

Ministers ask for follow-up inspection in Western Isles

SWIA is to conduct a follow-up inspection in the wake of its report, *An Inspection into the Care and Protection of Children in Eilean Siar*, published in October. Scottish Ministers have requested the performance inspection to make sure that child protection authorities in the Western Isles are taking forward an action plan to sort out weaknesses in their inter-agency practice. The inspection will take place during the first half of 2006.

The inspection conducted in 2004 and 2005 was commissioned by the Western Isles Child Protection Committee, following the arrest of 13 adults in relation to the alleged abuse of three children. The subsequent report is clear and constructive, highlighting what everyone can learn from the proceedings, rather than apportioning blame. It is a child-centred report, which concludes that the children involved were telling the truth and should have been listened to.

The report makes it clear that the range of issues demonstrated by the abuse of the children would have presented a major professional challenge to health, education, social work and police staff in any part of Scotland. The report's recommendations, which have been widely welcomed, have been written with a view to identifying broader lessons which might help others working to protect children across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Among the important recommendations is a call for a multi-agency national resource for professionals working with complex child protection issues. The Scottish Executive is considering this as part of the Child Protection Reform Programme. A national resource of this kind would offer consultancy and co-working for staff in relevant agencies, with a managed care network based on the model of managed clinical networks. It would establish a register of recognised experts who could be called upon when needed.

Another key recommendation urges the Executive to develop guidance on how professional staff might determine the most appropriate action where a child is living with a convicted sex offender.

The report *An Inspection into the Care and Protection of Children in Eilean Siar* is available online at www.swia.gov.uk.

Deputy Minister visits SWIA



The Deputy Minister for Children and Young People, Robert Brown, is pictured with SWIA's Chief Inspector, Alexis Jay, during his visit to Ladywell House at the end of November. It was an informal visit, and the Minister chatted to staff, finding out how things were going since the launch earlier this year. He was keen to discuss the inspection process, and was particularly interested in the inspection model that SWIA has developed.

Inside Inspection Matters

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LISTENING TO CHILDREN...

Western Isles report heralds a new era

When *An Inspection into the Care and Protection of Children in Eilean Siar* was published in October, the three girls at the centre of the case had already said that they wanted all the findings in the SWIA report to be made public, so that other children would benefit in the future.

In an innovatory move, the Scottish Minister for Education and Young People, Peter Peacock, had decided to appoint an expert to work with the children and their carers to help them understand the implications of the report and how its publication might affect them. The appointment would be independent of Western Isles Council, SWIA and any legal teams, and the advocate would report directly to the Minister.

Mary MacKinnon, a Reporter with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, was asked to take on the role of independent advocate. Her professional background is one of child-centred work, with a legal component. Before taking her law degree and going into private practice as a solicitor, Mary worked in child protection and in a children and families unit (with children who had been sexually abused). Her first degree was in psychology and sociology, followed by a CQSW.

Mary told *Inspection Matters*: "I think this was the first time that someone had been appointed in an enquiry to advocate directly on behalf of the children, and I admired the Minister for taking such a step. In the end, the children said they wanted the SWIA report to be published in full. I am confident that its publication heralds a new era, where children are going to be listened to and their views acted upon."

With only three weeks to carry out the interviews with the three girls and their carers, work on her report and also advise on the continuing package of care needed for the girls, the schedule was tight. When Mary flew to the Western Isles at the end of August to meet those involved, she was able to agree with everyone the timetable for interviews and to get down to work straight away.

"During the three weeks, I spent part of the time in a local hotel, so that I could meet with the girls outside school time," said Mary. "It was important to obtain their separate views and so I met with them independently, getting to know what worked well with each of them. I met with the carers, too, and the support that they gave, both to the

girls and to me, was more than I could have hoped for. They are totally committed to the girls.

"Right at the start, I was heartened when one of the girls produced a notebook and pen and asked me for my qualifications and experience that made me the best person for the job! This showed she had a level of commitment and also the self-esteem to exercise her right to ask. All three obviously felt they were being listened to for the first time and were confident that the decision-makers would hear and consider their views. That was so important for children who had felt for too many years that adults had not listened to them."

Midway through the interviews, Mary realised that all three girls were clear about why they wanted the report to be published in full. "They felt that publication would rid them of the stigma of rumours and doubts, and would vindicate them," she explained. "If they had felt there should be deletions, then I would have put their wishes forward. However, they recognised that the personal details included in the report were all necessary.

