

The Brock Report: Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from child abuse

A review of the Scottish system

A new report from Children in Scotland

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Children in Scotland report calls for programme of improvement and increased support to strengthen further the Scottish child protection system

An independent assessment of Scotland's child protection system has highlighted a number of challenges over its future role in protecting vulnerable children from child abuse.

Commissioned by the Scottish Government in the wake of a series of historical child sexual abuse scandals, *Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from child abuse: a review of the Scottish system* is calling for a programme of improvement and increased support for the Scottish system.

In her 10-day review, Jackie Brock, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, has looked back at developments in child protection since 1995 and highlights significant progress in Scotland's ambition to protect children and improve their wellbeing, taking an integrated approach. She also points to the opportunities that new legislation presents. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 embeds Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) in law and introduces the new Named Person role to universal health and education services and the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 introduces new Health and Social Care Partnerships that could have a positive impact on local child protection systems.

While welcoming these opportunities, she also signals that risks to vulnerable children could be missed unless greater priority and support is given to strengthening child protection arrangements at every level. The report makes a number of recommendations to help ensure Scotland's child protection system, and the workforce itself, is properly supported to identify, early on, those children who are at risk and raise the alarm.

These include:

- the new Health and Social Care Partnerships which should confirm the arrangements they are putting in place to work effectively across adult and children's services to improve child protection;

- a more coordinated approach to supporting frontline staff, such as teachers and health visitors, who will take on the new ‘Named Person’ role and have a crucial role to play in identifying, early on, those children who are at risk and in preventing and addressing issues such as child sexual exploitation; and
- the Scottish Government to begin by calling a summit of Scotland’s Chief Officers of the 32 Community Planning Partnerships, their local Child Protection Committee Chairs and the Health and Social Care Partnership leads to agree how child protection is strengthened at every level, with priority given to early intervention for children who may be at risk and with particular reference to preventing and addressing child sexual exploitation.

Cabinet Secretary for Education Michael Russell said:

“I commissioned the Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, Jackie Brock, to take an independent look at the working of the Scottish Child Protection system as developed by recent legislation. The purpose of this report was to examine how robust our child protection systems are and to identify areas of improvement.

“Ms Brock’s report usefully complements that of the Care Inspectorate, considering the strategic issues in delivering child protection services efficiently and consistently across the country, and offering 12 recommendations about how the Scottish Government and partners can do this more effectively. I am also publishing this report today and I can confirm that I am supportive of all its recommendations.”

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Notes for editors

- **Children in Scotland** is the uniting voice for the children’s sector in Scotland. Our vision is to make Scotland a world leader in achieving the wellbeing of every child and improving the quality of every childhood. As an umbrella body for the children’s sector, we represent children’s services organisations and individuals across the voluntary, private and public sectors. Equality, inclusion and leadership are the values guiding our work, underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The charity focuses on finding answers that make positive, lasting improvements for Scottish children and young people. Our membership of more than 400 organisations includes statutory agencies, local government, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups, all of whom contribute and inform our stance on issues affecting children, young people, families and those

who work for them, making Children in Scotland the leading and authoritative voice for the children's sector in Scotland. www.childreninscotland.org.uk

- The Minister for Children & Young People established an expert Working Group on CSE that reported with initial recommendations last year. The group's life span was extended into this year to ensure the action plan was comprehensive and took account of the widespread work being carried out in this area, including the Public Petitions Committee report published in January. Jackie Brock, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland was Chair of the group.
- Jackie Brock, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland will be speaking at the Children in Scotland Annual Conference 2014 taking place at Perth Racecourse on the 12-13 November. She will be available for interview over the course of the Conference and will participate in a live Twitter Q&A to discuss the report on 12 November between 1.00pm-1.30pm on @cisweb #brockreport.

The Brock Report: Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from child abuse

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Key points

- *Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from sexual exploitation: a review of the Scottish system* is calling for a programme of improvement, and increased investment, in the way we protect Scotland's vulnerable children.
- Children in Scotland was commissioned to carry out this assessment by the Scottish Government in the context of the UK Government's inquiries into historic child sexual abuse and the implementation, in Scotland, of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The Scottish Government wants to ensure the Scottish approach to protecting children is robust.
- Substantial work is already underway to improve the wellbeing of children who are officially 'looked after'. This review does not include looked after children. It focuses on those children who are not looked after, but vulnerable and "on the radar". This group form around two thirds of the children who were victims of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, the majority of children who died or were the victim of a significant incident (2012 Audit and Analysis of Significant Case Reviews in Scotland), and includes Declan Hailey.

