

FALKIRK COUNCIL

SUBJECT: JOINT INSPECTION OF SERVICES TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE FALKIRK COUNCIL AREA

MEETING: FALKIRK COUNCIL

DATE: 24th JUNE 2009

AUTHOR: ACTING DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES / CHAIR OF FALKIRK CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief Members on the content of the report concerning the Joint Inspection of Services to Protection children and Young People in the Falkirk Council area. This report was prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) and published on 18th June 2009. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Inspection took place between December 2008 and January 2009. It covered the range of services and staff working in the area who had a role in protecting children. This included services provided by the NHS, Central Scotland Police, Falkirk Council and the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA), as well as those provided by voluntary and independent organisations.

2.2 As part of the Inspection process, Inspectors reviewed practice through reading a sample of files held by relevant Services. Some of the children and families in the sample met and talked to Inspectors about the services they had received. Inspectors also visited Services that provided help to children and families and met users of these Services, as well as talking to staff. This included staff with leadership and operational management responsibilities as well as those working directly with children and families. Inspectors also sampled work that was being done in the area to protect children, by attending meetings and reviews.

2.3 In their approach to the Inspection, Inspectors used a range of quality indicators to evaluate the overall effectiveness of services to protect young people and meet their needs. The Inspection report uses the following definitions to make clear the evaluations made by Inspectors;

Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
Very Good	Major strengths
Good	Important strengths with areas for improvements

Satisfactory
Weak
Unsatisfactory

Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Important weaknesses
Major weaknesses

3. INSPECTION FINDINGS

3.1 The overall evaluation made of services to protect children and meet their needs in Falkirk was as follows;

How effective is the help children get when they need it?	
Children are listened to, understood and respected	Good
Children benefit from strategies to minimise harm	Good
Children are helped by the actions taken in immediate response to concerns	Good
Children's needs are met	Satisfactory
How well do services promote public awareness of child protection?	
Public awareness of the safety and protection of children	Very Good
How good is the delivery of key processes?	
Involving children and their families in key processes	Good
Information-sharing and recording	Good
Recognising and assessing risks and needs	Satisfactory
Effectiveness of planning to meet needs	Weak
How good is operational management in protecting children and meeting their needs?	
Policies and procedures	Good
Operational planning	Good
Participation of children, families and other relevant people in policy development	Very Good
Recruitment and retention of staff	Very Good
Development of staff	Good
How good is individual and collective leadership?	
Vision, values and aims	Very Good
Leadership and direction	Satisfactory
Leadership of people and partnerships	Good
Leadership of change and improvement	Satisfactory

3.2 Inspectors made specific mention of the following key strengths on how children were protected and their needs met in the Falkirk Council area:

- Children experiencing domestic abuse received help quickly through an effective multi-agency approach;
- Helpful advice from Legal Services supporting immediate action and long term planning for children at risk;
- The Health needs of children looked after away from home being met effectively;
- Use of a robust and effective approach by the Children's Commission to assess the needs of children and agree service development priorities;
- Children and families being involved as partner in planning and developing services.

3.3 In summarising their findings, Inspectors noted that they were confident that when children were identified as being at immediate risk, prompt and effective action was taken to protect them. They also noted that Chief Officers had strengthened their collective leadership and accountability for services to protect children and that the Leader of the Council was influential in promoting access to Health, Education, support and care services for vulnerable children. Positive reference was also made to the effective multi-agency approach to children affected by domestic abuse. They commented that the assessment of the needs of children in the Council area had been successfully completed leading to agreed priorities for service development, however, noted that this had yet to impact fully on identified gaps in services to support vulnerable children and families. They also commented on inconsistencies in risk assessment and planning to meet needs.

3.4 The Inspection concluded that elected Members, Chief Officers and Senior Managers should ensure that they have sufficient information from which to assure themselves that children are well protected and their needs met. They should collectively develop a culture of continuous improvement focused on improving outcomes for children in need of protection. In doing so they should take account of the need to:

- Improve delivery and co-ordination of family support services;
- Improve the quality and consistency of assessments of risk and needs and ensure that appropriate Health staff are actively involved in all child protection processes;
- Ensure child protection plans have specific actions and timescales and that core groups measure progress in reducing risks and meeting needs;
- Ensure Senior Managers drive forward service development priorities; and
- Develop and improve the use of performance information from which to evaluate the effectiveness of services in improving outcomes for vulnerable children

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 In response to this report, Chief Officers have been asked to develop an Action Plan indicating how they will address the main recommendations of this report and to share that Plan with stakeholders. Within two years of this report, HM Inspectors will re-visit to assess and report on progress made in meeting these recommendations. The Inspection process has been a valuable, albeit demanding one for all agencies. It has provided all agencies with a very sound baseline understanding of both strengths and areas for development. The Child Protection Committee are currently conducting a series of briefings for staff across all agencies on the findings of this Inspection. This will also enable staff to contribute to the development of an effective Action Plan which will be designed to further improve services.

5. CONCLUSION

The Inspection report relating to services to protect services and young people in the Falkirk Council area is generally a positive one and is regarded by the Falkirk Child Protection Committee as a fair reflection of the quality of local services. The Child Protection Committee are committed to using the findings of this Inspection Report to promote further improvements in services.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 **That Members of Falkirk Council note the findings of HMIe in relation to their Joint Inspection of Services to protect children and young people in the Falkirk Council area.**
- 5.2 **Request the Acting Director of Social Work Services bring back Action Plan to Housing & Social Services Committee.**

MARGARET ANDERSON
Acting Director of Social Work Services /
Chair of Falkirk Child Protection Committee

Date: 12th June 2009

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