

## A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK - FOR HIGHLANDS CHILDREN 2

### Background

In November 2004 the Executive issued the Integrated Children's Services Plans guidance to local authorities, NHS boards and other planning partners asking them to draw together their separate plans for school education, children's social work, child health and youth justice into integrated Children's Services Plans from April 2005. The Executive's guidance makes it clear that " *the primary focus and content of plans should be to establish an agreed description, table or display of local partners' agreed improvement objectives for services and support for children and young people with, for each of these, clear strategies for delivery, outcomes, measures of performance and timescales*".

The discussion and consultation document *Making Services Better for Scotland's Children*, launched at the *Services for Children Seminar* in November 2004, presented an overview of how inspection of services for children and young people needs to evolve to take account of developments in policy and changing practices in the delivery of services on the ground. In particular, the document addressed the need to design more comprehensive and co-ordinated arrangements for the inspection of services for children and young people.

The Quality Indicators for child protection services indicate that very good practice involves:

- managers at an operational level ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the Children's Plan for their work (4.2);
- operational managers ensure that efficient management information systems are in place, and are used as a dynamic tool to helpfully inform their work and that of the staff they manage (4.2);
- there is a clear line of accountability within and across organisations (5.2);
- senior managers have developed a clear best value approach to continuous improvement (5.2);
- senior managers take a leading role in ensuring improvements both within and across services, and have systems to support the monitoring and review of outcomes (5.4).

The recent pilot child protection inspection identified that there is "a need to establish an overall evaluative framework for the protection of children. .... Expectations and models of self evaluation needed to be prescribed more explicitly where services were commissioned from, or funded in, the independent sector. Procedures for reviewing and evaluating outcomes for children receiving interagency support, to ensure greater consistency, were in the early stages of development. ... [and agencies] should more consistently evaluate the effectiveness of work to protect children and young people.

This paper sets out a Quality Improvement Framework which aims to develop a coherent and sustained approach across Highland to raising quality across all services for children and young people. It is based on documentation that it is presently being prepared by the Scottish Executive, as it is important that early linkage is made with the developing plans for inspections of integrated children's services.

Accordingly, this paper uses the improvement objectives framework in *For Highlands Children 2*. It further builds on the service specific frameworks that are already in place, such as the Schools Improvement Framework and Health for all Children 4, to set out a coherent, strategic structure for Performance Management and Quality Assurance across all children's services in Highland.

## **Nature and Purpose of the Quality Improvement Framework**

Achieving progressive and sustainable improvements in the quality of children's services will depend on robust and systematic approaches to ensuring that service provision is of good quality. Such systems are in place to varying degrees in the different agencies and services, but there is a need for more consistency and coherence in our approach.

The purpose of this Quality Improvement Framework is therefore to provide a vehicle for promoting the necessary consistency and coherence of quality improvement processes within and across services for children and young people. It will contribute to the development of a shared culture of quality improvement and a shared language for discussing issues of quality amongst all professionals.

This Framework consists of five elements which should both characterise the quality improvement systems of individual services and the processes which they use when working together to raise the quality of the services that we provide in partnership:

1. The vision for Highland's children and young people
2. Key outcome targets
3. Improvement objectives, and the delivery strategies to achieve these objectives
4. Arrangements for evaluating, systematically and rigorously, whether improved outcomes are being achieved
5. Using the information from evaluation to make continuous and sustained improvements to achieve improved outcomes.

### **Element 1: The vision for Highland's children and young people**

Our vision is that *all of Highland's children have the best possible start in life; enjoy being young; and are supported to develop as confident, capable and resilient, to fully maximise their potential.*

If these aspirations are to become reality our children and young people need to be: safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, *active, respected & responsible and included:*

**Safe:** protected from abuse, neglect and harm by others at home, at school and in the community.

**Nurtured:** within a supportive family setting, with additional assistance if required, or, where this is not possible, within another caring setting, ensuring a positive and rewarding childhood experience.

**Healthy:** enjoying the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, with access to suitable healthcare and support for safe and healthy lifestyle choices.

