



EAST AYRSHIRE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE: 19 MAY 2009

VULNERABLE YOUNG CHILDREN & PEOPLE AT RISK OF SIGNIFICANT HARM GUIDANCE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the above proposed Guidance and to seek members views of the guidance (Appendix 1).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 These procedures were drawn up in response to the recognition within East Ayrshire that there are a small but significant number of children and young people, who, through their own behaviour, or as a consequence of others behaviour towards them, are at considerable risk of significant harm. The procedures are intended to give guidance in the assessment, decision making and co-ordination of a multi-agency response to the complex needs of this group of children/young people. It is recognised that often this group may be involved in a number of high risk activities/behaviours, and that managing and supporting children/young people will often be demanding and progress very difficult to measure or achieve.

3. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 3.1 There have been several meetings relating to the above guidance and there will be a further meeting arranged for 15 May 2009 to progress the document.
- 3.2 Following the above meeting and any amendments required from expressed views of the Child Protection Committee members the guidance will be presented to the next Child Protection Committee meeting on 3 September 2009 for final approval and dissemination.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Child Protection Committee is asked to:
- i) relay any views on this document to the Child Protection Co-ordinator to progress prior to the final meeting.
 - ii) otherwise; note the content of this report.

Susan Taylor
Chair of Child Protection Committee
12 May 2009

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Inter-agency Staff Guidance

Vulnerable Children and Young People at Risk of Significant Harm

www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/childprotection

(Draft 4 – 09/09/08)

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 These procedures were drawn up in response to the recognition within East Ayrshire that there are a small but significant number of children and young people, who, through their own behaviour, or as a consequence of others behaviour towards them, are at considerable risk of significant harm. The procedures are intended to give guidance in the assessment, decision making and co-ordination of a multi-agency response to the complex needs of this group of children/young people. It is recognised that often this group may be involved in a number of high risk activities/behaviours, and that managing and supporting children/young people will often be demanding and progress very difficult to measure or achieve.
- 1.2 Work with children/young people involved in high risk activities / behaviours should be co-ordinated as part of the multi-disciplinary child protection system. A common procedure is necessary to ensure:
- Key support staff are alerted to vulnerable and dangerous situations for children/young people
 - Care, support and protection for young people and others is readily available and timely
 - Monitoring of the child/young person's progress and the effectiveness of support plans.
- 1.3 Practitioners have to reduce the risk to the community and give these children/young people the opportunity to change their behaviour and become positive contributors to society. Meeting the needs of these children/young people, in addition to any essential controls necessary to protect individuals and manage the risks they pose, is necessary to safeguard them and their communities. Care for this group should be high quality, and approaches and programmes should be effective. Those who work with them need to have a high level of expertise. This promotes the Government's aim of giving young people the best start in life and improving the life chances of all children, young people and families, especially those at risk (GIRFEC, 2008).
- 1.4 This procedure will support the existing work of staff in all Operational Units and should assist all agencies and professionals plan and work together to make best use of their experience and expertise in protecting children. The management of this procedure will be the responsibility of Social Services and the appropriate Service Manager.
- 1.5 Many of these children/young people may not come within the scope of the Child Protection Procedures, but may be looked after or accommodated and be known to several workers and services. These procedures are intended to mirror and complement existing Child Protection Procedures. **In any circumstances where there is conflict between the two, the Child Protection Procedures shall take precedence.**

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 The procedure should:

- Provide practical support for children/young people who are identified as vulnerable and at considerable risk of significant harm
- Support children/young people in making the decision to take responsibility for themselves and to encourage them to make positive lifestyle choices.
- Ensure that children/young people are viewed holistically and that their behaviour/activities are understood within the context of the child/young person's environment
- Offer agencies a platform for positive responses locally
- Ensure that existing services are effectively co-ordinated
- Ensure available skills are identified and utilised
- Improve communication between agencies ensuring that information is shared
- Allow gaps in service provision to be highlighted and appropriately responded to.

3. DEFINING THE CHILD

3.1 For the purposes of these procedures 'child' means a person under the age of 16 yrs, or under 18 yrs if remaining looked after or accommodated by the Local Authority, however, these procedures may also be considered for young people out with this definition (see 4.4).

