

Lord Herbert Laming
Department for Children, Schools and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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03 December 2008

Dear Lord Herbert Laming

Lord Laming Inquiry 2008

The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is pleased to have the opportunity to assist in the preparation of your report into safeguarding practice for submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families, in the wake of the tragic death of Baby P.

Organisational Context

Established in 1936, NCVYS is the only national independent body representing voluntary and community youth organisations in England. We help such organisations through influencing and informing public policy that impacts on our 170 national and local members, improving the quality of their work with young people by developing, supporting and promoting best practice and raising the profile of this important sector.

Our Response

As well as using NCVYS's own expertise as an organisation which shapes safeguarding policy with national partners and delivers safeguarding training and resources to the voluntary and community youth sector¹, we conducted an urgent survey with our membership base in order to formulate a balanced and representative response to the following questions put forward by your call for evidence.

Yours sincerely



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¹ Further information about NCVYS's safeguarding work is available via:
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=292>



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NCVYS submission to Lord Laming

Question 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:

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

There appears to have been much progress in the advancement of safeguarding awareness, both in terms of policy and practice since the publication of the Victoria Climbe inquiry report and the following Children Act 2004 which introduced the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.

The power of the ECM agenda in joining up professionals across services working directly with children and young people is a direction of travel which we would like to see continue. We remain committed to the principles of Every Child Matters; to further strengthen multi-agency working; to further strengthen early intervention and prevention of neglect and abuse and to strengthen family support services.

There is still a great deal of work to be done to build the capacity of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to engage fully. However, much has been achieved especially in making the cultural shift towards an integrated approach to support children, young people and families. Three examples of good practice gained from our consultation with members about the progress towards establishing sound safeguarding procedures are set out below and demonstrate the value of multi-agency working where there is mutual support and understanding across statutory and non-statutory sectors:

Case study 1 – Young Suffolk

Young Suffolk has seen clear progress in the involvement of the VCS in local arrangements. The group has a place on a number of key boards including the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and the Child Death Overview Panel. Safeguarding systems and procedures are in place and training is made available to the VCS through a project called 'SAFEchild' specifically for the sector.

There have been several excellent examples recently of Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) early contact with voluntary sector representatives over complex allegation cases. In February next year Young Suffolk will be running a series of seminars aimed at introducing the role of the LADO to the voluntary sector.

Suffolk Youth and Connexions Service has funded the development of Young Suffolk's Quality Standards Framework which is making a real difference to developing integrated safeguarding practice across a whole host of Suffolk voluntary organisations.

There has been progress in workforce development and integration in Suffolk with full involvement of the voluntary sector through the work of the Children's Workforce Development Council and specifically their Workforce Strategy Partners Programme.

Case study 2 – Youth Focus (Buckinghamshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services)

Buckinghamshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CVYS) has strong representation through the Children and Young People's Trust and sub-committees to the local LSCB. Training is prioritised for local VCS organisations working with children and young people for example through a safe recruitment conference and a partnership project to train and support Child Protection Advisors from voluntary organisations.

Inter-agency governance is strong and is facilitated through a council funded VCS link officer and Youth Focus has been able to contribute to local delivery programmes for example, ContactPoint, workforce development, commissioning arrangements and setting up of the family information service.

Integrated processes are supported through regular training across a range of child protection and safeguarding areas together with a range of workforce development opportunities including a two year foundation degree course. The common assessment framework is in place and will be rolled out across all five localities from April 2009. In addition, local VCS organisations are involved in developing performance and quality assurance strategy for delivery of the CYP Plan and associated performance groups.

Integrated front line delivery is supported through accountability for outputs and outcomes through performance measures which are put in place for services delivered through the VCS and these support priorities in the local Children and Young People's Plan. The VCS is including in the planning and delivery of services to children and young people through Extended Services, Children's Centres and Youth Centres.

Case study 3 – Bradford Children and Young People’s VCS Network

There has been progress in the development of targeted work in Bradford through a partnership arrangement that draws together members of the Safeguarding Board and representatives of the VCS’s local network.