"I asked each of them to write their own recommendation to the Minister, which was attached to my report. Although they emphasised different areas of the SWIA report, they were united in saying that it was essential to publish in full and so to protect other children from going through what they had had to endure. Their sincerity was unquestionable."

At the end of the three weeks, Mary reported back to the Minister, and was 'over the moon' when he shortly afterwards announced that the SWIA report should be published in its entirety. "This was especially positive for the girls," she said, "because it was clear that, along with the SWIA report, he had read and treated seriously their own recommendations to him. They had no doubt of his commitment to safeguarding children in the future."

The girls will always have a special place in Mary's heart. "I have so much admiration for their resilience," she said. "The strong message from all three was that adults should listen to what children say and shouldn't disregard it because it makes you feel uncomfortable. If it is difficult for you as a worker to deal with, how much more difficult is it for a child to live with?"

Inclusive partnership plays key role in Borders follow-up inspection



“It was good that people with learning disabilities were asked to be inspectors. We could relate to the situations that people with learning disabilities find themselves in if they use services.” So said Brian Rosie and Mary Anderson, the People First (Scotland) representatives who were inspectors in the follow-up inspection of Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders. The inspection report, *No fears as long as we work together*, was published in October.

The two inspectors were part of a joint inspection team led by SWIA and the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland. Family carer Ursula Corker from Carers Scotland was also part of the team, working along with representatives from the Care Commission, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Education, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Audit Scotland.

This high profile follow-up inspection presented many challenges to the team, but the lead inspector, Ian Kerr of SWIA, said that the inclusive partnership formed had brought a breadth and depth of knowledge and experience to their work. In particular, the involvement of two inspectors who have learning disabilities and one family carer inspector had been critical. Ian said: “They brought a unique perspective to the inspection team and shared their first-hand experience of using services. They also had a great ability to cut through management-speak.”

The follow-up inspection looked at how the council, health service and their partners had put into effect their action plan for services for people with learning disabilities. The action plan dealt with the 33 recommendations made in last year’s reports on the abuse of a number of vulnerable adults with learning disabilities in the Borders. The reports had identified serious failings in council and health services for people with learning disabilities.

The inspection team found that the key agencies and their partners had done an enormous amount of work and had made significant improvements. Speaking at a presentation on the report in the Borders, SWIA’s Chief Inspector, Alexis Jay, said: “Our conclusion is that, provided this progress is maintained by all agencies concerned, adults with learning disabilities in the Scottish Borders Council area will be safe and well protected.” She emphasised that there was now a much greater chance of the public agencies:

- preventing abuse of vulnerable adults with learning disabilities;
- finding out about such abuse; and
- stopping the abuse once they find out about it.

Giving the important job of inspector to two people with learning disabilities and a family carer sent out powerful messages about respect and equality. One person with learning disabilities from the Borders said: “I have never seen someone with learning disabilities with such an important job.” The follow-up inspection report has important messages for all Scottish local authorities, NHS Boards and their partners, about working together to protect vulnerable adults with learning disabilities.

The report *No fears as long as we work together: Follow Up Joint Inspection of Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders* is available online at www.swia.gov.uk. The report’s title is taken from one of the comments made by a person with learning disabilities during interviews for a survey conducted by Borders Independent Advocacy Service as part of the inspection.

Peer inspection adds value to new programme

An important feature of Scotland's new performance inspection programme for social work services is the introduction of peer inspection as an integral part of the process. SWIA now has a pool of associate inspectors – senior managers from local authorities, health and voluntary organisations – whose work is already adding value to the pilot inspection programme currently underway.

In June, Alexis Jay, SWIA's Chief Inspector, invited councils, NHS boards and national voluntary organisations to put forward the names of senior managers to be considered as associate inspectors. The commitment would be for the associate inspectors to be released from their normal duties for about 20 working days in total in the course of an inspection. They would probably be involved in one or two inspections every three years. In return, they would contribute as full team members in inspections, with an opportunity for significant professional development and the chance to learn about the process ahead of their own authority's inspection.

The response was excellent, with over 70 people applying. Alexis Jay commented: "We had a good spread of applicants, not just from local authorities, but from health and the voluntary sector, too. They bring important perspectives from their different backgrounds, and that encourages a good interplay of ideas."

