

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE - 18 June 2001

REPORT ON: AUDIT OF CHILD PROTECTION CASES UNDERTAKEN BY THE UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 399 - 2001

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform members of the outcomes of the audit of child protection cases commissioned by the Director of Social Work and carried out by the University of Dundee, in conjunction with the Social Work Department.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that The Social Work Committee:-

- 2.1 Note the contents of the summary report on the Audit of Child Protection Cases attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Acknowledge the co-operation of all the staff involved in this audit and recognise their openness and continued commitment to the service.
- 2.3 Instruct the Director of Social Work to implement the attached Service Improvement Action Plan.
- 2.4 Instruct the Director of Social Work to conduct a further audit on the quality of practice in cases of children whose names are not on the child protection register.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

None

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of the recommendations will enhance the Council's response to children in need of protection and support, thereby promoting equal opportunities.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

- 6.1 In accordance with the Committee's decision on 15 December 1997, after consideration of Report No. 892/1997, that an external audit of child protection cases should be conducted regularly, the Director of Social Work commissioned such an audit from the University of Dundee.
- 6.2 In accordance with the wish of both the University and the Department to enhance the quality of work through co-operation and collaboration, a departmental officer was assigned to carry out audit work under the supervision of Professor Norma Baldwin.

- 6.3 The aims of the audit were:
- 6.3.1 To examine the match between policy and procedural response targets and operational achievements
 - 6.3.2 To test for quality through detailed analysis of written material (casenotes, initial assessments, etc) in a sample of cases which would be representative of the Department's activities across a range of work settings
 - 6.3.3 The development of audit tools to aid continuous quality monitoring and service development.
- 6.4 The full report is in four sections. It sets out the statistical information about the current operation of the child protection system in Dundee and looks at the quality of information contained in the case files of all children named on the child protection register at 31st March 2000. It also considers the experience of staff and discusses issues arising from the audit to which the department may wish to give further consideration (see attached Service Improvement Action Plan).
- 6.5 The full report is available in the members lounge. The attached summary report (Appendix 1) which was written by Professor Baldwin in conjunction with the Department's Service Manager responsible for child protection, highlights key points.
- 6.6 The audit set out to measure actual performance against the policies and procedures that spell out what should be happening in practice. The report illustrates that, generally, the department does what it says it will do.
- 6.7 The report is a detailed analysis of practice. It points to a number of areas where there should be development of processes and practice (eg recording of information). These points are taken on board in the attached Service Improvement Action Plan.
- 6.8 Notwithstanding the areas for development highlighted in the report it is nevertheless, important to note the conclusions drawn by the auditors who refer to objectives generally being met; policies being implemented and quality of work recorded being high. The report also highlights the role and strength of the staff in this important and high profile area of work.

7.0 CONSULTATION

The Director of Support Services and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

9.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date

7 June 2001

**Dundee City Council Social Work Department
And
Centre for Child Care and Protection Studies,
University of Dundee**

**Audit of Child Protection Cases
Summary**

Work undertaken

An audit of all 40 cases on the child protection register on 31st March 2000 was undertaken by Norma Baldwin, Professor of Child Care and Protection and Shaun Ogden, Senior Social Worker between May and December 2000.

They studied:

- how far departmental targets for undertaking investigations, case conferences and reviews were achieved;
- the quality of records, assessments and protection arrangements for children.

Quality of Services

The audit demonstrated that the objectives of the child protection system are generally being achieved. Policies are being effectively implemented and response targets are being met. The quality of work recorded in individual cases is high. Follow up across agencies is careful and consistent, taking account of many of the concerns raised nationally in research and inquiries into failures of the Child Protection system.

The staff of the social work department provide the strongest child protection resource. They are a dedicated, experienced and well qualified group, who despite feeling under pressure at times with their workload, still appear to retain feelings of job satisfaction in child protection work. They co-operated most constructively with this audit.

Complexity of cases

Some of the cases studied showed a wide range of problems over lengthy periods. There were major health problems for children and parents, issues relating to disability, to parental relationships, to substance abuse, to physical and emotional care of the children, to trauma arising from sexual abuse. Where families moved areas it was particularly difficult to keep track of past and current needs and risks.

The Child Protection Register now contains some of the most difficult and intractable situations and progress can be slow: it is not simply a case of children's situations improving greatly: for some they clearly do not. For this reason it is important to ensure that their long-term needs are taken account of when they are no longer registered - integration of child protection services within the wider child care and family support services is essential.

Statistical information

At 31 March 2000, the Child Protection Register was made up as follows:

Age	Number	As %
Aged 5 Years & Under	25	62.50%
Aged Over 5 to 10 Years	7	17.50%
Aged Over 10 Years	8	20.00%

Registration Category	Number	As %
Emotional	3	7.5%
Failure to Thrive	1	2.5%
Neglect	20	50.0%
Physical	10	25.0%
Sexual	6	15.0%
Total	40	100.0%

Neglect is fairly uniformly spread across all age groups, while Physical Abuse seems mainly concentrated in children under 5 and is evenly split between male and female.

The Dundee City child protection system has a clear entry and exit process for its Child Protection Register, and timescales relating to certain actions. If one part of the system is delayed, it inevitably causes delay in the next stages of the system. In cases where there was delay, the audit identified why these delays seemed to be occurring. In some cases there were difficulties in obtaining necessary information in extremely complex situations.

69% of initial child protection investigations were completed within 7 working days and 65% of initial child protection case conferences took place within 14 days. In only a very small percentage of cases was there a substantial delay. In all cases where a child's name was placed on the Child Protection Register, a review case conference took place within 6 months.

Case information

All the case files of the 40 children on the CP register were in good condition, tidy and well maintained. All files had a full set of the essential documents.

Assessment information

In all case files there was a wide spread of information about the child, the family and the reasons for concern. This compared well with studies undertaken elsewhere - for example 'Messages from Research' by the Department of Health.

There is no doubt from talking with the social workers involved that their knowledge about the families they work with extends well beyond that which is recorded in case files, but the audit concentrates on the quality of recorded information.

In the majority of cases the Assessment was built on a firm foundation of information from which flowed a clear plan. In only a very small number of cases was the assessment limited by insufficient information or lack of co-operation.

Most of the plans were detailed and interdisciplinary, often involving Health and Education workers, most frequently Health Visitors and Teachers, though other disciplines such as Child Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology, Paediatrics and other specialist services also have involvement with a few children. Different parts of the Social Work Department such as Child & Family Centres and Drugs/ Alcohol workers were also frequently involved. Few GP's were involved.

There was evidence of careful communication between agencies.

In all case files there was information about how the case was progressing, according to identified priorities, though some were more specific than others.

Detailed factual information about home conditions, the neighbourhood and income and outgoings including debt, was however only documented sub-substantially in half of all cases.

The complexity and instability of some situations of families on the register is difficult to document effectively. The audit raised concerns about the wide range of disparate documents which workers must use, about the repetition involved and the difficulties of ensuring that the most crucial information is immediately apparent. Further work will be undertaken to ensure the most effective use of records for the protection of the child and the support of the family.

The attached action plan (Appendix 2) details the Social Work Department's response to the recommendations made in the Audit.

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**Dundee City Council, Social Work Department
and
Centre for Child Care & Protection Studies,
University of Dundee**

Audit of Child Protection Cases, 2000/2001

Service Improvement Action Plan

This Service Improvement plan takes account of the statement in the audit that, “...the objectives of the child protection system are generally being achieved. Policies are being effectively implemented and response targets are being met. The quality of work recorded in individual cases is high.”

It is with the above remarks in mind that this action plan picks up on areas where there is room for practice improvement. The action called for below, is part of a programme of continuous improvement. A programme that accepts we are always learning and can always develop practice based on that learning.

Issues raised in the Report	Area for Action	Where we are now	Where we need to be	Action Required	Timescale
In highly complex cases...we question whether a more extensive review system - of records and professional practice- would be helpful, to ensure that current assessment and reviews of action plans and outcomes are based on a comprehensive overview...	Internal quality monitoring.	No internal, 'arms length' auditing and quality monitoring taking place.	Officers who are not directly involved in cases to use audit tools developed by Dundee University and other quality monitoring instruments on a regular basis.	Children's Services Management Team to agree formats/tools for audit and quality monitoring. Children's Services Management Team to identify system and personnel to undertake internal audits and quality monitoring.	July 2001 Sept 2001
We strongly recommend that a timeline, showing brief details of all significant incidents.... should feature at the front of every case. ... This would provide a useful aid to assessment...and encourage an emphasis on factual, evidence based recording and review.	Clear chronological history.	When a simple chronological history is absent, it can be difficult to put together a clear picture of circumstances, events and involvement by agencies.	Every case record must contain a straightforward, chronological history of key events and changes in circumstances.	1. First-line managers to ensure maintenance of chronological histories. 2. Continue development of IT systems so that chronological history can be produced from information recorded on computer systems.	Immediate Ongoing

