

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCS COMMITTEE - 31ST OCTOBER 2011

REPORT ON: CHILDREN'S SERVICES PRESSURES

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

REPORT NO: 495 - 2011

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise elected members of the continuing increased pressures being experienced by Children's Services within the Social Work Department and outlines some of the steps being taken as a response to these.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:

2.1 Notes the projected overspend within Children's Services for the current financial year and the reasons identified for these increases.

2.2 Approves the recommended actions proposed within the report.

2.3 Agree to establish a Best Value Review of Children's Services to follow the current review of child protection services.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The 2011/12 Social Work Revenue Budget included additional resources of £1,000,000 to fund projected financial pressures within Children's Services. This was on top of additional resources of £500,000 included in the Social Work Budget in 2010/11. The financial projections for the current financial year highlight further increased growth in expenditure driven by significant increases in the number of looked after children. A further £500,000 has been allocated from within the Council's General Contingency provision in the current financial year, however, a net overspend of £1,600,000 is still projected. This budget pressure will require to be considered in the preparation of the Council's Provisional 2012/13 Revenue Budget.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 BACKGROUND

4.1.1 Over a number of years Dundee City Council has experienced large increases in the number of looked after and accommodated children. Previous reports to Committee have highlighted the resultant increased financial pressures and action being taken to reduce the impact of these. The most recent of these reports, Development of Fostering and Adoption Services (146/2010), was presented to Social Work and Health Committee on the 22nd March 2010. This report in particular highlighted the ongoing pressures being faced within Family Placement services where at 31st January there were 49 children in external family

placements with around 132 cared for by in-house foster carers. The number of looked after children in September 2009 had peaked at its highest ever level at 606 following an average increase of 9% since 2002.

- 4.1.2 Report 146/2010 outlined proposals to increase the number of in-house foster carers and specialised professional carers known as ACE carers (Alternative Community Experience for young people) to reduce the number of more expensive external family placements which once fully implemented could see a net reduction in expenditure of £250,000 per annum.
- 4.1.3 Since then, despite success in recruiting more in-house foster carers, demand for appropriate family placements continues to outstrip the supply of in-house carers and the council has had to increasingly rely on the use of external placements. These are considerably more expensive than an in-house placement with fee rates of on average £1,100 per week against an in-house carer payment of approximately £320 per week. The number of looked after children as at 30th September 2011 was 708 - an increase of 17% since 2009 (see Appendix 1). The number of children placed in external family placement currently stands at 84 - a 71% increase since January 2010. The number of children cared for by in-house foster carers is currently 160 - an increase of 21% since 2010.
- 4.1.4 The growth in expenditure since the financial year 2007/08 for family placement is shown in the table below:

	Budget £000	Actual £000	Overspend £000
2007/08	3,597	4,275	678
2008/09	4,387	5,756	1,369
2009/10	5,404	6,259	855
2010/11	5,991	7,377	1,386
2011/12	7,427	9,027*	1,600

* Projected position

The above table highlights that despite a significant increase in budgeted resources from 2007/08 to 2011/12 of £3.83m or 106%, actual expenditure has increased by £4.75m or 111%.

- 4.1.5 The budget setting process for 2011/12 recognised that additional resources would be required within the family placement budget and an additional £1m was added to the budget. A further increase in the number of children in placement from 59 in March 2011 to the current number of 84 could not have been anticipated.
- 4.1.6 In previous years, expenditure within Residential schools & secure care has been an area of significant overspend within the Social Work budget but the current years projection is in line with budget. The number of children in residential care has remained fairly constant over the last few years but there has been a recent increase in the number of children placed in secure care which at a cost of approximately £5,000 per week means that expenditure can increase rapidly over a short period of time. Any future projected overspends in this area will be reported to P&R Committee.
- 4.1.7 The increased number of external family placements out with the city brings about additional costs over and above the fees paid to family placement agencies. The Council is frequently required to fund additional educational support (classroom assistants) within mainstream schools in other local authorities to support children in their placement. In addition, there are increased travel costs associated with workers and families having to travel greater distances for contact visits/meetings.

