



**Hon Andrea Mitchell MLA
Minister for Mental Health; Child Protection**

Our ref: 55-00128

Ms Margaret Quirk MLA
Chair, Community Development and
Justice Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly
1st Floor, Parliament House
Harvest Terrace
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Ms Quirk *Margaret*

Community Development and Justice Standing Committee Report: *Red flags, white flag response? The Department for Child Protection and Family Support's management of a troubled boy with a baby*

Please find attached the response to the two recommendations of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee Report: *Red flags, white flag response?*, required in accordance with Standing Order 277(1) of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response on the proposed actions to safeguard and protect children from abuse and neglect.

Yours sincerely

Andrea Mitchell

**HON ANDREA MITCHELL MLA
MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION**

Response to Community Development and Justice Standing Committee Report: Red flags, white flag response? The Department for Child Protection and Family Support's management of a troubled boy with a baby

Recommendation 1: Where there is insufficient information about a case and there is potential for a dangerous outcome, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support should take a precautionary approach.

It is acknowledged that a precautionary approach should be taken in cases involving very young children given they rely totally on their caregiver for food, nurturance, supervision and medical treatment and are also the children that are typically the least visible in the community.

This approach is reflected in the Department for Child Protection and Family Support's (the Department) practice guidance which requires staff to consider the additional vulnerability of children aged under five in relation to risk and determining the priority of response when concerns are raised.

The Department also has in place comprehensive pre-birth planning processes to manage child protection risks to unborn children, which usually commence 20 weeks into the pregnancy. In circumstances where the child protection risk is received late in pregnancy, a condensed timeframe for assessment is implemented. The Department now also has a local pre-birth planning process in place in the South West that provides specific local information and guidance for managing pre-birth planning (see attached local protocol).

In these cases the Department must assess whether the child is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect and whether the parents are unlikely or unable to protect the children from harm. The Department is currently reviewing whether there is a need to further strengthen its practice guidance to assist staff further to assess and predict likelihood of significant harm and a parent's capacity to protect in these circumstances.

The Department has recently strengthened existing practice guidance for assessing child protection concerns when a child is hospitalised and may be in need of protection. Staff are now required to assess whether parental/caregiver contact requires restrictions and/or supervision, and work with the hospital staff to implement arrangements to safeguard and/or promote the wellbeing of the child.

Recommendation 2: The Department for Child Protection and Family Support should review its methods of maintaining contact with highly vulnerable and transient youth to ensure that every possible avenue for contact is pursued. It should direct sufficient resources to monitoring the location of particularly troubled children.

Where a child cannot be located, Departmental procedures require that the carer and the Department must make a 'missing person report' to the local police office. There are robust case management plans for children in care whose whereabouts are unknown which are regularly reviewed to manage risk.

These include a range of strategies, such as making contact with all previous known connections, visiting known places at times of the day the young person may be likely to be there and following up information provided by other service providers, including the Department of Corrective Services as well as family/community members.

The Department is also able to use Police and local media to help locate young people. However consideration needs to be given as to whether this action may drive the young person further "underground" in some circumstances where young people do not want to be found.

If a child is transient the Department also works closely with partner agencies such as the Department of Corrective Services (when they are involved); this collaboration is supported by legislative provisions that allow information to be shared with other government agencies, non-government agencies and any other relevant persons.

ENDS