

ANGUS CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE



INTERAGENCY EARLY SCREENING GROUP PROTOCOL

(CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Government has set out a vision for children and young people in Scotland. This is built around the idea that every child and young person in the country should be safe, nurtured, achieving, active, respected, responsible and included.

Police Officers come into contact with many children and young people during the course of their normal duties. Where a Police Officer has a concern about the safety or welfare of a child or young person they are expected to take appropriate action.

This Protocol forms part of a framework of common protocols, policies and procedures agreed by agencies in Angus who work with children and young people for whom professionals have concern. Drawn up between Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), Tayside Police, NHS Tayside, Angus Community Health Partnership (CHP) Angus Council Housing Department, Angus Education Department, and Social Work and Health Departments, (which agencies are hereinafter collectively referred to as "the Group") it aims to ensure an informed and appropriate response for children and young people about whom the Police have concerns.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Interagency Early Screening Group was established by the Angus Child Protection Committee in terms of Sections 19, 20 and 21 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Part 2 and 3 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

The purpose of the protocol is to set out the respective responsibilities, duties and agreed process involved in screening, assessing, recording and acting on Police Child Concern Reports in 'welfare' cases all in accordance with (1) "Sharing Information About Children at Risk" - the Guide to Good Practice issued by the Scottish Executive and any subsequent updated Guidance ("the Scottish Executive Guidance") (2) the Angus Child Protection Committee Interagency Guidance for Professional Staff ("the Professional Staff Guidance") and (3) the legislation governing the protection and use of personal data, principally the Data Protection Act 1998.

Through this pro-active, multi-agency approach the agencies are committed to supporting the protection of children and young people in Angus by:

- Sharing relevant information swiftly;
- Making an initial screening assessment of the child or young person's needs;
- Ensuring decisions are appropriate and effective, and relevant supports are identified and provided; and
- Ensuring that referrals to SCRA are made only where compulsory measures of supervision may be necessary and in cases of significant need, risk or harm.

This protocol does not introduce any process or procedure that would prevent or delay the instigation of child protection procedures where there is a concern that a child may be at risk of 'significant harm'.

This protocol also shall in no way limit the power of the Police or any other agency to make referral to the Reporter where this is considered to be appropriate. It does not seek to introduce any process or procedure that would prevent or delay referral to the Reporter where that is the required response for the child, that is, where Police believe that a child has significant needs, and/or where compulsory measures of supervision may be required. Referrals to the Reporter should be made following the joint decision by members of the Interagency Early Screening Group where possible.

2 ARRANGEMENTS

All parties hereto agree to the arrangements outlined below. Arrangements shall only be amended or changed following consultation with all relevant partners namely Tayside Police, SCRA, NHS Tayside, Angus CHP, Angus Council Housing, Education and Social Work and Health Departments.

Where Police Officers have any concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or young person they shall note their concerns on a Child Concern Report Form. These concerns shall include all incidents involving domestic abuse where a child is affected, or lives in the same household, whether the child(ren) are present or not at the time of the incident, e.g. when a child is having residential access to a parent.

All relevant welfare Child Concern Report Forms are forwarded to the Police Family Protection Unit (FPU) at Bellevue House, Springfield Terrace Arbroath. An initial screening is made by the Tayside Police Duty Worker in FPU. The information is then forwarded to Angus Council Social Work and Health identified officer who checks the Social Work and Health's Client Index System (CareFirst), to see if the child or young person is an active case within Children's Services, or lives in the same household as a child or young person who is an active case. If the child is an active case the details of the Child Concern Report will be forwarded to the relevant Social Worker.

Meetings of the Interagency Early Screening Group shall be chaired by the Detective Sergeant from the Family Protection Unit, Tayside Police ('the Chairperson'). In the first instance Tayside Police will provide administrative support for the group.