3.2 These procedures are underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children (Scotland) Act, 1995. Each child/young person:

- Has the right to be treated as an individual
- Can form a view on matters affecting him or her and has the right to express those views if he or she wishes
- Has the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation
- When it is in the child/young person's best interest, they should be raised within their own family environment.

3.3 Where it is identified that a young person will require a transfer into Adult services, these procedures should be used to ensure the period of transition from Children & Family services to Adult services is seamless. While such a meeting will be chaired by Children and Families, Adult Care services should be invited to attend in order that early plans can be made to ensure there is a clear plan for the young person. Staff from both Children and Families and Community Care services should attend.

4. SCOPE OF PROCEDURE

- 4.1 These procedures are not intended to be used where children/young people become involved for the **first** time in at risk behaviours, for example, using drugs/alcohol, absconding etc, but rather when workers and those with a knowledge of the child, identify an escalation/pattern in behaviour resulting in increased risk either to themselves or to others.
- 4.2 It is likely, that children/young people being reviewed under this inter-agency procedure, will often be known to Social Services and other agencies. However, there may be occasions, when a young person comes to the attention of agencies/organisations for the first time, and because of the assessed risk to the young person, a meeting will immediately be convened. These procedures should be implemented when agencies consider a young person's behaviour to be of a level of concern which could lead to serious physical and emotional difficulties; in some instances the level of risk may be life threatening.
- 4.3 The procedures **must** be applied in relation to children under 16 yrs, or children/young people who are looked after by the Local Authority.
- 4.4 These procedures **will** also be applied for those young people who are 16 - 18 yrs and who are not on a supervision requirement, but who are considered to be at significant risk and subsequently vulnerable. Consideration should also be given to invoking these procedures for those young people aged 18- 21yrs who have previously been accommodated by the Local Authority. Service Managers should give careful consideration to applying these procedures in such cases, and should respond positively to any requests from Social Workers or other inter-agency practitioners to do so.
- 4.5 Alongside a prompt response to immediate risk or safety concerns, it is acknowledged that full consideration should be given to preventative measures which should be developed for all children/young people living in East Ayrshire. Examples of preventative strategies include the provision of advice in relation to all high risk activities/behaviours, such as, substance/alcohol use and sexual health and pro-active early intervention from education for children/young people.
- 4.6 Social Services have the responsibility for co-ordinating Vulnerable Children/Young Persons' Case Conferences. However, it will be necessary that all agencies/organisations coming into contact with vulnerable children/young people acknowledge their responsibilities for sharing information through direct representation or by providing a written report. **All** agencies/organisations have a key role in identifying and supporting vulnerable children/young people.

5. CORE PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 The welfare of children/young people will be the paramount concern in any decision making.
- 5.2 The views of children/young people should be ascertained and taken into account. These views should be balanced with the duty to take positive action to ensure their safety and welfare. They should be advised that it is sometimes necessary to share this information with others, but that they will be informed and encouraged to participate in the process.
- 5.3 Consideration should be given to the views of parents/carers and their active involvement in the decision making processes. However, this should not be to the detriment of the child/young person.
- 5.4 **Concerns about confidentiality must not obstruct the exchange of information between agencies/organisations which may be essential to the protection of a child/young person from serious harm. The rights of the child/young person should be considered at all times, and the sharing of information should be undertaken sensitively. Where there are Child Protection concerns, all practitioners have a duty to share information in accordance with their own Agency Guidance or available Inter-agency Guidance. If uncertain whether to share information, practitioners should discuss this in the first instance with their Line Manager.**

