

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Policy & Resources Committee - 10th May 2004

REPORT ON: Reforming Child Protection - The Statement of Assurance Requested by Ministers for Children & Young People, Justice and Health & Communities

REPORT BY: Chief Executive

REPORT NO: 320 - 2004

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1.1 To seek the approval of members to the content of the Statement of Assurance from Dundee City Council, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside. This report also seeks committee approval for the submission of the statement by the Chief Executive to the Scottish Executive.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:-

2.1 Note and approve the contents of the Statement of Assurance.

2.2 Approves the submission by the Chief Executive of the statement

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The aim of this report is to improve the quality of child protection services across Dundee, furthering the Council's commitment to protect vulnerable children and young people. The contents of the report are consistent with the Council's objective to ensure that people in Dundee live without fear of personal violence and abuse.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This report takes account of the rights and needs of vulnerable children and young people, including those from minority ethnic communities and those with disabilities. The report promotes the principle that child protection services must be provided and developed in ways that promote social inclusion and equality of access to services.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 In a letter dated 11th November 2003, jointly signed by the Minister for Children & Young People, Minister for Justice and Minister for Health & Communities, the Scottish Executive requested Chief Executives of local authorities, Leaders of NHS Boards and Chief Constables, to submit a statement of assurance by May 2004. The letter requested assurances:-

- that you have reviewed the way in which your services act individually and jointly to protect children,
- that you are either satisfied or have identified areas for further action, and
- that you have robust quality assurance mechanisms in place

6.2 Report number 762-2003, adopted by the Committee on 17th November 2003, set out a series of initiatives that had been or were being, implemented by Dundee Child Protection Committee and the Social Work Department. These initiatives are compatible with the Scottish Executive aim of reforming and improving child protection services across Scotland.

6.3 Appendix 1 to this report contains the contents of the statement of assurance that it is proposed the City Council submits to the Scottish Executive.

6.4 The statement sets out Dundee City Council's response under each of the three headings above. It demonstrates that:

- the Council has long standing arrangements in place for commissioning external reviews of child protection services (Minute of Social Work Committee, 15th December 1997 - "The Committee agreed that an external audit of these high priority services be conducted on a biennial basis to inform planning and service delivery and to evaluate the effectiveness of the services").
- as well as reviewing practice, a review of the way in which the Child Protection Committee operates has led to a reconfiguration and strengthening of that body. And it demonstrates that the Council departments most closely associated with services for the protection of children (Education, Social Work and Communities) have review processes in place.
- the Council is committed to the continuous improvement of services. The Child Protection Committee has identified areas for further action and these areas will be addressed through a variety of actions.
- in addition to existing Council commitments to continuously review services, the Child Protection Committee is developing strategies and instruments that will further improve quality assurance mechanisms. This work is being undertaken in conjunction with staff in the Scottish Executive's Child Protection Reform Programme.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Assistant Chief Executive (Management), Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning), Director of Education, Director of Leisure & Arts, Director of Housing, Director of Social Work and Head of Communities have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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 the above report.

Alex Stephen
Chief Executive

Date: 29th April 2004

Peter Peacock MSP
Minister for Children and Young
People

Cathy Jamieson MSP
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Ministers

Reforming Child Protection

In your letter of 11th November 2003, you asked for a Statement of Assurance that:

1. we have reviewed the way in which our services act individually and jointly to protect children,
2. we are satisfied (with those services) or have identified areas for further action,
3. we have robust quality assurance mechanisms in place.

The commitment to partnership working in Dundee is represented by the fact that this letter is being submitted on behalf of Dundee City Council, Tayside Police and NHS Tayside and is jointly signed by these bodies. The Statement of Assurance, therefore, has a multi-agency focus which is appropriate to the delivery and development of services to protect children in the City.

NHS Tayside through their Child Protection Action Group undertook a review throughout Tayside, in conjunction with partner organisations, including Dundee City Council, to address issues which have emerged from the recent child protection inquiries into the tragic deaths of Caleb Ness and Carla Nicole Bone. NHS Tayside will report back separately on this matter through their own Statement of Assurance submission.

