



Joint inspection of services to protect children and young people in the Dundee City Council area

17 May 2012



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

The inspection of services to protect children¹ in the Dundee City Council area was carried out in February 2012. 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 Inspectorate carried out inspections of Dundee City Council fostering and adoption services linked to the inspection of services to protect children. Any recommendations or requirements are reported on the Care Inspectorate website, www.careinspectorate.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

Dundee City Council area is situated in Central Scotland and borders with Angus and Perth & Kinross Councils. It covers an area of 60 square kilometres. Dundee City has a population of 144,290 with 18.9% under the age of 18 years compared to the Scottish average of 19.9%.

The number of children referred to the council for child protection enquiries increased between 2007 and 2010. The level of referrals is lower than that for Scotland as a whole. The proportion of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) in Dundee City is 2.9 per 1000 which is broadly in line with the national average of 2.8 per 1000.

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

- Staff identifying and supporting vulnerable pregnant women and their unborn babies.
- The help and support provided through partnership working with voluntary organisations.
- Joint leadership and direction supporting improvements.

3. Examples of good practice

- **The Looked after Children Champions Board** - gathering the views of looked after children to improve the services provided for them.
- The multi-agency Practice Review Group - reviewing child protection cases to identify good practice and make improvements.

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

Children learn about personal safety through effective programmes delivered in schools and in the community, including how to keep safe when using the internet and mobile phones. Particularly vulnerable children are helped by direct work with staff to recognise dangers and make safe choices. Approaches to identifying the most vulnerable children and families at an early stage are improving. Families benefit from support which is usually coordinated well and lasts as long as it is needed. Vulnerable pregnant women and their babies are supported very well through the **New Beginnings** project. Parents are helped to increase their

skills and confidence in caring for their children through parenting groups or one-to-one support. There is effective support for families where parents have drug or alcohol problems from services, such as Aberlour Outreach. Parents are supported well by Tayside Substance Misuse Service (TSMS) to enable them to take better care of their children, but some have to wait too long to get this help. Families affected by domestic abuse receive very helpful support from a range of services, including Women's Aid and Barnardo's. In other circumstances, children do not always get the help they need when parents do not take up services. In some cases, children's circumstances do not improve quickly because effective help is not provided early enough.

Children are protected by staff, including those who work mainly with adults, being clearer and more confident about what to do when they are worried about children. In most cases, social workers and police are responding much more effectively.

Families are usually kept informed and supported well while concerns are being investigated. Staff use legal measures effectively to keep children safe. Foster care placements are always found when children cannot remain at home. Often, arrangements are made for children to stay with family members. In these circumstances, greater consistency is needed in carrying out the necessary checks to ensure their safety.

In a growing number of cases, more effective joint working is helping to reduce risks to children, improve their wellbeing and meet their needs better. In some cases, outcomes for children experiencing neglect could be improved if their health needs were identified more effectively and services worked together better to ensure they attend appointments. A range of specialist services provide valuable support to help children recover from abuse and neglect and achieve good physical and mental health in the longer-term. However, some children have to wait too long to get this help. Foster care placements are improving children's safety and wellbeing. Relatives who provide better care for children unable to live with their parents can get valuable group support. More emotional and practical support would help them to meet the needs of children in their care.

Staff have clear guidance on what to do when children go missing from school. They know what action to take when children run away from home, residential or foster care. When young people return, they benefit from advice and support and, where necessary, additional help from Barnardo's Young Runaways Project. Training is helping staff become more aware of the risks to children who have been brought into or moved around the country illegally. Services work well together to provide useful information, advice and support for gay and lesbian young people.

Staff work hard to build trust with vulnerable children and families and win their confidence. They are usually appropriately persistent when families are reluctant to accept help. In most cases, they communicate clearly with parents about their difficulties and the reasons for taking action. As a result, most parents understand staff concerns and what is expected of them to reduce risks to their children. Where children are too young to give their views or have communication difficulties, staff take time to observe their behaviour and record what children need to thrive and be healthy and safe. Some children are supported well by staff who know them to express their views and attend decision-making meetings. Managers are taking action to strengthen ways in which staff seek and understand children's views. In some cases, frequent changes of key staff is a barrier to developing trust with children and families. A more consistent approach to providing children and vulnerable parents with independent support to help them give their views and understand decisions at meetings would be beneficial.

