

Services for children and young people in  
**Argyll and Bute**

**18 September 2013**

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Report of a pilot joint inspection

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# 1. Introduction

At the request of Scottish Ministers, the Care Inspectorate is leading joint inspections of services for children and young people across Scotland. When we say children and young people in this report we mean people under the age of 18 years or up to 21 years if they have been looked after.

These inspections will look at the difference services are making to the lives of children, young people and families. They take account of the full range of work within a community planning partnership area including services provided by health visitors, school nurses, teachers, doctors, social workers, police officers, and the voluntary sector.

The inspection teams are made up of inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

A draft framework of quality indicators was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012. The indicators in 'How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators' were used by the team of inspectors in their independent evaluation of the quality of services. We have covered all of the quality indicators in this report and reached evaluations for eight of them which are set out in the table in Appendix 1.

This report is published following a pilot joint inspection. This means that future inspections may be carried out differently and the reports we will publish at a later date may take a different format.

## 2. Background

The pilot joint inspection of services for children and young people in the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership area took place over three weeks in March 2013 and April 2013. It covered the range of services that had a role in providing services to benefit children, young people and families across the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership area including the islands.

This pilot inspection also took a close look at how services had responded to the agreed priorities for action set out in the Care Inspectorate's report on a joint inspection of services to protect children published in 2011.

Inspectors reviewed documents and spoke to staff with leadership and management responsibilities. They talked to staff who work directly with children, young people and families and observed some meetings. Inspectors reviewed practice through reading a sample of records held by services who work with children and young people. Some of these children, young people and families met with and talked to inspectors. Inspectors are very grateful to all of the people who talked to them as part of this pilot inspection.

As the findings in this joint inspection are based on a sample of children and young people inspectors cannot assure the quality of service received by every single child in the area.

### 3. The Community Planning Partnership area and the context for services for children and young people

Argyll and Bute has a population of over 89,500 and is Scotland’s second largest local authority by area. It has the third lowest population density, and has the most inhabited islands. The population is decreasing which is in contrast to Scotland as a whole. The number of children under the age of 16 is projected to fall by 8.7% by 2035.



Population of Argyll and Bute

89,500



Predicted population decrease of children under 16:

8.7% by 2035

The Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership has members from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, and the Ministry of Defence. The Partnership has a new Community Plan and **Single Outcome Agreement** for the period 2013 to 2023, which sets out the vision for achieving improved long-term outcomes for communities in Argyll and Bute. This includes key priorities for children and young people. The partnership has overseen the development of a new vision for services for children and young people: Working together to achieve the best for children young people and families. The Child and Adult Protection Chief Officer Group oversees planning and continuous improvement and the Argyll and Bute Children’s Group is responsible for updating an **integrated children’s services plan** for 2013 to 2016. This new plan will set out what services will do to achieve the vision using the Getting it right for every child approach.

**A Single Outcome Agreement** is an agreement between the Scottish Government and community planning partnerships which sets out how they will work towards improving outcomes for Scotland’s people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities.

**The Integrated Children’s Services Plan** is for services which work with children and young people. It sets out the priorities for achieving the vision for all children and young people and what services need to do together to achieve them.

## 4. Particular strengths that are making a difference to children, young people and families

- The strong commitment to prevention and early intervention.
- A very positive culture of partnership working at all levels.
- The flexible approach to working with families to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Sound work to promote strong and resilient children, young people and families.

## 5. Examples of good practice

### Getting It Right Antenatal

Getting it Right Antenatal is having a significant impact on giving unborn babies the best start in life. It is a highly successful approach to identifying vulnerable pregnant women at an early stage and to providing coordinated support in partnership with other services to improve their parenting skills. This support includes the provision of suitable housing.

### Early Intervention Service

Staff deliver high quality intensive support to vulnerable young people and families. They work closely with other services to give flexible support that helps young people to remain in their own communities, improves their educational achievement and promotes stable caring relationships.

### Nurse Co-ordinators

Nurse co-ordinators work with children and young people who are looked after away from home, families affected by homelessness, and the Gypsy Traveller community. They coordinate and communicate information across services and enable families to access the help they need quickly. Their work is highly effective in helping children, young people and families to stay healthy and to be involved and included within their communities.

