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Our Ref: CL/HH

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Chair of the children and young people's partnership  
(Chief Social Work Officer)  
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Dear Sharon

I am writing to you in your role as chair of the Clackmannanshire children and young people's partnership on behalf of the scrutiny bodies who worked with us to support your self-evaluation and improvement work. These are the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Between 23 August 2021 and 10 November 2021, inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and Healthcare Improvement Scotland worked in collaboration with the Clackmannanshire children and young people's partnership. Together we undertook a focussed programme of self-evaluation and improvement work to support your partnership to make improvements.

This letter outlines the programme of activities and our observations. It will be published on the Care Inspectorate website.

### **Background**

The hiatus in the programme of joint inspections necessitated by the Covid-19 global pandemic meant that we had resource available during 2021/22 to support community planning partners in joint self-evaluation and improvement activity, building on work undertaken already by the Strategic Director (People) and her team.

The aim was to assist partners to prioritise improvement activities, directing improvement actions towards those areas most likely to result in real and lasting benefits for children and families. This work also provided the opportunity for leaders to demonstrate that they are collaborating effectively and taking collective responsibility for putting in place improvements which can be sustained. We would hope to see evidence of positive impact for children, young people and families in any future joint inspection undertaken in the Clackmannanshire area.

## What we did

We worked collaboratively with you and agreed that we would support the children and young people's partnership to:

- consider the extent to which children and young people are safer because they receive the right help at the right time, to reduce risks
- consider how the children and young people partnership had implemented Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC), prevention and earlier intervention as part of the continuum of care and protection

You questioned the reasons for high child protection referral rates and the number of child protection referrals that were subsequently reclassified to welfare concerns. As a partnership, you were keen to explore thresholds and joint working in respect of the above.

Our key aims were to support the children and young people's partnership by introducing improvement and quality assurance frameworks and approaches. We aimed to build your capacity to apply these approaches to your joint quality assurance arrangements and joint self-evaluation in relation to the areas of focus above.

We began our support in August 2021 when we issued a survey to staff from services across the partnership, who work with, or provide support to, vulnerable children and young people and families. This included health visitors, school nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers, and staff working in the voluntary and independent sector. We also invited children, young people, and their carers to complete a survey to give their views of services. This was followed by a series of four workshops focussing on findings from the surveys, on joint self-evaluation and an introduction to improvement science.

In October 2021 we returned to the partnership, introduced the Care Inspectorate's guidance and approach to reviewing children's records, and delivered record reading training. Working alongside 21 local practitioners from partner agencies, we reviewed practice by reading records for a sample of 31 children and young people at risk of harm. This was followed up by a further two workshops: one focussed on the findings from the review of practice and the application of improvement science in relation to assessment and care planning, which was an area of improvement identified through the audit; and the other on thresholds for intervention and joint self-evaluation.

In addition, you provided documents which gave us a broader understanding of the vision, policy, planning and structural context in which you were working as well as examples of your quality assurance activity.

Throughout the activities, partners contributed fully and utilised the Care Inspectorate's quality framework for children and young people in need of care and protection and improvement science to identify areas of strength and improvement, sources of evidence that would support these, and began to list potential future actions. As a result, we consider that as a partnership, you are better sighted on

what you must do. You also have a basis to take forward the improvement work that was ongoing before our involvement. However, to sustain change and improvement, you must ensure that there are robust structures, governance, reporting and oversight arrangements in place.

We note some key observations below:

### **Self-evaluation and quality assurance**

From the outset, you, as a partnership were clear that you routinely carried out self-evaluation. Within the workshops participants described single service audits and evaluations of service delivery. You recognised that individual services were gathering rich data, but not always sharing the analysis and conclusions within and beyond their own service. This meant that you as a partnership were not fully benefitting in terms of being able to use all the available data to help inform planning and improvement of services for children and young people.

Participants involved with the workshops showed a clear interest in developing their approach to joint self-evaluation through becoming more familiar with the Care Inspectorate's quality framework and applying the quality indicators. In the workshops, participants focussed on three quality indicators and jointly identified some strengths and areas for improvement in these key areas. Participants drew information together, identified data from a range of sources and began to explore potential action points. This information will be relevant to support ongoing work in your joint self-evaluation process.

Documents shared by you clearly outlined the high level of audit activity and evaluations that had been taking place. As noted previously, these were mostly single service. We noted that some of the findings from audits were long standing, required improvements had not significantly progressed and continued to be areas of concern for the partnership. As a partnership, you told us that you did not feel able to confidently demonstrate the impact of practice on outcomes for children, young people, and families, without further analysis of data that you currently gather.

You collectively acknowledged that strengthening quality assurance mechanisms with strategic oversight were areas for improvement. We agree with the partnership's view that more work is needed to strengthen the current arrangements for multi-agency strategic oversight and quality assurance.

