CONSULTATION ON THE REFRESHED PRACTICE GUIDANCE GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT (GOPR)

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM
Please Note this form must be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

1. Name/Organisation
Organisation Name
Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

Title  Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please tick as appropriate

Surname  Fowlie
Forename  Anna

2. Postal Address
Scottish Social Services Council
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
Postcode  DD1 4NY  Phone  0845 60 30 891  Email  anna.fowlie@sssc.uk.com

3. Permissions - I am responding as…

Individual  I  Group/Organisation

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?
Please tick as appropriate  Yes  No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis
Please tick ONE of the following boxes
Yes, make my response, name and address all available  ☐
Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address  ☐
Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address  ☐

(c) The name and address of your organisation will be made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).
Are you content for your response to be made available?
Please tick as appropriate  ☒ Yes  ☐ No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so.
Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?
Please tick as appropriate  ☒ Yes  ☐ No
CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Does this document provide a useful practical update to the 2003 Guidance?

Comments

The revised practice guidance Getting Our Priorities Right (GOPR) places GOPR firmly in the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach and together the documents provide excellent practice guidance for implementing a whole family, early intervention approach to meeting children and young people’s needs. The revised guidance is clearly situated within the principles of GIRFEC and the Recovery Agenda and there is a stronger focus on wellbeing rather than welfare. The specific guidance related to substance use and its impact on children and families is clearly contextualised to significant legislation and policies and is consequently consistent, integrative and effectively ‘joined-up’. It is vital however to ensure that there is consistency in local and national implementation of the GOPR and Child Protection guidance and that the Child Protection framework remains the central focus of practice guidance with GOPR being read as an addendum. The refreshed GOPR guidance appears to resonate with the aspirations of the Children and Young People Bill (CYPB) in promoting early prevention practices and evidenced based interventions. There is consistency in promoting the operational roles of Named Person and Lead Professional and implementing the Child’s Plan. There are also synergies in the focus on multi-agency cooperation, planning and response.

The chapter summaries provide useful abridged summaries of the key elements for easier access by practitioners, although it would be advisable for all practitioners to have a sound knowledge of the entire contents. The reference to some of the key research findings related to the impact of substance use will be valuable for practitioners in evidencing their assessments and professional decision making. There is helpful reference to local practice examples, and key tools are cited through the Multi Agency Resource Service. The focus on early intervention with children and their families should be supported by the increased and flexible Early Years’ provision being introduced by the CYPB.

It is positive that the impact of alcohol use on families is more prominent than in the original guidance reflecting the contemporary context.

The document provides clear guidance regarding multi-agency working (providing an effective supplement to GIRFEC), and it sets out the importance of preparing and training the workforce to deliver effective services.
Do any areas require further updating?

Comments

The centrality of children’s rights and the UN Convention of the rights of the Child could be more strongly emphasised, which would be consistent with the Children and Young People Bill. It should also resonate with the Children’s Charter and Framework for Standards. The guidance identifies the importance of assessing immediate risk when a concern is noted. Whilst it is important to ensure that risks are properly assessed and addressed, it is also important to ensure that risk is conceptualised within an assessment of needs and wellbeing. The emphasis on early intervention and provision of support to children and their families may mitigate this, but in view of recent critiques of the over-emphasis on investigation practices, this may need to be more prominent.

The document could have incorporated reference to the national Child Protection practice guidance related to substance use by children and young people. It is vital that adult service workers recognise that parental use of substances increases the risk of their children becoming involved in substance use. The increased vulnerability of children and young people affected by substance suggests that additional supports should be offered, albeit at a lower level, to all families to mitigate the impact of the inherent issues.

Additional guidance should be included in relation to kinship issues. Whilst children are living with kinship carers there may be increased risk to the carers and to children and young people during periods of contact when parents may be affected by fluctuating substance use.

The SSSC is concerned with raising standards of social service delivery and protecting the public through continuing improvement in workforce planning and development of the workforce and would commend the guidance in its attention to workforce learning and development. It is credible that the guidance reinforces the responsibility of the local strategic partners, Child Protection Committees and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships to provide learning and development opportunities for all levels of staff, including practitioners, operational managers, specialist services, strategic leaders and Elected Members.