## 6. How well are the lives of children and young people improving?

Staff are very effective in recognising when children, young people and families need additional help. They provide flexible support and guidance at an early stage to stop difficulties getting worse. Multi-agency screening of incidents of domestic abuse is helping to ensure that children, young

people and families receive prompt and appropriate assistance. The Getting it right for every child approach is developing very well and most staff carry out their responsibilities with confidence and skill. Vulnerable pregnant women are identified quickly and provided with very effective support. Staff gather comprehensive information and share this appropriately to promote the well-being of children and young people. They maintain detailed and up-to-date records of observations and concerns.

The Getting it right for every child approach is being implemented successfully and staff are highly committed to working together. Children and young people are benefiting from effective collaborative work which promotes prevention and early intervention. Vulnerable children are getting the help they need at an earlier stage to improve their well-being.

**Getting it Right for Every Child** is the Scottish Government's approach to making sure that all children and young people get the help they need when they need it. For more information, search "GIRFEC" online.

Children and young people feel safe within their communities due to the proactive approaches services take to promote safer communities. Staff in education, youth services and police help children and young people to acquire the skills they need to keep themselves safe in a wide range of situations which may place them at risk. Young people living in residential units feel safe in their homes. Children and young people are safer and better protected from harm and abuse due to considerable improvements in the recognition and response to children and young people at risk. Staff work well together to consider all aspects of children's and young people's well-being when they respond to concerns. Where necessary, children are moved quickly to suitable accommodation in order to keep them safe.

A framework to assess risks and needs is an orderly way of exploring, understanding and recording what is happening in children's lives.

The health of children and young people is improving. More babies are being breastfed and children have better dental health. Nurse co-ordinators ensure that the health needs of vulnerable children and young people are being met as quickly as possible. Early years services place a strong emphasis on improving healthy lifestyles through outdoor play, attention to hygiene and healthy eating. Social workers, health and education staff respond quickly to the early signs of emotional difficulty and are helping vulnerable young people to develop successful ways of managing anxiety and stress.

Children arrive in primary school better prepared for learning. Literacy rates in young children have improved. Most young people achieve well in schools and more are moving onto positive destinations. Children and young people's educational progress is monitored carefully to identify potential barriers to their learning. More support is needed to help vulnerable children to achieve their academic potential. Most young people leaving care receive very effective support to develop the skills they need for independence. However, vulnerable young people would benefit from better access to meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities.

Children and young people living in kinship care receive helpful and responsive support. Increasingly, children and young people who are not able to remain at home are able to live in good quality family and residential placements. However, some are waiting too long before the plans for their future care are made permanent.

Young people are very positive about the help they get to stay active, learn new skills and become more confident. However, some young people could miss out through limited access to affordable leisure and recreational activities. Young people benefit from a sense of belonging and positive attitudes within the wider community. Overall, children and young people feel included and listened to. Gypsy Traveller children and young people are included and helped to overcome inequalities. Services are successfully preventing and diverting young people from anti-social activity.

Families and carers receive highly effective support from a range of services. There is a strong commitment to including fathers. Families are stronger and more resilient and this is enabling them to provide safer, more nurturing environments for their children and young people. Most families and carers are positive about the flexible help they receive. They feel valued, encouraged to be equal partners and enjoy improved experiences of parenting. They have someone whom they know, trust, and can contact when they need to. A small number of families with long-standing problems need more effective help to accept support and sustain improvements. Families, including kinship carers, would benefit from more opportunities to meet each other in suitable child-friendly places.

The diverse needs of widespread communities are considered carefully when services are being planned. Some local areas such as Tarbert benefit from a wide range of community organisations which very effectively promote health and well-being. This successful approach could be shared more widely in order to make best use of the opportunities offered by voluntary services. Members of the Gypsy Traveller community have been meaningfully involved in the development of services to meet their needs. Young people are involved in decision-making within their communities through youth forums and the youth bank project.

## 7. How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?

The plan for integrated children's services for the period 2009-12 has concluded. Partners have continued to work together on implementing Getting it right for every child and improving services for children in need of protection. The way in which **the child protection committee** carries out its work has been improved and its priorities for improvement are now much clearer and focused on outcomes. While this work is leading to positive improvements, partners have yet to set out a broader set of priorities, objectives and plans to improve services for all children, young people and families. A coherent plan was under development to shape the future of services for all children, young people and families and to meet the needs for public accountability.

**The Child Protection Committee** brings together all the organisations involved in protecting children in the area. Their purpose is to make sure local services work together to protect children from abuse and keep them safe.

