

## SCRA response to Care Inspectorate

### Background

The Children's Hearings System is Scotland's distinct system of child protection and youth justice. Among its fundamental principles are:

- That children who offend and children who are in need of care and protection are dealt with in the same system
- That the welfare of the child remains at the centre of all decision making

SCRA operates the Reporter service which sits at the heart of the system. SCRA employs Children's Reporters who are located throughout Scotland, working in close partnership with other professionals such as social work, education, the police, the health service and the courts system.

SCRA's vision is that vulnerable children and young people in Scotland are safe, protected and offered positive futures. We will seek to achieve this by adhering to the following key values:

- The voice of the child must be heard.
- Our hopes and dreams for the children of Scotland are what unite us.
- Children and young people's experiences and opinions guide us.
- We are approachable and open.
- We bring the best of the past with us into the future to meet new challenges.

### Response to questionnaire on the future scrutiny & improvement of children's services

SCRA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Care Inspectorate's consultation on the future scrutiny and improvement of children's services. We recognise the value of inspection processes and the benefits which can flow from robust, independent scrutiny, and are pleased to contribute to discussion on the design and delivery of these processes.

#### Question 1

All of the key principles are relevant and, in considering these internally, we have found a range of views on which are most relevant. Some of the key points we would wish to express in relation to the principles are as follows:

- **Outcome focused** is seen as of critical importance. The primary concern should be the impact of services on children passing through the system, rather than on the activities undertaken by individual agencies, and the focus on the most vulnerable children and young people is strongly supported
- **Partnership oriented** is also seen as very relevant and, reflecting the point made under "outcome focused", it is important to focus on the effectiveness of end to end processes delivered collectively by partners rather than simply how each agency performs in its own specific areas of responsibility. SCRA

has, in the past, experienced difficulty in fully participating in joint self evaluation due to constraints on its ability to share case files, and if our legislative powers of information sharing were to be widened this would be a welcome and enabling development.

- **Transparent** is relevant, but it would be helpful in this respect if clarity were provided on which outcomes the scrutiny will focus on and how success against these will be measured.
- **Intelligence-led and risk-based** would allow existing data and knowledge to guide how scarce improvement resources are utilised. Inspected bodies can best target improvement efforts by using existing qualitative, quantitative and complaints based information, and can do so with confidence if it is clear that scrutiny will operate on a similar basis. Our experience of CP2, however, is that, in spite of being designed to be proportionate dependent on findings from the initial phase, this did not generally lead to a significant reduction in the effort required to support inspection, which is one of the benefits we would have anticipated from such an approach.
- **Integrated and coordinated** is relevant since it will hopefully produce a more informative scrutiny process that leads to actionable findings for the agencies being scrutinised whilst minimising the effort required to respond to scrutiny.
- **Improvement-led** embeds the ethos that improvement of children's services should constantly be targeted. As mentioned earlier, it is important that these improvements should be focused on collective responsibilities across children's services rather than simply on the efforts of individual agencies.
- **User-focused** is relevant and we would be particularly supportive of any arrangements which would capture the quality of experience and lived outcomes of children, young people and their families.

## Question 2

It would be helpful to include an additional principle covering respect for the agencies being inspected and all being affected by it. Inspection can cause significant disruption, particularly for smaller agencies when a disproportionate amount of management time can be diverted to managing the inspection process, and disruption is even greater when arrangements already made for inspection are cancelled or changed at short notice. Whilst this principle may be seen as implicit in how scrutiny arrangements are planned and delivered, there would be merit in making it explicit during the process of establishing a new agreed set of principles.

We consider that the principle **integrated and co-ordinated** would benefit from being broadened to include **holistic** to emphasise the need to understand the whole experience of the child or young person (family, home, community, school, relationships) and not simply fragmented elements. Whilst this may be challenging to achieve, we believe it necessary, to ensure that children's protective services are not seen outwith the context of other dimensions of children's lives and experiences.

## Question 3

Quality improvement frameworks based on or consistent with EFQM are now well established across most agencies and are generally accepted as the core mechanism for driving improvement. Such an approach would be helpful in that it would enable scrutinised bodies to continue to operate existing self evaluation activities, "banking" evidence of strengths and planning & implementing improvement activity as they do so, and requiring minimal additional effort to service inspection requirements.