6. RISK CRITERIA

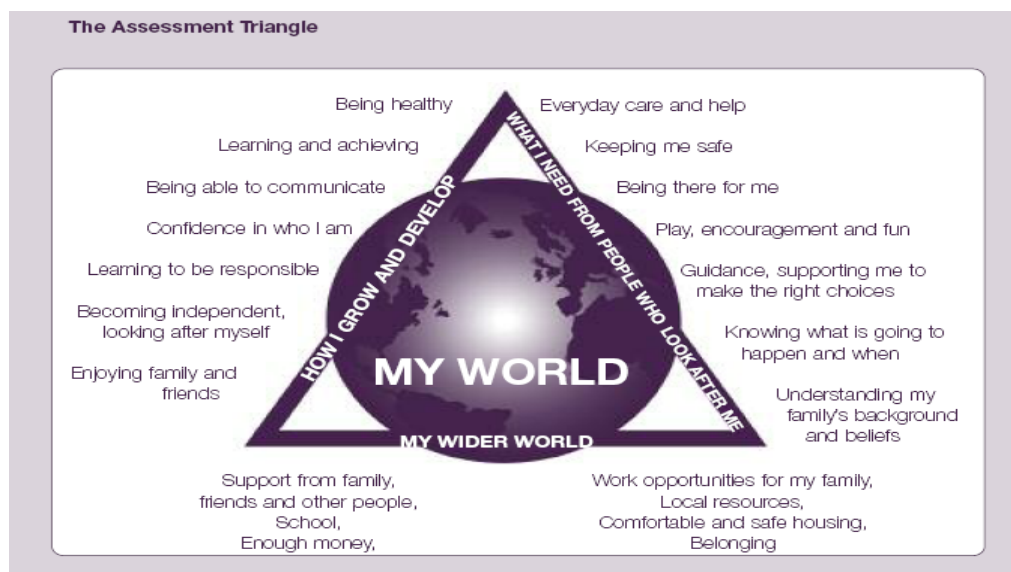
- 6.1 These procedures will apply to children who have been assessed as being at considerable risk of significant harm and whose behaviour causes concern under one or several of these vulnerability groups. This list is not exhaustive:
 - a) **Children / Young People who regularly go missing from home or their care placement for more than 24 hours, and where concern has been expressed about their safety and well being**
Consider regularity of absconding, pattern, possible destinations, absconding with others/alone, level of risk
 - b) **Children/Young People involved in/affected by problematic drugs, alcohol or substance use**
Where there is a clear deterioration in the overall situation characterised by an increase in use of abusive substances, evidence of beginning to inject, cocktail of drugs, poor level of self-awareness, loss of control, health related problems
 - c) **Children/Young People being Sexually Exploited. This could be through:**

- **The exchange of money or other forms of coercion**
A young person may become involved in prostitution and may find themselves having sex in order that they have a bed for the night, food, cigarettes etc. Some children/young people become involved in abusive relationships which can result in serious emotional difficulties or violence
 - **Grooming and targeting of children/young people through new technology**
Chat rooms, mobile phones, web sites, message boards, etc
 - **Exploitative sexual behaviours**
The individual will have power over the young person by virtue of one or more of the following – age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength or intellect
 - **Being Trafficked in the UK**
This is now recognised as significant in the UK. Trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation (UN, 2000).
- d) **Children/Young People affected by Domestic Abuse**
There are clear links between domestic abuse and child abuse. When children/young people are exposed to this, their responses vary, from emotional/physical disorders to a range of behaviours which can increase their vulnerability, such as running away.
- e) **Children/Young People whose violent, sexually harmful or abusive behaviour places themselves or others in danger**
Assess level of verbal, emotional, physical and sexual aggression, their risk to themselves and others.
- f) **Children/Young People on the Child Protection Register/LAAC**
These children/young people have already been assessed as being at risk/suffered significant harm.
- g) **Children/Young People living with/affected by mental health issues**
Consideration should be given to psychological issues/mental illness and the effects of either which could increase the child/young person's vulnerability.
- h) **Children/Young People involved in incidents of Self Harm**
Consideration should be given to the nature of the incident, patterns of behaviour, gravity of the incident, level of self-awareness and likelihood of the behaviour being repeated.
- i) **Children/Young People who may be vulnerable as a result of their ethnic, cultural or minority group**

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 Initial assessment

7.1.1 A risk assessment should always be considered in order to highlight the vulnerability of the child/young person you are concerned about. This is usually completed as part of any risk assessment process in a multi-agency way. A risk assessment grid is attached to support this guidance and should be used to support any current professional assessment processes and must not be used in isolation (**Appendix A**). In East Ayrshire the use of an Integrated Assessment Framework is essential in this process.



