

CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES SCOTLAND

**Promoting policy and best practice for
the protection of children across Scotland**

A Communications Strategy for Child Protection Committees Scotland and its Public Awareness Advisory Group

April 2017

Introduction

In this document, Child Protection Committees Scotland (CPC Scotland), and its Public Awareness Advisory Group (the PAAG), set out their ambitions to improve public awareness and increase understanding of child protection issues across Scotland, in line with the current political objectives to review and improve services for vulnerable children, or children at risk.

This strategy proposes that a more proactive, more accessible and more consistent series of key messages about child protection issues are promoted across both traditional media channels and contemporary digital platforms. These key messages will be used to communicate to all members of Scotland's diverse communities, including children themselves, about the great work already being done to keep children safe, and how everyone can play a part in our children's safe-keeping.

The strategy proposes a more proactive, and less defensive, approach to delivering those messages in the mainstream media. It enshrines a commitment to communicate across all channels in a way which keeps a child's perspective in sharp focus, and aims to avoid jargon-heavy language and tone. This set of refreshed and updated key messages will also aim to communicate more clearly how child protection services, processes and systems work, and how at times it can still be impossible to protect every child.

Objectives

The key objective of the strategy is to progress the process of raising public awareness and understanding of child protection issues, as described by the CPC Scotland's PAAG:-

Children themselves have told us that "it's everyone's job to make sure I'm all right", and an important part of Child Protection Committees Scotland's job is to raise awareness of what child protection actually means, and to explain why each and every one of us has a responsibility to keep all of our children safe and protected from harm.

When we talk about child protection we mean helping to keep children safe from abuse, neglect, exploitation, harm and anything else that puts them at risk.

Child Protection Committees Scotland is a group of professionals who work together to improve the protection of children in Scotland. People involved in our group come from diverse organisations including social work, health, education, the police, children's charities, even housing associations and the emergency services.

In its efforts to raise public awareness, this strategy aims to develop and implement a media, social media and digital "marketing" action plan to promote child protection messages across a range of platforms. This includes developing more supportive relationships with the media,

relationships which in turn may foster a more open learning culture, which will ultimately contribute to better protection of children.

The strategy seeks to deliver these objectives within realistic and achievable parameters in line with current and potential capacity and resourcing.

To achieve these objectives, the strategy will:

- Begin the process of talking to the public via the media, social media and other digital platforms about how all of us can work to keep our children safe
- Use media and digital platforms, and public speaking opportunities, to explain to the public what's actually involved in keeping children safe, and what systems already exist
- Emphasise the good work already being done across the country to protect Scotland's children
- Maximise opportunities to explain that child protection is not all about babies, but about all children and young people
- Provide definitions of what constitutes abuse and neglect to help raise public awareness and understanding
- Work towards national consistency for communicating key messages about child protection issues
- Develop collaborative working, information-sharing and good practice partnerships with CPCScotland Associate Members and other external agencies involved in child protection work e.g. NHS, Police Scotland, local authorities, third sector etc., and new partners yet to be identified
- Work collaboratively to develop communications/promotional materials and provide guidance to local child protection committees to support the development of that consistent messaging nationally
- Recommend the development and implementation of an action plan to promote child protection messages in the mainstream media through a group of nominated and trained CPC Scotland media spokespersons, supported by an outsourced comms/PR specialist
- Work collaboratively with local partners to provide guidance and prepare responses in the event of "bad" news or important Significant Case Review findings
- Recommend the development and implementation a social media strategy supported by nominated members of CPC Scotland and the PAAG, and supported by an outsourced comms/social media specialist
- Recommend that all sector specific digital content and data for professionals involved in the delivery of child protection services currently available on the existing WithScotland website be transferred to another accessible platform e.g. the CELCIS website
- Recommend the development and promotion of a national public-facing Child Protection information website which will signpost support and advice services across Scotland

Key Messages

Through a series of collectively agreed key messages, CPC Scotland and the PAAG will begin to deliver consistent and confident communications about child protection issues in the media, on social media, other digital platforms, in public and in person, based on the overarching messaging principles outlined in this strategy.

Agreement on the content and genuine accessibility of those key messages is critical, as is consistent communication of that content across Scotland, delivered in a collectively agreed tone and voice. The key messages may also be thought of as a way of explaining succinctly and memorably why CPC Scotland exists and the work which member organisations already undertake to protect Scotland's children from harm. Further, it is agreed that the key messages will prioritise the child's perspective first and foremost, ahead of explanation of the systems and processes involved in child protection.

It is important that the sense and substance of the key messages is included in all CPC Scotland's public-facing communications, and that a positive, professional and confident approach is taken to the delivery of those messages, no matter the medium. Further, it is important that the key messages and the voice of CPC Scotland are backed and "owned" by all committee members.

This strategy recommends that those key messages be based around the following:

CPC Scotland want to:

- Make things better for vulnerable children and young people
- Encourage both children and adults to have the confidence to speak up and out, and to take action if required
- Encourage individuals and communities to offer support to families who might need a bit of help now and again
- Explain in accessible language what child protection actually means and is (i.e. not just about children being taken away from their families)
- Outline the kinds of services already working with families to ensure that their children are safe
- Communicate consistently about how it's everyone's responsibility to protect children
- Increase understanding that children from all backgrounds and communities can be at risk of harm or neglect, not just those living in poverty and disadvantage
- Raise awareness that some children can become isolated and particularly vulnerable because of a range of circumstances
- Increase understanding that individuals and communities themselves can play an active and proactive role to keep children safe
- Encourage everyone, including professionals, individuals and communities, to listen carefully, take concerns seriously, and take action if required
- Set a consistently high standard for the delivery of child protection services right across Scotland
- Talk about child protection issues in a way which emphasises children's perspectives, and avoids jargon-heavy discussion about systems and processes
- Provide support and advice about consistent communications and key messages to Child Protection Committees across Scotland

Target Audiences, Platforms & Channels

This strategy stresses the importance of taking a strategic and phased approach to the delivery of these key messages. CPC Scotland currently don't have the capacity to be over-ambitious - but with the appropriate level of specialist support, the group does have the ability to make steady progress with awareness-raising across a variety of audiences using a range of platforms.

As such, the strategy recommends that to achieve its communications objectives through the coordinated implementation of the action plan, specialist support from a communications/media/PR professional or organisation is required. That person/agency will have responsibility for:-

- Co-ordinating and managing the media and social media action plan
- Relationship-building with the media
- Acting as adviser and main point of contact for the CPC Scotland's media spokespersons and the wider group
- Liaison with other Child Protection agencies e.g. CELCIS, local authorities etc
- Liaison with other communications professionals working in the sector e.g. Police Scotland media & PR team, local authority press officers, Scottish Government communications team etc
- Overseeing any further development of the strategy e.g. the design and build of a national child protection website
- Overseeing the collaborative production of any national child protection marketing and publicity template materials for amendment and distribution in local Child Protection Committee areas

Target audiences

Unusually, the target audience identified by CPC Scotland is “everyone”, on the basis that awareness of child protection issues should be raised across the whole community and to people of all ages and backgrounds.

The strategy seeks to communicate its key messages to:

- Collaborative partners e.g. local CPCs, other agencies' communications professionals
- Individuals
- Communities
- Relatives
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Children and young people themselves (because they look out for and after each other)
- Other professionals

Platforms & channels

The media

It is agreed by CPC Scotland that public awareness will be best raised initially through the mainstream media and social media, and through public speaking opportunities. However, the

strategy offers the potential to add new mid and long term objectives e.g. the development of a national child protection information website.

A pragmatic, relationship-building approach with the mainstream media should be adopted as part of the strategy's implementation (the media will not seek contribution until they know who and what CPC Scotland is and does). The media profile-raising element of the strategy will include the design and circulation of an introductory media briefing pack, the development of a tailored media database, and the identification and training of a small group of CPC Scotland media contributors to be promoted across a range of media outlets as child protection spokespersons and experts.

This new positive, proactive and carefully planned approach to communicating key messages about child protection issues in the media aims to overcome previously entrenched anxiety, fear and distrust of the media, and will serve to manage the potential risks involved with hostile interviews in the wake of serious child protection events.

It must be acknowledged that there is an element of risk involved with media coverage when it comes to potentially controversial subject matter like child protection, and that the media do not necessarily play fair. This strategy recommends that all media contributions will require careful response planning and preparation, supported by an experienced communications and media specialist, and that media contributions must be fully supported by CPC Scotland and the PAAG.

Through media appearances and interviews, CPC Scotland spokespersons will help develop and improve public awareness of the complexities of child protection issues by communicating key messages in an accessible, non-defensive manner. The strategy proposes to develop public trust, accountability and assurance, by offering a deeper understanding of the positive work which is already being done to protect children, and an explanation that this kind of work always aims to improve the protection of vulnerable children.

Proposed media outlets/platforms to target via the strategy's action plan may include:

- Specific sector specialist journalists
- Scottish national press
- Local, regional & evening press
- Online news platforms
- Broadcasters
- Sector publications

Social media

An improved and active social media presence is also included as a central objective of the strategy, as a useful, contemporary "marketing" tool for public awareness-raising and increased dialogue with interested parties. Raising the profile of CPC Scotland on social media has the potential to be very effective, but will require time and regular posts.

The strategy recommends that CPC Scotland prioritises use of Facebook and Twitter as the main social media platforms for spreading the word about child protection issues. CPC Scotland social media streams may be most effective when acting as pointers to existing material, news and research etc, retweeting and sharing alone will not be sufficient to raise profile.

