

Services for children and young people in South Ayrshire

May 2018

**Progress review following a
joint inspection**



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1. Background to this progress review

The Care Inspectorate together with Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland carried out a joint inspection of services for children and young people in the South Ayrshire community planning partnership area between April and June 2016. You can find our report, published in October 2016, on our website at www.careinspectorate.com.

At that time, we were not confident that leaders were working effectively together or that children's services planning and the work of the child protection committee was resulting in improvements in the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The locality model that was in place to access and allocate resources was overly bureaucratic and meant that children, young people and families were not getting the help they needed at an early enough stage. Too many young people aged 11-15 years were being accommodated away from home.

We identified five areas for improvement and gave notice that we would return at a later date to report on progress. We subsequently provided support and monitored the implementation of the South Ayrshire strategic children's services partnership's joint improvement plan through our link inspector arrangements.

2. How we conducted this progress review

A team comprising strategic inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Education Scotland undertook a range of activities in the community planning partnership area over five days during the week beginning 29 January 2018. We set out to review the five improvement areas that gave greatest concern in the previous inspection. **These are listed in appendix 1.**

During this review we:

- carried out a staff survey completed by 195 staff across health, police, education, social work and social care services, third sector and other council staff such as youth workers and quality assurance and improvement officers
- reviewed the partnership's self-evaluation of progress made against the five recommendations for improvement along with supporting evidence they provided
- held multi-agency focus groups with first-line managers and frontline staff
- met with chief officers, senior managers and elected members
- met with 10 children and young people representing the youth forum and three young people working with the champions board
- took account of the work carried out over the previous 18 months by the Care Inspectorate link inspector and the Education Scotland area lead officer.

3. Our findings

The partnership's approach to improvement

Partners fully accepted the inspection findings published in October 2016 and promptly began to work closely together to develop and implement a comprehensive improvement plan to address the identified weaknesses. Elected members, chief officers and other strategic leads were outward looking; seeking advice and support from a range of external sources. They explored and adopted examples of good practice from across the other Ayrshire authorities and other parts of the country.

While the current children's services plan is due to conclude in 2020, the partnership acknowledged the scale of improvements required and were committed to a change programme that will take them beyond this timescale. Strategic leadership and governance has been significantly strengthened and partners have been collectively striving to ensure services were keeping children and young people safe and working to improve their wellbeing.

Improvement Area 1: strengthen strategic leadership and direction through effective collaborative working and joint management of resources to drive an improvement and change programme at pace

Significant progress had been made at an appropriate pace of change in this improvement area, which was prioritised following the joint inspection.

Strategic leadership and direction had been significantly strengthened across the partnership. Importantly, the political leadership and commitment to vulnerable children had also improved markedly. Since the last inspection, partners had collectively agreed that their key priority is early and effective intervention and subsequently were working closely together to deliver five agreed outcomes that support this priority. Considerable cross-party political commitment had been given to prioritising the needs of vulnerable children and young people, through financial investments in approaches to early and effective intervention in order to close outcome gaps associated with deprivation.

Governance and reporting arrangements had been significantly strengthened by the introduction of a programme for effective governance and more direct lines of accountability from the children's services planning group to chief officers and the community planning executive group.

We found that a genuine ownership and commitment to the new vision for children, with a focus on vulnerable children and young people and closing the attainment gap experienced by children living in poverty, had directed activity and provided clear focus. In turn, this vision was driving progress in meeting the strategic objectives set out within the local outcomes and improvement plan 2017-20 and the children's services plan 2017-2020.

Leaders and senior managers were more visible to staff than when we inspected previously. We were encouraged by the successful approaches to communicating and engaging with staff who felt well informed about key objectives and reported

confidence that their views and perspectives on how best to deliver the vision are being taken into account.

Considerable financial resources had been committed to children's services. However, joint strategic commissioning and deployment of these resources remained under-developed and was not progressing as quickly as the partnership had hoped. While there was no overarching strategic approach in place, we were encouraged to hear partners' views on how they planned to progress this important work. They were beginning to use data about assessed need, joint self-evaluations, information from the GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) authority resource forum (GARF), and the 'team around the child' locality model to ensure resources were effectively targeted to the children and young people in greatest need.

We are confident that collaborative leadership has become more effective, with a clear and shared vision providing strong direction. Revised governance arrangements have been providing strong reporting and accountability structures. With these important foundations in place, the partnership is well placed to drive further improvements at an appropriate pace of change.

Improvement Area 2: Demonstrate improving trends in closing outcome gaps in the early years for children growing up in communities affected by poverty and deprivation

Partners were making encouraging progress towards demonstrating improving trends in closing outcome gaps in the early years for children growing up in communities affected by poverty and deprivation. This had been underpinned by a shared commitment from leaders to work in partnership to close outcome gaps with a clear focus in the children's services plan on addressing child poverty.

