



Children England response to call for evidence from Lord Laming on Safeguarding, issued on 20 November 2008

Introduction to Children England

Children England (formerly the National Council of Voluntary Child care Organisations, NCVCCO) is the leading membership organisations for the children, young people and families' voluntary sector. First established in 1943, the organisations continues to provide a platform for the collective voice of the sector, campaigning for change nationally and delivering services that create real change on the ground for children and families.

With member organisations working in all parts of the country ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.

This response represents the views of members and partners as expressed in number of meetings and events on safeguarding held throughout England over the past year, and incorporate comments from those members who responded directly to our request for views on the questions posed in Lord Laming's letter of 20th November. We have provided some contextual information about safeguarding and the voluntary and community sector below, to inform the response to each of Lord Laming's questions which follow.

Understanding safeguarding priorities for the Third Sector

The Third Sector is rich in complexity and diversity and the priorities and challenges of safeguarding children across the sector reflect this. Safeguarding is relevant not only to organisations in the children and young people's voluntary and community sector (CYPVCS), but to a much broader constituency. Large though the CYPVS is, there are probably even more organisations whose primary focus is not on children but which involve children in their activities. Churches and faith groups, community groups, clubs and societies all involve children to a greater or lesser degree and sometimes it is these organisations whose main focus is not on children that have the least awareness of the need to put safeguards in place.

The safeguarding needs of a small organisation, perhaps comprising a handful of volunteers, will be different from those of a large national children's charity. The challenge is to help all Third Sector organisations put in place safeguards that are both effective and proportionate to their circumstances.

The notion of proportionality is vital. We know from our experience that many organisations in the VCS are anxious about the implications of safeguarding, particularly if their workforce is wholly or primarily made up of volunteers. Many such organisations believe that introducing safeguards and conducting CRB checks will have a negative impact on their members and their organisations. Indeed, some organisations have told us that they would rather not involve children than go through what they understand to be a draconian process.

We recognise that there are additional barriers preventing groups serving BME children and families getting safeguarding advice and training. These relate to lack of money for training, poor or non-existent relationships with social services, lack of information about what is available, lack of training in appropriate languages, lack of materials on safeguarding issues specifically relating to BME communities, such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation and honour killings.

Based on our experience of work with members and statutory partners we consider the following to be key safeguarding priorities for the sector:

- Increasing awareness that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility
- Implementing the new vetting and barring arrangements being introduced in response to the Bichard Inquiry.
- Ensuring there are appropriate safeguarding measures in place to prevent abuse within an organisation and that there is not an undue reliance on criminal records and vetting checks.
- Improving the relationships with and consistent responses to and from Children's services departments on children in need and at risk
- Ensuring a proportionate approach to activities and events that does not stop children taking healthy risks.
- Contributing to wider safety net and early identification of children who are in need of additional services to prevent harm
- Being able to meet the expectations of insurers and commissioners in relation to safeguarding
- Having effective anti-bullying processes in place
- **Enabling children's voices to be heard**

Research evidence on the needs of the sector

It is fair to say that there is a serious lack of formal research evidence on the safeguarding needs and practices of the Third Sector.

Our response is based on available research evidence plus the knowledge gathered by partners in their work with the sector, through data gathered from help-lines advice services and survey work alongside the experience of local organisations on the ground, working with children and families.

Looking at the national picture for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector (VCS) across England, G. Craig (2008) *Every Organisation Matters – Mapping the children and young people's voluntary and community sector*, (NCVCCO/NCVYS) found that the size of the sector was consistently underestimated and that the best estimate, based on extrapolation from reliable local studies, was that a third of the voluntary sector were delivering services to children young people and families. It also found that;

- The CYPVCS employs as many as one in three of the total VCS workforce;
- The constant uncertainty of funding and short term contracts inhibits training and development activity, especially amongst smaller groups;
- Infrastructure bodies are under strain and are not able to meet the development capacity building or representational needs of the sector.

The study also pointed to the lack of data kept by local authorities on the sector and the fact that many small groups were not in contact with any formal body, either statutory or voluntary.

The most recent research based evidence on safeguarding comes from F. Millar (2008) *Safeguarding children: policy and practice in the voluntary and community sector*

<http://www.havs.org.uk/pdf/Safeguarding%20Children%20Policy%20and%20practice%20in%20the%20VCS.pdf>

Consistent messages were gathered from eight regional consultation events.¹ Practitioners from all agencies agreed the VCS had a vital role in safeguarding because of their unique role in working with groups in the community, which do not or cannot access statutory services. However, practitioners felt there was scope for the VCS to develop their broad safeguarding role in the future. **VCS representatives attending these events felt that there were issues to be overcome such as being excluded from joint working and multi-agency training. Training was often free to statutory agencies but VCS organisations had to pay for it** (Ipsos-MORI 2007, p8).

¹ DCSF (2008) Staying Safe Consultation Regional Reports DCSF [online] Available at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/RS00043

VCS organisations felt that the issue of short-term funding made it difficult for them to plan and deliver consistent and well-resourced services. VCS organisations also appeared not to be treated as equals, mistrusted or viewed as unprofessional by statutory organisations.

In summary, in all the regions there was recognition that, in relation to safeguarding, the VCS could develop and grow. The VCS recognised some issues hindering progress. A lack of trust by statutory partners may be a barrier. Lengthy government documents were a barrier to developing effective practice. Face-to-face or distance-learning training accompanied by concise leaflets or booklets were far more effective (Stacey 2007, p5).

Similar findings were recorded by Packwood (2007) *Commissioning, Contracting and Delivery of Children's Services in the Voluntary and Community Sector*, VCS Engage, London, who surveyed 127 VCS organisations and found that:

- 10% felt they had a skills gap in child protection and safeguarding that prevented them from being commissioned;
- 27% felt that safeguarding training would help them become more commissioning ready;
- Of the groups already commissioned to provide services, 14% said they had to meet safeguarding and Child Protection (CP) standards
- 4% of commissioners felt that CP and safeguarding were a barrier to commissioning the VCS but also felt this could be overcome by training.

An additional obstacle is that of VCS organisations that are registered charities, 75% of the smaller ones, those with annual incomes less than £100,000, receive no public monies¹, and thus have little interface with national or local government, or incentive to adhere to government policy,

Barnardo's Yorkshire was commissioned in 2006 to research workforce issues in the VCS. The results published as Shepherd L. & Proctor S. (2007) *Final Report for the Children's Workforce Development Council of findings into research with Barnsley Voluntary, Community, Independent (Third) Sector* involved 1718 staff and volunteers.

Of these only 24% had CRB checks, 2% were awaiting a check, 1% had none. 73% did not record an answer. The researchers recognised that it was likely some staff did not require CRB checks but felt that the limited responses gave some concern about whether VCS organisations met legal requirements (Shepherd and Proctor 2007, p6).

Only 17% of staff and volunteers were trained in safeguarding. Some of the training was old and therefore out of date. This research found that the overriding challenge for the sector was short-term funding. Sometimes the funding for the project would run out before the training course would be completed. Volunteers sometimes did not have the ability to attend because of other commitments.

Children England's own research work with members and the small organisations it supports directly shows both a worrying continued lack of awareness, both about

safeguarding practice and its importance. In J. Thompson *Under the Radar* (2007), a survey of 108 small organisations;

- Only 38% of organisations reported having attended safeguarding training. That number dropped to 14% for organisations with no paid staff.
- In the same report, only 24% of respondents wanted more access to safeguarding training – the least desired training from the seven options they had to choose from.

Emerging data from Oct/Nov 2008 follow up survey of small organisations indicates that;

- Almost 25% of organisations say they have no or limited awareness of Every Child Matters
- When asked how aware they were of the new Independent Safeguarding Authority and the vetting and barring scheme, 33.7% of small organisations had never heard of it and just 45% knew it has to do with safer recruitment. Just 18% were aware of the start date for the scheme.

Responses to individual questions

1. What good practice has been successfully achieved in safeguarding children since the publication of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report? We would like you to set out the key features of this good practice, and whether it is being universally applied across the country, particularly in relation to:

- A. the effective implementation of safeguarding systems and procedures;*
- B. interagency working;*
- C. the development and deployment of professional workforce capacity;*
and
- D. effective systems of public accountability*

A. The effective implementation of safeguarding systems and procedures

We are not in a position to comment on every aspect of the implementation of safeguarding systems and procedures. Our comments are based upon the experience of voluntary organisations implementing safeguarding within their own organisation and interacting with statutory services:

- There have been significant improvements in multi-agency working at strategic level on LSCB's and Children trust boards and at practice level. This is particularly positive within multi agency settings such as children's centres where professionals are taking a more holistic view of children and their needs. Problems still remain at middle management levels however where targets and budget decisions still appear to dominate the context of decision making and relationship negotiations.