Issues raised in the Report	Area for Action	Where we are now	Where we need to be	Action Required	Timescale
<p>Should the wide range of forms and records be reviewed to see if simpler, more coherent systems can be devised to underpin clear, current, comprehensive and accessible information; assessment and review?</p> <p>It would be helpful to have a space on the current CP1 (Inquiry Record) to show the decision making path; who talked to whom, and who decided what,</p> <p>In a few cases, changes of address, particularly from one area to another, led to periods when it was hard to continue to monitor children's progress.</p>	<p>Rationalisation of documentation.</p>	<p>Recording of information takes place on a number of different documents. There is evidence of different versions of forms being used.</p>	<p>A written comprehensive assessment must be easily identifiable and accessible within the case records.</p> <p>Other forms and documents to be reviewed and, where appropriate, rationalised.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Amend CP Inquiry documents to incorporate section that allows for recording of the decision-making process. 2. Finalise work already underway on development new assessment documents that will draw information together in one place. 3. Those involved in improving Information & Technology systems to prepare proposals for further rationalisation for forms and documents. 	<p>Sept 2001</p> <p>October 2001</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>Accurate and quick recording on K2 database.</p>	<p>Information on database is not always up-to-date and accurate.</p>	<p>We must know that all information is up-to-date and correct.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Those responsible for IT development to continue work towards simplifying and streamlining the recording procedures. 2. First-line managers to strictly apply existing procedure and regularly scrutinise caseload data for accuracy. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Immediate</p>
	<p>The written child protection plan.</p>	<p>Written plans vary in detail and, therefore, usefulness.</p>	<p>Using one format, the design of which leads to a clear statement of who is doing what and why, to protect the child.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce already drafted Protection Plan template (CP4). This will provide a clear, written plan. 2. Service Groups, Children's Services Management Team and Dundee Committee for Child Protection to agree that Case Conferences must state what the objectives on a child protection plan are to be. 3. Chairs of Case Conferences must ensure that reviews carefully scrutinise progress made in meeting objectives in plans. This requires all plans to be tabled at Case Conferences, as per current procedures. 	<p>Immediate</p> <p>Immediate</p> <p>Immediate</p>

Issues raised in the Report	Area for Action	Where we are now	Where we need to be	Action Required	Timescale
Transfers from child protection team to longer-term teams appear to be substantially delayed in a number of cases	Continue to develop the quality of child protection inquiries and procedures.	Child Protection Team carries out inquiries in respect of children not already known. Case holding social worker leads inquiry if child already known to social work.	Must ensure that every child protection inquiry is carried out to the highest possible standard, thereby providing best service and enhancing the likelihood that the quality of information will increase.	Decision on whether child protection team should carry out all inquiries to be made by Children's Services Management Team.	August 2001.
The frequency with which timescales are exceeded - often for clearly legitimate reasons - leads to anxiety for social workers. Should there be a greater emphasis on the need to discuss any reasons for delay with managers and record them...? Should guidance on timescales be subordinate to the priority to gathering and assessment of information?	Greater acknowledgement of timescales for action, as set out in Procedures. Children's Services Management team to agree prioritisation.	It is not always clear why timescales are exceeded in some cases. Nor is there always managerial sanction of timescales being exceeded.	If there are good reasons why timescales cannot be met, then these must be recorded and signed off by a manager	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First-line managers to ensure implementation of practice that meets timescales or, when this is not possible or desirable, that records reasons for timescales being exceeded. 2. Children's Services Management team to discuss, agree and implement any amendment to CP procedures to reflect prioritisation of the need for proper assessment over the strict meeting of timescales. 	<p>Immediate</p> <p>Sept 2001</p>
Sometimes core group meetings have been attended only by social workers, even though seniors have made strenuous efforts to involve other agencies. This undermines the principle of interdisciplinary planning in child protection.	Ensure that everyone involved plays a full part in implementing child protection plans.	Often, the case-holding social worker is left carrying the bulk of the work following CP inquiry.	A fuller sharing of tasks with SWD resources and across agencies, allowing the social worker to focus on important co-ordination tasks as well as specific direct work.	Dundee Committee for Child Protection to be asked to note comments and to be invited to further promote ethos of ongoing inter-agency collaboration and co-ordination, through strategic planning and training programmes.	Immediate

