

Cumbria County Council

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T: [REDACTED]

9 September 2014

Ian Smith
HM Senior Coroner
Central Police Station
Market Street
Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria
LA14 2LE

Dear Ian

Re: Regulation 28 Report – Helena Kathleen Farrell

Thank you for your letter of 4 July regarding Helena Farrell.

In responding to the Regulation 28 notice Cumbria County Council would like the following matters to be taken into consideration:

1. Cumbria County Council was not notified of or represented at the Inquest into the death of Helena Farrell.
2. No County Council employee was requested to provide a statement or report in relation to any matter considered at the Inquest.
3. Neither the County Council nor any of its employees were requested to attend the Inquest as an "interested person".
4. Cumbria County Council has not had sight of the evidence presented at the Inquest (apart from that subsequently provided – the Serious Untoward Incident report, the Serious Case Review and the Coroner's summing up).

Your recommendations for Cumbria County Council cover two broad areas: the commissioning of the School Nursing Service, and the checking of credentials of school counsellors. I shall respond to each in turn.

1. School Nursing Service.

At the time of Helena's death, the responsibility for commissioning the School Nursing Service lay with the then Cumbria Primary Care Trust. Cumbria County Council took over this responsibility on 1 April 2013 as a result of the national changes to the health service under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. At this time the existing school nursing contract with Cumbria Partnership Foundation Trust was extended until the end of September 2015 in order to give Cumbria County Council the necessary time to review and recommission the service as appropriate.

In summary, while Cumbria County Council was not responsible for school nursing services at the time of Helena's death, it is now. It is therefore clearly important that we learn any lessons arising from this case and build them into our planning for future services.

Recognising the immediate pressure on the School Nursing Service, since April 2013 the Council has funded a further three posts within the service. However this has always been seen as a short term solution to relieve pressure while a more fundamental review of the service is undertaken.

Your findings, together with the Cumbria Partnership Foundation Trust Serious Untoward Incident Report and the Serious Case Review Report, indicate a problem with capacity in the school nursing system meaning that school nurses are not able to devote the appropriate amount of time to cases that really need their input. We have therefore carried out a full case audit to determine whether the existing approach to safeguarding and child protection within the service could be improved. This audit has revealed a number of areas where the multiagency safeguarding system could be improved in order to reduce significantly the bureaucratic burden on school nursing, without increasing the risk to other children. This would clearly free up school nurse time to focus on other issues, including giving adequate time to individual cases where their input is most appropriate.

We are working with the Local Safeguarding Children Board to amend the multiagency systems appropriately, and with Cumbria Partnership Foundation Trust to make the necessary changes within the School Nursing Service on a voluntary basis within the context of the existing contract. We will be building all necessary changes into the new service specification to be commissioned from October 2015.

2. School Counselling Services

You recommend in your report that the Council "needs to be more thorough with checking credentials" of school based counsellors.

The Council is not the employer of counsellors at Academies such as Kirkbie Kendal School or in Foundation or Voluntary Aided Schools. The Governing Body or the Academy appoints and employs all staff in these schools.

The Council does employ counsellors at Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools however deciding which staff are appointed and ensuring the relevant employment checks are completed is the legal responsibility of the individual school. The school must adhere to relevant safeguarding guidance and employment law.

The Council has in the past reminded schools of their duty to ensure that counsellors are appropriately qualified with appropriate clinical supervision. Following your report we shall do so again by the end of September and will also undertake a sample audit later in the school year to ascertain from schools whether they have complied with their duty. The results of this audit will be presented to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Cumbria County Council

I hope that the actions outlined above satisfactorily address the recommendations made in your report.

Yours sincerely



Diane Wood
Chief Executive