There is a definite requirement for original content, plus both proactive and reactive commentaries, so a central consideration of the strategy is how to achieve regular

contribution to these digital streams to keep them “alive” and active. Additionally, management, authorship and maintenance of the social media streams may present some difficulties for CPC Scotland and the PAAG because of the diverse membership and potentially conflicting corporate communications strategies of the group, and an agreed approach to abusive posts and trolling must also be implemented.

As such, the development of a successful social media presence requires either a small group of CPC Scotland members to be “approved” to manage and contribute posts to the streams, and to respond to comments and conversation, and/or this social media management must be outsourced to a specialist external organisation or freelance.

Further, an improved social media presence may only be successfully built on the basis that all CPC Scotland members and partner organisations will be encouraged to contribute ideas, news, content and material to these streams, and when an editorial sign-off and approval system is agreed before any such material can be posted online.

Proposed social media platforms:-

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Guest blogging e.g. on CELCIS website, third sector partner e-bulletin/websites etc

Child Protection websites

A further objective of this strategy proposes an improved online presence for both members of the public and professionals working in child protection to access.

The strategy seeks to identify a new online “home” and the smooth transfer of all of the relevant child protection-specific data and information already collated for professionals which currently exists on the [WithScotland website](#). As the expiry date for the website domain approaches, it is essential that this valuable and extensive digital database of material and information is not lost, and that it is transferred to another digital home (e.g. the CELCIS website) as a matter of urgency.

A further online objective proposed as part of the strategy’s overarching objective to raise awareness and understanding of child protection issues, is the development of national public-facing child protection information website. This site may be promoted by CPC Scotland, and all other agencies involved in child protection, as the “go to” place for information and signposting to local and national support services for anyone with concerns about a child’s welfare.

Considerations

To achieve strategic success from using communications as a tool for raising public awareness about child protection issues, a series of considerations highlighting both opportunities and obstacles for CPC Scotland must be discussed.

Expectations of what can be delivered by this strategy need to be carefully managed given the make up and capacity of CPC Scotland and the current lack of resource to support full, or even partial, implementation. Further discussion with the Scottish Government and/or CELCIS will be required to consider what role the strategy may play as part of the current Child Protection Improvement Programme etc.

Some of these considerations can be summarised in this CPC Scotland SWOT analysis:-

Strengths

- Wide range of professional experience and expertise
- Deep knowledge of child protection practices, processes and systems
- Ability to explain CP issues to all audiences
- Collective potential to significantly raise public awareness

Weaknesses

- Diverse sector membership of the committee
- Concern over how best to deliver key messages
- Lack of understanding of comms & media processes e.g. CP is not necessarily an easy subject to achieve positive media coverage for
- Embedded fear of the media, and of social media
- Lack of capacity and resource to raise awareness effectively
- Inability to react to events/news quickly

Opportunities

- Chance to make positive improvement in public understanding of CP issues
- Fresh thinking about effective, accessible ways to talk about CP
- A new approach to open, transparent commentary and discussion about CP across all media
- Potential to review and evaluate success of the strategy over predetermined time slots

Threats

- CP is always going to be a controversial subject matter, can be difficult to combat media agendas
- Disagreement within CPC Scotland/PAAG about best responses to CP events/stories
- Negative coverage of CP issues/cases in the media, misinterpretation and misquoting
- Potential of risk e.g. difficult media interviews and/or for managing response to oppositional contributors

Timescale

The timescale for implementation of this communications strategy, whether phased or full, is subject to the provision of adequate resourcing, and the recruitment of specialist and administrative support to facilitate and manage that implementation.

Alongside the overarching principles of raising public awareness about child protection issues outlined in this strategy, an important further aim is to work towards national consistency of messaging about child protection issues. The strategy recommends that those messages will also need to reflect the recommendations (and broader GIRFEC objectives for children's wellbeing) identified in the Scottish Government's [Child Protection Improvement Programme report](#) published in March 2017. To achieve that consistency, and to encourage both buy-in and local delivery of those all-important messages, sufficient time and resourcing will be essential.

CPC Scotland and the PAAG propose that implementation of this strategy is resourced and managed to be delivered in line with the findings and recommendations outlined in the Child Protection Improvement Programme i.e. by April 2018.

Practical Implementation, Review & Evaluation

If and when the strategy is adequately resourced, CPC Scotland, the PAAG and the chosen media specialist will work together to develop strategic priorities and practical task delivery within a timetabled action plan, designed to deliver short, medium and long term objectives in order of priority.

The practical elements of the action plan will be delivered to fit appropriately with a range of review and evaluation methods, methods by which success may be measured. This methodology may include action plan task completion dates, number of media appearances, digital analytics, increase in digital dialogue, feedback forms, number of subscribers etc.

The Strategy has been prepared for Child Protection Committees Scotland by Mairi Damer of Word Up Communications, March 2017.