



**East Dunbartonshire Council**

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**SUE BRUCE**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**  
Tom Johnston House  
Civic Way  
Kirkintilloch  
GLASGOW  
G66 4TJ  
Tel: 0141 578 8082  
Fax No:0141 578 8330

e-mail:[chiefexec@eastdunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:chiefexec@eastdunbarton.gov.uk)

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: SB/JK  
If calling please ask for Sue Bruce  
Ext 8082

31<sup>st</sup> May 2006

Peter Peacock MSP, Minister for Education and Young People  
Cathy Jamieson MSP, Minister for Justice  
Andy Kerr MSP, Minister for Health and Community Care  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
EDINBURGH  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Ministers

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

### **Introduction and Context**

We refer to the Ministerial requests for assurance that the principal, although not exclusive, public service agencies are confident in their ability to protect children from harm.

We note the specific requests for assurance with regard to children affected or at risk of harm through the misuse of drugs.

A subsequent letter received from Colin McLean provides some helpful additional clarity around some contextual and detailed elements incorporated into the original request for assurance.

The under noted composite response will hopefully provide the ministers with an assurance that East Dunbartonshire Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGG&C) and Strathclyde Police are all committed to the protection, well being, safety and welfare of all children in our communities.

We are not however as a group of chief officers able to provide the ministers with anything other than a qualified assurance that we are working together formally and informally to minimise risk to and harm of all our children. This qualified assurance is consistent with our previous response to ministers in May 2004.

The response seeks some ministerial acknowledgment that it is not entirely possible to predict, with confidence, all aspects of human behavior and that despite all our best efforts, it is likely that a child or children will be harmed or rendered unsafe as a consequence of the actions of others at sometime in the future.

Many positive developments have taken place across Scotland in the years since the publication of "*For Scotland's Children*" and "*It's Everybody's Responsibility to Make Sure I'm Alright*".

The Planning Partners in East Dunbartonshire have already reported to Ministers in May 2004 as to the effort and action planning which informed our approach to Child Protection. The Partners volunteered to participate in the 'pilot' Child Protection Inspections, which are now being rolled out throughout Scotland. The inspection report is attached for reference. (Appendix 1).

There are a number of significant policy and organisational agendas which have come to the fore in the intervening years and which need time to settle and mature in a systematic manner if we are to anticipate positive outcomes in respect of all children:

- The NHS Reform (Scotland) Act 2004.
- The establishment of a dedicated inspectorial function on Child Protection.
- The creation of a dedicated Social Work Inspection Agency.
- The National Review of Social Work – 'Changing Lives'.
- The National Agenda and brief to "Wholly Integrate all Children's Services".
- The Public Sector efficiency drive.
- The establishment of Criminal Justice Authorities.
- Guidance on developing Child Protection Committees.
- Getting it Right for Every Child – Review of S.C.R.A.

In summary terms, therefore, the agencies have been working closely as major Planning Partners to oversee organisational change with a stated object of ensuring better joined up working informed by models of good practice.

We previously reported to Ministers with a tabular Appendix which described various action points for the agencies around the recommendations of "*It's Everybody's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright*".

As a helpful indication of our ongoing commitment to Child Protection, we attach an updated action plan which takes into consideration many of the findings and recommendations from inquiries and policy introduced since 2004 (Appendix 2).

### **Children's Services Planning – East Dunbartonshire Council**

Children's services within East Dunbartonshire Council are modeled around the Council's organisational structure. Hence, Education, Social Work, Early Years, Community and Housing Services are led by the Corporate Director (Community). This officer in turn leads an extended core group of agency representatives including:

- Health
- Police
- SCRA

The Child Protection Committee (CPC) for East Dunbartonshire has similar representation. Discussion is well advanced as to the convergence of the CPC with the core group of senior officers mentioned above, so as to ensure that Child Protection issues inform our global responsibility to children. In this way we can ensure that each service and or agency is working towards a common vision and set of objectives from a planning and operational context.

The partner agencies have recently produced a revised Draft Children's Service Plan (CSP) which describes the overall direction of travel with regard to strategic planning and our efforts to drive forward children's services in a joined up and meaningful way (Appendix 3).