MY WORLD ASSESSMENT Model (Scottish Executive, Girfec 2006)

The Integrated Assessment Framework is supported by developments from the Scottish Government. The change initiative, *Getting it Right for Every Child*, includes a model for Risk Assessment. Referred to as SHANARI, the emphasis is placed on seeing risk in the context of a child's whole development, identifying strengths and pressures in a child's world and, above all, looking at the interaction between factors. These can then be weighed in decision-making to inform planning and action, look at strategies for preventing harm or further harm. This emphasis on risk management can then be built into the child/young person's plan. (Aldgate & Rose, Open University)

Safe
Healthy
Achieving
Nurtured
Active
Respected &
Responsible
Included

Practitioners can use the MY WORLD ASSESSMENT model to identify immediate risk by considering the elements of the Assessment Triangle and then ask a key question – What is obstructing a child/young person from reaching SHANARI outcomes?

- 7.1.2 Many children/young people who become involved in high risk activity have been known to Social Services and other agencies for some time. Their high risk behaviour may have developed over a period of time, and it is critical that significant changes in behaviour are recognised, and that appropriate action is considered. Practitioners from other agencies/organisations may have significant information regarding a child/young person which may reflect a different set of risk behaviours therefore effective Inter-Agency communication is essential.

Any practitioner from any agency/organisation who is concerned about the vulnerability of a child/young person should liaise with the child/young person's Social Worker if an open case, or the duty Children & Families Team Leader where they are not known to Social Services. This referral should be followed up within **3** working days. It is likely that most children/young people will be known to Social Services therefore there should be existing information around the vulnerability issues.

- 7.1.4 An initial assessment will be necessary by those in contact with the child/young person to identify issues of concern and an initial level of risk. All agencies should recognise that children/young people are often unable to accept or comprehend the level of risk they are exposed to, and are therefore unable to accept they are vulnerable.
- 7.1.5 The Partnership Area Manager will consider the assessed needs of each case with the Team Leader and will advise of any immediate action to be taken or inter-agency consultation required in terms of protecting the young person. **Necessary urgent action must not be delayed while a vulnerable young person's (VYP) Case Conference is being arranged.**
- 7.1.6 The Service Manager, Standby Service, should be consulted in the event of any concerns being raised out of hours.
- 7.1.7 In reviewing the information the Service Manager will make a decision about the need to convene a VYP Case Conference. A decision on such a meeting should be convened by the area team and conveyed to the referrer within **5** working days.
- 7.1.8 In any situation where Social Services and the referrer disagree over the need for a VYP's Case Conference, the Service Manager, in discussion with the referring agency, will discuss and agree an appropriate course of action.

7.2 Vulnerable Young Person (VYP) Case Conference

- 7.2.1 VYP Case Conferences will be chaired by the CP Reviewing Officer.
- 7.2.2 Where an agency is concerned about the vulnerability of a young

person (16-18 yrs) who is unknown to Social Services, initial discussion should take place with the duty Team Leader to agree what action is necessary.

7.2.3 The referrer will complete the written referral form (**Needs to be developed, either from existing paperwork or adapting Glasgow CPC paperwork – see App B**) outlining the high risk behaviour which is causing concern and this will be available at the Case Conference.

7.2.4 When it is agreed that a VYP Case Conference should be convened Social Services and the referrer will agree:

- Who will inform the young person of the date of meeting
- The purpose of meeting
- Who should prepare/support the young person to attend the meeting
- To inform the young person of their right to have a support person.
- To discuss the young person's views if they do not wish to attend

7.2.5 Social Services will open a Vulnerable Child/Young Person's Event and all activities will be recorded on SWIFT (**where on SWIFT?**)

7.2.6 The Case Discussion should be needs led and the agenda should include:

a) Assessment of need

Has, or should, an Integrated Assessment been undertaken, in what areas of the child/young person's life is he/she experiencing difficulty, past history of abuse, current abuse history, personal support systems, involvement with other agencies, for example, Police

b) Review of Risk

Description of risk behaviour(s), how/when behaviour commenced, pattern of behaviour, level of risk, escalation of behaviour with subsequent rise in level of personal risk or risk to others, current areas of concern, what changed for this procedure to be considered necessary

c) Options for supporting and protecting the Child/Young Person

These may include the use of Child Protection Procedures, Secure accommodation, accommodation by Social Services, referral for emergency medical assessment, intensive community support package

d) Relevance of the Children's Panel to the Child/Young Person's situation

If there is a current supervision requirement the Reporter must

be kept informed.

