

**Joint Interim Follow-through inspection of services
to protect children and young people in the
Dundee City Council area**

4 March 2010

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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.

1. The inspection

HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published a report on the joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in the Dundee City Council area in June 2009. Working together, services within the Dundee City Council area prepared an action plan indicating how they would address the main points for action identified in the original HMIE inspection report.

Inspectors revisited the Dundee City Council area in December 2009 to assess the extent to which services were continuing to improve the quality of their work to protect children and young people, and to report on progress made in responding to the main points for action in the initial report.

2. Continuous improvement

Chief Officers had established a clearer vision and priorities for improving services to protect children. There had been a positive change in culture across services to ensure a stronger focus on continuous improvement.

Multi-agency project groups had been set up to develop and manage improvement plans. This approach had been successful in focusing all relevant services on the priorities for improvement and ensured close tracking and monitoring of progress.

Staff now placed a stronger focus on seeking out good practice to help plan improvements. The importance of ensuring that staff across services receive support and training to implement changes in practice was clearly recognised. The staff development group was now better placed to identify and respond to these training needs.

Chief Officers had prioritised significant resources to ensuring that the improvement plans for services to protect children were realised. A number of important improvements had the potential to have a positive impact on improving the lives of children at risk. These included investment in a new purpose-built child protection unit in which police, social work and health staff will be co-located; the introduction of an electronic information system in NHS Tayside to support immediate access to health information for children who may be at risk; and additional funding in the council to support social work child protection services.

3. Progress towards meeting the main points for action

The initial inspection report published in June 2009 identified seven main points for action.

3.1 Improve the actions taken in immediate response to concerns about children

A very positive start had been made to improving the actions taken in immediate response to children in need of protection.

The number of police officers and social workers in the Social Work Access Team (SWAT) and the Child Protection Unit at Seymour Lodge available to respond to children in need of protection had increased. The introduction of administrative support for staff carrying out initial referral discussions had started to improve the coordination of meetings and the recording of decisions. Advanced nurse practitioners had recently been employed to support health staff in their work and to improve the identification of and response to children in need of care or protection.

There were advanced plans to introduce a single telephone contact number for any person wishing to report concerns about children. Proposals to introduce a multi-agency assessment team to ensure a prompt and consistent approach to children in need of protection were under development. The number of children who were unable to be placed in alternative safe care placements out of office hours was now being closely monitored.

3.2 Improve the processes of assessment of risks and needs and the system for jointly assessing the risks associated with parental substance misuse

There had been noteworthy progress to improve the processes of assessment of risks and needs and the system for jointly assessing the risks associated with parental substance misuse.

Together, services have developed an Integrated Assessment Framework and single agency referral form for children in need of care and protection. Tools to help staff to carry out more comprehensive assessments in line with the principles of the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) approach had been devised. These were being tested with a view to wider implementation.

The Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) had prioritised the development of an action plan to ensure a multi-agency approach to the assessment of children and families affected by problem substance misuse. The risks to children were identified and taken into account when prioritising help for parents with problem substance misuse. The time taken for these parents to receive support had been reduced. Staff were actively carrying out a pilot of a *Getting our Priorities Right* (GOPR) risk assessment tool. Plans were at an advanced stage to increase the range of services for children affected by parental substance misuse.

3.3 Improve the processes for joint planning to meet children's individual needs

Positive initial steps were being taken to improve processes for joint planning to meet children's individual needs.

The attendance of police and health staff at review child protection case conferences had significantly improved. Staff from adult services were becoming more involved in child protection planning processes. The timely sharing of information about changes in parent's circumstances was starting to support more effective decision-making and planning for children.

Services were working together to increase the effectiveness of individual children's plans to improve their circumstances. A helpful standard format for child protection plans had been developed and was ready to be implemented. Health staff now received support to help them plan to meet children's needs. A Permanence Planning Group was helping to prevent delays in placing children who needed new families. More meaningful ways of involving children in child protection planning and decision-making meetings were beginning to be developed. Senior managers were strengthening the quality assurance of assessments and child protection.

3.4 Review and update policies and procedures to guide staff in their work to protect children

A purposeful start had been made to reviewing and updating policies and procedures to guide staff in their work to protect children.