**Achieving:** through access to positive learning environments and opportunities to develop their skills, confidence and self esteem to the fullest potential.

**Active:** and encouraged to choose rewarding play and leisure opportunities, including sport

**Respected & Responsible:** involved in decisions that affect them, have their voices heard and encouraged to play an active and responsible role in their communities.

**Included:** with access to high quality services, when required, and assisted to overcome the social, educational, physical, geographic, environmental and economic barriers that create inequality.

## **Element 2: Key outcome targets**

*For Highland's Children 2* includes 50 key targets to identify how progress towards these outcomes will be demonstrated. The targets sit across the seven themes of the plan. Comprehensive monitoring arrangements are in place for each of these targets.

## **Element 3: Improvement objectives, and the delivery strategies to achieve these objectives**

*For Highland's Children 2* identifies a comprehensive set of improvement objectives, and the necessary delivery strategies to achieve these objectives. These delivery strategies sit within and across agencies and require clear and common understandings about standards of quality, how improvements can be worked towards and how success is measured.

Supporting this structure is a Performance Delivery document which identifies the managers and forums with lead operational and strategic responsibility for the achievement and monitoring of these strategies. A resolute and systematic approach to quality improvement requires leadership, and it is important in each context to determine who should provide the necessary leadership and how that leadership should be exercised. This is particularly important where the provision of services is shared across a number of partners. It is essential that everyone is clear about what aspects of the improvement objectives he or she is responsible for achieving and how they can exercise their accountability effectively.

Wherever possible, this framework builds on established groups and management structures with existing responsibilities. Occasionally, it is suggested that a new forum requires to be established. It is strongly recommended that the responsibility for these improvement actions is institutionalised into the ongoing formal business of these various forums.

**Element 4: Arrangements for evaluating, systematically and rigorously, whether successful outcomes are being achieved.**

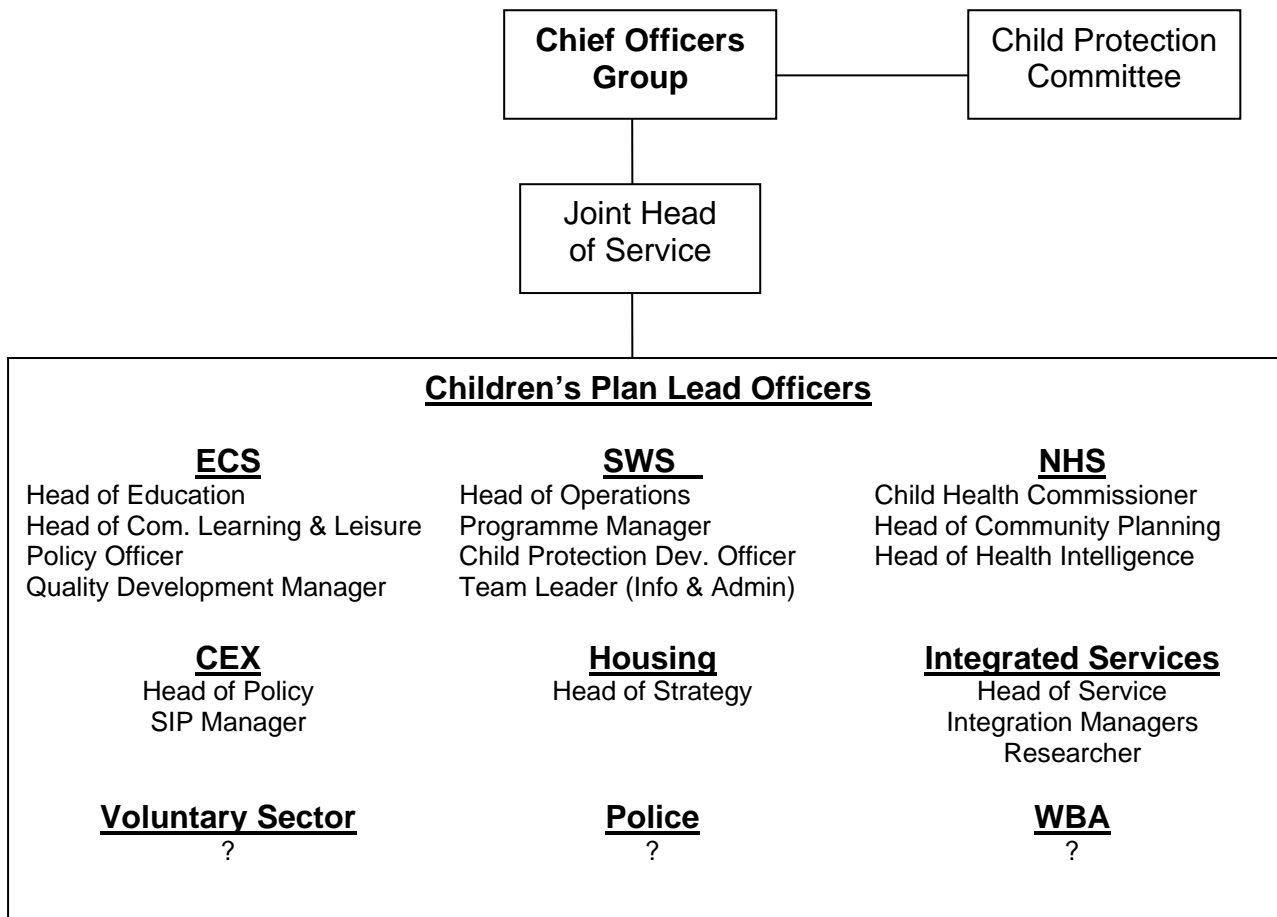
The primary responsibility for assuring the quality of services provided to children and young people lies with the managers and practitioners with responsibility for service delivery.

