

Councillor Alan J Blair
Ward 17 - Cardwell Bay
Leader of the Council

Inverclyde
council

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Date: 1st June, 2006

Peter Peacock, MSP,
Minister for Children & Young
People,
Scottish Executive,
Victoria Quay,
EDINBURGH. EH6 6QQ

Cathy Jamieson, MSP,
Minister for Justice,
Scottish Executive,
Victoria Quay,
EDINBURGH. EH6 6QQ

Andy Kerr, MSP,
Minister for Health &
Community Care,
Scottish Executive,
Victoria Quay,
EDINBURGH. EH6 6QQ

Dear Ministers,

I am aware that you have requested a second Letter of Assurance following that provided by this Council, and myself, in May, 2004. As stated in the initial response, this Council views the safety of children within our community as a high priority. We, in partnership with other public sector agencies such as the Police and Health, and in conjunction with our wider partnership with the voluntary sector and the community, are committed to working together to make Inverclyde a safer community.

I believe that the protection of children is the responsibility of the whole community and within this context view the role of Elected Members as having significant importance in driving forward the development of services to meet their needs. Within Inverclyde Councillors take their responsibility for child protection seriously.

I am advised by Senior Officers of the Council that the implementation of the new guidance in respect of the Child Protection Committee has been progressed. Information will be provided through the Annual Report, in respect of the Child Protection Service, to the appropriate Committee of the Council, thus allowing political scrutiny of the service provided.

I would share the concern you raise regarding the effects substance misuse can have on the lives of children. It is acknowledged that children and young people live in situations where drug misuse is part of their lives either due to their own misuse of such substances or due to the impact on them of the drug misuse of their parents or carers. Alcoholism within families is also a major concern within our and other Council areas. These are particularly complex problems within our community and will require a significant investment of resource in order that we can make a difference.

I am assured that agencies within the Inverclyde area are engaged in a variety of projects designed to work towards alleviating the devastating effects on family and community life of substance misuse. Such services operate across the spectrum of our engagement with adults and children and are inclusive of educational preventative strategies and also those more intrusive and targeted strategies related to law enforcement. There is no one solution to the problem and, as such, it is important that we continue to work in partnership. Councillors are playing an active part in this joint work as chairs of both the Inverclyde Substance Misuse Forum and the Community Safety Strategy Group, as well as our active role in the Community Planning processes.

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1st June, 2006

Peter Peacock, MSP

Cathy Jamieson, MSP

Andy Kerr, MSP

Acknowledging the problem, and developing strategies for action, does not allow us to present guarantees that there will not be a child in Inverclyde who might suffer significant harm or injury due to substance misuse, or for that matter any other form of abuse or neglect, at the hands of their parents or carers. I would, as indicated in my first Letter of Assurance, state that I believe that the partnerships developed, and the wider strategic approaches we are taking do provide a network which aims to minimise the risk for children within Inverclyde.

I would endorse the response from the Chief Officers involved in overseeing child protection services within Inverclyde and welcome the continued partnership between Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive in securing a safe and healthy environment for children within our communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Blair', written in a cursive style.

Alan Blair,
Leader of the Council



Inverclyde
council



STRATHCLYDE
POLICE

Peter Peacock MSP
Minister for Children
& Young People
Scottish Executive
Victoria Quay
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Cathy Jamieson MSP
Minister for Justice
Scottish Executive
Victoria Quay
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Andy Kerr MSP
Minister for Health and
Community Care
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Dear Ministers,

We are in receipt of your letter of 22 March 2006 and the subsequent follow up letter from Colin McLean, 4th May 2006, both of which request information and assurance in respect of

1. The implementation of the new Child Protection Committee Guidance; and
2. Particular assurances with regard to children adversely affected by drug misuse.

In responding to this correspondence we would firstly like to assure you that our agencies take seriously our commitment to protect children who are vulnerable and at risk from harm, regardless of the underlying cause (including drug misuse) from which such risks emanate.

