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Children, Young People and
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Dear Mr MacLean

CHILD PROTECTION

Further to your letter dated 4th May we make the following comment;

The Chief Executives of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling Councils, NHS Forth Valley and the Chief Constable of Central Scotland Police can confirm that we have taken action to implement the guidance for Child Protection Committees. This is set out below:

Chief Officers Group

As a group of Chief Officers, we meet together on a regular basis to discuss key strategic issues of relevance across the Forth Valley. Child protection is part of our ongoing agenda. In October 2004, following the publication of the draft guidance, we commissioned senior officers to consider how the guidance could be implemented across the Forth Valley area. We subsequently agreed to implement the following actions:

- We confirmed that the existing Chief Executive's Group would fulfil the role set out in section 2 of the guidance.
- The existing Child Protection Consortium would be replaced by a Forth Valley Child Protection Strategy Group, which would be chaired by a member of the Chief Officers group.
- Local Child Protection Committees would continue to operate, under revised arrangements, in order to fulfil the functions outlined in the guidance.
- 2 lead officer posts for child protection would be established, one to support the Falkirk Child Protection Committee and the other to support the Stirling and Clackmannanshire Committees.
- The existing Child Protection Co-ordinator would support the work of the Child Protection Strategy Group.

In addition to the work which we undertake collectively as Chief Officers, we also provide leadership within our respective organisations in relation to Child Protection and ensure that a corporate approach is taken to Child Protection.

Child Protection Strategy Group

The Child Protection Consortium for Forth Valley has been replaced by the Forth Valley Child Protection Strategy Group (FVCPSG), as indicated in the first Letter of Assurance to Ministers in 2004.

The FVCPSG is chaired by the Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire Council on behalf of the Chief Officers of the three Councils within Forth Valley, NHS Forth Valley and Central Scotland Police.

The FVCPSG has agreed the constitution of each of the Child Protection Committees, ensuring these follow a common format which addresses the requirements identified within the revised guidance for Child Protection Committees.

The membership of the FVCPSG is drawn from the following organisations:

Central Scotland Police
Clackmannanshire Council
Falkirk Council
Stirling Council
NHS Forth Valley
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Procurator Fiscal

This fulfils the requirements contained in the Scottish Executive guidance on accountability and collective responsibility in ensuring that the protection of children is located at the most senior level within the partner agencies.

The FVCPSG supports the Child Protection Committees through addressing the following key issues:

- Communication
- Quality Assurance Framework
- Interagency procedures
- Any other child protection issues which impact on a Forth Valley – wide level

The Group has formulated an action plan which is reviewed at each meeting and has also assisted in ensuring consistency in the development of the constitution and work plans of the child protection committees.

A key task for the FVCP Strategy Group in its first year of operation was to agree the job description and funding mechanisms for appointing staff to support the work of the Child Protection Committees. These posts were created through, initially, pooling the additional funding from the Scottish Executive. Ongoing funding has been agreed through pooling of resources from the Changing Children's Services Fund in each authority. One post covers the Falkirk area and the other post covers Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

Together the creation of the Lead Officer posts and the review and the amendment to Child Protection Committee Constitutions ensures that the new guidance for Child Protection Committees has been implemented. Membership of Child Protection Committees has been revised and agreed at a local level to ensure that members are of a sufficiently senior rank to be able to make decisions.

The three Chairs of the Child Protection Committees and chair of NHS Forth Valley Child Protection Action Group are all members of the Forth Valley Strategy Group, thereby ensuring continuity of communication, accountability and decision-making.

Where issues arise in one area then they can be advised at the Forth Valley Strategy Group to ensure that there is a coordinated approach involving all of the partners. This can be evidenced by two matters raised by CPC chairs, following discussion at CPC. The first, raised by Falkirk CPC, was with regard to making additional provision for Joint Investigative Interview Training and the second, raised by Stirling CPC, was agreement to pilot, on behalf of Forth Valley Strategy Group, electronic access to Child Protection information for the police and health.

Child Protection Committees

The continuing commitment to maintaining Child Protection Committees on a local authority boundary basis reflects the needs of the respective committee and the variation in service development over time. The Forth Valley Strategy Group, with its overview of Forth Valley-wide issues, ensures that we achieve effectiveness by working across Forth Valley.

The sub-groups of each local Child Protection Committees reflect the three key responsibilities contained within the revised guidance.

Each Committee contributes to inter-agency Child Protection Training including basic awareness of substance misuse issues. We recognise that although there is enhanced awareness in this area progress is required on the provision of more specific training e.g. Child Protection in drug and alcohol misuse seminar planned for June 2006 in Forth Valley. We are also progressing single agency training in each organisation in accordance with our identified development needs.

Forth Valley, as indicated in its first Letter of Assurance, already had a structure in place for interagency training and is in process of reviewing the training programme to ensure its alignment with the tiered approach recommended by the Executive. Whilst each agency takes responsibility for single agency training, there is increased sharing of information on training programmes.

On the basis of the above, we are confident that the guidance in respect of Child Protection Committees in Forth Valley has been implemented and that the Committees are developing in the way intended by the Executive.

It is too early to judge the impact that this is having for those who use our services and, even with the changes; there can be no guarantee that an individual child will not come to harm. Having said that, there is evidence of staff working together on evaluation/self-evaluation of services using the Framework for Standards. This is a new area of joint working, which should identify areas for service improvement and action planning ahead of any inspections.

Children affected by substance misuse

Forth Valley Interagency Child Protection Guidelines were reviewed and revised by a Child Protection Investigations Sub-Group in light of the Children's Charter and Framework for Standards. These provide direction to all agencies in Forth Valley on communicating and responding to child protection cases where substance misuse is an issue.

