

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	9
Report No	HCW-11-24

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 16 May 2024

Report Title: Children's Service Joint Inspection Improvement Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following publication of the Children's Service Joint Inspection report in December 2022, and in consultation with partners, Highland is on a significant improvement journey. The Inspection graded Highland as **Adequate** in relation to Indicator 2.1 - *'children and young people's lives improve with high quality planning and support, ensuring they experience sustained loving and nurturing relationships to keep them safe from further harm'*. Whilst the overall responsibility for delivery of the Inspection Improvement Plan sits with the Integrated Children's Service Planning Board, key elements fall within the remit of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) and Public Protection Chief Officer Group (PP COG). A full update was provided to Chief Officers on 27th March 2024.
- 1.2 This report seeks to inform Members about progress in these areas to date with a specific focus on work in relation to older young people, highlighted as a key area for improvement in the Inspection report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the progress to date.
 - ii. Scrutinise the inspection improvements and developments noted in the report.
 - iii. Continue to support the work of Child Protection in Highland.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - None
- 3.2 **Legal** – The protection of children is a statutory public duty for the local authority with a broad range of multi-agency partners including Police, Health, Education etc. Child protection is governed by a substantial amount of complex cross connecting legislation with associated national and local child protection guidance, regulations and procedures.

- 3.3 **Community** (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – Children requiring protective processes to keep them safe are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Highland. They are exposed to familial and community harms, which can be exacerbated by poverty. Harm can be hidden in families and communities. Equality and rights protections are fundamental to all protective work with children and families.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - None
- 3.5 **Risk** – Risks identified in the plans outlined are recorded in the Health and Social care Risk Register and will be monitored quarterly with changes reported to future Committee meetings.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – None.
- 3.7 Gaelic - None

4. Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

- 4.1 The Inspection report highlighted that there was a variance in both the understanding of GIRFEC and a shared language across the partnership. GIRFEC guidance and Child Protection procedures have been collated into a single set of documents to ensure clarity of processes, language and connections across universal and targeted services.
- 4.2 Between April and June 2024, a series of roadshows ‘GIRFEC Refresh and Reset’ are being held across Highland to introduce the updated Guidance and engage with local practitioners. This will be supported by the release of an e-module hosted on various platforms in order that it is accessible for all services.
- 4.3 Following the roadshows and engagement with staff, the Guidance will be finalised with a ‘go live’ date of 1st July 2024. The final Guidance document will require sign off by Chief Officers prior to this date.

5. Older Young People

- 5.1 The Inspection reported highlighted one of the most significant areas of improvement required was in relation to older children and young people. In response to this feedback, and in consultation with all partners, the CPC has had a specific focus on young people at risk of harm to themselves, and others, including those at risk from community harm(s). This includes children and young people who are at risk of exploitation, missing children and young people, children in conflict with the law and children and young people affected by drugs and/or alcohol.
- 5.2 Highland have been working with the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ) using the Scottish Approach to Service Design to look at ways of improving approaches to young people in conflict with the law. To date, this work has involved engagement with frontline practitioners and managers to identify priority areas of work. This is now being followed up with engagement sessions with children and young people to co-design our approaches moving forward. The CPC is also working with

CYCJ in relation to Places of Safety for young people and are aiming to hold an event in Highland in June 2024 to progress this further.