There is the purposeful development of a number of themed Partnerships under the auspices of 'Community Planning', these will include a Community Health Partnership and a Children Services Partnership and will be at the centre of East Dunbartonshire's drive to provide effective governance and strategic leadership across all public service agencies who have the interests, welfare and wellbeing of all our children at heart.

Some further examples of good practice initiatives which provide evidence of our collective commitment to Child Protection are described in summary terms:

- Implementation of Pilot Protocol for missing, looked after and accommodated children with Strathclyde Police.
- Appointment of a Child Protection Committee lead officer post with West Dunbartonshire Council on a cost sharing basis.
- The establishment of a Community Health partnership wholly within the geographical boundary of the authority.
- A council wide corporate risk analysis of Child Protection.
- Council and Health board approval of an authority wide drug and alcohol strategy.
- Authority wide rollout of Triple P parenting programme, universal and targeted where applicable.
- Advanced consideration of an Integrated Assessment Framework for children.
- Agreed protocol in place with NHSGG&C for information sharing between agencies. Note that the issue of informed consent is overridden by case circumstance.

- Reciprocal access to share information between Education and Social Work computer systems.
- Full participation by East Dunbartonshire Council in the National Pilot for an Intensive Support and Monitoring Service.

In order to align the response with ministerial expectations, the following sections focus on particular elements of the ministers concern and interest.

### **Child Protection Committee – East Dunbartonshire**

As intimated above, the Planning Partners are committed to the more effective joint working within children's services across and beyond the authorities geographic boundaries.

The guidance issued by the Scottish Executive with regard to the establishment of a new committee structure for child protection has been purposefully reviewed. Steps are now being taken to functionally incorporate child protection and children's services within a single planning construct. At the time of writing the authority is preparing its annual report and business plan on child protection, scheduled for completion in July 2006. This report will signpost the direction of travel as well as reflecting on progress to date in developing interagency progress on partnership approaches to keeping our children safe from harm.

### **Action on Drug Misuse Within East Dunbartonshire**

You will note from the content of this letter that each of the partner agencies are giving serious consideration to how their service responds to those persons and children adversely affected by drug misuse.

East Dunbartonshire Council and our health partner NHSGG&C have one of the first developed and jointly managed Community Addiction Teams, which is operationally managed by the Council's Social Work Service.

An audit of assessment and intervention plans was undertaken as part of the action requirements of your letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006. We are satisfied that of the families currently allocated to the agencies as being affected by drug misuse, strategies and plans are in place and subject to monitoring and review.

We attach for your attention, (Appendix 5) a copy of a recently completed action plan which demonstrates our determination to make progress in this complex area. Through the Child Protection Committee we have consulted on a localised protocol based on the guidance contained in '*Getting Our Priorities Right*' (Appendix 6). The Child Protection Committee is also proactively considering the revised practical guidance contained in '*Hidden Harm*' - the Next Steps with the object of incorporation into local practice.

We would however wish to bring to the attention of Ministers, the omission of any reference to alcohol misuse and its relationship to child protection. It is our firm belief and experience that alcohol misuse contributes greatly to all risk factors attributable to well being, welfare and harm for those affected. To this end our approach in this as apposed to separate drug and or alcohol categorisation area of harm and protection has been to address manifest problem areas from a context of substance misuse.

### **Partner Agencies**

East Dunbartonshire Council recognises the larger geographic constructs which inform the planning and operational activities of Police and Health partners. Their particular individual improvement objectives are described through reference to:-

- i) NHSGG&C – Child Protection Forum Action Plan – April 2006 – March 2007 and NHSGG&C – Child Protection unit Progress Report (pps 12-35) (Appendix 4).

NHSGG&C have invested substantial resources in child protection since 2004. The establishment of formal and informal partnerships with all local authorities operating in the health board area, through the mechanism of Community Health Partnership, has led to increasing effectiveness and communication at the front line of service delivery. This work complements the work of the Local Authority and ensures a consistency of approach as well as attention to the unique aspects of East Dunbartonshire childcare needs.

- ii) Strathclyde Police similar to NHSGG&C have developed a strategic response across their operating area. This is complemented by the participation and contribution of local Divisional Command (Glasgow North and East Dunbartonshire) to local strategies, planning and operations within their particular areas of responsibilities.

