

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 2 APRIL 2008

THE JOINT INSPECTION OF SERVICES TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL AREA

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the publication by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) of the final report on the Joint Inspection of Services to Protection Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Council Area and to seek Cabinet approval to the proposed arrangements for the development of an action plan in respect of the report's findings.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Child Protection Chief Officers' Group wrote to all Elected Members on 1 October 2007 to advise of the Managing Inspector's verbal feedback on issues arising from the HMIE evaluation of services to protect children and young people in East Ayrshire.
- 2.2 The Managing Inspector's final report from HMIE was subsequently published on 31 January 2008. The Child Protection Chief Officers' Group wrote further to all Members advising of the broad conclusions from the final report and the next steps in moving forward with partners in the preparation of an action plan to address issues highlighted in the report. The final report was placed on the Council's website and also in the Member's Information Point.
- 2.3 The Inspection covered services provided by health, the police, the Council and the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, as well as those provided by voluntary and independent organisations.

3. REPORT CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The Chief Officers' Group considers the report to be one of the most positive Child Protection Reports received by any Scottish local authority area. It clearly demonstrates the commitment and good work being done by key agencies to protect our children and keep them safe.
- 3.2 The Inspection Report provides an evaluation of the quality of services in 18 specific areas. In 13 of these, child protection services received good, very good or excellent ratings and 4 adequate ratings, whilst 1 area was deemed to be weak. There were no areas assessed as being unsatisfactory. With 2 areas assessed as excellent, East Ayrshire Council is the only area of those inspected and reported upon to date to have received any excellent ratings.

3.3 The following matters were identified by HMIE as particular strengths for our council area: -

- the quality of relationships between staff and children which helped children effectively communicate their needs and views;
- the range of successful approaches used to raise public awareness of child protection;
- children, especially vulnerable children and their families, were consistently involved in the development and design of services;
- shared vision, values and aims, which influenced the work of partnership services;
- staff awareness and ownership of joint planning for improvement; and
- partnership working at a strategic level, across all services.

3.4 In addition, the inspection report highlighted a number of issues for Chief Officers and the Child Protection Committee to strengthen services to protect children. All of the detailed issues contained within the final report have been drawn together and will be considered carefully in the development of the required action plan. Additionally, the action plan will be closely informed by the summary of the issues which require to be taken account of:

- improve process for identifying and assessing risks and needs of children where there are child protection concerns;
- more fully involve Health in child protection processes and improve children's access to medical assessments and examinations;
- improve joint planning to meet children's needs; and
- ensure the work of Social Workers is monitored more consistently.

3.5 HMIE has advised that no interim report is required and the Council and its partners should now work towards the preparation of an action plan to address the report's findings.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTION PLAN

4.1 It is important to highlight that whilst Chief Officers have been asked by HMIE to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report and to share that plan with key stakeholders, work has already begun, and will continue to be, undertaken to address the specific aspects of the report's findings.

4.2 As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, short term external consultancy support has been engaged to provide support and advice to the Social Work Service on a range of service delivery aspects.

4.3 It is proposed that the preparation of the action plan be incorporated into the normal business planning processes of the Child Protection Committee. This will result in a single action plan which will become the focus of attention for the work of the Child Protection Committee over 2008/2009.

5. POLICY AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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 these inspections. Inspectors will return to evaluate and report on progress within two years of the publication of the East Ayrshire Inspection Report.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report. Any implications arising from the development of the required action plan will be reported to a future meeting as appropriate.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report. Any implications arising from the development of the required action plan will be reported to a future meeting as appropriate.

8. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Ensuring that our children are safe and their needs met are at the heart of the purpose and objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan. The partnership approach through the Chief Officers' Group and the Child Protection Committee which our Inspection Report praised, will continue to provide the required focus in taking the proposed action plan forward.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet is asked to: -

- (i) note the generally positive conclusions arising from the HMle Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Area;
- (ii) agree that the Child Protection Chief Officers' Group progress the preparation of an action plan to address the issues identified by the Chief Inspector as part of the annual business planning process of the Child Protection Committee; and
- (iii) otherwise note the content of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
13 March 2008
Enc (0)

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) HMle Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Council Area, January 2008.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: JACKIE DONNELLY, EXECUTIVE HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK

Anyone wishing further information please contact Jackie Donnelly, Executive Head of Social Work on 01563 – 576920