- More children and young people in the care of the state have access to advocacy services. The very best safeguard for children is empowering them to speak out when something is wrong and we would like to see a far greater expansion of these services to all children and young people who are deemed in need or at risk. Not only would this provide welcome dedicated support to the children involved it would provide an added safeguard within the system, and provide cost effective support to hard pressed social workers, who are all too aware of the limited time they have to spend with the children in their care.
- Agencies are more open to sharing information in an informal way and in more formal settings such as “team around the child” meetings. Although needs are much more clearly articulated and understood through these processes there are often no resources to meet the needs identified. VCS agencies are called in to offer increasing amounts of support to families with much higher levels of need that was the case two or three years ago. In addition the meetings are often chaired by head teachers with no social services input. This highlights the issue of thresholds which we cover below, but also leads to some children’s services colleagues having little input to or understanding of the type and extent of preventative work being undertaken in the community.

B. Interagency working

Interagency working has improved in many areas and on several levels. We believe that the Every Child Matters framework provides an excellent set of aspirations for children, young people and families which have enabled agencies to understand how they can all contribute to the wellbeing of children and work towards common aims and priorities at local level. However there is still a long way to go across all sectors and agencies in truly embedding these principles and high level aspirations into the working lives of all staff employed delivering services which affect children’s lives. The voluntary sector is often excluded from key decision making forums, even where they are delivering direct services to the families concerned and training is far from universal on safeguarding. These issues are explored further below. There are, however, some areas where real progress is being made;

- Bradford MBC have an excellent project with a dedicated worker and resources aimed at involving the VCS in all aspects of safeguarding, improving their practice and increasing understanding between statutory and VCS staff working to protect and safeguard children and young people. Unfortunately funding is only secure until 31st March 2009
- Kirklees local authority have worked with their VCS to develop a handbook “Safe and Sound” which assists the sector in understanding referral routes and thresholds for intervention and how the sector can work in partnership with the authority to keep children and young people safe.

- Sheffield also have an excellent project which resources and supports the sector to improve safeguarding practice in the context of their local Children and young people's plan.
- Almost all Children's Trusts now have a VCS representative on their Board and many on the LSCB, although this is less evident, and although the NSPCC provide welcome expert input to the majority of LSCB's links with the local sector often leaves much to be desired.
- Where multi-agency training has been prioritised it is paying dividends not only in improving practice but also in building the relationships of trust and respect which must underpin any effective safeguarding system. VCS colleagues report increased understanding of the constraints and context within which the wider system must operate and feel more confident in playing a supportive and appropriate role within it.

C. The development and deployment of professional workforce capacity

The service children young people and families receive is dependent not only upon the quality of the staff and workers providing these services but also on the relationships between all front line staff working with them. Some of the difficulties are well understood, including the shortage of skilled and experienced social workers, frequent turnover of social workers and the shortcomings in training and support mechanisms when they start to practice; all of which affect those working alongside them as well as the social workers themselves. The level of resource in the system as whole remains a key issue for the effectiveness of the service. However our members also tell us that;

- In many areas the LADO's are making very positive links with groups and organisations in the community, leading to greater confidence in the response to referrals.
- There is a greater understanding of what child centred practice looks like and a wider agreement on the benefits of this approach. Workers may lack the resources to provide the holistic response they would wish, but the recognition of this as a valued multi agency way of working is gaining strength.
- The increasing visibility of social workers based in VCS/health/multi-agency settings such as children centres, is to be welcomed and encouraged.

E. Effective systems of public accountability

The new arrangements of Children's Trusts and LSCB's have increased the visibility of service planning for children and young people. In some areas it has also increased the commitment to and practice of joint working to achieve the priorities of a cross agency Children and Young People's Plan. Roles

such as the DCS and Lead members have clearer responsibilities and accountabilities which are to be welcomed and built upon in working towards effective public accountability.

