

# DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** Social Work Committee - 18 March 2002

**REPORT ON:** Social Work Department - Young Persons' Units - Staffing/Training Working Group

**REPORT BY:** Director of Personnel and Management Services

**REPORT NO:** 179-2002

## 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide the Committee with details of the work undertaken by the Staffing/Training Working Group and to make proposals for the future.

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:-

2.1 notes the work carried out and the progress made by the Staffing/Training Working Group;

2.2 agrees that the group should continue within the Social Work Department to continue to take forward its original remit;

2.3 agrees that the group should now be chaired by a senior manager from the Social Work Department;

2.4 agrees that the Planned Cover Team should continue until the new rota for Balgowan Avenue, Duncan Place, Fairbairn Street and Strathcarron Place is introduced;

2.5 notes that the Director of Personnel and Management Services will recommend to the Personnel and Management Services Committee that some form of cash conservation will be granted to those unit employees who, as a result of a one-off exercise, are redeployed voluntarily to lower-paid jobs.

## 3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The financial implications of proposals arising in future from the work of the group will be reported to the relevant Committee. The cost of continuing the Planned Cover Team will be contained within the Social Work Revenue Budget.

## 4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

## 5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

## 6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 At its meeting of 11 September 2000, the Social Work Committee considered Report No. 606-2000 by the Chief Executive and agreed, among other things, to establish a working group, chaired by the Director of Personnel and Management Services, to examine staffing levels, rotas, sickness absence and cover, and training in the young persons' units. The group's work was due to be completed within 3 calendar months.
- 6.2 The proposal to establish such a group arose from a meeting chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by employees, trade union representatives, unit managers and senior Social Work management. A number of concerns were raised by employees with regard to the operation of units at times of high demand.
- 6.3 At its meeting of 18 December 2000, the Social Work Committee considered an agenda note by the Director of Personnel and Management Services and acknowledged that, while a considerable amount of work had been done by the group, several issues still had to be taken forward. As a result, the Committee agreed that the deadline for the group's work to be completed should be extended to 31 March 2001.
- 6.4 At its meeting of 18 June 2001, the Social Work Committee considered Report No. 376-2001 by the Director of Personnel and Management Services. The report confirmed that a number of operational issues remained to be resolved. In particular, the Committee was advised that one of the complications in trying to arrive at a consensus view was the wide variation of working hours and arrangements across the units. The Committee was further advised that, for further progress to be made, more time had to be devoted to discuss a wide range of issues, and that most of these discussions had to take place within the Social Work Department.
- 6.5 Based on discussions in the group, the Director of Personnel and Management Services recommended as an interim measure that, in addition to 4 temporary part time posts approved by the Social Work Committee on 11 September 2000, a further 4 full time (equivalent) posts should be created until 31 March 2002. These posts evolved into the Planned Cover Team. The Committee approved this recommendation and also agreed that the work of the group should continue.
- 6.6 The group met 14 times. A total of 34 people attended.

## 7 THE ISSUES DISCUSSED

7.1 While the remit of the group was specific (“to examine staffing levels, rotas, sickness absence and cover, and training in the young persons’ units”), it was agreed by all participants that group meetings presented a valuable opportunity for a whole range of other issues to be discussed, and opinions to be aired. A summary of the discussions is outlined under the following headings.

### 7.2 Communication

The group agreed that it was essential to maintain and develop communication channels and that this should be done within existing structures. It was also agreed that the work of the group would not cut across established consultation/negotiation mechanisms.

The role of unit employees in the group was crucial, but onerous. They were charged with the responsibility of obtaining the views of their colleagues on a whole host of different issues and then bringing these to the attention of the group. On some issues, it did not prove possible to bring forward a consensus view. However, the employees appreciated being involved in the consultative process.

### 7.3 Health and Safety Training

Given the fact that most of the training carried out in respect of the units is related to health and safety, the Director of Personnel and Management Services is of the view that they should be grouped together.

Everyone employed in the units receives CALM (Crisis and Aggression Limitation Management) training and CALM refresher training. The group accepted the continuing necessity of risk assessments to ensure, as far as possible, the health and safety of the young people and employees.

It was agreed that the Social Work Department’s Health and Safety Forum was the appropriate place in which the Violence and Aggression Policy, Physical Intervention Policy, breakaway techniques and other safety issues should be discussed. Unit employees work frequently in pressure situations and it is essential that any health and safety concerns and issues continue to be addressed as a matter of priority.

