

“The child protection system in England has been subject to much scrutiny in recent years. The Munro report is a major step forward, and there have been significant and very positive developments and changes in the child protection system in the last few years. In our inquiry and this report we seek to draw attention to some areas where improvement is still needed.” (Summary)

Note: This guide reproduces in full the conclusions and recommendations in the report. Paragraph numbers refer to those in the full report.

Conclusions and recommendations (pages 81 - 90)

Neglect

Definition of neglect

1. We recommend that the Government investigate thoroughly whether the narrow scope of the definition contained in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 is causing problems in bringing criminal cases of neglect. (Paragraph 45)

Scale of neglect

2. We recommend that the Government commission research to investigate whether similar situations and behaviours are being classified as neglect in different local authorities. (Paragraph 54)

Neglecting neglect

3. An understanding of the long-term developmental consequences of neglect and the urgency of early intervention should be built into child protection training and guidance for all front-line professionals, including those in health and education. This would mean a strong focus, both in initial training and in continuing professional development (CPD) courses, on normal child development, in terms of emotional, intellectual, behavioural and physical development, and the impact upon it of parental behaviour, including neglect. The training should extend to the developmental impact of neglect on adolescents and the potential long-term effects for this group of children. It would be highly advantageous for CPD in this area to be offered to professionals from different disciplines training together, and we call on the Government and the College of Social Work to take this forward. (Paragraph 65)
4. We believe that the needs of children and the importance of acting quickly to secure early intervention for children are all too often not given enough priority. Securing positive outcomes and meeting the need of the child should come before all other considerations. There needs to be a continued shift in culture so that there is earlier protection and safeguarding of the long-term needs of the child. (Paragraph 66)
5. We recommend that Cafcass continue to monitor the responsiveness of local authorities to neglect through the timeliness and quality of care applications. If there are signs that improvement is not being sustained, the Government must be prepared to act to ensure that local authorities respond promptly in cases of neglect. (Paragraph 67)

Domestic violence and neglect

6. In cases of domestic violence, there should be no presumption that an abused parent cannot be a good parent. Wherever possible, the focus should be on supporting that parent and helping them to protect their children themselves, rather than on removing the children. But the interests of the children must come first. Guidance and specialised training in this sensitive area should be reviewed

and updated and highlighted to all social workers. The Department for Education must liaise more closely with the Home Office on issues relating to child protection and domestic abuse. (Paragraph 72)

Older children

Professionals' perceptions of older children

7. Both the College of Social Work, in outlining curricula, and individual institutions delivering social work training must ensure that teaching delivers an understanding of the effect of maltreatment on older children, their ability to cope with it and the long-term implications for their future well-being. (Paragraph 82)
8. Practitioners of all disciplines, including social workers, the police, GPs and others, must demonstrate greater awareness of the fact that older children may also be vulnerable and be a 'child in need'. The Government and LSCBs should remind practitioners of their statutory duty to assess the needs of those children and to offer support. (Paragraph 87)

Care options

9. We recommend that Ofsted monitor and report as a standard part of all inspections on the quality and suitability of the provision made by local authorities for older children, taking into account the views of the children themselves. It is essential that as much attention is paid to the care options provided for vulnerable young people as to those provided for younger children. (Paragraph 92)
10. We are particularly concerned about the position of care-leavers and the accommodation and range of support provided for them. The impact on their life chances is highly significant and this area needs further detailed examination. (Paragraph 93)

Specialised forms of abuse

11. The issues raised by trafficked children, and possible changes to the guardianship system, require far more detailed attention than we have been able to give in the course of this inquiry. We share ECPAT's concerns about the number of children going missing once identified by the authorities and the likely numbers of those who are not discovered in the first place. The Government must act faster and more effectively work with others to address this. (Paragraph 103)
12. We are also concerned by the treatment of children found in criminal settings. The police and the UKBA have a focus on detecting crime and implementing immigration policy which can lead to the criminalisation of abused and vulnerable children found in these situations. Such children must always be treated as victims— and children—first and not just as criminals. Training and guidance should be given to police and UKBA front-line staff to this effect. (Paragraph 104)
13. Children's charities and others have raised legitimate concerns about the correlation between Government policies on immigration and the incidence of destitution amongst asylum-seeking and

migrant children. It would be outrageous if destitution were to be used as a weapon against children because of their immigration status. We call on the Government to review the impact of immigration policy upon child protection and children's rights to ensure that this is not the case. (Paragraph 109)

