

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 22 MARCH 2010

REPORT ON: CHILD PROTECTION - IMPROVING IMMEDIATE RESPONSES TO CONCERNS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH

REPORT NO: 150-2010

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

In June 2009, HMle published the report of the Joint Inspection of Services to Protect Children and Young People the Dundee City Council Area. The report identified 7 main points for action to improve child protection services in Dundee. A child protection improvement plan, with specific actions to address the concerns raised in the report, was developed by the partners in Dundee. This was noted and approved by Committee in Report 362-2009.

In response to the inspection a number of task groups were created to progress the agreed Improvement Plan. A specific task group was established to deal with the recommendations around improving immediate responses to concerns. The task group is chaired by Social Work with representation from health, police, education, housing and the voluntary sector. This report provides an update on the actions undertaken thus far and contains proposals for further improvements.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:

- Notes the actions taken thus far to improve immediate responses to concern
- Endorses proposals to establish a multi agency assessment team and combine the functions of the Access and Child Protection Teams to establish a care and protection service.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications as the proposals seek to make more effective use of existing resources.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 In addition to regular meetings representatives from the task group have considered areas of best practice from other local authorities. Group members have participated in 2 staff consultation events and hosted a table top exercise involving staff from the key agencies to look at how care and protection referrals are dealt with currently and to test out possible improvements.

4.2 A number of improvements have already been made which include:

- Increasing the capacity of Social Work and Health Visiting by establishing additional posts;
- Establishing regular liaison meetings between Social Work and Health;
- Launch of 307999 - Dundee's Child Protection Line - a single number for members of the public to report child protection concerns.

- 4.3 In addition to these improvements the task group has reviewed the way in which care and protection concerns are dealt with and ascertained that there are multiple routes of access to services, some of which are multi agency such as the Child Protection Unit at Seymour Lodge and some are single agency such as the Access Team within Social Work. Currently new child care and protection referrals are dealt with primarily by the Access and Child Protection teams. Those dealt with through the Child Protection team tend to be dealt with jointly with the police whilst referrals to the Access team are primarily dealt with by social work. There is a potential for confusion between the 2 teams as the nature of work with children and families means that it is not always possible to be definitive at the point of referral about what is a child and family in need who may require additional support as opposed to a child protection issue.

From a social work perspective posts within the Child Protection Team have been increasingly difficult to fill and the distinction between the 2 teams does not facilitate flexible use of staff to accommodate variations in workloads.

The quality of referrals received is varied as there is no standardised assessment form and the Access team often has to undertake extensive enquiries to ensure they have the right information to inform action. It is therefore suggested that there is a need to introduce a single point of entry and a single assessment process.

- 4.4 A number of services have existing staff who have a child protection function within their own organisation. The proposal is to ensure child protection staff work on a more collaborative basis through their involvement in a multi agency assessment team. This will ensure a more co-ordinated approach to information sharing and decision making by bringing together lead officers across the Council, Police and Health and introduce a single point of access for care and protection concerns. The team will consider all referrals and decide the most effective way of dealing with them and be responsible for allocation of work to agencies via the agency lead within the team

Referring agencies will have direct contact with a designated child protection lead officer within their own organisation to discuss child care and protection concerns

- The designated lead officer will have the ability to offer advice and, if necessary, escalate the referral for multi agency discussion in a very short space of time
- There will be a single pathway for all referrals based on a one stop shop approach
- An agreed assessment form will be adopted across the agencies to ensure consistency of information.

- 4.5 The Multi Agency Assessment Team will have core representation from health, education, social work and police however the benefit of having links to other services such as housing, leisure and communities and the voluntary sector are recognised consequently regular meetings will be held with designated lead officers from these agencies to discuss specific cases.

The Team will also have a crucial role in terms of quality assurance and will undertake multi agency file audits.

- 4.6 It is proposed that the work of the multi agency assessment team will be supported by a child care and protection service which will effectively combine the work of the Access and Child Protection teams. Currently the Child Protection Team primarily works with referrals where there is an investigative approach required in relation to child protection concerns. The Access Team provides a broader service for child care and protection concerns which typically do not require an immediate, investigative approach for example concerns around neglect, parenting capacity or advice and practical support. There is a high volume of referrals to the Access team, primarily from other agencies, and the team also liaises with the Police and other agencies in relation to Child Concern referrals. Not all referrals will become active cases of the team; some will be concluded on the day or referred to another agency for action.

Both teams undertake initial assessments and provide short term targeted intervention to children and families for generally up to 3 months

While combining the 2 teams will deal with issues of demarcation there are a number of complexities around volume of work and size of service. However the following assumptions have been made:

- The introduction of a single assessment form is likely to result in a reduction in referrals as agencies conclude that there are more appropriate agencies to refer to or their concerns do not merit a referral at this stage. This has been the experience of other areas who have adopted such an approach
- The creation of the Multi Agency Assessment Team will support this and will identify potential cases where further work is required by the referring agency before a decision can be made that a referral is necessary
- The introduction of a single form and level of information sharing which will be facilitated by the Multi Agency Assessment Team will provide more comprehensive information to inform action
- Merging the work of the teams will allow greater flexibility in terms of managing the workload, allow greater professional development opportunities for staff and the opportunity to ensure more balanced caseloads

4.8 In the longer term the proposal is to locate both the Multi Agency Assessment Team and the care and protection service in the new Seymour Lodge when this is completed however interim proposals are currently being developed to allow for earlier implementation from 1 October 2010. A Detective Chief Inspector from Tayside Police has been nominated to lead project implementation which will include consideration of interim accommodation, staffing levels, training requirements, timescales and referral routes.

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), Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report. The proposals have been discussed at multi agency consultation events which took place in October 2009 and have been discussed with the Chief Officers from Tayside Police, Tayside Health Board and the Chief Executive of Dundee City Council. HMIE have also been advised of the proposals through their interim follow up inspection conducted in December 2009.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

HMIE Joint Inspection of services to Protect Children and Young People in the Dundee City Council Area - report published in June 2009