



## Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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Judge John Cain  
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Dear Judge Cain

### **Investigation into the death of Baby S COR 2013- 2108**

In your *Finding into death without inquest for Baby S* on 20 November 2020, you made the following recommendation in paragraph 119:

*'... , I recommend that the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Service conduct a review and audit of the updated Child Protection policies and procedures listed ... , to determine whether these changes have effectively improved Child Protection's response to and management of high-risk infants. In addition, I recommend that the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services conduct a compliance audit to ensure that staff are complying with the policies and procedures listed... The review and audit should be completed no later than 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021'.*

In our letter dated 3 March 2021, the Secretary confirmed a review and audit of the stated Child Protection policies would be undertaken, including a compliance audit of the infant intensive response and infant response. Further the Secretary advised due to the changed work priorities impacted by COVID-19, the review and audit would be completed by 30 November 2021.

As such, I write to advise of the following:

- An independent auditor was engaged to undertake a compliance audit and review of the Child Protection Infant Risk Assessment and Response Decision policy and procedure.
- The audit at **Attachment A** found compliance to the policy and procedures noting there were elements that needed strengthening in practice.

- Focus groups as part of the audit identified practitioners' views about how the policy and procedure could be strengthened.
- The departments analysis of this work has concluded that the policy and procedure themselves have improved the quality of oversight appropriate to support a focus on infants.

The department is committed to further work in the next 12-months to uplift practice in the management of high-risk infants. This includes further development of the workforce to develop greater competence in the application of SAFER (the new risk assessment for child protection), complete more timely documentation and the translation of the policy and procedures into practice to create consistency across the State.

The SAFER children framework (launched on 20 November 2021) seeks to support current child protection practice, in providing child protection practitioners with evidence-informed tools and resources to guide practitioners in identifying, assessing and managing risk of harm to children, and to plan for their safety and wellbeing. Practitioners will continue to use their professional judgement drawing on their skills and knowledge and applying these to the analysis of relevant information to establish risk, ultimately, and interventions relevant to the individual needs of children and families.

In addition, to further uphold the commitment to better meet the needs of vulnerable children and families in Victoria, the department has also launched a new Child Protection Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2024 in August 2021 to guide the attraction, retention and development of the child protection workforce to meet current and future demand.

The department has now completed the recommendation and found the audit process beneficial to planning our approach to strengthen practice with infants over the next 12 months.

Yours sincerely



**Christina Asquini**  
Deputy Secretary  
Community Services Operations Division  
3/12/ 2021

Attachment A: Infant audit report final