their right to this needs to be balanced with their right to protection
- The quality of the relationship between the child and their family and the professionals directly impacts on the effectiveness of the help given.
- Early help is better for children
3. A system that values professional expertise

The review identifies that in the past, child protection practice has changed reactively to child abuse crises and that the unintended consequence of this is that the system has become overly bureaucratic to the extent that it limits practitioner’s ability to protect children by reducing their capacity to work directly with children and their families in favour of inspection/procedural-led activity. Services have become too standardised and a ‘one size fits all’ has evolved which is insufficiently flexible to respond to the unique needs of each child and their family. The report urges that there needs to be a shift from compliance to learning. To illustrate this, the report says that the underlying importance of timeliness should take precedence over prescribed timescales for the completion of assessments.

The report says the ‘Assessment Framework for Children in Need and Their Families’ is not sufficiently flexible, that less prescriptive local arrangements should be introduced and that the distinction between Initial and Core Assessments should be abandoned.

The process of inspection should, according to the report, be reformed to encourage the consideration and observation of social work practice and the way that professionals relate to children and families. Inspections should mostly be unannounced and should examine the practice of other agencies, harnessing their inspection expertise and organisations so that the ability of agencies to learn can be judged as opposed to single agency compliance and box ticking. The new inspection regime should examine the child’s journey from needing to receiving help. The report suggests that the Ofsted current inspection and grading of Serious Case Reviews (see below) is not enhancing learning and that it should cease straight away. In exceptional cases, for example where there are serious concerns about practice in a particular area, the report acknowledges that a more thorough inspection process may be required and it advocates a ‘deep dive’ inspection model.
4. Clarifying accountabilities and improving learning

The review recommends that the role of the Director of Children’s Services (DCS), Lead Member for Children’s Services and designated professionals must not be watered down and that these roles should not be encumbered with additional duties. The proposed reorganisation of health and other public services by the coalition government is recognised and new lines of accountability, at the most senior level, in the reconfigured services are identified to preserve the effective multi-agency approach that has been promoted successfully in England.

Services delivering early help to children should have designated professionals and the ability for relevant professionals to be able to identify, on a 24 hour basis, whether children are the subject of child protection plans should be ensured. The role of the LSCB is supported by the review as is the principle that each partner agency retains its own lines of accountability for their respective operations. LSCBs should be independently chaired but the DCS and Lead Member for Children’s Services must play an active role on the LSCB. The LSCB’s annual report should be made available to the heads of relevant organisations such as the police, health, council leaders and chief executives.

5. Serious Case Reviews and Learning

The report identifies that the system for conducting Serious Case Reviews (SCR’s) has evolved into a process in its own right and that the original aim of deriving learning from deaths and serious injuries has become secondary to a desire to fulfil the expectation of regulators so that learning is not facilitated in the way in which it was intended. It is recommended that the evaluation of SCR’s by Ofsted should end and that the obligation to provide Independent Management Reviews (IMR’s) will need to be revised to facilitate a different model of review.

Professor Munro’s roots in systems thinking and research is most apparent in this element of her report which advocates that the systems model of case reviews is adopted along the lines of the model that is currently being piloted by the Social Care institute for Excellence (SCIE) This model has evolved from industry via the health service patient safety movement. In essence this process is one that uses the experience of practitioners to look at how the things they did were influenced at the time and how the systems in which they operate could be changed to maximise the ability of practitioners and managers to do the correct thing in the future. An accredited scheme which would enable LSCB’s to use suitably trained reviewers to undertake systems based reviews which share a typology of the problems that contribute to adverse outcomes is recommended, so that local and national learning can be derived from the process of case review via the Chief Social Worker (see below)

The report identifies that regular case review should become the norm and that the systems approach can provide a window on the multi-agency provision of help and that this can also give useful feedback on the effectiveness of the service.
6. Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help

The review report identifies (alongside other reviews by Dame Clare Tickell and others) that, there is a growing body of evidence that the provision of early help provides a more effective option than higher level, reactive services which are often unsuccessful in helping families to change and provide improved care for children at home. Parents and children are more likely to respond positively to early help and if applied successfully, such help reduces the demand for services from Children’s Social Care Departments. The coordination of early help is recommended especially in terms of investment and savings from respective organisations i.e. the provision of a service by one organisation is often experienced as a saving by another. Local collaborative approaches are suggested which can respond to unique local needs.

The review found concerning evidence that, currently, savings are being made in these services and it recommends that the government requires local authorities and statutory partners to secure sufficient provision for early help and that they set out their arrangements to deliver this locally. The review recommends that local authorities should also have duties to specify how they will identify children who are (likely to) suffer significant harm including the provision of social work expertise and to set out their arrangements for the provision of an ‘Early Help Offer’ where families do not meet the criteria for receiving help from Children’s Social Care.

To do this, a multi-agency responsibility is required but in order to work confidently with vulnerable families, social work expertise is also an essential element to avoid the unnecessary referral for higher level services which can be a response to organisational anxiety as opposed to the needs of children and families. The complex nature of decisions about thresholds is recognised by the report and the availability of social work expertise to those grappling with these difficult decisions in the arena of universal services is explained.

The report recommends that the use of the Common Assessment Framework is confusingly named and that this form is too prescriptive and that local changes to the form or the use of other models should be enabled.

