4.20   Norman argues that the traditional approach of designers has been machine-centred, concentrating on automating the parts of the process they know how to work on and leaving it to the human operator to cope with the resulting changes. In contrast, a human-centred approach starts by considering their needs. Designers should begin by asking first, what are humans good at?, and second, what are machines good at?, before deciding how to help humans improve their performance. He concludes:

> *'we need information processing systems that complement our thinking, reasoning, and memory skills as comfortably as the calculator enhances our arithmetic skills. The best of these technologies provide us with rich information and leave control of the process, and what to do with the results, in our hands'*[80].

4.21   The review has been given some interesting examples of tools that have been designed through detailed discussion with those who are going to use them. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets undertook a major review in 2010 of its use of the ICS system to make it more streamlined and less onerous on frontline staff and designed a new assessment form (Annex B). With a fundamental re-shaping of the initial and core assessment exemplars and its positive impact on child-focussed practice, the following key question has been considered - is there an alternative framework for assessment of children and their families and what would this look like?

4.22   Embarking on this work, Tower Hamlets held a series of workshops and development sessions with frontline social work practitioners, operational and senior managers, to review and critically evaluate current practice and to consider how the continuum of intervention through assessment could be both streamlined and improved to focus on the child. The following themes in the workshops emerged:

- prescription led to a description of the child and family circumstances as opposed to an understanding of the family and the child(ren) and how the family was functioning;
- that the descriptions captured often contained snippets of history not in a chronological format;
- the child's story was often deconstructed or absent across the different domains and not a central feature;
- pressures and a focus on timescales meant social workers were not often taking the time to plan and think through the family issues subsequently impacting on outcomes for the child; and
- the process tended to be engaged as an end to itself rather than a way of practising child focussed social work.

The form developed by Tower Hamlets is the emerging thinking regarding how a different approach to assessment and understanding families could be considered.

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[80] Norman, D. (1993), 'Toward human-centred design', *Technology Design*, p 52

The design has been informed with the following principles in mind:

- articulates, describes and understands the child's story;
- a practice framework that is flexible with timeframes to be determined at the outset (with a clear time frame for Section 47 child protection investigations);
- enhances the social workers understanding of the family and fundamentally supports social work analytical thinking, judgment and decision making;
- a process that supports an exploration of the interplay between historical factors and the present situation to inform future planning and involvement;
- facilitates direct work with families through enhanced partnership practice;
- genograms, eco maps and a purposeful chronological understanding are key requisites;
- on receipt of the completed document, the family can understand the concerns that the social worker has raised with them;
- promotes a family based assessment and intervention methodology within an ecological context;
- promotes and prioritises inter-agency involvement in the work undertaken; and
- reinforced in the organisation through practice, supervision, quality assurance and research.

4.23   In this section on tools, two areas of practice where tools have become dominant in what many see as a problematic way merit close attention: the ICS case management software and the detailed procedures intended to improve the quality of practice.

The Integrated Children's System (ICS)

4.24   Computers have a lot to offer, but their use so far has been problematic. ICS exemplifies an innovation that has had a major, unforeseen impact on the way that frontline work is performed. Although there are variations in the design used at a local level, there are some common problems in its implementation. The way that organisations have, until recently, dealt with emerging problems with the system has been a good illustration of a failure to learn. There was a tendency to blame any emerging problems on the social workers using ICS, instead of accepting that the quality of performance arose from an interaction. The detailed studies of Bell et al, White et al and Shaw et al showed conclusively how influential and how damaging the design of the software was[81].

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[81] Bell, M., Shaw, I., Sinclair, I., Sloper, P. & Rafferty, J. (2007), The Integrated Children's System: An evaluation of the practice, process and consequences of the ICS in councils with social services responsibilities; White, S., Hall, C., & Peckover, S. (2009), 'The descriptive tyranny of the Common Assessment Framework: technologies of categorisation and professional practice in child welfare', British Journal of Social Work, 39(7), pp 1197–1217; Shaw, I., Bell, M., Sinclair, I., Sloper, P., Mitchell, W., Dyson, P., Clayden, J. & Rafferty, J. (2009), 'An exemplary scheme? An evaluation of the Integrated Children's System', British Journal of Social Work, 39, 4, 613-626

4.25   To return to basic principles, recording is a necessary task and has three functions:

- individual casework - records the activity undertaken and the information gathered by workers on an individual basis to assess, inform, understand, reflect and plan for individual children and families. The record should be the record for the child in the future that should illustrate what decisions were made and why. It should also clearly tell the child's story. Therefore, records should provide an accurate reflection of the child's experiences, history and observations. It also provides the evidence should the worker or agency be held to account for their work;
- performance management and data collection - local authorities should collect information required for national reporting purposes, but it is important that data collection and data entry should not be over-burdensome for social workers. Local authorities should consider whether the time and cost to enter data over and above the minimum requirements is a good and effective use of social work time and skills and whether the data collected is required, useful and enables the authority to understand and manage their performance; and
- workforce and service planning: - senior managers and commissioners need accessible information for effective workforce and service planning to allow their services to adapt to changing demands.

4.26   Local authorities have been given permission to modify ICS - as Baroness Morgan, then Minister for Children, wrote to Directors of Children's Services in June 2009:

> '… it is the responsibility of local authorities to determine how ICT systems can be used to support the delivery of social care services. The key test of those systems should be that they support effective practice and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families'[82].

4.27   Because there is substantial evidence that the ICS does not support professional judgment and often inhibits efficient working, there is a strong case for many local authorities to use these powers. The degree of standardisation imposed in the current system may be supportive to novices but is not likely to enhance professional learning and skill and indeed may erode its development[83].

4.28   The ICS remains a very poor tool for mapping the child's journey. The research carried out by Professor White's team at Lancaster University and the preceding evaluation of the ICS by the Universities of York and Southampton[84] show that the

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[82]

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=6169

[83] Gilligan, P. (forthcoming) Decision making tools and the development of expertise in child protection practitioners: are we "just breeding workers who are good at ticking boxes"? *Child and Family Social Work*

[84] Shaw, I., Bell, M., Sinclair, I., Sloper, P., Mitchell, W., Dyson, P., Clayden, J.and Rafferty, J. (2009) 'An exemplary scheme? An evaluation of the integrated children's system', *British Journal of Social Work* Advance Access published April 8, 2009, 10.1093/bjsw/bcp

current documentation makes it difficult to 'see the child'. This has been confirmed in evidence submitted to the review. For example, there is nowhere in the current system for the child to tell their own story, or for the family's social history to be effectively summarised. Instead, there is an over-concentration on repetitive data entry and there are multiple processes and transfer points in the workflow which require the child's story to be continually retold. This encourages cutting and pasting and the process of recording to be considered a chore, rather than an integral part of the work.

4.29   Feedback to the review shows considerable enthusiasm for rediscovering family-based recording, whilst preserving the child's unique record within the family. Some suppliers are working on this, but it is a challenge when they have designed the system to a rigid specification which precludes family records. There is a consensus that genograms and chronologies are crucial, but as yet there has been limited success in providing these within the current packages. It is important to note that even optimally-designed ICT cannot replace human effort in the crafting of meaningful chronologies. It can only search for incidents and present them in a list. It cannot interpret these. This attention to human factors is essential in any subsequent systems. In the future, ICT design should make full use of mixed media. Digital stories and photographs, for example, could be embedded in the child's record providing additional and meaningful information to the child and significantly improving upon what is available with paper documents. This requires a professionally-led design project, involving young people.

4.30   ICS does provide a degree of order in the case record and, if stripped down, could operate as a document repository, pending the design of a more suitable system for children's social care. Understandably, many authorities are anxious about losing the document management functions provided by ICS. Whilst paper files have some limited self-organising features, the same is not always true of electronic documents which can easily be misfiled and where version control is vital. Some of these features can be locally improvised in some sites. It is unlikely that any one-size-fits-all model of adaptation will be possible because of the different team configurations, service structures and interoperability issues in localities. There is also the serious matter of post-implementation support for authorities with no in-house ICT expertise, if software adaptations are undertaken outside of the supplier contracts.

