



Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in the South Ayrshire Council area

March 2012



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

The inspection of services to protect children¹ in the South Ayrshire Council area was carried out in November and December 2011. We looked at the services provided by health, the police, the council and the Children's Reporter. We also looked at the services provided by voluntary and independent organisations. Our report describes how good they are at protecting children and keeping them safe. To find this out we read a sample of children's files which were held by these services. We talked to a number of children and their parents and carers to listen to their views about the services they had received. We also spoke to staff in these services who worked with children, parents and carers and to senior managers who were responsible for these staff and the services they provided.

What we found and tell you about in this report is based on a sample of children and families. We cannot promise that this will be the same for every child in the area who might need help.

A team of inspectors gathered all the information and helped to write this report. These inspectors have experience of working across the range of services involved in protecting children. Inspection teams include professional staff who work in council areas elsewhere in Scotland.

The Care Inspectorate carried out inspections of South Ayrshire Council fostering and adoption services linked to the inspection of services to protect children. Any recommendations or requirements are reported on the Care Inspectorate website, www.careinspectorate.com

¹ When we refer to children in this report we mean children and young people under the age of 18 years

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1. The area

South Ayrshire is situated in the south-west of Scotland. It covers an area of 1,222 square kilometres. South Ayrshire Council area has a population of 111,440 with 18.6% under the age of 18 years compared to the Scottish average of 20.5%.

The number of children referred to the council for child protection enquiries increased between 2007 and 2010. The level of referrals remains lower than that for Scotland as a whole. The proportion of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) in South Ayrshire is 2.4 per 1000 which is lower than the national average of 2.8 per thousand.

2. Particular strengths that made a difference to children and families

- Highly flexible support provided to meet children and families' needs at an early stage.
- Staff sharing responsibility and working very well together to meet children's needs and improve their future outcomes.
- Very effective work by staff to gain children and families' trust and confidence.
- Clear leadership and direction which is motivating staff to make and sustain improvements.

3. Examples of good practice

- Helping children and young people learn about the risks of alcohol and how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Health, education and social work staff working together to ensure the most vulnerable young children get the best possible start.
- Providing young people with easy access to sexual health advice and support to promote their physical and emotional well-being.

4. How well are the needs of children and families met?

Staff work closely with vulnerable children and families to make sure they get the help they need at an early stage to prevent difficulties arising or increasing. Almost all vulnerable pregnant women are identified and supported quickly, allowing them to care better for their babies. Families benefit greatly from a wide range of practical and emotional supports which are provided flexibly to meet their particular needs. Parents are helped to respond better to their children through a variety of parenting programmes. Children and parents are given useful support from staff in pre-school centres. Services work very effectively together to provide targeted support to reduce risks where children are affected by domestic abuse or parental substance misuse. Staff are very effective at helping children learn to keep themselves safe when using mobile phones and the internet.

Staff across services, including those who work mainly with adults, are alert to risks to children and take prompt and very effective action to keep them safe when concerns arise. During office hours, concerns about children are now responded to very quickly and consistently. This includes concerns that children might be at risk of emotional abuse and neglect. As a result, staff are taking more effective action to protect children who may be at risk of neglect. On occasion, West of Scotland Standby Service (WSSS) responds to concerns raised at evenings and weekends by telephone when it would be more appropriate to visit families to ensure children's safety. Police officers responding to incidents where children may be vulnerable do not always pass on concerns so that risks to children can be fully assessed. As a result, a few children may not get the help they need quickly enough.

Staff make effective use of legal measures to keep children safe. Children are found emergency placements without delay when needed and staff check to ensure it is safe when placing children with family members. Staff take care to keep families very well informed during child protection investigations.

Vulnerable children benefit from staff working very effectively together to provide a range of supports at times when it is most needed, including at evenings and weekends. Helpfully, support continues when children's names are removed from the CPR. Education staff understand how children may be affected by their home circumstances and use helpful approaches to improve children's learning. Vulnerable children, including looked after children, are having their health needs assessed regularly and met without delay. Foster carers provide high quality care which helps children thrive. Relatives who take on the care of children when they cannot grow up with their parents would benefit from more support to help them meet children's needs. In most cases, staff are making speedier decisions about the long term future for children who are unable to return to their parents' care, giving them a better chance of a stable life. Children's mental health needs are now being assessed much more quickly. However, there can still be delays in children receiving the treatment they need to recover from abuse and neglect.

Education staff are clear about what to do when children go missing from nursery or school. They take appropriate action without delay. Positive relationships between police and residential staff help to keep young people safe when they run away from care placements. Managers recognise the need to develop their processes to ensure an appropriate response to young people who run away, including those who run away from their own homes. The Child Protection Committee (CPC) is helping staff develop their practice in response to children who may be brought into or moved around the country illegally. Gay and lesbian young people are supported well by local services working together effectively with national organisations such as Stonewall Scotland and the Terence Higgins Trust.