14. We are concerned that abuse between teenagers is an overlooked issue in the child protection system. There is a need for the issue to be recognised and for strategies to be developed to deal with the complications involved in assisting victims and perpetrators out of the abusive situation. We welcome the current Government plan to extend the definition of domestic abuse to under 18s and to include "coercive control". Teenagers in such situations need appropriate support from all those with whom they come into contact. We consider that training for social workers must include specific input on these issues. We also recognise that abuse between teenagers is most likely to be dealt with by schools and youth workers who need training and guidance to be confident in their role. Finally, there is a need for greater willingness to take action on the part of the authorities. There is research evidence that those who have experienced abusive relationships are more likely to have children who also experience abuse. This makes it all the more important to stop the cycle as effectively and as quickly as possible. (Paragraph 114)
15. We welcome the Government's plans to increase protection of children against forced marriage, and the recent efforts made to highlight the issue. We urge the Government to increase awareness of the availability and use of Forced Marriage Protection Orders and to take steps to improve the monitoring of compliance with such orders. (Paragraph 124)
16. We recommend that the College of Social Work take a leading role in co-ordinating and promoting awareness of CPD training in specialised forms of abuse and in encouraging other disciplines to participate in relevant courses. For more general use, if the guidance on specialised forms of abuse is to be deleted from Working Together, the Government needs to make clear where such guidance will be found in future and how it will be updated and signposted to social workers and other professionals. (Paragraph 133)
17. We are also concerned that professionals faced with a specific type of abuse with which they are not familiar should have an identifiable source of expertise to consult in person. Local authorities should nominate a specialised child abuse practitioner to lead on such matters. Where an authority has a low incidence of a particular form of child abuse, they should be able to draw on the expertise of nominated practitioners in other authorities. (Paragraph 134)
18. We agree that the primary aim within Government must be effectiveness but we are not convinced that the system at the moment enables vulnerable children to be treated as children first. Other agencies, such as those involved in immigration and crime, cannot reasonably be expected to put the interests of the child before their statutory responsibilities on their own initiative. We therefore recommend that the Department for Education be given explicit overall responsibility for the welfare of all children, including those who have been trafficked or who are seeking asylum. (Paragraph 136)

Help-seeking by older children

19. We recommend that local authorities monitor the situation with

regard to youth services and report to the Government on the impact of cuts in the provision of such services upon safeguarding. We also recommend that LSCBs work together to establish best practice in raising awareness of and ensuring a better response to child abuse amongst older children through the co-ordination of the efforts of all the agencies in their local area. (Paragraph 140)

20. We recommend that local authorities encourage schools and other universal settings to provide more peer-led support, such as peer safeguarding forums and peer mentors. They should seek to learn and apply lessons learnt from the apparent success of the schemes described to us by The Children's Society. (Paragraph 142)
21. We recommend that the Government encourage local authorities to include on their website information aimed at older children on how to make a self-referral. This information should also clearly set out what children can expect once the referral has been made in order to remove the sense of loss of control and uncertainty that children needing support may experience. (Paragraph 145)
22. We recommend that local authorities include in their 'pledge' a requirement for all social workers and carers to ensure that children know about and have access to their local Children in Care Council and other advocacy support in their area. (Paragraph 148)
23. If the current discussions with CEOP do not resolve the limitations in the technical support available to ChildLine on a permanent or sustainable basis, then we recommend that the Government consult the police and ChildLine on possible legislative solutions to their difficulties in identifying those at risk of immediate harm. (Paragraph 151)
24. We recommend that ChildLine be assisted and enabled by the Government to market its existence and services more widely, especially to older children. ChildLine should also review how it could improve its services for particular groups of children. We would expect the Government to look favourably upon financing or otherwise aiding any proposals which would improve the effectiveness of ChildLine in reaching these groups. (Paragraph 155)

Conclusion – older children

25. We recommend that the Government urgently review the support offered by the child protection system to older children and consult on proposals for re-shaping services to meet the needs of this very vulnerable group. (Paragraph 157)

Thresholds for intervention

Are thresholds for intervention set at the right level?

