

Submission from the Scottish Social Services Council

Inquiry into decision making on whether children should be taken into care

THE ROLE OF THE SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the Education and Culture Committee's Inquiry into decision making on whether children should be taken into care.

The SSSC was set up under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. We are responsible for registering and regulating people who work in social services, and regulating their education and training. Our work will increase the protection of people who use services by ensuring the workforce is properly trained, appropriately qualified and effectively regulated. The SSSC registers and regulates all residential child care workers.

Our aims are to protect people who use services, raise standards of practice and strengthen and improve professionalism in the workforce.

The SSSC's Register is qualifications-based so that workers either have to hold a specified qualification, or agree to achieve a specified qualification by a particular date.

The SSSC must be satisfied about an individual's good character, conduct and competence before the individual will be registered. Complaints that raise issues about a worker's suitability can result in a worker being removed from the Register, or having conditions imposed such as training in a particular area.

In our workforce development and planning role we have developed a range of resources to ensure the social service workforce is competent, confident and able to meet the needs of people who use services and their carers.

The SSSC also has in place a Code of Practice that all social service workers must follow. Social service workers must:

- protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers
- strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers
- promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm
- respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people
- uphold public trust and confidence in social services
- be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

Having set our role and areas of expertise we have responded to questions one, four and five.

Question 1

It is the responsibility of a local authority to remove a child from her/his birth family, but the decision is often taken jointly with a multi-agency team of people supporting the child and their family or at a Children's Hearing. The people involved will be trained in different disciplines. In relation to the range of professionals involved in the decision making there are currently no common standards of training, knowledge and practice.

The Looked After Children-Strategic Implementation Group (LAC-SIG) considered the shared common standards of training, knowledge and practice of those involved in the decision making process. Whilst those involved in the process may be operating at a similar academic level they may have different areas of focus. There would seem to be continued scope for all agencies to share common learning and development on the complexity of issues when a child is removed from the family home. Areas of joint learning and development for staff may include such elements as: early intervention, work with families as well as children/young people, the social and educational needs of those who are at home, use of respite resources, areas of support for family members.

In relation to professional judgement, it is important to note that this does not mean that every professional would make the same decision given the same circumstances (in the most serious cases it is likely the same judgement would be made). This is why professional development, which is supported by the Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements (PRTL) of the SSSC is so important. It is the on-going experiential learning and reflection on practice through supervision that has the most impact on decision making.

The proposed changes in the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) framework currently being considered by the SSSC and awarding bodies in Scotland would result in a children/young people award rather than the current framework of having two awards - SVQ Health and Social Care (Children and Young People) **and** Children's Care Learning and Development. Employers have indicated that this would provide for a more flexible social services workforce with shared common aspects of learning and development.

The recent work on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland may also provide scope for greater cohesion in learning for those involved in decision making. GIRFEC must underpin all of the above.

Through our conduct hearings we are able to identify any themes emerging within the sector and feed these into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for consideration of how they can be reinforced as part of the graduate and post graduate social work training programme. We also encourage employers and workers to look at the outcomes of conduct hearings to consider if there is any learning that is relevant to their own practice.

Question 4

One of the aims of regulation is to increase the number of qualified social service workers. Evidence shows that having qualified staff leads to better outcomes for children. Therefore, the requirements for all registered workers to continue to improve their practice through gaining a qualification and PRTL should result in improving outcomes for looked after children.

Question 5

In the context of the work of the SSSC and our expertise one of the issues that we would like to highlight is in the training and continuing development of social service workers. As already highlighted, it is usually a multi-agency group that will make the decision to remove a child from their family home. For social service workers the important skills they require are in assessment so they can gather and contextualise the right information to inform decisions. This reinforces the need for social workers to continue to improve and reflect on their practice.

CONCLUSION

There are many agencies and professionals involved in the decision to remove a child from their family home. Therefore it is vital that the role of professionals such as teachers, health visitors and decision makers such as sheriffs and children's panel members are included in the remit of this Inquiry. The most important factor is that the child should be at the centre and their needs should always come first. It is up to the people making decisions that they do this to ensure the best outcomes for looked after children.