Effectively workers in Bradford feel they have a raised consciousness of safeguarding issues which is becoming embedded in their thinking and practice with children and young people. Positive steps which have helped develop this include additional focus provided through an LSCB funded Safeguarding Development Worker. The creation of this post was initiated by the local VCS Network to:

- raise awareness of the individual responsibilities within agencies to safeguard children and young people;
- develop a model of safeguarding standards/practice that voluntary sector groups can apply within the diverse range of settings;
- development of a “Self Audit Tool” to enable voluntary sector groups to review and/or develop their procedures in line with both national/local requirements; and
- continuous drive to raise standards of safeguarding within the VCS through a dedicated Safeguarding Development Worker.

In addition the provision of LSCB training has widened the scope of opportunity for voluntary sector organisations to develop knowledge and skills related to safeguarding children and young people.

Steps have been taken to promote awareness and information sharing across practitioners about safeguarding and have enabled workers across different sectors to come together, share good practice, provide knowledge about local issues and highlight the availability of resources to support sectors. These steps have also enabled a clearer understanding of the roles/responsibilities of the different agencies and expectations of their contributions to keep children safe from harm.

Question 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?

NCVYS’s consultation shows that there is still much to do in developing holistic local arrangements which do not allow children to ‘slip through the net’ as in this tragic case and hope that the following contributions help to illustrate what is working well and where there are potential areas for further development.

Accountability and Leadership

While the statutory guidance setting out roles and responsibilities of Directors of Children’s Services (DCS) and Lead Members (LM) is clear, there remains a question about how these roles and responsibilities are taken forward by individuals acting in services on behalf of the DCS and/or LM and whether there is enough support for practitioners and senior managers to understand the complexity of

cases concerned with vulnerable children and young people in their care or whom they or their frontline services may come in contact with. One response to our consultation stated:

....working together at a strategic level is being realised, however, this is not filtering down and becoming common practice at an operational level. There is insufficient capacity within the VCS to address this and needs more support from LSCBs.

Referrals

NCVYS's consultation found that local providers of voluntary and community services to children and young people were not always clear about which avenues should be used for reporting serious cases. For example consultation with members operating youth clubs across England revealed that many VCS organisations particularly those operating in counties (with the exception of Young Suffolk) did not know who to refer their concerns to. Common practice where this occurred was to use the Police as the primary referral agency as there was no other clear route to report concerns. Interestingly one response to our consultation stated:

....it is difficult to establish who a local lead professional might be for any one child so often reports are made to people with the hope that the information gets to the right person.

Partnership Boards

Roles of partnership boards can be an issue where these are not linked up locally, particularly in terms of how LSCBs and Children's Trust Boards share information and whether there is enough linkage with the partnership bases these groups represent outside of these meetings to facilitate real interaction with local agencies who deliver children's services. For example, health, Police, VCS organisations and schools all have a place on these boards but often one representative may not be able to represent the voice of his/her sector or take important information back to colleagues. There needs to be a proactive approach to involving partners aside from partnership boards such as through information sharing, training and development of partners to ensure all have the skills to protect children and young people in their care. For example, in Suffolk, lessons learnt from serious case reviews are shared with practitioners in a sensitive way in order to promote better practice.

Strengthening local communities through the VCS

The VCS has a valuable role to play in strengthening local communities. Stronger communities can act as a safety net for local families and whilst there is good practice in this area this can be further strengthened through active multi-agency engagement with local VCS organisations. This can be vital in ensuring that children and young people are safe, that parents and families are supported and that, where necessary, there is a concept of 'good-neighbourliness' where people support each other and show concern when something is perceived to be going wrong. This is an important approach if we are to fill government's aim of making 'safeguarding everybody's business'.

Training

While some areas may have excellent procedures in place there is clearly a way to go in terms of getting all those working in the sector understanding roles and building up a culture of trust and collaboration. More and more opportunities for multi-agency training including the voluntary sector are a real way

forward here. Lack of training can lead to many adults lacking the skills to identify abuse and being clear about what needs to be reported.

