1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The following report will provide East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee (EACPC) members with an update on improvements made by social work staff in relation to specific areas highlighted within the research carried out by Garth Associates.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee commissioned Garth Associates to undertake a research study to:

- Provide a greater understanding of the level of child protection activity in East Ayrshire. A case file audit was carried out on 17 case files.

2.2 Garth Associates presented their findings to Child Protection Committee (CPC) in December 2011.

3. FEEDBACK FROM FILE AUDIT

3.1 An audit of 17 files was undertaken to inform the research. Feedback from the file audit highlighted concerns in relation to the following key areas:

- High risk pregnancy protocol
- Kinship care arrangements
- Delays on child protection meetings
- Attendance at key child protection meetings
- Recording of joint investigative meetings
- Integrated assessment framework
- Children's plans; child protection orders
- Risk assessments/thresholds/optimism

3.2 Improvement action has been taken on each of these matters as set out below.

4. HIGH RISK PREGNANCY PROTOCOL

4.1 The researchers found delays in babies being discharged from hospital, timescales from the identification of risk to the conference taking place. Accordingly the High Risk
Pregnancy protocol has been reviewed on a multiagency basis. It reflects the National Guidance for Child Protection which was published in December 2011. The updated Pan-AYrshire protocol has been implemented. A series of workshops is planned to ensure staff are fully familiar with the protocol. The protocol reflects early intervention and assessment by Midwifery staff and multi-agency discussion and decision making on child protection concerns taken at an early stage which allows for women to be supported as early as possible in their pregnancy.

4.2 It is recognised that multi-agency assessment, support and planning with pregnant women maximises the potential for a healthy pregnancy / child (Vulnerable Pregnancy Protocol). At present a groupwork programme is addressing the support needs of women identified within the high-risk pregnancy protocol. Work is also being undertaken with the family support team in order to assist them to intervene early and offer practical support/advice/assistance to women in the early stages of their pregnancy.

4.3 In some circumstances, the risks to the unborn child will be significant and this will trigger the need for a pre birth case conference. Pre-birth child protection case conferences should take at the earliest appropriate date. The conference is now taking place no later than at 28 weeks of pregnancy, or in the case of late notification of pregnancy, as soon as possible from the concern being raised (and no later than 21 days of the concern being raised).

4.4 A specific development programme for all managers has been commissioned to equip them to consider the assessment of risk, the programme focuses on the following areas:

- Information gathering/sharing
- Defining child protection/thresholds
- Stages of assessment
- Assessment and risk management
- Examining child protection reports
- Managing child protection processes
- Working with challenging/resistant/plausible service users
- Managing the core group
- Supervision of staff in child protection

4.5 A programme of child protection practice development for all lead professionals is currently being considered to address the issues above.

4.6 Joint meetings have taken place between social work and the consultant paediatricians to ensure the issues of babies being discharged from hospital has been fully addressed.

5.0 KINSHIP CARE ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 The researchers found Kinship arrangements to be “Ad-hoc”, with the suitability of carers not properly assessed.

5.2 East Ayrshire Council has fully implemented the Scottish Government Guidance in relation to the assessment, support and financial contribution to Kinship carers. Kinship care practice guidance has been produced, which encompasses the arrangements for assessing Kinship carers.
5.3 A programme of briefing sessions to all staff to raise awareness of the practice guidance is planned for March/April 2012. A multi-agency Kinship panel has been established to consider new Kinship assessments and carry out bi-annual reviews of Kinship carers. A more detailed report on this area report will be presented to Child Protection Committee on 6 March 2012

6.0 CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

6.1 The research found that there were delays in the setting up of child protection conferences. Further analysis suggests that these delays mainly related to the late submission of social worker reports to conference, (CP1’s).

6.2 Action at a number of levels has been taken in relation to this matter:

- The Child Protection National Guidance, November 2011, and the West of Scotland Child Protection Procedures have been fully implemented. A series of briefings have been delivered to all lead professionals. The guidance and child protection procedures provide clear timescales from the receipt of a child protection referral to the date of a child protection conference.
- Service managers (Locality Services) have assumed responsibility for the chairing of conferences when possible, within the prescribed timescales.
- Management information is now being produced to monitor performance in this area.
- Significant improvement has been made in addressing the issue of delays in organising conferences. Progress in this areas will be monitored via the quality assurance approach developed by senior managers.

7.0 MULTI-AGENCY AGENCY ATTENDANCE AT CHILD PROTECTION MEETINGS

7.1 The researchers highlighted concern regarding attendance at review case conferences. This matter will be discussed further when a report on multi-agency attendance will be presented to Child Protection Committee on 6 March 2012.

8.0 JOINT INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING OF CHILDREN

8.1 The research found little evidence in case files of records of managers briefing and debriefings where a joint interview had been carried out.

8.2 The service managers (Localities) will ensure an overview of Joint Investigation Interviews, and ensure they see the written records of the interviews/briefings and debriefings.

8.3 The senior manager and review officers have devised a Quality Assurance framework which incorporates analysis of joint investigative interviews. This approach will consider the quality and approach to joint interviews and an analysis of key findings will be given to team and service managers. Improvement actions required will be highlighted through this process.

9.0 INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

9.1 The researchers found good evidence of improvement in the quality of integrated assessments however, were concerned that training had reduced, and that health staff had no access to the shared drive.
9.2 The Senior Manager with lead responsibility for integrated assessment is working with IT colleagues across partner agencies to devise a shared drive. The drive will allow all agencies to contribute to integrated assessments and plans for children. When this work is completed training will be delivered to all agencies.

10.0 ASSESSMENT OF RISK

10.1 The audit of children’s files highlighted practice which was over optimistic, with staff viewing very small improvements too positively. The researchers highlighted concerns that staff were too focussed on the needs of adults rather than children, this was particularly noticeable in cases of long-term neglect.

10.2 This matter has been tackled at a number of levels:

- The commissioning of a specific programme of training and development in relation to the assessment, analysis and management of risk in child protection. Initially this will focus on all Children & Families managers. The development programme will pay particular attention to issues in relation to long term neglect by allowing managers to consider the use of the “graded care tool”, a specific tool which allows for assessment and measurement of the impact of neglect on children. The programme will also allow managers to work with the new National Risk Assessment Tool Kit, (draft). A programme of development for all Lead Professionals is also being devised focussing on these particular matters.
- A management development programme has been delivered to all children and families managers, the focus of the programme has been on ensuring managers retain a professional distance from staff to allow them to be questioning interventions/actions of workers.
- The service managers now have responsibility for all decision making in child protection. This allows for them to constructively question and challenge recommendations made by social workers and managers.
- The quality assurance approach has been adopted which involves the scrutiny and review manager, and senior manager scrutinising decision making process and feeding back key themes/areas of practice requiring improvement action.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee is asked to:

i) Note the contents of this report.

Susan Taylor  
Chair of East Ayrshire Child Protection Committee  
February 2012

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