2. What are the key barriers, including in the legal process, that may impede efficient and effective work with children and families that may be preventing good safeguarding practice from becoming standard practice everywhere, for example in deciding whether an application should be made to take a child into care? Is the right balance being struck between the correct application of processes and the needs of the child?

1. Training and front line practice issues

“Most reports following the death of a child have for decades identified 3 key themes. First of all, the professionals involved did not adequately communicate with each other. Secondly, there were always clear guidelines in place but one or more individuals failed to follow them. Thirdly, professionals were deceived by those caring for the child. This situation is not likely to be changed unless professionals have enhanced training and services are properly resourced. Local authorities have struggled for years to recruit appropriate professionals in the required numbers.....this is a particular difficulty in the inner city areas and especially in the London Boroughs. Frankly speaking, cases like Baby P do not encourage recruitment to this highly charged area of social care. Unless we review the training and qualification of social workers and reward those who elect to serve in this highly volatile area we are unlikely to achieve the critical mass necessary to support children in need.” CEO of voluntary organisation and ex-Director of Social services.

Current training provision was regarded as inadequate by all our respondents, at many different levels. This training and development of Social workers is receiving welcome attention through the activities of CWDC and the recommendations of the soon to be published, Government Workforce Strategy. The introduction of a ‘probationary’ year and the revision of initial and in- service training are all very welcome. However worries remain about the access social work colleagues have to training once qualified, given their heavy workloads, the high turnover in some areas and the pressure on resources.

In addition we believe that managers and team leaders are often ill prepared for their roles and are in turn poorly supported. Dedicated training provision needs to be in place for these colleagues. Managing a complex, difficult and pressured social work function has unique requirements as well as needing generic management skills. The emotional and psychological support aspects of the role are often completely overlooked and managers are not prepared (other than by their own experience) consistently, or supported by senior staff with an understanding of these aspects and how they might affect both individual and team performance.

It is important to build upon the improvements ECM has brought in the application of principles and good practice of multi agency working through also giving higher

priority to the training needs of other staff working with children and young people. One profession, no matter how well trained and supported cannot safeguard all children and young people. Currently training for the voluntary and community sector is inadequate in many areas. Indeed some colleagues have said clearly that there is less provision now than under the previous ACPC system. They attribute this to the way resources are now allocated, with statutory colleagues getting first preference on training. This is not a problem in itself, but becomes so when there are insufficient courses and places to meet demand even within these staff groups.

Additional comments made by respondents were;

- i. **Senior staff;** many areas have education managers taking the lead in safeguarding, both as DCS's and chairing LSCB's as well as in other senior management posts. While it would be nonsense to assume that only social services managers could possibly take a lead in this work it is nevertheless a specialist area and recently safeguarding has not achieved the same prominence as it once did, which is in some ways to be expected given the professional passions of those at the top, combined with the relentless pressure to improve educational attainment. A specific management qualification in relation to safeguarding should be developed to ensure a high standard of oversight at the most senior levels. Some elements of this training could also be made available to elected members.
- ii. **Special needs;** Children and some parents, with a range of special needs including autism, and other physical and mental disabilities which impede communication have a range of needs which Safeguarding staff often do not understand. The training available to those safeguarding children often does not include any input on children with complex needs, communication difficulties and particularly autism. This is vital for staff in education, health and voluntary sector settings as well as in social care.
- iii. **Teenagers and young men;** there is an increasing tendency not to accept referrals concerning teenage children and particularly older boys. This is part an issue of thresholds (see below) but also reflects a lack of understanding of the safeguarding needs of these groups and how they may present themselves. The situation is more acute with refugee and asylum seeking young people and those from some BME communities where cultural misunderstandings and confusions compound the difficulties of timely and sensitive assessment of need and appropriate interventions. Ongoing training, regularly updated to take account of the changing nature of abuse and exploitation, including on-line bullying and grooming etc. needs to be in place to ensure staff in all agencies are confident in serving the needs of these young people.
- iv. **Work with Fathers;** Voluntary sector colleagues point to a failure of social care and education agencies to support the safe engagement of fathers and paternal relatives in children's lives. Children's services social care staff, voluntary sector, education and health service workers need specific training to work with fathers (resident and non-resident)including involvement in case

conferences, assessments, supporting access arrangements, and specific support in dealing with violent or threatening men.