It is important to ensure that there is consistency nationally and locally in the approach that is adopted to delivering training for the workforce and that multi-agency training is planned and delivered under the auspices of the Child Protection Framework. The guidance does not specifically relate to the National Framework for Child Protection Training and Learning that is in the final stages of consultation, but it would be helpful if these documents could be considered jointly to ensure that there is consistency and that the proposals within this document are consistent with the final framework for training. The level of training should be linked with the functional role, as suggested within the National Child Protection Learning and Development Framework. Joint adult/children’s services’ learning is needed to ensure consistency of understanding and response, also to engage in discussion re
the differences in timescales for recovery and children’s wellbeing.

Inter-agency workforce development and learning should have a higher profile, with core knowledge, skills and values learning and development opportunities being provided jointly. Many of the skills and values are situated within Scottish Social Services Continuous Learning Framework (CLF). This is currently being revised to incorporate leadership capabilities. We make further comments about the leadership aspects in our response to the final question.

Current developments related to the integration of health and social care should take account of the need for integrated training and learning opportunities to prepare the ‘joined up’ workforce to be consistently responsive to the needs of children and families and to achieve the multi-agency whole family approach being promoted within the guidance.

Does the document sufficiently highlight the importance of ensuring that children’s and parents’ views are taken into account?

Comments

There is strong reference within several sections of the guidance to the importance of representing the views of children and young people, but it lacks robust guidance on how this could be achieved beyond the engagement of professionals in good quality relationships. The views of parents are not prominent and only conveyed within the practice guidance in relation to the Child’s Plan. The guidance conveys a clear expectation of partnership with parents, so is an implicit expectation, but could be made more explicit. The guidance needs to emphasise the importance of ensuring that the views of parents are properly taken into account, in line with the explicit expectations of the personalisation agenda and the GIRFEC agenda that the participative involvement of parents is key to effective assessment and intervention. The document could incorporate some guidance on managing potential tensions between parents’ and children’s views.

Does the guidance help you with the question - what to do? And in which situations?

Comments

The guidance provides an effective framework for practice and should be used as a framework to inform practice, rather than as prescriptive guidance. It will be important to ensure that practitioners and managers use the guidance as a framework for practice rather than as the practice tool and that the checklists are not used mechanistically. Greater prescriptiveness may undermine professional judgement and effective evidence-based decision making. The emphasis on assessment as a process is helpful, and the guidance does emphasise the importance of establishing purposeful relationships with children and families. It could be
more specific about the need to ensure that the practitioners involved are mindful of making informed judgements, rather than being judgemental. The National Framework for Child Protection Learning and Development emphasises the importance of professional judgement and this could be more definitively emphasised within the guidance.

To be effectively implemented the guidance needs to be underpinned by robust professional supervision and learning and development opportunities to ensure that the workforce is equipped with the knowledge and skills to apply the guidance confidently and competently-refer to final comments.

There will be a need for local guidance related to inter-agency protocols in specific situations e.g. information sharing and clear definitions around proportionality to ensure that common understanding and practices are achieved.

Does the document provide a good basis for the development and implementation of protocols at local level?

Comments

The key elements of the guidance are clear and resonate with the central themes of the Children and Young People’s Bill, with the exception of the focus on children’s rights within the Bill. The focus on early intervention, recovery, needs and strengths-based assessment, roles of Named Person and Lead Practitioner are all clear and provide a good basis for developing into local strategic plans and implementation protocols. As GIRFEC is likely to be enshrined in legislation, local protocols will have to reflect this approach. The CYPB iterates the importance of appropriate, proportionate and timely interventions based around the child’s individual needs and risks and the guidance reinforces this approach in assessing and responding to the impact of substance use in families.

Does the evidence base/research help?

Comments

The reference to research evidence provides a clear rationale for the guidance and consolidates the key messages related to the impact of substance use. It reifies the need for a multi-agency approach and early intervention. It is also helpful to link with practice examples and signpost resources and tools to support practice. However it is important that practitioners do not rely on the abridged version of the research base, but that they are encouraged to maintain a currency of knowledge and regular access to research to enhance evidence-based and research informed practice.