4.31   Many of the problems currently experienced with the ICS are related to the rigidity of the performance management regime operationalised within it. This regime is a potent source of 'latent conditions for error'[85] i.e. it creates the systemic conditions which make errors more, rather than less, likely to occur; for example, rushed or incomplete assessment driven by the need to meet time-scales. It is thus making practice less safe. Accordingly, the matter of technology cannot be separated from

[85] Broadhurst, K., Wastell, D., White, S., Hall, C., Peckover, S., Thompson, K., Pithouse, A., & Davey D. (2009) 'Performing 'Initial Assessment': Identifying the Latent Conditions for Error at the Front-Door of Local Authority Children's Services', *British Journal of Social Work* (available online at http://www.publicservices.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/broadhurst-et-al_2009-performing-initital-assessment_.pdf)

the practice model, nor from the inspectorial and performance management systems.

4.32 This situation continues to slow the potential progress in reforming ICS. It is, however, difficult for authorities to change their practice model because of the perceived and actual impact of the current inspectorial regime. For example, a number of authorities have expressed interest in moving to a more holistic form of assessment, rather than using separate forms for particular activities. However, they feel unable to do so, because of a perception that Ofsted are still inspecting against the practice model embedded within ICS. Where authorities are using a different theoretical model, they are entering data twice. If social workers are to make better use of research and emerging theory, they need the flexibility to change the recording framework too.

4.33 Computers and computer software have considerable, as yet unrealised, potential to support decision-making. There are many examples of 'expert systems' being used to support complex professional tasks, e.g. in the airline industry and medicine, and there is also a substantial body of research on the design of safe systems and organisations. Current work in health informatics underlines the importance of a 'socio-technical' approach to systems design[86].

4.34 The next phase of the review will examine the ways in which the inspection framework can better examine how the system is serving children (see below, chapter five). Currently many authorities are tied into contracts for systems they have purchased and developed. Freeing themselves from them is likely to take a varied amount of time dependent on whether:

- they rely upon them for their data and performance requirements;
- their contracts have them tied in to certain arrangements or cost agreements (changes to the system are likely to have implications on data collection and businesses processes; it might be significantly more complex than just changing a form);
- they have developed and changed them already to make them 'fit' their authority needs and further changes or tweaks are likely to involve significant cost, time and development; or
- any change to systems is likely to incur further training costs in time and money.

4.35 Ideally, local authorities would audit their own ICS systems to see:

- how easily the child's story can be extracted from the system;
- how efficient their frontline workers feel their systems to be (how time consuming their individual systems are);
- how easily it provides the information they need to inform decision making

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[86] See: Fish, S., Munro, E. & Bairstow, S. (2008), *Learning Together to Safeguard Children: Developing a Multi-Agency Systems Approach for Case Reviews*, Report 9, London, SCIE; Munro, E. (2005) 'A systems approach to investigating child abuse deaths', *British Journal of Social Work*, 25, pp 531–46

and clear next steps; and

- how effectively the existing system records what help has been provided to the child and family and what impact this has had on the child's safety and well-being.

Procedures

4.36   Procedures are the second major example of tools for social workers where the influence on practice has been problematic. The main criticism is that they have become too extensive and are so dominating practice that space to exercise professional expertise is being severely reduced. Procedures have a number of strengths but they also have weaknesses and a clearer understanding of both helps in considering how to revise and, in places, remove them.

4.37   The most obvious strength of procedures is that they are a way of formulating best practice in carrying out a task so that the wisdom of experienced staff is readily disseminated throughout the organisation and variation in the quality and type of service received is reduced. Procedures are also good as training tools, helping novices get started in learning a task.   They can enable newcomers to get on with the work quickly, giving them simple rules to follow without going through the longer process of understanding *why* those rules are sensible.   For experienced workers, they are valuable as a checklist to use to when reviewing their work, and particularly helpful if they tend to be interrupted and have to leave the task for a while.

4.38   Procedures play a crucial role when people have to work together on a task, enabling them to predict what each other will do, setting out basic rules about roles and tasks. This is even more important when it is not an established team but a group who come together on a particular occasion, as is often the case in child protection work when carrying out an enquiry into an allegation of child abuse.   The extent of the guidance in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)* is questioned in chapter six but the need for some guidance in this aspect of the work is incontrovertible.

4.39   Procedures, however, have a number of weaknesses. The strength mentioned above that newcomers can quickly learn to follow procedures even when they do not understand them is also a weakness. It can lead to people just following procedures and not trying to become better:

> *'Procedures can lull people into a passive mindset of just following the steps, and not really thinking about what they are doing. When we become passive, we don't try to improve our skills. Why bother, if all we are doing is following the procedures? So the checklists and procedural guides can reduce our motivation to become highly skilled at a job*[87].

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[87] Klein, G. (2009), Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making, p 22

4.40   Another weakness is that procedures are always incomplete:

> *'There is always a distance between a written rule and a task. It can only be closed by human interpretation and application'*[88].

4.41   This was illustrated in the preceding chapter when discussing how much more social workers needed to be able to do than following guidance on collecting information for an assessment. Most of the procedures in child protection involve dealing with other people and require the use of relationship and communication skills. When the organisation does not pay sufficient attention to the latter skills, then procedures may be followed in a way that is technically correct but is so incompetent that the desired result is not achieved. Evidence submitted to the review shows that some social workers feel that the skill and effort they use in engaging complex families is undervalued by their manager whose prime interest is in checking that they have completed forms.

4.42   The final two weaknesses are interwoven: procedures can deal well with typical scenarios but not with unusual ones, and an organisational culture where procedural compliance is dominant can stifle the development of expertise. In child and family social work, the needs and circumstances of children are so varied that procedures cannot fully encompass that variety. Efforts to make procedures cover more variety quickly lead to the proliferation of procedural manuals that, because of their size, become harder to use in daily practice. The inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié found that there were 13 documents containing policies, procedures and guidance to staff in relation to child services[89]. Dealing with the variety of need is better achieved by social workers understanding the underlying principles of good practice and developing the expertise to apply them, taking account of the specifics of a child's case. The work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus on how people develop expertise shows how they build up intuitive understanding and tacit knowledge[90]. They may use procedures to get started as novices but need to move beyond this to achieve mastery. Social workers in a culture where procedural compliance is expected, and deviation is met with blame, are discouraged from building up that expertise.

4.43   Experienced social workers who understand the underlying principles of good practice can face a situation where they know that compliance with procedures would entail violating those principles, while violating the procedures would, in their expert opinion, be in the best interests of the child. From evidence submitted to the review, it is clear that this scenario is not rare. For some, the combination of anxiety about violating procedures in a blame culture and their moral discomfort at not acting in the child's best interests has been a factor in driving them away from child protection work.

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[88] Dekker, S. (2005), Ten Questions about Human Error, p 136
[89] The Lord Laming (2003), The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: Report, 1.60
[90] Dreyfus, H.L., & Dreyfus, S.E. (1986), Mind over Machine: the Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer

4.44   The introduction of fixed timescales provides a good example of how a well-intentioned reform can go too far and become dysfunctional. Timescales were introduced because of the evidence that the cases of too many children were drifting with no clear assessment, plan, or help being offered. The basic principle that timeliness matters is sound but turning this into fixed rules of ten days for one stage of case management and 35 days for another creates difficulties for social workers trying to provide an individualised response to families. Ten days may, on average, be a reasonable timeframe for completing an initial assessment but that average will not be best for everyone. One child may need assessment within an hour because the referring information indicates such a high level of danger while another may be best helped by allowing longer to make sense of an unusual or complicated set of circumstances. Besides over-standardising practice, having timescales on their own leads to the undervaluing of other key practice principles, especially the principle of making an accurate assessment.