Validation of self evaluation is a useful source of external verification, and can be used to prioritise or focus efforts of scrutinised agencies, as well as providing a necessary challenge which may require agencies to revisit their original assessment.

Involving current practitioners in inspection teams has proved to be valuable in helping to spread quality assurance expertise in agencies. SCRA is both supportive of this approach and keen to participate.



Receiving detailed inspection findings with crisp, unambiguous recommendations (where traditional inspection has been applied) is also important. We have experience of receiving high level, generalised inspection findings which are unhelpful and at times opaque, lacking specificity and a sense of rigour.

#### Question 4

Inspection findings that lack specificity or detail, are broad and non-specific, based on vague evidence or inspectorial analysis that is difficult to locate in the published report are all particularly unhelpful, and do not lend themselves to improvement activity.

For SCRA specifically, the lack of acknowledgement and visibility of the importance of the Children's Hearings System and the underpinning standards, quality dimensions and accepted National Blueprint (timeliness or reports/provision of reports) which underpins this serves to constrain our efforts to drive improvement, particularly where this requires acceptance by our partners of the need for improvement in key areas. The Children's Hearings System is a fundamental guardian of the most vulnerable children and young people's rights to be protected, heard and helped and it is simply not accorded this level of prominence within current inspection processes. We want to help future inspections to understand the trends/issues and underlying factors to guide their scrutiny and support improvement.

Professional dialogue and inspection must involve the full range of partners. There have, for example, been deficits in the past in including NHS performance as a partner in scrutiny arrangements, and there would be merit in arrangements that seek to address such deficits.

#### Question 5

Use of existing research and evaluation material from organisations singularly or collectively to guide focus of inspections – for example SCRA's work on permanence/children under 2/supervision 5 years and over, and the most recent qualitative research on young people's testimony of being made subject to compulsory measures of care/Looked after children

Inspections should assess partnerships on evidence of a clear analysis of the needs of their population and communities now and in the future – including population trends, social and health care needs, accommodation needs, needs of disabled children etc. We believe that there is a correlation between lack of comprehensive needs analysis and linked commissioning and investment strategies and poorer service delivery, reactive as against pro-active responses, expensive as against cost effective well evidenced arrangements.

#### Question 6

We see value in variable advance notice periods for inspection – no notice, short term notice, long term notice – dependent on initial assessment based on intelligence and risk. The benefits of no notice or short notice are twofold – a more realistic picture of the inspected agency is likely to emerge, and there is minimal additional preparatory work required. This may lend itself well to an approach centred on validation of robust self evaluation. Where the inspection approach is more extensive, it is likely that some preparation will be required, and this should be taken into account in determining notice requirements.

#### Question 7

We firmly believe in the potential of Community Planning Partnerships to be the key vehicle for delivery of improvement for children and young people, integrated responses to diverse needs, and better strategic use of resources, demanding improvement and efficiency from service commissioning and redesign, informed and anchored by community engagement and the meaningful participation of children and young people.



- Access to data which supports areas of focus and enquiry/scrutiny. SCRA has a national data set which we are very happy to share with CIS in shaping and helping define priorities, look at trends and evidence of improvement.
- Open dialogue in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect
- Well visioned, equipped and skilful civic leadership and direction of children and young peoples issues
- Clear time orientated, measurable targets for collective improvement and indicators/measures of success – embedded **within Single Outcome Agreements**, with identified leadership and intra Partnership scrutiny and challenge
- More top level/executive engagement with services users, children and families and carers to inform the improvement impetus

### Question 8

The care Inspectorate can act as critical friend to Community Planning Partners, guide them towards evidence based approaches to improvement, demand evidence of the discharge of corporate parenting to looked after children and scrutinise the effectiveness and quality of partnership working which underpins good quality experiences for children and young people.

### Question 9

- Grouping together key findings from complaints
- Use of Critical Incident processes to understand the key issues in complaints
- Encourage providers to use root cause analysis techniques more regularly to examine complaints and their derivatives
- Publish a bulletin of learning – similar to Clinical Incident/Clinical Governance Units across Scotland
- Quicker dissemination of complaints findings across Scotland

### Question 10

We have no comments to offer on this question

We hope that the above comments are useful in helping to develop arrangements for the future scrutiny and improvement of children's services. We would be pleased to engage further on any of the points we have made, and to participate in further discussions or developmental activity where we might usefully contribute.

**SCRA**  
**4<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