- 4.1.8 There are many reasons why the city of Dundee is experiencing such a large increase in the number of looked after children. The prevalence of substance misuse has been well documented and remains one of the main reasons why children cannot return to be cared for by their birth parent(s) and are instead placed in permanent substitute care. The following issues have been identified in causing the increase in numbers over the last few years:

4.2 REASONS FOR INCREASES IN DEMAND

The Impact of Increased awareness of Child Protection

- 4.2.1 The increase in the number of Looked After and Accommodated children in Dundee is a direct result of the increased awareness of Child Protection issues, promoted by reports such as "It's Everyone's job ", the wider embedding within all agencies, not just Social Work, of "Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)" and the high priority, rightly, devoted by the Chief Officer's Group to child protection issues in Dundee. Workers in every agency, voluntary and statutory, are now much more aware of their responsibilities towards children who appear at risk or who appear to be not having their needs met in their current care situations. This increase in awareness, of not only the issue but a responsibility to act, is not limited to agencies working directly with children but extends to agencies who work with adults, where a Parental Capacity Assessment, is expected where there are any concerns about an adult's ability to meet the needs of children in their care. The public also has a higher awareness of Child Protection, through high profile campaigns, such as the launch of Dundee's Child Protection Line.
- 4.2.2 All of these factors have, inevitably lead to a higher proportion of adults willing to refer, report or share information, regarding children deemed to be at some degree of risk or need. By every other indicator, other than the financial impact, an increase in adults willing to share Child Protection concerns is a positive outcome, a testimony to the high profile given by the Chief Officer's Group to better protecting children and young people in Dundee. However such an increase in awareness, reporting and information sharing, must come at a cost, as more children are identified as needing investigation and support.
- 4.2.3 Currently, this increase in referral and investigation has led to an increase in investigations resulting in the conclusion that the child requires to be placed away from their family. No-one would want the agencies tasked with protecting children in Dundee to revert to a position of reduced awareness of child protection, reduced information sharing or reduced referral, so the challenge must be to better deploy the combined resources of the Local Authority, Health Board, Police and Voluntary sector to ensure that, wherever it is compatible with a child's safety and best interests, there are resources available that helps that child stay within his or her family ,or at least within their home community. Only this availability of local solutions will counter act the seemingly relentless increase in external family placements and external residential placements.
- 4.2.4 In many ways this "Children's Services Pressures paper" could be entitled "What happens after Child Protection " .It is a timely and necessary reminder to the Council and the whole of Integrated Children's Services that we must all work together , not just at the raising awareness , referral and initial investigation stage regarding children in need of protection and better care but that we must also work together to achieve the best possible local solutions, at every stage of a child in need's involvement with targeted protective services. This is an appeal to recognise that having successfully embedded GIRFEC within initial investigation, we must now better embed GIRFEC within the range of resources devoted to maintaining children in their home communities. This will form part of the recently agreed Lochee Pathfinder.

4.2.5 A combination of factors related to greater awareness of Child Protection has led to the increase in children being accommodated.

4.3 **Increased response to Domestic Abuse**

4.3.1 There is increasing awareness of the impact of Domestic Abuse on children within the household. This awareness raising has been championed by developments such as MARAC, developed to better protect adult victims but this also has an impact on Services for Children with an increase in investigations , where the impact of Domestic Violence on children is one of the issues of concern. This increase is reflected in the greater number of children placed on the Child Protection Register , where exposure to Domestic Abuse is one of the main issues of concern . In 2011 the categories of Child protection Registration were changed to specifically record if one of the reasons for Registration is exposure of the child to Domestic Abuse. Previous to this, the impact of Domestic Abuse was primarily expressed through Registration under "Emotional Abuse" in 2006/7 there were 10 children Registered in Dundee under Emotional Abuse in 2010/11 this figure had risen to 36 Children.

