



SCSWIS

social care
and social work
improvement scotland

Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in East Lothian Council area

28 April 2011



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

The inspection of services to protect children¹ in the East Lothian Council area was carried out in January and February 2011. We looked at the services provided by health, the police, the council and the Children's Reporter. We also looked at the services provided by voluntary and independent organisations. Our report describes how good they are at protecting children and keeping them safe. To find this out we read a sample of children's files which were held by these services. We talked to a number of children and their parents and carers to listen to their views about the services they had received. We also spoke to staff in these services who worked with children, parents and carers and to senior managers who were responsible for these staff and the services they provided.

What we found and tell you about in this report is based on a sample of children and families. We cannot promise that this will be the same for every child in the area who might need help.

A team of inspectors gathered all the information and helped to write this report. These inspectors have experience of working across the range of services involved in protecting children.

Inspection teams include professional staff who work in council areas elsewhere in Scotland.

The Care Commission carried out inspections of East Lothian fostering and adoption services linked to the inspection of services to protect children. Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) has now taken over the work of the Care Commission, so any recommendations or requirements are reported on the SCSWIS website, www.scswis.com

¹ When we refer to children in this report we mean children and young people under the age of 18 years

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1. The area

East Lothian is situated in the south east of Scotland. It covers an area of 679 square kilometres, stretching along the coast from Musselburgh to Dunbar. It borders the City of Edinburgh, Scottish Borders and Midlothian Council areas with Haddington as the administrative centre. East Lothian has a population of 96,836 with 23.5% under the age of 18 years compared to the Scottish average of 20.5%.

The number of children referred to the council for child protection enquiries increased between 2008 and 2010. The level of referrals is higher than that for Scotland as a whole. The proportion of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) in East Lothian is 3.7 per 1000 which is higher than the national average 2.8 per 1000.

2. Particular strengths that made a difference to children and families

- Help and support provided by a range of services at an early stage.
- Staff taking action very quickly to protect children and keep them safe.
- Families having trusting relationships with staff who communicate well with them.
- High levels of staff confidence and trust in their managers who direct and monitor their work.
- The leadership and vision of Chief Officers and the Child Protection Committee which is improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

3. Examples of good practice

- Improving the skills and confidence of new mothers who were previously looked after children through the Vulnerable Young Mum's group.
- Staff using technology effectively to gather the views of children and young people to improve services.

4. How well are the needs of children and families met?

Staff are successful in helping children learn how to keep themselves safe. Children receive useful information to raise their awareness about a range of risks including drugs, alcohol, sexual relationships and using the internet. Children who are looked after away from home are helped to identify an adult they trust and can talk to about keeping themselves safe. Staff give priority to helping vulnerable children and families at an early stage to prevent difficulties arising or stop them getting worse. Helpful support is provided through the Vulnerable Young Mum's group. Services are tailored carefully to meet each family's particular needs. This early support is helping many children get a better start in life and have a more positive future. Overall, staff work very well together to support children and families. In a few cases children would benefit from having their needs identified sooner.

Staff are very alert to signs that children may be at risk. They take prompt and effective action to protect children and keep them safe. Appropriately trained social workers and police officers work well together to ensure children are interviewed sensitively when investigating concerns. They keep families well informed during investigations. Staff are able to make helpful decisions in children's best interests when concerns arise outwith office hours. There is very effective communication between local social workers and the Emergency Social Work Service.

Staff use legal measures well to ensure children are protected. When it is not safe for children to remain at home, arrangements are quickly and sensitively made for them to stay with family members or foster carers. Staff carry out assessments to ensure children are placed with safe and suitable relatives and friends. They should now ensure their assessments of emergency placements are better recorded.

Staff work well together to ensure children's short and longer term needs are met. Most children who have experienced abuse and neglect benefit from consistent relationships with staff who understand their needs and

help them recover. Once children's needs have been identified, specialist services are provided quickly, for as long as they are needed. Helpfully, managers encourage staff to be imaginative, designing and combining services so that the particular needs of each child and family are met. In a few cases, staff do not show enough understanding of how children are affected by their parents' drug, alcohol or mental health problems or domestic abuse in the home. Services should identify and agree an appropriate member of staff with skills and authority to take the lead in coordinating services for those children with complex health and emotional needs.

Staff take note of children's attendance at school and take action quickly to trace them if they go missing. There is a high level of awareness across services about risks to young people who run away from home. Their needs are monitored and support, including emergency accommodation, is provided. Training is helping staff become more aware of the risks to children who may have been brought into or moved around the country illegally. Services take seriously their responsibilities to ensure all young people are treated with respect and provide schools with helpful material to tackle any bullying of gay and lesbian young people.