Such a system of protection requires sustained joint partnership working between the Executive, our agencies, the independent sector and the wider community and we endeavour to achieve this. There can be no guarantee given by our Agencies that a child will not experience abusive or life threatening situations within their family, nor that we would be in a position of identifying every child in such potentially threatening situations. We are, however, committed to the development of a robust network of protection and safety which aims to minimise such occurrences.

1. NEW CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

We have re-established the Inverclyde Child Protection Committee (Inverclyde CPC) in line with the guidance issued by the Scottish Executive.

A Chief Officers Group has been established, chaired by the Chief Executive of Inverclyde Council, with the main agencies of Health, Police and SCRA being appropriately represented by Senior Officers with delegated Chief Executive authority. The Chief Social Work Officer for the Council is also a member of this forum. This arrangement takes account of the geographical responsibilities of Strathclyde Police and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board and the related complexity of Chief Executive Officers covering a number of Child Protection Committee areas.

This Group has approved a new constitution for the Inverclyde CPC, appointed a Chair and Vice-Chair and approved the wider interagency multidisciplinary representation.

The newly constituted Inverclyde CPC, has a wide interagency and multidisciplinary membership reflecting the local organisational agency structures. The Inverclyde CPC meets on an eight weekly cycle and works in conjunction with other strategic groups within Inverclyde in progressing the child protection agenda. This is inclusive of developing protocols and policies in respect of joint working, integrated assessment and information sharing. A number of sub groups have been formed which afford the opportunity for joint quality assurance, evaluation processes and the development and delivery of joint training.

Scrutiny of the Child Protection system is a component of both the Inverclyde CPC and Chief Officer Group remit, supplemented by single agency quality assurance mechanisms. The level of scrutiny will be further enhanced by the independent inspection of the child protection service by 2008.

Implementation of the new process will be reviewed through the development of the Annual Report and Business Plan which are due for submission from the Inverclyde CPC to the Chief Officer Group in June of this year. Thereafter the Reports will be published and widely circulated. Individual agency representatives on the Inverclyde CPC, and its subgroups, also have a responsibility to report back to their agency or sponsoring group, in the case of the voluntary sector forum, and vice versa.

2. CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DRUG MISUSE.

Your correspondence highlights the particular concerns which relate to children in respect of drug misuse and we would acknowledge the difficulty for children in such circumstances. However, as indicated within the correspondence, it would not be possible at present to give an assurance that every child in such a situation has, or can be identified. This is not to say that we are not committed to meet the challenge presented in our communities from the effects of substance misuse. Nor does it reflect any complacency in respect of how our agencies view the necessity to improve the early identification of risk factors for vulnerable children. This is viewed by us as an essential area for development in our aim to minimise risk for children.

On a practice level Agencies within Inverclyde are aware of the issues surrounding the effects of substance misuse in respect of both adults and children considering the significant identified problems in our community related to substance misuse. Agencies utilise existing referral mechanisms in such situations, incorporating existing good joint working arrangements and partnerships to facilitate appropriate action and intervention.

There has also been the development of specific joint approaches aimed towards early identification of risk and provision of support programmes. For example:

- Special Needs in Pregnancy Service. This service offered between Health and Social Works aims to identify pre birth situations relating to substance misusing women where risk assessment is required, and support services provided to minimise risk.
- Joint working arrangements have been established between the Problem Drug Services (Health), the Community Drugs Team and the Children and Family Social Work Services of the Council. This joint working arrangement helps facilitate early referral of vulnerable children related to substance misusing parents or carers.
- The “Indie”-Project has been developed to meet the needs of children involved with substance misuse or affected by substance misuse. A “Peer Education” system was developed through this project where young people provide input to others within schools and youth groups.
- A clear link has also been established through the “Young Carers” support service.
- Education Service and Police also work closely in the provision of health education and information both through the curriculum and presentations by Police Officers to pupils and parents.
- Particular joint initiatives between agencies can also be evidenced through ‘Choices for Life’ a drugs event for children and young people, and the ‘Safe Kids’ initiative, providing wider exposure to children around safety issues including substance misuse. Both of these initiatives are led by Strathclyde Police though are presented through interagency collaboration. The latter has also involved senior officers of agencies with joint membership of the Inverclyde CPC and Elected Members.