Actions to be taken

- a) Where there are child protection concerns regarding a child the procedures set out in the Professional Staff Guidance shall be followed.
- b) Where the child is **an active case**, or lives in the same household as a child or young person who is an active case, to Children's Services, the Child Concern Report is forwarded to the Social Work and Health relevant team to log having received the Child Concern Report on CareFirst, follow up, and, if necessary, consider referral to the Reporter. Appropriate actions may include discussion of the report with the child and family, sharing the information with appropriate professionals, and relevant actions and/or changes to the care plan, where it is assessed that this is required.
- c) Where the child or young person is **not an active** case within Children's Services, a copy of the Child Concern Report is forwarded to the Social Work and Health Intake Team, SCRA and to the named contacts within Housing, Health and Education, and these children will be discussed at the next available Interagency Early Screening Group Meeting. The clerical assistant in the Intake Team logs having received a Child Concern Report on CareFirst. Child Concern Reports will be submitted to SCRA for information only unless it is stated that it is a referral.

Interagency Early Screening Group (Children's Services) Meetings

Interagency Early Screening Group (Children's Services) Meetings are held weekly on a Tuesday afternoon to consider the referrals. These meetings currently include a nominated substitute from Police, Health, Housing, Social Work and Education. The SCRA will be sent the list of children being considered at each meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting will be issued to all agencies prior to each meeting.

Prior to the meeting, the Police send out a Child Concern Report Screening Forum Schedule to each agency representative and a copy to SCRA. The group members check their own department/agency information in respect of each named child and family named on the Schedule, and submit any information at the meeting.

For example, for a young child under 5 years the health representative will ask the Health Visitors to check their records and for those over 5 years the School Nurse will refer to their records. Where a young child is in the first year of primary school, the Health representative will get information from the Health Visitor records and school health.

For each child discussed at the Interagency Early Screening Group Meeting, the agencies present will agree upon:

- What concerns are raised by the information contained within the Child Concern Report and from information shared by the agencies present?
- What needs are identified?
- Which agency is already involved in providing a service to the child and/or their family, and therefore
- Which agency is in the best position to provide relevant services to enable the child and/or family to address the identified needs and concerns?
- Which agency will take the lead role in addressing these issues, and which other service(s) may also be involved?
- Whether the child should be referred to the Children's Reporter on the grounds that:
 - There are believed to be significant needs, and
 - Compulsory measures of supervision may be required.

The Group must decide on one of the following options for action:

1. No further action required - where it appears that sufficient action has already been taken or is ongoing;
2. More information required - one or more agencies to seek more information and bring it back to the next meeting;
3. Direct referral to a single agency - in which case that agency should be prepared to accept the referral and identify a "lead professional". The lead agency may, where relevant, approach a second agency where they may be able to support the needs of the young person or family;

4. Immediate referral to a Child Protection Initial Referral Discussion when there are concerns that the information provided suggests that a child may be at risk of significant harm;
5. Referral to the Children's Reporter where, following an initial assessment by an agency nominated by the Interagency Early Screening Group, the group believes that the child has significant needs and where compulsory measures of supervision may be required. Details of any previous Child Concern Reports shall be included with any referral made to the Reporter at this time or subsequently by any agency; or
6. Referral to a local multi agency resource such as:
 - LMART – (Local Multi Agency Resource Teams);
 - Pre-Birth Resource Allocation Meeting;
 - Youth Offender Monitoring Group;
 - Joint Assessment Group (JAG); or
 - Link-Up Initiative.

Where possible, decisions should be on the basis of:

- Consensus between all agencies, or, where consensus is not achieved;
- A majority of those attending; or
- In exceptional circumstances the Chairperson.

Once a collective decision has been reached, details are recorded on the Child Concern Report Screening Forum Schedule by the Chairperson and sent to: the appropriate social work admin, housing admin, education admin, health admin, SCRA, and Social Work Service Managers. Any objections and/or individual concerns will also be noted. The Schedule shall include details of those agencies in attendance.

