

Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children

Monday 21st March 2011
4.30pm-6pm
Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Westminster

Chair: Baroness Massey

1. Introduction from Baroness Massey

Baroness Massey welcomed everyone and thanked people for attending. She introduced Professor Eileen Munro and provided an overview of the aims and purposes of the Professor's review of child protection.

2. Presentation by Professor Eileen Munro

Professor Munro introduced herself and the review and said she was interested in hearing from the group whether her approach made sense. She stated that there was very little new to say in terms of what a good child protection system would look like but that the tricky part was to find ways to introduce and implement such a system.

Professor Munro stated that child protection currently is too bureaucratic and too process driven and that by looking at child protection through eyes of a child it is easy to realise how dysfunctional it has become. She stressed that lots of messages were coming through from children and a general theme is that children want a stable person to relate to.

The Professor then invited any immediate questions.

3. Questions

Winston, BASW- stated that children's experience of having several social workers over short period was alluded to a lot in the second report from the review. Will there be more thinking about that?

Eileen Munro replied there would be although she did not want to prescribe the details.

Kevani, care leaver from North London responded to the Professor's point about reducing paperwork. She said that people had been talking about that for a long time but no one had said how

that would be done. She said that social workers should be able to take young people out of their homes to meet them on neutral ground and asked how that would be incorporated.

Eileen Munro agreed that the need to be met outside of foster homes was a point that young people had made a lot and said it was a widespread problem.

Yvonne, Solihull Council- Asked what will happens with the integrated children's system and said that there needs to be some central thinking about whether this kept.

Eileen Munro responded that there were two obstacles: 1) The expense of changing it; 2) that statutory guidance is too restrictive. The professor said she wanted social workers to be able to redesign their forms so that the system helps social workers to do their work.

Jean, Social Worker made the point that it is incredibly difficult to see the world through a child's eyes and asked whether there is there enough training to help social workers to do this.

Eileen Munro stated that serious thought should be given as to whether children should work alongside social workers. She referenced this being done in Hackney.

Jessica, young person said that social services have said she should stand on her own two feet now that she was 18. Jessica asked what other 18 year old gets kicked out of their home.

Eileen Munro Stressed that senior managers need to empathise with the child and agreed that they would never let their own child go out on their own at that age.

Zabe, care leaver made the point that longer relationships help children to have more confidence in speaking to their social workers.

Eileen Munro Agreed that it used to be the general wisdom that children in care needed a stable relationship. Continuity used to be highly valued and this has been forgotten

Sarah Smith BASW asked how the Professor was going to stop management simply paying lip-service to the changes she was trying to implement.

Eileen Munro replied that tackling that had to start with the inspection service. She stated that it had to be a child-centred

inspection process including feedback from service users. She said she would like to see all directors doing a duty from time to time.

Sarah Smith replied that there had been good changes in inspection i.e. unannounced inspections but said that these have not gone far enough. She said that councils have too much warning.

4. Further presentation by Professor Munro

- Early intervention= central. Important to pick up on child's problem as early as possible
- Mentioned the 3 other reviews; Tickell, Field and Allen – all in agreement on early intervention.
- No simple measure of detecting abuse or neglect. Thinking about how to manage that better. A lot of children referred in 3 or 6 times before actually getting help.
- Around country, some local authorities are designing multi-agency teams to decide who can best help the family.
- She presented a case study showing cost of not intervening over a 12 month period.
- Real problem is around early intervention because politically it looks less important than helping a child once a problem has arisen. However, in reality it is much better to help then and much more likely to make an impact.
- Remit to decrease bureaucracy and increase space for professional judgement. We need a child protection workforce that is able to make sensible, informed decisions. Today's workforce is more used to filling in paperwork and is generally fairly inexperienced because of the high turnover.
- Social workers are moving a lot because of bureaucracy
- Need to give social workers the skills and training to be able to work more closely with children and families.
- Want a higher level of people coming into the profession because they are dealing with incredibly challenging decisions
- To make any change happen, there has to be change within inspection. Need inspectors to go in and look far more for

quality. Inspectors need to watch the work going on rather than the recorded data about it.

- Should be more of an engagement with the quality and culture of the organisation. Variables should all be related to whether children are well.
- Inspections are currently silent on whether we have actually helped a child and improved their long term outcomes.
- Surveys of users = one source of data
- Possible follow up checks to see whether services have helped

5. Further questions

The Earl of Listowel, Co-Vice Chair of the APPG for Looked-After Children and care Leavers said it was good to have Professor Eileen Munro and so many young people from care, care leavers, professionals and foster carers at the meeting. He stated that there was nothing more important than getting social work right and said he had heard time and again about the high turnover of social workers from young people. He warmly welcomed the Professor's review and asked two questions:

- Can we still provide information into the review? Lord Listowel outlined some research by Dr Andrea Warman that he felt would be useful.
- In terms of dissemination would you think in terms of informal meetings between the decision makers and the people delivering services/ first line managers?

Eileen Munro stated that the 28th April was the deadline for her final report and said she was still keen to hear views and ideas. In terms of first line managers, she responded that case consultation and management should possibly be considered as separate roles.

Ivor Frank, barrister said he accepted the good intentions behind the report but asked what would happen if it failed to achieve its objective. He stated that so far the government had failed to address the issue of a sanction when things go wrong for children in care. He asked whether the Professor would recommend making a sanction in the hands of a child so they can make a complaint when things go wrong.

