

ANGUS COUNCIL

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 29 MAY 2003
SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 5 JUNE 2003**

Angus Committee for Child Protection Response to the report of the National Child Protection Audit and Review – “It’s Everyone’s Job to Make Sure I’m Alright”

**REPORT BY THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

ABSTRACT

This report advises Committee members of the Angus Committee for Child Protection’s response to the national Child Protection Audit and Review’s recommendations.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education and Social Work Committees, each for its respective interest:

- i) notes the Child Protection Committee’s response to the 17 recommendations.
- ii) notes that a further report detailing bids to Changing Children’s Services Fund to address the resource issues arising from the implications of the National Review is being presented to Members this cycle.

2 INTRODUCTION

In November 2002 a Review Team appointed by the Scottish Executive published the report “It’s Everyone’s Job to Make Sure I’m Alright” detailing the findings of the National Child Protection Audit and Review and made 17 recommendations intended to improve practice across the agencies involved in the field of Child Protection.

The report and its recommendations was the subject of a number of discussions by Angus Committee for Child Protection and also the Joint Management & Commissioning Group for Children’s Services. The Joint Management & Commissioning Group for Children’s Services endorsed the Child Protection Committee’s views on the recommendations and ultimately these were presented to the Chief Executive of Angus Council who was charged with responding to the Scottish Executive on the recommendations.

The recommendations of the Child Protection Audit Review Report are wide ranging and in many cases require multi-agency action. For many of the recommendations it is expected that the implementation will be picked up via the 3 year reform programme and the work of a National Action Team appointed by the Scottish Executive.

The Joint Management & Commissioning Group for Children’s Services in Angus has given top priority to bids designed to enhance planning and delivery of Child Protection services in the current round of bidding for Changing Children’s Services funding. Bids have been formulated to address the relevant issues in the recommendations and particularly to strengthen resources of the Child Protection Committee and enhance services to vulnerable children and families in Angus.

The 17 recommendations contained in the report and the Angus Committee for Child Protection's response to these are contained in an Appendix to this report.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As stated detailed bids have been formulated against the Changing Children's Services Fund and a report has been prepared for Members detailing these.

4 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no human rights implications arising as a result of the recommendation contained in this report.

5 CONSULTATION

Chief Executive, Director of Law & Admin, Director of Finance have all been consulted in the preparation of this report.

6 CONCLUSION

Angus Council with its partner agencies will endeavour to continue to make Angus a more secure and safe place for our most vulnerable children. Further reports will be prepared for Committee detailing progress made during the process of change envisaged in the National Report.

J Anderson
Director of Education

R Peat
Acting Director of Social Work

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

APPENDIX

Recommendation 1: All agencies should review their procedures and processes and put in place measures - to ensure that practitioners have access to the right information at the right time, and in particular to ensure that:

- **Where children present to medical practitioners with an injury or complaint, practitioners must consider what further information is available from their own or other agencies *before they rule out* the possibility of continuing risk.**
- **Where children present to any hospital, there should be in place mechanisms for checking other health records to ensure a pattern of injuries is not being missed.**
- **Where there have been concerns about possible abuse or neglect, schools, police, health service and social work service files should contain a succinct, readily accessible chronology of events or concerns which can be easily referred to should a further incident or concern arise. This chronology should contain information relating to the child and, where known, information relating to other people in the child's life, for example, any previous deaths of children of a mother's new partner.**
- **Courts should ensure bail address suitability checks are undertaken in cases where the alleged offence is against children, or in the case of domestic abuse, where children may be at risk.**
- **Caldicott guardians in Health Boards and Trusts should ensure that health professionals are aware of their responsibilities towards the care and protection of children. In particular they should ensure that where children are at risk of abuse and neglect information is shared promptly with other relevant professionals in line with the General Medical Council and the Scottish Executive guidance on when medical confidentiality can be breached.**

Committee endorsed the recommendation and lead officers were identified within the Committee to take forward the issues within their agencies.

Recommendation 2: Through the Child Protection Committees all agencies should improve access to help for children who have been abused or neglected by:

- **providing for single-page contact information for telephone directories, public phones and the web, which identifies local contact points in health services, local authorities, police services, SCRA and the voluntary sector;**
- **providing for services users and referrers, information about how to access help for children about whom they are worried. This should include information about how and when children and young people will be consulted, what will happen after a referral is made and what, and how, feedback to people who refer concerns will be provided**

Committee endorsed the recommendation subject to appropriate resources being available to discharge the responsibilities (bid to Changing Children's Services Fund for CP Development Manager)

Recommendation 3: The Scottish Executive should, in consultation with service providers, draw up standards of practice that reflect children's rights to be protected and to receive appropriate help. All local authorities, health boards, police services and SCRA should undertake regular audits of practice against these standards and report on them annually to the Scottish Executive and local Child Protection Committees.

Committee accepted the requirement to monitor performance within agencies involved in CP work but were unanimously of the view that this required resources allocated to the CP Committee to support this function. (Bid to Changing Children's Services Fund for CP Development Manager)

Recommendation 4: The Scottish Executive should revise the remit of the Child Protection Committees to include:

- **Annual auditing and reporting, to constituent agencies and to the Scottish Executive, on the quality of agency and inter-agency work.**
- **The provision of information to members of the public, volunteers and other professionals.**
- **Assisting a wider range of organisations to help prevent abuse and neglect through training for staff and volunteers.**
- **The development of safe recruitment practices for agencies working with young people.**

The Committee felt that:

- ◆ Auditing and reporting would require significant resources for Committee to discharge this remit (Bid to Changing Children's Services Fund)
- ◆ Provision of info – significant resources required for Committee to undertake this (Bid to Changing Children's Services Fund)
- ◆ Training staff and volunteers. The Committee felt that a needs analysis exercise should be undertaken across Scotland to determine the level of demand and the level of resources required to meet that need and also where funding would come from to facilitate training before Committees can agree to this. The current resources available to the Committee for interagency training would in no way address the potential demand in this recommendation.
- ◆ Development of safe recruitment practices. The Committee felt that this was quite inappropriate for CP Committees – National Standards should be developed for all agencies in Safe Recruitment practices based partly on work already undertaken eg consortium on safe recruitment practices involving 4 local authorities. There is clearly a case here for minimum national standards and not ad-hoc local development. This should be monitored by bodies such as the Scottish Social Services Council and General Teaching Council etc.

Recommendation 5: Local authority Chief Executives, in consultation with other services, should review the structure, membership and scope of the Child Protection Committee covering their authority and report to their Council and partner agencies on whether it is best constituted to take on the responsibilities for assuring the quality of agency and inter-agency services and the recommendations about their role contained in this report.

Structure and membership

Angus Child Protection Committee is an integral part of the children's services planning process in Angus. The chair of the Committee is a member of the Joint Management and Commissioning Group for children's services ensuring a transparent two way process exists for the sharing of information.

The Committees work is supported by the work of three sub groups responsible for policy, training and practice.

Membership of the Child Protection committee is defined within the constitution and is deemed to be fit for the purpose for which the committee was established. (See appendices 2, 3 and 4). Discussions are currently taking place to ensure that representation from all sectors is at a sufficiently senior level in terms of discussion and decision making.

Scope

Developing the work of the Child Protection Committee has been fully discussed within the planning structure. Two proposals are being submitted to the Changing Children's Services Fund to ensure that the recommendations within the report relating to future Committee responsibilities can be fully addressed. In particular recommendations 3 and 4 will be targeted by this bid proposal. The co-ordination of audits of current practice across agencies and sampling activity in an objective manner will ensure the Child Protection Committee can report effectively against standards. Without the establishment of this post the recommendations contained within this report for the Committee will be almost impossible to implement.

Interagency training is provided by a rolling programme throughout the year by way of a partnership with two other local CPC's and a commissioned service with Dundee University.

It is noted that a number of the recommendations within the report which are directed towards the Scottish Executive will potentially lead to the scope of the Angus Child Protection Committee being widened significantly. Issues such as training will require significant additional resources and the scale of potential need should not be underestimated.