- 7.2.7 Agencies should be included in VYP Case Conferences on the basis of their existing involvement with the child/young person, or the potential for them to contribute advice or services which will benefit the child/young person.
- 7.2.8 All agencies participating in the VYP Case Conferences should be prepared to share appropriate information and be flexible in their approach to providing direct or indirect support to the child/young person. All agencies must agree the level of risk the child/young person may be exposed to, and should collectively agree an integrated action plan which reflects the child/young person's unique situation. All agencies must be able to clearly define what they can offer the child/young person, and be prepared to participate in the core group if this is the decision of the Case Conference.

7.3 Action Plan

- 7.3.1 In most cases an action plan will be agreed, allocating specific roles and tasks to individuals and agencies/organisations. Where a child/young person has not been previously known to Social Services a decision will be taken about the need for the allocation of a Case Worker.
- 7.3.2 The action plan from the VYP Case Conference will be circulated within **5** working days, setting out tasks and areas of responsibility to be undertaken by individual workers and agencies. The action plan will be written up immediately following the discussion using the standard pro-forma **(Needs to be developed, either from existing paperwork or adapting Glasgow CPC paperwork – see App D)** and circulated to Case Conference participants, the Child Protection Independent Review Officer and the manager of Standby.
- 7.3.3 During the VYP Case Conference a decision will be made about the need for the establishment of a core group of practitioners who will work together on the child/young person's behalf.
- 7.3.4 Consideration needs to be given as to whether a referral to SCRA is necessary. Where it is agreed a referral should be made a copy of the minute along with a letter advising the Reporter of the referral should be forwarded to the Children's Reporter. Where the child/young person is subject to a supervision order a copy of the minute should always be forwarded to the Children's Reporter for information.
- 7.3.5 Where a child/young person does not attend their VYP Case Conference, the participants will agree who should meet with the child/young person and provide them with feed back in relation to the action plan. In those circumstances where the child/young person is

missing, the action plan will proceed and discussion will take place with the child/young person upon their return.

- 7.3.6 The minutes of all VYP Case Conferences will be signed by the Service Manager, Social Services.
- 7.3.7 The Child Protection Reviewing Officer will record all VYP Case Conferences and an analysis of risk and unmet need will be recorded. A Child/Young Person's Care Plan will be established and recorded in the minute.

8. CORE GROUP

Where a core group has been agreed, the following will apply:

- 8.1 The core group will be made up from the key agencies involved with the child/young person.
- 8.2 The co-ordination of the care plan and action plan will normally be the responsibility of Social Services, however, there may be circumstances when this may be the responsibility of the Through care worker or someone else as agreed at the VYP Case Conference. Communication between members of the core group must be open and prompt.
- 8.3 Frequency of core group meetings will be agreed at the first core group meeting. This will often be determined by the level of the child/young person's risk and whether or not the child/young person is participating and engaging in the process.
- 8.4 These procedures and subsequent reviews should be linked to existing review frameworks.
- 8.5 All core group meetings will be formally recorded (**Needs to be developed, either from existing paperwork or adapting Glasgow CPC paperwork – see App E**) with minutes distributed to all participating
- 8.5 All core group meetings will be formally recorded with minutes distributed to all participating agencies and including the child/young person (where appropriate) within **5** working days.
- 8.6 The core group can, at any time, request a Case Conference be convened if circumstances change and there is a need for urgent review.

9. REVIEW

- 9.1 The action plan will be reviewed at regular intervals and at least quarterly. An initial review should take place within 3 months and can be

