

The Scottish Out of School Care Network

SOSCN Response to Scottish Executive Draft Guidance in Respect of Child Protection Committees

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) is the national organisation promoting the development of good quality, accessible and affordable, care, play and out of school hours learning services for children of school age in Scotland.

The work of SOSCN is underpinned by a firm commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child, especially Article 31, the Right to Play.

SOSCN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive's Consultation on the Draft Guidance in Respect of Child Protection Committees

Draft Guidance in Respect of Child Protection Committees

Introduction

SOSCN notes that Chief Officers have responsibility for ensuring that their agencies, individually and collectively, undertake the protection of children, and have responsibility for ensuring the involvement of other agencies including the voluntary sector. (para 1.1) SOSCN welcomes this approach and will continue to work hard to support it.

SOSCN, as the umbrella body for organisations providing care, play and learning in Scotland, is a major channel for information and support for voluntary sector providers of registered day care services for children and young people aged 3-16, which are predominantly in the voluntary sector.

Our organisation pioneered the establishment of networks of small parent-led providers of out of school care services and strongly supports the establishment of Childcare Partnerships which, through the childcare strategy, support the development of childcare, much of it in the voluntary sector.

SOSCN welcomes the statement (para 1.4) that it is essential that the Child Protection Committee in each area links closely to integrated children's services planning.

The principles in the introduction to the draft guidance are important to ensuring that it is everyone's job to protect children.

Role of Chief Officers

SOSCN supports the clear statement of the role of chief officers and anticipates that much of the inter-agency activity with respect to child protection which Chief Officers in each area must work collectively to identify and commission (para 2.1) will relate to staff training. SOSCN welcomes the formal evaluation of progress and steps to ensure increased integration into other planning structures, in particular integrated children's services planning.

Resources

SOSCN welcomes the commitments to resources, including the commitments to support inter-agency training (para 2.7) and commitment of staff time to delivering multi-agency training.

However, SOSCN believes that partner agencies such as voluntary sector providers of children's services, including day care services for children, may also have relevant skills and experience and should have a role in delivery of multi-agency training. SOSCN believes that a commitment to use resources to recompense voluntary sector providers for the time of their staff undertaking such work should also be specifically mentioned in this section. Otherwise, relevant skills and experience, available in the voluntary sector locally, may be overlooked by CPCs.

Involvement of staff of local voluntary organisations in delivery of inter-agency and multi-agency training.

Voluntary organisations, particularly small ones such as typical providers of day care for children, may not be able to release staff who could help to facilitate training, or act as trainers for a wider group of multi agency staff, if they are not recompensed for the additional costs of staff time involved.

It is important that staff who work in the statutory sector, particularly teachers and social workers, are given the opportunity to learn from voluntary sector service providers, and the process of learning is seen as an ongoing two way process.

It is important for child protection that trust is built between all those who know an individual child. Involving workers from the voluntary sector in the delivery as well as participating in inter-agency and multi-agency training, to explain the types of services the voluntary sector provides and the standards they work to, will help to encourage mutual trust and respect.

As voluntary sector organisations are independent, issues of confidentiality and lines of accountability may have different implications from what is expected in the statutory sector. It is important that workers in both sectors have the opportunity to consider how the other operates.

Workers in the registered day care for children sector will have daily contact with parents of the school age children in their care. This means that they are the frontline staff who may know the family best.

The above are suggestions of why trust and understanding between workers in the statutory and independent sectors are so important that an acknowledgement of the need for resources to be available to support the full engagement of the voluntary sector must be made explicit. Not all voluntary sector providers will have service level agreements with local authorities where such mutual obligations can be made explicit on an individual basis. This is particularly the case in the independent registered day care sector.

Functions

Child Protection Committees will need to be aware that any voluntary sector representative on the committee, cannot make commitments on behalf of other voluntary organisations. Other systems will need to be put in place to ensure, for example, that voluntary organisations have up to date policies and procedures. (para 3.5) However in the case of day care services for children, all are registered with the Care Commission and will be required to have policies. Voluntary management committees will be required to have regard to the Codes of Practice for Employers published by the Scottish Social Services Council which cover the continuing professional development of their staff. The implementation of the Protection of Children Scotland Act will require good staff management practice as well as disclosure checks on all staff. CPCs will need to consider whether these safeguards meet their requirements.

With the publication of the Framework for Standards and the introduction of an inspection regime, it is understood that what will be inspected will be the inter-agency procedures. It will be necessary to ensure that these procedures are understood by each individual voluntary sector provider of services for children as well as the statutory services. (para 3.5)

SOSCN welcomes the commitment to a process of implementation and review of multi-agency quality assurance mechanisms for inter-agency work, to include auditing against the Framework for Standards.(para 3.7)

SOSCN understands that individual agencies should now be starting to audit their work against the Framework. SOSCN believes that all voluntary sector childcare services should be made aware of this, and that the local Childcare Partnerships are well placed to help with dissemination of information. SOSCN has made this point to the Child Protection Reform Programme and to Childcare Partnerships.

SOSCN understands that the distribution of the Charter for Young people is the first step in the process of dissemination of information. SOSCN is currently distributing information, including the explanatory booklet about the Charter and links to the Reform Programme website to all Out of School Care

providers on our contact list (approximately 1000 services predominantly in the voluntary sector). However at present our contact list is still not fully in line with that of the Care Commission. Plans are in place through the Scottish Executive's Statistics Branch, to align the lists held by the Scottish Executive, SOSCN and the Care Commission.

SOSCN believes it is important to ensure that the distribution of the Framework is thorough and that information goes to those individuals best placed to ensure the effective use of the document. To ensure timing of the distribution of information is effective, SOSCN will consult further with Childcare Partnerships and the Child Protection Reform Programme about how to ensure that the distribution of the Framework, and that all registered day care services are effectively auditing themselves against it.

We are pleased that each CPC will have an overview of single agency child protection training and we would anticipate that this would include the current child protection training in voluntary organisations in the CPC area.

Child Protection Committee Model

Linking the voluntary sector to the CPC

Appendix 5 correctly identifies that voluntary sector members cannot speak on behalf of the whole voluntary sector. It is suggested that a local voluntary sector forum could be established.

SOSCN accepts that there are clearly child protection issues for voluntary sector organisations which work with adults (e.g. mental health organisations, and organisations supporting people with addictions). However, to ensure that the CPC has an understanding of voluntary sector providers of services for children, and to avoid inventing new voluntary sector forums, SOSCN strongly suggests that representation on the CPC should be through the existing Childcare Partnerships, or local Out of School Care Networks where these exist. Local networks can involve all voluntary sector organisations working in a local area including local day care services provided by the large charities.

Linking the voluntary sector through the Childcare Partnership avoids duplication and ensures that all the registered providers of day care who are in most regular contact with children and their families are as directly linked in to the CPC as possible.

The diagram in Appendix 5 could actually be altered by moving the "voluntary sector" to closer to Children's service planning, of which the Childcare Partnership is already a part, and using a linking two way arrow to show that voluntary sector childcare services already link directly to children's service planning through the Childcare Partnership.

Considering the above points, "voluntary sector", there is an argument that voluntary sector in the diagram should actually be "children's services voluntary sector". The existing diagram in appendix 5 already makes it clear

that there is a need (defined in a separate box under roles and responsibilities) to link with other bodies, such as those dealing with drugs. etc.

Research

SOSCN acknowledges the need to undertake analysis and research, and to provide information to professionals. SOSCN believes that there might be benefits in stating in the guidance that this work might be undertaken collectively with other CPCs

Janet Law
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