

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee - 15th November 2004
REPORT ON: Developments within the Staff Support Service
REPORT BY: The Director of Social Work
REPORT NO: 762 - 2004

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise Committee of developments taking place within the Department that are designed to support staff more effectively within the workplace.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Social Work Committee:-

- i. Endorses the positive work being undertaken in partnership to improve the health of the workforce
- ii. Supports the department in pursuing Scotland's Health at Work Silver Award

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Background

A national strategy has existed for some time since 1998 to encourage and develop initiatives to support front line staff in social work and social care. The strategy has led to the Associations of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) and the Scottish Executive developing a framework, evidencing good practice and developing systems for monitoring and reviewing policy and practice.

The main objectives for supporting front line staff are to improve

- Recruitment and retention
- Morale and motivation
- Attendance and well-being
- Performance
- Capacity for change and learning

The development of the Staff Support Service in the Social Work Department has been supportive of this joint strategic initiative with the Scottish Executive and ADSW. A previous report about the Staff Support Service was approved in August this year (report number 461-2004). Members will recall this report outlined the work involving the service and established a permanent post and funding to further develop the service.

The Staff Support Service is helping to attract new graduate social workers for example to come and work for the Department but also helps to retain existing staff especially staff delivering personal care to the most vulnerable people. By promoting the health and well-being of staff this impacts on staff feeling valued. Promoting health and well-being should also have a positive impact on reducing the level of sickness absence of staff. If staff are healthier and off less due to illness, then the quality of service and continuity of services should be better for service users and carers.

"Front line" staff work in demanding circumstances that cause stress and illness. Many "front line" staff work unsocial hours, shifts and weekends, often working in people's own homes and in more difficult working environments. When "front line" staff are absent due to illness they have to be replaced by others. This generally costs more to provide essential services and is therefore a natural concern to seek ways to help and motivate staff to return to work or assist them to continue at work.

The development of the Staff Support Service is also consistent with the Council's strategy to have a fit and healthy workforce that can contribute to the wider health improvement agenda for Dundee. In addition the service is also consistent with the Scottish Executive's national strategy for mental health and well-being which identifies the workplace as being a key setting for action.

The Staff Support Service has attracted much interest at national level and from other local authorities and agencies. The service is being held up as an example of good practice and setting high standards here in Dundee. Information has been provided about the service for the ADSW website to share good practice and guidance. The success of the service has led to the need to plan and establish a Staff Support Committee in the Department to further promote and develop the service.

The SHAW Award

On 21 October 2004, the Department was officially awarded the Scotland's Health at Work, (SHAW) Bronze Award recognising the efforts of the 2000 strong workforce. A significant amount of work is continuing to maintain this level of award. It is proposed to progress towards assessment for the Silver Award. Due to the activities the Department is involved in it is also proposed to seek a commendation award for mental health and well-being. A detailed action plan for the service has been developed linking it to the Department's Service Plan.

Health and lifestyle checks for staff are one of the key areas of development identified to meet the criteria for the SHAW Silver Award. This is being developed corporately. Arrangements will need to be included in the action plan and considered for the Department in terms of the size of the workforce. Some of the other points in the action plan are listed along with the following range of health and well-being events.

6.2 Health and Well-being Events

A range of specific activities have been scheduled towards the end of 2004 and well into 2005. All staff have been encouraged to attend especially front line staff. This requires flexibility in staff rotas, for example, where staff work in the community or in residential settings providing social care. These activities have been reported widely throughout the department using e-mail, newsletters and other forms of communication. A SHAW working group has been operating in the department and this helps the planning, organising and support of events.

- Health Fair - Over 300 staff attended events in December 2003 and June 2004. Another event is planned on 19 November 2004. Smaller and more local events are being planned to improve access by employees out in the community working near sheltered housing complexes.
- Stress management courses - seven courses have taken place helping around 150 employees acknowledge the impact of stress and how to use techniques for handling it more effectively. It is proposed to continue stress management courses each month and prioritise places on the course according to staff needs. It is planned to evaluate impact of the training on sickness absences. It is also planned to compare the content and costs of the training.
- Back care Initiatives – There are plans to extend the range and evaluate the quality of provision and develop written contracts with practitioners. It is also planned to measure the impact on sickness absences.

A number of specific classes have been arranged as a result of consultation with staff. This has attracted a wide number of staff to one off tasters or events over a few weeks.

- Smoking Cessation Class
- Aerobic class
- Tai Chi tasters and class
- Yoga and relaxation tasters and class

Newsletters and talks have been particularly successful in meeting the expressed interests and needs of staff. Topics included in newsletters have provided advice and information about healthy hearts, cancer prevention, diabetes, menopause and mental health. Talks have been organised locally with support from health agencies and at team meetings about meningitis and septicaemia, epilepsy and fibromyalgia.

Staff Counselling Service

In addition to the list of events the Staff Counselling service has been audited and extended. There are now seven female counsellors that are independent or external to the department. This improves real choice and responsiveness for staff. In the past six months 37 staff accessed the service using 148 sessions. It is planned to promote the staff counselling service to make more staff aware about it not just when they need to access it. It is also planned to measure the impact of the service on sickness absence.

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion the staff support service is key to how we effectively support staff. There is evidence that the health of the staff is improving, staff are feeling more valued, morale is higher and communication is improving. It is however recognised that improving the health of staff is not a quick fix and the department is committed to continuing to develop new strategies and ideas which will benefit the 2000 staff.

It is proposed to continue to work in partnership with ADSW and the Scottish Executive at national level. Joint working will continue corporately and locally with health towards the SHAW Silver Award for the Department and development of the intranet as one of the ways for the organisation to learn from good practice.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Depute Chief Executive (Finance) were consulted in the preparation of this report .

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Director of Social Work

Date: 5th November 2004