4.4 **Increased awareness of neglect in early years**

4.4.1 There is increasing awareness of the negative impact of neglectful , under stimulating environments on children in the very first years of life. Significant research has highlighted the negative impact on infant brain development if they are brought up in circumstances characterised by neglect. Consequently , Dundee has invested heavily in services for higher risk pregnant women and new babies, for example through the New Beginnings Service and the Unborn Baby Protocol. New Beginnings has succeeded in supporting a number of vulnerable parents to care for their babies but the increase in awareness and investigation has also led to a greater number of children aged under one year being accommodated . In March 2008 the number of children aged under 1 year Looked After was 12, in March 2011 the number was 21. For children accommodated in their early years the challenge is not only to secure immediate safety but also to assess for the best route to achieve a long term , stable home environment for the child (Permanence). When it is assessed that the child's best interests are not met by remaining with natural parents, the process of achieving Permanence ,out with the family, can often be complex and legally contested, prolonging the length of time a child has to remain in foster care.

4.5 **Kinship Care (as young people and carers get older)**

4.5.1 Dundee has been one of the leading authorities in promoting the use of Kinship carers, which allows children to stay with extended family members, when they are unable to stay with parents. One of the most dramatic increases in Looked After children has been the increase in children Looked After by Kinship Carers . This approach has been recently given greater legal prominence within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and continues to be a key resource by which we will achieve more Dundee children staying within their own Dundee families. However Kinship care also comes with its own complexities, with a number of kinship care (most frequently grandparents) placements made when the child was primary aged , coming under strain when the child reaches teenage years. A number of Kinship placements have broken down in recent years , with parental and extended family care already tried, a number of these young people have had to be accommodated out with the family.

4.6 **Young people who place themselves at Risk**

4.6.1 There have been dramatic reductions in Youth Crime in Dundee, an outcome, in part, achieved by the excellent inter agency processes in place to share information and implement interventions, as close in time to the alleged crime as possible (Early and Effective Intervention Group). However there are not the same multi agency structures and processes in place to respond early and effectively to the needs of young people who place themselves at risk, through absconding, sexual activity and substance misuse. Young people at risk have been a significant growth area within the numbers of young people accommodated and the young people accommodated in Secure Accommodation and external resources. There are a number of contributory factors that have led to an increase in young people who exhibit risk taking behaviours. Among these are a number of young people whose parents have substance misuse (drugs and/or alcohol) who have offered their children poor experiences of adult control, leading to children who are consequently much less willing to accept boundaries, even when accommodated. A number of the young people who have been moved to Secure Accommodation have done so after a period in which they exhibited highly risk taking behaviour within Dundee Young people's Units or Foster care, with their absconding opportunities being aided by having relatives, involved in substance misuse, in the local community, who are not stable enough to offer consistent care but are willing to harbour the young people when they abscond from their care placements.

4.7 **Returning externally placed young people to Dundee**

4.7.1 These combination of factors, (increased awareness and activity surrounding Child protection, increasing responsiveness to children affected by Domestic Violence and children experiencing neglect in their earliest years, the impact of sustained parental substance misuse leading to more kinship carers and more young people exhibiting risk taking behaviours) has led to more children being accommodated and the in-house Dundee City council fostering and residential service reaching saturation point, with more young people being placed in external family placement on an emergency basis. This can also create dilemmas, as once children have been placed in out of authority placements for some time and become settled (often for the first time in their lives,) difficult decisions have to be made as to whether they should remain in placement or be moved for financial reasons. Often it is not always within the Social Work Departments control to bring a child back to the city, even when a DCC placement becomes available, as the decision to remain in a successful external placement can be made (for valid child centred reasons) by a Children's Hearing.

4.8 **Target those children who do not need to be placed out with Dundee and find ways to return them, as soon as possible.**

4.8.1 Some children have needs that are such that specialist external resources offer the best solution. These children are likely to still need accommodation in external resources. However there are a number of children who were placed in expensive external resources, simply because there was not an available in-house alternative. It is this figure that we must seek to reduce, both to enhance our Dundee based solutions and to reduce the growing expenditure on external placements.