Ivor also stated that many MPs were well-intentioned in terms of children in care. However there is no Ministerial post specifically for looked-after children. He pointed out that there is a Minister for

Prisons but no Minister for Children in Care despite looked-after children being a larger population.

Eileen Munro responded that the trouble with the rights of the child is that adults do need to speak for a child when they are very young. It is difficult for a child to have the power to assert their voice even if they have a legal right.

John Metcalfe, BASW said he was interested in the comments about directors having cases. He said that as social workers move up the food chain they become viewed more as managers than service provision professionals. He asked whether we should consider a return to a different model.

Eileen Munro said she would like to see a lot more shared recognition that the job is really difficult. Taking less punitive action can enable people to do their jobs and move away from the defensive practice.

Adi, Young Peron, Brent - pointed out that often, when you're in care, social workers can not read your needs because they do not spend a lot of time with you. Social workers need to spend more time with the young people they work with.

Care Leaver expressed concerned that young people become a statistic. Stressed that the cuts have a big impact on young people and expressed concern about how change is implemented when social workers are concentrating on budgets.

Eileen Munro explained that she was looking at having a career structure where people reach senior levels but are career social workers and not managers. This will enable them to argue on behalf of service users at a high level and in terms of funding.

Young person, Isle of Wight asked how the major trust issues that exist amongst children in care will be overcome with all the changes that will be made.

Eileen Munro responded that the aim was to try to reduce the number of children that get into that position. Social work has to go back to the messy human service that it should be.

Young person asked how young people could get to see a social worker when social workers are no longer allowed to take young people out because of all the cuts. How will relationships be built?

Social worker, Wandsworth Independent Living Team

thanked the young people who had shared their stories. She explained that she had run care leavers' groups and children in care councils etc. She stressed that building peer relationships with one another can help young people to build resilience.

Social worker, Wandsworth stated that there needs to be recognition that a lot of social workers have a huge caseload. To increase contact there needs to be a limit to the number of cases. A lot of social workers are also agency workers and so they will not be in once place for the long term.

Eileen Munro suggested that data on turnover, sick leave and the number of agency staff should be collected so we possess indicators of problems.

Sian, foster carer commented on the CRB system. She suggested that it is not economic to spend so much money having multiple CRBs. She suggested that money could be saved there to reduce cuts to other services.

Eileen Munro stated that new guidance on CRBs had been published recently. She suggested that a lot of people around the country have rules that are locally created but that they think are national rules so they do not change them.

Baroness Howe outlined her years of experience in this area and said that she was particularly interested in the whole subject. She emphasized the role of health visitors and midwives who often know where intervention should be. She asked whether the review could look more at how all the various professionals are involved in child protection and at how they interact.

Eileen Munro replied that she had spoken positively about Home Start in the second report. She agreed that they have a huge role to play but stressed that they need a back-up service of supervision to help them.

Young person from care commented that social workers are acting by the rules but stressed that the problems of young people in care are emotional.

Eileen Munro responded that the rules do not cover the heart of the work but are used as a frame for it.

Kavros Gill stressed that this is a huge opportunity to get the right people into social work; people who have the skills to engage with

children. Need to recruit people who will be good at working directly with children and families.

Member of the IRO project group asked what the Professor thought of the role of the IRO.

Young person stated that inspections should not be dictated by deadlines. She stressed that her time with social workers was restricted by deadlines.

Jasmine, young person from care pointed out that her social worker was diverted elsewhere because of the cuts even though she had a really good relationship with her.

Alan Coombe, NSPCC raised the issues of transparency and accountability. He asked how well those principles had been understood.

Simone, care leaver asked why there was not more support for single mums.

Kevani, care leaver said that a lot of young people in care have had bad experiences. She explained that being in care was hard and that she had worked hard and overcome multiple disadvantages to get to where she was today. She said that there is no form of inspiration for children in care and this is a problem.

Councillor Joanne Welch asked whether the review had looked at boarding schools for vulnerable young people combined with therapeutic training for foster carers.

Tara, care leaver stated that the level of emotional support a child gets in care is not sufficient to prepare them for leaving care.

Mentor thanked the young people for their contributions and said that they were a source of inspiration. He outlined his experience as a mentor and said that there was a very good mentoring system out there.

Young person from care-asked what can MPs could do to promote positive images of young people in care.

John Kemmis, Voice said that empowering young people is important. He explained that Voice has been pushing for section 8 rights for young people in care for a long time and said that advocacy as a universal right could be helpful.

John said it was important to look at how to create an environment that allows social work teams to thrive.

Frankie Fisher stated that services have been decimated recently. One of the realities is that when you refer to Children's Services it very much depends on capacity and to whether that case gets picked up.

6. Summing up by Professor Munro

Eileen Munro summed up that the message was coming across about how to enable social workers get the time to do direct work. She said that she was grateful for advice and about how to get to where we want to.

She said that, when she was a social worker, colleagues provided a source of wisdom and emotional support. She stressed that positive change was about moving away from the idea that if you fill in enough tick boxes you get to the right decision

Baroness Massey asked the Professor for details of how people could contribute to her review.

Eileen Munro provided details of how people could get in touch.

Baroness Massey finished by saying that the meeting was difficult to summarise but that it had been very exciting, honest, open, useful, challenging, and emotional. She thanked Professor Munro for stimulating the discussion and thanked everyone for their contributions.