- v. **Young children;** *“Children over two and under five can all too easily disappear from services. It is rare for a health visitor to consistently visit a three or four year old due to massive case loads and lack of time. There is also less of an expectation on a parent to attend clinic with a three or four years old. Some of my clients have not seen their Health Visitor for over two years, even though they have small children” Family Support worker Children’s charity.*

- vi. **Listening to children and young people;** Children need more guarantees from people in authority when they disclose abuse, far too many children are still being put off from reporting abuse due to no guarantees that they won't be separated from siblings or sent back to their abuser due to lack of evidence or not meeting the threshold. In addition many workers are not confident in assessing the evidence they receive from children in relation to that provided by adults. There remains a tendency to de-value their views and experiences. The extension of advocacy services would assist with giving children the confidence, access to dedicated support and a voice independent of those having to assess cases and ration resources.

- vii. **Communication;** many organisations have said that they have no idea what happens after they have made a referral and find it difficult to get a response from the agency they made the referral to.
“There are delays in action when referrals are made to Social services when there is concern about a child and often after a home visit has been made, there appears to be no follow up procedure. This often results in apathy about referral.” Manager of a Children’s centre

2. Interagency working and resources

The move to Safeguarding children introduced a broader range of responsibilities to an already over worked group of professionals. No one would argue against the principal of safeguarding children in this broader sense, but the responsibilities have come without the requisite resources. The consequence of this on the ground is that the same small group of over stretched professionals have yet more to address and this comes at a cost. Many very well experienced social workers are leaving the profession blaming this widening of responsibility as well as the massive increase in bureaucracy \ form filling and the constant preparation for inspection.

“ there is still an overburdening of agencies that means they have had to significantly reduce their sessions with clients. Most now see clients 3 times!!! Few are like us and are able to maintain sufficient support.” CEO Voluntary Organisation

“I am particularly concerned that schools we work with are reluctant to start CAF’s because of workload”. CEO VCS Organisation

Schools and the teaching profession in general see children on a regular basis in several different settings, in education, sport and play. Schools should have a much higher profile in the Child Protection arena.

“Quite often when I have attended training it is a rarity for a employee from a school to be there yet these are the very people with the eyes and ears when identifying child abuse” Manager Children and young people’s charity

In addition concerns were expressed at the reduced emphasis on practice in inspection processes. While it is right that inspectors (across all agencies, not simply Ofsted) should pay rigorous attention to the process and procedures which underpin safeguarding and the robustness of interagency arrangements, front line practice remains the first line of protection and should receive a higher priority. In addition we fear that the separate inspectorates do not always take the same view of what is deemed adequate or good in safeguarding, which leads to confusing messages for those trying to work in a multi agency way.

3. Thresholds

Many of our members tell us that they feel Local Authorities and other agencies have too high thresholds when it comes to taking action on a referral. Comments included;

- The pressure on local authorities to cope with referrals means that the threshold for referral has been raised. The number of times authorities in whose area abuse has occurred attempt to pass the case to the authority in which the child’s parents live has increased exponentially.
- In the past children placed under the provisions of section 20 of the Children Act meant that they were visited by social workers, were the subjects of regular reviews etc. In efforts to reduce the number of “children looked after” some authorities now list these children as being cared for under Section 17 of the Act removing the safeguard of regular social work visits. This has reduced safeguarding but is another example of corner cutting by people under intense pressure to meet demand.
- Local Authorities and other agencies not being in agreement about what constitutes abuse/ neglect which often results in no action taking place, again thresholds come into play.
- The increasing thresholds required for social work intervention have meant that voluntary organisations are increasingly being asked to deal with more complex and difficult cases in community settings, but without additional resources or access to higher levels of training.
- VCS organisations which work across many authorities report widely varying practice in the acceptance of referrals and subsequent case management for children and young people with very similar needs and circumstances.

4. Instability within the parts of the system

There is a need to encourage and promote stability within the childcare system as a whole, but this is especially important within safeguarding. The relationships of trust and the understanding of protocols, accountability chains and agreed multi -agency referral procedures need time to bed in, be owned and used reliably by all those caring for children and young people in an area.

