

**Joint inspection of services to protect children and young  
people in the Renfrewshire Council area**

**6 January 2011**

The inspection of services to protect children<sup>1</sup> in the Renfrewshire Council area was carried out in September and October 2010. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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**

Renfrewshire Council area is situated in west Scotland. It covers an area of 261 square kilometres. The population is mainly concentrated in the towns of Paisley, Johnstone, Renfrew and Erskine. There are high levels of deprivation and poor health. Renfrewshire has a population of 169,910 with 20.4% under the age of 18 years which is roughly the same as the Scottish average.

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 Renfrewshire is 3.9 per 1000 which is higher than the national average of 2.8 per 1000.

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

- Supportive relationships with staff and very high levels of trust and confidence in them.
- Very helpful support from a wide range of services for as long as it is needed.
- Staff across services taking quick and very effective actions to protect children and keep them safe.
- Staff working together to ensure services to help and protect children improve.
- The leadership of Chief Officers and the Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee (RCPC) to improve outcomes for children.

## **3. Examples of good practice**

- Very successful television advertising to increase community awareness about internet safety
- Preparing staff to meet the needs of children affected by parental substance misuse
- Learning from reviews of practice and the highly effective approaches to improving the ways in which staff work.

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

Children benefit greatly from high quality advice about keeping themselves safe. They are assisted by very successful personal safety programmes in schools. Significant and increasing numbers of children and parents understand how to keep safe when using the internet and mobile phones. Children can identify trusted people with whom they can confidently share their worries. A range of staff provide very sensitive support to individual children to help them move between the different stages of their education. Children benefit from valuable social and emotional support from Extended Support Teams, psychologists, counsellors and the Home Link Service. Staff work very well together to identify families who need help and support at an early stage before their difficulties increase. The well-being of the most vulnerable children and families is significantly improved by a wide range of high quality services. Help is available for children and families for as long as they need it. Families who have difficulty in accepting support benefit from the resourceful and persistent efforts by staff. Vulnerable pregnant women are getting very valuable help before their babies are born from the Special Needs in Pregnancy Service (SNIPS).

Staff take very prompt and effective action when children are identified as being at risk of immediate harm. They take steps to keep children safe while they investigate concerns and make very effective use of legal measures to protect children. When it is unsafe for children to remain at home, staff quickly arrange suitable safe places with friends, family, foster carers or in residential units. The West of Scotland Standby Social Work Service is responding more promptly to children who need help out of office hours.

Children and families are supported very well during child protection investigations. They are fully informed about what is happening. Staff carefully explain their actions and help children and families to understand the reasons for decisions. Staff are particularly sensitive to the needs of children when they are interviewed during investigations.

Many children and families affected by abuse and neglect have their needs identified quickly and staff ensure that these needs are met without delay. Children with less immediate needs are now receiving appropriate help which is improving their lives. Families with young children receive high quality support from Family Matters. Women and Children 1<sup>st</sup> provides helpful support to women and children who are affected by domestic abuse. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) now has more staff to help children. Staff across services now need to ensure that children get the most suitable specialist help to recover from the effects of abuse and neglect. More careful attention is needed to ensure that the longer term needs of some children are met. Staff have improved the ways in which they plan for children who are unable to return to the care of their parents but some children experience delays before they are placed with permanent new families.

Staff have a very high level of awareness of the risks to children who go missing. They have reliable systems to trace children and manage unexplained absences from school and nursery. Staff across services work together very effectively to find children who run away, assess risks and support children in their safe return. The RCPC has introduced guidance to help staff to identify and protect children who are brought into or moved around the country illegally. The needs of lesbian and gay young people are understood well by staff and services are particularly active in their work to prevent and reduce bullying.

Children and families benefit from extremely positive relationships with staff. They have a very high level of trust and confidence that staff know them well and listen carefully to them. There is an outstanding level of open and honest communication between staff and children and their families. Families are helped to participate fully in decisions about their lives and their views are taken very seriously. Staff pay special attention to very young children and those unable to talk about their worries. They carefully observe any changes in their behaviour to monitor their well-being. Staff are persistent in offering support and use a variety of sensitive approaches to help families to take up the

help they need. Independent support is used well to help children express their views and build their confidence.

