

Mark Boden
Chief Executive
Shetland Islands Council
Town Hall
LERWICK
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Our Reference: KM/MH/EW
11 January 2017

Dear Mr Boden

Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People in the Shetland Community Planning Partnership Area – review of progress

Further to my letter dated 1 September 2016, I am writing to inform you that the review of progress following the inspection of services for children and young people in the Shetland Community Planning Partnership area has now been completed. As you may recall, the aim of the progress review was to report on the work done in addressing areas of concern identified in the report of the last joint inspection, published in July 2015. In view of this, our review had a relatively narrow and specific focus, looking once again at the way services assess and respond to risk and need. Because of this, the outcome of the review is presented in this letter rather than contained in a separate report.

The review comprised of a number of activities, including the reading of information sent in advance, a review of practice through case file reading (16 case records in total), and a series of meetings with front line staff, managers and service users. I would be grateful if you would pass on our sincere thanks to all your colleagues who assisted us, both during the week of the progress review and in the period leading to it.

I am pleased to inform you that inspectors found evidence that overall, significant progress had been made in the assessment of need and risks faced by your children and young people. The quality of response to these needs and risks had improved.

More specifically, I would like to draw attention to a number of key improvements and ongoing issues, some of which had been raised in the original inspection report.

- The file reading indicated improvement in how well services were responding to concerns that children may be at risk of abuse. Thirteen out of 15 case records were evaluated as good or better, and there were none evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory. This trend was also reflected in the results surrounding responses to concerns about wellbeing – 12 out of 14 evaluated as good or better, and none considered weak or unsatisfactory.
- There were also indications that provision of safe accommodation for children who needed it had improved. Six out of seven children had been found appropriate accommodation since September 2015. This reflected the progress made in expanding the resource pool – for example, going ahead with a fee-paid fostering scheme, developing a foster care recruitment strategy, and increasing the number of beds in children’s houses in Shetland. Despite this progress, pressures remain around the availability of placements for children – particularly those in their teens.
- Discussion with front line staff and their managers indicated a range of factors contributing to this improvement, including effective supervision and support, and a thorough approach to quality assurance, both at team and partnership levels. The advanced practitioner (adult and child protection) role in facilitating professional dialogue between front line professionals was repeatedly highlighted.
- The weekly child concern collaborative (formerly known as the screening meeting) now presented as a more efficient and effective means of identifying and dealing with those children who had been identified through police concern forms or where there were concerns about their wellbeing. Meetings were more formal and structured in accordance with agreed terms of reference. More consistent membership had resulted in much better communication with front line staff, and greater efficiency in the way the meeting operated. Front line staff voiced confidence in the work of the collaborative, and were making referrals at an earlier stage. All agencies were making a consistent and effective contribution to the weekly meetings. The collaborative had recently produced an analytical overview to issues brought to their attention, beginning with patterns and trends regarding inappropriate use of social media and the internet. Related to the operation of the group, managers had started to consider the implications of the recent Supreme Court ruling in relation to the Named Person and the sharing of information.
- Activity around quality assurance and self-evaluation had improved significantly since the inspection, overseen by the integrated children’s services quality assurance group. We considered the self-evaluation of strategy meetings and pre-birth child protection referrals - both identified as areas for improvement in the inspection. Suitable, sound methodologies had been developed for both these reviews. This self evaluation activity revealed evidence of significant improvement, as well as continuing areas for improvement. This stronger performance was reflected in the progress review file reading results.

- There were indications from the case records that practice in relation to chronologies had improved. All 16 lead professional (social work) case records had a chronology, with 13 considered fit for purpose. These figures reflected the work of the project team to date, which had started by focussing on practice in the social work team, with positive results – both in terms of writing chronologies, and applying them to practice.
- Progress in relation to integrated chronologies, as well as single agency chronologies, had been made but had been slower. Chronologies fit for purpose were found in five out of 11 records other than those of the lead professional (compared with one out of 13 in 2015). Front line staff and their managers recognised that more needed to be done in relation to developing chronologies across all agencies, establishing a common format, and establishing integrated chronologies in complex cases. It was encouraging that there was a clear next step/testing change underway – introducing chronologies in a school setting, with a supporting link provided by the social worker in the project team.
- There were clear indications that written assessments of both risks and needs had improved. Eleven out of 16 risk assessments were very good or better; none evaluated below good. Similarly, 15 out of 16 needs assessments were good or better, with none evaluated as weak or unsatisfactory. Social workers, as lead professionals, had played a key role in achieving this. The early improvement in social work assessment practice, referred to in the inspection report, had continued. This had been effectively led and supported by the social work team leader.

As you will be aware, the joint action plan, agreed by partners in response to our inspection findings, will continue to influence improvement in the key areas identified in the inspection report, including those matters set out in this letter. The Care Inspectorate link inspector for Shetland, Martha Shortreed, will continue to take an interest in the partnership's progress in taking forward the action plan, and will be happy to provide support for improvement as required.

Please note that a letter setting out the outcome of the progress review has also been issued to the Chair of the Shetland Partnership Board, and will be published on the Care Inspectorate website on 11 January 2017.

If you have any questions about the inspection or require further clarification, please contact, Marc Hendrikson at marc.hendrikson@careinspectorate.com Tel. 07825842165 or Judith Tait, Service Manager – Strategic Scrutiny (Children and Criminal Justice) at judith.tait@careinspectorate.com Tel. 07825842316.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Mitchell
Executive Director of Scrutiny and Assurance