This needs to take place within a coherent framework, where services and agencies work collaboratively to evaluate the combined effect of on the continuous improvement of services and the quality of outcomes for children and young people. We will also need to have robust evidence-based processes in place and demonstrate that we use this evidence to improve services.

A consistency in approach can be achieved through co-ordinated and effective use of:

- the 50 key outcome targets for integrated services, linked to a rationalised and collaborative approach to performance indicators in each agency
- the formative external evaluation being conducted by UHI Millennium Institute
- self-evaluation, based on the relevant generic quality indicators being developed by the *Services for Children Unit*, and the key questions that will be used in the integrated inspections
- ongoing analysis of performance at Area Children's Services Forums and by lead officers reporting to the Chief Officers Group

It is proposed that the Lead Officers Group which developed *For Highland's Children 2* is continued, and combined with the Common Performance Management Group, to enable ongoing monitoring and review of performance. This will provide a structure for the annual review of the plan, ensuring linkage to all associated planning processes.



A further development, previously considered by COG, is that the existing Performance Management and Quality Assurance resources for children across Education, Culture & Sport, Social Work and NHS Highland are combined to form a more integrated team.

Children, young people and their families will have a key role to play in improving services, by being better informed of what they should expect and by providing feed-back to service-providers about the quality of service they have experienced. It is therefore essential to include these users of services in the process of evaluation and continuous improvement

**Element 5: Using the information from evaluation to make continuous and sustained improvements to achieve successful outcomes.**

This involves having a deep-rooted culture within and across services which values and demands continuous improvement in quality. It means using the results of evaluation to identify where further improvements need to be made and taking action to make these improvements. This requires that:

- Service-providers have a robust understanding of what children, young people and their families have experienced in using their services and of how services could be improved for them.
- Service-providers, individually and collectively, have well-developed systems for continually monitoring and improving the quality of their work with children and the outcomes achieved

by and for children, young people and their families. This includes having monitoring arrangements which ensure that improvement objectives, once identified, are actually achieved.

- Individuals working with children and young people are clear about what they personally need to do to improve the quality and impact of their work.
- Support is available when organisations or individuals have difficulty in making improvements to the quality of their work.