A common framework for assessment and linked computer based information such as is suggested in recommendation 15 will without doubt enhance the effective, integrated work within child protection and inform the work of Child Protection Committees. It is the view within Angus, however, that the Executive has a prime role and responsibility for taking this forward particularly in relation to computer systems where national standards, support and resources are all required if this is to become a reality.

Preliminary discussions have taken place with senior officers from key agencies and the Tayside Child Protection Committees to consider the formulation of a pan-Tayside Child Protection Group to consider strategic and operational issues across geographic and agency boundaries. It is likely that this will conclude successfully with agreement on a remit for this initiative that will complement the work of Angus Child Protection Committee.

Recommendation 6: The Scottish Executive should consult on how child fatality reviews should be introduced in Scotland. This should include consultation on how they should be conducted, how review teams should be constituted, to whom they would report and what legislative framework is required to ensure their effectiveness.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation but felt that clarity needs to be given by Scottish Executive:-

Definition and scope of child fatality. Also the Committee expressed doubts as to whether CPC's can review fatalities credibly given members closeness to service delivery if a child is on CP Register or looked after.

It was also felt it would be extremely useful to have a national pool of "experts" who could be called upon by a Committee if faced with a fatality enquiry. This would bring a significant degree of expertise, credibility and objectivity to a very difficult and complex task.

Recommendation 7: The Scottish Executive should strengthen the current arrangements for the development and dissemination of knowledge about abuse and neglect. In particular it should identify:

- **the most effective arrangements for recording and collating examples of effective practice;**
- **the delivery of staff training across all disciplines or agencies;**
- **the best means of disseminating research findings and best practice; and**
- **the links between research and knowledge and staff education and training and how this can be consolidated.**

Committee endorsed this recommendation in principle subject to resource adequacy particularly in relation to "delivery of staff training across all disciplines or agencies". (See response to Recommendation 4).

Recommendation 8: The Scottish Executive should initiate a long-term study of the effectiveness of current methods of responding to abuse and neglect. The study should follow children from infancy to adulthood

This recommendation was welcomed and endorsed by the Committee.

Recommendation 9: Children's Services Plans should be developed so that they include clear plans for the implementation of national priorities and demonstrate the application of resources to these outcome targets set out in *Building a Better Scotland*.

The Committee endorsed this recommendation and a bid to the Changing Children's Services Fund for a development manager post to support the committee in its contribution to the development of Angus Children's service plans.

Recommendation 10: Local authorities' plans for integrated children's services, as the overarching plans and drivers for all local children's services, should develop *positive childhood* initiatives. These should be lead by a children's rights rather than a public service perspective and should promote every child's rights to life, health, decency and development. The Executive should support this with a public campaign.

The Committee fully endorsed the recommendation that the Children's Services Plan should develop "positive childhood initiatives". The Angus Children's Services Plan has input from the Child Protection Committee but this will be greatly enhanced if the Changing Children's Services Fund bid is approved.

Recommendation 11: The Scottish Executive should:

- **Advise on how agency resources can be pooled and what systems may best be deployed to ensure the most effective joint commissioning of services on behalf of children.**
- **Commission a study of the costs and benefits of the current child protection system in Scotland and identify costed alternative options for improving outcomes for children.**

The Committee expressed its concern re this recommendation and requested that the Scottish Executive acknowledge that Child Protection is an integral part of the spectrum of services to vulnerable children and should not be separated from other children's services functions.

The Committee felt strongly that the Scottish Executive should consider the establishment of a national centre of excellence for CP Policy and Practice similar to the investments made in the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care and the Criminal justice Development Centre and felt that in the National Review the case for such a development has been amply demonstrated.

Recommendation 12: There needs to be a new approach to tackling risks and the needs of the most vulnerable. As a first step this should start with assessment of the needs of all new-born babies born to drug- or alcohol-misusing parents; parents who have a history of neglecting or abusing children and parents where there have been concerns about previous unexplained deaths in infancy. The inter-agency assessment and subsequent action plan in respect of each child should clearly state:

- standards of child care and developmental milestones the child is expected to experience or achieve;
- resources to be provided for the child or to assist the parents in their parenting role; and
- monitoring that will be put into place along with contingency plans should the child's needs fail to be met.

The Committee supported this recommendation with the reservation that there are clear resource issues for key agencies in carrying out any assessment and addressing the needs identified.

