



STRATHCLYDE
POLICE

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Minister for Children
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Scottish Executive
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Cathy Jamieson MSP
Minister for Justice
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Andy Kerr MSP
Minister for Health and
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Dear Ministers

In response to your letter of 22 March 2006 you may be assured that like you we also share a common desire to protect our children and young people. Furthermore we can specifically assure you that the new guidance on the remit, structure and work of Child Protection Committees has been fully implemented in South Ayrshire and that we as the Chief Officers are carrying out our role in ensuring that the functions of South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee are being effectively implemented.

As evidence of the impact of our local Committee, we enclose a copy of the South Ayrshire Child Protection Committee's Annual Report, Business and Action Plan, all of which are currently being reviewed. The existence of these documents, which are open to scrutiny, together with our co-operation with the implementation of the Child Protection Reform Agenda and the fact that all authorities in Scotland will have a Child Protection Inspection in the next two years, will clearly demonstrate that we are taking forward this agenda. The guidance for Child Protection Committees clearly underlines the strategic and scrutiny roles to be undertaken by Chief Officers around the work being undertaken by our Child Protection Committees. Given all of this we believe the necessary mechanisms are currently in place to ensure that the quality of work in this vital area is developed and will allow us all greater assurance around the quality of our protection services..

Issues Raised by Cases of Children Affected by Drug Abuse

The issues raised by this particular section of your letter are varied and complex and there is clearly a developmental agenda associated with the implementation of the Hidden Harm Action Plan. As is accepted in both that document and the letter from Mr Colin McLean (dated 4th May 2006), at this stage it is not possible for any agency or Child Protection Committee to identify with any degree of certainty all of those situations where the substance misuse of adults raises issues for children. It is therefore not possible to give the kind of commitment or reassurance as proposed in your letter. We can, however, clearly state that when there are concerns from any agency about children in such circumstances, communication between agencies is good and increasing use has been made of for a such as pre-birth and post-birth case discussions around high risk or vulnerable pregnancies. In addition to this, in common with other Child Protection Committees, South Ayrshire has implemented improved Child Protection practice in the area of substance misuse. Again a number of these actions are highlighted in the Child Protection Committee's Business and Action Plan and would include:

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- Ayrshire Integrated Assessment Framework
- Roll out of Getting Our Priorities Right protocols
- Training around High Risk Pregnancies
- Health Service protocols for High Risk Pregnancies and information sharing

Furthermore we are committed to ensuring that any further issues emanating from the Action Plan associated with Hidden Harm are integrated within Child Protection practice in South Ayrshire and to building on the already established good practice which takes place around those children affected by substance misuse who are made known to us. It is, however, our considered view that there are a number of major issues associated with taking this work forward:

- i) The continuing challenge of implementing a system or systems where electronic sharing of information is facilitated.
- ii) While we currently fully share information with regard to child protection, there may be a requirement for legislation in the grey areas where there are concerns about children and there is no consent by parents to the sharing of information who are not yet "labelled" as child protection.
- iii) Significant pressures in the area of resources, such as foster care, which are currently overstretched.
- iv) A recognition that there will be new budgetary resources required to assist extended families and/or substitute carers in supporting children in this situation.
- v) Concerns that the implementation of the Hidden Harm action plan, will increase the volume of referrals to agencies without the necessary framework in place to ensure that appropriate intervention takes place across agencies and the outcomes for those who need it are improved.
- vi) Concerns that the framework in relation to Getting it Right for Every Child which may help address the above issue is not sufficiently detailed and able to be progressed within realistic timescales. This is vital to underpin this action.
- vii) Concerns that a major national debate is required to agree a view on the appropriate thresholds for any statutory intervention with children.

In respect of those young people who themselves abuse drugs where this is identified as an issue attempts to respond to this would be addressed with their care. However, we recognise that resources to address the specific needs of young people engaged in this behaviour are limited and this may well be an area the Scottish Executive would like to consider further.

For all children identified as being in need of services to safeguard and promote their welfare we have in place assessment and care management plans, which are robustly reviewed at regular intervals.

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In summary therefore, it is our view that our Child Protection Committee has, and will continue to take seriously the issues associated with the Hidden Harm agenda and we will ensure it will integrate the new Action Plan in the Committees future Business and Action Plan. While we cannot give an assurance that all children will be identified under the terms you have outlined, we believe all reasonable steps have been taken to further develop the quality of Child Protection work.

In all of the foregoing we can reaffirm our commitment to date, and in the future, to taking forward all of these issues in partnership with the Executive.

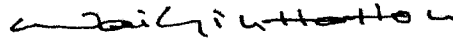
There remains outstanding the development of a national consensus on the level of statutory intervention in children's lives. Once that has been established then the proper resourcing of those interventions will be essential.

Finally, you ask about working jointly across boundaries. We have evidenced above good progress being made on an Ayrshire basis. In addition, the three local authorities and NHS are meeting regularly to explore new ways of joint or joined up delivery. We have no doubt that if this work shows new opportunities in this field with real benefits we will pursue them together.

Yours sincerely



Tom Cairns
Chief Executive
South Ayrshire Council



Wai Yin Hatton
Chief Executive
NHS Ayrshire & Arran



Sir William Rae QPM
Chief Constable
Strathclyde Police