

Performance Inspection Summary

South Ayrshire Council 2009

September 2009

What is a performance inspection?

The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) is carrying out performance inspections of all local authority social work services in Scotland.

SWIA gathers and analyses a wide selection of information about a local authority and the social work services it provides or is responsible for. The inspection findings are published in a report that identifies strengths as well as areas for improvement.

This leaflet summarises some key findings of the inspection of South Ayrshire Council's social work services, which are set out in the full report published in September 2009.

South Ayrshire Council will produce an action plan in response to the inspection report. The plan will set out how any necessary changes are to be made. Once the plan is agreed, SWIA and the council will monitor the implementation of the plan together.

If you would like a copy of the full report or would like to know more about SWIA, please contact:

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Inspection findings

Summary

The directorate of children and community in South Ayrshire was delivering good outcomes for many people who used its services. People who responded to our survey and that we met during the inspection were satisfied with the help they received and the way they were treated. Carers were less positive about their experiences of support for themselves.

There were key strengths in multi-disciplinary working at an operational level. Whilst the majority of services were being provided on time, thresholds for prioritising work and making decisions needed to be more consistent between teams. Assessment and care management worked well in adult services and much had been achieved in developing integrated assessments in children's services. However, the directorate needed to improve its assessment and management of risk to vulnerable children.

There had been considerable organisational and managerial changes within the council during 2008 following the arrival of a new chief executive and executive director. An ambitious, but necessary improvement agenda had been launched by the directorate, which needed to address gaps in strategic service planning and commissioning, and modernise key services – specifically home care and resources for accommodated children. Managers were committed to improving their use of information to manage performance.

Despite the changes, we found that the majority of staff remained motivated and committed, particularly valuing the support of their immediate managers and team colleagues. However, morale was affected by uncertainties about the future direction of services and

more work was required to involve staff in the improvement process.

The challenge to the new directorate management team to deliver sustainable improvements within significant financial pressures was considerable. However, we concluded that leadership had improved substantially within the past year and the capacity for further improvement was good.

We identified a number of key areas for improvement, including:

- Improving the consistency of decision making in duty services;
- Improving the quality and consistency of risk assessment and management practices in child protection;
- Improving the arrangements for assessment, review and support of children in kinship care placements;
- Developing a workforce strategy and training plan;
- Completing service plans that link to financial plans;
- Improving the collection and use of management information to measure outcomes and performance;
- Developing a strategy for commissioning services.

Some examples of good services delivered by social work services and partner agencies

- Young people aged 16-21 were offered a mediation service at the point of presenting as homeless. The mediation process involved individual meetings with the young person, parents and key people, and a family meeting, where the resolution process began. An evaluation of the service reported that the service was achieving success in preventing homelessness. Other positive outcomes included reducing offending and substance misuse.
- A snapshot service user survey was carried out in 2008 across the Ayrshire criminal justice partnership with positive feedback received. Service users said they had been treated politely; were seen on time; had been informed of any delay; were allowed to put their views forward; felt that the reason for their contact with the service had been properly explained and had reduced their offending.
- Care and share project – the team provided a weekly drop-in centre offering a range of support and advice for homeless people – a one-stop shop which demonstrated effective partnership working with health and the voluntary sector. Between 1st April and 31st August 2008, 437 homeless people were supported. This was an example of positive engagement with vulnerable people to provide improved access to services and a vital social support network.
- We observed a session of the “nurture group” at Ayr family centre. The group was specifically designed for young mothers involved with the throughcare service and their babies. They prepared food together and practised baby massage as a means of raising self-esteem and improving parenting skills. Those who attended valued the support they received from the

staff and told us it had helped them strengthen relationships with their children. We found staff were enthusiastic, respectful and warm in their approach towards the young mothers.

- Sensory impairment support group – a voluntary organisation who provided befriending, a hearing aid service and support groups for people in the community and nursing homes. The service, which received limited funding from the council, was developed in partnership with the disability resource centre and supported social inclusion for people with a hearing impairment. The project made a considerable impact on the lives of those it helped.
- The children's services integrated learning and development unit was established to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people by developing a comprehensive training programme for staff from a range of agencies. They had increased staff participation, trained health and education staff in core child protection skills, developed flexible training materials and developed online consultation groups.

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