

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN – 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

### 1. Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on progress with the Children's Services Plan. The current phase of the Children's Services Plan was agreed by Dumfries and Galloway Council on 26 March 2015. The Council also agreed the reporting arrangements for the plan: these being that both the Council and NHS Board would receive an annual report on the plan, and that the Council would also receive 6 monthly progress updates. This report is a 6-month update with a highlight report attached (**appendix**). There is a set of high-level annual performance indicators for this plan and these will be reported on in the full annual report in March 2016.

### 2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

2.1 consider progress made against implementation of the Children's Services Plan as set out in the **Appendix**; and

2.2 note that high level annual performance indicators will be reported in the full Annual Report to be presented in March 2016.

### 3. Considerations

3.1 The Council is committed to giving all local children and young people an equal chance to fulfil their potential and one of its four priorities is to provide the best start in life for all our children. The Children's Services Plan will help deliver the commitments under this priority. The current Children's Services Plan, agreed by Council in March 2016, was developed as a short-term 18-month plan. Our aim is to develop a longer-term plan for children's services and the current plan effectively forms an 'initial phase' of this. The reason for this approach is that the current plan has been driven by the continued need to address the five inspection recommendations from the 2014 Joint Inspection of Children's Services in Dumfries and Galloway. The five recommended areas for improvement were allocated to four strategic groups: Child Protection Committee; Early Years Group; Corporate Parenting Group and GIRFEC Group and to the Children's Services Executive Group. The action plans of these groups are the delivery mechanism for the first phase of the Children's Services Plan.

3.2 This approach, and our focus on vulnerability, was endorsed by the Care Inspectorate in their Progress Review published in May 2015:

"They had decided to implement an integrated children's services plan in two phases and they were appropriately prioritising the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people."

3.3 Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) 2014 Act, there is a statutory duty from April 2017 for partners to jointly prepare a Children's Services Plan for a 3 year period. The current plan therefore, might be extended from September 2016 to April 2017 in order to align with the statutory requirement.

**Progress against improvement areas**

3.4 There has been significant progress in key areas, including: child protection and risk management; GIRFEC implementation; corporate parenting, early years and governance and accountability.

**Child protection and risk management**

3.5 The Child Protection Committee remains the key driver for improvement in this area and the recent appointment of a new independent Chairman, Liz Jamieson, former Head of Children's Services with Renfrewshire Council, will continue to support this. New training, based on the National Risk Assessment Framework, has been introduced - 8 sessions have been delivered in total with 251 staff across services attending. Staff report increased confidence in identifying risk. A Risk Assessment Group is overseeing the impact of the training and is carrying out further work to ensure that this translates into improved practice on the ground and earlier identification of risk for children and young people. Initial Referral Discussions (IRDs) to ensure timely, effective, multi-agency decision-making have been implemented and an electronic system is now in place to facilitate these discussions between Health, Social Work and Police staff. The electronic system allows robust reporting on this new process to the Children's Services Executive Group (CSEG). In response to a need identified through our audit, a Pre-Birth Pathway Group has now delivered on the new Pre-Birth Protocol. In line with advice from the Care Inspectorate, we have adopted the new West of Scotland Child Protection Procedures and an implementation plan is being developed. We are confident that our actions will minimise risks to vulnerable children and young people.

**Getting it right for every child implementation**

3.6 Significant progress has been made in developing and implementing key products to support the implementation of GIRFEC in order to be ready to meet new statutory duties from August 2016. These include: the single Child's Plan; multi-agency chronology and information-sharing. A new template for the Child's Plan Meeting was developed in response to the messages from the Joint Inspection. Aligned with this has been the introduction of solution-focused approaches to meetings. Combined training on Child's Plan and solution-focused approaches has been developed with 4 sessions delivered to 50 staff to date. The template streamlines the process with a focus on planning rather than minute-taking. The live planning process introduced by this template ensures faster planning and joint accountability. The new process also ensures that children and their parents are empowered to take a more active role and be assured of having their views considered. In a recent successful pilot, views were collected from chairmen of meetings and more importantly from children and parents using feedback forms. This pilot provided the following evidence:

- 100% of the children felt prepared for the meeting and knew who was going to attend.
- 80% understood the reason why the meeting was called, only 20% said they were not sure why the meeting was going to take place.
- 93% of young people felt they were able to voice their opinion and that they were listened to. 87% felt their views were respected. 13% of young people felt their views were not always respected.