Multi-agency approaches involving a range of specialist staff had made good use of the well embedded pupil equity fund and the attainment challenge funding to improve outcomes.

Initiatives such as the holiday lunches project and food banks were having a positive impact on families experiencing food poverty. As a result of more flexible travel arrangements such as passes for local buses, access to out of school activities for young people living in more rural areas had improved. Effective use of pupil equity funding was helping achieve improved outcomes for children and young people, with early evidence indicating improving trends in literacy and numeracy. Challenging targets had been set by the education service in relation to closing the gap in attainment, attendance and exclusions. Post school destinations for young people who are looked after have improved. Partners demonstrated commitment to ensuring that looked after children achieve as well as their peers.

More systematic and consistent use of the AYRshare performance framework was contributing to partners being able to demonstrate improved health outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

The joint improvement group was making good use of evidence from regular self-evaluation activities and information used from improved data collection was

resulting in more effective and creative targeting of resources towards the most vulnerable families.

There is potential to better capture and evaluate the rich source of performance information available from a range of sources. This would help to ensure a more accurate picture of how the outcome gap was being closed. While staff were confident that they were making a difference to the lives of vulnerable children, a more robust and transparent data collection mechanism that included additional qualitative data, would help staff and the partnership demonstrate impact on, and improved outcomes for, children and young people.

Improvement Area 3: Urgently reduce the number of young people aged 11-15 years starting to be accommodated away from home by taking a multi-agency approach.

Partners were making steady progress towards addressing this recommendation. The change of political administration in 2017, with a stronger focus on, and financial investment in, children's services, had contributed to an increase in momentum over the last seven months.

Partners had been making positive and meaningful progress in shifting the balance of care from children being accommodated away from home to more flexible and responsive community-based alternatives. Local performance data showed a reduction in the numbers of young people aged 11-15 years starting to become looked after away from home, from 19 to 11, between 2015 and 2017.

The needs of children and young people who were looked after away from home had been given appropriate focus in the children's services plan and we are encouraged that resources were being redirected to support more coordinated and creative approaches to early intervention. We found positive examples of external consultation being used to drive a redesign of services. Examples included work with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) and financial investment in the development of intensive family supports aimed at changing the way services were being delivered to prevent children and young people being accommodated. While these were encouraging steps, a greater effort will now be required to ensure that the new approaches are fully implemented.

The champions' board had been raising awareness of the experiences and care journeys of children and young people who are looked after. This included a programme of education for professionals and elected members and guidance for committees and panels making decisions. The exchange of letters between looked after children and their corporate parents demonstrated a clear motivation on the part of the corporate parents to maintain a focus on their legislative responsibilities. Young people told us they will continue to hold their corporate parents to account.

Overall, encouraging progress is being made to reduce the numbers of children who need to be looked after away from home and increase the understanding and ownership by corporate parents of their duties and responsibilities. We would encourage partners to now build on the momentum and commitment we have seen

demonstrated by leaders across all levels and by the staff and young people to sustain these developments into the future.

Improvement Area 4: Progress plans to deliver a locality model of integrated service delivery, ensuring that children and young people get the right help at the right time

Partners had made sound progress in developing and delivering a more efficient locality model of integrated service delivery. The previous model of multi-agency locality forums was considered bureaucratic and cumbersome by partners and created barriers to families getting the right help at the right time. Since then, partners had revised their locality model. The locality forums were replaced by a 'team around the child' model, which included a request for assistance process where services are accessed directly by people undertaking the role of named person or lead professional. Staff and managers were confident that the request for assistance process was having a positive impact and was being used well. Partners should monitor and measure response times to ensure that families get the right support at the right time.

Following an initial pilot in the Kyle Academy cluster area, the team around the child model was rolled out across South Ayrshire. Partners, including staff in adult services, were becoming more confident about their role. We were encouraged that children and families were now more engaged and involved in the process, with their views being routinely sought. While partners spoke positively about the benefits of the model with regards to improved joint working arrangements, consistency of practice and shared language, there was limited evidence, beyond anecdote, to show the difference this model was making to the lives of children, young people and families. An evaluation of the model is planned for May 2018.

Partners had also introduced four multi-agency 'teams around the locality' that covered the whole of South Ayrshire as part of their strategic approach to embed GIRFEC across all children's services activity. We recognised that while they were in the early stages of development, they had the potential to help partners identify emerging issues and risks for particular localities and provide a platform for sharing and disseminating relevant information. Positively, the teams around the locality were seen as a forum to bring together practitioners from across a range of services and promote opportunities for staff to take forward and report on small tests of change.

