

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 9TH JUNE 2008

REPORT ON: GUIDANCE ON OVERNIGHT STAYS FOR LOOKED AFTER AND ACCOMMODATED CHILDREN

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 269 - 2008

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the development of national guidance on overnight stays for looked after and accommodated children. It will also inform Committee on the implementation of this guidance within Dundee.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:

- 2.1** Note the contents of Getting it Right for Every Child: Guidance on Overnight Stays for Looked After and Accommodated Children.
- 2.2** Note that Departmental procedures have been amended slightly to reflect the contents of the new guidance.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

4.0 MAIN TEXT

- 4.1** In January 2008, following a period of consultation, the Scottish Government published national guidance designed to provide a starting point for local authorities to develop policies and approaches to overnight stays. The guidance seeks to assist local authorities, acting as corporate parents, in ensuring that the children and young people they look after are able to experience the full range of life opportunities open to their peers who are not looked after whilst recognising the special circumstances of being in public care.
- 4.2** The issue of overnight stays with friends, and the restrictive approaches adopted by some local authorities, has been highlighted by young people as something which sets them apart from their peers.
- 4.3** A key message from the guidance is that establishing and maintaining relationships with friends is an essential part of a child's development and that sometimes these relationships will include requests to stay overnight at a friend's home or elsewhere. The young person should, as far as possible, be granted the same permissions to take part in normal and acceptable age-appropriate peer activities as would normally be granted by the parents of their peers.
- 4.4** There must be a local procedure and approach to the delegation of decisions on overnight stays, backed up by appropriate training and support for carers. The presumption should be that the child's foster carer or lead residential care worker should have the authority to agree to an overnight stay.

- 4.5** If a carer has serious worries about an overnight stay invitation then it should be refused and the reasons for refusal explained to the child or young person and clearly recorded.
- 4.6** Decisions about overnight stays should be based on a risk assessment framework that considers factors such as the views of the child, carers and parents; the age, level of maturity of the child and any specific health, cultural or religious needs, the length and quality of the relationship with the friend and the host family's capacity to meet the child or young person's needs.
- 4.7** Wherever possible the child or young person should be able to reciprocate if they want to. If the child is in foster care and the foster carers are comfortable with making these arrangements then no action is required. When the young person is accommodated in a residential unit, it is important that the visiting young person and his or her family understand what a residential unit is, and the particular arrangements which apply within that particular unit.
- 4.8** It has been policy and practice within Dundee over a number of years to ensure that children and young people can participate in overnight stays with friends as part of normal day to day life, whenever it is safe and appropriate for them to do so. Operational procedures have offered guidance in relation to this issue. The current procedures have been reviewed and amended as appropriate in light of the new national guidance.

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 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Head of Finance have been consulted regarding this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Director of Social Work

DATE: 28 April 2008