



# Services for children and young people in **North Ayrshire**

**28 October 2013**

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Report of a pilot joint inspection



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# 1. Introduction

At the request of Scottish Ministers, the Care Inspectorate is leading joint inspections of services for children and young people across Scotland. When we say children and young people in this report we mean people under the age of 18 years or up to 21 years if they have been looked after.

These inspections will look at the difference services are making to the lives of children, young people and families. They take account of the full range of work within a community planning partnership area including services provided by health visitors, school nurses, teachers, doctors, social workers, police officers, and the voluntary sector.

The inspection teams are made up of inspectors from the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

A draft framework of quality indicators was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012. The indicators in 'How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators' were used by the team of inspectors in their independent evaluation of the quality of services. We have covered all of the quality indicators in this report and reached evaluations for eight of them which are set out in the table in Appendix 1.

This report is published following a pilot joint inspection. This means that future inspections may be carried out differently and the reports we will publish at a later date may take a different format.

# 2. Background

The pilot joint inspection of services for children and young people in the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership area took place over three weeks in March and April 2013. It covered the range of services that had a role in providing services to benefit children, young people and families across the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership area including the islands of Arran and Cumbrae.

Inspectors reviewed documents and spoke to staff with leadership and management responsibilities. They talked to staff who work directly with children, young people and families and observed some meetings. Inspectors reviewed practice through reading a sample of records held by services that work with children and young people. Some of these children, young people and families met with and talked to inspectors. Inspectors are very grateful to all of the people who talked to them as part of this pilot inspection.

As the findings in this joint inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of service received by every single child in the area.

### 3. The Community Planning Partnership area and the context for services for children and young people

North Ayrshire has a population of around 138,000 spread across urban and rural areas. It also includes the island communities of Arran and Cumbrae. The number of people living in North Ayrshire is projected to decrease by 4.7 per cent between 2010 and 2035. Over the same period, the number of children under the age of 16 is likely to reduce by 10.6 per cent compared to Scotland as a whole, which is set to increase by just over 3 per cent.

The North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership is responsible for community planning and has wide representation from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The partnership is responsible for improving outcomes for people in North Ayrshire. Community planning is well established in North Ayrshire and the partnership has an ambitious vision for a better life for the people living there. This is reflected in joint agreements to tackle unemployment, improve health and reduce poverty. The **Integrated Children's Services Plan**, entitled A Better Childhood, sets out clear priorities up to 2015 to improve the life chances of children and young people and provide support for families.

The **Integrated Children's Services Plan** is for services which work with children and young people in North Ayrshire. It sets out the priorities for achieving the vision for all children and young people and what services need to do together to achieve them.



Population of North Ayrshire

**138,000**



Predicted population decrease of children under 16:

**10.6% by 2035**

## **4. Particular strengths that are making a difference to children, young people and families**

- The strong commitment to prevention and intervening early to provide children, young people and families with the help they need.
- Highly motivated staff, committed to giving children and young people the best start in life and improving their life chances.
- The involvement of individual children and young people in decision-making.
- Strong and successful partnership working to tackle long standing inequalities.
- Improvements in the wellbeing of the most vulnerable children and young people.

## **5. Examples of good practice**

### **Building safer communities for children and young people**

Community planning partners have developed a unique and highly successful approach to reducing offending and addressing anti-social behaviour. They have pooled resources and established a Multi-Agency Problem Solving Group which supports a particular strand within the Community Planning Partnership **Single Outcome Agreement – A Safe and Secure North Ayrshire**.

A Single Outcome Agreement is an agreement between the Scottish Government and community planning partnerships which sets out how they will work towards improving outcomes for Scotland's people in a way that reflects local circumstances and priorities.

This has so far been taken forward in eight local areas – all of which feature amongst the highest crime tariff areas in Scotland. As a result, significant reductions in crime have been sustained over time.

### **Helping young people to stay at home with their families**

The Rosemount Crisis Intervention Service provides very quick and effective help for young people who are at high risk of becoming looked after and accommodated. The support is tailored to meet the individual needs of the young person, their parents or carers and it is highly successful in helping them to manage difficult circumstances and keeping young people at home.

