

THE FUTURE of CHILD PROTECTION in SCOTLAND

A One-day conference run by Holyrood in the Royal College of Physicians,
Edinburgh
on Friday 27 March 2009.

This report is my own interpretation of events at the conference as a delegate for SACP, and is not the official report of the proceedings.

The conference started sharp at 9.30am, chaired by Jacqui Roberts Chief Executive of the Care Commission. She pointed out that *people* protect children, and the focus of the conference was on how best to support families and those looking after children, and how agencies work together.

As always, we were told that it was not necessary to take notes, as the presentations would be available on-line after the conference. As always, I did (or tried to) take notes, and these were invaluable when I down-loaded the official offering!!

Adam Ingram MSP gave the Keynote Address:

It is useful to debate and discuss Child Protection, especially in the light of Baby P and other recent cases. Issuing edicts from on high will not do it – we have to support those working in the field – support the community. Parents must take responsibility to protect their children. Public services have a key part to play to help professionals reach the best decisions they can – we want the best possible outcomes with the resources available. The government has a crucial role in setting policy, but share responsibility with all the agencies to keep children safe. Government is clear about its priorities – to give children the best possible start and keep them safe. GIRFEC is linked to Child Protection, with a working group updating the 1998 Early Years Framework to a national framework, with local protocols within it. There will be no wavering from protecting the most vulnerable, but there are national challenges – gaps in risk assessment, in information sharing. With the latter, there needs to be a cultural change, as the law is already in place. We want to support early action in protecting children. E-care framework allows agencies to communicate electronically. It is not one huge database; each agency records its own data and there has to be justified need to allow sharing of that data as a protection. A privacy impact assessment is done at every stage to ensure consent and confidentiality.

GIRFEC Pathfinders – the evidence is due this autumn. We know that key information can be obtained very quickly - police → teacher over a weekend. Inspection has proved valuable in identifying where supports need to go to work. A multi-agency resource service is being built up, to be launched in the summer. Money is being put in to help police follow up vulnerable people – follow up on improving the provision for runaways etc.

Protecting children is everyone's job; Social Work (SW) are the primary discipline, who will draw in other relevant professionals. Government is committed to ensure SW have the training they need to be able to do this difficult task. All SW are expected to undertake at least 5 days in-service, to look at risk assessment etc. The consequences of getting it wrong are devastating.

Stella Perrott, former Principal Adviser to the Scottish Government on Child Protection Reform, then gave an update on the policies and projects relevant to Child Protection.

She stressed that she was giving an independent view, was no longer with the government. The subject matter did not lend itself to an ‘interesting’ presentation, and was read as a litany of projects, which made it rather difficult to follow. A review of national child protection guidance is underway, and Scotland is still the only country to have done such a comprehensive review. Recent cases show we are still struggling to protect our children where drug-abusing parents are involved, where the injuries to children are not spotted etc. It has been found that the outcomes for children are good when SW worked well, and *vice versa*. Also, somewhat surprisingly, it was found that information-sharing was not a contributory factor in either good or bad outcomes.

- 1) HMIE-led Joint Inspections of child protection services are underway from April 2009.
- 2) Assessment of Risk and Need: proportionate responses to risk and need are crucial to ensuring children in need of protection get the help they need when they need it., and GIRFEC guide sets out the principles, values and core components of its approach and how to put them into effect.
- 3) Multi-Agency Resource Service (MARS): will be officially launched this summer, based at Stirling University, with the aim of advising and supporting organisations handling complex child protection cases, to co-ordinate and broker further specialist support or expertise if necessary, and maintain a directory of expertise.
- 4) Scottish Child Care and Protection Network: analysis of the consultation asking respondents to identify topics for research is current, and will be used to inform research and dissemination plans for the Network.. Currently they are looking at evidence on the interventions that aim to support children affected by parental misuse, describe the range of responses, identify the factors acting as barriers or facilitators to practice, and find out what has been effective.
- 5) National Child Protection Gateway Line: evaluation of this is underway, and based on the outcome, a decision will be made about the future of the service.
- 6) Young Runaways: Work is being undertaken in Grampian, and based on its findings, national policy will be developed. Emergency accommodation for young runaways is also being looked at – its commissioning, delivery and perceptions. A targeted awareness campaign is being undertaken to raise public and professional awareness of young runaways.
- 7) Internet Safety: the UK Council for Child Internet Safety was established in September 2008, and will look at industry standards, public information and awareness, better education, and video games.

