

REPORT TO: DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE

REPORT ON: CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEVELOPMENT FUND:
ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND PROPOSALS FOR 2000/2001

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 288-2000

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek approval to deploy the new resources from the Children's Services Development Fund 2000/2001, taking account of the three additional objectives set by the Scottish Executive.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Social Work Committee is asked to:

2.1 Note and agree the contents of this report and in particular to authorise the deployment of the extra resources from the Children's Services Development Fund (2000/2001) in the following way:

2.1.1 To develop and implement a Foster Care Strategy for Dundee with emphasis on expanding skill-based specialist fostering (£100,000)

2.1.2 To plan and develop throughcare and aftercare services for looked after children (£30,000).

2.1.3 To extend the support to vulnerable families with emphasis on preventing family breakdown through making available extra grant assistance to local voluntary organisations (£9,000).

2.2 Instruct the Director of Social Work to bring back a report to Committee on the progress made in improving service delivery to looked after children and vulnerable families through the use of the monies available from the Children's Services Development Fund.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Government has allocated an extra £139,000 to Dundee City Council for 2000/2001 as part of the Children's Services Development Fund. The proposals within this report will be met from that fund. This is the second year of operation of the fund which the Government has indicated will operate for three years as a means of addressing its strategic priorities for Children's Services.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The proposals within this report are in keeping with Agenda 21 objectives.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The proposals within this report will go some way towards equalling the opportunity and promoting the rights of Dundee's most vulnerable children and young people.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Background

In November 1999 the Scottish Executive announced the Children's Services Development Fund and an extra £36.7million for local authorities over the next three years to help improve Children's Services. Some £15million of that total was intended to assist specifically with the implementation of the recommendations arising out of the Children's Safeguards Review (The Kent Report) relating to the welfare of children looked after away from home.

Dundee City Council, as requested by the Scottish Executive, accepted its allocation of monies from the Children's Services Development Fund which amounted to £391,000 in 1999/2000. These resources were required to be directed to three main areas. These can be summarised as promoting community as opposed to residential child care placements, developing children's rights and advocacy services and supporting families to maintain more children at home.

In line with these objectives, a skill-based fostering scheme was developed (the ACE Scheme) as a direct alternative to secure care for some looked after children; a Community Support Team was developed to undertake planned and intensive work with troubled young people to maintain them at home and a new individual advocacy service for looked after children was commissioned from Who Cares? Scotland.

6.2 Children's Services Development Fund 2000/2001

For the second year of the Children's Services Development Fund, the Government has determined that an additional £3.3million will be made available to local authorities through the fund in the 2000/2001 financial year and that it expects each authority to continue to reflect its priority service areas for the use of these monies. In addition however, it wishes work to be taken forward in respect of the following additional objectives:

- To assist the introduction of appropriate IT support for care planning;
- To encourage further work on specialist fostering;
- To encourage the development of throughcare and aftercare services.

6.3 Proposals for 2000/2001

In making recommendations for service developments, the Children's Services Plan has been reviewed to ensure that the planned initiatives in Dundee complement and extend services to meet with national priorities and local need. Progress made in achieving strategic objectives by means of the 1999/2000 projects has also been taken into account in determining our priorities for expenditure in the coming financial year.

6.3.1 Dundee Foster Care Strategy

A locally based family placement is the preferred choice for the majority of children who can no longer live at home. Like other authorities, Dundee experiences difficulties recruiting and retaining carers for children in crisis, some of whom have challenging behaviours and complex care needs.

The need for a more professional foster care service, which links a realistic financial reward with carer's skills and willingness to take on more complex placements, is well recognised. Other local authorities and voluntary fostering agencies are developing professional skill based schemes and there is a real risk experienced carers will move to alternative schemes if they do not feel sufficiently valued and rewarded.

The Children's Services Development Fund is being used to fund a small skill-based fostering scheme in Dundee (ACE), targeted at preventing secure and residential school placements. It is proposed to use the new allocation of monies to extend the principles of skill-based fostering across all of our fostering services.

It is proposed that a new Foster Care Strategy be developed, in consultation with our existing foster carers, which moves our practice towards a service which encompasses the principles of payment of a professional fee to those carers who have the necessary skills and willingness to undertake the tasks required of them. This Strategy will be supported by a comprehensive training programme for all carers.

The monies available under the Children's Services Development Fund 2000/2001 will be used as "bridging" finance to move from the current fees and allowances structure to new "fees for skills-based" payment arrangements. This will include, for example, the recruitment of more ACE foster carers and more emergency foster carers. Detailed proposals on this will be worked up as part of the Foster Care Strategy.

6.3.2 *Developing Throughcare and Aftercare Services*

Local Authorities have a duty to provide "Aftercare" in the form of guidance, advice and assistance, either in kind, or in certain circumstances, in cash, to children formerly "looked after" by Local Authorities. Throughcare is the process by which the Local Authority plans and prepares young people who are looked after for the time when they will cease to be looked after. There is a need to have a seamless transition from throughcare to aftercare for young people. This involves close working agreements with other agencies to provide a wide range of services as the nature and extent of services required will vary with the individual.

The Children's Services Plan identifies the need for aftercare support and assistance to be co-ordinated within departments, between departments and with other organisations. The number of young people supported by aftercare services at this time is 90 and this is provided by the commissioned service of the Carolina House Outreach Team and the independent living workers based in care and assessment teams across Dundee.

The nature of these young people is that a number of them will make different demands on the service at different times over varying periods of time. Research indicates that looked after children will have significantly poorer outcomes in the areas of education, employment and social relationships - the young people requiring aftercare are often the most socially excluded.

The deployment of extra resources from the Children's Services Development Fund will allow us to commission by secondment, or by external contract with a voluntary organisation, a member of staff for the period of one year to plan and develop services in throughcare and aftercare. This development worker would produce an inclusive strategy to put the young person at the centre of the assessment process, ensuring joint working between housing, education, careers and health. The strategy will take into account the numbers of young people who will be requiring a service over the next three years and will identify the specific type of services required from an analysis of current care plans.

The areas which can be included in the strategy are the drafting and implementation of service standards; the development of joint assessments and protocols between housing and education/employment providers; and the design and preparation of reference materials/information for young people leaving care. The development of an inclusive strategy will direct the future planning of the throughcare and aftercare service. It will propose costed options for purchasing specific services and outline opportunities for partnerships which will expand the existing provision, improve quality and offer choice.

6.3.3 Supporting Vulnerable Families

One of the key objectives of the Children's Services Development Fund is that of supporting vulnerable families. It is proposed that £9,000 be allocated for this purpose from the 2000/2001 monies to provide small grant assistance to local voluntary organisations involved in the provision of family support services.

A new grant assistance application process has been adopted by the Social Work Department this year, as reported to the March Social Work Committee. Monies from the Children's Services Development Fund would be used to top-up the department's grant assistance budget. Local organisations providing services to children and families will be invited to make application for these funds. Applications will be assessed on their relative merits and in respect of their fit to the department's strategic aims.

Making available small grant funding of this kind promotes the development of new community initiatives. Such partnerships bring added value. They complement statutory provision and give due emphasis to early intervention and to the prevention of family breakdown.

7.0 MID YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

The Scottish Executive requires local authorities to provide a progress report on their use of the Children's Service Development Fund at the end of September 2000. A report on our achievements in improving service delivery to looked after children and vulnerable families up to that date will be presented to the Social Work Committee.

8.0 CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance and the Director of Support Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

10.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date