Training to overcome this barrier was considered to be one of the most urgently needed areas for development by those responding to our consultation. One of our members stated:

It is difficult to get people in the voluntary sector to really believe they have a significant role to play when so little is spent on training and supporting them.

Members expressed that practitioners, senior managers and sector representatives on partnership boards need to be equipped to effectively execute their respective roles in working with or representing children and young people. This means training needs to be tailored to relevant roles and agencies and this raises the question of resources. Whilst some authorities, such as Buckinghamshire, clearly invest resources to training their local VCS partners in the delivery of safe children's services, this is not a standardized approach and where it is not VCS organisations cannot always fund this training themselves so there needs to be either centrally or locally-managed assistance in order to build capacity and skills which meet the needs of every child. Indeed one consultation response stated that:

Many services and organisations do not have the funds available to ensure the correct levels of safeguarding training are in place, so they share information between themselves, this is not an ideal situation as we know that second hand information becomes distorted and exaggerated.

Information sharing

Information sharing is still seen to be an area for development and an area of varying practice. For example the Common Assessment Framework has caused a lot of confusion and is burdensome for agencies to complete, not least because not all agencies have access to this system and do not know how to feed their information into it. Both statutory and non-statutory agencies need to be better informed of how to offer information to the right individuals to ensure that these processes work to collectively log information about children and young people perceived to be at risk, in order to ensure appropriate action is prompted when needed.

This case has also highlighted issues around confidentiality protocols when working with children and young people perceived to be at risk. Practitioners across agencies working with young people need to be given clear guidance about what is appropriate to keep confidential and what is not – this is again seen as an area where additional training could help.

Inspections and practice

This case has highlighted the need for inspections to ensure they are looking into the quality of practice employed in the safeguarding of children and young people. Ofsted's rating of 'good' in the recent joint area review has raised questions about the value of inspections and whether there needs to be more time spent looking at front line delivery of services as well as the framework with which they are delivered.

Role of Social Workers

Feedback from members responding to NCVYS's consultation highlighted concerns about the placing of newly qualified social workers with vulnerable young people and the difficulty of changing a social worker where a more experienced social worker maybe needed. Mixed teams working with young people may be a way forward so that social workers are not left alone to manage vulnerable young people with complex needs; by involving other practitioners such as those working in the voluntary sector it may be possible to get a broader spectrum of skills and experience to support those at risk. There is a need to continue to promote a common core of skills and knowledge across practitioners working with young people in local areas. Whilst there needs to be accountability in place for practitioners working with children and young people, these should be exercised through local arrangements rather than restrictions placed on practitioners which can lead to the development of professional silos.

Question 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?

Based on the barriers highlighted above, NCVYS puts forward the following recommendations for action in order to ensure continuous improvement within current safeguarding procedures and practice:

Recommendation 1: To invest in training for all staff that work with children and young people to give them the confidence and skills to act in order to protect and safeguard young people. This should be supported by clear guidance issued centrally to LSCB that requires them to support the delivery of appropriate training to the voluntary sector.

Recommendation 2: We need a stronger focus on preventative services and actively engage the voluntary and community youth sector to cultivate stronger community networks which act as preventative safety mechanisms for parents and families

Recommendation 3: We need to focus more on improving the quality of front-line practice across all services for children and young people and review the degree to which external inspection focuses on the quality of front-line practice as well as the framework for delivery.

Recommendation 4: We need to help everyone, at all levels, to understand how the systems of accountability work - so that everyone in the system understands where their responsibilities begin and end. In particular a review of youth work training to look at how child protection and the wider concept of safeguarding is being integrated into youth work.

Recommendation 5: We need to improve our current systems to ensure continuous performance improvement, so that our structures and our focus all bear down on how we can improve outcomes for children and young people.

Recommendation 6: We need to ensure Social Workers are supported by other professionals working with vulnerable children and young people to ensure a spread of skills and experience in managing difficult cases and areas of potential risk.