



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State

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Dear Eileen,

### **MUNRO REVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION BETTER FRONTLINE SERVICES TO PROTECT CHILDREN**

I am announcing today that I have asked you to conduct an independent review to improve child protection. You are extremely well placed to lead this review, given your extensive research experience in child protection, and I am very grateful to you for agreeing to take forward this work.

The reforms led by the previous administration were well-intentioned. The immense dedication and hard work of frontline professionals is an inspiration. But the system of child protection in our country is not working as well as it should. We need fundamentally to review the system. My first principle is always to ask what helps professionals make the best judgment they can to protect a vulnerable child?

I firmly believe we need reform to frontline social work practice. I want to strengthen the profession so social workers are in a better position to make well-informed judgments, based on up to date evidence, in the best interests of children, free from unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation. I want social workers to be clear about their responsibilities and to be accountable in the way they protect children. I particularly want social workers to have the confidence they need to challenge parents when they have concerns about the circumstances in which children are growing up, and to know they will be supported by the system in doing so.

I would like the review to set out the obstacles preventing improvements and the steps required to improve child protection. This should include considering how effectively children's social workers and professionals in other agencies work

together. I should be grateful if you would work closely with those leading related reviews such as the Family Justice Review. I also want any review to be informed by the strongest systems of child protection in other countries.

This is complex territory and necessarily wide-ranging. I intend this review to be broad in scope and want you to feel free to consider a wide range of issues. Three principles will underpin the Government's approach to reform of child protection: early intervention; trusting professionals and removing bureaucracy so they can spend more of their time on the frontline; and greater transparency and accountability.

You will want to identify and develop priority areas for improvement in practice by listening to what social workers and others working with children are saying, and build on the work of the Social Work Task Force, though the review may refine the future direction of this work. Examples of issues you might like to address are:

### **Early Intervention**

- How can interaction between social work teams and universal services for children and families be improved?
- In particular, how can Sure Start Children's Centres and Health Visitors make sure that the families who need the specialist input of Social Workers are identified effectively?
- What are the barriers to consistent good social work practice? How can other agencies help social workers undertake more effective practice?

### **Trusting frontline social workers**

- How could regulation be simplified and bureaucracy be reduced so social workers can spend more time with vulnerable children and their families?
- How have targets got in the way of good practice? What are better ways of using data to improve social work practice?
- How can recording of cases contribute to supporting the work of professionals and improving the service experienced by children? How can ICT contribute to strengthening good practice?
- How could social workers be given greater professional freedom and how could support for social workers be improved? How can social workers be supported to have the confidence to challenge difficult families when that is what is needed to protect children? What role might Social Work Practices, new models of social work delivery and volunteer social workers play? What can be learnt by what happens in other countries?



- How could poor performing areas come up to the standard of the best? How could councils most effectively share best practice with each other, including sharing information about how good outcomes can be achieved in a cost-effective way?

### **Transparency and accountability**

- How can greater transparency in the system be achieved in a way which commands public confidence and protects the privacy and welfare of vulnerable children and their families?
- It is the Government's intention to publish anonymised full Serious Case Reviews. How could reviews be strengthened? Are there alternative ways of learning from experience that could be more effective? What might be learnt from other sectors?
- How can risk be managed so that agencies do not develop a blame culture and their focus remains on protecting children?
- What approaches to inspection would better capture the quality of frontline practice and lead to better services for children?
- How could the system champion the profession, raising its status? Is there a role for a Chief Social Worker?

You have already identified a number of experts to act as a reference group for your review, and I know you plan to talk to people working in the voluntary and statutory sectors on specific issues. The Department will provide you with the necessary support to complete your review.

I look forward to receiving by the end of September a first report on the evidence you have gathered and the problems you have identified. This should be followed by an interim report in January 2011 setting out your further analysis of these problems and a final report by April with solutions.

Yours,

Min

MICHAEL GOVE