### **Supporting victims of domestic abuse**

The Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Response Team is a highly effective approach to responding to children, young people and families affected by domestic abuse. Staff from health, police, social services and housing provide prompt and comprehensive intervention to reported incidents of domestic abuse.

## 6. How well are the lives of children and young people improving?

The wellbeing of children and young people is improving positively in a number of areas. There are upward trends in the outcomes for all children and young people. Outcome gaps for children and young people whose life chances are at risk are closing. An innovative, integrated approach to community safety has improved outcomes for children and young people in those communities. This is a significant achievement, given North Ayrshire's standing as one of Scotland's five most deprived local authority areas.

Staff recognise when children need help and intervene early to offer support and guidance to families. This is successful in preventing difficulties from increasing. Very effective early screening processes assist staff to identify children and young people who may need more support to improve their wellbeing. Vulnerable pregnant women are identified at an early stage and helpful support given prior to their babies being born. Staff work well together and overall, they share information well to promote the welfare of children and young people at an early stage. This could be improved further by better access to relevant information when families need assistance out of office hours.

Parents who need extra assistance with their parenting receive very effective support which is tailored to meet their individual needs. A broad range of services are having a very positive impact on family resilience and skilful and confident parenting. Parenting support is provided in early years services and allows some parents to access helpful support at an early stage and in a non-stigmatising way. The **Solihull approach** is used consistently by the full range of staff who work with children, young people and families.

Plans to extend support for parenting through early years hubs will mean that more families will benefit. Parents who need it receive sustained support and guidance to manage their own difficulties with substance misuse, mental ill-health or domestic abuse.

The **Solihull Approach** is a recognised way of working alongside families to strengthen and encourage positive parenting.

Staff carefully identify young people with a caring responsibility and provide valuable support to help them manage this.

Children of all ages are receiving very helpful support to promote all aspects of their wellbeing. This is improving their day to day experiences and creating better life chances. They are benefiting from the wide range of services that contribute to the health and wellbeing curriculum in schools. Children and young people who need it receive additional support in school to successfully remove barriers to learning and improve attainment. Overall attainment continues to rise for all young people.

There is a strong commitment to inclusion and to providing encouragement and assistance to those who might not participate fully in community activities. Children and young people with disabilities are helped to be active and achieving. They are included positively within their communities. Parents of children with disabilities greatly value the services they receive. However, a few parents have to wait too long before they get the help they need.

Children and young people are encouraged to make positive lifestyle choices including eating healthily, looking after their wellbeing and being active. The Active Schools programme is having a positive impact on active lifestyles. Children and young people take part in a wide range of physical activities in their communities and lead healthier lives as a result.

Children and young people are protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community. Children and young people whose life experiences make them particularly vulnerable are benefiting from personalised support to ensure they can keep themselves safe - for example, by learning strategies to avoid harmful situations. More generally, children and young people develop positive relationships with police officers in schools. This, alongside a range of other strategies and initiatives, has contributed to a reduction in youth offending and children and young people feeling safer.

Children and young people who are looked after away from home are benefiting from nurturing and caring relationships. Young people living in newly built children's houses value comfortable homely surroundings and feel involved. The range and suitability of accommodation offered to young people leaving care has greatly improved as a result of very positive joint working between the through care team and housing service.

The North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership aims to build the capacity and skills of parents, families and communities. The Community Engagement Strategy and Neighbourhood Planning Approach are designed to increase the impact of prevention and early intervention and to address inequalities. This is improving the quality of life for children and families across North Ayrshire. A helpful range of community activities is available for children, young people and families. Youth services are available in local communities and staff persevere in order to make sure they involve young people who are harder to reach. Families would benefit from better information about local services.

There are innovative and effective approaches to building strong and sustainable communities such as the Asset Based Community Development Project which targets families with young children. The Multi-Agency Problem Solving approach, applied in eight local areas, is very successful in designing and delivering local solutions to community issues. Levels of crime, youth offending and anti-social behaviour have consistently reduced over recent years and these reductions are being sustained.