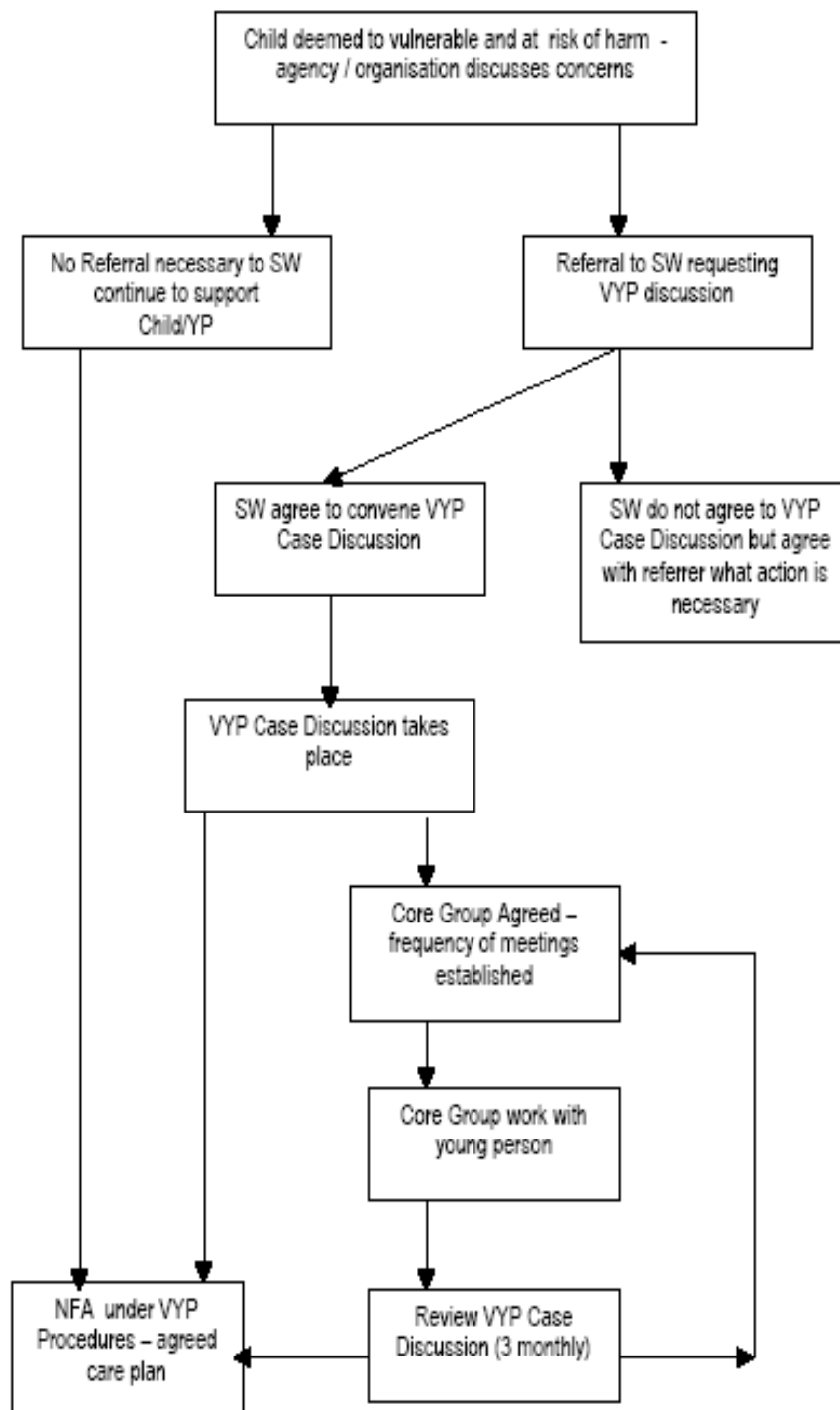
earlier if specified by the VYP Case Conference. The inter-agency core group will update the review VYP Case Conference with regard to work undertaken and current concerns.

- 9.2 At review, if the action plan is not successful in promoting change and the reduction of risk, meetings should continue to be convened to record the level of risk and to review the action plan taking account of statutory responsibilities to the child/young person.
- 9.3 It is recognised that these meetings may be less frequent. It will be important to monitor the young person's progress even if they are refusing to participate in the protection plan or work with the core group.
- 9.4 When it is agreed at a review VYP Conference that there no longer requires to be ongoing reviews under this procedure, Social Services will close the VYP Event, clearly recording the reasons why the decision has been taken and informing the referrer of the decision.

10. Useful Contact Numbers:

Social Work Office, Kilmarnock	01563 528011
Social Work Office, Lugar	01563 554455
Social Work Office, Cumnock	01290 421444
Standby Social Work (out of hours)	0800 811505
Child Protection Advisor, East Ayrshire	012904 421194
Police, Kilmarnock	01563 505000
Family Protection Unit, Kilmarnock	01563 505195
Police, Cumnock	01290 420755
Scottish Children's Reporter's Office, (for East Ayrshire)	01292 291910
24 hour Child Protection Line	0800 0223222

PROCEDURAL FLOWCHART



Acknowledgements:

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