



Safeguarding Children

A summary of the joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children



Chief Inspector of Social Services



Director for Health Improvement, Commission for Health Improvement



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the Magistrates' Courts Service



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons



Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation

INTRODUCTION



The safety and welfare of children has become an issue of increasing public concern over the past 50 years. Numerous inquiries into the circumstances of the tragic deaths or abuse of children at the hands of their parents, carers and professionals, have identified failings in arrangements to protect children and promote their welfare. Safeguarding the welfare of our children and young people is crucial to the future wellbeing of our society. We know that abuse and neglect in childhood can cause long lasting damage with consequences into adulthood.

The Chief Inspectors responsible for inspecting all the services involved in safeguarding children have jointly prepared a report *Safeguarding Children*. The report brings together evidence from a number of recent inspections along with specific findings arising from a programme of joint inspections addressing the inter-agency arrangements for safeguarding children, in eight Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) localities between December 2001 and March 2002. *Safeguarding Children* makes a number of recommendations to Government departments, national and local agencies and draws on the individual and joint work of:

- The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI);
- The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED);
- The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI);
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC);
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP);
- Her Majesty's Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate (HMMCSI);
- Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPPI);
- and
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP).

This summary of the report *Safeguarding Children* highlights the key findings and recommendations for Area Child Protection Committees and their constituent organisations and agencies. As such the summary will be useful for all agencies and professionals involved in providing care or services to children and young people.

The Government made a commitment in the 1998 White Paper *Modernising Social Services* to put in place new arrangements to commission from all its Chief Inspectors of services involved with children a joint report on children's safeguards. This is the first of these reports.

What do we mean by safeguarding children?

The term safeguarding has not been defined in law or Government guidance. It is a concept that has evolved from the initial concern about children and young people in public care, to include the protection from harm of all children and young people, and to cover all agencies working with children and their families. We have taken the term to mean:

- all agencies working with children, young people and their families take all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to children's welfare are minimised; and
- where there are concerns about children and young people's welfare, all agencies take all appropriate actions to address those concerns, working to agreed local policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies.

We have included within this definition the responsibilities of agencies, particularly the police and probation services, in respect of potentially dangerous persons who present a risk of harm to the public, including children.



KEY FINDINGS



Arrangements by Agencies for Safeguarding Children

All agencies accepted that they have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that children are safeguarded, and in most cases this was backed up with a firm commitment by senior managers to ensure that their agencies did so. Although there have been important recent developments in legislation and in national guidance for some agencies relevant to aspects of safeguarding children, we found the ability of agencies and professionals to safeguard children was being compromised by:

- The priority given to safeguarding had not been reflected firmly, coherently or consistently enough in service planning and resource allocation nationally or locally across all agencies;
- Local agencies interpreted their safeguarding responsibilities in different ways or with different emphasis;
- Other priorities competing for attention had sometimes resulted in resources being diverted away from key safeguarding activity;
- The priority that senior staff said was given to safeguarding children was not reflected in many agencies' business plans.

In the areas where we were most confident of the safeguarding arrangements, we found senior managers who;

- were committed to protecting children;
- communicated their commitment throughout their organisations;
- ensured that their staff were child focused;
- kept the safeguarding of children high on the agenda at all times;
- ensured that there was an open culture between local agencies;
- enabled good direct lines of communication between senior managers; and
- had sufficient trust and confidence in each other to accept and address concerns brought to their attention.

Responding to Welfare Concerns

We looked at how well local agencies were working in partnership and responding to child welfare concerns.

We are pleased to report that:

- In the vast majority of individual cases that we examined, the children were protected from the risks of further harm;
- In all councils, children on the child protection register were allocated to social work staff, who were working well with professionals from other agencies;
- There were good working relationships between almost all local agencies at all levels in most areas we inspected;
- The good inter-agency relationships in most areas were characterised by all agencies being willing to work together flexibly to safeguard children.

However, we were concerned to find that

- Many services were under pressure, and experiencing major difficulties in recruiting and retaining key skilled and experienced staff. This was having a major impact upon safeguarding arrangements for children and young people;
- In a minority of areas there were longstanding tensions and poor co-operation between agencies and it was difficult to achieve the necessary level of inter-agency commitment to ensure that arrangements to safeguard children were effective;
- Many staff from all agencies were confused about their responsibilities and duties to share information about child welfare concerns with other agencies and were not confident about whether other agencies shared information with them;
- Despite consistency in the findings of inquiries over past years about weaknesses and failings in information sharing, there were few formal agreements between agencies about how and when information should be shared; and
- There were variable practices in relation to care planning, reviews, visits by social workers and independent visitors, and access to complaint procedures and independent advocates for children looked after;





Thresholds for Responding to Child Welfare Concerns

In most areas that we visited, there were serious concerns amongst staff of all agencies about:

- the thresholds that social services were applying in their children's services;
- social services not being able to provide an adequate response to situations which did not involve a high risk of serious harm to children and young people;
- social services not providing sufficient guidance, advice and support when they raised concerns about the welfare of children and young people; and
- reluctance by some agencies, including schools, to refer child welfare concerns to police and social services.

We also found concerns about specific services that were not well integrated into the local safeguarding arrangements. These included:

- independent schools;
- General Practitioners (GPs);
- child and adolescent mental health services;
- adult mental health services; and
- NHS Direct and walk in health centres.

The quality of care and responses to safeguarding issues for many children living away from home, in family placements, children's homes and residential schools, varied considerably. The care and protection of children placed in secure accommodation was generally found to be of good standard.

