

Performance Inspection Summary

East Ayrshire Council 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 provided 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 East Ayrshire Council's social work services, which are set out in the full report published in June 2009.

East 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

Most people in East Ayrshire who responded to our surveys or who we met during the fieldwork, agreed that they could rely on the services they received. The majority agreed that services were of good quality. Carers were broadly positive about social work services.

Social work services had worked hard at shifting the balance from residential care to care at home and performed well in this area of service delivery. We found evidence of good outcomes, in particular, for older people.

Whilst trends were moving in the right direction, improvements were required in educational attainment, pathway planning processes, access to employment, further education and suitable accommodation for young people leaving care.

There were high levels of community involvement in social work activities, with social work services and the council actively involved in efforts to inform the public about social work services.

Standards of assessment and care management varied. Risk assessment practice was improving but was not consistently good. Permanency planning in adoption and fostering work also needed to be improved. A high proportion of reports were not sent to the children's reporter on time. Managers were developing plans to improve practice.

Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working was a real strength, with many good initiatives in place across a number of services and care groups.

We found staff were committed to their work and well motivated. Over the previous year social work services staff had experienced a number of important changes in both leadership and service organisation. Some staff were still coming to terms with these changes.

Partnership working was a key strength and there was a strong commitment to joint planning. Social work services had made good progress on performance management and service improvement through best value reviews.

A specific plan for social work services needed to be developed to inform commissioning and financial planning. Budgetary control was generally well managed, but sustaining levels of services within available resources posed a serious challenge.

We found the service's capacity for improvement to be good. Social work services will continue to face challenges in relation to capacity issues but with their strong commitment to partnership working and social work regarded positively both within the council and by external agencies, there was optimism that the present momentum for continued improvement would be sustained.

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

- Improving ways to make sure that managers gathered information which helped them to know how good services were;
- Improving ways in which senior managers communicated with staff;
- Introducing a more systematic workload management process, subject to robust management monitoring;
- Improving the quality and consistency of assessments and care plans;

- Improving the time taken to make decisions for children being considered for permanency;
- Auditing, reviewing and updating policies and procedures; and
- Resolving the budget pressures in relation to the provision of social work services.

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

- East Ayrshire carers centre had acquired Dalmellington House and set up a social enterprise company to provide respite/ conference facilities, an information/advice service and training unit for young carers to enable them to access work.
- The DVD, 'Admission to Foster Care', was produced and launched in partnership with young people who had been looked after, Who cares? Scotland, SOLAR BEAR theatre company and East Ayrshire social work services.
- The child protection committee had taken a strong lead in ensuring all staff across other council departments and partner agencies, including technicians and manual workers, were trained at a basic level on child and adult protection awareness.
- We observed a meeting at a GP surgery where the care needs of people who required multi-disciplinary services, as well as their carer's needs, were discussed. GPs, district nurses, the carers centre representative, an occupational therapist, social work management and home care manager attended the meeting. This process was replicated in other GP practices.

- Ross Court provided a 10-bedded short-term assessment and rehabilitation service for older people and took a multi-disciplinary approach to care. Occupational therapists, district nurses, social care staff and local GPs worked together to prevent hospital admissions and determine future care needs.
- MERGE was the first social firm in Ayrshire set up by people with learning disabilities. It aimed to deliver disability awareness training to tackle discrimination and promote social inclusion and disability equality. MERGE had developed a DVD based induction training course.
- The North West Kilmarnock Area Centre, a jointly-funded resource, housed a wide range of health and social care services. This one-stop shop was managed by social work services. The co-location of services led to a positive culture of sharing and working together, within which formal arrangements for single management, pooled budgets and integrated services could develop in the future.

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