The performance inspection programme deals with the overarching functions of local authority social work services, as well as covering day-to-day duties such as assessment and case management. There was little time for a detailed induction before the first associate inspectors had to get down to work in Angus, Fife and South Lanarkshire. However, training and guidance will be part of the process for each of the performance inspections in the programme for 2006 and beyond.

SWIA Inspector Irene Scullion was full of praise for the associate inspectors involved in the pilot inspection which she has been leading in Angus. "They very soon became part of the team," she said. "They hadn't known each other beforehand, but everyone bonded really quickly. They had to put in a phenomenal amount of work, from the preparation, to the fieldwork, to writing it all up, and then commenting on the draft report. They gave their all!"

Associate inspectors are well placed to understand the difficulties facing their peers in other local authorities, and this helps to balance the views of the SWIA team. SWIA Inspector Tom Leckie said: "They bring up-to-the-minute experience, and can spot any practice that is unusual or uncommon. Their involvement makes our work more transparent. Because the associate inspectors will talk about the inspections back in their own authorities, it lets everyone learn more about what we are trying to do. It means that they take examples of good practice back with them, too."

Accessible summary simplifies – but keeps the message

The accessible summary which introduces *No fears as long as we work together* was designed to put across the report's findings to the widest possible audience. The aim was to simplify the information from the complex issues of the joint follow-up inspection in the Borders – but not to lose the message.

Equal attention to words and pictures have made sure that the summary works well. With the support of People First, three inspectors – Brian Rosie, Mary Anderson and Ursula Corker – wrote the text in easy-to-understand terms. Brian

suggested the addition of illustrations to show the meanings of the words. The inspection team contacted FAIR, an information and advice service for people with learning disabilities and their families, which specialises in simplifying often sensitive subjects. Their illustrator provided the pictures which bring the words to life, to complete the accessible summary.

- FAIR is at 25-27 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DB, tel. 0131 662 1962, www.fairadvice.org.uk.

Committed to clarity

Staff from SWIA recently attended training organised by the Plain English Campaign, underlining our commitment to avoiding jargon in our reports. We aim to strike the balance of making all our publications accessible and transparent, while at the same time avoiding the over-simplification of complex issues.

Willie Paxton, one of SWIA's Inspectors, commented: "I found the course useful in exposing all kinds of myths about written English and 'official' writing. I intend to try to follow some of the suggestions the trainer made, such as using shorter sentences and avoiding jargon. I think it's important that what we write is accessible to everyone. Our reports are public documents and it is important that they are understood by everyone who is interested in them."

Inspection Project Manager Tansy Clarke was impressed by the rule that any report or document can be cut by one third without losing any important information. "Although we were all a bit pessimistic, we tried it out in practice and were convinced!" she said. "One of the most valuable things was the 'everyday language rule'. Quite simply, if you wouldn't say 'furthermore, aforementioned, in addition, etc.' in your own home, then you shouldn't use it in official writing either!"

Sharing expertise

SWIA is keen to share expertise with other countries, particularly in Europe. Next Spring, two colleagues from Malta will come to Scotland to learn about our inspection organisation and methodology. They will work in two-week placements, shadowing SWIA staff on performance or thematic inspections.

Performance inspection timetable 2006

The approximate dates cover the period from the initial meeting with the authority, to preparing a draft report.

Dumfries and Galloway*
early January – end May

Inverclyde
mid-January – end May

Western Isles*
January – June

Aberdeenshire*
February – July

East Renfrew
mid-March – end July

Perth and Kinross
mid-June – October

Orkney*
mid-June – November

Highland
mid-July – mid-December

Glasgow
mid-July – December 2006/January 2007

West Lothian
early September – February 2007

* concurrent with criminal justice inspection

NEWS ON INSPECTIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Recently published

Report on Performance of Criminal Justice Social Work Services in the Lothian and Borders Consortium (November 2005)

An inspection into the care and protection of children in Eilean Siar (October 2005)

No fear as long as we work together – Follow up joint inspection of Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders – Verifying implementation of their action plan for services for people with learning disabilities (October 2005)

Coming soon

Review of services for looked after children

In the new year...

- main phase of performance inspections begins (ten local authorities in 2006)
- criminal justice inspections in Forth Valley, Dumfries and Galloway, Western Isles and Northern (with Orkney, Ayrshires and Shetland following later in the year)
- national consultation event on performance inspections (February)

HAVE YOUR SAY

At SWIA, we are committed to following up all your views and suggestions. So please get in touch!

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