

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW

REPORT OF CONSULTATION EXERCISE

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1 Introduction

Scope of the exercise

1.1 The consultation exercise conducted as part of the wider Child Protection Review was undertaken over the winter of 2001/2002 and comprised two principal elements:

1. A questionnaire that was circulated to a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies involved with and concerned about matters relating to child protection
2. A web site that was available for members of the general public to record their views and comments on, about matters relating to child protection

1.2 A total of 1219 questionnaires were distributed and the web site was open from 20 November 2001 to 31 January 2002.

1.3 The 1219 questionnaires were circulated to the following agencies and individuals:

Academic bodies	50
Statutory Agencies	801
Voluntary Agencies	222
Private Individuals	17
MSP's	129

1.4 The questionnaire and the web site were both structured around three key questions:

What helps the protection of children?

What hinders or prevents the protection of children?

What would improve the well being and protection of children in Scotland?

The web site also provided an opportunity for respondents to indicate the nature of their interest or involvement with child protection matters.

Level of Response

1.5 A total of 109 completed questionnaires or written submissions were returned with 89 of these being formal responses on behalf of statutory or voluntary sector agencies, academic institutions or professional bodies that were involved in some way, with child protection. Ten of these formal agency responses reflected the outcome of a consultation exercise with local stakeholder groups and as such represented a relatively broad span of opinion from the area or constituency covered by the agency.

1.6 The 109 completed questionnaires were received from:

Local Authority Education Departments	10
Local Authority Social Work Departments	20
NHS Health Boards	4
NHS Health Trusts	9
Voluntary Organisations	31

Academic Institutions and Professional Bodies	15
Others	20

1.7 In some cases, completed questionnaires were submitted on behalf of an entire local Council or the local Council and the local Child Protection Committee.

1.8 Of the remaining 20 written submissions, the great majority were from individual professionals or small groups of professional staff with a direct interest or involvement in the formal child protection system. Only a small minority was from members of the public who commented in their capacity as a parent or concerned adult. In addition 74 responses were recorded on the web site from children.

Number of different comments

1.9 Collectively the completed questionnaires and web site records reflected a total of 291 different comments or suggestions covering the three questions. The number of specific comments or suggestions made in a single submission ranged from one to 34.

1.10 The 10 formal agency responses that incorporated comments from local consultation exercises reflected the highest number of comments and suggestions.

1.11 Some responses were not structured to answer the questions that were posed directly, but all of them covered relevant issues and it was therefore possible to relate the comments and suggestions to the questions, as appropriate.

1.12 The total number of comments that were received from the different respondent groups were:

Agencies:	844
Individual adults:	139
Children:	25

Analysing Responses

1.13 The comments or suggestions made by respondents were evenly apportioned to each of the questions, regardless of whether the respondent was an agency, an individual adult or a child. The proportion of responses in each case was:

- Q1. What helps the protection of children? - 37%
- Q2. What hinders or prevents the protection of children? - 29%
- Q3. What would improve the well being and protection of children in Scotland? - 35%

1.14 Responses to question 2 were often commented upon by respondents as being the converse of the comments that they had included in response to question one. As such they often made less detailed comments for this question. This would therefore explain the slightly lower proportion of responses to this question.

1.15 In considering responses to each of the three questions, comments and suggestions were initially grouped on the basis of whether they concerned issues relating to the following:

- 1. Formal procedures and practice involving statutory agencies and others with a professional interest and involvement in child protection

2. The experience and perspective of the individual child
3. The needs and role of the family
4. Broader social themes that provide the day to day context for child protection measures
5. Longer term cultural issues reflecting the values and attitudes that shape society's view of child protection

1.16 Under each of these five sub-headings, comments and suggestions were coded according to their particular content or emphasis. Many concerned similar issues but reflected a difference in emphasis or focus. In these cases, similar or related responses were collated in order to calculate the level of comment or concern relating to issue areas.

1.17 Across all three questions the proportion of responses addressing each of these five sub-headings was again consistent, with the overall proportion in each case being:

1. Formal procedures and practices-	61%
2. The individual child-	4%
3. The family-	7%
4. Social-	19%
5. Cultural-	9%

1.18 The very high relative number of responses from agencies masked some difference in the focus of attention between agencies and other respondents.