Each agency is responsible for forwarding the information within their own organisation as required.

It is the responsibility of the agencies to collate all decisions made within their own systems (e.g. in social work and health, the team manager, Intake Service will ensure the outcomes are recorded in the social work information system known as CareFirst.)

Any agency that agrees to accept a referral from the Interagency Early Screening Group shall make all appropriate and necessary efforts to engage with the child and their family to provide services to enable them to address the identified concerns all in accordance with the terms of the Scottish Executive Guidance and in particular paragraph 22 thereof.

Where there are any concerns or issues raised during the contacts relating to concerning behaviour, threats or violence to staff members of the agency, this information must be shared immediately across all the agencies to allow them to assess the level of risk and safeguard staff members of the agency.

If an agency is unable to engage with the child and/or family for any reason, and there is evidence that the family's circumstances are either not improving or indeed deteriorating, the agency shall make a referral to SCRA or take any other appropriate legal measures.

The agency shall also prepare a report of their involvement (or attempts at involvement) with the child, which should then be held within their own agency records all in accordance with the terms of the Professional Staff Guidance.

This protocol will be reviewed by the Group on a three monthly basis along with a review of the working group. Any review will evaluate all the arrangements outlined within the protocol in addition to the various interventions provided for children and families and subsequent outcomes. Progress in respect of the Interagency Early Screening Group will be reported to the Child Protection Committee by the chair of the Interagency Early Screening Implementation Group.

Information sharing

All agencies and their representatives will share information about child protection work in line with the Professional Staff Guidance and the Scottish Executive Guidance and the agencies' obligations in terms of Data Protection legislation, the guiding principle being that the child's welfare is paramount. All agendas, reports and other documents and proceedings of the Group shall be treated as confidential unless and until they become public in the course of the Group's business or are authorised to be communicated to and are available for publication by the press or other news media and in accordance with a formal decision of the Group or are required to be disclosed in terms of the agencies' statutory obligations or by court order.

Police officers attending an incident which will result in a Child Concern Report Form being completed will advise parents, carers and young people where appropriate of their intention to complete the report and that this information will be shared with other agencies to decide on the next steps for the child and family.

Record keeping

Child Concern Report Forms which are circulated to the group will be stored safely and securely in the child's agency record by the individual agencies in accordance with their obligations in terms of the Professional Staff Guidance and the Data Protection legislation. A record of decisions of the Early Screening Group of each meeting will be recorded on the template in Appendix 1 [and circulated to all agencies as part of the minutes of the Group meetings prior to each subsequent meeting].

Specific arrangements are as follows:

Social Work and Health

Reports will be located in the restricted section of the file for the child.

Education

Information from the Early Screening Group Meeting will be sent to a named person in each school/early years centre by senior staff in the School and Family Support Service. This information will be password protected and should be held in the child's Pupil Progress Report (PPR). An entry should be made in the Chronological Record of Significant Events Form, also held in the PPR. The information is restricted and should not be shared with parents, carers or a child or young person without the prior consent of Tayside Police unless an agency is obliged to do so in terms of its statutory obligations or court order. However the information should be shared in confidence with the designated member of staff in the school with responsibility for child protection in order to support the child appropriately in the classroom in terms of the Scottish Executive Guidance, "Sharing Information about Children at Risk".

NHS Tayside

The Child Concern Report Form will be located in the child's file. However, restricted information contained in the Child Concern Report Form will not be shared with parents, carers or a young person without the prior consent of Tayside Police unless an agency is obliged to do so in terms of its statutory obligations or court order.

Housing

All Child Concern Reports with reference numbers will be noted on the Housing System and in the House File of the Tenant. Housing Officers will therefore be aware that there has been a Child Concern Referral discussed at the Early Screening Group. Information within the reports will not be shared across Angus Council's Housing Division.

3 CONCLUSION

This multi-agency working practice aims to timeously identify the most appropriate and effective response to concerns about individual children and young people identified by the police.