4.45   The review is considering whether, when a child is referred to children's social care, the existing assessment should be continued by social workers rather than the current system which starts a new bureaucratic process of initial and core assessments. Current practice is dominated by prescribed timescales but the review is concerned that there should be a stronger awareness of balancing the timeliness with the quality of assessment so that the specific needs of any child can be well assessed. Timeliness matters, but so does quality so local arrangements should monitor for both instead of having statutory timescales.

4.46   What bedevils the prescriptive approach is the conflict between the very wide variety of situations that are encountered - and, hence, the variety of responses that are required if the child's life is to be improved - and the wish to standardise the processes that are used. This is why the aim of improving the system is rapidly confronted with a central conundrum: how to organise it so that it can display 'requisite variety' - the ability to tailor each response to the need of children and young people - whilst ensuring that reasonable standards are being upheld across the board.

4.47   As discussed above, there is a clear need to improve the capabilities of social workers so that they are better able to exercise professional judgment. Since the Children Act 1989 there has been a well-documented expansion of rules and guidance. In part this has been due to an increased awareness of specific issues but it also seems that rules and guidance have been issued because of a lack of confidence in workforce competence. This is potentially damaging for two reasons. First, too great a reliance on rules creates the illusion of certainty in a sector where uncertainty prevails. Secondly, it leads to an overdependence on process which diminishes professional judgment and creates a mindset which seeks pre-formulated solutions to complex and uncertain situations. In the next phase of the review, more attention will be given to clarifying when rules and principles are most appropriate.

4.48   One difficulty in moving to more judgment-based practice is that it removes a (false) sense of security from individuals dealing with uncertain situations in a highly

punitive culture. In such circumstances, the defence 'I was following the rules' is very tempting. Developing more scope for professional judgment to improve the service received by children requires reducing the blame culture and developing a more realistic understanding of what it means to make judgments in uncertain circumstances. The police have recently adopted a set of ten risk principles (Annex A) and the review will consider whether they should be given wider endorsement by the child protection system since they convey a clear account of good practice in making decisions in uncertain circumstances.

4.49   As mentioned earlier, the Government has already started to relax some of the rules and bureaucratic reporting requirements relating to the performance framework and ICT. In relation to performance, the Government has already revoked the designations of Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets meaning that local areas no longer have to report on their performance to central Government and are free to drop or amend them if they so wish. It has also been announced that the National Indicator Set of performance measures will be replaced with a single comprehensive list of data required by central Government, giving local areas far more freedom over the management of their own performance. This provides local authorities with the flexibility to move away from previously prescribed specifications in order to adapt their systems to suit local needs.

4.50   Many of the rules for child and family social work, however, are contained in the local procedural manuals developed to implement the statutory guidance of *Working Together to Safeguard Children.* As will be discussed in chapter five, the review is working with a multi-professional group to consider how to revise this guidance and, where appropriate, replace rules with principles of good practice.

4.51   In addition, consultations with social workers has made the review aware that many of the rules and regulations with which frontline practitioners are frustrated are actually the result of local rather than national prescription. As discussed below, the final report will examine how and why local procedures have sometimes had unforeseen, negative implications for practice and how a more adaptable system, capable of learning from its practitioners, can be encouraged.

Journey authorities

4.52   The review is working with a number of authorities that are demonstrating the type of systemic learning and adaptation that the review wishes to encourage. They have identified problems in the existing way of working and, drawing on theory and research, have formulated ways of improving practice. The details of each authority are given below.

Reclaiming Social Work in Hackney

Reclaiming Social Work is a programme developed in the London Borough of Hackney, to improve services for children and families recognising social work as a challenging profession requiring complex skills, deep professional knowledge and a strong understanding of its evidence base. Central to the changes has been the creation of Social Work Units in which social workers function as part of small multi-skilled team headed by a consultant social worker, who has some managerial responsibilities and overall responsibility for cases. The teams also include a qualified social worker, a child practitioner, a clinician (one per two units) and an administrator. An independent evaluation found the approach to:

- support reflective learning and skill development through its shared approach to case management;
- foster a sense of openness and support;
- re-establish the primary focus of social work on the family; and
- allow social workers to spend more time with families by passing on administrative tasks to the administrator.

Results have shown that there are now lower rates of children becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time and fewer looked-after children. The initiative has also shown an overall cost saving of children's social care of 4.97% due to:

- a reduction of the number of children coming in to care;
- a 55% fall in staff days lost to sickness;
- placement stability; and
- very low numbers of children in residential care.

Bath and North East Somerset 'lean review'

Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) have been working on a review of their social care processes, including safeguarding, to obtain an 'end to end view of the system'. The review team have assembled a team of frontline practitioners who consider and analyse the interactions they have with the child and family, the nature of the individual demand and what action was taken in response and the impact of these on the experience of the child. Findings have included the following and will inform a re-design of services aimed at improving outcomes for children:

- inconsistencies in the handling of some cases and the consequent failure to always draw out the right information about needs;
- the need to ensure that universal services have access to consistent risk management expertise in order to avoid professional anxiety, leading to inappropriate referrals to social care;
- a reluctance of professionals to 'de-escalate' once a case is in the social care system; and
- duplication between services and burdensome recording, which does not always capture the necessary information about the child; and

The Knowsley Approach

Since 2007, Knowsley have been on an improvement journey that adopted a systems approach to redesigning the statutory safeguarding services. They have developed a robust partnership approach to thresholds for referrals and intervention both at an operational and strategic level, including the co-location of the children's social care duty arrangements and the Common Assessment Framework team. These developments were underpinned by needs analysis and research undertaken by Lancaster University and a comprehensive independent review of child protection practice.

In 2010, Ofsted judged safeguarding in Knowsley to be good with outstanding capacity for improvement. Taking the feedback from this inspection and the learning from serious case reviews, Knowsley decided to take its reforms a stage further, with a specific focus on frontline practice. The approach that is now being taken in Knowsley is to undertake a 'commission' into child protection, looking at how social care, the police, health services, education and early years settings interact systemically and how this interaction impacts on those children in need of protection. Further, it will examine the nature and effectiveness of feedback loops in the system, the role of the 'authentic voice' and that of emergence linked to the impact of unintended consequences.

The Family Recovery Project and remodelling social work in Westminster

The **Family Recovery Project (FRP)** is a co-located multi-agency team incorporating Adult and Children's Services supported by an intelligence function. It uses the 'Think Family' approach, working with families who have a history of non-engagement with services or where, even with multi-agency support, positive change has been limited or not sustained. FRP work to improve the experience of both the families, and the communities in which they live, working in a targeted and phased way, including a contract with consequences (Family Care Plan). Year one research has indicated that for every £1 spent on FRP, £2.10 in costs is avoided by the public purse (Westminster City Council figures).

The **Remodelling Social Work pilot** is an example of early intervention and innovative frontline practice. It aims to improve outcomes through enabling social workers to undertake a greater amount of direct work with children and undertake earlier and more effective identification of need and joint assessment with key partners, by co-locating social workers within universal settings.

Managing referrals in Tower Hamlets

The **Integrated Pathways and Support Team (IPST)** in Tower Hamlets manages 'the front door' for children's social care. Its main function is to triage contacts and referrals, utilising expert knowledge to signpost to other services where the case is not accepted. It is social work led and managed with multi-disciplinary partners being part of the team. IPST provides general advice on child protection issues, including to other professionals, such as teachers, and has played a major role in managing anxiety over referrals. Against a backdrop of a 2,393 annual increase in contacts between 2008-09 and 2009-10 there has been a reduction in the percentage that progress to referral from 32.5% to 15.9% with interim figures for this year showing the rise in contacts continuing but the referral rate remaining steady. IPST has developed a much improved and more dynamic working relationship with other agencies, such as the police Public Protection Desk with regular staff face to face contact and improved and more purposeful sharing of information. This has led to a more consistent and commensurate approach to contacts and therefore reduces the proportion of cases made subject to referrals.