1.19 Whilst agency responses reflected the overall emphasis upon issues concerning formal procedures and practices, individual adults, who were predominantly individual professionals responding in their own right, and children, were more likely to comment upon broader familial and social issues. In the case of children less than 7% of their comments concerned the formal child protection system.

1.20 However, the individual issues that were highlighted in responses from children and individual adults were largely consistent with those identified by agencies, even though the overall pattern of their responses was different.

Executive Summary

The factors that emerged from this consultation exercise as being most significant in both helping and hindering effective child protection reflected what were generally considered to be both the best and worst aspects of the formal child protection system. Inter agency collaboration and communication and comprehensive policies and procedures that were implemented consistently, featured most prominently as making the biggest difference in achieving effective interventions.

Within the broader context of public services and national priorities, the need to ensure that adequate resources are afforded to child protection-related services, both staff and services, was felt to be the most important factor, without which practice developments, such as those mentioned above are significantly undermined.

Those involved in the formal child protection system largely agreed on the major practice issues outline above. Voluntary organisations and independent comments from professional staff placed a greater emphasis upon the need to listen to children and to ensure that interventions matched the particular circumstances of each case.

Comments about changes that will improve things in the future reflected less general agreement, with suggestions covering a wide range of topics both from within individual agencies as well across the whole range of organisations and individuals who responded.

The number one priority for children was services that can ensure that they are effectively protected. Being able to find out what they need to know, when they need to know it and being confident about where they can be safe in an emergency helps children to feel safe. Measures that minimize the risk that they face, day to day, represented the second most important aspect of safety that was important to children. Being aware that the adults around them are taking steps to reduce the likelihood that they will need to seek help and support further reassures and encourages children to feel confident and free to get on with their lives.

Most of the comments from children locate the principal source of enhanced safety as being within their local community. The willingness of adults to look out for them and the preparedness of services to listen to what they say are the issues of greatest concern to them, and these are considered to be the things most likely to make their neighbourhood into the type of place they want it to be.

Despite the heavy emphasis in responses to this exercise upon formal child protection arrangements, most respondents acknowledged that it is the social and cultural context within which we live that ultimately determines how important the protection of children is considered to be and therefore the extent to which statutory and voluntary sector agencies, the general public and their elected political representatives, commit themselves to making a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children.

2 Responses to Key Questions

2.1 This section outlines the overall pattern of responses that were submitted relating to each of the key questions, including formal replies from agencies, informal replies from individual or groups of professional staff, children and members of the public.

What helps the protection of Children?

Formal policies and procedures

2.2 The most important aspect of formal child protection arrangements that helps to protect children was identified by statutory and voluntary agencies, professional bodies and individual professionals alike as being effective inter-agency communication and collaboration. A number of comments focussed upon the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities between the various agencies and professional groups involved and upon the role that effective leadership has to play in enabling this to be achieved.

2.3 Another important factor that was said to be important in underpinning good practice was comprehensive child protection procedures and practice guidelines that are implemented through clear and focussed working and investigation practices.

2.4 The availability of a qualified, experienced, knowledgeable and skilled workforce that is subject to robust and competent professional supervision, appropriate to the task, was recognised by all agencies and individual professionals alike as being a further vital element at the centre of effective child protection practice.

2.5 48% of all responses concerning aspects of the formal child protection system that positively help the protection of children identified these three issues as being the most important.

2.6 In the context of this emphasis upon the importance of effective inter agency working, recent initiatives such as Sure Start and New Community Schools, that promote integrated services and co-ordinated interventions, were noted by all respondents as being of particular value. At the same time a perceived reluctance by statutory agencies to acknowledge the important role that is played by voluntary agencies in child protection was seen by some of the non-statutory bodies to be a less positive aspect of practice in some areas.

2.7 The importance of communication and collaboration **within** agencies was recognised as being a significant, if lesser, issue for many involved in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Providing services that are accessible and responsive and ensuring that key personnel are identified within each agency to take the lead responsibility on child protection was said to be lacking in many cases.

