

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 6 NOVEMBER 2003

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PRACTICE DEVELOPMENTS – PROGRESS STATEMENT

Report by the Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise elected members of progress with implementing service developments to improve Child Protection services in East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 On 25 November 2002, the Scottish Executive published the report of its audit and review of child protection services in Scotland, entitled *It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright*. The Executive had commissioned the review in response to the enquiry into the death of the child Kennedy McFarlane in Dumfries and Galloway.

2.2 The review made 17 recommendations, focusing on 7 areas for improvement :

- Better information;
- Developing quality standards and strengthening monitoring and inspection arrangements;
- Strengthening the role of child protection committees, particularly in respect of information provision and quality assurance;
- Better knowledge about effective practice, staff training and competence;
- Promoting the rights of all children to life decency and development and tackling the needs of the most vulnerable children as early as possible;
- Ensuring resources follow need;
- Reviewing the grounds of referral to the Children's Reporter.

2.3 Following publication of the review, a national implementation team was established to support local agencies in improving child protection arrangements. A follow –up review will take place in three years time, with annual reports on progress being made in the interim period.

2.4 On 18 February 2003, the First Minister addressed a summit conference attended by Leaders and Chief Executives of local authorities to reinforce the expectations of the Scottish Executive in terms of action to achieve improved performance in child protection services.

2.5 On 27 March 2003, Social Work Committee (Minute Reference P3189, item 8) approved a package of service developments to improve child protection practice in East Ayrshire in response to the Scottish Executive review. Subsequently, on 10 April 2003, Policy and Resources Committee (Minute Reference P3227, item 17) approved

funding (£305000 per annum) to support the developments from the Council's Changing Children's Service Fund allocation for 2003-2004 to 2005-2006.

- 2.6 In approving the package of service developments, Committee noted, amongst other things, that annual progress reports on the implementation of the improved arrangements would be presented to Committee. However, in the light of recent public and media interest in the report on the death of a child, Caleb Ness, in Edinburgh, it is considered timely to provide elected members with an early progress statement at this time.
- 2.7 Members should note that a further report on the implications of the Caleb Ness report will be presented to the next meeting of Committee, following detailed consideration of the issues raised in the Child Protection Committee meeting scheduled for 26 November 2003.

3. PROGRESS STATEMENT

Child Protection Reviewing Officer

3.1 The Child Protection Reviewing Officer took up post on 1 September 2003. Initial progress has already been made in respect of each of the main priorities for the post, which relate to chairing case conferences and reviews of children who are on the Child Protection Register, carrying out quality assurance audits of practice and identifying training needs.

Child Protection Co-ordinator

3.2 The Child Protection Co-ordinator also took up post on 1 September 2003. Again, initial progress has already been made in respect of each of the main priorities for the post, which relate to developing and implementing multi-agency training, supporting the work of East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee, promoting better joint working, maintaining a library resource and co-ordinating the development of public information materials on child protection issues.

Child Protection Adviser – NHS Ayrshire and Arran

- 3.3 The Child Protection Adviser within NHS Ayrshire and Arran took up post on 15 September 2003. There is close liaison between the postholder and the Reviewing Officer and Co-ordinator posts described above. Co-location of the posts in suitable accommodation is being pursued as a matter of priority.
- 3.4 The Adviser has a crucial role in raising awareness of child protection issues within frontline staff in the NHS as well as promoting closer joint working between community nurses/health visitors and frontline social work staff. The post also contributes to the development and implementation of multi-agency training to support improved practice.

Training

- 3.5 Using Changing Children's Service Fund monies to supplement existing committed training budget, the Council is currently supporting seven members of staff to undertake the one year part time post-qualifying Certificate in Child Protection Studies developed by Dundee University. It is intended to continue to send staff to undertake the training each year with the long term aim of every frontline qualified social worker dealing with child protection holding the qualification.
- 3.6 An allocation of Changing Children's Service fund monies has been earmarked for developing multi-agency training, supplementing existing training budget commitments from each of the agencies represented on the Child Protection Committee. A calendar of multi-agency training for frontline staff is being finalised for implementation at the present time, based on the Child Protection Training Plan approved by the Child Protection Committee earlier this year.

Information Sharing

- 3.7 Work is in progress to develop an information-sharing protocol for use in child protection work, building on work already done on information-sharing in respect of Single Shared Assessment within the Joint Future policy.

National Implementation Team

- 3.8 The initial focus of the team's work has been to draw up National Standards to define what children in need of protection can expect from agencies. Managers and frontline practitioners from agencies on the Child Protection Committee have already participated in a local day of workshops on the standards led by members of the national implementation team and the Child Protection Committee will send a representative to a national consultation event in late October 2003. It is anticipated that the standards will be finalised in December 2003.

4. POLICY/LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no immediate policy implications arising from this report. If any practice developments are made over the three year implementation period which carry policy implications, they will be the subject of separate reports at the relevant time.
- 4.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 4.3 The additional cost (£305,000 per annum) of the service developments detailed in Section 3 of the report are funded from the additional allocation of Changing Children's Services Fund monies which the Council has received for the period 2003-2004 to 2005-2006.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Committee is requested to:

- a) note the progress made to date with the service developments described in Section 3 above;
- b) agree that further progress reports on implementation of the service developments will be presented to Committee on an annual basis;
- c) note that a further report on the implications of the Caleb Ness report will be presented to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- d) note that this report will also be considered by the Education Committee at its meeting on 11 November 2003;

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services
16 October 2003

For further information, please contact John Alexander, Principal Officer (Quality and Planning) (Tel. 6978)

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : JACKIE DONNELLY, HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK