

Services for children and young people in Moray

December 2017

**Progress review following a
joint inspection**

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Appendix 1: Areas for improvement arising from the February 2017 joint inspection of services for children and young people in Moray community planning partnership area.

1. Background to this progress review

We carried out a joint inspection of services for children and young people in the Moray community planning partnership area between August and October 2016. You can find the report, which we published in February 2017, on our website www.careinspectorate.com.

At that time, we were not confident that joint planning of children's services was resulting in improvements in the wellbeing of children and young people. Leaders were not working together effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people. The lack of governance and accountability for implementing improvements meant that the pace of change was too slow. The quality and effectiveness of children's assessments and plans was too variable. While those at immediate risk of harm were being protected, children experiencing neglectful parenting and cumulative harm were exposed to risk for too long before decisive action was taken.

We identified six priorities for improvement and gave notice that we would return to the area to report on initial progress within six months of our report being published.

2. How we conducted this progress review

The aim of this initial progress review was to assess partners' commitment to making improvements and their effectiveness in doing so at an appropriate pace. We recognised that it would be unrealistic to expect to see the impact of changes on overall outcomes for vulnerable children and young people but we were looking for compelling evidence that improvements had been achieved in the initial response to child protection and welfare concerns.

A team of inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland and Education Scotland undertook a range of activities in the community planning partnership area during the week beginning 11 September 2017. We did not set out to reassess all the areas of work relating to children, young people and families that would be covered in a full inspection. Instead, activities were designed to find out about the work being done to bring about improvements in the six areas of performance which gave greatest concern in the previous inspection. These are listed in appendix 1.

During this progress review we:

- took account of the work carried out by the Care Inspectorate strategic link inspectors and the Education Scotland area lead officer to support chief officers and senior managers in improving services
- reviewed partners' self-assessment of their progress against all six of the main areas for improvement, along with supporting evidence they provided
- interviewed chief officers, senior managers, elected members and the chairs of the child protection committee
- held focus groups with first-line managers and frontline staff around the six recommendations made in the February 2017 report
- reviewed a sample of the most recent child welfare and protection concerns referrals to the social work service to assess the multi-agency initial response.

We decided not to meet with children, young people, and their families during this initial progress review. We judged that the joint improvement plan was at too early a stage of implementation for children, young people and families to be able to tell us about any real impact on service delivery.

3. Progress made

The partnership's approach to improvement

Leaders and senior officers have made a firm commitment to work more closely together and raised their collective aspiration for improving services to children and young people. In response to our verbal feedback, and prior to publication of the report, partners revised their governance arrangements and established an interim structure to respond to the concerns raised during the inspection. They have developed both a strategic and detailed operational improvement plan to prioritise, monitor and review key improvement actions. Partners have visited another local authority area that had faced similar significant challenges, and are using this learning to develop new approaches. They have sought out examples of best practice across the country, and formed links with partnerships in other areas to provide them with greater external support and challenge. Partners recognise the scale of improvement and culture changes required to achieve their aspirations for all children and young people in Moray. They identified this would require a change programme of two to three years to establish and implement new ways of working. They accept that the cultural shift required to embed and sustain improvements over time will take longer, and are fully committed to achieving this.

Area for improvement: Strengthen collective vision and collaborative leadership to direct the delivery of integrated children's services. It should be underpinned by strategic needs assessment and robust performance information, and demonstrate measurable improvements in outcomes for children, young people and families.

Following the inspection, chief officers had prioritised a review of children's services planning governance and reporting arrangements. They have now identified and agreed their priorities for improvement and are engaging in more open dialogue with frontline staff and managers as they share their vision for the delivery of children's services.

Chief officers are beginning to deliver clearer leadership and direction for services for children and young people in Moray. We are persuaded that they are committed to their vision that Moray should be the best place in Scotland to grow up, and they are successfully communicating this vision, together with their key strategic priorities for children's services, through a series of staff engagement events and briefings. Following the joint inspection, partners had prioritised three key actions to improve standards of operational practice. We talk about these later in the report.

Governance and accountability arrangements for children's services planning have been revised and are now more robust. The interim governance structure

established post inspection has been replaced with an executive leadership group (ELG). Supported by four strategic groups, this more streamlined and simplified governance structure has been designed to enable senior officers to more effectively direct change and review progress in children's services planning. Delivery plans for each of the groups are in place, but not yet sufficiently SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound). Senior officers are now working more effectively together to begin to address key improvement actions arising from the joint inspection. Led and modelled by chief officers, a more open and transparent culture of debate and challenge is beginning to emerge. At a local level, locality management groups are beginning to meet more consistently. This approach to the delivery of children's services has the potential to help partners build additional capacity for change and improvement.

A recently completed locality-based profile of children's needs has been used to inform the new children's services plan. Partners recognise the need to strengthen the current plan, to re-align joint resources towards early intervention and to develop more meaningful performance measures. Their current profiling work will provide a positive foundation for a more comprehensive joint strategic needs assessment. Partners have formally approached the Realigning Children's Services¹ team from Scottish Government to support them with this work. If agreed, the work will commence early next year.

Overall, leaders have made encouraging progress in this improvement action. They have used the inspection findings to help them understand how best to strengthen children's services planning and now have the structure in place to support this work.

Area for improvement: Strengthen the governance, leadership and accountability of the child protection committee.

The chief officers' group is now providing more effective leadership, support and challenge to the child protection committee. Membership of the chief officers' group had been reviewed, a new chair introduced and the group is meeting regularly. It is beginning to provide clearer direction to the child protection committee. Governance and reporting arrangements have been established, with the child protection committee chair reporting directly to the chief officers' group and to the newly formed executive leadership group.

Chairing arrangements for the child protection committee have been revised as part of an overarching review of strategic children's services planning groups. A proposal for an independent chair of the committee is being considered by the chief officers' group and an interim chair appointed on a temporary basis. The committee's interim chair had met with the chief officers' group chair as part of an induction process to agree priorities, expectations and reporting arrangements. Chief officers are beginning to hold services to account if their attendance at the committee diminishes. A review of the membership of the child protection committee is planned to ensure representatives attending hold sufficient authority and delegated

¹ The Realigning Children's Services programme is funded by the Scottish Government and supports community planning partnerships to improve the commissioning of children's services in their local area.

responsibility for their service. Recently elected councillors, new to the committee, have been given helpful briefings to enable them to better understand their role and responsibilities. While there are clear connections between the child protection committee and the Moray alcohol and drug partnership, links to other public protection partnerships are less well defined and could be strengthened to ensure that the protection of children is seen more widely within the context of public protection.

The child protection committee has produced a revised performance framework, which is beginning to provide more relevant and comprehensive data. Children's reviewing officers are helpfully providing contextual information about vulnerable children's plans to provide greater meaning to this. The chief officers' group and the child protection committee are now interrogating management information and performance reports more robustly. They are beginning to request further analysis of reports to help them better understand this information. Multi-agency practice audits were beginning to take place, and although still at a very early stage, these should help the child protection committee and the chief officers' group better understand the quality and effectiveness of child protection practice across Moray.

Chief officers have made very positive progress to re-establish governance and reporting arrangements for the child protection committee. The protection of children and young people could be strengthened through more formal alignment of public protection arrangements across Moray.

Area for improvement: Strengthen the approach to corporate parenting, participation and children's rights to deliver improvements at pace.

Leaders understand their responsibilities as corporate parents and are taking encouraging steps to fulfil these responsibilities more effectively. Governance arrangements and membership of the corporate parenting group have been reviewed and revised and are now more closely aligned with other strategic planning groups and the executive leadership group. We found newly elected councillors to be well informed about their responsibilities as corporate parents. Partners have completed a draft corporate parenting strategy, informed by the views of care experienced young people, and are currently planning arrangements for its launch. Underpinned by 10 guarantees, this has the potential to improve services and outcomes for looked after children, young people and care leavers. The strategy and plan could be further strengthened by including timescales for completion and resource requirements.

Leaders and senior officers have fulfilled their long-standing commitment to establish a champion's board and engaged young people in a range of related events and activities. This has resulted in improved opportunities for care experienced young people to share their views and experiences. Externally secured funding has supported the creation of the champion's board and the appointment of a development officer for youth participation and engagement. These developments have the potential to enhance meaningful participation by care experienced children and young people in the development of policy and service improvement.

Senior officers and staff we met cited positive examples within their own services of promoting children's rights and engaging children and young people to seek their views on services. However, a collective strategic approach for the effective engagement of children and young people in children's services and wider aspects of community planning has yet to be developed. A greater focus is now required to strengthen and embed children's rights and child-centred values and behaviours across Moray in order to fully implement this area for improvement.

Area for improvement: Implement a framework of joint self-evaluation, ensuring a clear focus on improved outcomes for children and young people, including those in need of protection.

