

**REPORT TO:** DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**REPORT ON:** WORKING FOR DUNDEE'S CHILDREN IN NEED – CORPORATE PARENTING

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

**REPORT NO:** 291/2000

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report advises members of the Policy and Resources Committee about the needs of vulnerable children, including those who are looked after by the local authority. It specifically gives details of the responsibilities of those who act as corporate parents in respect of these children and young people.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee agrees to:

- 2.1 adopt a policy framework which will enhance the decision-making and scrutiny by elected members of services for children in need in the City. The framework will have the collective title of "Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need" which is the theme of Dundee City Council's Children's Services plan and will become an integral part of future plans.
- 2.3 delegate responsibility to the Director of Social Work, as Chair of the Strategic Planning Group, to ensure that the corporate parenting responsibilities of the Council are addressed through the Children's Services Planning process, including the development of an Action Plan and the publication of baseline data on children in need.

## **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no additional costs associated with the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

## **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

The emphasis on improving the outcomes for children and young people who are looked after away from home is implicit in this report and the Working Together Framework is aimed at promoting the social inclusion of some of the most vulnerable citizens. This will be achieved by promoting involvement in decision making and enabling everyone to play a full part in society.

## **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

Implementation of the recommendations in this report will ensure that a policy framework exists whereby elected members are well supported in their work to promote the welfare of children in need within the City.

## **6.0 MAIN REPORT**

- 6.1 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 sets out for local authorities : ***"The duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need falls upon the local authority as a whole, and embraces social work services, education, housing and any other relevant services required to safeguard and promote the welfare of such children."***

- 6.2 Corporate parenting emphasises the collective responsibility of the local authority to achieve good parenting for the children in their care.
- 6.3 The Document "Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need – Corporate Parenting (see attached) outlines the needs of vulnerable children, including those who are looked after by the local authority. It specifically gives details of the responsibilities of those who act as corporate parents in respect of these children and young people. It sets out the policy framework to be adopted by Dundee City Council which has the collective title of "Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need." This policy framework will allow those who have the responsibilities of corporate parents to enhance their decision-making and scrutiny roles in respect of children in need in the City.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

Consultation has taken place with the Directors of Education, Housing, Neighbourhood Resources and Development, Leisure and Parks and through the Strategic Planning process with other planning partners in organisations and agencies.

## **8.0 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.

## **9.0 SIGNATURE**

Director of Social Work .....

Date .....

## **WORKING TOGETHER FOR DUNDEE'S CHILDREN IN NEED**

### **CORPORATE PARENTING**

#### **POLICY STATEMENT**

*Dundee City Council is committed to “Working Together for Dundee’s Children in Need”. When carrying out corporate parenting responsibilities the Council will adopt the behaviour of a good parent at all times. It will share collective responsibility for ensuring that children who are looked after are provided with quality experiences and the help they need to maximise their full educational, social and economic potential. It will ensure that work is undertaken in partnership with children, parents and carers and is in the best interest of individual children. The Council will, when carrying out these duties, act as positive advocates for these vulnerable children and will actively challenge instances of less favourable or different treatment.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This document outlines the needs of vulnerable children, including those who are looked after by the local authority. It specifically gives details of the responsibilities of those who act as corporate parents in respect of these children and young people. It sets out the policy framework to be adopted by Dundee City Council which has the collective title of “Working Together for Dundee’s Children in Need”. This policy framework will allow those who have the responsibilities of corporate parents to better carry out their decision-making and scrutiny roles in respect of children in need in the City.

#### **BACKGROUND**

For more than fifty years, the aim of the child care system has been to make the lives of children in need \*\* as normal as possible. For the past twenty years child care policy and practice have focussed on supporting families in the community and reducing the need for children to be looked after away from home. More recently emphasis has been placed on good assessment and care planning for those children and young people who do have to be cared for in public care.

