



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Neil O'Brien MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Primary Care and Public Health
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Emma Whitting
HM Senior Coroner
Bedfordshire and Luton Coroner's Service
Coroner's Office
The Court House
Woburn Street
Amphill
MK45 2HX

03 March 2023

Dear Ms Whitting,

CORONER REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS: HARPER MARIE DENTON

Thank you for your letter of 15 September 2022 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, about the death of Harper Denton. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Health and Secondary Care and I thank you for the additional time allowed.

Firstly, I would like to say how deeply saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Harper's death. I can appreciate how distressing her death must be for those who knew and loved her, and I offer my heartfelt condolences. It is vital that we take the learnings from what happened to Harper to prevent future deaths.

I am aware that the Police, as well as, the Home Office have responded to you directly on the relevant matters of concern. Therefore, this response focuses solely on your concern related to safeguarding assessments.

Health visitors and school nurses as leaders of the Healthy Child Programme have a vital role in keeping children safe. They work with their teams and partners to support local safeguarding arrangements. We are currently updating a set of resources for health visitor and school nurse-led services. This includes emphasising the importance for children who may have additional needs to complete an assessment of family relationships and chronology of events to identify strengths and vulnerabilities. These are due to be published shortly.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has highlighted evidence and challenges to consider in their report on safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury by

male carers “The Myth of the Invisible Men”. The report clearly identifies the need to address the interconnected issues that were apparent in cases when men harmed children and to deal with the ways that these risks intersect.

In response to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, we have agreed a cross-Government programme of work focusing on strengthening whole family approaches and improving evidence. We have hosted a round table with Partners on how to better engage fathers, and are developing new resources to provide sensitive, responsive care for infants in vulnerable households. We will also look for opportunities to share evidence from National Institute for Health & Care Research projects that include evaluation of “ICON”, a programme to support parents and carers with infant crying.

Health visitors, school nurse and their teams are required to follow national safeguarding guidance in relation to assessment of risks and take appropriate action if there are concerns. Appropriate information sharing between the police, probation and other services is also critical for multi-agency safeguarding and to inform assessments.

We are currently updating a set of resources for health visitor and school nurse-led services. This includes emphasising the importance for children who may have additional needs to complete an assessment of family relationships and chronology of events to identify strengths and vulnerabilities.

National guidance sets out that health needs should be identified in partnership with families, using approaches that build on their strengths as well as identifying any difficulties. This was updated in 2021 and departmental officials from the Chief Public Health Nurse directorate meet regularly with professional bodies to consider implementation issues. Engagement with both parents or partners and the whole family is important – from the identification of risk to early help and targeted work and formal child protection.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours Sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Neil O'Brien MP.

NEIL O'BRIEN MP