



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19**  
**JANUARY 2015**

**SIGNS OF SAFETY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**Purpose of the report**

1. To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with further information about the Department's new practice approach to working with children and families in Leicestershire, Growing Safety, and the County Council's involvement in the English Innovation Programme: Signs of Safety.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Munro Review of English Child Protection Services [2011] concluded that the system had become locked into a defensive compliance culture, underpinned by unnecessary and overly bureaucratic procedures resulting in social workers spending less time working directly with children and families and more time feeding the system. Her report cited that professional expertise had become eroded and social workers found their role becoming progressively less clear.

**Background**

3. The Munro Review emphasised the need to redesign services around children and families and create a culture of continuous learning. A central recommendation was to draw on robust evidence that supports effective ways of working with children and families and encourage workers to think critically and foster a stance of inquiry.
4. A proposal was made to the Department for Education's Innovation Programme to transform children's services with Signs of Safety at the centre. This practice approach directly addresses the challenges identified in the Munro Review and, importantly gives greater clarity to the role of social work, as well as making it more accountable.
5. The proposal was drawn together by Professor Eileen Munro herself, together with the one of the creators of Signs of Safety, Andrew Turnell, and their colleague Terry Murphy, who has successfully implemented Signs of Safety in Western Australia to well evidenced success. 10 local authorities<sup>1</sup> were invited to be partners in the bid, one of which was Leicestershire. The bid was successful, attracting £4.7million of investment from the Department for Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Brent, Bristol, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Tower Hamlets, Wakefield, West Sussex and Wokingham

6. Signs of Safety is based on a robust theory of change, has a strong evidence base, can have a unifying impact across the whole system, supports more effective partnerships and is value for money.

### **Transformation**

7. For Leicestershire, the County Council's involvement at this stage of the local transformation programme will enable it to create a way of working across social care and early help that will respond positively to the Munro Review, provide clarity for its workforce about their role and the practice methodology that is used in Leicestershire, and further improve outcomes for children and families.

### **Intentions**

8. As part of the Innovations Programme, each local authority involved in the project will:
  - (a) align policy and procedures within the Signs of Safety framework;
  - (b) identify their specific information requirements as part of a quality assurance system to measure the impact of better working with children and young people;
  - (c) build capacity to train the workforce in the new practice method; and
  - (d) develop an action research programme to evaluate the implementation of Signs of Safety and the outcomes for children.
9. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 about the way in which Children and Family Services was implementing Growing Safety (Leicestershire's local approach to Signs of Safety). At that meeting it was reported that the Department intended to bring forward a plan to strategically implement this practice approach across the County Council and with our partner agencies. The Council's involvement with the national Innovations Programme provides additional impetus and resource to deliver this intention. A local Programme Board will be established in January 2015, chaired by the Director of Children and Family Services.

### **Conclusions**

10. It is suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to be updated by the Programme Board as the Innovations Programme is implemented with information on the impact that Signs of Safety is having on the intentions set out in paragraph 8 above.
11. A regular staff update about Growing Safety called 'Wiki Leeks' is regularly produced and circulated to departmental staff and workers in other agencies. The most recent copy is attached for information at Appendix A.

**Resource Implications**

12. Additional resources are available through the national Innovations Programme to support the implementation.

**Background Papers**

13. Report to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 – Signs of Safety and Leicestershire’s Growing Safety Strategy.

**List of Appendices**

Appendix A – January 2015 edition of Wiki Leeks.

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**Equality and Human Rights Implications**

14. The work of Children and Family Services is frequently with those children and families who are most vulnerable. The practice approach has significantly improved the ability of the staff to work effectively with vulnerable children and families.

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