2.8 Another issue attracting significant comment was the extent to which adequate and appropriate resources were available to deal with child protection work. 10% of all of the responses from agencies and individual professionals regarding the formal child protection system concerned this issue. Most emphasised the importance of having available sufficient dedicated staff who collectively, reflect the necessary range of specialist professional knowledge, including nurse advisors, child protection and health visitors working with children in need and child protection social workers.

Helping individual children and families

2.9 Responses from voluntary sector agencies in particular, concerned action or issues at an individual child level. Whilst overall, comments relating to this perspective were less in number than those concerning the formal child protection system, all types of respondent emphasised the importance of ensuring that children are well informed about their rights and receive age appropriate awareness raising and personal safety training.

2.10 As regards the role of the family in protecting children statutory, professional and voluntary sector agencies all focussed upon the importance of providing opportunities for parents to develop adequate parenting skills, perhaps through training or direct practical coaching. In addition the importance of the early identification of parents who are under pressure and who may need additional support was recognised. In this context the benefits that can result from exploring the assistance that an extended family may have to offer were noted.

2.11 The importance of recognising domestic abuse as being a child protection issue was of particular concern to those voluntary sector agencies that are directly involved in supporting the victims of such abuse and was cited as being potentially crucial if children are to be adequately protected in the home. Yet respondents also commented upon the all-too-common failure to make this connection, a factor that was explained by some as reflecting an absence of adequate awareness, education and a willingness to listen, on the part of adults. The value of continuing to support the non-abusing adult in cases of domestic violence was identified as another factor that can have an important influence on the ability of families to continue to provide a safe environment for children.

Social and Cultural Issues

2.12 On a broader social level, over 51% of responses from all sectors and individual adults identified public awareness raising, the provision of accessible public information regarding child protection coupled with a willingness on the part of adults to listen to what children have to say, were identified as being of prime importance in addressing this perspective on child protection.

2.13 Many respondents from all sectors felt that despite efforts to improve general public awareness regarding the nature and incidence of child abuse, this issue had not been given a sufficiently high profile. An initiative such as the 'zero tolerance' campaign in the context of domestic violence, was cited as an example of what can be achieved when an issue is afforded sufficient priority.

2.14 Also in this broader context, the potential for more pro-active measures to reverse trends and characteristics that are apparent in many of the communities within which we live, featured prominently. Developing 'safer routes to school', building public confidence in those who intervene and as members of the public being prepared to become more engaged with the people in our neighbourhood, were all offered as examples of how more could be done to protect children. This was of particular importance to children themselves and was also recognised in many agency responses as being an important aspect of an effective social inclusion strategy.

2.15 The cultural issues that were commented upon most commonly as being likely to promote the effective protection of children were the importance of developing a culture of openness and the need for adults to be willing to become involved and to respond to incidents or concerns rather than to turn away and ignore the problem.

2.16 Voluntary sector agencies, individual professionals and children themselves were the groups that expressed most strongly the view that all adults should be watchful and 'look out' for

any children who could potentially be at risk. 68% of all responses addressing social and cultural matters referred to issues relating to people's sense of social responsibility as being of the utmost importance. Further comments acknowledged the challenge of creating a society in which children are more valued and are treated with the dignity and respect that we all expect.

What hinders or prevents the protection of children?

Formal policies and procedures

2.17 The most common single factor that was identified as hindering or preventing the protection of children was poor communication and trust between agencies. In the context of the responses to the previous question 'what helps the protection of children?' this is not surprising and once again all types of agencies and individuals agreed on the importance of this factor.

2.18 In addition however, many voluntary sector agencies and individual professionals placed almost as much emphasis upon the ineffectiveness of agencies in communicating with the general public about matters concerning child protection.

2.19 Agencies who work alongside local Council social work departments, identified the problems faced by many local Councils in recruiting and retaining sufficient, suitable social work staff as being a second key problem that hinders effective child protection practice. Many of the same agencies, as well as individual professionals who depend upon or wished to highlight the value of well-resourced social work interventions, referred to a number of issues as serving to undermine the contribution that social work makes to effective child protection. These included the absence of sufficient specialist professional training, the dilution of social workers' ability to respond to risk indicators, an upsurge in specialist initiatives that have diverted staff away from mainstream services and also a general malaise in the professional status of social work.

