

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 24TH SEPTEMBER 2012**

**REPORT ON: RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS FROM THE FATAL ACCIDENT INQUIRY INTO THE DEATHS OF GEORGIA ROWE AND NIAMH LAFFERTY FROM THE ERSKINE BRIDGE ON 4 OCTOBER 2009**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK**

**REPORT NO: 295 - 2012**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report gives a summary of the findings from the Fatal Accident Inquiry report. The recommendations in the report relate to residential care, and the management of young people who display self harming and suicidal behaviour. The report summarises Dundee City Councils current policies, practices and responsibilities in relation to these recommendations for looked after young people in order to reduce the risks of young people accommodated and taking their own lives.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The committee is asked to approve the following recommendations;

- Note the actions taken locally to strengthen approaches to young people who are deemed to present a risk to themselves and the on-going work to review care planning approaches for young people who are moved in crisis situations.
- That the Children's Integrated Planning process will confirm and promote the work of Choose Life and embed it in practice within all agencies.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **4.0 MAIN TEXT**

#### **4.1 BACKGROUND**

4.1.1 The Inquiry report detailed the lives of Georgia Rowe and Niamh Lafferty aged 14 and 15 who committed suicide from the Erskine Bridge on 4th October 2009. Both girls had been accommodated in the Good Shepherd Open Unit at the time. The report gives a comprehensive history of the moves, traumas and significant changes each child had experienced, describing their self harm and suicidal behaviours until their deaths. It also gives the history of the social work/health/education interventions. It describes and outlines the decisions that were made and by whom during the period of time that these young people were involved with care and health services.

4.1.2 Sheriff Ruth Anderson QC determined that both girls died of injuries due to a fall from a height and that their deaths were not accidents but were suicides. There were no defects in the system of working which contributed to the deaths, but a number of areas were highlighted as being relevant. These can be summarised as follows:

- a) The need for a robust approach to absconding linked to security of premises;
- b) The importance of addressing issues which arise between residents. In this case it was the persistent bullying of one of the children by another resident;
- c) That placing authorities should hold detailed comprehensive, concise and readily accessible information which is shared and copied to the establishment on any placement being made;
- d) The importance of good systems of communication that are adhered to by staff responsible for the care and safety of young people to ensure accurate and up to date information relating to a child is available to decision makers and those responsible for their day to day care;
- e) The need for a 'stand alone' risk assessment for each young person with separate consideration given to the issues of self harm and suicide.
- f) The need to ensure the number of staff members on duty meet the regulation 13 of SSI114/2002; and
- g) The importance of matching staff supervision and internal security in accordance with the assessment of risk.

- 4.2 Services within Dundee work with a number of young people who are deemed to present considerable risks to themselves and others, typically this will include absconding and/or self harming which can be very challenging for both family members and professionals. While it is impossible to eradicate the risk of suicide locally services have been working together to strengthen arrangements for vulnerable young people. This includes the development of an absconders protocol based on risk assessment with Tayside Police, the use of planning meetings to share information and agree significant issues that require further action and ensuring young people have access to the right service including the LAAC (looked after and accommodated) nurse who can advise and assist staff when dealing with self harming behaviour. A multi agency development group has recently been established to progress the development of the Elms Residential Unit and this is seeking to ensure that young people within residential care have access to a full range of support services. The outcomes from the remit of this group will be presented to Social Work and Health Committee before the end of 2012. In addition a programme of ASIST (applied suicide intervention skills training) training has been made widely available
- 4.3 The Children's Rights Officer takes a pro-active role with young people placed in residential care providing an independent route both in terms of advice and access to support and services.
- 4.4 Internal decision making forums and processes are in place which ensure information is shared and that a child's needs are appropriately matched to resources. Work currently being done on the purchasing and commissioning of external resources will improve information sharing, the matching of needs to resources and ensure clarity of expectations through the use of individual placement agreements. This work will also extend its remit to include all placements made in crisis situations where young people are moved on an emergency basis.
- 4.5 Choose Life Strategy seeks to reduce the number of people in Scotland who complete suicide and has a particular focus on younger people. Locally the Choose Life Steering Group established a Children and Young Person's sub-group and they developed multi-agency guidance in 2006 to ensure all services who work with children and young people in Dundee who have been, or are at risk of self harm and suicide are well informed and able to offer a positive and caring response.
- 4.6 The guidance, which was reviewed and revised in 2011, and is now Tayside-wide, gives information to workers on factors which can impact negatively on mental health, types of self harm, why young people might self harm, signs which may precede suicide, some

advice on what to do in terms of seeking advice, training and taking action and included information on national and local support agencies.

- 4.7 Workers across a variety of services and organisations are more informed and more confident in dealing with self harm or attempted suicide within their current work. They also have useful information about where to seek appropriate advice and support which will assist them in this area of work.
- 4.8 The Children and Young Person's Choose Life subgroup, which is now a joint group with Angus Council, continues to focus on the needs of young people at risk of suicide and self harm.
- 4.9 A number of services have been funded locally to support this work. This includes a specific service for women and young girls who have been sexually abused and are self harming and a specific service for young people who have experienced issues of loss and bereavement which has been heavily supported by Education. Information on these developments has previously been reported to Committee (Report No 150-2004).
- 4.10 An extensive programme of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training has been made available both to professionals and community members.

## **5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website [www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/).

## **6.0 CONSULTATIONS**

The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democratic and Legal Services.

## **7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Committee (Report No 150-2004)  
Fatal Accident Inquiry May 2012  
Equality Impact Assessment

Alan G Baird  
**Director of Social Work**

DATE: 12th September  
2012