Review of Services

a. Child Protection Committee

In line with Recommendation 5 in 'It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright', the Chief Executive of Dundee City Council commissioned an external review of the Child Protection Committee. This resulted in a re-constituted Child Protection Committee, the structure of which is congruent with the preferred model for Child Protection Committees proposed by staff within the Scottish Executive Child Protection Reform Programme. In November 2003, Dundee City Council approved a range of initiatives for the reform of local child protection services. The Changing Children's Services Fund has facilitated promotion of this local child protection reform programme. A Lead Officer and Staff Development Officer, along with administrative support, have been appointed to work directly to the Child Protection Committee. These officers, working alongside departmental and agency officers, such as the recently appointed Senior Officer Child Protection in the Social Work Department, are the main engine for implementing change and reforming services. Close liaison with staff in the national Child Protection Reform Programme will ensure that local action reflects and addresses national priorities.

b. Services for Children and Young People Affected by Substance Misuse

A joint Children and Young People's Group has been established to address the needs of children and young people affected by substance misuse. The group will report to the Child Protection Committee and Dundee Drug & Alcohol Action Team. The group will also establish formal links with the Domestic Abuse and Public Protection Forums. Members from Child Health and Early Years planning fora are members of the group. This group will, therefore, be a fulcrum around which planning of services for children affected by parental substance misuse and young people who put themselves at risk through their behaviours takes place and will directly inform the children's services plan. The action plan developed by the group is informed by the outputs from

both 'Getting our Priorities Right' (Scottish Executive, 2003) and 'Hidden Harm' (Home Office, 2003).

Awareness and assessment of the link between substance misuse and child protection has led to the planning of a pre-birth service for families in which there is a pregnancy and concern about substance misuse. This is a partnership between Dundee City Council, neighbouring local authorities and NHS Tayside.

c. Policy, Procedures and Practice

The Caleb Ness Inquiry Report includes a recommendation that regular internal and independent audits of child care and protection cases should take place. Prior to the publication of this Report, the Social Work Department had already commissioned two independent reviews of child protection services. Dundee City Council commissions regular, external, reviews of child protection practice and has recently commissioned Professor Norma Baldwin, of Dundee University, to lead a further audit. This builds on a previous audit undertaken in 2000-2001. The audit process will review the recommendations from the previous external audit, inspect a range of child care case files, interview a sample of service users, conduct a staff survey and carry out a statistical analysis of child protection referrals. The outcome of the audit will be reported to the Council and will inform service development.

The partners are aware that all staff need clear guidance in order to practice at a consistently high level. Key Council departments have reviewed, or are in the process of reviewing, their child protection guidance. This will link to the Child Protection Committee publishing revised local inter-agency guidance. A revised and more comprehensive edition of Dundee's inter-agency guidance will be produced. Information technology will be used to ensure its ready accessibility to all members of staff.

The Education Department has recently issued new guidance on Child Protection practice and procedures for its staff. In its guidance, the department has confirmed the placement of trained designated officers in all educational establishments. A centrally located practice coordinator who is available to guide practice, to support staff and to ensure standards are met, supports the designated officers. Newly introduced recording procedures relating to incidence and response provide the basis of an effective quality assurance mechanism.

Tayside Police is involved in a joint initiative with Barnardo's, which addresses the immediate needs of victims of domestic abuse and their children.

Tayside Police is also represented on the child protection working group of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) and through this maintain a national perspective on developments within the police service and its partners.

Dundee City Council and Tayside Police are taking part in a pilot programme to conduct and evaluate electronic recording of interviews in child protection cases. This work is taking place in consultation with local representatives from the Procurator Fiscal Service and Children's Reporter. It is conducted under the auspices of a National Steering Group established with the authority of the Solicitor General under the Supporting Vulnerable Witnesses initiative. Dundee is one of two areas taking part in this pilot. The other being Glasgow City Council in partnership with Strathclyde Police. Dundee City Council's child protection team is co-located with the Family Protection Unit of Tayside Police in a unit that also has forensic medical examination facilities on site. This means that all aspects of the investigative stage of child protection require a child to visit only one site.

The partners in Dundee consider prevention of abuse to be as important as its investigation and treatment. At the preventative level, the Education Department is rolling out a personal safety programme for young people in nursery, primary and secondary schools. This initiative is being undertaken in partnership with the voluntary sector and with support from other agencies. In addition, the Home School Support Service, working in partnership with school Guidance staff and within the new Framework for Standards, will target vulnerable families for support and advice to prevent any escalation of risk.

The Council has worked with Barnardo's in delivering the 'FACE' (Fighting Against Child Exploitation) programme. This has supported young people who have been at risk of sexual exploitation and engaged them in the production of materials aimed at supporting other young people who may be similarly at risk. Production of the award-winning 'ACE' magazine has, in turn, allowed for the development of an animated video, 'Nae Danger', which Barnardo's is now seeking to make available nationally. The Council's initiative also led to the establishment of a national steering group on working with children and young people who may be at risk through sexual exploitation.

