

## Leadership Summit

### Slide 1 – Introduction

Child Protection for me, involves managing complex risk, on occasion's failure, sometimes blame, and even mistakes. Today, we are still required to grapple with all of the inadequacies, pain and agony felt in relation to the protection of children. It remains a messy and painful business. Child Protection has us out with our comfort zone every minute of the day. I have often commented to front line staff that if you are operating outwith your comfort zone at least you are doing it right.

This Leadership Summit is timely but also painful. Over 40 years ago in 1975, the Richard Clark Enquiry took here in Perth. The challenges remain as complex as ever. In reflecting on the complex issues it is clear that in identifying challenges, we are required to absorb some difficult reflections.

### Slide 2 – Reflecting on the Complexity of Protecting Children

In reflecting on the complex issues there could have been many, but I wanted to concentrate on just three- leadership, the support to front line staff and learning. In this respect I thought it might be helpful in the midst of this difficult week, to reflect on a past response to a tragedy and consider that in the context of where we are now and the critical reflections by Professor Eileen Munro centred on a system's approach.

As a student, I was required over 30 years ago to study and exam Louis Blom-Cooper Enquiry into the death of Jasmine Beckford in 1983. In reviewing and re-reading the events in 2016 I was struck by a number of points and reflections.

- Blom-Cooper concluded – **“some parents abuse, even kill their children. Throughout history they always have, and they always will”**. My immediate reaction was well I won't be reading that out. It jarred reading it. It was a statement that even now 30 years on I struggle to accept. I recognised that no-one in a civilised society should ever feel comfortable with that statement. Nevertheless, we have to concede over the last 30 years that Blom-Cooper for all his brutal analysis stands sadly vindicated.
- Blom-Cooper also concluded that Gun Wahlstrom (Social Worker) bore the tabloid harassment and vilification with great dignity (prior to Levisohn) and that she remained patient and professional throughout. Despite this he asserted, that she was required to take **personal** responsibility for the death of Jasmine. Not professional responsibility. Personal. In contrast to the fact that it was Maurice Beckford who was convicted of her neglect and brutal murder. For a moment let's reflect on that comment. Personal responsibility. This made sense to me in how many of us have seen no distinction between personal and professional responsibility. It perhaps also explained the sleepless nights we have all had about the decisions made. Yet significantly his assertion burned into the Social Work psyche and laid down a marker that someone was to blame. I much prefer Munro's observation that the public outcry this week and the professional distress is a clear demonstration of our natural instinct to protect.

### Slide 3– Leadership with no Guarantees

Leadership is often portrayed as the bedfellow of success. Leadership is associated with a range of positive attributes; ability to influence, impact and assertiveness. Not so with child protection, the typical leadership characteristics may need some reflection. The CFSC would assert that in child protection there is a requirement to embrace fine judgements and consequently, to understand at a deeper level what then constitutes 'mistakes, error and failure'.

Of course there is established practice wisdom and procedures but the scale of fine judgements will never be encapsulated by a tool kit, set of procedures or new managerialism. Munro challenges all of us to recognise a commonly held belief that somehow the complexity and associated uncertainty of child protection can be eradicated. It cannot. The profession is always shocked how much of a surprise this remains to those who have never worked in the sector or undertaken such fine judgements.

Front line staff advised us that leadership in some instances, can be seen as detached and distant. Pointing the finger by me however involves looking in the mirror. There are three fingers pointing back at yourself. Creating a distance with the agony, trauma and distress of child protection is inevitably, but we need leadership that stand shoulder to shoulder with the realities of poverty, inequality and neglect.

The context and the reality is that near misses occur frequently, fine judgements are made every day and therefore identifying what constitutes “mistakes” and what is right and what is wrong is not a good accounting system. There is a need Munro maintains, to be realistic about professional’s ability to predict the future. Munro advocates that we must however, promote professional expertise over compliance.

We need leadership that embraces the realities and challenges of protecting children, across all disciplines and political processes. Eileen Munro asked for a leadership that demonstrates **humility**. There are no easy answers and no quick fixes. We need leadership that is not only commensurate with the complexity of this distressing problem, but leadership prepared to demonstrate that humility in times of strife.

#### **Slide 4 – Support to Front Line Staff**

Within the CFSC, we have identified that our leadership needs to be integrated with the front line delivery of service and that our support to front line staff represents one of our most effective contributions to protecting children.

To date, no significant case review has properly identified the attributes required by front line staff just to do the job. **Courage, hardiness, tenacity, respect and compassion.**

Blom-Cooper back in 1984 recognised the importance of supervision to front line staff, as did Lord Lamming, who reiterated that supervision remains the cornerstone of good practice. I know myself that a case I could and should have done better on occurred when supervision was absent. The recent spotlight on Birmingham also identified the pressure on front-line managers. Munro has reiterated that the support to staff demands a culture of regular and effective supervision and support.

I was surprised in reviewing the Blom-Cooper enquiry that he identified the appalling impact of ‘burn out’ on front line staff. He also identified 4 critical recommendations page 217:

- Attention to front line staff workload - a level that might prevent visits to the child.
- Proper priorities-maintaining priorities in the face of pressure.
- Making joint visits with Team leaders/ colleagues. Feelings as evidence.
- And believe it or not adequate clerical support-of course we have cracked that problem. The demands of bureaucracy remain significant. Helping children however remains a human process.
- More recently, Professor Munro has developed some interesting research into the impact of mobile working for social workers.

