

11 October 2011		ITEM 6
Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
REPORT OF CHILD PROTECTION		
Professor Munro's review of child protection social work		
Report of: Barbara Foster Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Foster		
Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Director of People Services		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: To inform Members of the Government's latest recommendations on Child Protection and Early Help		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Professor Munro presented reports on child protection, followed, in July 2011, by the Government's response. Professor Munro has emphasised local design of services and the provision of early help to children and families. The Government has accepted virtually all recommendations and is in the process of implementing same. The recommendations are important for Thurrock and link closely with our project to build our early offer of help through our re-designed children's centres.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.1 Report to be noted

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 Professor Munro's reports are entitled "The Child's Journey" and "A Child Centred System". They are unusual in that they have been commissioned without a precipitating child death tragedy and bring together key themes of reform, change and local design. All of these themes are reflected in the Government's timetable for implementation.

- 2.2. This report is presented to inform Members and to highlight the links with the work being undertaken in children’s centres in Thurrock to ensure that our local early help to families is maximised. When this work is completed, we intend to review the structure of the social work teams dealing with children and families.

3. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:

- 3.1 Professor Munro is a renowned expert in the field of child protection; she writes clearly and eloquently as to the impact of child protection social work, stating that this is not an exact science and that there are risks and dangers associated in both excessive intervention in family life and too little action being taken.

- 3.2. Her emphasis on early help to families describes services intervening early in the lives of young children and early in the development of family problems. She identifies three main reasons for providing early help:

1. It is the morally correct thing to do and is endorsed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989.
2. It is more difficult for children to overcome damage than for it to be minimised or avoided, especially damage caused to newborns and infants.
3. It is cost effective in comparison with helping to cope with serious problems which develop later

- 3.3. There have been several other recent national reports which raise the same issue on the fundamental importance of early help – Dame Tickell’s Report on Early Years, Frank Field, MP, on Poverty and Graham Allen, MP, on Early Intervention. These reports underpin the Government’s emphasis on social care, education, health and police staff all creating a child care system which also includes the voluntary sector and the courts.

- 3.4 There are four themes in the report:

1. Valuing professional expertise
2. Sharing responsibility for the provision of early help
3. Developing social work expertise and supporting effective practice
4. Strengthening accountabilities and creating a learning system

- 3.5 Example recommendations are as follows:-

Recommendation 1

Remove national time scales and create local standards – the Government endorses this key theme and will revise national standards and time scales.

Recommendation 2

By July 2012, every local authority must also have a new Principal Child and Family Social Worker in post. This is to be a senior manager in touch and involved with front line services.

Recommendation 3

Develop local performance criteria so that there will be a twin core of nationally collected and locally designed indicators called “a system of improving organisations” by the Chair of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services.

Recommendation 4

Each LSCB to produce an annual report to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council and (after legislation) to the Local Police and Crime Board and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board – Government accepts and there will be legislation as soon as possible.

3.6 The recommendations are now in hand and are presented as a timetable in Appendix 1.

3.7 The Government’s acceptance of the report falls across two main areas – the provision of early help and the development of social work practice. The latter is a particular strength in Thurrock where the Workforce Development Team liaise closely with managers and staff to ensure that both formal and in-house training opportunities are maximised. The Children’s Workforce Development Council provides grants for four areas of work and all of these are being utilised in Thurrock:

- Early Professional Development
- Step Up to Social Work
- Social Work Improvement Fund
- Newly Qualified Social Workers

As well as co-ordinating all these initiatives the Workforce Development Team is constantly vigilant in identifying new opportunities to bring provider funding into Thurrock.

3.8 The department therefore exceeds the normal support to staff who want to pursue a qualification in social work by constantly updating the workforce on new developments or by organising training on social work management to the extent of supporting some staff to acquire a formal management qualification. All of this enhances service quality and makes Thurrock an attractive work place in the competitive search for social work staff, we could be described as meeting the workforce requirements already.