- 93% of the young people felt it was easy to follow the meeting, whilst seven percent of young people felt they did not fully understand what was discussed.

This pilot will now be rolled out for all Child's Plan Meetings.

3.7 Guidance and a multi-agency agreed template on chronologies reinforced by new training in this area is starting to have an impact on the production of effective chronologies.

3.8 The information-sharing guidance and key practice points launched in May 2014 and reinforced by training is supporting effective information-sharing at an earlier stage. The Council and NHS are working together to deliver a local IT solution that builds on the electronic IRD system, while awaiting national IT developments. This local portal will be able to deliver safe, secure and streamlined routing of information across services. This ability to share information effectively between named persons and other services will not only support effective implementation of GIRFEC but will also reduce risk through timely sharing of information and support effective monitoring of the wellbeing of looked-after children and young people.

3.9 The Corporate Parenting Champions Board is established and has met twice this year with the next meeting scheduled for October. The Corporate Parenting Promise has been distributed throughout the region on posters and leaflets. The Listen2Us group are also working in conjunction with Leaving Care to produce two booklets, one for young people going into Care' and the other for those leaving care. A dedicated Looked After Children and Young Peoples Specialist Health and Wellbeing Service is now operational and reports to the Corporate Parenting Group. This service is a multi-disciplinary team that includes staff from both mental and physical health backgrounds. Improved engagement and consultation with looked-after children and young people is starting to influence service planning.

3.10 The Early Years Strategic Group are leading on the development of an evidence-based, multi-agency parenting strategy for Dumfries and Galloway and the draft strategy is currently at the stage of finalisation and sign-off.

3.11 Robust structures were established following Joint Inspection and were endorsed in the Care Inspectorate's Progress Report:

"Partners had established sound structures for delivering improvement..."

The subsequent governance and accountability arrangements put in place by CSEG have ensured that these structures support challenge and are starting to deliver an impact on practice and outcomes for children and young people. Visible and supportive leadership is reinforced with regular communications with staff across all agencies and an ongoing programme of multi-agency engagement events with staff and managers. Since December 2014 there have been 15 multi-agency briefings. Five staff engagement events were held in 2014 and two are taking place this September. All engagement events are led by Chief Officers and/or members of CSEG. The most recent staff engagement event in September 2015 was well-attended by staff from all sectors of children's services, including the Third Sector. All events have evaluated positively.

### Challenges

3.12 With a plan of this size and complexity, there is a risk of slippage leading to loss of momentum. In order to mitigate this risk we have refocused our planning and milestones and invested in additional resource. All actions need to be completed within the lifecycle of the plan. However, some of the actions in the GIRFEC Group's action plan are dependent on, or will be impacted by, the release of the Scottish Government's Statutory Guidance on GIRFEC implementation. The release of this guidance has been delayed and it is not now expected until November 2015. This is currently impacting on some of the GIRFEC actions but the overall timescale remains unchanged as there is a statutory responsibility to implement the GIRFEC elements by August 2016.

3.13 The action plans contained within the Children's Services Plan have always been intended to evolve in response to new challenges and priorities. Action plans are regularly reviewed and actions may be re-prioritised. Reporting structures are in place for the action plans and the Chairmen of the four strategic groups report to CSEG on progress with their plans.

3.14 Capacity remains a challenge but CSEG are addressing this by directing resources to development activities.

### Priorities over the next six months

3.15 Priority actions include implementation of the multi-agency Pre-Birth Planning Pathway; the Parenting Strategy and GIRFEC processes (on release of the Statutory Guidance on GIRFEC implementation), and development of a multi-agency Quality Assurance Framework for children's services.

3.16 Development of the next, longer term phase of the Children's Services Plan has already started. A multi-agency Engagement working group has convened and this group will co-ordinate stakeholder involvement in developing the next plan.

## 4. Governance Assurance

All partnership agencies have been consulted and are in agreement with the terms of the report.

## 5. Impact Assessment

As this report does not propose a change in policy/strategy/plan/project, it is not necessary to complete an Impact Assessment.

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**Approved by**

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**Appendices – 1**

**Appendix:** Highlight Report on Children's Services Plan

**Background Papers** Dumfries and Galloway Council, 26 March 2015, Children's Services Plan – Full Council – March 2015.