Signs of Safety in Gateshead

Gateshead has been developing **Signs of Safety** over a number of years, following the creation of referral and assessment teams who have a key role in assessing risk and need.   Gateshead has gradually increased the number of staff working to the model and the number of processes where it is applied, to the point where it is now used across the full range of its interventions. This includes:

- assessment;
- direct work with children and families;
- as a tool for reports and planning;
- to underpin/facilitate case discussions; and
- case conferences and multi-agency meetings.

Gateshead has found that it has brought about a real sense of professionals working alongside children and families and actively involving them in tackling and finding solutions to their problems. It has helped them to embrace a range of tools that ensure the child's voice is central to assessments.

Redesigning systems in Cumbria

Cumbria is aiming to deliver children's services in a radically different way through its **Better for Children Project**. A review team, using a systems thinking approach, has analysed current systems and processes and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of children, young people and families. The team has developed new measures, which include whether the assessment of need and interventions delivered as a result were right first time and if the timescales for delivery were within the shortest possible time. The findings included:

- only 30% of cases were deemed to be 'right first time';
- there were multiple assessments with 63% of cases being re-referrals;
- system requirements limit face to face contact with service users ;
- ICS drives rather than supports practice; and
- 66% of work undertaken was waste activity prescribed by the system.

Cumbria is now working with partners in redesigning the system to refocus on the needs of service users, doing only the value work, recording what is necessary and ensuring continuity of case ownership. The aim is to develop a new model which is scalable county-wide.

4.53   To start to encourage change the review has been working with the Government on how to give local systems greater flexibility to keep their focus on helping children. Cumbria, Westminster, Knowsley, Gateshead and Hackney want to make locally driven changes to the assessment processes that seek to give greater autonomy to frontline social workers. Specifically, the changes proposed would focus on allowing more flexible timescales so that social workers can exercise their professional judgment more effectively to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. Subject to their agreement to the conditions of the trial with Ministers, the testing by these authorities of a more flexible assessment process would last for six months. Evidence from this trial would inform any recommendations that may be made in the final report. The trial will last beyond the period of this review and the evidence available at the end of six months would be considered by the Government when responding to the final report.

The local authorities have proposed the temporary suspension of the following requirements of the statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children:*

Cumbria: - the 10 working day timescale for initial assessment; the 35 working day timescale in which to complete a core assessment; the requirement to hold Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences in their current timescales and the 10 working day timescale for the first meeting of the core group;

Knowsley: - the requirement to carry out a child protection conference within 15 working days of the strategy discussion;

Gateshead: - the requirement to carry out a separate and distinct initial assessment (within 10 working days) and then a core assessment (within a further 35 working days);

Hackney - the distinction between initial and core assessments; the timescales for completion of assessments; and the statutory timescales for core groups held when a child is subject to a child protection plan;

Westminster: the requirement to carry out an initial assessment within 10 working days; the requirement to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference within 15 working days of the relevant strategy meeting.

The media and the public

4.54   As well as being influenced by the overt and covert cultural messages they receive from within their organisation, social workers are also influenced by the messages they receive from outside their organisation. Many professionals, in the past, have reflected on the '*climate of fear, blame and mistrust that seems to be endemic within the child protection system*'[91]. The report of the Social Work Task Force highlighted social workers' concerns about the way in which the profession is reported on in the media and the impact of this on recruitment, morale and public perception[92]. This can be said to contribute to 'disproportionate responses to risk'[93], which help to undermine public confidence in the profession and puts children at greater risk. The last report showed how reporting can have unintended consequences on the way the system functions, for example, by altering referral patterns, creating spikes in demand and increasing thresholds[94]. Thus the rationale for improving public confidence in the child protection system is not just about getting a message across, but about getting the right message across strategically to enhance the way the system functions.

4.55   The review, working with the College of Social Work, is addressing two issues:

How to help the public gain a better understanding of the complexity, uncertainty and emotional challenge inherent in child protection:

- a clear narrative that describes the complicated nature of social work, building on the work of the Social Work Task Force, is in development for use by child protection professionals, those representing them in the media and those reporting on their work. This should recognise issues such as:

  - the emotional and moral dilemmas that are inherent to making difficult decisions about children and families;
  - the size and variety of social workers' caseloads and frank acknowledgement of problems in the system;
  - the range of tough decisions that child protection professionals have to make;
  - the fear that some have expressed about discussing social work openly;
  - the need to face issues around confidentiality, and other legal issues, squarely rather than hiding behind them, learning to share similar stories to increase understanding without breaching confidentiality /

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[91] Ayre, P. (2001), 'Child Protection and the Media: lessons from the last three decades', *BJSW* 31(6), 887-901

[92] Social Work Task Force (2009), *Building a Safe and Confident Future*, p 7

[93] Kitzinger, J. (2004), Framing Abuse: Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children

[94] See Munro I, c 2.10, p 27; Mansell, J. (2006), 'The Underlying Instability in Statutory Child Protection: Understanding the System Dynamics Driving Risk Assurance Levels', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, no. 28

          client relationships;

- o the wide range of perceptions the public and journalists currently have about social work; and
- o the importance of widening the debate on child protection so that it covers positive, as well as negative, aspects of this work.

Improving the response of the social work profession to public debates about their work, especially in a crisis, so that there is a clearer account of professional practice:

- Child protection professionals and those representing them in the media must develop better ways of joining in with public debates about their role and responsibilities. The review will work with the College of Social Work to:

  - o consider how child protection professionals can join this debate to make the biggest impact;
  - o help make clear the importance of leaders speaking out constructively and how communicating well on issues of public interest should be a key part of any corporate ethos; and
  - o emphasise the importance of collective support and responsibility among organisations, and across them.

4.56   In thinking about these issues, the review has been struck by the thoughtful responses of the Prime Minister and Home Secretary when commenting on the events on 2 June 2010 when 12 people were shot dead and 11 injured in West Cumbria:

> *'Of course we should look at this issue but we should not leap to knee-jerk conclusions on what should be done on the regulatory front'*
>
> (Prime Minister)

> *'But it would be wrong to react before we know the full facts. Today we must remember the innocent people who were taken from us as they went about their lives, then, we must allow the police time to complete their investigations.'*
>
> (Home Secretary)

4.57   Given the uncertainty inherent in child protection work, social workers are entitled to expect similarly calm and thoughtful responses from politicians, the media and public when a tragedy occurs in the child protection system, recognising the need for time for professional judgments and actions to be thoughtfully reviewed, lessons learned and any professional malpractice identified.

Monitoring performance

'In designing recommendations, the review will be considering how the system can become better at monitoring how it is performing, learning about emerging difficulties, and responding creatively and adapting to tackle them. The aim is a legacy where the system is better equipped to continuously learn and improve'[95].

4.58   The first report began with some examples of how the interactions of previous reforms of child protection have led to imbalances and distortions of current practice priorities. The reforms were designed by well-informed and well-intentioned people; the negative consequences were both unintended and unforeseen. Where we might justifiably criticise is that alerts about the unexpected consequences were not given sufficient heed, e.g. feedback on the perverse incentives of process-focussed performance measures. Imbalances were therefore not amended and instead left to increase. So how can we get better at noticing when things are getting out of balance? How can we create a child protection system that is able to notice when imbalances are developing and to correct them more quickly as an integral part of organisational learning? As noted in the quotation above, that is the legacy that this review aims to achieve.

4.59   These questions hinge on the issue of how a system 'learns' in order to be able to adapt and ultimately improve. Some key ideas from systems theory were introduced in the first report, which are helpful in this regard. One is that of a system requiring 'feedback', or data about what is actually going on at the frontline, where goals, structures, reforms, policies, procedures etc. come together in direct work with children, young people and families. Linked to the notion of 'feedback' was the concept of 'loops' of learning, whereby corrective action is taken on the basis of the feedback. 'Single-loop learning' focuses on compliance with prescribed behaviour; it is like a thermostat that learns when it is too hot or too cold and turns the heat on or off. 'Double-loop learning' goes further to reflect on the appropriateness of the original prescription, focusing not only on whether we are doing things right but whether we are doing the right thing. The initial report raised the question of whether, to date, we have done too little learning of the double loop kind.