## 7. How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?

A Better Childhood is the Integrated Children's Services Plan which sets out high aspirations for children, young people and families. The links between the Integrated Children's Services Plan Steering Group and other planning groups such as the Child Protection Committee are clear and work well. The principles of **Getting it Right for Every Child** helpfully underpin the Integrated Children's Services Plan. The Child Protection Committee has close links to other relevant groups including the Alcohol and Drug Partnership, Adult Protection Committee and Violence Against Women Group.

**Getting it Right for Every Child** is the Scottish Government's approach to making sure that all children and young people get the help they need when they need it. For more information, search "GIRFEC" online.

There is a strong ethos of involving children and young people meaningfully in policy, planning and service development. There are many examples of children and young people being consulted and involved in service developments through forums such as the Youth Council. Harder to reach groups are engaged successfully in consultation using a range of imaginative methods. There is a commitment to including children and young people who are looked after in plans to review the effectiveness of the corporate parenting strategy.

Sound structures and a shared vision support strong partnership working across services for children and young people. Partners work well together to devise ambitious plans and implement them. Relationships are positive and voluntary services are making a significant contribution at all levels. There are positive examples of procuring services which help to deliver strategic objectives which make a real difference to the lives of children, young people and families. There is scope to develop joint approaches to the strategic commissioning of children's services which builds on the work in services for adults. Risk management is established within individual services and an effective approach to jointly managing service risk now needs to be extended to services for children and young people.

There is a comprehensive range of policies and procedures to guide staff in their work. These are reviewed and updated regularly and helpfully support joint working to achieve the vision for children and young people. The implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child is assisted through clear and accessible guidance. Quality assurance is largely undertaken within individual services. Partners set high standards and jointly monitor performance in a number of areas. Joint quality assurance systems are developing.

Staff are alert to circumstances which might place children and young people at risk of harm and abuse. They take prompt action to protect them. Information is gathered appropriately and staff jointly assess risks and plan their response. Legal measures are used appropriately and if required suitable accommodation is found quickly to move children to a place where they will be safe.

Assessments of risk and need for a majority of children and young people demonstrate important strengths. However, there is considerable variation in the quality of assessments overall. Improvement in the effective use of chronologies of significant events for individual children and young people would help staff to identify patterns of risk as these emerge. Assessments are supported by information gathered from a range of relevant sources. They would now benefit from fuller analysis and better identification of what needs to change to reduce risks and meet needs. Continued effort should be made to ensure that prominence is given to the views of children and young people within assessments.

Staff work well together to make **plans to meet the individual needs of children and young people**. Clear aspirations for a better future are set out for children and young people within these plans. In most cases these plans are reviewed appropriately by multi-agency groups which make sure progress and actions are carried out well. Plans could be improved further by setting out more clearly defined outcomes, the actions needed to achieve them, when they need to be achieved and by whom. This will help in measuring progress in meeting outcomes for individual children and young people.

A Child's Plan records the child's needs and views. The plan lays out exactly what support will be provided, and in what way, to meet the child's needs.

Parents and carers enjoy trusting relationships with staff across services. They are included in relevant meetings and are involved in decisions about their lives. They understand what is expected of them, and others, to ensure their children's safety and wellbeing. Staff gather the views of children and help them contribute to their meetings and plans. Overall, staff persist successfully with families who are reluctant to receive help and overcome barriers to getting children and young people the help they need. Children whose names are on the child protection register benefit from high quality independent support through advocacy services. More children could benefit from this helpful assistance.

Staff are valued, supported effectively and experience high levels of job satisfaction. Staff recruitment and retention across the community planning partnership is working well and a culture of positive team working is building. Staff are encouraged to be creative in the ways in which they work together to achieve better outcomes for children, young people and families. Staff and managers in social services, health and education work flexibly in order to respond to increasing pressures and allocate resources creatively to achieve planned outcomes.

Staff are strongly committed to making a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families. They are clear about what they need to do to improve the quality of their work and are imaginative in bringing about these improvements. They are proactive in finding solutions to problems in a context where there is often increasing pressure on resources. There is a comprehensive training strategy in place which is supporting the successful implementation of Getting it Right For Every Child. Staff share an understanding of Getting it Right and the wellbeing indicators and are committed to joint working. Clearer guidance and support for education staff will help them take on lead professional roles in planning and co-ordinating support for vulnerable children and young people.

## 8. How well do services lead and improve the quality of work to achieve better outcomes for children and families?

The Community Planning Partnership has embarked on an ambitious strategy to reduce the long-standing inequalities across the communities of North Ayrshire. Successful prevention and early intervention to improve life chances is central to these efforts. The vision for children, young people and families is being driven forward collaboratively by the Community Planning Partnership Board, the Child and Public Protection Chief Officer Group, and the Integrated Children's Services Partnership Steering Group. There is a strong commitment among partners to realising positive outcomes and better life chances for children and young people in the longer term. This is demonstrated through additional resources allocated to early intervention and prevention and investment in services for more vulnerable children and young people. A successful approach to corporate parenting has contributed to positive improvement in outcomes for children and young people who are looked after.

Partnership working is improving. The proposals for health and social care integration are regarded as an opportunity for the further development of joint children's services. The partnership is responding proactively to financial constraints, holding on to its shared vision. Partners work closely together to manage financial pressures and to make savings in line with agreed priorities. Leadership of people is positive and senior managers communicate well with front line staff. Joint working is supported and encouraged by managers. Staff are clear about the vision for children, young people and families and are strongly committed and motivated to realising it.

Across the partnership, the level of awareness of joint and integrated working is growing. Leaders are very committed to self-evaluation and improvement. There are highly effective approaches to **self-evaluation** and review carried out by the **Child Protection Committee** and in some individual services. A cycle of joint self-evaluation carried out by the Child Protection Committee has been particularly successful in achieving improvements in the performance of services to protect children. Partners have identified the need to build on this and extend systematic approaches to joint self-evaluation beyond child protection.

**Self-evaluation** means taking a close look at what services have done and how well they have done it. It is important because it helps people to see clearly where they need to make improvements.

**The Child Protection Committee** brings together all the organisations involved in protecting children in the area. Their purpose is to make sure local services work together to protect children from abuse and keep them safe.

# 9. Conclusion and areas for improvement

The Community Planning Partnership has a clear vision and strategy to address significant inequalities across its communities and to improve outcomes for all children and young people. There is strong collaborative leadership and a robust commitment to continuous improvement. The promotion of prevention and early intervention and investment in services for more vulnerable children, all provide tangible evidence of the shared commitment to achieving the vision. The implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child is underpinning positive joint working around children, young people and families. Staff are highly motivated and work very well together. The wellbeing of children and young people is improving in a number of important areas. The gap in outcomes for those children and young whose life chances are most at risk and the rest of the child population is closing.

Inspectors are very confident that services for children and young people will continue to improve. Within this positive context the Community Planning Partnership should take account of the need to:

- implement robust and systematic approaches to joint self-evaluation across services for children and young people
- develop and implement an effective joint commissioning strategy to reflect the community planning partnership's vision and ambitions
- continue to improve the joint **assessment of risks and needs** for individual children and young people.

A framework to assess risks and needs is an orderly way of exploring, understanding and recording what is happening in children's lives.

# 10. What happens next?

The Care Inspectorate will ask the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership to publish a joint action plan detailing how it intends to make any improvements identified as a result of the inspection.

The Care Inspectorate and other bodies taking part in this inspection will continue to offer support for improvement through their linking arrangements.

Marc Hendrikson  
Inspection Lead  
October 2013

# Appendix 1: Indicators of quality

Quality indicators help services and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved. In this pilot inspection we used a draft framework of quality indicators that was published by the Care Inspectorate in October 2012 called '**How well are we improving the lives of children, young people and families? A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators**'. This document is available on the Care Inspectorate website.

Here are the evaluations for eight of the quality indicators.

<b>How well are the lives of children and young people improving?</b>	
Providing help and support at an early stage	<b>Good</b>
Impact on children and young people	<b>Very good</b>
Assessing and responding to risks and needs	<b>Adequate</b>
Planning for individual children	<b>Good</b>
<b>How well are services working together to improve the lives of children, young people and families?</b>	
Planning and improving services	<b>Very good</b>
Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders	<b>Very good</b>
<b>How good is the leadership and direction of services for children and young people?</b>	
Leadership of improvement and change	<b>Good</b>
Improving the well-being of children and young people	<b>Very good</b>

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
Adequate	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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