

The history of child protection

1889

The first act of parliament for the prevention of cruelty to children is passed. This is commonly known as the 'children's charter'. British law is now able to intervene in relations between parents and children. Police can arrest anyone found ill-treating a child and obtain a warrant to enter a home if a child is thought to be in danger. The act also includes guidelines on the employment of children. Begging is outlawed.

1894

The children's charter is amended and extended. It now allows children to give evidence in court. Mental cruelty is now recognised and it becomes an offence to deny a sick child medical attention.

1908

The Children's Act 1908 establishes juvenile courts and introduces the registration of foster parents. The Punishment of Incest Act makes sexual abuse within families a matter for state jurisdiction rather than intervention by the church.

1932

The Children and Young Persons Act 1932 broadens the powers of juvenile courts and introduces supervision orders for children at risk.

1933

A further Children and Young Persons Act collates all existing child protection legislation into one act.

1948

The Children Act 1948 establishes a children's committee and a children's officer in each authority. It follows the creation of the parliamentary care of children committee in 1945 following the death of 13-year-old Dennis O'Neill at the hands of foster parents.

1970

Under the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, social services departments are unified. This brings together social work services and social care provision.

1974

The inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell at the hands of her stepfather highlights a serious lack of coordination within child protection services. The inquiry leads to the development of area child protection committees (ACPCs). ACPCs coordinate the agencies responsible for ensuring the safety of children at risk.

1989

The Children Act 1989 gives every child the right to protection from abuse and exploitation and the right to have inquiries to safeguard their welfare. Its central principle is that children are usually best looked after within the family. The act comes into force in England and Wales on 14 October 1991 and with some differences in Northern Ireland in 1996.

1991

Working Together under the Children Act is published in England. It states that when child abuse is suspected or confirmed to be the cause of a child's death, ACPCs have to conduct an investigation. This is known as the part eight review and establishes whether child protection procedures are followed. The guidance is updated in **1999** in Working Together to Safeguard Children.

1995

The Children (Scotland) Act incorporates the three key principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish Law – protection from discrimination, ensuring that the child's welfare is a primary concern and listening to children's views.

1999

The Protection of Children Act 1999 is passed. This aims to prevent paedophiles from working with children. It requires childcare organisations in England and Wales to provide the Department of Health (DoH) with details of anyone known to them who is suspected of harming children or putting them at risk. A similar act is passed in Scotland in 2003.

2001

Jack McConnell, the Scottish education minister, orders a review of child protection in Scotland following the inquiry into the murder of three-year-old Kennedy McFarlane. An audit published the following year finds that half of all children at risk of abuse and neglect in Scotland fail to receive adequate protection. In 2003, the Scottish Executive publishes a children's charter, setting out how carers and professionals should protect and respect children's rights.

2003

In January 2003, Lord Laming publishes his report into the death of Victoria Climbié, which finds that health, police and social services missed 12 opportunities to save her. It recommends a minister for children, a national agency for children and families, local committees and management boards to oversee children's services, a national child database, and a 24-hour helpline for the public to report concerns about children. In September 2003, a government green paper, Every Child Matters, proposes an electronic tracking system for England's children, and that 150 children's trusts should be set up by 2006. These trusts will amalgamate health, education and social services and a children's director will oversee local services. Statutory local safeguarding children boards will also replace ACPCs and there will be a children's commissioner for England.

2004

The Children Act 2004 takes forward the main proposals of the green paper – electronic children's files, children's directors and a children's commissioner is passed by parliament. It allows local authorities more flexibility in organising children's services. The amalgamation of education and social services is no longer mandatory. Councils are given another two years to set up children's trusts.

2005

Professor Al Aynsley-Green is appointed as England's first children's commissioner. Former education secretary Estelle Morris is appointed to

oversee the Government's reform of the children's services workforce.