

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Social Work Committee - 21 February 2005

**REPORT ON:** Review of 2001 Foster Care Strategy

**REPORT BY:** Director of Social Work

**REPORT NO:** 107 - 2005

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report provides members with details of the Review of Dundee's Foster Care Service undertaken by the Independent Consultant, Dr Marjut Kosonen. The report gives proposals for the future development of the Service. Copies of the consultant's report have been passed to each of the group secretaries and are available to view in the member's lounge.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:

2.1 Acknowledge the dedicated work undertaken by Dundee Foster Carers in the complex and challenging task of looking after children in need.

2.2 To note the achievements made by the Dundee Family Placement Service highlighted in para. 6.4 and as commended by the Consultant.

2.3 Approve the contents of "Dundee City Council, A Review of Foster Care Service, October 2004 Report" prepared by Dr Marjut Kosonen, Independent Social Work Consultant.

2.4 Instruct the Director of Social Work to bring a further report to committee outlining an action plan to progress the recommendations of the Review noting those which can be achieved within existing budget provision and those recommendations which will be progressed when future funding is available.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 Full provision for the current Foster Care Service is made within the Social Work Department's Revenue budget.

3.2 Dundee City Council's Social Work Department undertook a Financial Review of the Family Placement Service. The project set out the various methods open to the Council for the provision of this service, identified the relevant costs, analysed and verified the expenditure incurred and concluded that the full cost was £3,258,299 in the financial year 2003/2004.

3.3 This financial review concluded that the Family Placement Service should continue to be provided under the current method of provision in the short-term. The report noted that in the light of placement numbers and budgetary pressures, a short-fall in funding may be anticipated and that in the longer term, alternative methods of provision such as part in-house, part external, on a block contract basis should be further explored.

3.4 The Scottish Executive recently announced its intention of investing an additional £12 million in the fostering service in Scotland. Dundee's allocation of this funding, when it is confirmed, should allow some service development to take place.

#### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Our current Foster Care Service is in line with the principles of Agenda 21 in that efforts are made wherever possible to meet the needs of children locally and for their social, education and health needs to be promoted within a family setting.

#### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Foster Care Service recognises and values diversity and promotes the principles of equal opportunities.

#### **6.0 MAIN TEXT**

6.1 In March 2001, the Social Work Committee approved the content of Dundee City Council Social Work Department's Foster Care Strategy and instructed the Director of Social Work to formally review the progress of the strategy in 3 years.

6.2 Dr Marjut Kosonen, Independent Social Work Consultant undertook the Review on behalf of Dundee City Council. The Review was based on information from a variety of sources including research findings; statistical information; consultation with foster carers and family placement staff; analysis of policy documents and benchmarking with other agencies.

6.3 Since the Foster Care Strategy of 2001, the Review noted that Dundee Family Placement Service had faced some very challenging times, mainly related to:

- The greater number of children requiring accommodation. There are currently 139 children in Dundee foster placements compared with 119 in 2001. As the number of full time foster care households has stayed mainly the same at around 75 over the 3-year period, there are now more children in many of our family placements.
- Increasingly complex needs of children requiring placements. There are currently children and young people in foster placements in Dundee who 3 years ago would not have been placed.
- A shortage of foster carers. A recent survey by The Fostering Network identified a shortfall of 700 carers across Scotland. In Dundee, our successful recruitment strategies have enabled us to 'recruit to replace' i.e. as carers leave, we have found new carers to replace them. There has however been no increase to the overall number of foster carers in Dundee, leading to existing carers being asked to take additional placements.
- The growth of Independent Sector Provision. Independent Fostering Agencies offer carers more favourable fees and conditions of service and across Scotland many Local Authority foster carers have moved to work for independent providers. In Dundee four experienced carers so far have transferred to the Independent Sector and more may follow.
- Shortage of qualified Social Workers to undertake work with the children and progress their care plans.
- Regulation of Care. Dundee's Family Placement Service is registered with the Care Commission and needs to meet the required standards.

6.4 The Review commended Dundee Family Placement Service on some of its achievements over the last 3 years:

- Successfully implementing a payment for skills structure and developing a comprehensive training strategy for carers.
- Continuing to shift the balance of care in Dundee to ensure more children are looked after in Family Placements rather than Residential Care.
- Increasing the proportion of carers living in public housing areas of the city.
- Successfully retaining carers for longer than the national average of 7 years.
- Successfully establishing the Alternative Community Experience for Young People Scheme (ACE) to provide placements for some very challenging young people.

6.5 The Review makes some service improvement recommendations, relating to management information; measuring unmet need; reviewing some aspects of process and policy and joint training with Social Workers. These recommendations will be progressed over 2005.

6.6 The main review recommendations in terms of the future development of Dundee's Fostering Service are identified as being:

- To increase the size of foster care provision in Dundee. The Review found that Dundee's Family Placement Service was already providing placements in excess of capacity. Future predicted increases in the number of children requiring accommodation cannot be met within current provision.
- Improve conditions of service for Foster Carers, particularly given the very competitive fees now being paid by other Fostering Agencies.
- Improve Out of Hours provision for foster carers, recognising that the most effective support is provided by dedicated Family Placement Staff.
- Given the complexity of need of children in Dundee foster placements, improve the support and therapeutic services available for them.
- Enhance the current Link Carer Scheme with a view to placing and supporting more children with relatives.

It is hoped Dundee's allocation of the £12 million investment in fostering will enable some progress to be made in respect of the recommendations.

6.7 An additional Review recommendation was that Dundee City Council Social Work Department explore further the staffing model for Dundee Family Placement Service. Given the national shortage of qualified and experienced Social Workers and the broad range of skills required within a Family Placement Service, some fostering agencies have withdrawn the requirement for all staff to be Social Work qualified. Staff from non-Social Work backgrounds have been employed to undertake recruitment and marketing tasks, some elements of carer support and therapeutic work with children. It is planned to undertake a staffing review over the next 6 months to explore whether any staffing changes are desirable.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Depute Chief Executive (Finance) were consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

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Director of Social Work

Date: 11 February 2005