2.20 Collectively these comments represented a significant recognition of the challenges faced by social work as it seeks to fulfil what was acknowledged as being a key professional role within the formal child protection system.

2.21 A third issue attracting significant comment, particularly from voluntary sector agencies and individual professionals concerned the treatment of child witnesses during court proceedings. Current practice was felt to make children disinclined to give evidence and if they did, to subject them to an unacceptable level of pressure. Current arrangements were felt unlikely to ensure that evidence is presented fully and fairly.

2.22 Another key area that was identified particularly by statutory agencies as hindering the protection of children concerned the processes and practices that are followed under formal child protection arrangements. A general lack of clear guidelines and procedures for staff was the most commonly cited issue with the greatest problems being associated with the absence of a consistent risk assessment format. This was said to create difficulties in establishing a threshold for removal in cases of neglect or emotional abuse and to make it more difficult for established knowledge concerning the predisposing factors of abuse or neglect, to influence direct practice.

2.23 Responses from agencies across both the statutory and voluntary sectors identified the issue of resources as being closely associated with, but at the same time separate from, the staffing problems referred to above. Respondents commented upon the difficulties that they have experienced in being able to identify and access suitable practical support as and when it is needed. Whilst some commented that recent government initiatives such as *Sure Start* should

receive more resources, others considered that they drew skilled and experienced staff away from mainstream statutory and long term voluntary sector work, to the detriment of the support that is available to victims and vulnerable families.

2.24 In the context of these staffing and resource issues, the absence of generally accepted measures with which to determine a threshold of risk and hence intervention, gave rise to concerns that decisions as to whether to intervene or not may sometimes be resource-led rather than needs-led.

Helping individual children and families

2.25 Voluntary sector agencies drew attention to the vulnerability of children with disabilities and the need to ensure that their particular needs are adequately addressed in all child protection training programmes.

2.26 Responses from some voluntary sector agencies regarding the role of the family in protecting children, reflected a very significant level of concern that some of the approaches adopted by formal child protection systems failed to recognise the considerable impact of domestic violence and parental drink and drug addiction upon the quality of child care. These factors were felt to impair the ability of adults consistently to cope with the demands of bringing up their children.

2.27 Respondents across the board felt that these problems were exacerbated by a perceived lack of parenting skills on the part of some parents as well as the ability of others to resist becoming engaged in a dialogue with professionals that could, were it to succeed, see supportive measures being provided when there was still time for them to be effective.

2.28 Separating children from both parents and a lack of support for the non-abusing parent were noted by a number of individual professionals in particular, as being two of the less helpful aspects of some formal interventions.

Social and Cultural Issues

2.29 On a broader social level, the most significant factor preventing or hindering the protection of children was felt by both agencies and individual professionals as being a lack of trust in and fear of how the authorities would respond to any expressions of concern voiced by members of the general public or victims themselves.

2.30 In the case of parents and adults within the general population, this was felt by those involved in the formal child protection system to be reinforced by a widespread fear of 'getting involved' or 'interfering' in matters that many would consider were none of their business. In the case of children who have been the subject of abuse, the fear was said by those agencies working to support them, to be associated with the perceived risk of being removed from their family were they to disclose what had happened to them.

2.31 For many of the agencies responding, the blame culture that was felt to surround the work of many public services is a particular problem in the context of formal child protection work. In particular, it was said to result in additional pressure being placed upon the professional staff concerned and thereby, undermine their effectiveness in exercising judgement and making the difficult decisions that are sometimes involved.

2.32 Some statutory health agencies and some individual professionals who are closely involved in the formal child protection system commented that the absence of a total ban on the physical punishment of children undermines wider efforts to effectively protect children.

What would improve the well being and protection of children in Scotland?

Formal policies and procedures

2.33 In the context of the formal child protection system, the single most common response concerning this question referred to the need to invest more resources in child protection services across the board. 39% of all responses placed this issue at the top of their agenda for improvement.

