

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee - 21 February 2005

REPORT ON: Getting our Priorities Right for Children Affected by Substance Misuse in Dundee - A Protocol for all Agencies

REPORT BY: Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 108 - 2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report informs members of the development of a multi agency Protocol for working with children or families affected by substance misuse in Dundee. It also seeks approval for the adoption of the Protocol "Getting our Priorities Right for Children Affected by Substance Misuse in Dundee - A Protocol for all Agencies as part of a framework of shared protocols, policies and procedures agreed by agencies in the City who work with families in which parents have substance misuse problems. A copy of the Protocol has been passed to each of the group secretaries and is available in the members' lounge.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee: -

- 2.1 Notes the content of the report.
- 2.2 Notes and approves the content of the joint Protocol "Getting Our Priorities Right for Children Affected by Substance Misuse in Dundee", which will be used by all agencies working with children and families affected by substance misuse in Dundee.
- 2.2 To note that the Scottish Executive holds the work undertaken by the Social Work Department, in addressing the needs of many parents who misuse substances, in high regard.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The principles which underpin the Protocol are aimed at improving the quality of joint working among agencies involved in assessing and addressing the needs of children affected by substance misuse. The impact of effective integrated working will improve the quality of life of the children whose parents are involved in substance misuse.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The principles defined in this protocol should apply to the work carried out by all agencies in Dundee who work with families in which parents misuse substances. The principles mean

that, even where the agency's focus is on the parent's problems, the needs of their children will be assessed and addressed.

The principles mean that:

- the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration;
- every child has a right to be treated as an individual;
- every child who can form a view on matters affecting his or her has the right to express those views if she/he wishes; and
- every child has the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Dundee City Council Social Work Department, working jointly with other service providers, addresses the needs of many children whose parents misuse substances. There is a growing level of substance misuse among young parents in the City and this is reflected in the increasing number of children on the child protection register who have been neglected or are at risk whose parents misuse substances.

In 2003 the Scottish Executive published Good Practice Guidance for working with Children and Families Affected by Substance Misuse entitled "Getting Our Priorities Right". The document set out national guidance for all relevant agencies to assist them to assess the needs of children of substance misusing parents, and to provide services to safeguard and promote their welfare.

In introducing the guidance the Scottish Executive stated "The guidance is intended to enable agencies to help children in such circumstances to achieve their potential. It provides a way forward for agencies to work together to change things for the better and prevent substance misuse destroying the lives of more children."

"Getting Our Priorities Right" also encouraged local Drug and Alcohol Action Teams to work closely with their local Child Protection Committees to put in place joint policies and procedures for addressing the needs of children in these families. The joint work undertaken by the two committees was acknowledged recently by the Scottish Executive in their feedback on the report of Child Protection as a model of good practice.

6.2 Main Text

'Getting Our Priorities Right For Children Affected by Substance Misuse in Dundee' has been developed in consultation with members of Dundee Drug and Alcohol Team, (DDAAT), Dundee Children and Young Persons' Protection Committee, the Children Services Executive Group and the Child Health Strategy Group.

The Protocol contributes to a framework of joint protocols, policies and procedures agreed by agencies in Dundee who work with families in which parents have substance misuse problems. This framework also includes interagency guidelines on child protection and a protocol for assessing and addressing the needs of unborn babies of substance misusing mothers.

The protocol:

- defines the problem of substance misuse;
- explores the impact of parental substance misuse on their children;
- helps agency staff to decide when children need help;
- describes the process involved in assessing the needs of children, young people and their families;
- promotes the importance and features of effective partnership working; and
- provides guidance on how agencies should share information when children may be at risk.

The Protocol defines expectations as staff working in alcohol and drug related agencies and in child welfare services working with parents who use alcohol or drugs, either illegally or to excess.

Staff are expected to be equipped to provide information and advice to parents about the possible impact of their substance misuse on dependant children, alongside other information and advice about alcohol/drugs and their effects. Parents should always be helped to explore how substance misuse may affect their ability to carry out their childcare responsibilities and to safely parent their children. It reminds all agencies that they have a part to play in helping to identify problems at an early stage.

"All agencies in contact with children and families have a responsibility to act if they become worried about a child's welfare or a parent's ability to care for the child safely and adequately. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. If a child is at risk this must override concerns about the parent's wishes or welfare."

- 6.3 Once adopted the Protocol will be widely distributed and will form the foundation of extensive multi-agency training and staff development. It will also generate relevant inter-agency procedures. These will define the specific roles and responsibilities of local agency staff including those in the Council, Tayside Police, NHS Tayside and voluntary agencies. The development of a training or staff development plan and an action plan to ensure the fullest information of the Protocol is being undertaken by a inter-agency sub group which reports to Dundee Children and Young Persons Child Protection Committee and DDAAT.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 This Protocol has been developed in consultation with members of DDAAT, Dundee Children and Young Person Protection Committee, the Children's Services Executive Group, the Child Health Strategy Group and staff from relevant voluntary agencies. The Chief Executive, the Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) have also been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Date: 11 February 2005