

Gwenda Thomas AC/AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Wasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref SF-GT-00096-10

Darren Millar AM
Chair of the Health, Well Being and Local
Government Committee
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

3rd August 2010

Dear Darren

Thank you for your letter of 15th July requesting some further information about a number of issues that were raised when I gave evidence to the Committee recently.

The Committee has asked for further information on the remit and work plan of the Wales Safeguarding Children Forum as it relates to LSCBs. I recently met the newly appointed Chair of the Forum, Philip Hodgson, who until his retirement earlier this year was the Director of Social Services in Blaenau Gwent. We discussed the Forum's forward work programme and in particular the work strands that it had identified that it would like to look at. I expressed my view to Mr Hodgson that work around LSCBs should be a priority and I understand that at its recent meeting the Forum endorsed this. It has agreed specifically to look at the structure of LSCBs and their funding, as well as the need to reduce the amount of duplication. In addition, once published, it intends to consider the findings of your Committee's inquiry, as well as the overlaps between the roles of the various partnerships working in the safeguarding arena such as the LSCBs, Children and Young People's Partnerships and the Community Safety Partnerships.

It is my understanding that the Forum has asked the Chair and the Secretariat to spend some time over the summer pulling together and shaping a position statement, along with a detailed workplan which it will consider at its next meeting at the end of September, before formally submitting that information to me. I expect that position statement and workplan to provide me with greater detail as to what work is to be carried out and how, as well as a clear indication of the proposed timeline for the work. I would be happy to write to you again with the details once this information is to hand.

The second issue on which the Committee has asked for further information is in relation to the remit, timescale and process for a review of the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance document *Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act 2004*.

As I stated in my evidence there are plans to strengthen the 'Working Together' guidance, there are not however any plans for a wholesale re-write of a document which is fundamentally sound. A re-write of this nature would be resource intensive and serve little purpose as the feedback received from frontline practitioners is that there is already sufficient guidance out there to enable them to work effectively, safeguarding children and young people. What is needed is stronger leadership at a national level and greater acceptance of everyone's responsibility to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable members of our society.

However whilst a wholesale re-write would serve little purpose, that is not to say that such guidance should not be a living document, one that evolves and is strengthened in response to reviews such as those carried out by CSSIW and the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales last year; the findings of high profile cases such as the tragic deaths of Peter Connelly and Victoria Climbié; and the work of advisory groups set up to look at specific pieces of work such as that currently looking at a future framework for the Serious Case Review process.

There is therefore no specific remit or timescale for a review of the guidance document. The document is already published electronically chapter by chapter and officials will look to re-write individual chapters as the need arises. I expect for example to see the chapter on LSCBs being re-written following the work of the Forum and the publication of the Committee's inquiry report. The chapter on Serious Case Reviews will also be re-written once due consideration has been given to the findings of the current advisory group looking at a possible future framework.

In addition to re-writing chapters as the need arises, additional guidance on specific safeguarding issues will continue to be added. Since the main document was published in 2006 three additional pieces of guidance have been added around safeguarding children in specific circumstances. These relate to fabricated or induced illness; abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession; and child trafficking. A further piece of guidance on safeguarding children from sexual exploitation is currently out for consultation and once finalised this too will be added to the Internet site.

I trust the Committee will find this information helpful in drafting its report, and I look forward to seeing a copy of this in due course. In the meantime I shall contact you again once I have the information to hand regarding the Forum's forward workplan.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gwenda Thomas".

Gwenda Thomas AC/AM