We believe that the development of a coordinated approach to routine joint-self-evaluation would be a valuable tool that would support you, as a partnership, to answer the three self-evaluation questions: *How good are we now? How do we know?* and *What we plan to do next?*

Members of the children and young people's partnership acknowledged that they would develop a position statement to assist them to fully appreciate where their strengths and areas for improvement lie.

## **Strategic collaborative leadership and governance**

As the key strategic group, your children and young people partnership has oversight of and accountability for the delivery of the priorities in the recently published children's services plan (2021 – 2024).

You were able to identify a number of factors which had contributed to the uncertainty and the capacity of senior managers and leaders to maintain robust oversight of a coordinated and sustainable joint improvement and delivery plan. These included considerable restructuring within Clackmannanshire council and in the last few years significant levels of staff turnover at a leadership level across the partners. This led to a loss of highly experienced representatives within the children and young people's partnership. There are also some significant challenges due to the geography and size of Clackmannanshire and its communities.

Prior to our work commencing, you had started to progress, prioritise and improve practice. You were reviewing existing partnership arrangements. Terms of reference and membership of the children and young people's partnership were being refreshed to ensure relevance, accountability and to strengthen collaborative leadership. As part of one of the workshops, participants identified realistic actions that would support change and encourage ownership of the process. These included embedding a cycle of improvement, developing an integrated improvement delivery plan and more meaningful engagement with staff in the process.

Senior leaders in the partnership took immediate action as a result of the findings from this improvement support work to strengthen and disseminate shared learning for improving processes and practice. You told us that you are already progressing developments in multi-agency practice to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families.

## **Engagement with stakeholders**

You told us that partners regularly engaged with children and young people through surveys. You acknowledged that you did not always share findings or make best use of survey findings and the views of children and young people in relation to strategic planning for children's services. The children's services plan was written within the context of The Promise and collectively, you intend to review the quality of engagement with children and young people and approaches that you use. The findings from the surveys provided your partnership with valuable insights into the views and experiences of children, young people, and carers and from staff across services. We encourage you to add the findings to other survey activity to inform joint self-evaluation activity.

Through the review of records, we found that the majority of children had an opportunity to develop a relationship with a key professional although it was to a lesser extent than the opportunity afforded to parents in the sample. Several areas of strength were identified in relation to the meaningful and appropriate involvement of parents or carers. However, this was less evident with regards to children and young people. You recognised this as an area for improvement and we would encourage you to consider alternative ways to support children to contribute to multi-

agency meetings and explore ways to further improve how children are listened to, heard, and meaningfully involved by staff.

As a result of the surveys and workshops, you recognised the need to review the way you engage with staff and seek their views to meaningfully inform and support the collaborative approach to responding to children at risk of harm. The staff survey indicated different perceptions between services. As a partnership, you acknowledged that you must understand this in order to strengthen ownership of change and active co-production. Through the staff survey we saw respondents identifying strengths and areas for improvement in practice and service delivery. Equally through record reading activity staff across all levels shared aims to disseminate learning to heighten strengths, inform areas for improvement and include others in the change process.

We recognise and support your intention to drive ownership in collaborative working drawing on the experience and expertise from staff at all levels.

### **Improving practice**

Prior to the initiation of this self-evaluation and improvement activity, you were already engaged in development work across Forth Valley as well as with development work which was specific to Clackmannanshire. This included a review of the GIRFEC pathway, review of Inter-agency referral discussion (IRD) guidance and the development of eIRDs. The focus had been on revising processes to reduce duplication, strengthen collaborative decision making and making support more accessible. Within Clackmannanshire and in response to the evaluation of the STRIVE<sup>1</sup> pilot, you noted intent to broaden out the scope of the approach with a specific focus on children. This, combined with the vulnerable children's panel, which was established during the covid-19 response, aims to ensure accessibility to more targeted and enhanced support.

The development and improvement work underway has the potential to help answer the questions that you posed around thresholds, the effectiveness of key procedures and practices, and collaborative working. The review of children's records provided clarity and focus for required changes to GIRFEC processes to ensure the assessment framework is integrated and inclusive. The use of our revised inspection methodology with a focus on children at risk of harm was also noted to reinforce the decision of the partnership to enhance the inter-agency referral discussion by use of eIRD.

Record reading activity resulted in collective recognition of areas of strength and areas for improvement, both in relation to protective processes and impact on children at risk of harm. It provided some indications that staff were working collaboratively in their initial response to concerns and usually responded promptly. However, there was variability in quality, decision making and oversight arrangements. You recognised that this was an area for development and

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<sup>1</sup> STRIVE: Safeguarding through Rapid Intervention. A multi-agency, whole systems approach to reducing the number of crisis-led interventions. A priority for Clackmannanshire council and community planning partners: Prevention and early intervention.

anticipated that the review of IRD guidance and the introduction of eIRD would contribute to improving practice.