Committee felt that where there are clear predisposing indicators of risk that assessments should also be undertaken pre-birth rather than for new born only as stated in the recommendation.

A pre-birth assessment during the mother's pregnancy would enable better risk management and enable effective supports to be put in place for the child and family. A pre-birth inter-agency risk assessment with a clearly identified lead worker (usually the child protection worker from the local authority social work team) should be completed in each of the instances described; the Committee also felt that the addition of babies where a significant history of domestic abuse has been a factor in the parents' history is desirable.

Committee questioned where Scottish Exec were at re shared assessment models as they have had submissions from other authorities and academic bodies etc for some time.

Recommendation 13: In keeping with the philosophy of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, agencies referring to the Reporter should indicate what action they or their agency has undertaken to achieve change through consent and why compulsory measures of supervision may now be necessary.

This recommendation was fully endorsed by Committee.

Recommendation 14: The Scottish Executive should review the grounds for referral to the children's Hearing's system. Specifically, it should explore the feasibility of grounds being framed to reflect more clearly the needs of the child and to be more closely aligned with definitions of need outlined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

The Committee endorsed the recommendation that there should be a review of all grounds and in particular suggested new grounds for children who are exposed to alcohol/drug misuse/domestic violence by parents or carers or a member of the household.

Also it was felt that the issue of unborn babies, in particular risk situations as above could be considered but recognised there may be legal impediments to this.

NB – Subsequent to the CP Committee's consideration of this recommendation S.C.R.A. advised the Chair that it did not support Recommendation 14 and specifically that it demonstrates "a failure to understand the proper relationship between wider criteria for voluntary support and the higher threshold on which the need for compulsory intervention must be assessed".

Recommendation 15: In order to meet the shortcomings identified in this report, developing linked computer-based information systems should include a single integrated assessment, planning and review report framework for children in need. For those in need of protection the framework should include reason for concern, needs of the child, plans to meet them and protect them when necessary, and progress since any previous meetings. This core assessment, planning and review framework should be accessible and common to all partner agencies, multi-agency case conferences and the children's hearing. Arrangements should be made for appropriate access to information by agencies in other areas should children or their families move.

The Committee felt very strongly that the Scottish Executive has a prime role and responsibility for taking forward this recommendation, particularly in relation to developing the computer based systems to national standards.

Committee views linked computer information systems very positively, but had concern about the ability to develop this locally without a major national initiative, support and resources to achieve this.

Recommendation 16: The Scottish Executive in partnership with the regulatory bodies should consult on the minimum standards of professional knowledge and competence required of practitioners who undertake investigations, assessments and clinical diagnosis when working with children and their families. In particular it should establish the minimum necessary qualifications and experience required of those making decisions that fundamentally affect the future wellbeing of children.

The Committee endorsed the principles embodied in this recommendation and saw this linked to the response in Recommendation 4.

The Committee viewed this recommendation as positive – but felt that the issue of competent qualified staff to do the work has major workforce planning and post qualification training implications if it is to be properly addressed and the Scottish Executive must address these matters urgently and realistically if the promotion of children's well-being is to be taken forward adequately. It is clear that there are significant shortfalls in some professions and particularly in social work and although committee acknowledged the national plans to address these it was felt that it would take a number of years to reverse these workforce deficits.

Recommendation 17: The Scottish Executive should:

- **Establish a national implementation team to take forward the recommendations in the review, in particular the development of standards and local auditing processes.**
- **Establish a review process for annual reporting on progress and improvements.**
- **Implement a further national review of child protection in three years' time to be undertaken by a multi-disciplinary inspection team using this report as a baseline against which progress can be assessed.**

Bullet Point 1: National Implementation Team. The Committee accepted this recommendation but felt strongly that Scottish Executive should invest in a CP "centre of excellence" on par with SIRCC, rather than an implementation team and that an analysis of the report and recommendations more than justify this national investment in Scotland's children.

Bullet Point 2: Review Process. Endorsed subject to comments made re other recommendations in report and resource issues being adequately addressed by Scottish Executive.

Bullet Point 3: Further Review in 3 years - Endorsed

