

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2001**

### **LAUNCH OF EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL'S CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES**

#### **Report by Director of Educational and Social Services**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise Committee of the introduction and launch of East Ayrshire Council's Child Protection Procedures.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In the United Kingdom child abuse has been recognised as a major social problem within the past 25 years. Throughout the past decade there have been a number of developments which had a significant impact on child protection practice, most notably the then Scottish Office document "Protecting Children - A Shared Responsibility, Guidance on Inter-agency Co-operation" (issued in 1998). These procedures set out how East Ayrshire Council staff will work together with other agencies and professionals to protect children from abuse and neglect and to safeguard and promote their welfare. It emphasises the shared responsibilities, and identifies roles and tasks of different professions and agencies involved in tackling child abuse and neglect.
- 2.2 While all agencies have a role to play in protecting children, it must be clearly understood by all agencies and individual professionals that statutory responsibility for investigation rests solely with the Police and the Social Work Department; the Police to investigate any possible criminal offence, the Social Work Department to protect the child.

#### **3.0 THE EAST AYRSHIRE POSITION**

- 3.1 The Social Work Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1995 agreed an interim arrangement to adopt Strathclyde Regional Council's Child Protection Guidelines until such times as new procedures were created by East Ayrshire Council.
- 3.2 The Social Work Committee report of 14<sup>th</sup> November 1996 entitled "Review of Child Protection Work in East Ayrshire" acknowledged the plethora of guidance that was in circulation, some of which was contradictory.
- 3.3 This resulted in East Ayrshire Council joining a consortium of eleven of the twelve disaggregated authorities from Strathclyde Region to focus on consistent core procedures which would later be customised by each local authority.

- 3.4 Child abuse is a major problem in East Ayrshire, as elsewhere, and alcohol and drug misuse, along with mental health issues, impact on child protection work. There is also research evidence which links domestic violence and child abuse.
- 3.5 At present there are 31 Social Workers within Children and Families teams who are trained and qualified in the investigation and assessment of Child Abuse. In addition, there are 10 Children and Families staff who have the Certificate of Child Protection Studies from Dundee University, another four are currently undertaking the course.

#### **4.0 THE CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES**

- 4.1 East Ayrshire Council's Child Protection procedures draw on the consortium core procedures and the framework outlined in the document "Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility, Guidance on Inter-agency Co-operation", and the Department of Health Guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' as well as a number of inquiries into the deaths of children throughout the United Kingdom including Rikki Neave, Kennedy McFarlane, William Boyd and Lauren Elizabeth Creed. It addresses issues raised and lessons learned from research and best professional practice.
- 4.2 These procedures are consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the principles and provisions of the 'Children (Scotland) Act 1995' and also the European Convention on Human Rights and the Scotland Act (1998).
- 4.3 The procedures have been customised to reflect the organisational structure in East Ayrshire with lines of accountability and responsibility clearly defined.
- 4.4 The aim of the procedures has been to achieve a balance between working in partnership with parents where possible while ensuring that a child's right to be protected from abuse remains paramount.
- 4.5 Staff will continue to work within a procedural framework but with the confidence to exercise professional judgement about the most appropriate responses in specific circumstances. Where these responses involve departure from the normal procedures they should be justifiable. The justification will be recorded in the case file and approved by the supervisor or senior manager.

#### **5.0 CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 All of the agencies that work with children have a shared responsibility for protecting children and safeguarding their welfare. Inter-agency working is essential to child protection and no one agency should be seen as solely responsible for the protection of vulnerable children. The Child Protection Committee is an Interagency Forum, which co-ordinates and develops responses to child protection.

- 5.2 East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee is chaired by the Head of Social Work, and the Head of Schools and Head of Protective Services are members. All relevant statutory agencies are represented: Procurator Fiscal, Childrens' Reporter, Strathclyde Police, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Department of Child Health and the Childrens' Panel. In addition a Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Paisley attends.
- 5.3 East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee's Terms of Reference are:
- (i) to ensure joint agency procedures are consistent with the policies and plans of each agency for related service provision.
  - (ii) to review, develop, promote and monitor local child protection policies and;
  - (iii) to play a major strategic role in inter-agency co-operation.
- 5.4 The Child Protection Committee brings together the main agencies responsible for the provision of service for children and their families so that they can plan effectively for protection of children and encourage full collaboration to that end. Its functions are to:-
- ensure that local inter-agency guidelines on procedures to be followed in individual cases are produced, maintained and regularly reviewed and that the procedures, including referral procedures, are known about by those who may need to know;
  - promote good inter-disciplinary practice in preventing and dealing with the causes and effects of child abuse;
  - assess issues of significance in collaborate working which arise from the handling of cases and from reports on inquiries;
  - review arrangements for providing expert advice and inter-agency liaison;
  - monitor and review information about the operation of the Child Protection Register;
  - identify inter-agency training needs and take a leading role in developing and promoting inter-disciplinary training programmes;
  - publish an annual report.

Source: "Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility"

- 5.5 East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee will be asked to endorse the procedures and to assist in identifying training needs and in developing and promoting appropriate inter-agency training. As a key group of staff involved

with vulnerable children, training will initially be targeted to Educational and Social Services staff as a priority.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION**

6.1 The financial implications for the Council will be kept to a minimum as the procedures will be printed in-house by the authority. Training costs will be met from existing resources.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

7.1 It is considered that the procedures are a significant improvement on guidance issued previously, and take account of lessons learned from previous inquiries and research, changes in legislation and best professional practice.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) approve the East Ayrshire Child Protection Procedures.
- (ii) require the Director of Educational and Social Services to prepare an Annual Report for Committee in relation to Child Protection and to keep the Chair and Vice-Chair informed in relation to progress towards implementation of the procedures.
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

**John Mulgrew**  
**Director of Educational and Social Services**  
**14th August 2001**  
**JH/LG/PJP**  
**Enc (1)**

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1) Protecting Children 'A Shared Responsibility : Guidance on Inter-Agency Co-operation.'
- 2) The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 HMSO.
- 3) Regulations and Guidance Vol. 1 – Support and Protection for Children and their Families HMSO.

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**AGENDA**