Key recommendations are:

- **The confidence and competence of the current workforce**

"We do not yet seem to be in a position to conclude that the commitment and investment to date has achieved a confident and competent workforce for protecting children." (Page 17). And "There is unease and a lack of confidence among many children's services practitioners that all those children who are variously described as 'vulnerable' will be escalated appropriately from single to multi-agency support when necessary."

The report recommends that the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) National Action Plan sets out "detailed expectations of the support provided for the Named Person in health and education... In particular, we need to acknowledge the strengths of those schools and their partners who work well with children and young people at risk and how we can build on their approaches to build capacity across all schools, especially secondary schools to work with vulnerable young people." (page 18).

- **The current system needs to be improved to help ensure it can protect those children who are 'vulnerable' but not officially 'looked after'**

Many children who are neglected or the victims of child sexual exploitation are not officially 'looked after', even though they might be "known" to services.

In Rotherham, just under 1,000 of the 1,400 young people abused, were living at home. There is also strong evidence of this from the 2012 Audit and Analysis of Significant Case Reviews (page 11), and also Operations Cotswold and Dash; Declan Hainey; and the 56 Significant Case Reviews.

"Known children and families, [are] not yet satisfactorily addressed systematically at local level. There is unease and a lack of confidence among many children's services practitioners that all those children who are variously described as 'vulnerable' will be escalated appropriately from single to multi-agency support when necessary. The pressure on resource, including staffing and cuts in services, reinforces these concerns." (page 16)

A central recommendation is to focus on improving protection for children who are "vulnerable and 'on the radar'" – known to services but living at home. Early intervention is key.

- **The authority and capacity of the 32 multi-agency Child Protection Committees (locally responsible for child protection, inspected by the Care Inspectorate) and their respective Chief Officer Groups**

Recent joint inspection reports show that leadership and direction in CPPs is challenged. They have varying levels of authority and capacity - there is considerable inconsistency across Scotland.

The report recommends that we need to "reinforce their role as locally responsible for children's protection and wellbeing" and raise awareness and understanding of their work – for example, through a national awareness-raising campaign.

- **The impact of the new Health and Social Care Partnerships**

What role do the Health and Social Care Partnerships have in child protection and wellbeing? And what impact will Health and Social Care Partnerships have on front-line workers? The partnerships will be used to deliver adult services under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014. Children's services are included in some, but not all. A consistent finding in child protection inquiries is the failure of adult and children's services across health and social care to work together effectively (page 12).

- **Joint Inspections of Children's Services**

Joint Inspections of Children's Services can have a role in improving local and national accountability. They provide the only means through which Ministers can objectively decipher whether an area is fit or unfit (page 15). They are an accountability tool, as well as a quality assurance and improvement tool.

Some inspections now specifically include child sexual exploitation (East Renfrewshire's inspection report, due to be published shortly, will include child sexual exploitation for the first time).

There are concerns about how these reports communicated to the public. For example, why doesn't a bad report receive the same kind of media attention as a bad school inspection report? (Dumfries and Galloway; Argyll and Bute)

- **The legislative and organisational landscape is too complicated**

Scotland's legislative and organisational landscape in relation to child protection is too complicated, which means that local systems struggle to prioritise and act. ("Local systems are hindered by an over-complicated legislative system, and this is critical, particularly in the current climate when child sexual exploitation is in the spotlight").

There are 43 live documents considered relevant background reading for practitioners, not to mention Curriculum for Excellence materials; a wealth of health-related materials on alcohol misuse, family nurse partnership etc; community safety and policing documents; the child poverty strategy.

The report calls for all of these to be rationalised. There is a need for "a more consistent streamlined framework" (page 13).

- **Funding streams**

Early intervention using Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is at risk because of a lack of evidence of the long-term benefits of early intervention. In the current economic climate, with budget cuts, there's a risk that funds will be diverted elsewhere. Better evidence of the long-term benefits of early intervention will help local authorities make important decisions.

- **Consultation with children and young people**

Consultation and engagement with children and young people in the planning and evaluation of a range of children's services is not the norm, and it should be. It should be standard across all 32 local authorities.

- **Consultation with local community**

"The lack of community engagement and understanding of their [the whole community's] importance in protecting children is troubling" (page 17). (i.e. Declan Hainey)

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