

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 20 JUNE 2005

REPORT ON: INVESTIGATION INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE POST-RELEASE SUPERVISION OF A SEX OFFENDER IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 383 - 2005

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members on the issues arising from the recent investigation into the management of the post-release supervision of a sex offender in North Lanarkshire.

1.2 Following on from the publication of the outcome of the investigation, the Minister for Justice has asked that an audit and review of all cases of medium and high risk sex offenders be undertaken through the liaison arrangements for each Criminal Justice Social Work Grouping or Unitary Authority. This has to be organised in consultation with the Police and the Scottish Prison Service and has to ensure attention is paid to housing responsibilities and arrangements. The findings from the audit and actions taken have to be reported to the Inspectorate by 30th September 2005. The Report is available in the Members' Lounge.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:-

2.1 Note the contents of the report.

2.2 Require that the Director of Social Work progress an audit of sex offender cases in consultation with Tayside Police, the Scottish Prison Service, the Director of Housing and the other authorities within the Tayside Criminal Justice Partnership

2.3 Require the Directors of Social Work and Housing to report back to Committee in October 2005 summarising the key and actions arising from the audit and the recommendations contained in the report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications for the Council.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The policy objective of reducing crime and ensuring people are safe and feel safe are reflected in the plans for the audit.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 The Minister for Justice requested an investigation into the management of the post-release supervision of a sex offender following his conviction for the abduction and assault with intent to rape of a two year old child committed whilst under supervision. The offender had previously been convicted of a similar offence committed against a 91 year old woman. The investigation was conducted by the Social Work Inspection Agency who published their findings in April 2005.

6.2 The report highlighted that managing the risks posed by sexual offenders within the community is a complex task cutting across the organisational boundaries of local authorities, police, prisons, housing and health services and emphasises that risk can never be eradicated altogether. It concluded that even optimal work might not have prevented the offence from being committed. However, the investigation indicated that weaknesses in managing this case occurred across all of the agencies and at all stages through the prison sentence and back to the community.

6.3 The main areas of concern included:

- failure to adhere to national standards;
- the offender did not receive any input to address his sex offending whilst in prison;
- problems in identifying suitable accommodation prior to release meant that emergency accommodation was arranged on the day of release; staff within the homeless accommodation were unaware that the individual was a sex offender;
- police risk assessments were not done in conjunction with social work and the social worker within the community was not trained in the use of risk assessment;
- failure to follow agreed procedures for the management of sex offenders in the community.

6.4 The Report contains 12 recommendations which relate to practice, both locally and nationally, and have implications for Social Work, Housing, Police and the Scottish Prison Service. These include:

- adhering to national standards and engaging with prisoners' families;
- ensuring sex offenders are afforded the highest priority for service provision;
- ensuring Housing and Social Work staff work collaboratively to identify accommodation for sex offenders;
- ensuring collaboration between Police and Social Work when undertaking risk assessments;
- ensuring sex offenders receive appropriate assessment and treatment whilst in prison.

The Scottish Executive recognises that there is a need to develop a national strategy on housing sex offenders and to produce a national protocol for sex offender management.

6.5 The supervision of sex offenders poses particular challenges for staff and it is important that they are appropriately trained and supported in this complex and demanding area of work. Even the most serious of sex offenders who receive a lengthy prison sentence will eventually be released back into the community and it is important that strategies are in place to minimise risk and ensure that appropriate accommodation is available.

6.6 The recent inspection into the Tayside Criminal Justice Social Work Grouping noted that in most sex offender cases supervision focused consistently on offending and the file reading showed that staff supervise sex offenders rigorously and manage non-compliance robustly.

The report also comments that the partnership is well served by the Tay Project who work exclusively with sexual offenders.

6.7 However, within Dundee, there is a recognition that the overall approach to the assessment and management of sex offenders would benefit from a review and this work had commenced prior to the publication of the North Lanarkshire report. This will initially involve Police, Social Work and Housing and a temporary member of staff has recently been appointed within Criminal Justice Services to specifically examine information systems. In addition, a national model for risk assessing sex offenders has recently been agreed and a training programme for Police and Social work is due to start shortly. The outcome of the audit of sex offenders requested by the Minister for Justice will help to inform the outcome of this work.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Director of Housing and Tayside Police have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following Background Papers were relied upon on preparation of this report:

An Investigation into the Management of the Post-Release Supervision of a Sex Offender in North Lanarkshire.

Performance Inspection of Tayside Partnership Criminal Justice Social Work Services.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 10 June 2005