While it is early days in terms of being able to measure the impact of this approach, positive steps are being made to progress the delivery of a locality model of integrated service delivery. There is a confidence amongst staff with a clear commitment to ensure that children and young people are getting the right help and the right time.

Improvement Area 5: Deliver specific and measureable improvements in the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable groups of children and young people through effective children's services planning and the work of the child protection committee.

There had been considerable improvements in key aspects of children's services planning since the joint inspection in 2016. The children's services planning group had been refreshed and was now taking overall responsibility for coordinating activities and monitoring progress. The sub-group structure had become more streamlined and groups were more closely aligned with the five key priority outcomes. While it was early days for these new arrangements, this simplified and more streamlined structure, with its clearer governance and reporting arrangements, had the potential to effectively support the delivery and measurement of the key improvement priorities.

The children's services plan was focused on outcomes and was supported by the more detailed action plan and performance framework that was enabling progress against each of the indicators to be monitored and updated. While baseline measures and targets were in place for many indicators, inclusion of short- and medium-term targets as well as impact targets would enable partners to more effectively measure progress over the lifespan of the plan.

We were encouraged that partners had been working well together to develop a strategic assessment of the needs of children and families that underpinned children's services planning and child protection, and were making promising progress with this. Although at an early stage, it was helping partners begin to make better use of data, analyse trends and examine data about areas of deprivation. Partners have more work to do on the strategic needs assessment, and have the support of the Realigning Children's Services team at Scottish Government to help with this.

The child protection committee had led some positive pieces of joint self-evaluation work since the inspection in 2016. In particular, work to review the effectiveness of practice in relation to high-risk pregnancies was helping partners demonstrate improving outcomes for vulnerable babies and very young children. More recent work examining practice at key stages of the child protection process, while still at an early stage of implementation, was encouraging. It should provide the child protection committee with real-time information about the effectiveness of practice and the impact of this on children involved in the child protection system.

A revised performance management information report included a helpful narrative to support the data. The report continued to highlight predominantly volume and frequency data about key processes such as case conferences and child protection registrations. Nonetheless, the qualitative data emerging from the audit work undertaken by the child protection committee will provide partners with more meaningful impact information.

Partners were taking forward a number of improvement activities and the joint improvement group had developed a joint self-evaluation strategy. References to children in need of protection were limited. A single approach to joint self-evaluation

or a quality assurance framework across children's services planning and child protection committee business would enable partners to more effectively co-ordinate improvement activities, identify gaps and help prioritise future activity.

The child protection committee had used the Covalent project management tool to set out the five improvement priorities in the business plan. While this was a helpful way of monitoring and updating progress, the actions mainly described processes and tasks and did not link to outcomes for children in need of protection. The absence of baseline information, performance indicators or targets, made it difficult to see how the child protection committee will measure improvement against their priorities.

Overall, we found that some progress has been made by the child protection committee in the delivery of key processes but more work is now required to better demonstrate improved outcomes for children in need of protection.

4. Conclusion

Partners had been working hard to deliver change and improvement. They had prioritised strengthening their collaborative leadership and strategic planning arrangements and they now need to build on this work and use it to move forward in the other improvement areas.

Partners acknowledged that they had been able to give little attention as yet to developing an approach to joint strategic management of resources and commissioning and that this will need to be part of the improvement work, going forward. While there had been good progress in the gathering of performance data and associated reporting mechanisms, much of the data gathered was quantitative. It will be important for the partnership to include more qualitative data to be able to better articulate the difference that is being made in terms of outcomes and impact.

Partners recognised they needed to maintain the current momentum and energy levels if they were going to achieve sustained improvement and change. Nonetheless, we were encouraged by the clear cultural shift in the refocusing of priorities. Staff were more confident and there were stronger signs of joint responsibility, respectful, professional and focused multi-agency approaches at all levels.

5. What happens next?

Given the progress made and our confidence that leaders have the conditions in place for continued improvement we will not be undertaking any further reviews in relation to the 2016 joint inspection. We will continue to offer support as required and monitor progress through our routine link inspector arrangements.

Appendix 1: Improvement areas arising from the joint inspection of services for children and young people in South Ayrshire community planning partnership area (October 2016)

- Strengthen strategic leadership and direction through effective collaborative working and joint management of resources to drive an improvement and change programme at pace.
- Demonstrate improving trends in closing outcome gaps in the early years for children growing up in communities affected by poverty and deprivation.
- Urgently reduce the number of young people aged 11-15 years starting to be accommodated away from home by taking a multi-agency approach.
- Progress plans to deliver a locality model of integrated service delivery, ensuring that children and young people get the right help at the right time.
- Deliver specific and measurable improvements in the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable groups of children and young people through effective children's services planning and the work of the child protection committee.

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