Chronologies, assessments, and plans were consistently in place for children and young people at risk of harm. However, you recognised the variability of the quality of assessments and children's plans. You told us that the record reading findings will be used to inform the Forth valley review of the GIRFEC pathway and support practitioners' learning and development.

We encourage you to ensure improvement activity is set within a context where effective quality assurance mechanisms are in place to measure impact and ultimately outcomes for children and young people. This is of particular importance to ensure that the risks to and needs of children, young people and their families are at the centre of all activity.

### **Impact of supported self-evaluation and improvement**

We have provided opportunities for you as partners to come together for discussion and reflection on practice. You told us that the workshops were valuable and helped to build stronger relationships and a better understanding of each other's roles. We were told that the workshops helped to reinforce the value of joint working to support children's needs and wellbeing.

Fifty-one staff across the partnership fully contributed to the workshops and engaged in discussion about joint self-evaluation, the use of the quality framework and improvement science. Twenty-nine staff are now trained in the Care Inspectorate approach to reviewing children's records. This increased capacity should support your plan to cascade learning and undertake future audits.

You told us that record readers benefitted from conducting the audit activity collaboratively. The approach of engaging in ongoing group interaction and discussion clearly assisted the learning resulting in evidence of identified areas for improvement. You also highlighted that conducting regular audits would be beneficial to the partnership. We were encouraged to hear this and support your intent to embed multi-agency audit activity.

We were pleased to hear that across the partnership, you were already speaking to colleagues about what you had learned as part of this process. Partners indicated that they would change practice as a result of learning from the activity. Positively we were told that you were talking with your teams to gather views about areas of practice that were highlighted in the review of records. We support your efforts to involve staff meaningfully as this was an area for improvement that you identified.

All partners fully engaged with the improvement activity, were highly motivated to reflect on practice and did so in an open and constructive manner. We concluded that the partnership was fully committed to the process and to strengthening your collaborative approach. We anticipate that you will be able to build on this commitment and embed the continuous learning and development through a coordinated and strategic approach to improvement.

## Capacity for change/improvement

Within the context of ongoing structural change and significant turnover of staff over a period of time, you experienced challenges in your collective ability to manage and sustain commitment to improvement. Nevertheless, throughout improvement activity there was evidence of a desire to learn and improve across children's services. During our engagement with you, our impression was that leaders across the partnership demonstrated ownership of and commitment to the collaborative approach to continuous improvement. This was characterised by strong representation and engagement from all statutory and non-statutory partners, as well as an interest in learning from each other.

We believe that your partnership would benefit from additional support to continue with your improvement agenda and recommend that the Care Inspectorate link inspector continues to offer support and guidance. You told us about positive improvement activity that has been supported by relevant scrutiny and improvement partners. We suggest that relevant staff from each scrutiny and improvement partners liaise with each other to consider how to best support you where there are overlapping improvement areas.

## Next steps

By December 2022 we expect that the partnership should have the necessary oversight and governance arrangements in place and be in stronger position to demonstrate the impact of your improvement agenda on the quality of the planning and delivery of services for children, young people, and their families.

You are clearly making changes and are already initiating change in response to evidence from audits and other evaluation activity. You told us that our involvement with you has helped to sharpen your focus and priorities. While you have identified areas for improvement, we encourage you to focus on the activities listed below, over the course of the next 12 months.

You have already recognised the need to review and strengthen the children and young people partnership's membership and governance arrangements and are already addressing this. We agree that there is value in this and that it should provide you and colleagues with more confidence that a robust framework is in place to support your collaborative approach to quality assurance, your improvement planning and delivery of services, and improving outcomes for children, young people, and families.

We encourage you to establish a small multi-agency team, with appropriate membership to produce a **position statement** which outlines your joint practice relating to children at risk of harm or those in need of care and protection. This may be informed by building on the self-evaluation activity that you have been undertaking and should relate to how protection services and processes which identify and lessen the risk of harm are delivered. This has the potential for you to reach confident and informed conclusions in answering the three self-evaluation questions of *How good are we now? How do we know?* and *What we plan to do next?* The Care Inspectorate '*Quality framework for children and young people in*

*need of care and protection August 2019'* will be a useful tool in the development of your position statement.

We support your intention to carry out further multi-agency case audits and to build further capacity within teams to undertake this task. We agree that this will be a helpful way to measure change and development in practice areas already identified as areas for improvement. We suggest that you select a few focussed areas for development and apply the improvement science methodology introduced in the workshops to support a coordinated and consistent approach to managing and evaluating change.

We noted your plan to further develop an integrated improvement plan that aligns with the priorities in the children's service plan. We agree that the strategic children and young people partnership is well placed to establish a shared culture of continuous improvement and that a SMART<sup>2</sup> integrated plan would be beneficial, particularly in relation to ownership of and timescales for agreed actions.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Lumb

Care Inspectorate, service manager (Strategic Scrutiny, Children and Young People)



Helen Happer

Care Inspectorate (chief inspector)

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<sup>2</sup> SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic, Timebound')