### **Strathclyde Police - Force Position Statement**

#### **Child Protection Committees**

As a result of the publication in 2005 of the new guidance for Child Protection Committees, Strathclyde Police directed the Force representation on the newly formed Chief Officers' Group and reviewed representation on the Child Protection Committee for each of the 12 Local Authorities within the Force area. As there are 12 Child Protection Committees in the Strathclyde Police area, it would be logistically unrealistic for the Chief Constable to personally attend each Chief Officers' Group and as such this was delegated to local divisional commanders. Representatives on CPC's broadly reflect local command areas.

Strathclyde Police Family Protection Co-ordinator maintains regular dialogue with the Force's representatives to ensure that they are fully updated on current and emerging issues. This ensures that there is corporacy in representation and consistency of approach across all of the Committees.

Strathclyde Police is satisfied that the level of police representation on each of the committees is appropriate and those representatives appointed by the Force have sufficient seniority to effectively discharge their duties either on the Chief Officers' Group or Child Protection Committee. The representatives are supported locally by the Detective Inspector of the local Family Protection Unit. The corporate approach and Force overview is maintained by the Family Protection Co-ordinator supported by the Family Protection Policy Unit.

#### **Children Adversely Affected by Drug Abuse**

Strathclyde Police is committed to working, singly and jointly with partner agencies, in the protection of children. With specific regard to those children described as affected by drug abuse the Force has in place child protection procedures which clearly articulate the action expected to be taken in response to the identification of any such instance. This is supported by extensive preventative work designed to

raise awareness of the adverse issues attached to drug misuse and in particular targeting children and young persons.

Divisional Drugs Awareness Officers provide and support drug related educational presentations within the local community. Officers in this post have a comprehensive knowledge of non-enforcement drug issues and are equipped to respond to issues raised by children in relation to drug misuse by them or those around them. Further to this, the 'Get Real' DVD, produced by the SDEA will be distributed to all Divisional Drugs Awareness Officers and will become the common delivery medium across Scotland. This will be supported by a training course for all Divisional Drugs Awareness Officers at the Scottish Police College. Part of the input of this course is to raise awareness and ensure the Divisional Drugs Awareness Officers are fully equipped to offer help by answering child protection related questions and provide local reference material. Community Safety staff use Know the Score as their main point of reference for education and support literature.

Strathclyde Police is also involved in Criminal Justice Intervention Programmes such as Glasgow Drug Court, Prolific Offenders Programme and Arrest Referral. The intention of which is to assist offenders who have drug related problems, to engage in effective treatment programs. This in turn brings offenders and their families into closer contact with various partner organisations and groups involved in issues of social inclusion and provide more opportunities for any child protection issues to be identified and acted upon.

In accordance with the principles outlined in the Scottish Executive publications '*Getting Our Priorities Right*' and '*Hidden Harm*' Strathclyde Police are committed to improving information sharing between agencies and organizations involved in the field of child protection.

Within the context of Community Planning it is expected that the police will be active partners in the design and implementation of Integrated Children's Services Plans within each local authority area. These should provide the basis on which services are delivered locally and designed to achieve the Vision for Scotland's Children.

Strathclyde Police guidance to officers in respect of such children is clearly documented in the Force Standard Operating Procedures in respect of Children. Any child protection concerns made known to Strathclyde Police will be investigated in accordance with national and local inter-agency guidelines regardless of the source of the information. Through the adoption of an early intervention strategy and the identification of child protection concerns at source, we seek to reinforce our continued commitment to abuse prevention.

The policing response is conducted in accordance with the provision of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Section 52 and 53, for both children being exposed to the adverse effects of substance misuse from parents/carers, and those children who are themselves misusing substances. Given the number of drug abusers resident in the Strathclyde Police area, such referrals are not uncommon. Not only do they emanate from front line uniform officers during the course of their daily duties but also divisional proactive and drug targeting units whose specific remit causes them to come into contact with children whose parents may be involved in the trafficking and abuse of illegal substances. The safety, welfare and general protection of a child should be the paramount consideration for all agencies and organisations that have any dealings with child protection issues and all efforts must be made to ensure that this is achieved.

