

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 15TH MAY 2006

REPORT ON: THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 275-2006

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of the work undertaken by the Children's Rights Officer for Children and Young People Looked After by Dundee City Council, for the year 2004/2005.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:-

- 2.1 Note and approve the annual report on the work of the Children's Rights officer for the period 1st November 2004 to 31st January 2006
- 2.2 Instruct the Director of Social Work to develop a Participation strategy across Council departments and agencies, compatible with the Integrating Children's Services Report.
- 2.3 Instruct the Director of social work to require the Children's Rights Officer to further develop the Service to children with disabilities by strengthening partnerships with voluntary organisations providing advocacy to these Service users.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Children's Rights Officer has a specific role in providing the most vulnerable children and young people in Dundee with access to knowledge, information and support, which will empower and enable them to participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives. This creates opportunities to improve the quality of their lives in many social contexts.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report will further promote the status of children and young people of all abilities looked after by the Council, to give them parity with other service users and safeguard them from discrimination. The work of the Children's Rights Officer has a focus on participatory rights of children and young people looked after, creating equality of opportunity for active citizenship to a group acknowledged as having diminished life-opportunities.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Background

6.2 The Children's Rights Service reached its sixteenth year on the 1st December 2005. During this period the service has matured and developed as an advice, information and advocacy service for children and young people looked after by the Council. The service is also available to those professionals and adults with responsibility for the welfare of children and young people, for whom the Council is a corporate parent. The service has a positive reputation throughout Scotland and Dundee City Council has a right to be proud of having had the foresight to originally appoint the second Children's Rights Officer in the UK and the first in Scotland. Children's Rights Officers now exist in all but a few Councils in Scotland.

6.3 Update

6.4 The information covers a period from 1st November 2004 through to January 31st 2006. When making comparisons between the activity covered in this report and that of the previous report, this difference in timeframe should be borne in mind.

6.5 Throughout the past year, the Children's Rights Officer has continued to make a significant contribution to the work of the Social Work Department. This has been achieved through membership of appropriate strategic planning groups, facilitating consultation with young people and contributing to staff, volunteer, carer and Social Work student training events. The Children's Rights Officer has also expanded the Advice and Information service to all Council departments providing services for looked after children and young people.

6.6 The scope of the service has incorporated Education, Housing and Economic Development. The Children's Rights Officer also sits on the Board of Who Cares? Scotland and is a Trustee on the Board of the Scottish Child Law Centre. Through encouragement and support from the service, children and young people from Dundee are represented on the Board of Who Cares? Scotland and have been involved in a number of national consultations with the Care Commission and reviews conducted by the Scottish Executive. The service has also supported eight looked after young people to contribute to the recruitment of residential staff with Dundee City Council.

6.7 An update of service information in leaflet form has been completed. Leaflets are now available to service users outlining their rights and responsibilities in various contexts. This information is also available in a web page, www.dundee.gov.uk/childrensrights.

6.8 The Children's Rights Officer has established close links with the Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. This has ensured children and young people in Dundee have had the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Commissioner's Office. Membership of strategic groups allows the Children's Rights Officer to contribute a children's rights perspective to policy development ensuring policies are congruent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6.9 An aim of the Children's Rights Service is to promote a culture of recognition of rights with those adults who provide services to children and young people who are looked after and accommodated. To this end, the Children's Rights Officer has delivered training to social work students, residential staff, foster carers and voluntary organisations.

6.10 For a breakdown of the data on referrals to the Children's Rights Service, see Appendices 1 and 2.

6.11 **Service Users**

6.12 Those who are eligible to use the Children's Rights service include children and young people who are looked after at home or looked after and accommodated in foster care or residential settings, both within the City and outwith. This includes children with disabilities.

6.13 Children and young people in the 12-16 years age bracket represent the predominant age-group who contact the Children's Rights Service. The service has also supported the best interest of children pre-birth, to one adult who was 28 years old. Contact is maintained with those young people who are placed away from Dundee and have agreed to remain in contact with the Children's Rights Officer. The service is also available to those people who have, in the past, been looked after by the Local Authority (For a detailed breakdown of referral information see Appendix 2).

6.14 **Advice and Information Service**

6.15 The Advice and Information service is available to both children and young people looked after and those adults with responsibility for their welfare. Requests for this service range from enquiries regarding procedures, to requests for advice and information on complex children's human rights issues. There were 382 requests for advice within the period of this report. Requests also came from teachers, youth workers, Children's Panel members, nurses, elected members and others with an interest in children's human rights. (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of Referral sources).

6.16 **Advocacy and Representation**

6.17 Children and young people have a basic human right to express their views and have those views taken into account, in matters affecting their lives. Like all rights, this can be an empty concept unless young people are informed of the right and empowered to exercise it. The Children's Rights Service provides advice and assistance to children and young people, to express their views in meetings, Looked After Children Reviews, Children's Hearings and other processes. Support is also offered to negotiate concerns with Social Work staff, other Council employees, and staff in other agencies.