### 7.4 Working Arrangements - Rotas and Employee Numbers

The vast majority of the group’s time was spent in discussing the advantages, disadvantages and detail of various rotas. Given the variety of working arrangements which exist at present, it is not surprising that the group was unable to agree a rota which would apply to Balgowan Avenue, Duncan Place, Fairbairn Street and Strathcarron Place (the Elms secure unit already has an agreed rota in place).

Furthermore, the Director of Personnel and Management Services is anxious to ensure that employees’ individual circumstances are taken into account. People are conditioned to certain working arrangements. A further concern is that changes to working arrangements may result in a loss of remuneration for which employees would receive 3 years’ cash conservation in line with Council policy. The/...

The Director of Personnel and Management Services wishes to ensure that the number of cash conservations is limited as this affects the amount of money available for front-line service provision.

The group is of the view that there is a need for consistency across the units mentioned above and that this should reflect the needs of the young people who stay in the units. A common rota would also facilitate a more flexible deployment of employees across units, as circumstances demand. However, the group is aware of the financial constraints of the Council.

Other issues discussed included the ratio of full time/part time employees, the desirability of 'sleep ins' or 'waking nights', and the need for more employees to be on duty on backshift.

### **7.5 Working Arrangements - Other Issues**

Not unexpectedly, the group spent a significant amount of time discussing conditions of service and how they might be affected by the inevitable changes in working arrangements. There was also a need to put in place arrangements for the introduction of a 37 hour working week for all full time employees covered by the Scottish Joint Council for Local Government Employees (in accordance with the Single Status Agreement): this will be in place at 1 April 2002.

Discussions also focused on guidance on partners and family members working together, time off in lieu, and disturbance payments.

### **7.6 An Employee's Comments**

"I would like to stress how useful it has been to have been included in the Working Group. It has given myself and my colleagues the opportunity to contribute ideas and have a say on proposals. Especially in relation to designing a new rota, I felt that ... listened to me as a residential worker who has experience of working a rota and an understanding of some of the issues related to that. I felt that it was a great piece of joint working between ..., ... and myself. I believe the fact that staff felt the ideas for the rota came from their colleagues and was not imposed on them helped in their acceptance of it. I hope that it took account of their needs as well as those of the young people they care for."

## **8 THE FUTURE**

8.1 Much work remains to be done. It is essential that a common rota for the 4 units is introduced. The rota must be one which delivers the service which the units are required to deliver. Meeting the needs of the young people who reside in the units is paramount.

8.2 Throughout all of its meetings, the group maintained a positive approach. Naturally, group members did not agree on all of the matters discussed but the Director of Personnel and Management Services was impressed by the desire of all participants to move things forward. This aspect was remarked upon by Anne Black, independent consultant, who took the opportunity to attend a meeting of the group.

- 8.3 The group re-opened communication channels which became difficult as a result of events in the second half of 2000. It is essential that communication is maintained and developed in the future. This does not mean the dismantling of communication structures which are already in place and which work effectively.
- 8.4 The group's work has allowed employees from different units to come together to discuss issues of mutual interest. This should continue to be encouraged, although it is accepted that the needs of the young people must come first.
- 8.5 The group accepted that there are a number of long-serving employees who work in the units who, for various reasons, do not wish (and, in some cases, are unable) to continue working in the units. The group acknowledged that the job has changed and the demands are different. In such circumstances, the Director of Personnel and Management Services is willing to recommend to the Personnel and Management Services Committee that, if these people are redeployed to lower-paid jobs in Social Work or other departments, some form of cash conservation of existing earnings will be granted: this will be a one-off exercise.
- 8.6 Paragraph 6.5 above refers to the Planned Cover Team. It has been acknowledged by the group and confirmed by employee teams that the Planned Cover Team has met, and indeed gone beyond its stated aims. The primary benefit has been the physical, emotional, psychological and practical support given to employee teams across the service. The flexibility offered by the Planned Cover Team and the approach adopted by units with regard to the movement of employees across the units has served to enhance the feeling of a single service. The group agreed that this has helped to reduce potential stressful situations and to deliver a quality service to young people. Given the success of this initiative, it is suggested that the Planned Cover Team should continue until the new rota is introduced across the units.

**9 CONSULTATION**

- 9.1 All members of the group (including trade union representatives) have been consulted in the preparation of this report. The Director of Social Work, Director of Finance, Director of Support Services and Chief Executive have also been consulted.

**10 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

**11 SIGNATURE**

J.C. Petrie  
 Director of Personnel and Management Services .....

Date .....