A multi-agency sub-group of the Children's and Young People's Protection Committee (CYPPC) had started to review multi-agency guidance and had set timescales for completing this work. A much stronger focus was needed to ensure revised policies, procedures and guidance took account of national guidance and good practice. Consultation with relevant staff about policies and procedures was taking place and there were plans to produce clearer step by step guidance for staff. The challenges of keeping staff informed about important changes to procedures during a period of rapid improvement were now recognised. The CYPPC was seeking funding for a new post of lead officer for public protection to promote awareness of staff working in voluntary services.

Health and police representatives were beginning to monitor the consistent application of child protection procedures across Tayside.

3.5 Improve the joint planning of integrated children's services to take full account of the needs of children at risk of harm abuse and neglect

Some positive steps had been taken to improve joint planning of integrated children's services, but, much remained to be done.

The structure for joint planning of integrated children's services had been reviewed and links between the Integrated Children's Services Strategic Planning Group (SPG) and the Chief Officers Group (COG) had been formalised and strengthened. The COG now had a firm overview of the work of the SPG and will give final approval of the Integrated Children's Services Plan work plan and receive reports on progress. Better account was being taken of substance misuse and domestic abuse issues by including the Dundee Violence Against Women and the Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships as key groups in the structures for planning integrated children's services. Plans for integrated children's services had not yet set out clear strategic priorities to protect children and meet their needs or the joint actions required to ensure better outcomes for children and families.

It was not clear how the communications strategy for integrated children's services planning would inform children, families and staff about the key priorities for service improvements.

A framework for involving children and families in the development of children's services, including child protection services, had been designed. This will provide a multi-agency approach to meaningful consultation and engagement with children and families in planning and delivering integrated services.

3.6 Provide clear leadership and direction to the work of the Children and Young Person's Protection Committee

There were significant improvements in the collective leadership and direction provided by the COG to the work of the CYPPC.

Chief Officers had established stronger collective leadership and improved the governance of child protection. The COG had demonstrated a very high level of commitment to child protection and Chief Officers had increased their leadership and direction and were jointly supporting change and improvement. Together they had re-established the shared vision for the protection of children and this was being communicated to staff.

Chief Officers were improving their strategic overview of services to protect children. They were now providing effective support, challenge and direction to the CYPPC.

The CYPPC was now receiving stronger leadership and direction from the Chairperson. The roles and responsibilities of all members had been reviewed and strengthened. The links between the CYPPC and key strategic groups such as the ADP were now clearer. The CYPPC was developing a three year business plan to improve services to protect children.

3.7 Introduce a systematic approach to self-evaluation across services

Encouraging progress had been made in developing a more systematic approach to self-evaluation.

There was a strong commitment to promoting a culture of self-evaluation for improvement. Useful plans were being put into place to ensure that self-evaluation was more systematic and robust and that it was carried out on a joint basis across services.

A multi-agency task group had identified and learned from good practice in self-evaluation from other authority areas. The CYPPC and COG had agreed proposals for improving self-evaluation. These included regular and systematic evaluation of child protection meetings. A new scrutiny sub-group of the CYPPC was responsible for collating and analysing the results. The findings along with recommendations for improvement will be considered by the CYPPC and COG. Further consideration was needed to gathering and analysing the views of children and families.

A Case File Audit Team was being introduced to undertake twice yearly multi-agency self-evaluation of case records. A multi-agency practice review sub-group of the CYPPC was being set up to examine and learn lessons from specific cases. The CYPPC was about to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its work.

4. Conclusion

Chief Officers and the CYPPC had responded quickly and positively to the main points for action outlined in the inspection report published in June 2009. There had been significant progress in strengthening the leadership and direction provided by Chief Officers and by the Chair of the CYPPC to support improvement. Overall, positive progress had been made in most of the main points for action. Services were increasingly working well together in partnership. Although many improvements to systems, processes and practice were still at a very early stage, there was a strong commitment to long term and sustainable improvement across services. Chief Officers, senior managers and staff recognised that there was still considerable work to be carried out to ensure that the plans for improvement were fully implemented.

5. What happens next?

Within one year of the publication of this report, inspectors will re-visit the authority area to assess further progress in meeting the main points for action.

Jacquie Pepper
Inspector
February 2010

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