4.9 **ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THESE PRESSURES**

4.9.1 **Intake and initial assessment**

It was thought that the introduction of the Multi Agency Screening Hub (MASH) would lead to a reduction in work coming into Social Work, with a resultant decision not to fill posts within the Social Work Care and Protection Teams. This

led to a temporary situation where the Care and Protection teams had unallocated cases. These cases have now been allocated, through the temporary introduction of extra staff (1 from CJS, 2 agency). In the longer term, it has been agreed to fill the Care and Protection posts.

With regard to addressing budget pressures, some key decisions have been made to ensure that the Care and Protection Teams focus on their key role of high quality initial investigation, assessment and intervention. Too much time in these teams was being taken up by longer term case holding, due to difficulties achieving transfer to the longer term Locality Teams. Agreement has been reached for a number of changes that will see the Care and Protection Teams (and New Beginnings) supply the Locality teams with a prioritised list of cases requiring transfer, with sufficient information for receiving teams to make allocation decisions. A number of earlier transfer points (e.g. at first Child Protection Case conference rather than second) have been agreed, to ensure that the Care and Protection Teams have the capacity to concentrate on their primary task of initial assessment and intervention.

4.9.2 **Action Point: Increased Capacity for Initial Intervention**

The Social Work Department Children's Services Management Team will take the necessary steps to ensure that the Care and Protection teams are better able to devote all their energies into initial investigation, assessment and intervention. The potential beneficial effect on the budget overspend should be greater capacity to undertake more thorough initial interventions, with fuller exploration of all possible kinship care options, before accommodation within Local authority resources is agreed.

4.9.3 **Early Years and Early intervention**

The growth in pre-birth investigations and the interventions led by New Beginnings and other Social Work Teams, is a key development in achieving change for children. Either assessment and support allows a parent to develop skills to care for their own child effectively or early assessment reveals that this is not possible and the child is still young enough to attach to another significant carer (find Permanence and belonging) either through Kinship care or Adoption.

4.9.4 **Action Point: The long term benefit of decisive assessment in Early years**

The increase in assessment and intervention in the earliest years of a child's life, is leading to more accommodations now but with decisive assessment, that achieves true permanence (either with capable natural family or adoption) then these children should grow up in viable long term families. As well as being right for the children, it is expenditure and intervention now, so as to not require this expenditure in future.

The main aim of our Family Support Teams and Locality Teams, where they work with children and families in early years is to make a decisive assessment and intervention that either supports families to care successfully for their own children or makes the alternative decision early enough for the children to find belonging elsewhere. To achieve this focus our Family Support Teams have had to shift their targeting ever more to the higher tariff cases, to supervising and assessing contact for children Looked After and to running Parenting Groups, particularly for parents about whom there is significant concern about their parenting abilities. This has meant the Family Support Teams (FSTs) are less able to undertake the range of more preventative work with more able families, that they used to undertake.

4.9.5 **Action Point: Lochee Pathfinder.**

The Social Work Locality Teams and Family Support Teams need the capacity to concentrate on more intensive assessment of families where there is concern that the child may need to be accommodated. This means that other agencies need to undertake the preventative work previously done by Social Work. The Lochee Pathfinder Initiative, to better co-ordinate how the whole range of services are delivered to under 5s in a specific geographical area, should produce a range of outcomes that helps agencies concentrate on their core tasks and help define how agencies should best work together to support the most vulnerable children and families. An agreed menu of resources, from prevention through to most intensive intervention, will better ensure that appropriate, proportionate help is given at every stage and increase Social Work's capacity to concentrate on the highest Tariff assessments.

4.9.6 **Action Point: Early Intervention Team**

The application by the four major Children's Charities in Dundee (Children First, Barnardos, Aberlour and Action For Children) for Big Lottery Funding to create an Early Intervention Team should enhance the capacity across the city to undertake more preventative interventions and free up Social Work capacity to concentrate on working with families, where the risks to the children are highest. The Local authority and the main voluntary organisations will continue to work together in this way, to ensure that the input of voluntary organisations is part of a shared strategic vision, that minimises duplication and ensures that identified gaps are addressed.

