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Your Ref:

Our Ref:

If telephoning please call :

25<sup>th</sup> May, 2006

Peter Peacock MSP  
Minister for Children  
& Young People  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
EDINBURGH  
E86 6QQ

Cathy Jamieson MSP  
Minister for Justice  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
EDINBURGH  
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Andy Kerr MSP  
Minister for Health and  
Community Care  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
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Dear Ministers

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

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 North Ayrshire and that we as the Chief Officers are carrying out our role in ensuring that the functions of North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee are being effectively implemented. As evidence of the impact of our local Committee, we enclose a copy of the North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee's Annual 04/05 Report, Business and Action Plan, all of which are currently being reviewed with the draft 05/06 report being available by the end of June 06.

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 "Next Steps" Action Plan. It is accepted already by the Scottish Executive both in this document and the letter from Mr Colin McLean (dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 2006), that it is not possible for any agency or Child Protection Committee to identify with certainty all of those situations where substance misuse by adults raises concerns for children. It is therefore not possible to give the kind of commitment or reassurance requested in your letter. We can, however, clearly state that when there are concerns from any source about children in such circumstances, there is effective

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communication between agencies and increasing use has been made of pre-birth and post-birth case discussions around high risk or vulnerable pregnancies. In addition to this, we believe we can demonstrate improved Child Protection practice in the area of substance misuse. A number of actions taken are highlighted in the Child Protection Committee's Business and Action Plan and would include:

- 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 will be reflecting, on the work that has already been undertaken and will note any developments that 'Next Steps' might bring, assessing whether or not there is a need to introduce them in our area. Any further action required will be integrated within the Children's Service Plan in North Ayrshire and will build on the already established good practice which takes place around children in need.

It is, however, our view that there are a number of major issues associated with taking this work forward:

- i) The continuing resource challenge of implementing a system or systems where electronic sharing of information is facilitated. Nevertheless we are working together towards this.
- 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 is no consent by parents to the sharing of information and there are concerns about children not yet "labelled" as child protection.
- iii) Significant pressures in the area of resources, such as foster care, which are currently overstretched and require to be addressed nationally by the Scottish Executive.
- iv) A recognition that there will be new investment required to assist extended families and/or substitute carers in supporting children in this situation. We await the Scottish Executive's report on Kinship Care with interest.
- 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.

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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 within their careplan. 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.

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

Ian Snodgrass  
Chief Executive  
North Ayrshire Council

Wai Yin Hatton  
Chief Executive  
NHS Ayrshire & Arran

William Rae  
Chief Constable  
Strathclyde Police

David O'Neill  
Leader  
North Ayrshire Council