Children are helped to share any worries with staff who see them regularly and listen carefully to them. Children and parents value the trusting relationships they have with health visitors, social workers, teachers and family support workers and feel this is helping them improve their lives. Parents and family members feel that staff treat them respectfully and are good at recognising their strengths as well as their difficulties. Staff are usually successful in helping parents understand the reasons for concerns and what they are expected to do to keep their children safe. A range of useful approaches is being used to ensure children's views are understood when important decisions are made about their lives. Managers are developing ways of improving the support provided to help children attend and participate in child protection meetings. Independent representatives are available to help parents give their views at important meetings about their children.

5. How good is the management and delivery of services?

Staff clearly recognise children who may be at risk and share relevant information when they have concerns. Lists of significant events in children's lives are now being used well to identify children who need help. Inter-agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) are used very effectively to respond to children at risk of abuse. During these discussions police officers, social workers and paediatricians plan child protection investigations and decide together if a medical examination is needed. Medical examinations are carried out promptly by suitably trained staff. Health needs are identified quickly and met without delay. Staff and managers across services work together well to share information and manage the risks posed to children by sex offenders.

Staff across services are continuing to improve the quality of their assessments of risk and needs. They gather relevant information about children and families and use this well to identify patterns of risk and changes in circumstances. Assessments of risks and needs are generally comprehensive and of a high quality. Services need to continue to improve the consistency and quality of assessments and ensure that they focus on the risks and needs for each child in a family group.

The effectiveness of planning for vulnerable children is improving. Child protection case conferences carefully consider risks and make well-balanced decisions. Although there is a protocol for the removal of children's names from the Child Protection Register (CPR) without a case conference, managers should ensure decisions made are robust. Staff work very well together to put into place action plans to protect children. Plans now need to be much more specific about what needs to change to ensure each child's needs are met.

Chief Officers and managers are committed to continually reviewing how well services protect children and to making improvements. They use what they learn from reviews of case records to make helpful improvements. Chief Officers and managers now need to develop a set of key priorities for

improvement. They also need to ensure staff have a clear understanding of what they have to do to further improve outcomes for children.

6. How good is leadership and direction?

Chief Officers, the CPC and senior managers have a clear and well established vision for protecting children. They have provided purposeful, strong and visible leadership during a period of uncertainty and change. They are committed to making the Council area a thriving, safe community and improve the lives of vulnerable children. They make very effective connections between services which protect children and other services to protect the public. Their strong partnership approach to service improvement is supporting plans to share resources and skills with a neighbouring council. Chief Officers provide clear direction and effective lines of accountability for services. As a result, there is a high level of trust and confidence amongst staff. The appointment of an independent chair to the CPC has strengthened its leadership. Chief Officers and the CPC drive forward continuous improvement of services. Managers support staff to reflect on their performance. They recognise the need to evaluate the impact of services on children's lives and to become more focused on improving children's well-being.

7. How are services improving?

The Integrated Children's Service Plan (ICSP) is used effectively by the Chief Officers' group to evaluate services and monitor progress. Information from children and families about the services they have used is gathered very effectively and used by services for planning, for example through the **Listen More, Assume Less** reports. Progress has been made in identifying children at risk, and families benefit from well planned services to help them keep their children safe. Children and young people who have mental health problems are now helped more quickly. Senior managers are aware that they now need to build on the improvements they have achieved and take forward plans for a single integrated assessment to identify children's needs and improve outcomes for them.

The Chief Officers **Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)** Group places a strong emphasis on improvement through self-evaluation. The CPC has taken forward a number of improvements in procedures and practice identified through multi-agency and single agency audits of case files and national enquiry reports. Individual workers across services review the impact of their work and differences made to the lives of children and families. Senior managers recognise staff require to have a clearer understanding of the key improvement priorities.

8. What happens next?

We are confident that the services will be able to make the necessary improvement in light of the inspection findings. As a result, we will make no more visits in connection with this inspection. Our link inspection will maintain contact with services to support improvements.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with services in the East Lothian Council area.

- Continue to develop staff skills and confidence in using assessment materials to improve the quality and consistency of their assessments of risks and needs.
- Further strengthen child protection plans to meet children's individual needs.
- Ensure the strong vision for child protection is translated into clear plans for improvement.

Quality indicators help services and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work to protect children and meet their needs. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How well do we protect children and meet their needs?* Following the inspection of each local authority area, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of four important quality indicators to keep track of how well services across Scotland are doing to protect children and meet their needs.

Here are the evaluations of these for the East Lothian Council area.

Children are listened to and respected	very good
Children are helped to keep safe	very good
Response to immediate concerns	very good
Meeting needs and reducing long term harm	good

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work within the local authority area.

Self-evaluation	good
Improvements in performance	good

Managing Inspector: Jacqui Rennie
April 2011

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

excellent	outstanding, sector leading
very good	major strengths
good	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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