- 8) On April 1, 2009 UK became bound by the Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings whose aim is to prevent such trafficking, identify and protect victims and safeguard their rights, and promote international co-operation against trafficking.
- 9) Underage Sexual Activity: Draft guidance on disclosure of information where underage sex is raising concerns about safety and well being of young participants, agreed in a working group and submitted to be considered in drafting the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill.
- 10) GIRFEC: Pathfinder projects and learning partnerships in selected areas are on-going, incorporating eCare to develop a record of significant events in a child's life; single plan documentation being used to refer children to the reporter and for those attending hearings;

production of advisory leaflets for children and young people along with a common concerns form to record and share concerns;

identifying the elements and components of chronology information that needs to be recorded

to ensure appropriate shared summary information can be available in the child's virtual shared record and multi-agency plan;

initiative to provide information to allow efficient working between adult and children's

services and workers to support children who are affected by parents misusing substances
- 11) Pathfinders for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse
- 12) A Project Board to focus on actions to support children and young people affected by parental substance misuse
- 13) Forced marriage: to explore whether civil legislation will add to the protection already available
- 14) Adult Protection Committees:to develop core training material to raise awareness
- 15) Public Protection: responsible for development and co-ordination of a public information strategy on the management of sex offenders and the dangers of child sexual abuse , and show how we can empower the public and more specialist audiences with information.
- 16) Corporate parenting: provides training for trainers
- 17) Kinship and Foster Care: consultation on the draft 'Allegations Protocol for Foster Carers'

- 18) Implementation of the Adoption and Children(Scotland) Act 2007, and Looked After Children Regulations: implements the raft of new legislation supporting looked after children. The guidance and training to accompany the new legislation is being developed.
- 19) Reform of the Children's Hearing System: consultation closed in October 2008 – responses being considered, and a summary report and the next steps will be announced in due course (!)
- 20) Disqualified form Working with Children List: The panel has met 51 times since January 2005. By February 2009, 304 people fully listed, and 30 provisionally.
- 21) Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme: progress update due to be published in March 2009.
- 22) Early Years Framework: the framework was published in December 2008 and sets out the vision for the early years, and identifies 10 elements of transformational change needed to put the vision into action. The framework contains a number of actions and objectives which are considered to be important factors for success.
- 23) UNCR: Consultation has just closed – finding to be published in June 2009

Alexis Jay, Chief Social Work Inspector

Alexis spoke about regaining the vision and purpose – the need for change from within.

She looked at cases in the public domain, particularly Doncaster where 7 children have died recently. In particular she looked at 5 of the children:

Amy	aged 16 months
Alfie	aged 10 months
Child 'A'	aged 10 months
Baby BO5	aged 3 months
Baby AO6	aged 7 months

The key themes kept recurring:

- Alcohol / drug abuse
- Premature birth
- Risk of co-sleeping
- Domestic violence
- Information sharing
- Age of the children

When children are on the Child Protection Register, analysis of files shows that overall, the results are better than other children's social work files, with evidence of more:

- risk assessment
- worker supervision, first line and senior manager scrutiny
- care plans and reviews

- Two strands to the role -
- 1) in terms of the impact on outcomes
 - 2) in terms of providing the Council with advice

The CSWO is responsible for the management, development and promotion of an effective, responsive SW service across the council, including the assessment and management of risk, standard-setting, performance monitoring etc.

In the diagram, the lines round the boxes delineate the defining role - and we defend these with our lives!! This creates gaps, and children fall through, children die at the hands of their carers. The numbers go up year on year. The factors impinging on child protection are huge in complexity, so do we need a new service design?

Lord Laming's report of a few weeks ago highlighted important factors:

- 1) professional (SW) qualifications
- 2) effective SW training
- 3) independence in terms of review of practice.

Structures are the business of councils.

CSWO has a role in advising national government, too.

Key functions:

- practice governance
- professional leadership
- strategic direction
- scrutiny
- accountability

Brigid Daniel, Professor of Social Work, Department of Applied Social Science, Stirling University

Her theme was 'From Recognition and Response to Meaningful Intervention'

We have to move beyond the 'signs and symptoms' models.