Services are strongly committed to and use a variety of creative ways to consult and involve children, young people, families

and other stakeholders when they use services. As a result, young people feel that they are listened to and their views taken into account. Vulnerable young people are benefiting from more effective opportunities to participate in service planning. There is scope to develop joint approaches to involve and consult stakeholders in designing services and shaping plans.

Partnership working is supported through respectful, open communication, and challenge. The Child and Adult Protection Chief Officers Group provides effective strategic direction and governance to the work of the Child Protection Committee and Argyll and Bute's Children's Group. Partners are delivering improvements in systems, processes, and practice and have made significant progress in implementing Getting it right for every child. Services are in a positive position to provide increasingly integrated and more effective services for children and young people. Increasingly, partners are making evidence based decisions about the allocation of resources towards early intervention and prevention. There is still much to do to streamline and share resources. A joint strategic approach to resource planning and commissioning is under development to manage resources more effectively.

Services are reviewing and developing their policies, procedures and guidance with the aim of improving services to protect children and support the implementation of Getting it right for every child. A helpful start has been made to developing shared policies and procedures. Staff are asked for their views and the consistent application of policies and procedures is improving. Managers in social work are committed to adhering to statutory timescales for reviewing and making plans for children.

There is a genuine commitment to improving performance and standards with a focus on outcomes. Audit activity is mainly carried out by individual services and there is a growing appreciation of the benefit of jointly assuring quality. Managers are keen to embrace new ways of working and are demonstrating a willingness to do this together through review, audit and governance groups. Services now need to develop a systematic approach to quality assurance across services. Arrangements for supporting and managing staff in health and social work services have been strengthened. Managers are aware of where they need to provide additional support and guidance to help staff raise standards.

Overall, staff recognise circumstances when children might be at risk of harm and usually take prompt action to protect them. Suitable accommodation is found for children and young people who need to be cared for in a safe place. Staff keep helpful chronologies of significant events, however, they need to improve how they use these to identify concerning patterns and risks to children and young people. Health assessments of young children carefully identify additional health needs and any support that is needed. The quality of assessment of risks and needs has improved but is still too variable. A few children experiencing neglect are not getting the help they need soon enough and a shared understanding of neglect is needed across services.

Staff generally work well together to plan for individual children and young people. Further work is needed to reduce the number of different plans and planning. Most vulnerable children and young people have a care or child protection plan. The quality of these plans is variable and they do not always

**A personal plan or child's plan** lays out exactly what support will be provided, and in what way, to meet the child's needs. The plan also records their views and wishes.



set out all the actions needed to keep children and young people safe or improve their wellbeing. Services are working more effectively together to provide young people with a disability with the right level of support to help them move into adulthood. Independent Reviewing Officers provide effective support and challenge to staff to ensure that plans lead to action and that children and young people experience positive change. Services are improving planning for children and young people who are unable to return home but the full impact of this has yet to be realised.

Staff across services listen carefully to the views of children, young people and families. They treat them with respect and take their views in to account when making decisions. They help families understand what needs to happen to make positive improvements in their lives. High quality independent advocacy support is available to children who are looked after away from home or whose names are on the child protection register. More children and young people could benefit from this. Children and families are kept well informed even when they are mistrustful of services. Complaints about services are addressed effectively.

The Getting it right for every child approach has improved joint working across services. This and multi-agency training is contributing to a strong culture of trust and working together. There are examples of creative and flexible deployment of staff to intervene early and deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families. There is scope to introduce joint approaches to workforce planning, training and development aligned to the new integrated children's services plan. Overall, staff receive support and challenge to help them improve their work. They are valued and highly motivated and making a positive contribution to improving the well-being of children and families.

## **8. How well do services lead and improve the quality of work to achieve better outcomes for children and families?**

The Community Planning Partnership has overseen the development of a new vision for children's services. Leaders have engaged staff and young people very effectively in developing this vision, which is uniting staff around a common purpose and shared values. A recently formed corporate parenting board is at an early stage in defining its responsibilities. Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting equality and inclusion and this is shared by staff.

Strategic direction has been focused appropriately on improving services to protect children and young people and in implementing Getting it right for every child. Partners have shared responsibility for addressing areas of weakness and building sustainable strengths. Leaders should now ensure the new integrated children's services plan is completed and published. This will provide an opportunity to jointly agree how recent service reviews and plans for restructuring services can ensure that the right services are in the right places.