- 5.3 Highland have been supported by Missing People Scotland to review our responses to missing children and young people. Whilst there were a number of strengths identified including partnership working and set procedures in place, there were key recommendations in relation to the development of multi-agency protocols, training for staff who may undertake return discussions, and information about Missing People for services and communities to be publicised more widely. These recommendations have been accepted and a short life working group established to progress the development of multi-agency protocols with particular focus on the 'Not at Home' policy to ensure partnership approaches to children and young people missing from residential houses.
- 5.4 Exploitation remains one of the key areas of concern in Highland, with increasing numbers of young people being identified as being at risk of harm from criminal and/or sexual exploitation. From Police Scotland data, Highland comes second to Glasgow in terms of the identified number of young people at risk of exploitation across Scotland. This is partly due to an increased awareness of exploitation indicators across the partnership but also indicates increasing risk within communities in relation to both criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 5.5 A multi-agency PLACE process to identify young people at risk of harm and disrupt perpetrators is now in operation across Highland, developing shared approaches to support for children, young people and families/carers affected by exploitation. In addition, the CPC has received funding from CORRA and the Whole Family Wellbeing programme to expand the Barnardo's RISE Service to directly support children and families affected by child sexual exploitation, and further embed the PLACE process. The introduction of Action for Children's Side Step project will provide an intensive support service for young people affected by criminal exploitation.
- 5.6 In relation to high risk and harmful sexual behaviour, Care and Risk Management (CARM) processes have been reviewed and updated to reflect the UNCRC and The Promise, with an increased focus on the 'Care' elements alongside Risk Management. The use of CARM in Highland will be considered as part of the wider Re-imagining Youth Justice project. Further work has been undertaken on the Harmful Sexual Behaviour self-evaluation and training for staff across the partnership is planned.
- 5.7 Contextual safeguarding approaches are key to responding to children and young people at risk from community harm(s) and Highland are part of the national Contextual safeguarding network. This will support single referral pathways for support services, community-based approaches to support children, young people and families, and an understanding of community harm across Highland.

6. Participation and Voice

- 6.1 The Inspection report highlighted one of the most significant areas of improvement required was in relation to participation and voice. Whilst the report highlighted examples of good practice, this was not found to be 'embedded' across the partnership.
- 6.2 Inspiring Young Voices, supported by the Integrated Children's Service Planning Board have been working with children and young people to develop a Participation Strategy for Highland. This is now being drafted and will be launched at the Vision 2026 event in August 2024. Vision 2026 is a networking event for services and communities and will

highlight examples of good practice in voice and participation in line with the Children's Service Plan 2023-2026.

- 6.3 Exploration around 'Mind of My Own' for gathering the views of individual children and young people in child protection processes is also underway.

7. Bairns' Hoose and Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM)

- 7.1 Highland introduced SCIM in September 2023 with 6 forensic interviewers trained across 'N' Division and Highland Council Social Work. These interviewers are currently based in Inverness and Caithness and these areas have become the key pilot areas for the programme. This does not exclude other areas in Highland where an interview requiring the SCIM approach is needed. SCIM interviews have been evaluated positively through peer and manager evaluation, and by the National JII Team. Feedback from children and young people forms part of this evaluation process. In addition, collection of data relating to SCIM will be incorporated into the Minimum Dataset for Child Protection and reported to Chief Officers.
- 7.2 Following the announcement of Bairns Hoose funding in the Autumn of 2023, Highland became an Affiliate member of the national programme, receiving a grant of £68,320. The funding to date has been used to improve properties in Wick and Inverness in order to provide a safe and warm environment for the interviewing of children and young people in line with the Bairns Hoose standards. In March 2024, Highland received notification that an additional bid for £298,320 had been successful and the funding will be available for the 2024/25 financial year. This funding will be used to implement Bairns' Hoose standards across Highland for children and young people who have witnessed or experienced harm, require therapeutic support and/or ongoing support. A formal launch of the new premises is planned for May 2024. In 2024/25 the CPC and PP COG will oversee the continued development of Bairns Hoose by engaging with services and stakeholders across Highland to identify need and possible approaches for local communities. This work will be developed through the Bairns Hoose Strategic Oversight Board which replaces the original SCIM Board.

8. Prebirth and Early Years

- 8.1 The Inspection report highlighted Highland's assessment and planning processes for our younger children was better than processes for responding to young people. The Pre-Birth/Early Years Sub-Group of the CPC is being established to ensure standards are maintained and continues to develop. The Family Group Decision Making pilot is ongoing and the Vulnerable Pregnancy Pathway is being reviewed and updated through the Midwifery Development Officers. There is also a focus on support for the whole family, linking in with the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, Family First and The Promise to ensure collaborative thinking and working across the partnership.