We sincerely hope that the recommendations from this review will not lead to increased churn, but rather to a strengthening and clarification of roles and responsibilities and the improved resourcing of some parts of the system. There are several causes of the current instability which might be addressed by the review;

- Many areas of work which impact on the quality and support for safeguarding are funded through time limited funding streams. The longevity of projects in both the statutory and voluntary sector that carry out excellent work and make positive change are often threatened through lack of funding, and lose good staff due to this insecurity.
- The well documented levels of social work staff turnover creates instability in continuity of recording and evidence gathering; there can be several Social Workers assigned to a case during quite intense CP Procedures
- In the last five years many organisations in the voluntary sector have experienced real difficulties because of the development of the commissioning environment which is financially and target driven. Most contracts are short term, in spite of the recommendations within the Compact. Often the pressure to cut costs leads to insufficient money to pay for robust recruitment and supervision, training or the support that makes for a high quality professional child-centred service, which are by their nature often expensive in comparison with other services.
- In addition the introduction of competitive drivers has made a virtue out of innovation and radical change, when in fact what many staff and service users tell us they need is continuity and consolidation of their services, allied with incremental improvement.
- The introduction of Children's Trusts and LSCB's plus the many changes to NHS structures has led to a protracted period of restructuring of local services and changes of personnel. This has disrupted long standing relationships and has to some degree destabilised the way child care services are provided. Time is needed for all sectors and agencies to have confidence in the new systems and their roles within them. Children England and many of our members work alongside the Children's Workforce Development Council, General Social Care Council and Skills for Care. We have seen how continual restructuring and change challenges the commitment, knowledge and expertise of individuals and teams.

5. Preventative work

Voluntary organisations often do not get the adequate funding they need to include undertake preventative work around child protection.

Real thought has to go into the causes of children being at risk in families. Engagement with families under stress has to happen early on. The support given should be holistic and tailored to each family, not every family does well in parenting groups for instance, especially when they already feel that they are bad parents. When people are in debt, have housing and relationship problems and their children have behavioral difficulties they need support and encouragement to build both their own and their children's self esteem.

What has been missing all too often is this level of support which is not provided by social services until families are in deep crisis. Voluntary groups work in this way to prevent families reaching crisis, by gaining their trust, they are then able to be honest about their parenting and by providing access to funding, outreach parenting support, therapeutic groups for them and groups for their children that address behaviour issues and build self esteem, families become happier there is an improvement in safeguarding practice and children have a better chance to reach their full potential.

The government needs to highlight and fully recognise the cost effective nature of this work, which because it is not aimed at those whose needs are already at crisis point, is often the first to suffer from budget reductions. Preventative work is seen as a "luxury" rather than as essential part of a properly balanced safeguarding system.

Voluntary groups doing excellent work in hard to reach communities, underpinning and reducing demand on statutory services have already had to close due to lack of funding following the reorganisation of the Children's Fund and the loss of other local funding streams.

6. Legal Processes

We are concerned about the dramatic increase of 2500% in court fees per child in the institution of care proceedings. A response to a parliamentary question showed that there has been a 29% reduction in care applications brought between May to September 2008 (4,800) compared with the same period the previous year (6,200). It is not clear at this stage why this reduction has occurred though both national and local government argue that this is not attributable to an increase in court fees. However, we do believe that that issues of cost will feature in decision making about whether or not to take care proceedings amongst front line staff and their managers.

Others are more expert in this area, and will provide a more detailed response on legal issues but several of our members have expressed concern about the likely

reduction in the numbers of experienced Children Panel lawyers for children and young people given the way in which the government now funds this work.

3. What specific actions should be taken by Government and national and local agencies to overcome these barriers and accelerate systematic improvements in safeguarding practice across the country?

i. Improvements to the sharing of ownership and responsibility;

Successful Interagency working requires far more than a set of systems, computer programmes and committees, necessary though these are. The current position, is that there are as many child protection systems as there are agencies, each applying principles and good practice within their own organisational cultures, within the boundaries of limited resources, competing priorities and with different perspectives on their responsibilities in the overall local safeguarding arrangements.

As one of our respondents suggested, perhaps we need to move more toward the notion of a National Safeguarding Service as we have an NHS, with some local variation but common staff structures and lines of accountability. An organisational structure which has a clear management hierarchy, funded separately, but via local authorities, separate from the influence of local political and financial decisions. This change would be relatively easy to introduce through amendments to existing LSCB structures, giving LSCB's enhanced independence and authority employing multi disciplinary teams with the power to intervene when necessary in cases of concern. Perhaps the principles underpinning YOT's could form a useful model?

