

<i>item:</i>	5
<i>report:</i>	CYP07/07

CHILD PROTECTION FOLLOW THROUGH INSPECTION

By Alistair Dodds

Summary

The purpose of this report is to apprise the Joint Committee of the findings of the interim follow through inspection of child protection by HMIe. This report is also being considered by both the Highland Council and the NHS Board.

1. Background

1.1 Highland was one of the authorities chosen as sites for pilot multi-agency inspections of child protection. Published in June 2005, the report of the pilot inspection in Highland concluded that "children and young people in Highland were well protected". Key strengths, including strong strategic leadership, good working relationships and communication were noted. Notwithstanding, some areas for improvement were identified. These related to:

- Risk assessment and recording.
- Involvement of children and young people.
- Medical examinations.
- Staff support.
- Strengthening multi-agency audit and evaluation.
- Raising public awareness.

1.2 The report by Dr Jean Herbison following the tragic death of Danielle Reid published in March 2006 made 68 recommendations. The Highland Child Protection Committee produced a work plan which aimed to address the recommendations arising from both the pilot inspection and Dr Herbison's report.

1.3 HMIe returned to Highland in June 2006 for a follow through inspection. The inspectors, having identified common areas between the pilot inspection and Herbison recommendations, focused their attention on the following 6 areas.

- The effectiveness of help for children and young people.
- Public awareness of services to protect children.
- The assessment of risks and needs.

- Information sharing and communication.
- The effectiveness of management of services to help children.
- Leadership.

1.4 The inspectors met a range of staff during their visit. They observed practice meetings and visited services where they met children, young people and families.

1.5 Case records were not reviewed. However, a detailed submission of documents to evidence the Child Protection Committee evaluation of progress to date was scrutinised.

1.6 What follows is a brief summary of the HMIE assessment of progress against each of the 6 areas.

2. Effectiveness of Help to Children & Young People

2.1 The inspection report noted clear signs of progress to ensure services provided a positive outcome for children. The high level of commitment from staff was appreciated by families interviewed, as was the help they received. Good relationships between staff were evidenced. Furthermore, the positive impact of services, including foster care, school and personal support, was described.

2.2 Improvements in the arrangements for medical examinations were also identified.

3. Public Awareness of Services to Protect Children

Inspectors welcomed a number of initiatives taken by the Child Protection Committee to raise public awareness. These included the production and dissemination of information leaflets to pupils in schools, the introduction of a single local, telephone number and the development of the child protection website.

4. Assessments of Needs and Risks

4.1 Improvements in the assessment of needs and risks were identified. Children were seen to be involved and their views taken into account. Furthermore, the inspectors commented on the sound and helpful structures in place to support planning. The positive impact of the pathfinder project 'Getting It Right For Every Child' was clear to the inspectors and was paving the way for improved communication and information sharing.

- 4.1 Whilst improved outcomes were being secured for most children, inspectors encouraged further specific attention be given to planning and meeting the longer term needs of children, especially those where parental responsibilities were vested in the local authority.

5. Information Sharing and Communication Improvements

- 5.1 This area of practice, particularly involving health colleagues, was noted. There was evidence of this supporting positive joint working. Of particular note were:

- Developments associated with the increased involvement of health and medical practitioners.
- The implementation of effective systems to trace children missing from Education.

6. Effectiveness of the Management of Services

- 6.1 Clear signs of improvement were recognised in the operational management of services. There was specific positive evidence of the national reform programme informing policy and practice. The introduction by Social Work Services of new supervision standards was welcomed. The overall conclusion was that staff across agencies were well supported. Networks of professionals, both formal and informal, were seen to be working well.

- 6.2 Similarly, there was positive acknowledgement about the high quality of training offered to staff.

- 6.3 It was noted that although overall staff numbers in social work had increased, there were fewer experienced front line staff. The Social Work Service was congratulated on the creative strategies adopted to support recruitment and retention.

7. Leadership

- 7.1 The report found that leadership had been further strengthened. A high level of commitment, ambition and capability for leading change and improvement was noted. Elected Members were complimented on their understanding of issues and their trust in senior management, and the service was recognised.

- 7.2 The follow up inspection confirmed the confidence practitioners had in their leaders and the strong ethos of partnership working.

7.3 The vision for integrated children's services was seen to be clear and well understood.

8. In Summary

8.1 The overall conclusion of the follow through inspection was that considerable progress had been made in meeting the recommendations of both reports. A high priority had been given to securing improvements and agencies and the Child Protection Committee worked well.

8.2 While the pace of progress was encouraging in most areas, the assessment of risks and needs required further improvements to ensure that appropriate services reached all children.

8.3 A further follow up inspection to assess progress will take place later this year (within 12 months of publication). The focus will be on outcomes for children and on those areas which will be reliant on the successful implementation of the pathfinder 'Getting It Right For Every Child'.

8.4 The Child Protection Committee is presently reviewing its workplan, and progress will continue to be reported in the Children's Plan, available at www.forhighlandschildren.org.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is asked to endorse the positive evaluation of child protection services in Highland, and also the ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.



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