

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee - 20th June 2005

REPORT ON: External Audit Of The Social Work Department's
Child Care And Protection Services

REPORT BY: The Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 356 - 2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update members on the outcomes of the External Audit completed by Professor Norma Baldwin, University of Dundee, on the Social Work Department's Child Care and Protection Services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee: -

- 2.1 Notes and approves the progress and improvements which are being made as part of, and in response to, the External Audit of Child Care and Protection Services process.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The initiatives outlined within this report are aimed at improving the quality of Child Care and Protection Services provided directly by the Social Work Department in Dundee, which further the Council's commitment to protecting vulnerable children and young people. These improvements and service developments are consistent with the Council's objective of ensuring 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 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Local authorities have an obligation under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to promote and safe guard the welfare of children in need, including those who are in need of care and protection. In November 2002 the Scottish Executive published a national Child Protection

Audit and Review report and, in October 2003 the Caleb Ness Inquiry Report was published by Edinburgh and the Lothians Child Protection Committee. Both of these Reports highlighted the importance of commissioning External Audits of Child Care and Protection Services provided by Local Authorities.

In 2003 the Council authorised the commissioning of an External Audit of Child Care and Protection Services, from Professor Norma Baldwin, University of Dundee (Report: 164 - 2003). This Audit built on the previous External Audit undertaken in 2000-2001. The Audit process included a review of recommendations from the previous external audit, an audit of forty child care case files, interviews with a sample of service users, staff consultation and feedback sessions, and a statistical analysis of child protection referrals.

6.2 **MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE EXTERNAL AUDIT PROCESS AND REPORT**

The key findings of the External Audit are summarised under the following themes: Recording; Assessment and Planning; Engagement with the child; Multi-disciplinary working; and, Staff Supervision.

The audit of the 40 child care case files evidenced a lack of standardisation, in terms of recording and managing information. The recording systems were described as multiple, varied and difficult to follow. There were forms and reports but at times there was a lack of clear focus on the outcome of the assessment and care planning process. There were however examples of good practice, where case files included a monthly summary of contacts and tasks, providing a clear focus of the work and the related specific tasks.

The need for clear identifiable assessments was highlighted. Similarly, the need for identifiable care plans was recognised, although again there were examples of good practice found. Multi-agency assessments and care plans, concerning children who had been the subject of child protection concerns and inquiries, were identified as a real strength.

In over two thirds of case files there was evidence of direct work with the named child. It was noted, however, that the detail of this work was often limited, with little information being recorded about the views of the child. This finding does need to be set in context though, as a significant number the case files audited involved children under the age of four.

The case file system reviewed found limited evidence of line management reviews and quality monitoring. A number of teams reported that the supervision records were kept in separate 'supervision record' files. Some case files had monthly summaries which provided evidence of discussions and agreements with the line manager and a quality monitoring system for reports.

6.3 **PROGRESS AND CHANGES MADE AS PART OF THE AUDIT PROCESS**

The Children's Services Management Team, in consultation with the Strategy and Performance Service, drew up an action plan to address the initial and ongoing findings, from the Audit. This action plan was also linked to other initiatives aimed at developing and improving child care practice within the department.

A working group has reviewed case recording and case file management and has produced recommendations, which are leading to a revision of operational procedures, to establish a standard format for all child care case files and clear standards for case recording. Case files where a child is on the Child Protection Register now have a chronological history at the front of each file.

A working group has also reviewed the department's child care assessment framework, in line with the work of the National *Integrated Child Care Assessment Project*. The department's *Assessment Framework* is being revised and new operational procedures are being produced to support its implementation and use. The implementation programme will involve intensive staff development, in the form of training and coaching, to ensure that the *Assessment Framework* is used effectively and consistently to support all child care assessments. A review of care plans and the care planning process will follow the implementation of the new *Assessment Framework*.

The current level of inter-agency participation in planning and service provision is being reviewed, to build on the existing high standard of joint planning and working amongst child protection core groups. It is the aim to reproduce this high standard of practice in all other integrated child care planning processes.

The department is developing a performance management framework to support the monitoring of standards of child care practice. This system is directly linked to the National *Framework for Standards* and the *Multi-Agency Inspection Indicators*. It sets out clear standards and expectations about the roles and responsibilities of practitioners and senior managers in terms of quality and performance management.

6.4 **CONCLUSION**

The value of the External Audit process should be acknowledged, along with the progress that is being made to address the findings. This report highlights some of the measures being taken by Social Work Department to continuously improve the quality and range of services provided to vulnerable children. It continues to strengthen its partnerships across the Council, and with Health, Police and voluntary agencies, ensuring that the needs of children and young people are at the heart of its improvements.

7.0 **CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and the Lead Officer of Dundee's Child and Young Person Protection Committee have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

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Date: 10 June 2005