12 November 2008
STATEMENT FROM SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES, ED BALLS CONCERNING THE CASE OF BABY P AND HARINGEY LOCAL AUTHORITY

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (Ed Balls):

"In our Written Ministerial Statement this morning we said that, in addition to Lord Laming's independent report on progress on implementing the reforms introduced following the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, we would be considering the Serious Case Review commissioned by Haringey Local Safeguarding Children Board into the tragic death of `Baby P' and whether there needs to be a further investigation of child protection procedures and practices amongst local agencies in Haringey.

"It is important to make clear from the outset and to avoid any confusion, that the Serious Case Review was commissioned under the statutory procedures set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children. We are assured by Haringey that the Serious Case Review was conducted in accordance with the correct procedures, which require the Local Safeguarding Children Board to commission the overview report from an independent author. Ofsted will of course be conducting, as is standard practice, their own evaluation of the Serious Case Review against these procedures.

"The full Serious Case Review report was submitted to the Department for Children, Schools and Families this morning.

"The Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes and I have today urgently studied these findings.

"The review's findings indicate a number of failings of practice and management by the agencies involved.

"Having studied the report, there is clear evidence that;

- each agency has singly and collectively failed to adhere to the procedures for the proper management of child protection cases set out in Chapter 5 of Working Together 2006. In particular:
    - there was evidence of poor quality practice, management and supervision of staff in all agencies; and
    - health professionals appear to have failed to follow the appropriate procedures when there was evidence of a child having suffered non-accidental injuries.

- there was inappropriate use of family friends as temporary carers for Baby P. Our reading of the Serious Case Review suggests that the local authority was responsible for making arrangements for the

placement of this child with a family friend and therefore Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 should have been followed.

“Further examination of the Serious Case Review may reveal other areas where the implementation of proper procedures could have led to a better outcome for the child.

“Clearly such findings in an individual case raise serious concerns about the wider systems and management of services for safeguarding children in Haringey.

“In the light of these findings, I have today decided that Ofsted, the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Chief Inspector of Constabulary should carry out an urgent Joint Area Review of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in Haringey. I am requesting this under Section 20(1)(b) of the Children Act 2004.

“The Review will need to undertake an urgent and thorough inspection of the quality of practice and management of all services which contribute to the effective safeguarding of children in the local area. It will be important to ensure rigorous scrutiny of the quality of practice and decision making by front line workers and their managers, and of the effectiveness of management practice and performance management systems in all relevant agencies.

“I would expect the Review to be led and carried out by inspectors with specialist expertise and experience in child protection. Given the importance and urgency of these matters, I request that a first report be submitted to me by 1 December 2008.

“In parallel, Beverley Hughes and my officials have today been in contact with Haringey Local Authority. I can announce that while the Joint Area Review undertakes its work, Haringey have agreed that with immediate effect, John Coughlan, Director of Children’s Services in Hampshire, will be seconded to work alongside the DCS for Haringey to ensure that proper procedures for safeguarding children are in place and are being properly applied.

“The case of Baby P is tragic and appalling. It is our duty to take whatever action is needed to ensure that such a tragedy doesn’t happen again, that lessons are learned and that children in Haringey are safe.”