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**REPORT BY POLICY LEAD FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The report outlines the tasks undertaken by the Policy lead for Children and Families across 2013/2014. It has been a year where a number of activities have been implemented and achieved significant success. Within the Children and Families Service there has been learning from specific cases, however, overall it has been a positive year.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Council notes the contents of this report.

**3.0 DETAIL**

- 3.1 It has been a busy year as Policy Lead for Children and Families. The Children and Families Service Review has been completed and is being implemented. It has been challenging identifying savings whilst looking at improving front line services. There have been some high profile cases within the Service and learning across partners for a few cases.
- 3.2 Criminal Justice Community Payback Orders continue to offer opportunities for unpaid work for offenders in local communities. Unpaid work activity in Argyll and Bute has attracted positive press coverage in Helensburgh and the Lomond area.
- 3.3 The establishment of the Corporate Parenting Board has ensured that the Council and partners are delivering on outcomes for our 184 looked after children. WhoCares Scotland support an ex- care leaver from Argyll and Bute who attends and contributes to the Corporate Parenting Board. Argyll and Bute's young people have highlighted the need to access free leisure which the Corporate Parenting Board is actively pursuing.

As the chair, I would like to thank local children's' champions Councillor Robertson, Councillor Marshall and Councillor Corry and Councillor MacAlpine for their valuable contribution to the success of the board.

As the chair of the board, there have been a number of achievements including developing support for looked after children, tracking educational attainment and establishing a framework for driving lessons for ex-carers leavers. Argyll and Bute is the first local authority to establish this framework. The board is also actively involved in overseeing the project to replace Dunclotha Children's house in Dunoon. The board engages with a wide range of partners to prioritise the needs of looked after children in Argyll. Our young people who are currently in care or care leavers have hosted consultation events and produced a DVD to tell the Corporate Parenting Board what they want from us and how we can help them in the future. The board has produced a DVD for the young people explaining how the board works and how we undertake our role as corporate parents. I continue to meet with young people through these consultation events and visits to the Children's homes. The resilience of these young people continues to impress and as a Council we should be impressed by the quality of care they receive. All three Children's homes continue to be graded "very good" or above by the Care Inspectorate. Argyll and Bute has high quality foster carers who are committed to caring for vulnerable children. Argyll and Bute have undertaken a fostering campaign to recruit new foster carers, particularly in Helensburgh.

- 3.4 The recent fostering and adoption inspection graded services "good" across all quality indicators.
- 3.5 The Children and Young People Bill has a number of opportunities and challenges. The move from 475 hour childcare to 600 hours was successfully managed and supported by the Early Years team. The additional spend of £503,000 capital and £842,000 revenue required to make 600 hours implementation happen was a significant costing. Across the summer, Facility Services have worked tirelessly to undertake the capital work required to make pre-school establishment ready for the implementation. There are significant costs attached to delivering a service to 18-25 ex-carer leavers as part of the Bill, in addition to the extra support promised to Kinship carers. The increase in service demand could be up to 40% and could potentially costs £3.2 million. COSLA negotiations on funding are still underway with the Scottish Government with no indication of allocation. There are potential risks to the Council on how we will finance our statutory obligation if these initiatives are not fully funded.
- 3.6 The Early Year Collaborative is an approach outlined by the Scottish Government to achieve their vision of "ensuring Scotland is the best place to grow up and live". In Argyll and Bute we have appointed a program manager and developed a new approach across all services to identify and support families. The Kintyre Pathway is looking at identifying and providing support to families from birth across their lifespan, it is unique across Scotland. Argyll has attracted funding of £100,000 from the Scottish Government for a public partnership run by Children1st and is delivering parenting support in Helensburgh. In addition, Argyll is piloting a Psychology of Parenting programme with parenting support for parents of 3 and 4 year olds being offered in every locality. I have had contact with individual families who requested housing and financial support. Guiding families to housing

providers and income maximisation providers has helped these families' circumstances. However, housing remains a significant issue within Oban and the island areas.

- 3.7 It has been a year with a number of successes for the Children and Families service. The commitment and hard work of the staff is a credit. As we move forward there are new challenges with Health and Social integration and Criminal Justice redesign. As a member of the Shadow Integration Board for Health and Social Care I will be actively involved in the governance to take forward the new model of Health and Social Care integration. The Community Planning Partnership, who will be responsible for Criminal Justice, will need to work across the next 2 years to ensure the smooth transition for the Criminal Justice Service.

Engaging with staff, elected members and communities will be key to the success of these initiatives.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

As the Policy Lead for Children and Families, it has been an exciting and busy year. During 2013/14 the service has continued to develop and improve. The Corporate Parenting Board has achieved a number of successes, however, there is still more to do. The most vulnerable children and families in Argyll are supported through the service. We have as responsibility as elected members to ensure they have the best possible service. As the Policy Lead, I undertake the task with enthusiasm and commitment. In 2015/16 the new challenges of Health and Social Care integration will mean more engagement with children and families to make sure we are getting it right.

**Councillor Mary Jean Devon**  
**Policy Lead – Children and Families**  
04 November 2014