The legislative framework which governs the work with vulnerable children and their families was updated when the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (the Act) was implemented in April 1997. This Act introduced a number of underpinning principles which should govern work with children and their families. This includes the importance of working in partnership with parents. The Act recognises the important part parents play in the lives of their children and for the first time in UK legislation, the Act gives a definition of parental responsibilities and the rights parents have to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities.

As stated in its Children’s Services Plan 1998 - 2001 “Dundee City Council believes that the best place for children to be brought up is within their own families.” In the Plan, we state that the responsibilities and rights for children should be with their parents. The Council, and its planning partners, also confirm their commitment to working in partnership with parents, wherever possible and in the best interests of children.

\*\* Appendix 1 provides the working definition of children in need adopted by Dundee City Council and its planning partners in April 1998

## Why are parents important?

Parents hold together many strands in their children's lives: they care about their safety and their health, their education and their leisure interests, their friendships and their futures. They have continuous knowledge of their children's development. They know about their particular talents and achievements; needs and problems. For children who are looked after, just as for children in settled families, care, health and education are closely linked. If they have someone who makes sure that they have regular health checks, have vaccinations when appropriate and generally looks after their well-being, then they are likely to have better overall health as they grow up.

Parents play an extremely important role in the education of their children. If they are settled and supported they have a greater chance of taking advantage of the educational opportunities on offer. The serious underachievement of children who are without continuous parental support is testimony to this. Committed parents take an active interest in their children's educational progress, attend parents' evenings and sports days; they expect to be consulted and involved if their child has special educational needs. Parental partnership and good home-school links are equally vital for looked after children.

## What happens when children need to be "looked after"?

In some cases children and their families may be in need of the type of support which is provided through compulsory supervision by a social worker. In such cases children are said to be "looked after" at home. In other cases some children and young people may not be able to be looked after safely at home and, for a variety of reasons, they may have to be "looked after" away from home. ***The local authority has specific duties in respect of all children who are looked after.*** In such cases elected members and others are expected to share responsibility for the care of these vulnerable children and to undertake the duties which might be expected of a corporate parent.

## CORPORATE PARENTING

### What is corporate parenting?

***'Corporate parenting' emphasises the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting for children in their care. Once a local authority has taken the profound and difficult decision to remove a child, short-term or long-term, from his or her family, it is the duty of the whole local authority to 'safeguard and promote his or her welfare'. The whole authority includes every other aspect of local authority services.***

In Dundee the range of individuals involved in corporate parenting is diverse and, from the point of view of the child, potentially overwhelming. They include: elected members; parents; senior officers and managers of the Education Authority; Social Work; Neighbourhood Services; Leisure and Parks; Housing Departments; head teachers; social workers; residential social workers and foster carers; teachers; educational psychologists and education support personnel; fostering/family placement managers and a Children's Rights Officer.

The extent of the involvement of these individuals will vary according to the needs and circumstances of the child. The importance of education and in particular the need to support and improve educational progress needs to be clearly recognised by everyone involved. It is essential that the actions and efforts of all those involved come together in such a way that corporate parenting translates into 'good parenting', and that children and young people receive as seamless a service as possible. Lack of co-ordination can dramatically affect the outcomes of children who are looked after.

### **Why are children looked after away from home?**

Children end up being looked after away from home for a variety of reasons. Many will have been affected by distressing and damaging experiences, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Some will be looked after because of the mental or physical illness or death of a parent or because families are unable to provide adequate care for them. The majority of looked after children come from families who experience hardship and are separated from them because of some form of family upheaval or breakdown. Research indicates that in many cases where children need to be looked after alcohol or drug misuse are features of family problems.

### **What does it feel like to be looked after away from home?**

Very few children and young people want to be in care even though they may understand that they cannot live with their family. Despite the legal requirement to find out their wishes and feelings, children and young people often feel that they are not involved in the major decisions which are taken about their lives. Uncertainty about the immediate and long term future is a major worry.

Although some children and young people may feel safer and well cared for in foster care or residential care, they all have to cope with significant losses – of family, friends, and in some cases familiar neighbourhoods. For some the most acute sense of separation is from brothers and sisters who may have remained with their original family. They have a lot of changes to cope with: new carers, new surroundings and new ways of doing things, and perhaps no-one who is familiar to them.

Many children experience numerous and sometimes unplanned moves of home. Each move may also mean a change of school. A confident and competent adult would need considerable personal resources and robust support networks to cope with what children who are looked after too often experience.

## **What are the barriers to successful outcomes for children and young people?**

National research findings of young people's accounts of their care experiences throw a very harsh light on some of the services designed to meet their needs. For them the biggest barrier to succeeding remains one of public and professional attitudes. Some key factors which act as barriers to success have been identified in research, practice and inspection processes. These may include the low expectations of the adults involved, the many moves of placement often experienced by the children and young people and unco-ordinated care planning. In practice these mean:

### *Low expectations of the adults involved*

- ☐ those responsible for the day-to-day care of children who are looked after do not place sufficient value on education;
- ☐ schools and carers do not act quickly and sensitively enough to help pupils who are looked after catch up when their education is disrupted;
- ☐ schools and carers display lower expectations of children who are looked after, which can contribute to under achievement and failure; and
- ☐ pupils who are looked after are over-represented amongst pupils excluded from school;

### *Many moves of placement*

- ☐ children experience numerous, and often unplanned, moves of home;
- ☐ they experience unnecessary moves of school or are out of school for prolonged periods;
- ☐ making and sustaining relationships with peers can be particularly difficult due to a lack of continuity of care and schooling;
- ☐ lack of continuity in care providers and teachers means that looked after children cannot rely upon familiar adults who they trust to advocate for their needs; and
- ☐ low self-esteem and perhaps a justifiable mistrust of adults can act as a barrier to enjoyment of schooling and educational success.

### *Unco-ordinated care planning*

- ☐ the special education needs of some children who are looked after may not be identified or addressed;
- ☐ Social Work and Education Departments, individual schools, and health professionals do not gather and share information that would help them to plan most effectively; and
- ☐ unnecessary case transfers between social workers which hinder achieving continuity in care.

## **Making Education a Priority**

Education matters to all children and young people, including those in the care of local authorities. It is their entitlement. School is an important part of everyday life for them: somewhere to develop self-confidence and skills, to receive praise and encouragement, to learn about and build relationships, and to achieve.

Valuing and supporting the education of children in public care is the single most important contribution a corporate parent can make to their lives, because it is about investing in and caring about their future, and recognising that education is their passport to better chances in life.

## **Inclusion – changing attitudes**

Working within available resources, corporate parents need to ensure that children who are looked after have equal access to service provision and to opportunities. They need to make sure that the needs of individual children are sensitively and promptly assessed and met so that they can take advantage of those opportunities.

Children who are looked after report many instances of different treatment and 'exclusion', bullying and name calling and intrusive questioning about their home circumstances.

Corporate parents need to be confident that local policies act in the best interest of children who are looked after and do not single them out or discriminate against them in any way because they do not live at home with their birth families. Where a parental advocate is needed to access any service or support, the local authority as corporate parent, must ensure that all children in their care have an effective champion.

All those involved in corporate parenting are expected to promote achievement and actively challenge instances of less favourable or different treatment.

## **Achieving continuity and stability**

Continuity and stability are known to promote success for children in public care. There is a clear relationship between schooling difficulties and placement breakdown: either may bring about the other. Supporting schooling as a central part of care planning is essential to ensure a successful placement.

Repeated changes of school, and of placement, are damaging, not only because of the disruption they cause, but because each change represents another ending. Some young people experience the stress of unwanted family breakdown and go on to experience the termination of placements which they do not want to end. Some find it difficult to relate to new carers or to trust them, and they and their carers do not obtain the support they need in time to prevent another crisis and eventual breakdown.

The overall message many young people receive is that they are not important enough for people to want to make things work for them, and that it is acceptable to break up relationships. As young adults they need the skills to make and sustain relationships and to engage in work. Some will become young parents and for them to be able to provide stability in their lives they need to experience it.

## **High expectations – raising standards**

Research has identified that those involved in corporate parenting have had lower aspirations for, and expectations of children who are looked after in terms of attainment, behaviour and a sense of achievement. This stemmed from well intentioned assumptions that children who have endured traumatic events in their lives simply cannot take advantage of learning opportunities. The danger of according education a low priority in care planning is well documented.

Local authorities must have higher expectations in their role of corporate parents. This must translate into consistently high expectations on the part of all those with day-to-day contact with children who are looked after. These high expectations need to translate into action. It is about the mutual high expectations of all those involved in corporate parenting, so that the shared objective of improving the outcomes for children is achieved.

## **Early intervention – priority action**

Early intervention can be preventative. Avoiding delay and taking positive action quickly should be a shared objective of all involved in corporate parenting. The status of a child who is looked after should not mean that he/she is treated less favourably or that assumptions are made about his/her needs or behaviour. It should, however, act as a trigger for priority action by all involved in providing support services.

## **Listening to children**

Much of what is now known about the impact of care upon life outcomes, comes from young people who have experienced the care system. They are the ones who know what it feels like to be looked after away from home. Like other children they also know what interests, engages and motivates them, what undermines their motivation and they have their own opinions on matters affecting their lives.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child require those with responsibility for children to ascertain their wishes and feelings. Good parents listen to and communicate with their children. This means that local authorities need to determine how they are to listen and give weight to the views of children and young people to help them plan and deliver services.

## **EFFECTIVE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN AGENCIES**

### **Policies, structures and people**

One of the main implications of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is the need for local authorities to adopt a strategic planning approach in order to improve the quality of services and use of available resources to meet the needs of children. Although the Social Work Department undertakes a major role in the planning, development and delivery of services, their effectiveness in addressing the needs of vulnerable children and their families also depends on the contributions of other departments and agencies.

In order to ensure co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration in the development and delivery of services to children in need, including those who are looked after, and their families, the Director of Social Work chairs a Strategic Planning Group. This involves staff from the Education, Social Work, Housing, Leisure and Parks, and Neighbourhood Resources and Development Departments; Support Services and Corporate Planning; Tayside Police; the Children's Reporter and the Chairperson of the Children's Panel as well as representatives from Tayside Health Board, the NHS Trusts and Dundee Local Health Care Co-operative.

The Strategic Planning Group ensures that the Council is able to meet its statutory requirement to produce a Children's Services Plan every three years, with annual updates. Equally importantly the members ensure that the strategic objectives are met by monitoring progress on delivery against intended actions. All this activity, including the development and implementation of strategies, policies and services takes place under a collective commitment to "*Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need.*"



## WHAT ELECTED MEMBERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN IN NEED

In a press release on 12 January, 2000, about improving the lives of children who are looked after, the Minister for Children and Education concluded:

*"I want every looked-after child to have the best possible start in life, equal access to high quality support and services and every opportunity to realise their full educational, social and economic potential, because every child matters. Driving up standards for these young people must be at the heart of our social inclusion and social justice policies and targets."*

The Minister also referred to a consultation on a "Strategic Framework for Children's Services" which will introduce tighter performance measures against which the effectiveness of key services for vulnerable children can be assessed. He indicated that local authorities will be expected to report on these measures as part of their Children's Services Plans. He also suggested that challenging negative attitudes about young people in public care is critical to changing their experiences and improving outcomes.

It is clear that all elected members with decision-taking or scrutiny responsibilities should have information which will tell them about the services provided to children in need, including those who are looked after by the local authority.

### Baseline Data

Through the Children's Services Planning process regular reports will be made available giving basic activity and cost data, and providing answers to the following questions:

#### Children In Need

- How many children in need are there in your community?
- What is that figure based on?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What services are provided and how much is spent on them?
- What preventive action is your authority taking to ensure children in need, including children with and affected by disabilities, are not involved in offending behaviour?

#### Child Protection

- How many children are on the child protection register?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What percentages are re-registrations?
- How long do children spend on the register?
- How much staff time is spent on child protection work, what does this cost and what are the outcomes?
- Have all the children on the child protection register been allocated a social worker?
- How many children attend pre-school provision?

### Looked After children

- How many children are looked after away from home by your council?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What type of placement are they in – foster care, residential homes or secure units?
- How many are looked after outwith the authority in non-relative placements?
- How much is your council spending on services for children who are looked after away from home?
- Do all your looked after children have an allocated social worker?
- How many placement moves have children had?
- How many attend school regularly and how many are excluded from school?
- What progress are they making and what are their examination results?
- How many children run away or otherwise go missing from residential care and foster care?
- How many children have a record of a special educational need?
- How many children are involved in offending behaviour?
- What action is your authority taking in partnership with other agencies to reduce this?
- How many children attend pre-school provision?
- How many children are adopted?

### Care Leavers

- How many young people leave care at the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and where do they go to live?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- How many young people who left care after the age of 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person?
- What sort of progress do young people make after they leave care?
- How much is spent on after care services, including direct financial assistance to care leavers?

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **CHILDREN IN NEED**

Dundee City Council has a duty to provide services for children in need and additional responsibilities to assess the need for and provide services for children with, and affected by disabilities. The emphasis is to promote the upbringing of children within their own families by providing a range and level of service appropriate to the child's needs.

Entitlement to such services is prioritised on the basis of a comprehensive assessment of the child's needs, often involving more than one agency. The nature and level of services provided is determined by the outcome of the assessment and is linked to available resources.

For the purposes of planning and providing services within Dundee City the following working interpretation of groups of children in need defines the basis for determining eligibility to relevant services.

#### **Children who are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development**

This group includes children who are disadvantaged by their social, economic or environmental situation, and therefore, focuses on child welfare rather than child protection. It may include those children in need of preventative services such as children of vulnerable young parents, children of refugees, children whose parents are on low income, children who live in unsuitable housing or are homeless. Not all such children will require services as they may have appropriate support from extended family members or within their local community.

This group also includes children who have developmental delay and those who are failing to thrive.

#### **Children whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired**

The group includes children who require more intensive services, which may be supportive or protective rather than preventative. They are:

- ✓ children who have been or are at risk of being abused (including physical, sexual and emotional abuse) or who have been, or are at risk of being neglected;
- ✓ children who have been, or who are being, or who may require to be looked after by the local authority;
- ✓ children at risk of becoming involved, or who are involved in offending behaviour;
- ✓ children who may be adversely affected by serious family difficulties, including domestic violence;
- ✓ children whose moral development may be adversely affected;
- ✓ children who have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted;
- ✓ children who misuse drugs/alcohol or substances;
- ✓ children whose educational development is suffering and who may be excluded from schools;
- ✓ children who have significant emotional, social or behavioural problems.

### **Children with a disability**

The Act requires that services provided by the local authority shall be designed to minimise the effect of disability on any disabled child, and to give him or her the opportunity to lead a life which is as normal as possible. Guidance defines disabled as mental or physical impairment which has a substantial and adverse long term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

This group includes:

- ✓ children with physical disabilities;
- ✓ children with sensory impairment;
- ✓ children with learning difficulties;
- ✓ children who have mental health problems;
- ✓ children with HIV or AIDS;
- ✓ children with health related problems.

### **Children affected adversely by the disability of any other person in their family**

The child population referred to in this group is difficult to identify. To do so accurately requires agencies to look at the needs of the family as a whole and not just those of the person with a disability.

This population may include:

- ✓ children adversely affected by living in the same household as someone (parents or siblings) with physical disabilities or illness, sensory impairment, learning difficulties, or mental health problems;
- ✓ children who are carers for relatives;
- ✓ children whose parents misuse drugs, alcohol or substances;
- ✓ children who are affected by HIV and AIDS.