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

Staff across services are very confident in reporting child protection concerns and sharing information about vulnerable children. However, systems for discussing new concerns about children already known to services should be strengthened further. Assessments of risk and needs are improving but variable. Staff from other services, including adult services, are increasingly contributing helpful information to assessments.

Staff are beginning to see the benefits of using a dated list of significant events in a child's life to identify patterns of neglect. Across services, staff work well together to protect children from risks posed by sex offenders or from young people who present harmful and problematic sexual behaviour.

Police, social work and health staff work well together to gather information, plan investigations and make decisions about the need for a medical examination. Child protection medical examinations are carried out sensitively and children's health needs followed up quickly. When a child is already known to a social worker and a new concern is raised, staff should always seek advice about the need for a medical examination to ensure the child's health needs are met.

Staff are working together better in drawing up and reviewing plans for vulnerable children and families although the quality of these is variable. When adult services staff are involved in this work they make helpful contributions. In most cases children's plans are regularly reviewed to make sure that progress is being made and risks to children are reducing. It is not always clear how planning for children no longer on the Child Protection Register is coordinated and their plans routinely reviewed. Timely planning to meet children's longer term needs when they are unable to return home is improving.

Health staff are benefiting from more effective supervision. Across services, more staff would benefit from regular support and challenge by their managers.

Chief Officers and senior managers are highly committed to reviewing their work to improve services and outcomes for children. A Practice Review Group is successfully identifying strengths and areas for improvement. A range of other activities have been carried out identifying where improvements can be made. Staff, children and families have been involved in some of these. A sub-group of the Child Care and Protection Committee (CCPC) is managing and coordinating this work effectively. Individually, some services are reviewing aspects of their work. Chief Officers and senior managers recognise they need to build on this and involve staff and service users more fully.

6. How good is leadership and direction?

Leadership and direction of child protection has been strengthened considerably. Chief Officers and senior managers have established a clear and ambitious shared vision for child protection which has been communicated effectively to staff. Staff across services have a very clear understanding of what this means for them and how it directs their work with vulnerable children and families. They know and understand that child protection is a key priority for all services. Chief Officers take their individual and collective responsibilities for child protection very seriously. They work together well in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect supporting and challenging each other and their senior managers more effectively. Accountability for child protection within and across services has been strengthened. The Chief Officers' Group (COG) and the CCPC are successfully leading and directing change and improvement of child protection in Dundee. Improvement priorities are clearly stated and staff have been involved particularly well in developing and implementing these. Partnership working, including the voluntary sector, has improved significantly. Staff in adult services are becoming more involved in joint working. Despite increasing demands, most staff feel valued and well supported in taking forward improvements. Senior managers need to ensure services have the capacity and resources to sustain and build on these achievements and continue to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

7. How are services improving?

The Integrated Children's Services Plan has a strong focus on **Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)**, including those in need of protection. Progress in making improvements is regularly monitored and reviewed by the COG and the CCPC. There has been significant improvement in the immediate response to children in need of protection. There have also been improvements in information-sharing and recording, assessment and planning. More specially trained police and social workers are available to interview children. Staff are working much better together across services

and in teams. This is benefiting vulnerable children and families, including those in need of protection. Policies and procedures have been updated to reflect changes in practice and new national guidance. Multi-agency case file reviews successfully identified the importance of gathering the views of children and families and involving them better in decision-making meetings. As a result, improvements have been made. This work has also helped make improvements in key child protection processes. Senior managers recognise the need to develop better performance management information focusing more on measuring outcomes for children and families. Overall, significant improvements have been made.

8. What happens next?

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

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with services in the Dundee City Council area.

- Strengthen initial assessments of risks for new concerns about children already receiving a social work service.
- Improve the coordination of support for children following de registration from the Child Protection Register.
- Continue to develop approaches to joint self-evaluation which lead to improvement in outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

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 Dundee City Council area.

Children are listened to and respected	good
Children are helped to keep safe	good
Response to immediate concerns	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	very good

Managing Inspector: Kevin Mitchell
May 2012

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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
satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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

Email: enquiries@careinspectorate.com

Care Inspectorate Enquiries: 0845 600 9527

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本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

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