Leaders identified quality assurance and self-evaluation as a key improvement priority. They created a dedicated multi-agency quality assurance, performance and planning team to coordinate and lead the development, monitoring and review of joint self-evaluation activity across children's services with clear governance and reporting arrangements. Helpful links with key strategic and locality planning groups have been established and these arrangements should assist partners as they begin to develop a greater shared understanding and ownership of self-evaluation across children's services.

We could see partners beginning to implement the quality assurance and performance framework they have developed. This clearly sets out their approach to the joint self-evaluation of services for children and young people in Moray. With an ambitious calendar of activity, individual senior managers are responsible for ensuring completion of each activity. Templates are beginning to be used to feed back the learning from audits to staff and managers. Partners are beginning to collate findings from self-evaluation and audit activities into a central repository. They have developed tools, based on the Care Inspectorate quality indicator framework² to assist the collation of information. They plan to use this to inform annual reports and for planning future thematic self-evaluation activity.

Encouragingly, we found partners promoting self-evaluation and reflective practice among all staff groups. They had raised awareness of the framework through a formal launch event and a series of locality-based workshops, providing opportunities for staff and managers to discuss how they could become more involved in improvement activities. Partners worked with the Care Inspectorate's strategic link inspector to provide training to staff from across services and were using this learning to start the process of undertaking their own multi-agency practice audits. More considered use of improvement science methodology is enabling a greater focus on the key improvement priorities of supervision, quality assurance and neglect.

Partners have made a promising start to introducing a systematic approach to self-evaluation. With their quality assurance and performance framework now in place, once implemented, this should provide chief officers, managers and staff with a

² How well are we improving the lives of children and young people? A guide to evaluating services using quality indicators. Care Inspectorate (2014)

clearer understanding on the impact of practice on outcomes for children and young people.

Area for improvement: Improve initial risk assessment of, and response to, vulnerable children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, neglectful parenting or cumulative harm.

Leaders had introduced a range of measures to address the concerns identified in the joint inspection report. They had created a short-life working group to consider best practice and develop new ways of working where children were experiencing, or at risk of, neglect. While still at an early stage, this group is beginning to deliver on some key improvement actions. Multi-agency training is helping staff and managers develop a better understanding of neglect and thresholds of concern. More open debate about thresholds of neglect is beginning to take place. Involvement of staff from adult services in training would further enhance this shared learning. There is scope through the group's recent engagement with CELCIS and other local authority contacts to further develop evidence-based tools and approaches that could complement the existing risk assessment framework.

Senior managers quickly undertook a multi-agency review of the high-risk cases we raised with them during inspection and implemented immediate actions to ensure these children were appropriately protected. In addition, they have reviewed information-sharing processes and procedures. The education service has introduced a single point of contact within their service to enhance information sharing processes.

Chief officers have focused heavily on auditing case records as a key quality assurance mechanism. A practice audit is now undertaken every two months, with the records of 50 children and young people reviewed so far. While we recognise the critical importance of auditing activity, reviewing practice retrospectively means it has provided limited evidence of recent improvements which still need to be embedded to become 'the way we do things round here'. Nonetheless, they are proving a useful vehicle for staff and managers to develop skills and confidence in this method of quality assurance.

More recently, senior managers have introduced a multi-agency practice hub to review the quality of information contained within childcare or protection referrals and give immediate feedback to staff and frontline managers. This is helping managers better recognise quality in practice and identify factors which support good quality or act as a barrier. The next step would be to further develop this approach to assess the quality of decision making and the response by services to assessed needs and/or risks.

Partners have reviewed, revised and relaunched the inter-agency referral discussion (IRD) procedure. Staff we met had a clear understanding of the new process. Teleconferencing and real-time recording of IRDs is now beginning to become more systematic. Partners recognise the need to introduce a system of quality assurance, performance review and evaluation in order to drive and sustain improvement. The child protection committee will review the new procedure following a three-month trial period.

Overall, encouraging progress is being made. We would encourage partners to now identify a small number of key questions which address priorities, for example “How well do we respond to concerns that children are experiencing neglect or cumulative harm?”. We suggest they should use the new quality assurance mechanisms, including auditing case records, to provide answers across an increased number of cases, over a sufficient length of time to test whether changes to processes are resulting in improved experiences and outcomes.

Area for improvement: Improve standards of operational practice by setting clear expectations for staff and strengthening approaches to quality assurance and staff supervision.