The effectiveness of multi-agency teams is explored by the report and the example of Devon’s MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs) is given as a good example of emerging practice.

7. Developing social work expertise

The delegation of authority to act in social work practice from procedural exactitude to professional judgement can only be made, the report argues, once social workers have the right level of expertise to be able to manage this responsibility. The report highlights what expertise is and how it can be acquired and maintained and this is seen as essential in the move away from centralised control of social work.

The report expresses concern that good practice is not sufficiently widespread. It says that a the current approach has led to a concentration of time and effort on information gathering and planning as opposed to building relationships, analysis and reflective practice (cognitive and procedural as opposed to intuitive and reflective).
Professor Munro sees professional expertise as a cornerstone from which good practice can develop and the review identifies 3 particular elements under which expertise can be defined and therefore achieved:

- Relationship skills
- Reasoning and emotion in relationship based practice
- Using evidence - both from the case and from research.

These skills are explained and developed in terms of the Social Work Reform Board’s Child and Family Social Work Capabilities of knowledge, critical analysis and intervention and skills. These elements of expertise and skills are acquired both through training and experience and the review identifies ways in which initial social work training and continuous professional development can evolve in the recommended direction.

In terms of initial training, clear consistent entry criteria are recommended including a balance of academic and personal skills of the applicants, the provision of high quality, approved placements which equip students to undertake child protection work and a supported and assessed first qualifying year of practice. The report also recommends the use of ‘student units’ headed by a senior social worker.

The report identifies that the quality of social work assessments and planning has a direct bearing on the ability of the courts to conclude care proceedings in a timely way with the best outcome for the child. Poor quality preparation of cases by local authorities is one, but by no means the only, factor in causing court delay and Professor Munro aims to complement the Family Justice Review, which is running concurrently to her review and focuses on the role of the courts and the justice system in the timely protection of children from harm. In doing so, Professor Munro refers to a focussed nationwide trawl carried out as part of her review to explore the issues that contribute to court delay and has identified a number of ways in which the local authority may improve their contribution to care proceedings. These include the setting up of specialist teams to advise social workers on cases going through the court process and the allocation of experienced social workers to assist, and possibly co-work, on such cases to enhance the confidence of the courts in the quality of the evidence being presented.

Incidentally, the Family Justice Review also supports Professor Munro’s view that the child protection system should become better at learning and adapting and that all professionals involved, including the judiciary, have a role in sharing lessons learned with a view to collective improvement in performance.

8. The organisational context: supporting effective social work practice

The report goes on to explore how professional development is a cornerstone in providing effective social work services but it also recognises that to achieve effective change the whole system needs to move forward. For example, strong, skilled leadership is required at the local level to improve performance and manage change. The relationships between local politicians and managers are essential in developing frontline services together. This will be essential to move from a command
and control culture to learning and adapting culture and this will need to be done in an environment of financial pressure. Professor Munro says that leadership skills need to be seen throughout the organisation including the direct work with families for example when professionals challenge poor parenting.

The review recognises that it will be difficult to move from a blaming culture to one that acknowledges that positive outcomes for children cannot be guaranteed. However this is a requisite as the report identifies that unmanaged anxiety about blame leads to a compliance culture.

The report identifies the characteristics of an effective local system (P108) and it goes on to recommend that Local Authorities and their partners should start an ongoing process to review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered to support practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families. The Hackney Reclaiming Social Work – A Whole Systems Change is used as an example of this.

The review recognises requirements for effective record keeping but it found that ICT systems were universally seen by practitioners as an obstacle to practice. The report says that ICT systems need to be redesigned so that the requirements of the system should primarily be based on the human-centred analysis of what is required by front line workers. The feedback of frontline staff on the implications of decision-making cannot, the report says, be underestimated and that the cultural shift to learning centred functionality requires this.

To achieve this, the report recommends that each local authority should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker who is active in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the frontline to all levels of management.

The report says that the career progression into management and away from practice needs to be reviewed. This has led to the most experienced staff having the least influence on day-to-day practice and it should be possible for workers to progress without losing the requirement to work with children and families.

The retention of staff is recognised as an important issue and this is seen in the context of how resilience can be achieved in new staff through effective first line reflective supervision as opposed to manager-led information gathering and box ticking. More time is required for case discussion and reflection and this is needed if staff are to remain motivated. The model of a junior doctor is identified as a possible way forward where advice and support is available from those more experienced and knowledgeable but some degree of autonomy is also acquired as the worker becomes more effective and experienced and able to make decisions on their cases.

The report goes on to recommend that a Chief Social Worker should be appointed to advise the government on social work practice. They would also play a role in the way that social work is portrayed in the media. However this job is also seen as a local responsibility and the report encourages Local Authorities to use their media specialists to identify positive stories where social workers have made a difference.

The report highlights that the responsibility for how the service is presented in the media is shared from the College Of Social Work through to social workers and journalists. There is a balance to be struck
between social workers and their employers working proactively with the media whilst protecting client’s privacy, and the media to provide public scrutiny in a balanced accurate manner, which recognises the complexity of the work. This is important as it is acknowledged that adverse media publicity leads to spikes in referrals and the sort of anxiety within the whole system that leads to greater central control and prescription.

End

Tri-X-Childcare July 2011

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