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Dear Annie,

We are writing to welcome you formally to your new position as chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and to respond to the findings of your two National Reviews – *It was hard to escape – safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation* and *Out of routine: a review of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm*.

These reviews are of national importance and have given government a robust analysis of the issues, identifying key areas for us to consider as part of our response to the challenges facing some children and their families. It is important that we keep the momentum and focus on these issues as we exit from the restrictions put in place as a result of COVID-19.

We understand that quarterly cross-departmental policy forums are now in place to facilitate a continuous and timely dialogue with you and the Panel on key emerging safeguarding issues. As you know, Stephanie Brivio has been asked to act as interim National Facilitator for Children's Social Care, to work alongside the Police and Health National Facilitators, further embedding a national governance framework for safeguarding partners, jointly led by our three departments.

It was hard to escape – safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation.

We wanted to set out how we are responding to the Panel's first report. We all agree that tackling child criminal exploitation is complex, and effective practice approaches

where practitioners have the knowledge and skills to work with these young people and their families to secure improved outcomes, are critical. We are keen to ensure consistent, high quality identification of children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and that identification needs to be a collaborative effort amongst those who work with and alongside families – social workers, teachers, police, health workers, youth workers and community groups.

We are mindful that there are a number of government-funded initiatives underway which focus on improving practice with this cohort of young people and we are committed to review and build on what we know and what is happening in practice. We are investing in the Trusted Relationships Fund, which is testing innovative approaches to tackle vulnerability and exploitation; ‘Pathfinder’ local authorities, which seeks to develop and promote good practice in the youth justice space; and the Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme, which aims to support local areas in developing a strategic response to extra-familial harm and build evidence of effectiveness through an online community of practice. The Department for Education and the Home Office have also commissioned Liverpool John Moores University to conduct deep dives in a number of local areas to test the effectiveness of the new multi-agency safeguarding partnerships in working with young people at risk of serious violence and criminal exploitation, which will report later this year.

Over the coming months we will take time to evaluate the impact of these initiatives. We know that officials are keen to keep you updated on emerging findings, and we are reassured to know that both formal policy discussions and informal updates are planned. These interactions will allow a helpful flow of information and the benefit of your ongoing input and expertise.

In order to have targeted interventions that effectively engage young people and offer a framework for excellent practice to guide our frontline practitioners, we will continue to review the evidence, including from your review. We will then respond in detail to your recommendation on trialling a national practice framework, including proposed next steps, by Autumn 2021.

We are particularly concerned about the risk of serious violence as national restrictions begin to ease and children and young people return to school. On 22 February, we wrote jointly to safeguarding partners in 30 local areas, asking them to ensure they have in place robust and concerted plans to reduce the likelihood of additional victims from serious violence. We were pleased you were able to join the Learning from Excellence event on 17 March, where we heard from senior safeguarding partners and professionals across the sector about the challenges, but vital importance, of multi-agency working in keeping our young people safe from exploitation and harm. We are determined to build on the good practice and compelling evidence provided by the young person who had experienced serious violence, about what will really make a difference and look forward to your continuing expert input into this work.

We recognise the importance of making progress on ensuring that the statutory framework is responding to the specific challenges faced by children and young people from abuse and exploitation from outside of their families. We agree that

there is scope to review *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*, to ensure that it takes account of the specific conditions that will enable practitioners to work more effectively with young people facing harm through exploitation. The immediate impact of the pandemic and the capacity of local safeguarding partners to engage in a meaningful consultation will be a factor in progressing this, alongside considering the scope and timeframe of the Care Review.

Protection afforded to child victims by the legal framework of the National Referral Mechanism is imperative and we welcomed your findings on improving this system. We are funding 10 local areas across the UK to test whether making decisions within existing safeguarding structures, where a child is a victim of modern slavery, is a better model for identification of victims. This 12-month pilot is a vital part of the National Referral Mechanism Transformation Programme which aims to ensure victims have their cases settled promptly and receive tailored support to rebuild their lives. We are also progressing the roll out of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians scheme, which provides specialist additional support for this cohort.

We also agree that robust data collection and sharing makes a real difference in identifying and protecting young people from criminal exploitation. We have taken steps to improve data capture and sharing. From April 2021, social workers will be able to record 'child criminal exploitation' as a factor when assessing whether young people are in need of help and support. National data will be published annually as part of the Children in Need Census providing better evidence about prevalence.

Out of routine: a review of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm.

Turning to the Panel's second report, we welcome the focus on this important issue. We have included oversight of implementation of the panel's recommendations to the SUDI review under the terms of reference of the cross-government work we have established on vulnerable infants. DHSC will lead on monitoring implementation of the recommendations and officials are regularly engaging with the panel on their work.

In support of the report's recommendation on datasets, we have brought together data teams from DHSC, NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) and DfE to review how the Child Mortality Database and DfE serious incident notifications can be better aligned.

Public Health England are incorporating learning from the review into the refresh of the Healthy Child Programme. Members of the Panel have assisted Public Health England by contributing to an update of the early years high impact area on improving health literacy, managing minor illnesses and reducing accidents. This is due to be published shortly. We continue to work with Public Health England and NHSEI on communications to promote safe sleeping. This includes communications before Christmas to highlight seasonal risks and further communications planned for later this year, including a focus on young fathers.

We have also highlighted our concerns about infant injury and death in communications to multi-agency safeguarding partners. We intend to consider how

the multi-agency approach to child safeguarding will support vulnerable infants in our ongoing oversight of the new local arrangements. This is very much in-keeping with the Panel recommendation on multi-agency responsibility for these matters.

We remain absolutely committed to tackling all forms of harm and to working with you on how best to do this. We look forward to working with you in your role as chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and would like to thank you and the Panel again for your expertise and insight into these complex safeguarding issues.

Kind regards,



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