The Leadership of the Area Child Protection Committee

The ACPC has the primary responsibility for promoting safeguarding of children in the local community. We found that few ACPCs were equipped and able to exercise their responsibilities to promote and ensure safeguards for children and young people due to:

- Lack of effective leadership of the ACPC;
- Varying levels of commitment of all local agencies to support its work;
- Lack of effective joint funding arrangements;
- Local agencies did not generally accept that they were accountable to the local ACPC for safeguarding arrangements;
- ACPCs did not command the authority to require local agencies to report on how they undertook their safeguarding duties;
- ACPCs were not required to account for their work.

Young People who Commit Offences

HMI Prison inspectors have highlighted the very serious risks to the welfare of young people held in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). Although young people in YOIs are amongst those at highest risk of serious harm, their safeguarding had not been addressed in most areas.

Few ACPCs had representatives from Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) on them, and therefore they were not actively addressing the needs of these particularly vulnerable young people. YOTs were working in relative isolation from other services, and focused upon offending behaviour at the expense of considering welfare needs.

Potentially Dangerous Persons

In order to protect the public, including children, from dangerous offenders and other potentially dangerous persons, the police and probation services have been required to establish Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or Panels (MAPPPs).

Multi Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPs) were in place in all areas. In the absence of detailed national guidance, these had been developed in different ways. There was also confusion about terminology to describe different categories of offenders who present a high risk of harm to the public, including children.

There were good working relationships between the police and





probation services who took the lead for the MAPPP work, but there was no consistency in how they addressed their tasks. MAPPPs and ACPCs did not have formal links addressing their common concerns in safeguarding children. All areas were struggling to respond to unconvicted people who present a high risk of harm to the public, including children.

Our Greatest Concerns

While identifying good practice the report highlights that children's safety is being compromised by:

- insufficient priority being given to the safeguarding of children;
- a lack of commitment to and inadequate resources for ACPCs; and
- the severe difficulties in recruiting and retaining public sector professionals, particularly those working in the field of child protection and child welfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes a number of recommendations to Government departments including that they should: -

- Ensure the safeguarding of children is firmly and consistently reflected in national and local service planning;
- Support and facilitate national and local agencies to recruit and retain sufficient levels of appropriately qualified staff, paying particular regard to the image, status, morale, remuneration and working conditions of specialist child protection staff;
- consider whether ACPCs and MAPPPs should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding; and
- the issuing of guidance for the operation of Multi Agency Public Protection Panels (MAPPPS).

In addition to these and other recommendations to Government departments, inspectorates and commissions, all of which are detailed in the full report *Safeguarding Children*, the following recommendations are made:

Area Child Protection Committees and their Constituent Agencies should:

- Develop integrated planning processes in partnership with MAPPPs to ensure that the safeguarding of children is an individual agency and inter-agency priority.
- Review their constitution, membership, level of representation and funding arrangements to ensure that the committee is adequately resourced and fit for purpose to lead the children's safeguarding agenda across the area and in all relevant settings.
- Ensure that there is an appropriate range and quantity of joint and single agency training to meet the needs of the workforce of constituent agencies (including non-specialist staff) and relevant voluntary and independent organisations in their locality and agree minimum expectations in terms of attendance and content of training.
- Ensure that there are robust management information processes to support the monitoring, evaluation and auditing of local child protection procedures and practice.
- Ensure that reviews of serious cases are undertaken on all appropriate cases, within the timescales and expectations of Chapter 8 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, that reports





are circulated appropriately and action plan recommendations are implemented.

- Develop explicit arrangements for sharing information within a framework of joint protocols in order to strengthen the safeguarding of children.
- Ensure that concerns about the safety of young offenders are identified and addressed in partnership with the local YOT and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) and prisons.
- Review the local arrangements for maintaining and assessing the child protection register to ensure that relevant information is captured and used to maximise the safeguarding of children.

Social Services Departments should:

- Review the thresholds for providing services, instigating child protection enquiries, and convening initial child protection conferences, in order to ensure that children are protected from harm and ensure that there is a shared understanding of these thresholds across all local agencies.

Police Services should:

- Review and clarify the role, remit, location and status of force child protection units to ensure that all abuse of children is dealt with to a consistently high standard.

Health Services should:

- Ensure that pre and post recruitment checks are undertaken for all appropriate people working with children in the National Health Service.
- Ensure that workforce plans adequately reflect the workload of child and adolescent mental health services and community paediatric services.
- Establish clear lines of responsibility to ensure that there is:
 - appropriate provision and support for ‘designated’ and ‘named’ doctors and nurses;
 - appropriate senior representation on ACPCs;
 - the active involvement in and contribution of Primary Care Trusts, including GPs, in the local arrangements to safeguard children;

- attendance by general and medical practitioners at initial child protection conferences or the advance provision of written reports;
- adequate provision of specialist nurses and doctors to provide services for children looked after.

Local Education Authorities should:

- Monitor the efficiency of arrangements in maintained schools to safeguard children, including the effectiveness of child protection procedures and training.



Further Information

Copies of the full report *Safeguarding Children – A joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children* have been sent to all relevant chief officers and the chairs of Area Child Protection Committees. The report contains detailed findings, evidence and recommendations arising from recent inspection activity and the specific Children's Safeguards Inspection.

Appendices to the report provide information regarding the role of the contributing inspectorates, the inspection methodologies used, and details of relevant references and supporting evidence.

Further free copies of the report can be obtained from:

DH Publications
PO Box 777
London
SE1 6XH

Fax: 01623 724 524
Email: doh@prolog.uk.com

Please quote the print reference number at the foot of this page when ordering.

Main report available on-line at
www.doh.gov.uk/ssi/childrensafeguardsjoint.htm,
and via other Inspectorate websites.

Individual Chief Inspectors and the Commission for Health Improvement will produce separate reports specific to their services. Information about these reports will be made available on their websites.