Each area's Integrated Children's Services Plan 2005-2008 plan highlights as a local priority the need to provide support to children affected by parental (and other family members) substance/alcohol misuse. Actions plans include:

1. Implement "Getting our Priorities Right" and "Hidden Harm" objectives.
2. Implement good practice guidance for "Working with Children and Families affected by Substance Misuse".
3. Provide support and education to children and their families.
4. Achieve a reduction in substance misuse.
5. Achieve a reduction in the number of children affected by parental (other family members) substance/alcohol misuse.

Substance Action Team

The Forth Valley Substance Action Team oversees the strategy on substance misuse. The key objectives of the S.A.T are:

1. Identify local needs in relation to substance issues and National policies
2. Identify gaps in service provision by developing and implementing an integrated approach
3. Reduce the problems associated with substance use
4. Offer flexible and accessible services to people affected by substance use
5. Maintain and review local area Substance Misuse Forum Action Plans – a working document reviewed at each local Forum meeting showing progress achieved by all group members.
6. Decide on priorities and work towards meeting these as a partnership

There is a continual process of audit and monitoring across all agencies' systems. Where areas for improvement are identified these are taken forward.

Agency specific systems

Local Authorities

The 3 local authorities have undertaken a sample audit of child care cases involving substance misuse issues. From this we are satisfied that there is evidence of inter-agency working to ensure that children's needs are being assessed and met, where children are known to agencies.

We cannot be confident that we have identified every child who may be affected by substance misuse and we welcome your acknowledgment of this. However to try and reduce the gap we are taking steps which include:

- Training for staff in recognising substance misuse issues which affect children.
- Local authorities in Forth Valley have made a substantial financial commitment to the Voluntary Sector to help remove barriers to accessing services.
- Each local authority has robust systems in place to monitor and manage Child Protection cases.
- Dissemination of information about lessons learned in other areas.
- Training has been provided across Early Years Services in Forth Valley and this has recently been evaluated (Scotland Against Drugs Initiative Training). This pilot was supported and designed in collaboration with the 3 local authorities.

- Local authorities work in conjunction with the voluntary sector to provide services to young people who misuse substances.

Central Scotland Police

The Vulnerable Persons Database was developed in 2005 replacing the then Juvenile Referral Form.

Officers submit a Vulnerable Persons Report (V.P.R.) once they identify a member of the public has specific needs or considerations, particularly where issues have arisen in regard to Child Protection, Domestic Abuse or Drug Offending. All Vulnerable Persons reports are reviewed daily by a member of the Family unit, at Falkirk and where appropriate information is disseminated to partner agencies.

Processes are currently under review to ensure efficiencies and benefits are being fully realised. In addition the following processes are in place to ensure that matters of concern are progressed at the earliest opportunity to ensure children and families received appropriate assistance when they most need it:

- Arrest Referral Process;
- Youth Justice Referral Process;
- Substance Action Team;
- Drugs Unit Operational Orders contain a section on Child Welfare Issues/ Considerations; and
- Safer Central – All Operation Overlord briefings contain particular emphasis on child welfare issues/ considerations.

NHS Forth Valley

Community Alcohol and Drugs Service

This service has adopted the guidance from “Getting our Priorities Right” and “Hidden Harm” into their initial assessment process. The service prioritises clients who are pregnant or with children.

When carrying out an assessment of a client, information about dependant children is routinely gathered and information about the families is shared with Social Work. This information may also include details of drugs use e.g. type of drug, times and levels of use.

CADS are engaged in an ongoing initiative with midwifery services to look at improving the services through joint working with pregnant women who have drug and alcohol related problems.

NHS Forth Valley Child protection Action Group

This group takes a broad overview of Child Protection policies and guidance within Health. Summary of actions include -

- Currently implementing NHS Child Protection Training Strategy
- Introduction of Pre-birth Planning Protocol for pregnant women who are misusing alcohol and drugs.
- Introduction of a Family support and child minding initiative which supports families with drugs and alcohol misuse.

- Introduction of Hall 4 guidance enables Health Visitors to give a supportive and commensurate service to match the needs of these vulnerable families.
- Introduction of new NHSFV Family Health Records have been introduced and all Public Health Nurses, Health Visitors and School Nurses have been training in their use. These records include a Profile of Significant Factors (vulnerability tool) and an Assessment Tool based on Scottish Executive recommendations.
- CADs and Midwives are engaged in an ongoing initiative to look at improving the services through joint working with pregnant women who have drug and alcohol related problems.
- Interagency working with the focus on working with threatening and violent families.

National Issues

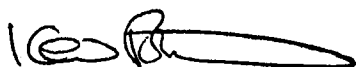
There is still some work outstanding which would assist agencies in addressing this particular area. Specifically the virtual training suite is not yet complete and we await the final guidance on integrated assessment frameworks.

As agencies we would want all drug using parents to engage with services and are concerned that recent media attention may act as a deterrent.


Under-funding of Children's Services continues to be a barrier in all areas of work.

Whilst we welcome the initiatives from the Executive in increasing the number of Social Workers there is still a national staffing shortage within Children and Families Social Work.

Yours sincerely



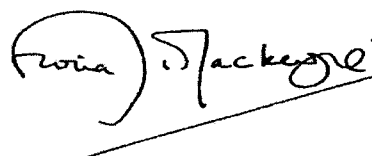
Keir Bloomer
Chief Executive
Clackmannanshire Council



Andrew Cameron
Chief Constable
Central Scotland Police



Mary Pitcaithly
Chief Executive
Falkirk Council



Fiona Mackenzie
Chief Executive
NHS Forth Valley



Keith Yates
Chief Executive
Stirling Council