Small community based groups and general purpose organisations such as community centres, can be a great support to both communities and service providers. They need to be included and their contribution respected if we are to achieve the situation where safeguarding truly is everyone's business, and we all have the confidence to act to protect the vulnerable.

ii. Training and professional development; Alongside the welcome enhanced training provision for social workers which the government is proposing, we would advocate for a system of Inset days, similar to the teaching profession, but with access for all those involved in safeguarding, including the VCS. This would assist everyone to understand their responsibilities and the role they can play in supporting social work colleagues.

In addition there should be dedicated training provision for social work managers and senior staff to support them in the practical and strategic management of safeguarding.

We need to improve our systems of performance management and continuous improvement on safeguarding, so that all staff have agreed and common standards for their own work and legitimate expectations of colleagues in other agencies.

Teachers , parent support workers, youth workers and others need training to enable them to raise safeguarding directly with parents, children, young people, enabling them to keep themselves safe and giving uncompromising messages about inappropriate behaviours which children have the right to challenge.

- iii. **Resources;** There is a need to review the resources applied to safeguarding across all agencies at both local and national levels to make best use of their deployment and ensure that sufficient resources are available in each local area. There is some duplication within the system at the moment and a review should seek to establish where that serves a useful purpose and where it is unhelpful.

For example we believe **that one set of mandatory training and awareness raising courses** should be run in a local area for all those working with children, young people and families; rather than health colleagues local authority workers, police and VCS workers attending different training. or having safeguarding simply tagged on to some other course This would not only save money on training costs it would have all the additional benefits of local workers understanding each other's agency better and having confidence in a joint level of skill and knowledge on safeguarding. Furthermore it could lead to a better understanding of each agencies responsibilities and encourage earlier contact, and reduce inappropriate referrals between agencies.

- iv. **Thresholds;** We believe that it is unacceptable that children in one area of our country could be safer than in another on the basis of resource allocation. But, based upon our members experience, over many years we believe that this is the case, since the difference in thresholds for intervention appears to be largely an issue of resource. We know that all our local authority partners, police services, NHS agencies and their staff are completely committed to keeping children safe. The decisions surrounding the acceptance and timely investigation of an allegation/referral are far too often taken not on the merits of the case but on the availability of staff and other resources.

Of course this is the case with all public services and there is not a limitless supply of taxpayer's money for ever expanding provision, but we would like to see safeguarding regarded in the same way as Accident and Emergency services. No one is turned away because the thresholds have changed and broken legs aren't being accepted anymore, or they are accepted in Birmingham but not in Cambridge!

- v. **Greater stability and credibility in the system;** This requires organisations to be able to maintain services over a longer time so that they are able to develop the skills of the workforce and establish relationships with other agencies and with communities. The current three year tender and contract system is destabilising voluntary organisations and other providers, as well as proving hugely wasteful of resources as a result of the transaction costs and bureaucracy that is being created.

All LSCB's should be required to involve their local VCS in safeguarding at both strategic and practice levels

There should be a clearer separation between the leadership of LSCB's and the agencies responsible for protection services, enabling independent oversight and scrutiny.

- vi. In order to provide greater stability within the workforce **the status and role of social workers needs to be enhanced** and this will require concerted government action and strong leadership. Of course social workers make mistakes, and at times these have terrible fatal consequences, as do the mistakes of medics and police officers on occasion. But we do not see those other professionals vilified in the press, and undermined in the eyes of the public when a child dies in the operating theatre or an innocent civilian is shot in error. It is unfortunate that Ministers have not given the strong and uncompromising lead on this issue which they might have done over the past weeks. It is hoped that Lord Laming's Review might begin to redress this balance, though much more will be needed if the brightest young people are to see social work as a career of choice.
- vii. **Implement the recommendations from past reviews and expert reports;** we do know much of what works in safeguarding. Although there will never be a system which can keep 100% of children safe 100% of the time, there are many lessons in a range of reports and reviews undertaken since 1997 when Sir William Utting's report " People like us" recommended greater access to advocacy for children and young people, amongst other reforms, which have not been implemented, and which would improve the safety of children and young people.

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