

North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee

March 2021 – Issue 6



Name: David MacRitchie

Job: Chief Social Work Officer



What does the role of Chief Social Work Officer involve?

As the Professional Lead for Social Work in North Ayrshire I have many responsibilities including providing appropriate professional advice on the discharge of the local authority's statutory social work functions, oversight of the registration and learning and development of qualified social workers and other social services staff and the development of social work practice, guidance, policy and procedures. I am also responsible for maintaining professional social work standards and for ensuring that all social services staff adhere to the Scottish Social Services Code of Practice.

I am here to offer advice to anyone within the Council, Partnership, Elected Members and the wider Community Planning Partnership with regards to difficult and complex cases, usually where a balance is required between the needs, rights and risks of service users. I have a lead role in Public Protection.

What are the main priorities within your role?

For me it has to always be public protection, whether this is in relation to MAPPA (Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements) for managing high risk sex offenders, Child Protection or Adult Support and Protection. This aligns with the priorities of the Council. It is about balancing risks, needs and rights of service users. Public Protection is a very complex area of work, for example, you would not want to take away an adult's liberties unnecessarily but at times there is a need to intervene to ensure a person's welfare and safety is protected as well as the safety of others. Decisions around public protection are rarely black and white and being in social work for over 42 years has given me the breadth of experience to help me make these kind of decisions.

What is your favourite part of the role?

By far the most satisfying part of the job is seeing positive change in service users which allows them to overcome the difficulties that led to social work involvement in the first place. I have witnessed countless people transform their lives and the lives of their families through using the support given by social work and other agencies. I have always believed in peoples' capacity for change and that they just need that opportunity and the right supports to achieve this.

I also need to add that I have really enjoyed working with outstanding colleagues over the years who are totally committed to their work and who have excellent values and attitudes.

What is the most challenging part of the role?

Going back to my experience, it is always a challenge when making decisions about balancing needs, risks and rights. It is extremely important to get those decisions correct as the impact of a wrong decision could have serious consequences for vulnerable children and adults as well as communities. There is a fair degree of stress and pressure in my job and this is something I'll not miss!

You have been with North Ayrshire since 1994, how have things changed since then with regards to social work practices and child protection?

There has been a major shift in working practices over the years, moving from public service doing things to, or for, people in my early days to now trying to adopt a more partnership approach with service users. The best outcomes are achieved when we put service users at the centre of everything we do and ensure that their views are heard, respected and acted upon. Real change is facilitated by building professional relationships with service users and gaining their trust and confidence.

You have been with North Ayrshire since 1994 and been the Chief Social Work Officer since 2017 and are now retiring, what will you miss most about your time and various roles?

I will miss being part of the truly life-changing work we are all involved in and, of course, I will miss the wonderful staff I have worked with over the years!

Keeping Kids Safe

The Child Protection Committee continues to increase Child Protection awareness to communities. In the past year, resources have been delivered to locality hubs, community pharmacies, North Ayrshire Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services, taxi drivers, foodbanks and Covid vaccination centres. Future plans include increasing child protection awareness by making connections with local supermarkets. If you are aware of an organisation or community who would benefit from child protection resources or training opportunities, please email cpc@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

A Scotland-wide social media campaign, Keeping Kids Safe Online launched on **Saturday 20**

March on the public-facing Child Protection Scotland social media streams and website, and has been designed to complement the current Scottish Government **#CSEthesigns** and Police Scotland **#GetHelporGetCaught** campaigns. North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee has been sharing info on the CPC Twitter page, you can find out more by following @NA_CPC



Practice Reflective Improvement Dialogue Pilot Project

Practice Reflective Improvement Dialogue is a multi-agency initiative that has been introduced within North Ayrshire in response to the learning from Initial Case Reviews and Significant Case Reviews. The learning from these case reviews has highlighted that a cultural shift is required which puts children at the heart of all decision making and ensures that adult voices are not over privileged. We are focusing on opportunities for professional reflection; leaders supporting workers to be accountable for their practice; and to increase professional curiosity. PRI Dialogue sessions are multi-agency sessions to reflect on Child Protection cases with the following 3 main objectives:



- Practitioners in North Ayrshire increase their professional curiosity and appropriately challenge colleagues to protect children and young people
- Practitioners have opportunities to professionally reflect to ensure that practice is centred around protecting and meeting the needs of the child
- Practitioners have an improved understanding of the child's experience and ensure that adult's voices are not over-privileged

The main purpose of the sessions are to provide a safe space to reflect and learn, and build on the existing PRISM (Practice Reflective Improvement Short Modules) model that is already well established in North Ayrshire. During discussions there may be issues identified that may mean actions need to be taken in relation to the specific case, however the main objective is to reflect and for practitioners to consider the strengths and what they would do differently in the future.

The project is due to be launched May 2021 and practitioners from **all sectors** can refer a case for consideration for a PRI session as long as the case has an element of child protection attached to it and there is a specific issue within the case that practitioners feel would benefit for further learning and reflection. More information will be released when the project is launched, but in the meantime please feel free to email cpc@north-ayrshire.gov.uk if you would like to find out more.

North Ayrshire Child Sexual Abuse Strategy

We know that children and young people are being sexually abused in many settings across Scotland – in their homes; online; in other's homes; at events; clubs anywhere children and young people are. In addition, there are indications that conditions caused by the Covid 19 pandemic have heightened the vulnerability of children and young people to sexual abuse (NSPCC 2021). We know that children and young people often don't tell anyone about the sexual abuse, and they often feel responsible – but they are never to blame.

Only when adults have more awareness of child sexual abuse and talk more openly, will children and young people begin to feel more confident to speak up. North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee are providing lots of information; awareness raising opportunities; support in how to look out for, listen to and support children and young people; and clear messages about what to do if people are worried that a child or young person may be being sexually abused or what to do if a disclosure is made.

We are involving local communities – adults and children and young people – as well as those who work with and for children and families.

We are also promoting clear messages to children and young people about what they can do if they're being sexually abused or know someone else who is.

We are helping those who work with children and families to tailor how they respond to members of the public who have concerns and to children and young people directly to encourage them to come forward and to speak up.

North Ayrshire's Child Sexual Abuse Strategy will launch in April 2021 and is the first of its kind in Scotland. This is only the beginning and further information will continue to be conveyed on a regular basis to keep these messages live.

Look out for further information by following @NA_CPC and @NAHSCP on Twitter.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Bill

Scotland is to become the first devolved nation in the world to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law. The Bill will ensure that there is a pro-active culture of accountability for children's rights across public services in Scotland. This will mean that public authorities will consistently act to uphold the rights of children.

More information can be accessed from the Scottish Government website here:

<https://www.gov.scot/news/landmark-for-childrens-rights/>

