



SCSWIS

social care
and social work
improvement scotland

Joint interim follow-through inspection of services to protect children and young people in the Stirling Council area

25 August 2011



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

Introduction

The Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Act 2006, together with the associated regulations and Code of Practice, provide the legislative framework for the conduct of joint inspections of the provision of services to children. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of quality indicators, 'How well are children and young people protected and their needs met?'.¹

Inspection teams include Associate Assessors who are members of staff from services and agencies providing services to children and young people in other Scottish local authority areas.

¹ 'How well are children and young people protected and their needs met?'. Self-evaluation using quality indicators, HM Inspectorate of Education 2005.

Contents

1. The inspection	1
2. How are services improving	2
3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action	3
4. Conclusion	6
5. What happens next?	7

1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education published a report on the joint inspection of services to protect children² in June 2010. Working together, services in Stirling Council area prepared an action plan which set out how they would address the agreed areas for improvement listed in the report. Inspectors planned to revisit the area within one year and responsibility for this transferred to Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland.

Inspectors revisited the Stirling Council area in May 2011 to assess the extent to which services were continuing to improve the quality of their work to protect children and to report on the progress made in responding to the agreed areas for improvement.

² When we refer to children in this report we mean children and young people under the age of 18 years.

2. Continuous improvement

Chief Officers responded quickly and positively to the findings of the inspection in March 2010 and developed action plans which set out clear priorities for improvement. A Multi Agency Continuous Improvement Group (MACIG) of senior managers was set up to make sure these plans were carried out. Together, services have promoted a positive culture in which changes can be introduced and supported. Chief Officers and the Child Protection Committee (CPC) provide visible leadership and direction to staff. Staff feel supported and that their views are taken seriously. Staff morale and confidence is improving at all levels and across services. There are significant improvements in teamwork and partnership working. Services are seeking to learn from best practice across the United Kingdom. A stronger sense of collective responsibility for protecting children and supporting families is emerging.

There have been recent and very notable improvements within the Council's Social Care service. Management has been revised and some services redesigned. This is successfully addressing areas of poor performance.

The quality assurance role of managers needs to be strengthened to further improve the consistency and quality of practice. Improved performance management information is providing accurate details of how well some processes are working.

3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action

The report published in June 2010 identified six agreed areas for improvement.

3.1 Ensure more children and families get the help they need at an early stage before their situation becomes more serious.

Encouraging progress has been made to ensure more children and families get the help they need at an early stage before their situation becomes serious. Help and support for vulnerable children is coordinated better. Services are working more effectively together to identify those children and families who need the most help and support. Information about these families is now shared at a much earlier stage. As a result they are now more likely to benefit from the help and support they need quickly. A change in the way the Social Care service is organised allows social workers to respond quickly and more effectively when concerns are raised about children. Managers recognise the need to improve the range of support available for children and families affected by parental substance misuse and ensure that the right help is provided quickly. A Partnership Forum is developing a Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach to helping children and families at an early stage.

3.2 Improve the actions taken in immediate response to children when there are concerns about their safety

Very positive steps have been taken to improve the immediate actions taken in response to concerns about children's safety. The responsibility of staff across services to report their concerns about children has been reinforced. An Intake Team in Social Care is improving the ways in which they manage and respond to concerns about children's safety. The responsibility for carrying out child protection investigations is now held by a group of police officers and social workers with relevant experience and training. The process of conducting Initial Referral Discussions (IRD) has been strengthened and the gathering of information from health

and education services has been improved. Communication between Social Care managers and the Children's Reporter has been improved and there are clearer arrangements for using legal measures to keep children safe. Social workers now carry out suitability checks with police and health services when they need to place children in the care of friends and relatives in an emergency. Overall, there are signs that staff are responding promptly and more effectively to concerns about children.

3.3 Improve assessments of risks and needs

An early start has been made to improving assessments of risks and needs. Social workers are now more likely to submit assessment reports to the Children's Reporter on time. School nurses and health visitors are completing health assessments for vulnerable children and families. Managers have appropriate plans to help staff improve the quality and consistency of assessments of risks and needs and staff are keen to further develop their skills. Training and practitioner forums are planned to assist staff to improve their knowledge and skills. These will include guidance on working with children affected by parental substance misuse and building helpful dated lists of significant events. Recent multi agency training to support the implementation of GIRFEC is helping staff to develop a shared understanding of assessing need and providing assistance for children and families.