4.60   The importance of having good feedback loops, in order to detect and respond to emerging imbalances and problems in the system, underpins this review's interest in making recommendations that support the development of the children's social care into a 'learning organisation'. Thinking in terms of developing into a learning organisation will have significant implications for how the review thinks about useful changes to management and inspection processes of multi-agency work on the one hand, and how to improve opportunities of multi-agency learning from practice, including serious cases, on the other. These are drawn out in other chapters of this report with chapter five focussing explicitly on the shared responsibility for managing performance.

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[95] Munro I, p 10

Organisational Innovation: Social Work Practices

4.61   It has been argued that difficulties in creating an effective social work service are in part due to their being within local government where there are competing political interests and a work culture that does not readily encompass creative, innovative professional practice. Social work practices, where a group of social workers work in autonomous organisations and contract with a local authority to provide a social work service to looked after children, have been proposed as a way of countering the managerial dominance in local authority children's social care and allowing professionalism to flourish[96]. The aims clearly are very much in line with the remit of this review. A number of Social Work Practice Pilots are currently in operation and more are being developed. These are being independently evaluated and findings will be published in 2012. Interim findings will be available to the review before the final report. Besides forming a view on their role in relation to looked after children, the review will also consider whether and how some of the positive features of their practice that are emerging from the pilots could be transferable to other areas of child and family social work. Early indicators would suggest that elements of practice, which if transferable, may make a significant difference to the quality of service received by children and families include:

- stability of staff group, lower staff turnover, reduced vacancies;
- increased motivation of staff, lower sickness levels;
- ownership by the staff group of 'the team' caseload, knowing each other's cases thereby being available to assist children, families and other professionals if a query arises when the primary worker is not available;
- staff able to spend more time with children, young people and their families; and
- reduced bureaucracy based on the reduced hierarchical processes for approvals and decisions.

Chief Social Worker

4.62   The review has been asked to consider whether there is a role for a Chief Social Worker. At present there is no permanent, professional representative of social work in Government. One model the review is considering is that of a Chief Social Worker like that employed in New Zealand where the position has successfully raised the profile and public understanding of the profession. Such a role, however, needs to be seen in the context of the revised career structure that the review is considering in which there would be a number of very senior social workers whose identity was clearly as professionals not managers. Such a network of experienced professionals could provide good support to a Chief Social Worker.

4.63   In the final phase, the review will be considering whether such a role is the most appropriate way of sharing the profession's experiences with Government and the

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[96] le Grand, J. (2007), Consistent Care Matters: Exploring the Potential of Social Work Practices, London, DfES

public, what the relationship of the role would be to other professional and public bodies, where such a role should sit, how and by whom it should be appointed, and what its precise remit might be.

College of Social Work

4.64   In stark comparison to the Royal Colleges of health professionals, and the Association of Chief Police Officers, until recently social work has had no single professionally led strategic body. The result of this has been that, since the 1970s, the responsibility for issuing professional practice guidance has fallen on Government. Inevitably, on occasion, this has meant that professional practice has been subjected to political knee-jerk responses to crises. Consequently, the review welcomes the establishment of the College of Social Work following the recommendations of the Social Work Task Force which explained how *'social work lacks a single locus of responsibility for promoting the profession, improving public understanding, spreading best practice and driving up its standards'*[97].

4.65   The College is charged with acting as the voice of the profession in furthering the reforms set out by the Task Force, e.g. in creating a nationally recognised career structure and establishing new standards for employers. This review envisages that the College will play an equally significant role in furthering the reforms set out in the final report. The following excerpts from the College's aims show the links with the review's concerns[98]:

> *'The College's strategic aims for the first three years to establish and develop the College of Social Work are:*
>
> - *'to be a powerful voice for the social work profession, in discussions with the public, policy makers and the media;*
> - *to provide strong leadership for the profession;*
> - *to work closely with people who use social work services and carers, ensuring that their views are incorporated into the overall development of The College; and*
> - *to be an international centre of excellence for the social work profession'.*
>
> (The College of Social Work, 2011, Strategic Vision)
>
> *'Providing guidance and support to the profession and allied professions The College will:*
>
> - *'provide national guidance, clarifying what good practice means in situations at all levels of the social work profession;*
> - *provide up to date information and guidance on issues affecting the profession;*

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[97] Social Work Task Force (2009), *Building a Safe and Confident Future*, 4.1
[98] National College of Social Work (2010), *Strategic Vision* (available online at http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/files/Strategic_Vision_of_The_College.pdf)

- *collect and disseminate knowledge, evidence and exemplars of 'what works';*
- *enable social workers to access up to date knowledge and information to inform and support their practice; and*
- *provide advice, guidance and support to social workers, enabling them to work to the highest standards.'*

(The College of Social Work, 2011, Strategic Vision)

Conclusion

4.66 The support that managers give frontline social work staff is crucial in helping them practice at a high level. However, they face a complex situation. There are too many in the current workforce who are inexperienced and whose basic training did not cover significant areas of knowledge and skills needed in child and family social work. For example, child development is not covered thoroughly in all courses. Managers therefore need to provide considerable guidance and oversight to counter such deficiencies in their frontline staff. A problem identified by the review is that such support can be offered in a way that discourages the development of expertise and the need is to design support that can adapt to the growing expertise of the worker.

4.67 Rules, for instance, are a quick solution to minimise the chances of a social worker making an obvious mistake but rules, in a compliance culture, can lead to workers just doing as they are told and not learning *why* the rule is generally appropriate. This deeper understanding is needed to enable workers to respond to the varied circumstances of children and make judgments that a deviation from the rule is in the best interests of a specific child or young person.

4.68 The conundrum facing managers is that the quick way of achieving a *minimum* standard of practice is through rule- and process-driven practice, but this creates obstacles to the development of higher levels of practice. A simple example of how it inhibits learning is that it is a factor in driving staff away and retaining staff is a necessary step to helping them achieve expertise. Many are discouraged from staying by the quick remedies, the increased paperwork, and the lack of opportunity to exercise professional judgment. Evidence from studies of why social workers leave indicate that the problem would be reduced if staff were given the work conditions that help them learn and develop, if they were more effectively supported in handling the emotional, moral and cognitive aspects of the work, were given the opportunity to develop expertise, and were given the chance to work with families to help them instead of becoming mainly case managers who assess and refer on[99].

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[99] Healy, K., Meagher, G., & Cullin, J. (2009), 'Retaining Novices to Become Expert Child Protection Practitioners: Creating career pathways in direct practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, 39, 299–317; Healy, K. & Oltedal, S. (2010), 'An Institutional Comparison of Child Protection Systems in Australia and Norway Focused on Workforce Retention',. *Journal of Social Policy* 39: 255–274

4.69   Social work with children and families can be a very rewarding area of practice and historically it has had good recruitment and retention[100]. The review is considering how altering the career structure and providing more help in developing expertise in exercising professional judgment and offering effective help could counter the current problems in keeping enough social workers in practice to raise the standard of professional practice.

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[100] Audit Commission (1994) Seen but not Heard: Co-ordinating Community Child Health and Social Services for Children in Need

Chapter Five: Shared learning and accountability

Introduction

5.1   Chapters three and four focused on the parts of the review remit that relate to supporting social workers in providing effective help to children and families. This chapter builds on chapter two by giving further consideration to multi-agency arrangements, reflecting the many services and professions that play a part in effective safeguarding arrangements and in the protection of children from harm. The chapter looks specifically at the influence of leadership in local systems and at accountability in the context of major public service reform, problems in managing multi-agency performance and inspection, multi-professional rules and guidance, and the scope for sector based approaches to improving performance. It explores the need to strengthen Local Safeguarding Children Boards' (LSCBs) role in multi-agency training and learning, with particular attention to Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). This chapter concludes by giving attention to the Family Justice Review work to improve the timeliness of the court process for those children whose journeys involve family court proceedings.