4.9.7 **Action Point: Intensive Family Support Team**

Within the Family Support Review there is a proposal to create an Intensive Family Support Team, dedicated to assessing and supporting families at key family routine times, i.e. breakfast time and evenings. The core task of this Team, if created, will be to significantly add to the capacity to drive forward key assessments, either demonstrating that families are able to establish routines at these times or demonstrating that they can't, therefore informing Permanence decisions. The quicker we are able to make decisions, the shorter time we need to use short term placements. Children awaiting assessment or completion of legal processes, occupying temporary foster placements, are not only missing out in their own "permanence" but are filling the capacity for other children to be accommodated, thus increasing the use of external placements. All steps that enhance quicker decision making, will also enhance throughput within the fostering resource and reduce the need to purchase temporary external placements.

4.9.8 **Action Point: Defining the role of the Social worker**

A work force capacity planning review is under way. This initiative was kick started by the Cap Gemini consultation process. The analysis of the key role of the qualified Social worker within Children's Services highlighted the crucial importance of giving Locality Social workers capacity to use professional judgement in making assessments, particularly around the critical issue of where a child should reside long term. The greater capacity such Social workers have to complete their assessments, the quicker decisions can be made for children. This is not only better for children's futures but can have a direct impact on the budget pressures, if children move more quickly to permanence, freeing up local Fostering resources more quickly. A range of solutions will have to be found for a number of tasks, currently undertaken by Locality Social workers, such as managing stable long term cases and transporting children, that gives these tasks to others, thus freeing the Social workers capacity to complete assessments. The whole Local authority has a role to play in this, as there a number of agencies,

such as School Community Support, that could play a greater role as the Lead Professional in more stable cases, helping free the Social work capacity for more complex work.

4.9.9 **Young People at Risk**

There is a pressing need to improve interagency assessment, allocation and earlier intervention processes regarding young people who place themselves at risk. As stated in the analysis of pressures, lessons could be learnt from the successful inter agency processes developed to tackle Youth Crime. There is some evidence that parent's "at the end of their tether" with young people exhibiting behaviour that is out with adult control, respond best to early intervention and support, thus increasing the chances of a family solution, rather than the parent feeling they are only listened to when they demand their child is removed. Similar to the Lochee Pathfinder for under 5s , there needs to be a co-ordinated review regarding how we get effective help to young people, growing out with control, as early and effectively as possible.

4.9.10 **Action Point: A multi agency response to Young people who go missing or at risk of Sexual exploitation**

Tayside police have begun to host a planning group to look at the range of responses to young people who are reported as Missing Persons. There is a proposal that this group extends its remit further and looks at the risks that are associated with young people whose whereabouts are unaccounted for, such as the danger of sexual exploitation and substance misuse. Dundee previously was at the forefront of developing a resource of nationwide importance , FACE (Fighting Against Child Sexual Exploitation) and the interagency examination of this topic should result in a renewed partnership between Barnardos and the Local Authority. The beneficial impact on budget pressures will be if we succeed in developing a range of measures that allows more young people to be supported to stay in Dundee, even with risk taking issues, rather than placed In Secure Accommodation or in external residential school.

Resource Provision and Decision Making

4.9.11 **Action Point : Review of ACE scheme**

A number of children , of all ages, have to be placed in external resources due the increasing number of children accommodated and our in house provision not expanding at the same rate. The Family Placement service continues to successfully recruit in-house foster carers to limit the reliance on external carers and to return children back to Dundee as appropriate. The recruitment of carers however has to be more targeted to meet demands and current trends and there is currently a review of our ACE scheme as it has become longer term in nature, which was not its original remit.

4.9.12 **Action Point: Review of Foster Care Respite arrangements**

Our system of providing respite to carers is also being reviewed which will aim to improve the availability of carers at peak times. This should help prevent some children moving to an external foster placement , just because there was no in-house resource on the day of their accommodation.

