



SCSWIS

social care
and social work
improvement scotland

Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in Aberdeen City Council area

9 June 2011



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

The inspection of services to protect children¹ in the Aberdeen City Council area was carried out in March 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 Commission carried out inspections of Aberdeen City fostering and adoption services linked to the inspection of services to protect children. Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) has now taken over the work of the Care Commission so any recommendations or requirements are reported on the SCSWIS website, www.scswis.com

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

Contents

1.	The area	1
2.	Particular strengths that make a difference to children and families	2
3.	Examples of good practice	2
4.	How well are the needs of children and families met?	2
5.	How good is the management and delivery of services?	4
6.	How good is leadership and direction?	6
7.	How are services improving?	6
8.	What happens next?	7

1. The area

Aberdeen City is situated in the north east of Scotland. It covers an area of 187 square kilometres and is the third largest city in Scotland. Aberdeen City has a population of 213,810 with 17.8% under the age of 18 years compared to the Scottish average of 20.1%.

The number of children referred to the council for child protection enquiries decreased between 2007 and 2010. The level of referrals is lower than that for Scotland as a whole. The proportion of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) in Aberdeen City is 3.6 per 1000 which is higher than the national average of 2.8 per 1000.

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

- Trusting relationships and regular communication with staff.
- Support to maintain positive relationships through high quality contact between children who are looked after and their families.

3. Examples of good practice

- Helping parents to encourage their children's development through the Parents as Early Education Partners (PEEP).
- Providing quick and effective help and support for young people who run away.

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

Children benefit from useful advice to help them keep safe. They receive valuable guidance on how to stay safe when using the internet and mobile phones. A helpful range of support services is usually used well to help families at an early stage. Parents receive valuable guidance to improve their parenting skills and families benefit from practical support. Families receive helpful support and guidance to manage the effects of parental mental ill-health, substance misuse and domestic abuse. Pregnant women affected by substance misuse are identified early in pregnancy and support plans are usually arranged quickly. Help is not always provided early enough to all vulnerable children and families to prevent their circumstances from getting worse. A few children miss out when their families do not cooperate fully or attend appointments. The Pre-Referral

Screening Group (PRS) is sharing information about children who may need support and protection. Services now need to make sure that these children receive the help they need quickly.

Overall, staff across services are alert to the signs that children may be at risk of abuse or neglect. These concerns are usually reported promptly and effectively and staff provide the necessary help and support to keep children safe. Some staff are not clear about where, or to whom they should refer their concerns. There are delays in responding to or investigating reported concerns which could place a few children at risk. Joint investigations are carried out by suitably trained police and social work staff. Children and families are kept informed of the progress of investigations and supported well throughout.

Children are found suitable alternative places to live when it is no longer safe for them to remain at home. Staff carry out appropriate checks to ensure that relatives and friends are suitable to care for children in an emergency but do not always record this well. They make appropriate use of legal measures to help keep children safe in most instances but for a few children staff rely inappropriately on voluntary arrangements.

Some children have their needs met well and as a result their lives improve. Many children are benefiting from the help they receive from their social worker. Education services support children well when they experience difficulties at home. Children with complex health difficulties and those looked after away from home have their health needs met well. Foster carers are providing children with high quality care to meet their needs. Support from staff at the Children's Contact Centre is helping to maintain and strengthen family relationships. Parents benefit from intensive help with parenting and emotional support to help them better meet the needs of their children. Staff do not always carefully identify and plan to meet children's longer term needs and as a result these are not always met fully. There is a shortage of foster carers for older children and some children who are unable to return home are waiting too long for a permanent place to live. Some children receive help to overcome the effects of abuse and trauma in good time, others wait too long to get the help they need.

Staff take appropriate action when children go missing from school or nursery. Highly effective procedures are in place to ensure young people who run away are returned safely and helped to overcome their difficulties. Services have made an early start in considering how best to respond to children who have been brought into or moved around the country illegally. A range of well established multi-agency services provide helpful advice and support to gay and lesbian young people.

Staff communicate well and build trust with children and families. When children are too young or are unable to communicate their worries, staff carefully observe changes in their behaviour. Most children are benefiting from seeing their social worker regularly and develop trusting relationships with them. A few children and families experience too many changes of social worker, or do not see them often enough. Children and families are encouraged to attend and participate in decision-making meetings and to express their views. Children and families whose first language is not English are usually well supported by interpreters. Children who are looked after away from home benefit from an independent supporter to express their views when important decisions are made. Other children and families would benefit from this type of support.

