

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 28TH MARCH 2011**

**REPORT ON: ENGAGING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK**

**REPORT NO: 160 - 2011**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report has been prepared to:

- 1.1 Propose ways in which children, young people and their families may be supported to be more effectively engaged in child protection processes.
- 1.2 Propose how children, young people and their families might be engaged in the development of care and protection policies and processes.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee agree that:

- 2.1 A Care and Protection Engagement Officer post is created to:
  - (a) support children and young people through the child protection process enabling them to express their views, with the aim of improving outcomes and service delivery
  - (b) offer guidance and support to practitioners on how to best engage children, young people and their families in the child protection process with the aim of improving outcomes and service delivery
- 2.2 The Care and Protection Engagement Officer reports quarterly to the CYPPC and the Chief Officer Group.
- 2.3 The Care and Protection Engagement Officer has a Strategic contribution to make to self-evaluation through his/her role in enabling children, young people and families to express their views about their experience of care and protection processes and procedures in Dundee.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The costs of the engagement officer post will be £38,000 per annum and will be funded from monies allocated to the Social Work Department for Child Protection.

### **4.0 MAIN TEXT**

#### **4.1 Background**

Article 12 of the UNCRC recognises the right of children and young people to express their views in decisions that affect their lives. In the child protection process, decision making can have a profound impact on the lives of children, young people and their families. It follows, therefore, that listening to their views in

such an important forum underpins a commitment to human rights. It assists accurate, proportionate and protective decision making while minimising the anxiety, confusion and distress that often characterises child protection proceedings.

Supporting children, young people and families to engage in any system can be a challenging task and it is certainly time consuming if it is to be done in a meaningful way. The support task involves a unique perspective which should bring a measure of independence from operational duties. For the engagement of children, young people and families to be meaningful and effective, there is a need to develop a clear engagement strategy and to build the capacity of those involved to be able to engage children, young people and families effectively in all aspects of care and protection processes and as a result effecting systems change.

The development of an engagement strategy for the CYPPC should start with an assessment of the opportunities for engagement that already exist and a critique of the quality of those opportunities and where the potential for development lies. The key indicators in this assessment will be the extent to which children, young people and families have influenced decisions and the extent to which they have been able to influence changes to policy and practice.

There are two dimensions to be considered:

- 1 The need to find effective ways to engage children, young people and families in the processes and procedures where decisions about their lives are taken.
- 2 The need to find effective ways to engage children, young people and families in proposed developments in Care and Protection policy and procedures.

We need to ensure that children, young people and families are supported to understand and participate in every stage of the process. We need to ensure that care and protection processes and procedures are carefully evaluated to facilitate professional practice development and continual improvement of the service. There would be an opportunity for this worker to make a considerable contribution to the overall self-evaluation methodology.

There is a clear opportunity to demonstrate a true commitment to Article 12 of the UNCRC and lead the way in terms of best practice in Scotland. More importantly, children, young people and families will have opportunities to contribute to decisions about their lives and assist us to develop professional practice and improve the overall service.

## 4.2 **Underpinning Principles**

- 4.2.1 The best interest of the child will be the guiding factor.
- 4.2.2 The Integrated Children's Services Engagement Framework describes the values, principles and quality standards that underpin engagement of children, young people and their families.
- 4.2.3 There will be a presumption of full engagement unless the child, young person or family indicates otherwise.
- 4.2.4 It is the responsibility of professionals to ensure barriers to participation are removed.
- 4.2.5 Professional staff will be familiar with Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC.

4.2.6 Level of support given will be determined in part, and where possible, by the wishes of the children who are to be supported.

### 4.3 **Key Tasks**

The Engagement Officer will be required to undertake the following key tasks:

4.3.1 Provide a casework service which allows direct interaction with children, young people and their families. This position to be reviewed after one year.

4.3.2 Develop a participation strategy to establish the most effective system for including children and young people in the process.

4.3.3 Work directly with children and young people to ascertain their views and assess the level to which the child or young person can participate in the CPCC agreeing with the child or young person what supports are necessary.

4.3.4 Develop a range of creative participatory methods with children and young people to prepare them for full participation in the process.

4.3.5 Develop evaluation instruments for capturing children and young people's views in accordance with age and stage of development.

4.3.6 Contribute to capacity building opportunities for professional colleagues to ensure that the opportunities for engagement and best practice in effective engagement of children, young people and their families are embedded in day to day practice.

4.3.7 Monitor the impact of the engagement strategy on decisions taken and policy changes.

4.3.8 Scrutinise the data derived from self-evaluation activity carried out following child care and protection procedures and processes for engagement related data and report the findings to the Scrutiny sub group of the CYPPC.

4.3.9 Prepare a quarterly report to be included in the dataset for presentation to the CYPPC and the Chief Officers Group.

### 4.4 **Governance**

The post will be located within the voluntary sector and subject to the voluntary agency's terms, conditions and management structure. This provides a further opportunity to enhance partnership working and to ensure the most effective use of resources whilst bolstering the position of the worker to deliver the best possible service to children and young people.

The pressing priority in setting up this post must be that professional practice is embedded in a rights perspective. The Children's Rights Officer therefore, should be the principal working contact. Along with the Who Cares? Scotland worker and the Children's Rights Officer, the post holder would form part of the Children's Rights and Independent Advocacy Services.

The Engagement Officer will work closely with the Children's Rights Service to establish professional support mechanisms, consistency of practice and a common approach that is informed by a rights perspective.

Integrating the post within the Children's Rights Service provides a number of benefits by pooling resources and expertise. This can be achieved without eroding the independent nature of the post or the employing agency's right to manage within their existing structures. The integration will be practical as well as philosophical and be achieved by:

- 1 The Children's Rights Officer will offer professional consultation with the Engagement Officer.
- 2 The Engagement Officer will have access to the full resources of the Children's Rights Service.
- 3 The Children's Rights Officer will be the access point for the Engagement Officer to the client information system.
- 4 The Engagement Officer will share office space with the Children's Rights Officer.
- 5 Data and information from the new service will inform part of the Children's Rights Service annual report.
- 6 Opportunities will be provided to contribute to a national rights discourse through participation in national networks.
- 7 The Engagement Officer will sit on the ICS Communication & Engagement Sub group.

#### 4.5 **Conclusion**

The need for a dedicated post to better engage children, young people and families in all aspects of the child protection process and build capacity in professionals to do likewise has been outlined. The opportunities to make a significant contribution to continual service improvement and self-evaluation have been noted. Furthermore, it is noted that this is an opportunity to be innovative and lead the field as there is no dedicated service in Scotland that supports and promotes effective engagement in the way that is proposed.

The post should be an integral part of the Children's Rights and Independent Advocacy Service. This will ensure that support and expertise in the Children's Rights field will inform and strengthen the status and professional standing of the post.

There is a clear need to enable children, young people and families to engage more effectively in a complex and often distressing process. Helping them understand and contribute helps professionals to do the same. Finally, supporting and including children and young people in this way is a demonstration of our commitment to children's rights as recognised by the UNCRC.

It is intended to explore independent evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of this post through partnership work with the University of Dundee.

#### 5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in relation to sustainability, strategic environmental assessment, anti-poverty, equality impact assessment and risk management.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>.

**6.0 CONSULTATIONS**

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

**7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 Equality Impact Assessment.

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**Date:** 17th March 2011