- 3.9 There are more Thurrock challenges on the requirement to be seen to provide early help to families. Professor Munro describes this as an obvious means of reducing later expense but does need many resources in itself and Professor Munro's report coincides with others in emphasising that spending should be on those services which are proved by research to be effective in bringing about change.
- 3.10 Research across Europe has shown that there are two key features of effective early help services; firstly, strong personal relationships across the whole workforce whether they are placed in any of the range of statutory or voluntary services and secondly, services which think of the whole family rather than just individuals.
- 3.11 Like other local authorities, Thurrock is affected by the economic context and national policy context which is one of change which can impact on effective co-working. However, co-working and the shared responsibility for vulnerable children is the focus of our Thurrock Children Young People's Partnership where all these issues are discussed and addressed.
- 3.12 The particular Thurrock style of delivering early help has been through the Multi-Agency Group Panels (MAGS) which are chaired by managers who are qualified in social work and bring together representatives of all local services who meet to consider individual cases when staff from any child care setting want to draw together resources to meet the needs of children.
- 3.13 The consultation on Children Centres in Thurrock will develop a full set of recommendations for Member consideration. This will become our local offer of early help on which the council will be judged and inspected. Recent OFSTED inspections have emphasised this duty, e.g. Norfolk, Hammersmith & Fulham.
- 3.14 Other local authorities have their own early help structures. Cynical voices in the sector regard Professor Munro's report as not promoting change and say that, without additional resources, many councils will simply maintain their current early help offer. Plans in other councils are not yet known but currently for example, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has one point of entry for all child care matters which are then separated into social care and early help issues. In both Essex County Council and Southend Council, the 'CAF' is used to co-ordinate local services at present and any proposals for change are not known at the time of writing.
- 3.15 In terms of how far we need to go in Thurrock in order to implement Professor Munro's recommendations, we have the following strengths:
- Our local young people contributed to Professor Munro's work
 - We have excellent social work staff who are supported by a competency payments system
 - We have an exceptionally strong workforce development team who deliver excellent professional opportunities – we are a learning organisation

- The development of early help offer is underway in the work on the children's centres and in strategy development
- We have strong data systems and could introduce the national and local data collection suggested
- We have used the SCIE Model of reviewing serious cases which Professor recommends
- We have a Shadow Health & Wellbeing Board

3.16 To take the recommendations further we need to:

- Make the best use of our resources for implementation, in particular children/family centres and locality based integrated delivery of services as we develop it in the Early Offer of Help Project.
- Continue the development of practice quality, in social work and maintain our strength in the training and retention of social workers.
- Maximise continuous systemic learning by strengthening our quality assurance systems, which we are launching on 28th September 2011, as recommended in the Peer Review and the Unannounced Inspection of Referrals and Assessment which took place in 2010

3.17 As we anticipate inspection shortly, Members may be interested to see that most recently published inspection reports from OFSTED address early help in several points. Norfolk, who had pre-dominantly adequate gradings were described as ***“A recently revised ‘priority matrix’, which identifies levels of intervention for referrals, is not fully understood, consistently applied, or fully accepted across partner agencies.”*** Hammersmith and Fulham graded good and outstanding were described as ***“The council and its partners have a wide range of child centred services in place to deliver support to families, ranging from early preventative services to interventions for those on the ‘edge of care’. There are consistently high levels of commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all children who come to the attention of services and these are demonstrated by an informed and knowledgeable staff group across the partnership.”***

4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

4.1 None

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

5.1 As described this report links closely with Early Intervention Strategy and there may be further changes for the council as this is developed.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by **Meinir Hall**
Telephone and email: **01375 652147**
mhall@thurrock.gov.uk

This report is for noting and there are no direct financial implications arising out of this report. As described this report links closely with Early Intervention Strategy and there may be further changes for the council as this is developed which may have financial implications which will have to be built into the medium term financial strategy.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Telephone and email: **01375 652054**
lmarks@thurrock.gov.uk

Professor Munro recommends that local areas should have more freedom to develop their own effective child protection services, rather than focusing on meeting central government targets. She concludes that a one-size-fits-all approach to child protection is preventing local areas from focusing on the child. Her report recommends that the Government and local authorities should operate in an open culture, continually learn from what has happened in the past, trust professionals and give them the best possible training. Her proposals for reform are intend to create the conditions that enable professionals to make the best judgment about the help to give to children, young people and families. She proposes that the system should change from one that is over bureaucratized to one that is focused on the safety and welfare of children and where professional expertise is valued and developed.

Having accepted almost all of the recommendations the Government is in the process of implementing these. The expectation is that each Local Authority will be taking the appropriate steps to implement the recommendations.

6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

The council is under a statutory duty set out under the Equality Act 2010 and the European Convention on Human Rights, which was incorporated into UK domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998, to ensure consideration of equality issues and relevant convention rights in all its activities and processes. This will mean that child protection procedures should reflect these considerations. This will require consideration of equality issues for example around race and culture and convention rights, such as the right to respect for private and family life in the context of case reviews and child protection training.

6.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 For information.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- Government Response to Munro Report

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Timetable for Munro Implementation

Report Author Contact Details:

Name: Barbara Foster
Telephone: 01375 652958
E-mail: bxfoster@thurrock.gov.uk