26. We acknowledge the strenuous efforts made by individual local authorities to minimise the impact of cuts on their child protection services but we are concerned that this position might prove difficult, if not impossible, to maintain as authorities are forced to find further savings in future years. We recommend that the Government commission work to monitor the impact of the current economic situation and cuts in local authority services on child-safeguarding. (Paragraph 164)
27. We recommend that the Government commission research to understand the impact of varying thresholds in different areas, and whether thresholds for section 17 and section 47 interventions are too high and/or rising in some areas. The data should be published. Ofsted should also monitor and report on the variation between

local authorities' provision and changes over time. LSCBs should use this data to ensure that any variation in their own area is justified by local circumstances. (Paragraph 165)

28. The referrals process needs to be able to account for 'soft' intelligence, and get better at trusting the judgement of front-line professionals. Where possible, those making the referral should be involved in decision-making about what action to take. (Paragraph 168)
29. We recommend that Ofsted monitor the re-referral rates in local authorities and make a judgment whether they are a sign of underlying systemic problems in particular areas. (Paragraph 170)
30. We recommend that children's services initial response (or equivalent) teams be required by their LSCBs to feed back simply and quickly to the person making a referral on whether and what action is taken in response. Ofsted should consider whether local authorities are giving adequate feedback to referrers, as part of its investigations under the new inspection framework. (Paragraph 171)

Common understanding of local thresholds

31. We commend greater use of multi-agency training, in particular for GPs, police, teachers and social workers, who were identified as having very different understandings of risk and thresholds. We also encourage LSCBs to take the initiative in finding further ways to enhance mutual understanding between those making referrals and social workers. (Paragraph 175)

Information-sharing between agencies

32. We recommend that the Government ensure that the guidance for professionals in all the relevant agencies is absolutely clear about their statutory duties on data protection and data-sharing with regard to protecting children, and that LSCBs take a leading role in ensuring that this guidance is understood and acted upon in their areas. (Paragraph 180)
33. We consider that information-sharing would form an important component of the multi-agency training we call for (see paragraph 175) and that LSCBs should work together to develop and support the provision of such courses. The revised Working Together guidance should reinforce this. (Paragraph 181)

Moving beyond thresholds

34. We strongly encourage all local authorities to consider the merits of moving to multi-agency co-location models. For best practice, this should include co-location of local police child abuse teams with children's social care. (Paragraph 189)
35. We recommend that the Government reconsider its rejection of the need for a statutory duty to secure the provision of early help by a range of partner agencies. (Paragraph 193)

Child protection and health reforms

36. We welcome the reassurance offered by the Minister about the impact of the Government's health reforms upon child protection but all the evidence to us strongly suggests that more needs to be done to provide clarity and shore up confidence. There is a real and urgent fear amongst health professionals in child protection and their partners about the place and priority of child protection in the

reformed NHS. The Department of Health urgently needs to clarify where and how safeguarding and child protection accountabilities will work under the new structures, in particular in the new clinical commissioning groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards, and how these bodies will relate to LSCBs. It should also confirm its continuing commitment to the role of named and designated doctors and nurses for child protection. (Paragraph 199)

37. To ensure that priority is given to the child protection in the new structures and to provide a point of contact with the LSCBs, we recommend that one of the chairs of the Health and Wellbeing Boards be nominated as a national lead on safeguarding children. (Paragraph 200)

Thresholds for removing a child to care

38. We welcome the research by Cafcass into applications for care orders and recommend that this work be repeated on a regular basis. An assessment of the reasons behind the local variability in care applications is needed. We also believe that it is essential to promote a more positive picture of care to young people and to the public in general. The young people to whom we spoke were generally very positive about their experiences, including those who had spent time in children's homes. This is backed by academic research on outcomes. Ministers should encourage public awareness of the fact that being taken into care can be of great benefit to children. (Paragraph 208)

Thresholds for adoption

39. We endorse the Government's current policy emphasis on increasing the number of children adopted, speeding up the process and facilitating foster-to-adopt arrangements. Adoption is clearly the preferred route to permanence and stability for some children. However, the same goal can be achieved by other means and it is vital that the Government and those in local authorities continue to concentrate effort and resources on prioritising stability in placements for all children, whether through long-term fostering, Special Guardianship or residential care. We would welcome greater debate on policies which might bring this about and greater encouragement from Government for these alternative solutions. In particular, while we recognise that an artificial limit on the number of times a child can be moved within the system would be unworkable, there should be increased emphasis in central guidance aimed at limiting the disruption and damage caused to vulnerable children by frequent changes. (Paragraph 216)
40. An appeals mechanism against "forced" adoption is an interesting idea and we look forward to examining the Minister's proposals when they are published. (Paragraph 217)

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