2.34 Comments from statutory, voluntary and professional bodies as well as individual professionals focused upon this issue, some noting the potential benefits of ring fenced child protection funding and others the importance of concentrating upon providing the support that is needed by professional staff in carrying out their front line duties.

2.35 Closely associated with comments on resources were those relating to training. A further 16% of all responses in this section focussed upon the need to improve the quality and increase the amount of training that is available to all professional groups.

2.36 A further 29% of all comments, from across the full spectrum of respondents in this section, referred to the need for enhanced inter agency working as being an important factor in improving arrangements to protect children. Comments addressed such matters as more integration of main stream local services and a national framework for interagency collaboration.

2.37 Taken as a whole, the comments about joint working were balanced between those that emphasised the importance of local joint working practices and those that viewed national or 'central' joint working initiatives, perhaps focusing upon the development of standard approaches or tools to deal with particular aspects of the child protection process, as providing the most effective way to proceed.

2.38 Beyond these most frequent responses, the importance of reflecting a greater emphasis upon preventative services and the benefits to be gained from enhancing current practice and improving the process by which the formal child protection system deals with those involved were other areas attracting a significant number of comments.

Social and cultural issues

2.39 On a broader social level, a significant number of responses from all sectors, concerned the need to promote a greater awareness amongst the public of the nature and incidence of child abuse. In addition it was felt crucial to promote a greater commitment to the principle that all adults should be prepared to 'get involved' and accept responsibility for protecting children within their community.

2.40 Two other more general issues concerning public information were mentioned in the responses from agencies in most sectors but were of particular importance to voluntary sector agencies. One concerned promoting and supporting positive parenting through a more widely available programme of parenting classes, in order to address some of the shortcomings amongst parents that were identified above. The other concerned the need to improve the public's

understanding of the whole range of abuse that takes place, not just the worst, and thereby improve the likelihood of effective intervention being taken by a concerned adult.

2.41 A significant number of individual or groups of professionals, responding in their own right, commented that Scotland's social and political values must highlight and thereby be seen to value and protect all children, to a much greater extent than is currently the case. The benefits that accrue from supporting communities to work alongside professionals in protecting children from abuse and exploitation were recognised as requiring a commitment over the long term from all concerned, but also as being potentially highly effective and empowering for all concerned.

2.42 Within responses from individual professionals, the weight of comment in this regard, appears to relate to the, already noted emphasis within responses from statutory agencies, upon issues relating to the formal child protection system. Many of the individuals who work within that system have sought to focus attention upon the wider social responsibility that has to be addressed if the formal systems is ever to be effective in protecting children.

3 Responses from agencies, children and the general public

Agency views

3.1 The overall span of responses from statutory, voluntary sector agencies to each of the three questions and the general pattern of key issues described above mask some differences between the key issues that appear to be of the greatest concern for the different types of agencies.

What helps the protection of children?

3.2 Overall, the spread of responses from NHS boards and trusts was much less than for all other types of agencies with their comments focusing upon a fewer number of proportionally more significant issues.

3.3 In response to the question ‘what helps the protection of children?’ 20% of their responses concerned effective inter-agency communication and collaboration with a further 20% referring to the benefits of integrated initiatives such as Sure Start and new Community Schools.

3.4 Local Authority Social Work Departments reflected a much greater spread of responses to this question with the highest proportion of comments at 6%, relating to the need for experienced, knowledgeable and skilled staff who regularly update their skills. Also at 6% were comments noting the benefits of effective leadership combined with robust and competent professional supervision for staff.

3.5 Responses from Local Authority Education Departments fell between these two as regards their relative focus, with 10% of their comments relating to the benefits of clear guidelines that clarify roles and responsibilities and another 10% concerning the benefits of public awareness raising and accessible public information.

3.6 As far as other agencies were concerned, including academic institutions and professional associations, their responses were again, relatively tightly focused, with 17% of responses to the question ‘what helps to protect children’, relating to effective inter-agency communication and collaboration.