4.9.13 **Action Point: Increasing Throughcare Resources**

We have also increased our options for children leaving care by offering an increase in our supported lodgings scheme placements. This is not only a positive bridging placement for young people on the road to greater independence but by

increasing the options for older young people accommodated to move onto, it will enhance throughput and increase in-house capacity for new accommodations.

4.9.14 **Action Point: Re-focussing ISMS**

We have had a number of moves to secure which have been the result of young people who have placed themselves at a high degree of risk while residing in in-house Dundee Young People's Units. The ISMS service has now been diverted from mostly supporting young people at home to mostly supplementing the support and monitoring to young people accommodated.

4.9.15 **Action Point: Enhanced multi agency response to children Looked After**

The in house residential resources have children whose needs are complex and require a more integrated approach with health to assess and find the most suitable long term placements, or to help support them in existing placements. The Health Board is reviewing its provision of health services to young people Looked After and Accommodated.

4.9.16 **Action Point: Absconders Protocol**

The recently agreed "Absconders protocol" agreed between DCC and Tayside Police, will differentiate through a robust risk assessment between young people who are placing themselves at significant risk and those who are at less risk which will result in the better targeting of resources and better decision making for certain children. This is relevant to the budget pressures issue as some of the pressure to secure young people who are frequently reported missing comes from Tayside Police. An agreed risk assessment will help us make multi agency decisions about the degree of risk we are willing to tolerate, when young people are testing the limits of adult control

4.9.17 **Action point: Improved Commissioning**

There is considerable work on-going nationally around contracts for both Foster Care and Residential Schools. We have adopted the national contract for Secure Care this year. All of this work leads to better financial management and a transparency about cost and best value.

In house we are undertaking a mapping and scoping exercise for all in house and commissioned services to reduce duplication and to confirm that the services ,through contract monitoring , are fit for purpose and meeting demands. We also need to complete work on the commissioning strategy for external placements

4.9.18 **Action Point: Re-focus the Placement Review Group**

There is to be a review of the existing decision making fora that allocates external placements to children and young people. Changes here may make the most direct impact on the budget overspend. The existing Placement Review Group (Managers from Social Work, Education, Contracts and Finance) reviews all external placements. Now the Group has agreed to concentrate on regularly reviewing those placements where there is a possibility of a return to Dundee , rather than spend time discussing placements where the need for long term external provision is agreed. Through greater focus and consideration of creative means to meet the needs of challenging young people locally, it may be possible to use fewer external placements and more in-house solutions. A recent example being the move a young person from £5,000 a week residential school to a placement with a relative supported by £800 a week of purchased support. The re-focussed Placement Review Group will ensure that the possibility of any young person , appropriately, returning to Dundee from an external resource , is pursued

in a Project Planned manner. The Placement Review Group, will contain managers of sufficient authority to ensure that the required Dundee resources (care placements, education placements, support provision) are made available to achieve this goal of reducing the budget overspend by returning , appropriately, as many Dundee children placed externally as possible.

4.9.19 **Action Point: Early Years Change Fund**

Scottish Government has agreed to establish an Early Years Change Fund. This fund will be used to help shift services towards greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Full details are not yet available however additional resources will help re-align our services without compromising the needs of children currently being looked after and accommodated.

4.10 **Conclusion**

As demonstrated above these pressures are not transient or superficial. There is no solution that involves a return to reduced identification of children deemed to be at risk . Changes need to be made in the way that we provide support to children in need, either to remain with their own parents, extended families or within their own communities. Only this will reduce the reliance that is growing on expensive external placements.

The challenges being presented through the issues noted above need to be seen as more than a Social Work issue. Under the GIRFEC agenda and Corporate Parenting, all agencies in Dundee need to work together in a more preventative way to reduce the need for children to become looked after.

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.

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

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

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

7.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The Options Appraisal Report
The Equality Impact Assessment Report
Risk Assessment

Alan G Baird
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Date: 21st October 2011

Appendix 1