- all disciplines are much more equipped and willing to identify children in need of protection
- whilst it is important to equip practitioners to recognise that a child may need extra support, there are limits to this 'detection' (forensic) model;
rather than labelling service users as 'hard to reach', we must examine what makes services 'hard to access';
we must do more to make services more accessible to parents and children so that people will seek help earlier.

What is the point of recognition if we don't then offer help? We are in danger of filtering children OUT of the system.

We need changes in concept of the problem and of the professional response:

- broadening of concepts of harm and a shift to the language of 'needs'
- broadening away from 'response' to 'early intervention'
- broadening of professional responsibility to include all professions who encounter children in their practice
- broadening expectations on all professionals to not only recognise that a child may need extra help, but **also to provide support to children.**

Integrated Approach to Intervention:

- 'It's everyone's job' does not mean everyone trying to 'do everyone else's job'
- but it does mean creating conditions that will allow children to benefit from the core service that each profession offers
- and ensuring that **all** children get access to health care, education, social and emotional support – whatever the level of parental capacity
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Review of Intervention Literature:

- Physical abuse; sexual abuse; psychological abuse; neglect; exposure to intimate partner violence
- Prevention:
 - before occurrence (targeted and universal)
 - of recurrence
 - of impairment

“... Prevention of recurrence and impairment are not necessarily achieved with the same type of intervention. Child Protection services have typically focused on preventing recurrence, whereas prevention of impairment has generally been the purview of the mental health system” Lancet

So, who does what? SW are squeezed from both ends. Early intervention and family support becomes the preserve of universal services, so that SW could become more of a residual service reserved for situations where there is a need for investigation and compulsion.

BUT/ it is essential that all professions are alert to the potential risks to children. Equally, there are essential skills in assessment, relationship building and therapeutic work that SW can bring to prevention before occurrence and to prevention of recurrence and impairment .

Social Work Role:

- SW operate at the interface between parental capacity and children's developmental needs
- Their role is pivotal in sorting out whether help to meet a child's developmental needs should be provided
 - alongside the parent
 - via the parent , or
 - instead of the parent, and
 - on a voluntary or compulsory basis
- SW can have a key role in maintaining the overview of the balance of intervention. GIRFEC gives
 - a model for intervention, using the Resilience Matrix.

Parents want services to be practical, professional, and their views taken seriously; to listen to them and be emotionally supportive; to treat them as partners or part of the 'team around the child'.

Interventions are most successful if;

- focuses on actual behaviour
- offer viable alternatives
- recognise the capacity of children and adults to recover
- are carefully structured in approach and multi-dimensional in approach

We then had a presentation from **Detective Superintendent Lesley Boal** of Lothian & Borders Police, entitled 'ACPOS Child Protection Working Group'. While she was speaking, a series of pictures of children flashed up on the screen, no words, just children, and no explanation as to why those particular children. I was not the only person there who found this very uncomfortable. When I downloaded the official 'conference presentations', these pictures with the ACPOS Child Protection Working Group heading on each, were all that downloaded. The delivery of this presentation was mind-numbingly monotonous, with no engagement with the audience, despite some interesting facts.

ACPOS CP Working Group has a high priority in the police force, and it published an investigator's guide to Child protection last year. The police response complements existing inter-agency working. Multi-agency interviews are being looked at and implemented – it is recognised that visual recording of interviews is best practice. Interviewers are being trained, and a register established.

Child Rescue Alert. There have been 446 successful recoveries. It is important to use the alert in the first few hours of abduction, and the aim is to galvanise a community to rescue a child.

Revision of grounds of referral are being looked at in the review of Children's Hearings, and in relation to GIRFEC

National Vulnerable Persons System – will allow police to share information over boundaries

After lunch, there was a 40 minute discussion and question panel, with the heading 'Are we delivering our promises? - learning lessons from each other.

The next speaker was **Maggie Mellon**, Director of Services of Children 1st. Her talk was entitled 'Child Protection – problems and solutions', and was the most interesting to listen to all day. She illustrated it with examples, and was refreshingly easy to listen to.

Maggie came into the system at the time of Maria Caldwell, and here we are again looking to revise the system, but 'babies and bathwater' come to mind – we are losing sight of the child. The Child Protection review – is it an opportunity or a threat? - there is always a defensiveness about practice.

'Getting the balance right' themes:

- trust in the system
- listening to children
- broken connection between child welfare and child protection
- universal versus specialist provision
- risk to children or risk to agencies
- adversarial and punitive approach versus public health and treatment responses. Broad public health support with universal measures is better.

Have we got a child protection system?

Prevention

Investigation

Treatment

It is not holistic – the focus is very much on the investigative phase. The violence that is regularly meted out to small children by adults has to be looked at – with a public health approach, rather than a criminal approach.

Do we need more strategy?

- It's everyone's job
- Children's charter
- Framework for standards
- GIRFEC
- Changing lives....
- Early Years Investment
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We need to move away from this. It is clear there needs to be a focus on training and practice, but there is a danger of the training being *training in the system* instead of *training in what we should be doing*.

Child-centred practice looks at the child as the centre of the family, ie putting child protection back into child and family welfare approaches.

Key practice issues for investment:

- child development - SW are not trained in this!
- communicating with children
- relationships with families
- supervision of practice - at the moment can have practice teachers that are NOT SW – this is crazy
- research
- treatment and recovery

Neil McKechnie, HM Chief Inspector, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)

'Improving scrutiny, Learning Lessons, and Moving Forward.'

From April 2009 HMIE is to co-ordinate and lead further proportionate 3-year cycles of joint inspection of Child Protection services in Scotland.

How well are children and young people protected and their needs met? – self evaluation using quality indicators

How good are we now? - how good can we be?

Emerging strengths are laid out in the HMIE report.

- the help and initial support given to keep children safe
- the involvement of children and families in key decision-making meetings
- children & young people are listened to, understood and respected
- the promotion of public awareness of child protection
- range of policies and procedures linked to vision, values and aims
- clear vision, values and aims for child protection which have been communicated effectively to staff
- leadership of people and partnerships, including working with private and voluntary organisations

Aspects for improvement (there is sometimes a lack of clarity as to what outcome is expected)

- recognition and assessment of risk and needs

- planning to meet children's needs and taking account of changing circumstances
- participation of children and families in policy development and in planning and developing services
- operational planning, including performance management and the development and use of management information

January 2009 – the changing scrutiny landscape

- Crerar report
- Scottish Government response to Crerar working groups
- Accounts Commission /Audit Scotland –led work

Self evaluation is a powerful tool for improvement and transformational change

Context:

- Crerar agenda
- Scottish Government's Purpose and Strategic Objectives 2008-2011
- National Performance Framework
- GIRFEC
- Early Years Framework, Equally Well

The Proposed Model:

- 3 phases over two weeks of fieldwork
- scoping, core and proportionate

Inspection Report

- recognises the importance of self evaluation
- improvements in performance
- children and young people are listened to, understood and respected
- children and young people benefit from strategies to minimise harm
- children and young people are helped by the actions taken in immediate response to concerns
- children and young people's needs are met
- improvement through self-evaluation
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Inspection Programme

- co-ordinated and integrated
 - 2009/2010 up to 10 inspections
 - follow-through inspection integrated in most cases based on risk assessment
- A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators published

Improving child protection services - key issues:

- building confidence and self esteem within from line services in the face of intense public scrutiny and adverse media reporting
- building community capacity and reinforcing the obligation and responsibilities of citizenship and parenthood
- increasing public confidence in services to protect vulnerable children
- attracting leaders and managers of the highest calibre for child protection and integrated children's services

- continuing to strengthen accountability and governance arrangements for child protection which reinforce a partnership approach
- building capacity for joint self evaluation as the key driver for improvement and ensuring that this becomes a mainstream activity which is firmly embedded within and across services
- clarifying the role of scrutiny bodies in supporting improvement and providing independent assurance

The final speaker was Alistair Gaw, Vice Chair, Fife Child Protection Committee who told us of Fife's on-line Child Protection register and how it was accessed. Before he did this, however, he took issue and disagreed with something that Maggie Mellon had said during her presentation. It had to do with the confidence of SW, with relevance to their training, and support, and he made the assertion that *confidence* is more important than *competence* - I was amazed! I know which one I would prefer my SW to be, and I agree with Maggie Mellon!

A final question and answer session, a summary from the very able chairwoman, and home we went at 4.00pm. A long conference, and very worthy, but hard going with lots of very dry information about working groups of various kinds and wish lists of how to improve child protection – we'll see if the practicalities bear fruit in the next few years, or if we have more spates of 'Baby P' – type cases.

Joyce Noble, SACP