3.7 Responses from voluntary agencies were more widely spread with the highest proportion of responses, 12%, being concerned with emphasising the importance of listening to what children have to say.

What hinders or prevents the protection of children?

3.8 In the context of a much smaller number of responses to this question than for any other sector, comments from NHS boards and trusts covered a smaller range. 15% of health board responses referred to a lack of training and a similar proportion of health trust responses referred to the negative impact of pressure on staff and a blame culture within public services.

3.9 A further 15% of Health Board’s comments identified the absence of a total legal ban on the physical punishment of children as being a significant hindrance to the protection of children.

3.10 11.5% of health trust comments reflected on the importance of poor communication and trust between agencies involved in child protection work and also between the public and such agencies.

3.11 Responses from Local Authorities again reflected a broader spread of responses. Approximately 12% of responses from both education and social work departments concerned difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

3.12 Beyond this issue, the most common focus for responses from social work departments concerned the formal child protection system with poor communication, the treatment of child witnesses and confidentiality being proportionately the most significant issues.

3.13 Education departments identified a wide range of issues as hindering or preventing the protection of children. The issues included the impact of domestic violence, parental drink and drug addiction, the fear felt by members of the general public at the prospect of becoming involved in the formal child protection system and the reluctance of the general public to interfere in what is seen to be their neighbours business.

3.14 The responses from other agencies and voluntary organisations were also widely spread across the full range of issues. The highest single proportion of responses, 11% in the case of professional bodies, was concerned with poor communication whilst 8% in the case of voluntary organisations was concerned equally with the impact of domestic violence and parental drink and drug addiction. The current treatment of child witnesses in court was another significant issue for voluntary sector agencies.

What would improve the well being and protection of children in Scotland?

3.15 Comments from all sectors, concerning measures that would improve child protection were wide ranging and reflected a lack of general unanimity about which might have the greatest impact. Hence the proportion that was associated with the most frequently identified issue or comment was significantly lower in almost all cases, than for the two previous questions.

3.16 Health boards identified sixteen different issues in their seventeen specific comments to this question whilst the two most frequent health trust responses identifying the need for more preventative measures and public awareness raising attracted only 9.5% of their responses respectively.

3.17 The highest proportion of Local Authority education department comments, 14%, concerned the need to invest more resources. This was supplemented by the only other proportionately significant single factor at 8%, being the need for general awareness raising of child protection issues.

3.18 Local Authority social work department responses also reflected the importance of general awareness raising which constituted approximately 11% of their responses to this question.

3.19 The most significant issue that was identified in relation to this question concerned the need to improve single and multi-agency training and procedures. This constituted 11% of the total responses, across all sectors. Other relatively significant responses to this question from other agencies concerned the need to invest more resources, the need for more preventative measures and the need for better integration of services.

3.20 Voluntary organisations were no less wide ranging in their comments. The importance of educating children in self protection and safety, opportunities for them to build their personal confidence and the need to promote general public awareness being the most proportionally significant responses.

Children's views

3.21 An analysis of the comments made by children on the web-site shows that most were concerned with issues that involved making their local area a safer place to live. Many of the issues that they highlighted concern aspects of the formal child protection system and the work of statutory agencies. However, in their responses, children viewed the responsibility to deal with the issues they raised as resting with the wider community in which they live, with many different elements of the adult world, being viewed as having a role to play.

What helps them to be protected?

3.22 The most significant factor that was identified by children as contributing to their safety was the availability of readily accessible services that could provide them with information, advice and protection, as and when they wanted or needed to use them. A well publicised free telephone number, a user friendly web site that was specifically designed to be child-friendly or perhaps a local drop-in facility where children could be confident that they would be safe were all examples that were mentioned.

3.23 The second most important aspect of responses to this question was the focus upon minimising risk. The development of new and imaginative approaches to remove the potential for danger was viewed as being a related but distinctive element of the help that children need. Identifying and promoting safer routes to school, providing more secure play and recreational facilities, responding effectively at a local level to the emergence of unsafe areas where violence predominated and the (related) use of CCTV on the streets and in public places were examples quoted.