Complex organisations

5.2   The review's first report highlighted that we are dealing with complex behaviour that requires a systems approach to understanding the interaction of its constituent parts and the inevitable appearance of unintended consequences that need to be searched for and responded to promptly. Table 5.1 from the first report, reproduced overleaf, summarised the approach that has been dominant and, in the right hand column, the approach towards which the review advocates that the system moves.

5.3   Senior leaders from the local agencies are charged with working together though the LSCB to provide local leadership for how agencies work together and to oversee the effectiveness of the child protection system in helping children and young people. LSCBs are well placed to take the holistic approach to child protection described in the right hand column in the table above. LSCBs can monitor quality and learn from their collective performance in relation to the child's journey and identify emerging problems in the system.

5.4   For LSCBs to be effective, they require evidence of the child's journey through the local system, including research, data and feedback from children and families that the LSCB can use to drive improvement, hold agencies to account and encourage learning and adaptive practice across agencies. The major changes to the local landscape over the coming years, all set within the tighter fiscal climate, will make the role of LSCBs even more vital. There is a pressing need to monitor the whole system so that the often unintended repercussions of change in one service on others are quickly identified.

	Atomistic Approach To Child Protection	**Holistic Approach To Child Protection**
Nature	▪ Narrow: tending to concentrate on individual parts or elements	▪ Broad: elements seen as standing in relation to each other
Perspective	▪ Isolated 'problems'	▪ Whole system
Cause & Effect	▪ Looking only at immediate and/or proximal effects ▪ Short chains of causality	▪ Separated in space and time: ▪ Long chains of causality, ripple effects, unintended consequences, feedback effects
Style of Recommend ations	▪ Regulation and compliance ▪ Technocratic	▪ Strengthening professionalism ▪ Socio-technical
Results (observed and sought)	▪ Narrow range of responses to children's and young people's needs ▪ Defensive management of risk ▪ Command and control management; frameworks and procedures; squeezing out professional discretion ▪ Compliance culture ▪ Focus on standardised processes, frameworks and procedures	▪ Requisite variety in responses to meeting children's and young people's needs ▪ Acceptance of irreducible risk ▪ Supportive and enabling management ▪ Learning culture ▪ Focus on children, their needs, appropriate pathways beneficial outcomes .

Table 5.1: **Atomistic and holistic approaches to child protection**

Signposting

5.5   The review has now been remitted to consider the potential value of having a national means of providing a quick and reliable way of identifying whether a child or young person is, or has been, the subject of a child protection plan or whether they are, or have been, looked after. In the next phase, the review will work with professionals and multi-agency teams to consider whether such a service would make a significant contribution to children's safety, be fit for purpose and proportionate.

Leadership

5.6   Children's services leaders currently face a number of challenges, including continuing public sector reform, a harsh financial environment, higher expectations for the delivery of services and, in many parts of the country, difficulties in recruiting and retaining social care staff that may seem intractable. The National College of Leadership for Schools and Children's Services, will shortly be publishing a report, '*Leading for Outcomes*'[101], that helpfully cites Keith

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[101] *Leading for Outcomes*, commissioned by National College of Leadership for Schools and Children's Services, written by Deloitte, Navigate and Oxford University, forthcoming February 2011

Grint's[102] concept of 'wicked problems' as a means of describing the particular complexities for leaders of children's services at this time. Such problems are said to be complex and often without solution. They are made more complex through multiple stakeholders and multiple perceptions of the same problem. It follows that such complexity requires leaders with particular strengths and a children's services system which has clear and well understood leadership accountabilities.

5.7   The forthcoming *'Leading for Outcomes'* report describes the attributes of Directors of Children's Services leading complex systems that house 'wicked problems'. Such attributes align well with the characteristics of a learning and adaptive organisation:

- **openness to possibilities** – understanding the different options for resource deployment and using the resources available to them in a considered way;
- the ability to **collaborate** – working together with one's team, partners, and political and corporate leaders to work on outcomes and deliver results;
- **demonstrating a belief in their team** and people – fostering a sense of team and practices of team working to work enable working through others;
- **personal resilience and tenacity** – demonstrating the ability to see things through and work through challenges;
- the ability to **create and sustain commitment across a system** – aligning people to work towards a common goal;
- displaying a **focus on results and outcomes** – not only inputs, outputs or the process, and ensuring that the improvement of outcomes is the overarching priority;
- ability to **simplify** – removing unnecessary complexity from systems, and also in creating a simple, clear narrative or strategy; and
- willingness and ability to **learn continuously** – trying new tools and techniques and adapting them as necessary, learning from the experience of leadership and resource deployment.

5.8   Evidence to this review, drawn from the local areas we have visited, the discussions we have been part of and much of the research evidence that has been made available, confirms strongly that the role of the local leadership team is critical in establishing and sustaining the adaptive behaviours needed to manage the provision of good child protection services.

Accountability

5.9   Both of Lord Laming's reports, *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry* [103] and *The Protection of Children in England, a progress report*, emphasised the fundamental importance of good leadership and clear accountabilities in services that protect children from harm.

> *'Effective leadership sets the direction of an organisation, its culture and value system and ultimately drives the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. It is essential that there is sustained commitment to child protection and promoting the welfare of children at every level of government and in every one of the local services'*[104].

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[102] '*Problems, Problems, Problems: the social construction of leadership'*, Keith Grint, H. Kerusuo et al. (Eds), Learning and Collective Creativity: Activity-theoretical and Socio-cultural Studies. Cambridge: CUP, 2005.
[103] The Victoria Climbié Inquiry, 2003,
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008654
[104] The Protection of Children in England, The Lord Laming, 2009,

5.10   Lord Laming confirmed the important roles of local authority Council Leaders, Chief Executives, Lead Members for Children's Services and Directors of Children's Services in exercising leadership of child protection. This review affirms the need for a strong local spine of accountable leaders with responsibility located in the local authority as reflected in the current statutory framework. In particular the review considers it important that local authorities ensure that the role of the Director of Children's Services continues as the key point of professional accountability for child protection services within the local authority and that this is not diluted or weakened.

5.11   However, where more clarity is needed around accountability is in response to the extent of public service reform at the present time, particularly in national and local health structures, but also in the police, local government and education. It will therefore be important to take the opportunity through the final phase of this review to be even clearer about where accountability lies and the respective roles and responsibilities of locally elected members; scrutiny committees; Chief Executives; Directors of Children's Services; Directors of Adult Services; LSCB chairs; new Directors of Public Health; new Health and Well-Being Boards; new GP consortia; and new directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

Managing performance

5.12   The messages frontline workers receive about what is important have a strong influence on the way they practise and on how caseloads are prioritised. The evidence of failure to spend sufficient time with families, and especially sufficient time with children, reflects the priorities that are being disseminated in the organisation. One group of frontline workers explained how senior managers made all the right kind of comments about quality work, time for critical reflection, and for professional supervision. But they said these things in a quiet voice; they spoke loudly about the need to meet performance indicators and followed this up with emails to check that they were being met. Greater weight should be given to how children feel about the service that they are receiving: Are their views being listened to? Are social workers explaining to them what is happening and why? Do they feel safer as a result of the services that they are receiving?