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

Staff know when and how to share information to keep children safe. Staff working with adults and sex offenders who may pose a risk to children share relevant information to assist others to take the necessary actions to protect children. The attendance at child protection meetings and the sharing of all relevant information at these meetings has improved. Managers have helped staff to become more aware of the risks associated with neglect. Increasingly, staff from different services are building detailed lists of significant events in children's lives. Staff are becoming more confident in identifying children at risk of neglect and are better placed to meet their short and longer-term needs.

Managers have recently established a system to ensure information from health services is sought quickly when there are concerns about children. Staff need to become more consistent in how they gather all available information to help them carry out initial assessments of risk. The RCPC now carefully keeps track of child protection medical examinations. Medical examinations now take place in child-friendly places by suitably qualified doctors. Managers across services meet regularly to review the arrangements for medical examinations and to make ongoing improvements. A full health assessment is now considered for all children who are discussed at child protection meetings.

Chief Officers and senior managers are strongly committed to improving services to protect children. Staff constantly try to improve how they work together to improve outcomes for children and families at risk. The approaches used to review practices across services are outstanding. Services routinely seek the views of children, families and staff about how well services are working. These views are used extremely well to improve the quality of the service children and

families receive. The RCPC has very effective systems to monitor and assess the impact of any changes made and as a result holds an outstanding knowledge of what is working well and where improvements are needed. The RCPC takes very effective action to ensure staff understand what they need to do to make improvements and provides training and support to help staff to carry these through.

## **6. How good is leadership and direction?**

Elected members, Chief Officers, the RCPC and senior managers continue to promote and enhance an understanding of the shared vision for protecting children. This vision is strongly linked to the longer term aim of securing improved outcomes for all children through joint working. This is demonstrated through the commitment to achieving long term improvements for all vulnerable children through the *Achieving Step Change in Children's Outcomes project*.

Outstanding leadership is driving forward service improvements. This leadership is inspiring staff to develop best practice and is increasing a sense of community responsibility for protecting children. Successful partnership working is resulting in more efficient use of those resources which are making the most difference to children's experiences and life chances. It is clear who is responsible for protecting children within and across services. Staff are working together very effectively in multi-agency teams. Chief Officers and senior managers have high expectations of staff. Managers encourage staff to reflect on their performance and to share good practice. Overall, staff receive appropriate levels of support and challenge.

## **7. How are services improving?**

Services have agreed together what they want to achieve for children and families. Joint planning of services takes account of national priorities and is based on a sound knowledge of the local needs of children and families. Clear aims and objectives to improve outcomes

for children and families are set out in shared plans. Joint working to support families has been enhanced in some areas where *Getting it Right for Every Child* is ensuring that children and families are getting the help they need at the right time. Staff across services continue to provide high quality processes and the outcomes for children and families have been further improved. The RCPC analyses information very well to plan and improve services to protect children. Chief Officers and the RCPC use this information to identify priority areas for improvement. They take very effective action to meet these priorities and there is notable and sustained progress as a result.

Staff across services work very closely together to review practice and to plan service improvements. They carefully check that these improvements are working well for children and families. There are many very positive examples of services improving as a result. Services have continued to build upon successful campaigns to raise public awareness of child protection. They have strengthened the ways in which they gather and take account of the views of people who use services. Information-sharing to support the protection of children is continuing to improve. Staff are getting better at recognising and helping children who may be at risk of parental substance misuse and neglect.

Progress has been made in all of the areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. Children's emotional needs are met more effectively. Systems to monitor medical examinations have been successfully established. Improvements in the involvement of health staff at an early stage when investigating concerns needs to become more consistent.

## **8. What happens next?**

As a result of the very good quality of provision to protect children and meet their needs, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection.

We have agreed the following area for improvement with services in the Renfrewshire Council area.

- Continue to build on very effective practices to improve services to protect children and to meet their needs.

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 Renfrewshire Council area.

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

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

<b>Self-evaluation</b>	<b>excellent</b>
<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>very good</b>

**Managing Inspector: Jacquie Pepper  
January 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