3.24 The provision of greater assistance to parents and more training for children in matters concerning personal safety and awareness were less frequently mentioned as being significant issues.

What hinders or prevents their protection?

3.25 Children considered that the most significant block to their being adequately protected was the level of violence that is generally apparent in their local community. Violence within the home was seen as being the most significant threat to children's safety but bullying by other children and street violence were also identified as being significant concerns.

What would improve their well being and protection?

3.26 The responses from children that were evoked by this question reflected a predominant view that adults need to be better informed about the dangers that children face in today's world. The other significant factor that was said likely to improve children's well being was the development of closer local communities where children and parents feel valued, safe and protected by people they know.

Views of the general public

3.27 A very small number of the individual adults who entered responses on the web site or submitted them by post were members of the general public who had no prior involvement with the formal child protection system. This consultation exercise has therefore been able to establish only a very limited picture of how the general public view the issue of child protection if they have not had first hand involvement in the formal system, for one reason or another.

4 Key Issues

Formal policies and procedures

Inter-agency communication and collaboration

4.1 Vital to promoting the protection of children and yet at the same time seen as being a major weakness that despite efforts to address the issue, currently prevents effective child protection in many areas. It is therefore an issue where improvements in current arrangements are seen as being likely to significantly enhance the well being and protection of children in Scotland.

Ensuring adequate resources

4.2 Seen as going a long way to determine the effectiveness of child protection arrangements. Staffing-related problems are a significant aspect of the resource agenda, but access to adequate support services for children, parents and families in order to prevent as well as respond to problems was also identified as being of vital importance.

Comprehensive child protection procedures and practice guidelines

4.3 A central element of effective child protection arrangements and yet seen as being an area where current practice falls short of what is required. Establishing a consistent means of measuring risk is an important example that was often cited. As regards future action, viewed as being dependent upon getting other key aspects of child protection arrangements, such as effective inter agency collaboration, in place.

A suitably experienced, knowledgeable and skilled workforce

4.4 A major problem for social work services and yet also seen as being problematic for health and education sectors as well. Closely linked to the issue of training that is seen as an important factor in helping to retain more staff. Staff retention was also linked to the poor public profile of key agencies which undermines the confidence of staff and the public alike.

Strong and effective leadership of child protection services

4.5 A key factor that determines the ability of individual agencies to make a real difference and to work well with other key players, confident in their own role and capabilities. Current weaknesses reflected principally in comments about the need to develop stronger working practices within agencies.

Getting the court process right – impact upon public confidence

4.6 The current treatment of child witnesses was identified as a major weakness in efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. Highlighted as an issue that is indicative of more widespread problems in ensuring the rights of vulnerable witnesses, this issue was seen to have a direct bearing upon both the reluctance of children to report abuse and the lack of confidence that the public has in the formal child protection system.

Children and families

Supporting families effectively

4.7 Recognition of the need to promote and facilitate better parenting whilst being alert to domestic abuse as a child protection issue. Reinforces the importance of responding to incidents of child abuse in a clear and appropriate manner without losing sight of the ongoing needs of non-abusing adults in the household.

Helping children to help themselves

4.8 Providing a range of opportunities to ensure that children are well informed about their rights and have the chance to develop greater self-confidence and self awareness. As adults, making a practical reality of a commitment to value children and to listen to what they have to say.

Society and the role of the general public

Getting the general public involved

4.9 The importance of recognising the fear and mistrust felt by many members of the general public at the prospect of becoming involved with the formal child protection system because of concerns and doubts about what they might become involved in. This impacts upon their willingness to 'look out for' children and to report suspicious instances or actual abuse.

Raising public awareness

4.10 A key issue in addressing the lack of understanding and fear that is felt to exist amongst members of the general public about both common and uncommon forms of abuse and how the formal child protection system works. Central to efforts to encourage adults to be more socially responsible and to be prepared to 'get involved' in order to support vulnerable children.

A culture that is open and which values children

4.11 Recognition of the importance of developing a social and political system that values children and supports the development of inclusive communities. This is seen as helping adults to feel empowered and encourages them to contribute to ensuring the rights of children to protection from abuse and exploitation.