6.18 An important principle in advocacy is independence. The Children's Rights Officer works in partnership with the young person's worker from Who Cares? Scotland to provide the **Children's Rights and Independent Advocacy Service**. Who Cares? Scotland offers organisational independence when supporting children and young people through advocacy, while the Children's Rights Officer is independent of operational duties. Working together with Who Cares? Scotland offers children and young people choice in who they approach for support. The Who Cares? Worker has taken on the bulk of advocacy for young people looked after and accommodated in Dundee. The Children's Rights Officer is responsible for providing advocacy to children and young people affected by disability and those who are placed outwith Dundee.

6.19 Over the past fifteen months, there has been an increase in requests for advocacy services and a dramatic increase in requests to support young people in formal processes such as Looked After Child Reviews and Children's Hearings. Explanations for this include the availability of Service leaflets, young people valuing the support given by the service and young people recognising the importance of expressing their views. Attendance at Reviews and Hearings are recorded separately to requests for advocacy as these place a significant demand on the Children's Rights Officer's time, given preparation time required, as well as the time needed to attend meetings (See table 2 Appendix 1).

6.20 **Complaints Service**

6.21 An important duty of the Children's Rights Officer is to ensure those complaints and concerns raised by young people, are given proper consideration by responsible officers. The role of the Children's Rights Officer is to enable and support young people to voice their complaints and offer assistance throughout the process, to resolution. Most complaints are resolved through mediation and negotiation with concerned parties.

6.22 There has been a reduction in the numbers of complaints. This may, in part, be explained by the willingness of children and young people to resolve issues without the need for formal processes. Complaints recorded included concerns raised in a number of contexts such as residential schools, Health service provision, Police practice, secure accommodation as well as with service provision within the Social Work Department. While the vast majority of young people were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint three individuals were not satisfied but did not wish to pursue the matters. (See Table 3. Appendix 1)

6.23 **Secure Accommodation**

6.24 When a child or young person is made the subject of a secure order, the Children's Rights Officer is notified. Contact is made within two working days of notification and regular visits are arranged with the agreement of the young person. The Children's Rights Officer ensures that young people understand their rights in relation to their circumstances and gives advice and assistance when it is requested. Staff and are made aware of the Children's Rights Officer's powers and the range of assistance offered by the service.

6.25 Of the 25 individual young people who were admitted to secure accommodation, 3 were female and 22 males. The young women were more likely to request support than the young men and they accounted for a significant number of the referrals. The majority of young people admitted to secure accommodation were placed there because of concerns for their welfare rather than offending being the primary concern (See Table 4 Appendix 1).

6.26 **Disability Service**

The Children's Rights Service offers an advice, information and advocacy service to children and young people who are affected by disabilities. The service is also open to those adults with responsibility for the welfare of these children and young people.. The Children's Rights Officer now acts as advocate for 5 individuals on a long-term basis. Access to specialist services and the response time are the primary concerns of children with, and families affected by disabilities. There has been a slight increase in the number of referrals from this group, which may be accounted for with the publication of Service leaflets. (See Table 5 Appendix 1)

7.0 **CONSULTATION**

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

8.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

5 May 2006

APPENDIX 1

COMPARABLE FIGURES

Please Note: The tables illustrated refer to differing timescales. The figures for the period 2003-04 reflect a twelve month period ending 31st October 2004. The figures for the period 2004-05 cover the timeframe 1st November 2004 through to January 31st 2006, a period of fifteen months.

Table 1 Request for Advice and Information

	2003-04	2004-05
Request for information and advice:	350	382

Table 2 Support Through Advocacy

	2003-04	2004-05
Requests to Children's Rights Officer for advocacy service	116	204

	2003-04	2004-05
Requests for support to attend LAC Review	26	32

	2003-04	2004-05
Requests for support to attend Childrens Hearings	7	26

Table 3 Complaints

	2003-04	2004-05
Complaints assisted by the Childrens Rights Officer	55	42

Table 4 Secure Accommodation

Referrals from young people in Secure Accommodation 2003-04	Female 45	Male 31	TOTAL 76
Referrals from young people in Secure Accommodation 2004-05	Female 51	Male 69	Male 120

Table 5 Children and Young People With Disabilities

	2003-04	2004-05
Referrals relating to Children and Young People with Disabilities	53	69

APPENDIX 2

DATA TABLES

REFERRALS TOTAL	
	2004-05 763

SERVICE	PROVISION	
LAC REVIEW		32
HEARING		26
DISABILITY ISSUES		69
CONSULTATION		14
COMPLAINT		42
ADVOCACY		204
ACCESS TO RECORDS		4
		Sub Total 391
ADVICE		382

REFERRAL SOURCE		
YOUNG PERSON		186
SW		71
RELATIVE		47
RES WORKER		22
VOL AGENCY		20
REVIEW OFFICER		12
CARER		10
TEACHER		5
OTHER LA		4
HEALTH		3
SERVICE MANAGER		2
DIRECTOR		2
RES MANAGER		7
		TOTAL 391

TRAINING			
VOL AGENCY		UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE	
4		2	
			RESIDENTIAL/FOSTER CARE
			4
			TOTAL 10

ADVICE AND INFORMATION			
YOUNG PERSON		PROFESSIONAL	
	196	186	TOTAL 382

AGE			
0-5 YEARS			24
6 TO 8 YEARS			14
9 TO 11			39
	12 YEARS		44
	13 YEARS		47
	14 YEARS		78
	15 YEARS		90
	16 YEARS		15
	17 YEARS		27
18+ YEARS			13
			TOTAL 391