

Valuable addition to any childcare library



Decisions taken by social workers are seldom far from the headlines, whether it is because they are said to have failed to act in order to protect children from harm or that they have interfered with family life by acting too soon or without proper assessment. Most of us, including lawyers who are new to childcare law, have little contact with social workers and know little of the complexity of the various decision-making processes. *Social Work Decision Making: A Guide for Childcare Lawyers*, written by a barrister and a children's guardian is a much-needed and helpful guide through the maze of assessments, reviews and planning processes which are the basis of social work with children.

The book takes the reader through the system in a logical order, which follows the typical pathway of a child through the various

processes. After a helpful introduction to the legal framework (including an overview of family group conferences, which will be useful to many experienced practitioners as well as newcomers), we are taken through the referral and assessment processes. This includes a detailed explanation of the assessment framework, which is the basis for the core assessment that is now a part of every care case.

Again, this detailed treatment, written with the needs of lawyers in mind, will be valuable for both new and experienced readers. The authors explain what the assessor should be considering when they carry out an initial or core assessment, looking at each of the 'domains' and 'dimensions' in turn. This is followed by guidance for lawyers on common pitfalls and on the characteristics of effective planning following assessment. This material will help the lawyer to scrutinise the local authority's case and to prepare an effective and focused cross-examination of the social worker.

Further chapters deal with the child protection system, including the child protection conference process, the planning and review process for looked-

after children, fostering, adoption and leaving care. The chapter on adoption planning, including the adoption panels and the adoption agency function of the local authority, is especially timely in view of the recent cases where the adoption work of local authorities has come under scrutiny.

This book is not a substitute for the various texts on childcare law, but should sit alongside them as a valuable addition to every childcare practitioner's library. Social work is undergoing rapid change at the moment and even experienced lawyers find it challenging to keep in touch with current thinking. The authors have made this task much easier by providing a comprehensive, clear and up-to-date guide.

Review by George Eddon, principle lawyer at North Yorkshire County Council.

Social Work Decision-Making: A Guide For Childcare Lawyers, by *Elizabeth Isaacs, Carmel Shepherd, Jordans (2008)*, pp 268, ISBN: 978 1 84661 065 3, £45