Issues raised in the Report	Area for Action	Where we are now	Where we need to be	Action Required	Timescale
<p>Many families would gain from some form of benefits maximisation advice such as that offered by the Welfare Rights team.</p>	<p>Ensure income maximisation is a core task in a protection plan.</p>	<p>Poverty can be a significant contributory factor in child abuse and neglect. Action does not always reflect awareness of this.</p>	<p>Assessments need to consider the role of finance in the circumstances of the child and family. Income maximisation to be a core task in a child protection plan.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First-line managers to ensure that income maximisation is part of child protection planning. 2. Discussion to take place with colleagues in welfare rights service to negotiate role that that service can play in Children’s Services 3. Managers of resource workers and Child & Family Centres to clarify role that their staff might play in income maximisation. 	<p>Immediate</p> <p>Summer 2001</p> <p>Summer 2001</p>
<p>Questions remain about whether there are major differences between children on the register and other cases where there is substantial ongoing work and whether current assumptions about the nature and limits of 'child protection' cases need further scrutiny.</p> <p>Is there a need for a parrallel study of continuing work in complex cases - both cases which have been de-registered and some which did not come through the child protection system?</p>	<p>Clarification of 'thresholds' used to include children within child protection procedures, particularly the criteria used to judge when CP procedures are no longer required.</p> <p>Develop training programmes to reflect up-to-date research and thinking and developments in policy and procedure.</p>	<p>Possible lack of clarity about 'thresholds' for including children within child protection procedures.</p> <p>Child Protection Course (incorporating 'stand-alone' Module 1) is no longer exactly what is needed.</p>	<p>With reference to best practice and current literature, agree criteria for de-registration and disseminate this information through SWD and other agencies.</p> <p>Providing tailored, credit-rated, modular training that focuses on current need and is flexible enough to develop as need and demand changes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University of Dundee asked to undertake further audit work on a wider range of cases. 2. Dundee Committee for Child Protection to be asked to discuss this issue and agree guidance for all agencies in Dundee. 1. Review of post-qualifying training now underway. Proposals being developed. 2. Dundee Committee for Child Protection to be asked to take account of points made when developing its inter-agency training programme. 	<p>Underway</p> <p>Dec 2001</p> <p>Underway</p> <p>Immediate and Ongoing</p>

Issues raised in the Report	Area for Action	Where we are now	Where we need to be	Action Required	Timescale
<p>There were no children from minority ethnic groups on the register. Are there ongoing consultations with community groups, cultural and religious and women's groups about child protection issues?</p>	<p>Application of Human Rights legislation.</p>	<p>Consultation has taken place on implications of Human Rights legislation.</p>	<p>If appropriate, amend procedures to ensure promotion of human rights.</p>	<p>Complete audit of key processes and procedures. First-line managers and Service Managers to ensure strict application of those procedures that already comply (e.g. sharing of information, etc). As required, new procedures to be written and introduced.</p>	<p>Complete Immediate End of 2001</p>
	<p>Consultation processes to be reviewed.</p>	<p>No specific consultation on child protection takes place with cultural or religious groups.</p>	<p>Ensuring that people who do want to discuss child protection issues, have the opportunity to do so.</p>	<p>Children's Services Management team to liaise with the Development Officer, Minority Ethnic Communities, and agree plan to promote consultation between childprotection services and members of specific groups and communities.</p>	<p>October 2001</p>
<p>Is there a need for a Scotland or UK wide link-up of register information, which might help speed up transfer and follow up in cases where risk may be substantial?</p>	<p>Possible development of national collation of register information.</p>	<p>Each local authority maintains its own child protection register, passing on information as appropriate.</p>	<p>Able to transmit information between local authorities whenever this is required.</p>	<p>Dundee Committee for Child Protection to be asked to consider the matter and decide about raising this matter at one of the regular meetings between CPC representatives and the Scottish Executive.</p>	<p>Sept 2001</p>