Children and families benefit from trusting relationships with staff who know them very well. They work hard to gain the confidence of families who are resistant to accepting help. Staff are clear but sensitive with parents about what needs to change to make children's lives better. Families speak highly of the support they receive. Most are confident that staff listen to them and take their views very seriously when decisions

are made about them. In almost all cases, staff are alert to changes in children's behaviour as an indicator of their well-being. Children and some parents are helped to express their views with the help of high quality independent support. Families know how to challenge decisions and are well supported to do so. Interpreting services are readily available if needed.

5. How good is the management and delivery of services?

The Chief Officers Group (COG), CPC and senior managers are highly committed to continuously improving services through reviewing and evaluating their own work. Managers in all services are monitoring the quality of their staff's work. Most are working hard to develop ways of finding out how effective their services are at improving experiences and outcomes for children. Managers recognise they need to build on this work to learn what difference services working together are making to vulnerable children and families. The CPC has set up a group with representatives from all key services to develop ways of helping staff reflect on their practice and consult with children and families about how well they are being helped. Together, they have reviewed some practice through reading case records and identified what is working well and what could be improved. Staff feel well supported by their managers and keen to help take this work forward.

Assessment of children's needs continues to be of high quality. The quality of risk assessment has improved significantly. Staff feel very confident about raising concerns about children at an early stage as a result of a strengthening of the social work duty system, improved information sharing systems and the introduction of multi-agency screening of domestic abuse incidents. In most cases, they work well together to identify and assess risks and plan ways of making children safer. Staff competence and confidence has increased through the consistent use of common assessment tools, high quality training and strengthened support and supervision from managers. Building on the good practice

demonstrated by some staff, more work is now needed to help all staff make best use of chronologies to assess risks to children, particularly those who may be at risk of emotional abuse or neglect.

Health, police and social work staff work together well during office hours to gather all available information and plan child protection investigations. At evenings and weekends, police and WSSS do not always contact the on-call paediatrician when they should and sometimes still make decisions about whether children should have a medical examination without advice from an appropriate health professional. Where medical staff are contacted, children are benefiting from increased capacity from paediatricians and improved examination facilities. A very helpful system for carrying out comprehensive medical assessments for children at risk of neglect is being developed.

Appropriate procedures are in place to guide police, social work and housing staff to manage the risks posed to children by registered sex offenders.

6. How good is leadership and direction?

Leadership and direction has improved significantly and this is having a very positive impact on staff and their joint work to protect children. Collectively, Chief Officers have now agreed a shared vision, values and aims for child protection and have communicated it effectively to managers and staff within and across services. The COG and the CPC are working well together, providing strong and effective leadership and direction. Together with elected members, they have demonstrated their commitment to supporting vulnerable children and families and the staff who work with them. As a result, staff understand clearly the priority that needs to be given to this area of work. They also recognise and are benefiting from the improved leadership and direction and feel valued and supported better in their work. Partnership working within and across services has been strengthened and staff across services are now working together more effectively to meet children and families' needs. Further

work is needed to ensure police managers and staff are always fully and effectively involved in joint working arrangements.

7. How are services improving?

The needs of vulnerable children are given high priority in plans to guide the development of children's services, including the Integrated Children's Services Plan (ICSP). Senior managers carefully monitor their implementation. They are reviewing the system for tracking progress against the ICSP so they can be sure that outcomes for the most vulnerable children continue to improve. Through closer co operation with colleagues in neighbouring authorities, plans are well advanced for a number of important developments, including the establishment of an Ayrshire-wide out-of-hours social work service. School exclusions have reduced, the health needs of all looked after children are now assessed and followed up promptly and support for children experiencing domestic abuse has been strengthened. There have been improvements in social workers' initial response to concerns, initial and comprehensive risk assessment and arrangements for medical examinations. Senior managers recognise that further work is needed to build on these improvements to ensure all children get the help they need when they need it. Improving the quality of the management information collected is a recognised priority. Managers' commitment and approach to reviewing their own work has helped them in making these improvements. Together, they should continue to focus on agreed priorities, ensuring improvement plans fully involve staff at all levels and are informed by the views of vulnerable children and families.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that the services will be able to make the necessary improvements in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Our link inspector will maintain contact with services to support improvements.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with services in the South Ayrshire Council area.

- Improve front-line police officers' recognition of risks to children, ensuring information is shared promptly to allow risks and needs to be fully assessed.
- Continue to strengthen approaches to joint self-evaluation and ensure that these are informed by children and families' views about the impact of the services they receive.

Quality indicators help services and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work to protect children and meet their needs. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication **How well do we protect children and meet their needs?** Following the inspection of each local authority area, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of four important quality indicators to keep track of how well services across Scotland are doing to protect children and meet their needs.

Here are the evaluations of these for the South Ayrshire Council area.

Children are listened to and respected	very good
Children are helped to keep safe	very good
Response to immediate concerns	good
Meeting needs and reducing long term harm	very good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work within the local authority area.

Self-evaluation	good
Improvements in performance	very good

Managing Inspector: Helen Happer
March 2012

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This report uses the following word scale to make clear the 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

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本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

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