These Service developments, which are not exhaustive, are identified as examples of the joint approach taken within Inverclyde and of the seriousness given to this area of service.

Within the Authority there is a strategic view taken in respect of substance misuse which is reflected within the Community Safety Strategy, Addiction Strategy, Youth Strategy and within the Community Care, Integrated Children’s Services and Criminal Justice plans. All of these are developed through interagency multidisciplinary forums. It is also important to note that there are services provided to adults, within the spectrum of interagency and single agency provision, which will have a direct impact on children through supportive contact and engagement with their parents or carers. For example the arrest referral scheme relating to early identification of issues, Community Drugs service for counselling and assessment services, Problem Drug Service linked to health provision and a number of community projects aimed to support adults tackle their substance misuse difficulty.

Through the Child Protection Committee, joint work has been established in respect of “Getting Our Priorities Right” and this will be progressed further through developments relating to “Hidden Harm - Next Steps” and “Getting it Right For Every Child”.

The progression of joint work within child protection services in general, and specifically in respect of substance misuse, will be further enhanced through the development of the integrated assessment framework and information sharing protocols. Evidence of positive

information sharing practice can be demonstrated through the implementation of the Antisocial Behaviour Strategy which again has a clear impact on reducing the adverse effects of substance misuse within our communities.

Whilst indicating that we are investing in specific, and general services, to minimise the impact of substance misuse on the lives of children, it is important to acknowledge that there are a number of resource issues which will impact upon the development of a more inclusive, joined up, network of protection for children.

The provision of more intrusive intervention which will be additional to the longer term preventive developments taking place, will place pressure on existing resources. This is inclusive of the following:-

- Increased demand for alternative family placement, both short and long term in respect of Foster Carers and also additional resources to facilitate the supportive caring role of families in such circumstances, i.e. kinship care.
- Further pressure is already being experienced within the residential child care sector as demand grows for placements.
- The integrated assessment framework and information sharing systems will also place strain on resources for the implementation and development of information technology and management systems accessible across agencies.
- There may also be a direct impact on the level of referral to SCRA which may result in additional resource pressures on SCRA, Social Work Services, with a requirement to meet additional assessment report requests, and the Police.

These are a few practical pressures which may be identified from our perspective. The resolution of these will necessitate continued joint working and partnership and in this regard we actively encourage Inverclyde CPCs involvement in the West of Scotland Child Protection consortium with a view to facilitating efficient use of resources. Such involvement also allows for the collaborative development of procedures, policies and protocols which improves communication and levels of consistency across agencies such as Strathclyde Police, who cover twelve local authority boundaries, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board which covers eight. The continued improvement of service provision and the identification of resources will also require the involvement of the Executive.

Conclusion

As Chief Executive Officers responsible for the provision and scrutiny of child protection services within Inverclyde, we would affirm our determination to ensure that the implementation of the new guidance in respect of Child Protection Committees will be fully implemented. We further acknowledge our responsibility for ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor, evaluate and quality assure those services aimed towards the protection of children, inclusive of those for whom substance misuse is an issue.

The continued development of policy in respect of 'Hidden Harm' and 'Getting it Right For Every Child' will be welcome, and endorsed by the Inverclyde Child Protection Committee.

At this present time, however, we could not provide general assurance that all children affected by substance misuse have been identified. We would state that every reasonable step is being taken to utilise our existing robust procedures and processes to minimise the risk to vulnerable children and to extend the protective and safety network across all children within Inverclyde.

Yours sincerely



John W Mundell
Chief Executive
Inverclyde Council



Sir William Rae QPM
Chief Constable
Strathclyde Police



Tom Divers
Chief Executive
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde