

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 8TH DECEMBER 2008

REPORT ON: ROLE OF THE CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER

REPORT BY: THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 617-2008

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report seeks committee approval of a draft response on guidance issued by the Scottish Government in relation to the role of the Chief Social Work Officer. The response date for this consultation is 19th December 2008.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members of the Committee:

2.1 Note the content of the draft response on the 'Consultation on Guidance on the Role of the Chief Social Work Officer.

2.2 Instruct the Chief Executive to forward this response to the Scottish Government on behalf of Dundee City Council by the due date of 19th December 2008.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Background

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (the Act) contains the requirement for every local authority to appoint a professionally qualified Chief Social Work Officer. The particular qualifications are set down in regulations.

Changing Lives, the Report of the 21st Century Review, set out a vision for the future for social work services in Scotland. A key recommendation was the need for a new organisational approach to managing risk, which ensures the delivery of safe, effective and innovative practice in social work services. In particular, Changing Lives recommended the strengthening of the governance and leadership roles of the Chief Social Work Officer as contained within Section 3 of the Act.

The guidance has been drafted by the Changing Lives Practice Governance Group, which is one of the five change groups that were set up following the publication of Changing Lives.

It is anticipated that the guidance on the role of the Chief Social Work Officer:

- a. will assist local authorities in the discharge of their social work responsibilities;
- b. will help local authorities maximise the added value of the Chief Social Work Officer role - both at a corporate and professional level;
- c. acknowledges that local authorities operate very different management and organisational structures;
- d. provides advice on how best to locate the Chief Social Work Officer role within operational structures to maximise its effectiveness; and
- e. is sufficiently generic to remain relevant in the event of future management or organisational change.

The consultation paper recommends clarification of the role and function; competencies, scope and responsibilities; and accountability and reporting arrangements, and is designed to assist local authorities to maximise the added value of the CSWO as well as providing advice on how best to locate the role within the variety of operational structures that exist across Scotland.

4.2 Response on Behalf of Dundee City Council

In summary this guidance is welcomed and the Principles, Requirements and Guidance contained are seen to enhance the recognition of social work and social care as vital contributors to local authority service development and delivery.

However, it is suggested that the document could be stronger about the position of social work as a profession and also about the importance of the key leadership role of Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) within local authorities. The opportunity provided by the development of this guidance should be taken to emphasise the unique contribution made by social work and the value it adds to multi-agency working. The guidance needs to emphasise the importance of the CSWO being located within any council at a level of seniority which empowers the post holder to ensure the delivery of the principles, values, and standards. The post holder should also be at a sufficiently senior position to influence strategies both internal and external to the local authority. It is also suggested that some of the responsibilities, standards and values, as described, could be strengthened - many of the functions are heavily weighted towards HR responsibilities and, as such, might be seen not to require a Social Work qualification. We would suggest that there needs to be more of an emphasis on the unique contribution of social work, including in areas of wider social responsibilities, so that the role of the Chief Social Work Officer in influencing change can be highlighted.

In addition to a general summary, the response contains suggestions about changes to the content and wording of the draft guidance.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

There are no major issues.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Head of Finance have been consulted in preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Alex Stephen
Chief Executive

Date: 19th November 2008

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the guidance document on the role of the Chief Social Work Officer.

In Summary:

In summary we welcome this guidance and see the Principles, Requirements and Guidance contained as enhancing the recognition of social work and social care as vital contributors to local authority service development and delivery.

We do, however, think that the document could be stronger about the position of social work as a profession and also about the importance of the key leadership role of Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). We think that the opportunity provided by the development of this guidance should be taken to emphasise the unique contribution made by social work and how it adds value to multi-agency working. The guidance needs to emphasise the importance of the CSWO being located within any council at a level of seniority which empowers him/her to ensure the delivery of the principles, values, and standards. The post holder should also be at a sufficiently senior position to influence strategies both internal and external to the local authority. We think that some of the responsibilities, standards and values, as described, could be strengthened - many of the functions are heavily weighted towards HR responsibilities and, as such, might be seen not to require a Social Work qualification. We would suggest that there needs to be more of an emphasis on the unique contribution of social work, including in areas of wider social responsibilities so that the role of the Chief Social Work Officer in influencing change can be highlighted.

Specific Comments

Paragraph 4

We suggest rewording to read "This requires a confident, competent, **motivated** and valued social care work force,". It is argued that the CSWO has a key role in the development and leadership of such a 'motivated' workforce.

We agree that the increased level of delivery of social work services from within multi-agency partnerships, or from integrated service delivery arrangements, does require clarity of accountability and professional leadership. It is not clear that the guidance, as it stands, fully addresses this requirement.

Paragraph 6

We recognise the strength of having the requirement to appoint a qualified social worker to the post of CSWO enshrined in statute.

Paragraph 8

While "the provision of effective professional advice to local authorities" may well be the overall key objective of the CSWO post, it is argued that without a level of responsibility for the development and delivery of these services the post holder cannot be seen to be accountable or to provide effective leadership. The CSWO also has a key role in ensuring the delivery of the 21st "Changing Lives" improvement programme for social work and for driving continuous improvement.

Paragraph 11

While it also recognised that emphasis is being put quite rightly on role and function rather than status or structure, it is argued that the CSWO must be a key member of senior management team(s) in order to be enabled to contribute effectively to corporate leadership agendas.

It is also argued that the CSWO is more than a professional 'adviser'. The post holder is a key decision-maker and should have a clear and accountable role in ensuring the protection of people including adults and children at risk, and in the provision of mental health services.

Paragraph 13

We strongly agree with the wording of this paragraph.

Paragraph 13.3 Responsibility for values and standards

It is suggested that the CSWO should promote rather than establish social work values and standards - these already exist and are defined in various sources.

In addition to ensuring that all social workers meet the requirements of the SSSC code of practice, it is suggested that the CSWO would also have a role in ensuring that social services employers meet the SSSC code of conduct for employers.

There is a strong emphasis on HR duties in the content of this paragraph. Little is reflected from the 'Changing Lives' agenda other than personalisation. This may be implicit in the list provided but it is suggested that the role would be strengthened by more explicit inclusions about the role of social work and, therefore, the CSWO. It is also suggested that carers' needs should be mentioned as well as those of service users.

It is suggested that the annual report to the local authority should contain strengths, areas for improvement and an agreed plan of action, the progression of which is the responsibility of the CSWO.

More could be said in Paragraph 13.3. (g) about the role of the CSWO in relation to continuous professional development and practice learning, both critical to the development of the social services workforce.

Paragraph 13.4 Access

The wording of this section is thought to be limiting. We would suggest that the CSWO has much more to offer to corporate agendas and should be recognised as a valuable corporate manager to whom others would want 'access'.

Paragraph 13.5 Leadership responsibilities

This list of leadership responsibilities includes many which we would expect of leaders throughout our Social Work Department in Dundee. It is suggested that the content is strengthened in respect of those expected of the CSWO - the ultimate 'professional' leader.

It is suggested that in addition to supporting and contributing to evidence based decision-making the CSWO should also promote and contribute to evidence based practice.

Paragraph 14 Accountability and Reporting Arrangements

Due to the importance of the CSWO role in providing advice and in decision-making, it is essential that this role is covered during any absence of the CSWO. Local authorities will have to ensure that their accountability and reporting arrangements address this.

We agree that local authorities will have to consider the various elements contained in this list. However, we suggest that the significant specialist skills, knowledge and expertise which the Chief Social Work Officer will bring to corporate agendas is not adequately reflected. If the position of the CSWO is not effectively strengthened then there is a danger that the needs of vulnerable citizens may not be adequately recognised or reflected in corporate agendas or budgets. It is essential that the Chief Executive and elected members have access to the CSWO in order to gain professional advice or elicit specific information.

Paragraph 14 (e) refers to relationships with operational managers. It is suggested that consideration needs to be given to the CSWO's relationship with **all** managers - both within the local authority and in planning and service delivery partnerships.