In relation to staff resources, the Council is aware of the staffing shortage problems both nationally and locally. The Council continues to place the highest priority on child protection and this is why, in the Social Work Department, staff have been redeployed to child care teams from other parts of the service.

The Department is currently undertaking a staffing review, designed to address areas where:

- there are current operational problems in delivering services to appropriate standards
- service objectives/priorities have changed and the current structure is no longer appropriate for the new environment
- there are significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff

Salary and conditions of service are included in the review as it is recognised that these factors contribute to the recruitment and retention of experienced staff.

Staff at all levels in the Department are involved in the review process, which will be concluded in September 2004.

2. Areas for Further Action

Whilst much has been achieved, the partners are aware of the need to continuously develop and improve services.

a. Inter-professional Staff Development

The Changing Children's Services Fund has enabled the Child Protection Committee to dedicate resources to inter-professional staff development. A full-time staff development officer, working to the Child Protection Committee will, in partnership with officers from individual agencies and departments, develop and deliver a more comprehensive inter-professional staff development programme than was previously possible. This programme will take heed of the findings in 'It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright' (para 8.33) that, "To continue to learn and develop knowledge, will require a number of approaches" and will be focused on ensuring that the experiences of and outcomes for children and families are improved through joint working.

b. Information Sharing

Access to help and information for children and families will also be improved. The Changing Children's Services Fund is to be used to provide the financial resources for the publication of relevant information. Age appropriate, single page, contact information for children and young people, along with information about how to refer a child about whom there is concern and the development of computer-based information are priority actions for the Child Protection Committee. Information will also increase awareness and knowledge about child protection issues and the role the community can play in protecting the welfare of children and aim to increase confidence in child protection systems. Staff time will be also be allocated to making direct

contact with members of the community, including people within ethnic minority groups. This will ensure that members of the community can be properly involved in informing service development.

The ability to share appropriate information between agencies to ensure the best quality of service to children and families is a priority. Already, an information-sharing protocol exists between the Council and NHS Tayside and information about child protection registration status is passed quickly to health staff. The Council, in consultation with partners, will be seeking support via the Modernising Government Fund (3) to enable it to further improve its information sharing capability. Work is already underway on the next phase of development of the Social Work Department's primary database. 'It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright' highlighted the need for succinct, readily accessible chronologies. An aim of the current developments is the ability to capture key information, set it out in a chronological history and share it electronically across agencies.

Provision of high quality, regular information on performance to all stakeholders will also be developed. Drawing on data from all the relevant agencies, members of the Child Protection Committee will be provided with appropriate management information. The Committee will, via an annual report, provide members of the community, elected members and Board members with information about performance and future plans. This information will be used in service reviews and audits and will inform service improvements.

3. Quality Assurance Mechanisms

A main aim of Dundee Child Protection Committee is the establishment of a local, multi-agency, inspection and audit regime that mirrors the inspection and audit regime developed by the Scottish Executive and which meets the needs of local stakeholders.

a. Quality Assurance and Audit

As stated above, regular reviews of practice are well established in Dundee. To achieve a programme of comprehensive quality assurance and continuous improvement, officers of the Council have developed an audit framework. This comprehensive framework, the subject of joint agreement through the Child Protection Committee, has been assembled from the recommendations and findings contained in recent inquiries and reports. Staff from the Scottish Executive's Child Protection Reform Programme are working alongside local staff to ensure compatibility between this framework and the Framework for Standards launched by the First Minister on 22nd March. This will provide a quality assurance instrument that is both comprehensive and considers services from the perspective of the experiences of the child and family.

b. Links with Academic Institutions

Both in terms of quality assurance monitoring and review and inter-professional staff development, the Child Protection Committee will promote partnership working with the University of Dundee, a leading institution in the field of child protection work. Agreement has already been reached on university staff acting in a consultative capacity to those charged with developing and implementing the inter-professional staff development programme.

This Statement of Assurance has been produced in consultation with other partners in the Child Protection Committee. As Chief Officers of the respective agencies, we will be pleased to discuss the contents or provide clarification, should that be required.

Yours faithfully

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Dundee City Council

John Vine QPM, BA, MSc, MCIPD
Chief Constable
Tayside Police

Professor Tony Wells
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NHS Tayside