3.4 Improve plans for children and ensure that their individual needs are met

A very positive start has been made to improve the planning for children to ensure their individual needs are met. Improved coordination of child protection meetings is helping to increase the attendance of relevant staff and ensure that written reports are submitted in good time. The role of core group meetings has been strengthened to ensure children and families get the help and support they need. They are now taking place more regularly and continue to take place once children's names are removed from the Child Protection Register (CPR). Further improvements

will enhance the important role of core group meetings in measuring progress in reducing risks and meeting children's needs. The chair of child protection case conferences is now challenging those situations where plans for children do not result in quick and effective improvements in their lives. Staff are becoming more aware of the importance of taking children's views into account when making decisions about their lives. The support of an independent advocate is now available to children whose names are on the CPR. Staff are starting to share the content of their written reports with children and parents in advance of decision making meetings routinely. Reviews of children who are looked after at home or in kinship care have started. The backlog of children waiting for permanent new families has been cleared.

3.5 Develop more effective ways of identifying what services need to do to improve and involve children, families and staff more fully in these processes

A stronger approach is emerging to reviewing how well services are protecting children. Services have undertaken a range of audits and reviews. Chief Officers, the CPC and managers appreciate the benefit of reviewing their work and taking action to improve those aspects which need to change. The CPC now recognises the importance of looking closely at information to monitor the effectiveness of services to protect children. The information now available to the CPC has improved significantly. Partners are in a better position to support and challenge each other and to plan improvements. Staff are beginning to be more involved in reviewing their own work. Multi-agency practitioner forums have been used well to share good practice and encourage staff to think more about how well their work is improving children's lives. Together, services are devising new ways of involving children, parents and carers in reviewing services. A positive example is the involvement of children in developing corporate parenting.

3.6 Strengthen leadership of the CPC to improve services to protect children

Chief Officers have made significant progress in strengthening the leadership of the CPC. The Council's Chief Executive quickly appointed an independent chair who has improved the leadership of the CPC and introduced robust challenge to its work. The role and purpose of the CPC have been revisited and the governance arrangements strengthened. Members of the CPC are now much clearer about their responsibilities. The CPC has established a clearer identity for staff and the public by adopting a distinctive logo. An ambitious shared vision for the protection of children has now been developed. Links between the CPC and other relevant partnerships, particularly the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP), have been reinforced. The CPC is now meeting more regularly, participation has improved and there is a stronger focus on supporting continuous improvement. It has begun to develop its role in quality assuring services to protect children and has made a very positive start to reviewing performance information. A stronger focus on involving children, families and staff is being promoted. Together, services are now in a much improved position to identify what is working better as a result of their actions.

4. Conclusion

Chief Officers are taking effective action to ensure progress is being made against all of the agreed areas for improvement. Together, they are prioritising and making progress in those areas which present the greatest risk for the safety of children. Improved partnerships and team work together with stronger leadership of the CPC provide a firm foundation for continued service improvement. Although many improvements to processes and practice are still at a very early stage, there are clear signs of improvements which should lead to long term and sustainable progress. Chief Officers recognise that there is still considerable work to be done and demonstrate a strong commitment to carrying this out.

They should ensure that the merger of key service areas by Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils consolidates the improvements made and further strengthens the quality of services to protect children.

5. What happens next?

Inspectors will revisit the Stirling area within one year of the publication of this report to evaluate progress in meeting the agreed areas for improvement.

Managing inspector: Jacquie Pepper
August 2011

To find out more about inspections or get an electronic copy of this report go to www.scswis.com

If you wish to comment about any of our inspections, contact us at enquiries@scswis.com or alternatively you should write in the first instance to SCSWIS, Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY.

Our complaints procedure is available from our website www.scswis.com or alternatively you can write to our Complaints Team, at the address above or by telephoning **0845 600 9527**.

If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to SPSO, Freepost EH641, Edinburgh EH3 OBR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spso.org.uk More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website at www.spso.org.uk.

This report uses the following word scale to make clear judgements made by inspectors.

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

Headquarters

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY
Tel: 01382 207100
Fax: 01382 207289

DUNDEE

Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY
Tel: 01382 207200
Fax: 01382 207288

PAISLEY

4th Floor
1 Smithhills Street
Paisley
PA1 1EB
Tel: 0141 843 4230
Fax: 0141 843 4289

ABERDEEN

Johnstone House
Rose Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1UD
Tel: 01224 793870
Fax: 01224 793899

MUSSELBURGH

Stuart House
Eskmill
Musselburgh
EH21 7PB
Tel: 0131 653 4100
Fax: 0131 653 4149

HAMILTON

Princes Gate
Castle Street
Hamilton
ML3 6BU
Tel: 01698 208150
Fax: 01698 282162

GLASGOW

Europa Building, Ground Floor
450 Argyle Street
Glasgow G2 8LG
Tel: 0141 242 0391
Fax: 0141 242 0425

SCSWIS Enquiries: 0845 600 9527

Website: www.scswis.com

Email: enquiries@scswis.com

This publication is available in other formats and other languages on request.

© Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland 2011
Published by: Communications



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

420