

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET: 27 AUGUST 2008

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN EAST AYRSHIRE- GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet for proposed Eligibility Criteria For Children's Social Work Services - Guidance for Staff.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education's (HMIE) Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People in the East Ayrshire Council Area were reported to Cabinet in February of this year. The report included a summary by the Chief Inspector of issues which required to be taken account of including;

- improve process for identifying and assessing risks and needs of children where there are child protection concerns;
- improve joint planning to meet children's needs; and
- ensure the work of social workers is monitored more consistently.

- 2.2 This report seeks to provide an update in relation to recent developments in these areas and also puts forward proposed eligibility criteria which will improve further the Council's ability to respond to and meet the needs of children in a planned and transparent way.

- 2.3 Eligibility Criteria for accessing community care services was approved by Social Work Committee in May 2005.

3. DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.1 The national policy framework, Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) seeks to introduce a common, co-ordinated approach across **all** agencies that supports the delivery of appropriate, proportionate and timely help to all children as they need it. The first set of GIRFEC principles was introduced in October 2004, calling for;

- a more child-centred system, with
- heightened focus on the child's needs;
- a greater focus on effective outcomes for children;
- more effective collaboration between agencies;
- a more integrated approach across agencies; and
- the reduction of institutional, cultural and procedural barriers to joint working.

- 3.2 As a response to this locally, a multi agency review group is currently working on the development of a single system of assessment and resource allocation for children and young people in East Ayrshire. Instead of different agencies having their own meetings and producing separate action plans the aim will be to have one integrated action plan which delivers what a child needs in a much more coordinated and joined up way.

This important work is consistent with one of the key GIRFEC principles i.e. establishing a **single meeting process**, and is integral to the work already underway across all Ayrshire to establish a single Integrated Assessment Framework.

- 3.3** Another multi-agency group comprising senior representatives from health, education, social services, early years, housing, police and the Council's legal section was established in June this year. This group meets weekly and through sharing concerns and inter-agency information, considers how best to respond to referrals of children in need. This can help build a picture of what is happening in a child's life and may lead to early intervention to ensure a child's well-being, or indeed provide reassurance that no action is required. This group does not replace inter-agency procedures in respect of Child Protection.
- 3.4** The establishment of agreed eligibility criteria for social work services to vulnerable children and their families will in time strengthen and give greater focus to the work of the above two groups as, underpinning the criteria is a recognition that the social work role is a targeted and specialist service. To be effective, it requires children and young people to be supported appropriately through the universal services of education and health. Equally, for education and health to operate effectively, they require the support of properly targeted social services.

4 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 4.1** The positive developments highlighted in section 3 and other measures being taken within the department will greatly assist in better managing the shift from a demand-led to a needs-led approach. The most recent performance information on social work activity demonstrates this:-

| | Figures as at 30/04/07 | Figures as at 31/03/08 |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Children on CP register | 60 | 82 |
| Total No. looked after in community | 273 | 302 |
| Total No. looked after and accommodated | 160 | 164 |
| Total No. of panel reports requested | 38 | 104 |

- 4.2** The trend is in keeping with the picture nationally and gives a sense of the work which needs to be assessed, continuously, discussed with other agencies, managed, reported on, allocated and then supervised in line with departmental policy guidance. The eligibility criteria and guidance for staff are intended to help with this complex and demanding process, particularly in ensuring consistency of response to the assessment and management of risk.
- 4.3** In parallel with work successfully undertaken earlier this year to clear a backlog of referrals from the children and families duty system the attached eligibility criteria were utilised by the team responsible for managing the process. They reported that the criteria reflected sound professional practice and proved useful in prioritising responses to the backlog. There is a need, now, to formally adopt these criteria to support delivery of services, often within complex situations. The criteria are available at the Members Information Point and on the Members Portal.

5 POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There is no legal or policy requirement to have eligibility criteria and not all councils have them. In the face of increasing demand, the criteria provide a professionally honest and open mechanism for the management of work, linked to the need to have a sustainable social work service.

6 COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The protection of children and young people is evidenced as a priority in the promoting Community Safety Theme of the Community Plan. This is also aligned with the Children and Young People's Services Plan.

7 FINANCIAL/PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** Nil

8 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The guidance given to staff by the eligibility criteria will further enhance their ability to protect vulnerable children and young people, and thereby minimise operational and reputational risk.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1** It is recommended that members of Cabinet:-

- (i) approve the proposal to establish the eligibility criteria for children's social work services in East Ayrshire and the guidance for staff; and
- (ii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
4 August 2008
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: KAY GILMOUR, ACTING EXECUTIVE HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK

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