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

Staff have an increasing awareness of the need to share information to protect children from harm. Training is helping them to recognise when to share information and they are becoming more confident and skilful in this. The police provide detailed information to help staff to assess risks and make decisions about children's safety. The recording of information has improved across services but the quality and accuracy of records is still variable, particularly in health records. Staff, including children and families social workers, are working well together to manage the risks posed to children by sex offenders.

The assessment of risks and needs is beginning to improve but the quality of this work is still very variable. A few high quality assessments are leading to well-considered actions and carefully thought out plans to meet the longer term needs of children. Staff need to give more attention to the effects of parents' substance use, domestic abuse or neglect on children. Managers need to regularly review assessments of risks and needs and ensure these are of a consistently high quality. Initial Referral Discussions (IRD) are helping to share information and to plan child protection investigations but their purpose is not well understood by all relevant staff. These now need to be carried out more consistently and a record kept of the decisions made. Medical examinations are carried out very effectively by suitably trained children's doctors in a child friendly environment.

The effectiveness of planning to protect children and meet their needs is improving. Child protection case conferences are now more likely to be attended by all relevant staff. The attendance of relevant health staff at case conferences and core group meetings could be further improved. The quality of decision-making at child protection case conferences has improved and decisions to remove children's names from the CPR are based on firm evidence. The quality of plans to keep children safe is much improved. These plans now need to focus more on meeting children's needs. Managers need to support staff to develop plans which identify clear outcomes for children and ensure that core group meetings regularly review the progress of these plans.

A number of new social work posts have been created and staff have been re-organised to improve the service to children and families. There are more social workers out of office hours to respond to children and families. The Council is developing a workforce strategy which will help to recruit and retain staff.

Across services, senior managers are committed to reviewing their work to improve services for children. Some services have had a closer look at how well they are protecting children and meeting their needs. The North East Scotland Child Protection Committee (NESPC) has reviewed some important areas of work. More locally, services have only just begun to

review their work together and are at the very early stages of identifying priorities for improvement. Services should build upon the positive start made in seeking the views of children, families and staff about the quality of services.

6. How good is leadership and direction?

Chief Officers have updated their shared vision for protecting children. They have reviewed their responsibilities and accountability for child protection is now much clearer. They have established the Aberdeen City Child Protection Sub-Committee (ACCPSC) in addition to the NESCP to take forward work to improve services to protect children within Aberdeen City Council area. Staff are beginning to understand the vision and they have a stronger purpose for their work. A shared responsibility for protecting children is growing across services and among all levels of staff. Stronger leadership is needed to ensure that the contribution of health services at an operational level continues to improve for children in need of protection. Chief Officers and senior managers have strengthened partnership working. Services in the voluntary sector are now playing a key role in all important partnership groups. A culture of support and challenge among services is growing. Members of the ACCPSC are developing a shared understanding of child protection and a team approach to improving services is emerging. The professional leadership and direction provided to social work staff has improved notably with the establishment of the Directorate for Social Care and Well-Being.

7. How are services improving?

Senior managers have successfully carried out a large amount of work to improve services to protect children. The structures in Aberdeen City Council have been changed and services re-designed. The planning groups for services for children have been reviewed and strengthened. The draft Integrated Children's Services Plan has taken good account of the work of the ACCPSC to help keep children safe and has clear aims about what it

plans to achieve. Together, services are working towards a Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) approach to supporting children and families.

Services have focused on improving their immediate actions to protect children from abuse and this has improved significantly. Positive improvements have been made in important processes to protect children including the sharing of information and planning to meet children's needs. Further work is needed to enhance the quality of work carried out to protect children and reduce inconsistencies in practice. A helpful start has been made to develop systems to measure performance but these are not yet sufficiently linked to clearly identified outcomes for vulnerable children. Together, services now need to identify and implement priorities which will improve the experiences of children and families in need of protection.

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 and monitor improvements.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with services in the Aberdeen City Council area.

- Ensure that vulnerable children and families get the help they need quickly.
- Make it easier for people to report concerns about children and ensure that staff respond to these concerns without delay.
- Improve the help and support for children to recover from abuse and neglect.
- Develop and put in place effective ways of reviewing the quality of services to improve key processes and outcomes for children.

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. 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 Aberdeen City Council area.

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

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

Self-evaluation	weak
Improvements in performance	good

Managing Inspector: Jacquie Pepper
June 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 0BR. You can also telephone 0800 377 7330, fax 0800 377 7331 or e-mail: ask@spsso.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website at www.spsso.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