

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK & HEALTH COMMITTEE – 25TH JUNE 2007

REPORT ON: PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES FOR THE PROTECTION OF DUNDEE'S CHILDREN

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 289-2007

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek committee's approval for specific proposals to improve the systems and processes within inter-agency child protection services in Dundee.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee agree:-

2.1 The creation of an expanded multi-agency team dedicated to the child protection task, to include representation from Social Work, Education, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside

2.2 The development of a model of co-location for a multi-agency team

2.3 The establishment of a multi-agency project team to operationalise the proposals

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The cost of these proposals can be met from existing budgets.

4.0 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The proposals in this paper promote further integration and co-location of existing services in order to provide a sustainable improvement in the multi-agency response to some of Dundee's most vulnerable children.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Protecting Dundee's most vulnerable children and supporting their parents will improve their opportunities for participation in the community as active citizens. The appointment to the post of co-ordinator will be in line with equal opportunities policies of Dundee City Council, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Social work and health authorities jointly commissioned a piece of work using a systems thinking approach, to examine capacity problems within the child protection system, particularly within health visiting/public health nursing and within the joint police/social work child protection team and particularly the relationship between these two specific parts of the child protection system.

6.2 The outcome of this work was presented to the child protection committee on 13 June 2006 and the child protection committee decided that a short life working group should be formed to take forward the findings of the whole systems review.

6.3 The main problems and issues identified with the whole systems review can be summarised as follows:

- Different agencies attributed different meanings and definitions of the term "child protection"
- Concerns about children were being mis-directed to the wrong parts of the system. This was described as the wrong work turning up at the wrong door
- Bottlenecks were being created in some parts of the system placing them under increasing pressure, particularly the joint police/social work child protection team
- There were some problems in information sharing between agencies related to issues of confidentiality

6.4 The short life working group proposed to the children and young persons protection committee that a staged approach should be taken in responding to children who may require protection. This staged approach can be summarised as follows:

Stage 1 - a single professional or agency takes action within their own resources to improve matters for the child and protect them where necessary

Stage 2 - if the concern requires the help of others, the professional or agency will arrange for the child or his parents and carer to get the help they need

Stage 3 - where multiple agencies need to be involved with the child, the family or carers, they come together to agree a plan of action

Stage 4 - action to protect the child is carried out by each of the relevant agencies and this work is co-ordinated by a lead professional or agency

Stage 5 - the child, the family and the professionals assess how well the plan is working, review the plan and take corrective action if necessary

6.5 Stages 2 and 3 raise the fundamental systems issues and problems. Two fundamental questions arose:

- what are the circumstances in which a multi-agency response is required to meet the child's needs and
- what are the circumstances in which multi-agency child protection procedures need to be activated as opposed to other forms of multi-agency intervention?

- 6.6 The development of the joint action teams in each secondary school catchment area provides an opportunity to take a more discretionary multi-agency approach to children's difficulties. Crucially they can provide an opportunity to mobilise multi-agency support for children without mobilising the machinery of a formal child protection investigation. It is proposed that the instigation of inter-agency child protection procedures should be founded on the concept of "significant harm" or "risk of significant harm" and a working definition of significant harm is being developed. This will help professionals decide whether there is a need for the activation of child protection procedures or whether these children would best be helped by the co-ordination of professional support through the locality joint action teams.
- 6.7 Where child protection procedures are activated, it is proposed that this be the decision of an expanded and co-located multi-agency child protection team who will be able to quickly share information from within the respective agencies, plan the investigation and propose how the ongoing support for the child and family should be provided. It is also proposed that additional co-ordination capacity is required for this and the related work of linking with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. In order to progress these proposals, a project team has been established with representation from social work, education, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside. A project plan will be produced for the implementation of the operational details of these proposals.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) have been consulted in the preparation of this report. The agencies represented on the Dundee Child and Young Person's Protection Committee have been consulted on these proposals and these agencies have been represented on the short-life working group and the proposed project team. The Integrated Children's Services Strategic Planning Group and the Implementation Management Group have also endorsed these proposals.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Director of Social Work

Date: 15 June 2007