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Baroness Barran MBE
House of Lords
SW1A 0AA

30 June 2025

Dear Diana

I'd like to thank you for the interesting debate on amendment 183C to insert a clause into of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to ensure that all court ordered reports are produced by qualified social workers, for example those under Section 7 of the Children Act 1989 (Welfare Reports).

I understand that your proposed amendment was borne out of concern our Families First Partnership Programme reforms, that alternatively qualified practitioners working with families in Family Help might undertake work with families including court reports and would not have the expertise needed. You expressed further concern in the House, that these reports may be prepared by a youth worker, for example, that may not have the experience of a qualified social worker.

You asked that I write to the House to confirm the arrangements for supervision when / if alternatively qualified practitioners – undertaking the role of the Family Help Lead Practitioner - prepare reports for court within family proceedings. As I mentioned during the debate we recognise that high quality reports being provided to court is critical in supporting the court to make the best decisions for children.

I also confirmed that most Section 7 reports are prepared by Cafcass social workers, with between 10-15% of them completed by local authorities. Local Authorities may use a range of experts to complete court reports depending on the request made by the Judge. Where an alternatively qualified practitioner undertakes this work, we expect clear social work oversight and sign off to ensure that these reports are quality assured. Of course, the court also has a duty to ensure that the reports are of sufficient quality.

As I have stated in the house, our reforms to Family Help, multi-agency child protection, and family group decision making, being rolled out through the Families First Partnership programme, aim to rebalance the Children's Social Care system toward earlier intervention. Our ambition is to wrap support around families at the earliest opportunity, so more children can stay safely at home and to take decisive action where children need protection.

New multi-agency child protection teams will provide expert child protection support across the system of help, support and protection, which can include providing evidence required by the courts when needed. Lead Child Protection Practitioners, who are experienced social workers will be embedded in these new multi-agency teams and work alongside Family Help Lead Practitioners, including in preparing for court proceedings. Where there is a child protection plan, the Family Help Lead Practitioner will always be a qualified social worker. Statutory Guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children, was updated in 2023 to clarify that a broader range of practitioners can work with families who need support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This is in line with our ambition that children and families receive the support they need, from the right people, with the right skills, at the right time to achieve the very best outcomes. Chapter 2, paragraph 141 is clear that local authorities and their partners must develop, agree and publish a local protocol for assessment and support. This protocol must be clear about who can act as a lead practitioner for a child in line with their relevant knowledge and skills. Working Together is also clear that this local protocol must set out the arrangements for decision making, and accountability. The guidance is clear that all lead practitioners should have access to high quality supervision and that oversight of a qualified social worker should always be provided where needed.

Thank you again for taking the time to engage on these matters. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Blake', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS, CBE