Does the document reflect accurately the assessment of support, care etc which would prevent the enactment of child protection procedures? I.e. is the document describing earlier intervention?
Comments

The intent of the document to promote early intervention and implement family support is clear. There is a sense of a ‘stepped approach’ beginning with universal services and progressing to targeted multi-agency approaches, if required. However the wellbeing of the child and the need to establish risk and respond appropriately is central to the guidance and this along with the National Guidance on Child Protection will provide balanced guidance for practitioners. The level of support offered to families will inevitably be linked with local resource capacity and the level of inter-agency work that is being undertaken.

Does it complement the National Guidance on Child Protection?

Comments

There are a number of guidance frameworks and it will be important for local Child Protection Committees, Community Planning Partnerships and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships to develop a coherent strategic implementation plan for service delivery, training and learning and to ensure that practitioners are clear about how the guidance integrates together to inform their practice. Ongoing review and evaluation will provide information about the implementation challenges and inform future developments-this process may be able to dovetail with the reporting requirements of the Children and Young People Bill.
Have you any further comments?

Comments

The guidance makes a positive contribution to ensuring that services re-focus from more strongly interventionist/investigative approaches to an emphasis on whole-family assessment, support and intervention at an earlier stage. The guidance will hopefully achieve greater consistency and transparency for families and greater consistency nationally in approaches to working with families impacted by substance use. It provides a framework for all professionals and reinforces the responsibility of all agencies to respond consistently and in partnership, with emphasis on clear links between adult care and children’s services. In particular it will promote a clearer understanding of the role of adult service workers. The abridged version offers practitioners easier access to information and guidance.

The SSSC commends the guidance for its recognition and promotion of the need for strong strategic leadership and a committed workforce as being fundamental to achieving effective service delivery and performance improvement. It also resonates with the CYPB in that it clearly sets out the importance of behaviours/ways of working and adherence to best practice being set by good leadership practices. The SSSC has been engaged in promoting the importance of developing leadership at all levels of social services and has commissioned research to analyse existing leadership activity and to establish the development needs of the workforce at all levels. This resulting information has helped to shape a vision for future leadership in social services that has been centrally informed by the views of the sector. A leadership and management reference pool has been developed and current work is aimed at developing leadership pathways. It would be helpful if the final guidance refers to the SSSC website materials as it does in relation to practice tools (MARS) and also ensures that the guidance in relation to leadership is informed by the work of SSSC.

It will be critical for strategic partners to work together locally to ensure that there is coherence in planning towards service delivery and to plan and deliver the appropriate learning and development opportunities for the workforce. The effective implementation of the guidance will rely on the workforce being properly prepared and equipped with the underpinning knowledge, understanding and range of core skills to deliver effective services.

The guidance does not relate to the centrality of supervision in supporting reflective learning, and an effective learning and development framework could be situated within supervision processes that encourage and support reflection on practice, to ensure that practice is predicated on research/evidence based assessments. The National Framework for Child Protection Learning and Development states that ‘valuing the workforce is central to the GIRFEC approach’ and that managers need to be aware of individual workers’ skills, knowledge, understanding and values. The guidance could be clearer in its iteration of the leadership and supervisory/mentor responsibilities of managers and practitioners at all levels. The leadership capabilities of managers and front-line staff will need to be
developed if we are to ensure that services have a personalised approach and innovative ways of working. The guidance could also relate to the importance of individual leadership and of empowering individuals to take control of their own child protection learning and development. This would resonate with the National Child Protection Learning and Development Framework and be consistent with the expectations of social work professionals through their Post Registration Training and Learning requirements. This approach could be strengthened within the final version.

It is important that training providers at all levels, albeit VQ, SW Degree programmes, early years, health or teaching related disciplines should be cognisant of the need to introduce students/learners at an early stage to the guidance and to the knowledge/understanding and research base of substance use and its impact on families. This could incorporate an understanding of the attitudinal issues referred to in the guidance. It is important to ensure that there are sufficient resources to access high quality learning opportunities to relevant practitioners. The SSSC will have a role in promoting this agenda through the quality assurance and annual monitoring role with providers of the Social Work Degrees, Childhood Practice programmes and post-qualifying programmes.