



## executive summary

# safeguarding: council developments

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In March 2009, Lord Laming published the findings of a review investigating the progress being made across the UK to implement effective arrangements for safeguarding children. Laming made 58 recommendations to ensure that services are as effective as possible at working together to achieve positive outcomes for children. The Government accepted all of Lord Laming's recommendations and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published its response in *The Protection of Children in England: Action Plan* (DCSF, 2009).

In June 2010, Professor Eileen Munro was commissioned by the Coalition Government to conduct an independent review of child protection in England. Munro suggested that 'good practice thrives' in many parts of the country despite the numerous system-level challenges that are yet to be resolved (Munro, 2010, p.42). In May 2011, Munro published her final report *A Child-Centred System*, and recommended that local areas should have more freedom to design their own child protection services (Munro, 2011, p.106). In July 2011, the Department for Education (DfE) published its response to Munro's recommendations setting out actions to reduce central regulation and prescription, and place greater trust and responsibility in skilled professionals and local leaders (DfE, 2011).

A scoping study (Atkinson, 2010) and literature review (Martin et al., 2010), carried out by the NFER for the Local Government Group (LG Group), set out relevant literature on developments in safeguarding practices published since the Laming review in 2009. At that time, the published literature depicting changes in safeguarding practices post-Laming was somewhat limited. This report aims to enhance that evidence base and provide further understanding of how local authorities have and continue to develop their safeguarding practices in a changing policy landscape.

Five local authorities were selected for the study. They range from 'adequate' to 'outstanding' in their recent safeguarding and looked after children inspections and offer a range of perspectives and approaches to safeguarding practices depending on local circumstances and priorities. Telephone interviews were conducted with a small number of senior officers at tiers 1–3 in each authority. Interviews were carried out between February and May 2011, and interviewees were asked to provide feedback on what they perceive to be key developments in safeguarding practices in their local authority during the last two years.

Across the five case-study local authorities, the main priority areas for improving safeguarding, identified by interviewees, include:

- leadership and management
- recruiting, maintaining and retaining a highly competent workforce
- quality assurance and performance management
- referral and assessment processes and procedures
- partnership working.

This report provides details of how safeguarding practices have been improved in these priority areas. It gives localised accounts of practice implementation and, where possible, evidence of outcomes.

Across the five case-study areas, specific conditions and factors influenced the improvement of safeguarding practices:

- the commitment of local authority leaders
- the facilitating approach of strategic and operational managers
- existing structures underpinning partnership working
- workforce attitudes and characteristics
- specific local authority contexts and circumstances.

Interviewees identified a small number of barriers and challenges to improving safeguarding across the case-study local authorities. These centred on:

- process and systemic challenges
- challenges to partnership working
- external constraints.

Supporting the findings of Munro (2010), good and emerging practice is evident among the five case-study local authorities despite current difficult economic times and system-level challenges. This study presents evidence that suggests safeguarding continues to be a high priority for local authorities. Furthermore, local authorities have or are developing the necessary structures, systems and effective working cultures to support continued reform of child protection.



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