5.13   The system of process-based targets and performance indicators has skewed local priorities so that the focus is on specific aspects of process rather than practice quality and learning. As highlighted by Tilbury[105], the goal has been to work to the performance measure, e.g. to complete an initial assessment in a set number of working days – which can have a positive impact on a narrow part of social work practice – rather than to work in a manner tailored to addressing the specific needs and requirements of each case and the children or young people involved. This view is supported by evidence submitted to the review in the first phase and the 2009 research conducted by Broadhurst et al[106]. Performance measures can have unintended effects when implemented by anxious managers, as described by Sanger in the Public Administration Review (2008)[107]:

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http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/HC-330.pdf

[105] Tilbury (2006) http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/10072/11223/1/tilbury_accountabilityviaPM.pdf

[106] Broadhurst et at (2009) http://www.publicservices.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/broadhurst-et-al_2009-performing-initital-assessment_.pdf

[107] Sanger, M.B. (2008). 'From Measurement to Management: Breaking through the Barriers to State and Local Performance', Public Administration Review, 68, special issue, S70-S85.

Revising *Working Together to Safeguard Children*(2010)

5.53   Working Together sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. As the statutory guidance itself says, it is important that '*all practitioners working together to safeguard children and young people understand fully their responsibilities and duties as set out in primary legislation and associated regulations and guidance*'[126]. The review acknowledges the importance of having a single set of rules that all organisations, including professional bodies, voluntary and private sector providers and government departments, follow and are clear on their respective responsibilities for protecting children from harm.

5.54   A significant part of the review's remit however, is to remove 'unnecessary bureaucracy and guidance'[127]. As was highlighted in the initial report, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2010), the Government's statutory guidance on child protection, is now 55 times longer than it was in 1974[128]. Submissions to the review have strongly suggested that the current guidance has become too long to be practically useful. This may be actively dangerous: research has shown that thick manuals of results can be paralysing because they prevent managers from moving quickly enough to seize opportunities[129].

5.55   One of the reasons for the growth in statutory guidance has been the inclusion of much professional advice. Whilst intended to support good practice, there is a risk that this approach has actually contributed to the deprofessionalisation of child protection, as those working in the field feel increasingly obliged to do things by the book rather than use their professional judgment to assess independently children's needs, (as discussed in chapter four, procedures can discourage the development of expertise). Consequently, in the next phase of the report the review will be considering whether Working Together should distinguish more clearly between the rules that are essential to allow different professionals to work together constructively and guidance that is best formulated as principles that professionals apply intelligently in particular cases.

5.56   Currently Working Together trades too easily in the language of certainty in an area which, as the first report established, is very far from certain[130]. The review will consider how statutory guidance can better reflect the inherent risks and uncertainties involved in child protection. In order to assess how Working Together can be simplified and improved, the review has assembled a group of representatives from relevant professional bodies. This group will advise the review on how statutory guidance might better support the practical needs of the professions working to protect children and consider what recommendations the review might make concerning Working Together's future form and content, and how these professionals can play a more permanent role in the development of professional guidance.

Family Justice Review

5.57   As LSCBs give greater attention to improving children's journeys they should examine the

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[126] Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010) P7
[127] http://www.education.gov.uk/news/news/~/media/Files/lacuna/news/munro-review/michaelgovetoeileenmunro.ashx
[128] From 7 to 390pp, Munro I, p. 11; Parton 2010.
[129] Eisenhardt & Sull, *Strategy as simple rules*, Harvard Business Review (2001).
[130] Munro I, *.

consultation with a range of relevant agencies and professionals suggests the factors that would have a significant and positive impact on the timeliness of care proceedings, thereby making this journey better for children and families, are the same aspects that would add value in all work with children and families:

- social workers who are well prepared, knowledgeable about a child and family, articulate and confident in their evidence and confident in their professional judgements;
- processes in place so that children and young people have a voice throughout pre-proceedings and through care proceedings;
- constructive challenge and authorisation arrangements within the local authority so that only the 'right' cases are brought into care proceedings;
- continuity of social workers allocated to cases in proceedings;
- effective pre court work including Family Group Conferencing and full exploration of all potential family carers;
- effective parallel planning and panel processes that have timeliness for the child and the child's journey central to their purpose and function;
- pro-active and highly efficient local authority legal service departments composed of experienced child care lawyers, so that good quality advice is available to social workers;
- effective engagement in the Family Justice System so that learning between the courts and the local authority takes place and informs practice on an on-going basis; and
- appropriate scrutiny and oversight of care planning and final care plans by the local authority, including agreed levels of support and resources available to deliver them.

Achieving a system characterised by these factors will be dependent on the growing expertise of social work and more child-centred management described in chapters three and four.

Conclusion

5.60   The performance management, leadership and accountability systems in local areas have a significant impact on the delivery of child protection services. As this chapter has outlined, the local leadership team has a vital role to play in setting the tone for the way that services are delivered in their locality. However, no matter how good the leadership, problems will still arise if roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are not clearly set out and understood by all players in the system.

5.61   The role of the Director of Children's Services as the key point of professional accountability for child protection services is critically important and it is vital that it remains so. Less clear, however, are the accountabilities in national and local health structures, the police, local government and education given the Coalition Government's extensive programme of reform of public services. Seeking to achieve greater clarity in this area will be an important area of focus for the review in its final phase.

5.62   Leadership and accountabilities can be seen to a large extent to be determined by local decisions, albeit with some guidance from Government. Rules and performance management regimes are, however, devised centrally and can be considered as external factors that have an incredible impact on the way that services are delivered and prioritised locally. Statutory guidance, inspection and performance measures and data all have a big impact on local practice, whether because of actual restrictions or perceived ones. There is clear scope for

considerable reforms in these areas that will not only reduce bureaucratic burdens, but also help to drive learning and adaptive local systems that are better able to focus on practice quality and outcomes for children.

5.63   Building on the theme of creating learning and adaptive organisations it is also extremely important to learn effectively from tragic cases of serious child injury or death. In its final phase, the review will explore the issues around Serious Case Reviews and how they might be reformed.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1   This interim report has used the structure of a child's journey through the system from needing to receiving help to set out a picture of what a good child protection system should look like. The first report summarised the problems in the current child protection system so this interim report has outlined reforms that could help get closer to the ideal, where the system keeps a clear focus on children's best interests throughout and develops the expertise and the organisational environment that helps professionals working with children, young people and families to provide more effective help.

6.2   The review has seen evidence of excellent practice and this illustrates how complex the system is. The first report analysed factors that created obstacles to good practice, but these do not determine poor practice in every case. Where excellent practice flourishes, it is due to courageous and intelligent efforts to counteract the factors that encourage a defensive, compliance-driven service. For example, one leader reported how vulnerable they felt because if a child died, as might happen in any locality, they would be vulnerable to extra criticism because their practice was non-standard.

6.3   The following areas of reform then are not presented as 'if you do x then y will follow' but that, remembering the complexity of the world, changing practice at these points could contribute to developing a system that was more child-centred and about learning rather than compliance driven and blaming:

- Early help: it is clearly in children's best interest that help is provided quickly. Therefore the review endorses early help and preventative services that seek to reduce the incidence of maltreatment and respond quickly to low-level abuse and neglect. The review's main concern is to help professionals working in those services decide, when they have worries about a child, whether the child might be suffering maltreatment of a degree that needs referral to a child protection service. The review has been impressed by those localities which have developed multi-agency teams including social work expertise to help professionals in universal and early support services to decide whether to refer to children's social care or whether the family would be better helped by other preventative services.

- Social work expertise: the review endorses the Social Work Reform Board's capabilities framework that details the core ingredients of skills, knowledge and values needed for good practice. The review will draft a set of the specialist capabilities needed in child protection social work. Reflecting on the sheer scale of the skills and knowledge that are needed to provide effective help for the range of children's needs, the review is led to question the traditional concept of an individual social worker carrying a caseload of many families, receiving only minimal supervision, much of which is overly concerned with management issues than professional casework analysis. The review, again building on the Social Work Reform Board's recommendations, will explore how career structures could be altered to increase the levels of expertise.