Of course analysing the problem is much easier when you are a distance away from the day to day 'near misses' and fine judgement. It was not even too difficult for students, who had not even practiced, to identify where Gun Wahlstrom and Diane Dietmann had apparently gone wrong in the review of Jasmine's death. It feels very different however when ten years later you take the telephone call late at night to be advised that the child you de-registered has arrived at the local hospital dead on arrival. That is different.

Professor Michael West has also highlighted the correlation between the care of staff in hospitals and the subsequent quality of care provided. Consequently, it seems patently obvious that within Child Protection practice our front line staff need their talent encouraged, supported and above all nurtured.

We will identify child protection today as a complex and wicked problem, but the true test and worth of leaders is how they respond in the heat of a crisis. It is still the most difficult task and we need to ensure that the environment and culture in Scotland remains conducive and able to promote effective practice.

### **Slide 6 – Significant Case Reviews Learning in a Wicked Context**

Blom-Cooper commented that the distress of Gun Wahlstrom and her colleagues was unqualifiedly genuine. No one in child protection this week however, needs reminded of the emotional impact.

The profession remembers, Maria Coldwell, Richard Clarke, Jasmine Beckford, Victoria Climbe, Kennedy McFarlane, Danielle Reid, Caleb, Nicole, Brandon, Declan, Peter, Daniel and now Liam. We recognise and agree that reflections on their deaths are an important testimony to their lives.

We need to recognise however, as Eileen Munro identifies that by themselves SCR have not promoted a learning culture which supports improved practice. Professor Munro also identifies 'hindsight bias' as a dynamic that can distort our judgement, she quotes Woods ( Behind Human Error) who similarly maintains that hindsight bias..' blocks our ability to see the deeper story of systemic factors that predictably shape human performance.'

It was perhaps within Scotland, that the report 'It's Everybody's job to make sure I'm alright' began to recognise that this complex challenge did indeed require a systemic and whole system response.

We need to ensure however, that SCR add value and learning. We need to ensure a focus remains on implementation and impact and that the clamour of SCR's are reflective and thoughtful. What about a SCR regarding an excellent piece of practice? What went well? What works? On that note we need every year to provide reassurance-to government, to elected members, to the public. As Alexis Jay quite rightly noted there must be scrutiny and robust accountability.

We also need to now ensure our leadership is commensurate with the changes in practice, Getting it Right for Every Child has dramatically altered the dynamic around compulsion-statutory measures-with voluntary arrangements and cooperation from parents rightly seen as an important shift in culture. To be fair, there are simply some behaviours and conduct you cannot legislate for.

In light of Blom-Cooper's analysis and Munro's critique we need to avoid making the same mistakes, we need to ensure that in addition to the forensic care review there is periodically also a system wide check around;

- How many social workers/ Health Visitors were in post at the time of the tragedy?
- How effective was the practice of supervision?
- How effective was the support to front line staff?

- How effective were the system's to support the delivery of time with the child, young person, family?
- What was the case holding ratio to staffing?
- What have been the obstacles to good practice?

We recognise that it is a difficult and complex judgement call, but perhaps it is both SCR and indeed whole system analysis that is required.

### **Slide 7 – The Long Curve of History and Legacy.**

It is a tough and utterly relentless task, so what would you do-what would be the social work ask? In watching a recent documentary on Obama, he quoted Dr Martin Luther King. To point out to young black activists that you need to see the long curve of history and that over time radical reform and change can take place.

In keeping with Eileen Munro, the CFSC would request the following;

- √ A whole system approach-Child Protection as an integral part of Getting it Right for Every Child.
- √ The Early Years Collaborative and Prevention- with a focus on Scotland's acute problems around substance misuse, domestic violence and poor parenting. A focus on the most vulnerable children and a collective responsibility to tackle neglect.
- √ Named Person-a consistent narrative about support, help and yes protection.
- √ The development of progressive universalism, the strengthening of Health Visiting and their commitment to effective supervision. Blom-Cooper would approve.
- √ A focus on integration to break down the barriers and silos of communication, working together and sharing information.
- √ The Realigning Children's Service Board-chaired by Olivia MacLeod-to shift our aspirations of prevention into operational realities and critically the resources for prevention.
- √ Integrated inspection focused on the whole system.
- √ The role of Chief Social Work Officers and the Chief Social Work Advisors-the line of sight to Scotland's most vulnerable children.
- √ We are heading in the right direction, but we now need to avoid IDD and focus on delivery. IDD – is Implementation Deficit Disorder.

We have built good foundations and I have never been more positive that we can in Scotland take a significant step forward, but we need to 'join the dots' and coordinate more effectively. Within social work, we would implore that the strategy around raising attainment is inter-linked and coordinated with the challenges around neglect and child hood poverty.

Finally, we need the fierce urgency of now.

In looking up the full quote from Martin Luther King-he also warned that there is such a thing in history of being too late. Missing the opportunity. In Scotland, we have built solid foundations. Let's ensure we have today the difficult and courageous conversation so that in the years to come the strategy we identify now and in the coming months is a leadership commensurate with the challenge, a leadership that promotes a culture of learning for all front line staff and above all a leadership that enhances the whole system and the whole of the community in protecting better the children and young people of Scotland.