9. Young Adults at Risk of Harm

- 9.1 A joint Sub-Group of the Adult and Child Protection Committees has been established to take forward work in relation to young adults (16+) at risk of harm. This includes those transitioning from children to adult services and those who might find themselves at risk of harm at crisis points. In line with the National Guidance for Child Protection (2023), there is a national issue particularly in relation to 16- and 17-year-olds due to the links between child protection guidance and adult protection legislation. Many

young adults will not meet the criteria for adult protection but are considered out-with a child protection framework.

- 9.2 The Sub-Group are developing a workplan to consider joint opportunities for learning and development, provision of guidance in relation to information sharing, and wider service guidance for responding to young adults at risk of harm.

10. Third Sector Partnership Working

- 10.1 Following the Inspection report, the CPC have strengthened links with third sector partners. The CPC have disbanded the original Keeping Children Safe Sub-Group (which previously sought to ensure the representation of the third sector on the Committee). Two formal representatives for the CPC have been elected through Highland Third Sector Interface and all Sub-Groups of the CPC now include a range of third sector agencies in their membership. Members of the CPC are also represented on the Highland Strategic Alliance to ensure collaborative working with partners. The work in relation to Exploitation and the Participation Strategy is strongly supported by agencies in the third sector.

11. Learning and Development

- 11.1 The CPC Learning and Development Strategy has been updated to reflect needs identified within the staff survey and through Inspection. Three additional members of staff have been trained to deliver the Graded Care Profile, a strengths-based tool to support families affected by neglect. Additional training has been provided for staff and managers in relation to exploitation and trafficking. The CPC Training Officer has worked with partners to develop a range of e-modules and update training programmes. The CPC has worked with the Promise Programme Manager to deliver the Promise Conversation Cafes and develop the Preferred Language Guide which is due to be launched on May 17th, 2024, at a 'Mind your Ps and Qs' Language Academy event. The CPC Training Calendar has also been extended to include relevant training from partners in statutory and third sector agencies. Staff have reported feeling more involved in development discussions through engagement and information sessions. An example of this is the People Connected sessions, delivered by the Head of Social Care and Justice.

12. Participation and Voice

- 12.1 In line with the Inspection Improvement plan, the CPC Quality Assurance Group has made use of the data available to understand the issues affecting children and young people in Highland. Examples of this include a review of re-registration data, referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and the group are currently conducting a review of child protection registrations which have increased significantly in the past year. We have reviewed gaps in data provision and are currently addressing these whilst updating to Version 2 of the national minimum dataset.
- 12.2 Audits in relation to Interagency Referral Discussions (IRDs) are taking place bi-monthly with feedback to practitioners. Training for audit purposes is planned for April 2024 to increase capacity for single and multi-agency audits across the partnership. A full multi-agency case file audit will take place in May 2024 to establish the quality of assessment and planning processes for child protection, and progress made since the Inspection took place. A report in relation to Quality Assurance Group findings will be provided to COG in June 2024.

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 This report seeks to inform Members of progress to date and provide assurance that findings from the Children's Service Inspection are being acted upon. Highland is on a significant improvement journey, and it is important to note that transformational change can take time. The current situation relating to vacancies and capacity must be considered whilst progress is being made. However significant progress has been made, particularly in relation to participation and approaches to older children. Staff have indicated that information sharing has improved, and they are more aware of, and involved in the work taking place.
- 13.2 There is further development to be considered, particularly in relation to work with younger children and young adults, capturing voice and evidencing outcomes for children and young people. These are included within the Improvement Plan and being progressed within the timescales outlined previously.
- 13.3 Stronger collaborative working within the Integrated Childrens Service Planning Board have increased opportunities for joined up approaches in relation to whole family and community led approaches, and whilst this takes time to develop, we are confident this will lead to better outcomes for children, young people and families across Highland, including those at risk of harm.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care

Date: 2 April 2024

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Appendices: None