- Managing social work: this report emphasises how much the quality of any worker's performance is shaped by the organisational context. Social work managers play a crucial role in supervising frontline practice to enable and encourage a high level of

critical reflection that improves the quality of assessments, in providing resources and tools that make it easier for the frontline worker to do the job well, for example, offering guidance that allows social workers to stay aware of the variety of needs of children while reminding them of the basic principles of good practice. The review is considering how professional guidance can be separated out from statutory guidance, and this will inform the work to minimise rules where appropriate and maximise the opportunities to exercise professional judgment, allowing work to be centred on the unique child. Social workers have been given numerous tools to help their practice, but design needs to be user-centred, and the review is working with practitioners on user-centred design of software and of assessment forms.

- A learning system: the child protection system is multi-agency and multi-professional. The LSCB has a major role in maximising the effectiveness of the child protection system locally. Currently the system is weak at getting feedback on children's outcomes and so the review is considering how the effectiveness of help can be better assessed. The LSCB has a role in multi-agency learning and training. SCRs are currently the most prominent aspect of this and the review is considering whether to adopt the systems approach used in healthcare by, for example, the National Patient Safety Agency. This theoretical approach is also valuable for learning from practice on cases that do not end with a tragic outcome. Inspection processes have been considered by many to be a significant factor in driving a compliance culture. The review is working with Ofsted on a more child-centred, quality-focused inspection process. There was a consensus in the feedback to the review that announced inspections create counterproductive incentives and that they should end, with unannounced visits extended to examine the full range of children's services.

6.4   Although the reform areas have been listed individually, it is their cumulative effect that will be important. No single reform can solve even a specific problem, but each can contribute to removing the problematic aspects of the current system and getting closer to the ideal that has been outlined. Removing the level of prescription will require local leaders and practitioners to take greater responsibility for the judgments and decisions they make. The journey authorities mentioned throughout this report will be significant learning sites for some of the elements of change and reform that are needed. Noticing there are problems in local child protection systems and innovating to improve the effectiveness of help to protect children, is evidence of precisely the sort of adaptive system that children's services might aspire to become.

6.5   In the many discussions the review has had, there has been a tendency to blame the current problems on one or two key factors 'If only ICS was taken away….' 'If only Ofsted didn't …'. Altering these individually will not rectify the problems. The underlying reality is that changing family behaviour is difficult and we are dealing with uncertainty, so that prediction and prevention of child maltreatment is necessarily a fallible process. The understandable public distress when a child dies, leading to the castigation of the workers involved, is a continuing driver of defensive practice that fails to prioritise the child's best interests.

6.6   Whilst it is absolutely right that care is taken in any reform of the child protection system to reduce prescription, equal care must be taken not to attribute the safety of children to compliance with a prescriptive framework for practice. The five authorities who have applied to trial specific local flexibilities to the *Framework of the Assessment of Need for Children*, are demonstrating the responsible use of judgment and seeking solutions to the problems in

practice they have identified. The early evidence from these trials will, as mentioned earlier, be included in the final report of this review.

6.7   This review is taking place at a time of major reform in all of the relevant public services, where serious fiscal constraints are being applied and with major workforce issues particularly in the field of social work. All of these changes may make the ideal child protection system look further away, but the review considers we can begin to work on some key variables that will contribute to the help children receive.

6.8   The draft set of principles described at the beginning of the report are also an important emerging foundation of a child protection system that is less tied to prescription and trusts the value of professional judgment.

6.9   The review is considering whether, in light of the current radical reforms of services, there is a need for a panel, composed of the relevant professions within the child protection system, to advise Government and the professions on how the different parts of the child protection system are interacting and whether problems are emerging.

6.10   The review will be seeking feedback about how to develop the reforms outlined in this report and will work with a range of groups to develop its thinking.

Annex A: ACPO's Statement of Risk Principles

Principle 1:
The willingness to make decisions in conditions of uncertainty (ie risk taking) is a core professional requirement of all members of the Police Service.

Principle 2:
Maintaining or achieving the safety, security and well-being of individuals and communities is a primary consideration in risk decision making.

Principle 3:
Risk taking involves judgment and balance, with decision makers required to consider the value and likelihood of the possible benefits of a particular decision against the seriousness and likelihood of the possible harms.

Principle 4:
Harm can never be totally prevented. Risk decisions should, therefore, be judged by the quality of the decision making, not by the outcome.

Principle 5:
Taking risk decisions, and reviewing others' risk decision-making, is difficult so account should be taken of whether they involved dilemmas, emergencies, were part of a sequence of decisions or might appropriately be taken by other agencies.

Principle 6:
The standard expected and required of members of the Police Service is that their risk decisions should be consistent with those a body of officers of similar rank, specialism or experience would have taken in the same circumstances.

Principle 7:
Whether to record a decision is a risk decision in itself which should, to a large extent, be left to professional judgment. The decision whether or not to make a record, however, and the extent of that record, should be made after considering the likelihood of harm occurring and its seriousness.

Principle 8:
To reduce risk aversion and improve decision making, policing needs a culture that learns from successes as well as failures. Good risk taking should be identified, celebrated and shared.

Principle 9:
Since good risk taking depends upon quality information, the Police Service will work with partner agencies and others to share relevant information about people who pose risk or people who are vulnerable to the risk of harm.

Principle 10:
Members of the Police Service who make decisions consistent with these principles should receive the encouragement, approval and support of their organisation.

Annex B: Tower Hamlets' Draft Record For Understanding Families

This document outlines the Tower Hamlets approach to understanding children and families.
(Important Note: the boxes in this form have been shortened and the format changed for the purposes of including it as an annex to this report).

Principles and Values

Outlined below are the key principles, values and processes that will underpin the work undertaken with children and families.

Core Values that underpin this practice framework:

- Each family is unique
- In every family (and those within this) there are strengths and deficits
- Every family member needs to be respected
- Autonomy

Social Work processes

The practice framework supports ethical and value based social work practice:

- We need to operate in a manner that enables the family to remain co-operative in potentially distressing circumstances
- We need to involve the family in a practice partnership
- The Family is central to our assessment /understanding process
- A systematic approach to the work is undertaken, recognising the family as a system while being attentive to dynamics
- A solution focussed approach is supported by the practice framework
- The assessment process (developing understanding) is a change process; it is a form of direct intervention, the social worker is an agent of change
- Understanding a family situation, their history and current circumstances is complex and requires a high level of engagement / interaction between the social worker and family; social worker and their manager
- Child welfare situations are complex and require sensitive exploration with the family to understand their family situation.
- Feeling attached and belonging, through sets of relationships is a central tenet of family life. With this in mind, the social work process must give due weight to these factors through the engagement process
- The social worker needs to understand the totality of family life, through thinking and practising ecologically
- Maintaining a curiosity about family life is a key practice tenet
- Critical and engaged supervision supports the maintenance of a curious and robust practice
- The practice framework supports the newly qualified practitioner alongside the experienced social worker

Social Work values

An understanding and focus on the child and the child's experience is at the heart of our work. **The practice should tell the child's story.**

Promotes a family based assessment methodology within an ecological context; while being family led and child focussed.

More direct and participatory work with families.

Promoting and prioritising inter-agency involvement in the work undertaken through social work plans that are written with families in mind.

Framework for understanding

Family membership

Details of all subject child/children/young person(s)

ID	Name	DOB / EDD	Gender	Disability	Ethnicity	Religion

Family / household composition and significant others

Name	DOB / EDD	Gender	Relationship	PR	Ethnicity	Religion

Child/children/young person(s) / family address

Telephone no

Professionals currently involved with the family

Name	Role	Agency	Telephone number(s)	Person working with	Contributed

Reason for undertaking this piece of work / presenting issues

Initial plan and time frame

This initial plan will be subject to review by the social worker and manager. Please document the time frame.

Child Protection

Is this work being conducted as part of a S47 investigation?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Please indicate if this assessment is to be presented at an Initial Child Protection Conference within the next 15 days

Yes ☐   No ☐

Family background / history

Child's profile / story

Family tree

Personal and professional relationships (eco-map)

Family history and understanding of family relationships

Timeline / significant events

Date	Event