



Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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To: All local safeguarding partners
cc: All Directors of Children's Services
Safeguarding partners business managers

26th November 2020

SAFEGUARDING REFORM IMPLEMENTATION

As the Minister for Children and Families, with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding, I am very pleased to be writing to all safeguarding partners as we mark the first anniversary of the implementation of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children. On behalf of my colleagues in Home Office and Health, I would like to extend our thanks for the very important work you are doing to protect and keep children and young people safe, particularly given the challenges presented by this unprecedented year.

The reforms to safeguarding arrangements were made in order to improve the strategic approach to multi-agency working at the local level. This will allow us to deliver shared, and equal, responsibility and accountability across the three safeguarding partners in the police, health, and local authority. Such close partnership working is particularly important at this time, when the impact of the COVID-19 virus affects everything we do. It is therefore vital that local authority chief executives, accounting officers of clinical commissioning group and chief officers of police across all three agencies understand their responsibilities as safeguarding partners and are providing the strategic direction required to ensure their services work seamlessly and efficiently together to keep children safe.

Across Whitehall officials are monitoring the implementation of the arrangements in order to assist and support the work you are doing. As part of this support national facilitators have been appointed to work directly with colleagues in the sector and together report back to departments on relevant issues regarding the implementation. Sir Alan Wood is currently reviewing the implementation of the new arrangements and will report on emerging good practice as well as raising any barriers to implementation. This will allow us to learn from where things are working well and consider where more progress and work is needed to ensure the local partnership arrangements deliver for children and families in the way we envisioned. Sir Alan will be contacting some safeguarding partners and we would be grateful for your participation in his review.

It is very important that the three statutory safeguarding partners have clear oversight of the work delivered over the year and its impact on local children and families. The *Working Together 2018* guidance makes clear that a statutory safeguarding partner can delegate their functions to a senior officer, but they remain accountable for any actions or decisions taken on behalf of their agency. I am particularly keen for Sir Alan to look at accountability and governance of the arrangements where functions have been delegated

and he will be picking this up in his review, as will the national facilitators. We are interested in your views so do feedback to both the facilitators or Sir Alan at safeguarding.reform@education.gov.uk.

I have been hugely encouraged by the way in which safeguarding partners are being proactive in responding to the challenges of COVID-19, working together in innovative ways, making quick decisions, and removing barriers that hinder action. But this is a difficult time, where the risk to children is not always easy to spot and concerns become more acute. It is imperative that safeguarding partners continue to review whether they have the right measures in place to quickly identify those children in need of help and ensure that children's social care receive timely and appropriate referrals. It is also important that relevant information is shared between agencies as early as possible whether this is when problems are first emerging, or the family is already known to children's social care. I am working jointly with Ministerial colleagues across the agencies to see what more central support can be offered to local areas at this critical time.

In particular I would like to thank you for the vital support you are providing for very young children at risk of harm during the pandemic. Across government, we are very concerned about the increased number of serious incidents reported for babies who have died or been seriously harmed in comparison to the same period last year. Under ones continue to be the most prevalent age group for serious incident notifications. Since April, almost 38% of all notifications have been children aged under one, with over half of those incidents (55%) being notified because the child has died. I am conscious that this is very much a multi-agency endeavour. In September, I wrote to Directors of Children's Services to highlight excellent collaborative and proactive work by some local authorities to protect vulnerable infants, who had been born during lockdown. I would ask you all to continue to work collaboratively to ensure we are identifying the right support for those born during the national lockdown, but also those born in the coming months.

I would like to include here a reminder about your yearly reports. These reports are incredibly important in providing transparency to children, families, and practitioners within your area, so they can understand the work being undertaken to keep them safe. Now we have reached the first year milestone, please could you send your yearly reports to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Mailbox NationalReviewPanel@education.gov.uk and the What Works for Children's Social Care info@whatworks-csc.org.uk as soon as possible, if you haven't already.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my thanks to you all. We are making progress in spotting signs of trouble and acting on them quickly to keep all children safe, but there is more to do, and I am confident we can do this by continuing to work closely together.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dash at the end.

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