### **Force – General Comment**

Strathclyde Police welcomes the publication of *'Hidden Harm – the Next Steps'* and the Force is eager to continue to support multi-agency strategies developed to promote further the partnership approach, this is vital in the field of the protection of children. Strathclyde Police has robust systems in place in terms of the Force policy and standard operating procedures in respect of Children and having reviewed the content the Force is satisfied that these procedures are wholly appropriate and fit for purpose.

That said, and despite the robust policies and procedures in place and the extensive work that is being undertaken in this area, Strathclyde Police **cannot provide a definitive commitment** that all children who are misusing substances or have parents/carers who are misusing substances have been identified. For clarification this statement is made for the following reasons~

1. It is unclear as to how many individuals are actually abusing substances in the East Dunbartonshire Council area which is wholly within the force operating area and in addition there appears to be no definitive way of identifying this target population.
2. As stated in the Scottish Executive publication *'Getting Our Priorities Right'* *"Data in respect of children living in families in which the parents or other family members misuse substances is patchy. However most recent estimates would suggest that perhaps 40,000-60,000 children in Scotland are affected by their parents' drug use and 80,000-1000,000 are affected by parental alcohol misuse.* The definition of *affected* is not clear, whether it is used in the context of the normal meaning of the word or whether this indicates that there is an adverse effect and that intervention or child protection measures are required.
3. It is noted that the Ministerial Letter has chosen to focus on *'drug'* rather than on *'substance'* misuse whereas it is known that the number of children *'affected'* by parental alcohol misuse is much greater than those *'affected'* by drugs. Strathclyde Police policy and standard operating procedures make specific mention of substance abuse to ensure that any problematic behaviour is encapsulated, much in line with the language used in the *'Hidden Harm'* and *Getting Our Priorities Right'* publications.

Strathclyde Police **can give a commitment** that there are clear, unequivocal and definitive policies and procedures in place whereby when Strathclyde Police Officers uncover instances of questionable care during the course of their duties which is clearly indicative of substance misuse, appropriate action will be taken, children will be protected and referrals made to partner agencies for further intervention.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

As the group of chief executive officers concerned with protecting children in the East Dunbartonshire Council area, we are satisfied that we are continuing to make progress in this complex area.

The minister's letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006 requests comments on what may be considered to further improve our response to protecting children. We would refer to the introduction and context sections of this letter wherein we describe some of the current policy and legal requirements either enacted or expected which inform many aspects of our separate and collective endeavor in this area of work.


The minister's attention is specifically drawn to the content of Appendix 4 which describes the work undertaken by NHSGG&C in the context of improving response, practice and communication through large scale service redesign.

We would request that ministers view this letter of qualified assurance as 'work in progress' and that progress between and within the partners has been significant since the original request for assurance in 2004. We would also comment that we are not complacent around what we still want to achieve and recognise that public service change agendas are constant in an increasingly complex environment.

As the chief officers concerned with protecting children in East Dunbartonshire we have collectively signed this qualified assurance for the ministers due consideration and reply.

To ensure that the ministerial deadline of 31 May 2006 is achieved, this letter will be communicated electronically. A hard copy together with all relevant appendices will be forwarded through the mail system.

Yours sincerely



**Tom Divers**  
**Chief Executive**  
**NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde**



**Sue Bruce**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**East Dunbartonshire Council**



**Sir William Rae QPM**  
**Chief Constable**  
**Strathclyde Police**

## **APPENDICES:**

- Appendix 1: A report on the pilot inspection of the services to protect children and young people in the East Dunbartonshire area (1 July 2005)
  
- Appendix 2: East Dunbartonshire Child Protection Committee Inter-Agency Action Plan (August 2005)
  
- Appendix 3: Integrating Children's Services Plan 2005 – 2008
  
- Appendix 4: Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Unit Progress Report August 2005 – March 2006
  
- Appendix 5: Children Affected by Parented Substance Abuse – Action Plan East Dunbartonshire - May 2006
  
- Appendix 6: East Dunbartonshire Child Protection Committee Protocols and Operational Procedures for Inter-Agency Working with Children and Families Affected by Substance Misuse (March 2006)