Leaders have been influential in promoting positive working relationships and an ethos of teamwork at all levels. Leaders and senior managers are becoming more visible and responsive to staff. Staff

are confident about the future of services. Partners are taking steps to strengthen the capacity of leadership at all levels. Services have taken collective ownership of the findings from inspection and reviews, and have taken positive steps to make the necessary improvements to ensure children in need of protection are kept safe. Leaders now need to build on this to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of services for children, young people and families.

Leaders have made a promising start to introducing a systematic approach to joint **self-evaluation** and should build on the skills and knowledge that already exist to take this forward. This has been enhanced by the experience of the validated self-evaluation exercise carried out in conjunction with Education Scotland. A new culture of respect and openness to challenge is developing well. Services are becoming more self-aware and understand the areas that require further improvement. Leaders are motivated to learn and test out new ways of working. Staff would benefit from more opportunities to share best practice and benchmark against others. Services are at an early stage in developing children, young people and families in self-evaluation.

The **Single Outcome Agreement** features a number of key performance indicators for children and young people, and improving trends are reported for most. There are steady and improving trends in child health, educational achievement and in positive destinations for young people as they leave school. Partners are reducing outcome gaps for children and young people whose life chances are at risk and are clear about outcomes that require further improvement and are taking appropriate steps to do so. Partners now need to measure the key outcomes being achieved through early intervention and preventive approaches.

**Self-evaluation** means taking a close look at what services have done and how well they have done it. It is important because it helps people to see clearly where they need to make improvements.

**A Single Outcome Agreement** is an agreement between the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships which sets out how each will work towards improving outcomes for local people.

## 9. Conclusion and areas for improvement

Services are working very well together in partnership which is underpinned by a positive culture of respect and openness. Strong leadership and direction is supporting successful collaborative working. Staff are united with a common purpose within the Getting it right for every child approach which in turn is having a positive impact on the well-being of children, young people and their families. Considerable improvements have been made in the immediate response to children in need of protection and providing help and support to children, young people and families at an early stage. Leaders are highly committed to consolidating these improvements and are clear about where to focus their work to build capacity and consistency. Together, services have made a positive start to leading and directing resources towards prevention and early intervention. Steady progress is being made against most performance indicators for children and services are highly committed to measuring the impact of their work together. There are plans to introduce systematic joint self-evaluation to support improvement.

Inspectors are confident that services will be able to make the necessary improvements in the light of

the inspection findings. In doing so the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership should take account of the need to:

- secure further and continuous improvement in the quality of assessment of risks and needs and planning for individual children
- complete and implement the integrated children's services plan
- continue to develop rigorous and systematic joint self-evaluation to improve outcomes for children and young people
- ensure continued leadership and direction is provided to implement the planned improvements for services for children, young people and families.

## 10. What happens next?

The Care Inspectorate will ask the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership to publish a joint action plan detailing how it intends to make any improvements identified as a result of the inspection.

The Care Inspectorate and other bodies taking part in this inspection will monitor progress and continue to offer support for improvement through their linking arrangements.

**Judith Tait**

Inspection Lead

September 2013

# Appendix 1: Indicators of quality

Quality indicators help services and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved. In this pilot inspection we used a draft framework of quality indicators that was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012 called '**How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators**'. This document is available on the Care Inspectorate website.

Here are the evaluations for eight of the quality indicators.

<b>How well are the lives of children and young people improving?</b>	
Providing help and support at an early stage	<b>Very good</b>
Impact on children and young people	<b>Good</b>
Assessing and responding to risks and needs	<b>Adequate</b>
Planning for individual children	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?</b>	
Planning and improving services	<b>Adequate</b>
Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders	<b>Good</b>
<b>How good is the leadership and direction of services for children and young people?</b>	
Leadership of improvement and change	<b>Good</b>
Improving the well-being of children and young people	<b>Good</b>

This report uses the following word scale to make clear the judgements made by inspectors.

Excellent	outstanding, sector leading
Very good	major strengths
Good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
Adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website at [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)





## Headquarters

Care Inspectorate  
Compass House  
11 Riverside Drive  
Dundee  
DD1 4NY  
Tel: 01382 207100  
Fax: 01382 207289

We have offices across Scotland. To find your nearest office, visit our website or call our Care Inspectorate enquiries line.

**Website: [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)**

**Email: [enquiries@careinspectorate.com](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.com)**

**Care Inspectorate Enquiries: 0845 600 9527**

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