Leaders had identified the development of new and improved approaches to quality assurance and supervision as improvement priorities. In addition to the introduction of regular practice audits as part of their new quality assurance framework, they have engaged with staff and managers to review the effectiveness of existing supervision arrangements.

Single- and multi-agency practice guidance is in place and senior officers have provided clear instruction to staff on the requirement for this to be adhered to. Exemplars of good practice are being developed which should assist staff develop higher-quality children’s assessments and plans. The recently developed quality assurance framework helpfully sets out the range of approaches, which, if fully implemented, should support improved standards of operational practice.

The practice of routine auditing of case records on a multi-agency basis has been instituted with the intention of providing evidence, in time, of improvements in practice, eventually working through to better outcomes for children and young people. The introduction of more systematic approaches to quality assurance within services is at an early stage. We could see that the police response to child welfare or child protection concerns is being scrutinised more closely by managers. They have successfully improved the timeliness of information-sharing and now need to focus on the quality of information and response. Managers in the social work and health services provide direct feedback to staff about the quality of their work after reviewing sample cases. However, we found this approach somewhat unplanned and it would be improved by developing more systematic quality control by first-line managers to ensure compliance with agreed standards, acknowledge good practice and take corrective action when this is required. The quality assurance role of reviewing officers had been limited due to capacity issues within the service. Now resolved, managers were planning to strengthen this role to include reviewing the quality of children’s assessments and plans. If implemented, this should provide managers and the child protection committee with an overview of the quality of practice across the authority.

Senior managers have reviewed models of staff supervision within their service. Well-evaluated development sessions have enabled health and social work staff and frontline managers to reflect on current supervision practices and explore new approaches. A competency-based supervision model is being tested in one social work team. Managers recognise the impact of increasing workload demands on the

frequency and quality of supervision staff received. They are hopeful that the creation of additional posts within the children and families service will alleviate some of these pressures.

New approaches are being developed to review individual children's cases where this proves necessary. Multi-agency reflective sessions had helped staff to critically review their practice in relation to two complex cases. The head of service in children and families social work had reviewed decision making at child protection case conference in relation to two children on the child protection register. We found staff to be enthusiastic about opportunities to become more reflective practitioners and these approaches are helping managers develop greater insight into issues of quality in practice and provide direct feedback and support to staff.

While these are encouraging steps, a greater focus is now required to ensure all aspects of the quality assurance framework are implemented. A more systematic checks and balances approach to quality control and analysis of performance data should enhance partners' understanding of the quality of operational practice. Multi-agency audit will be more helpful once practice changes have had time to become more fully embedded.

4. Conclusion

We are confident that partners have taken the findings of the joint inspection of services for children published in February 2017 very seriously. They have been working hard to deliver change and improvement. Chief officers have prioritised strengthening their strategic planning arrangements and developing quality assurance systems. They now need to build on this work and use it to evidence real improvements in operational practice to ensure that children and their families experience more effective support and intervention.

Partners acknowledge that they have been able to give little attention as yet to developing more strategic approaches to children's rights and participation. This needs to be included in their improvement work going forward.

Partners recognise they need to maintain the current momentum and energy levels if they are going to achieve sustained improvement and change. Given the limited number of officers and many competing demands, partners will need to invest in building capacity at all levels within services to do so.

5. What happens next?

The Care Inspectorate and its scrutiny partners will continue to monitor progress and to offer support for improvement to community planning partners in Moray. We would expect to see stronger processes starting to impact positively on children, young people and families and, in turn, leading to demonstrably better outcomes. We will make opportunities to gain the views of children, young people and their families as part of our ongoing monitoring work. We will publish a second progress review within 12 months of publication of this report.

Appendix 1: Areas for improvement arising from the February 2017 joint inspection of services for children and young people in Moray community planning partnership area

- Strengthen collective vision and collaborative leadership to direct the delivery of integrated children's services. This should be underpinned by strategic needs assessment and robust performance information, and demonstrate measurable improvements in outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Strengthen the governance, leadership and accountability of the child protection committee.
- Strengthen the approach to corporate parenting, participation and children's rights to deliver improvements at pace.
- Implement a framework of joint self-evaluation, ensuring a clear focus on improved outcomes for children and young people, including those in need of protection.
- Improve initial risk assessment of, and response to, vulnerable children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, neglectful parenting or cumulative harm.
- Improve standards of operational practice by setting clear expectations for staff and strengthening approaches to quality assurance and staff supervision.

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