

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 15 January 2001

REPORT ON: MANAGING THE RISK

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 47-2001

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To approve the Director of Social Work's response to Managing the Risk published by the Scottish Executive.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:-

2.1 Notes and approves the content of the attached response.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications for Dundee City Council directly arising from this response.

4.0 AGENDA 21

4.1 This report supports key theme 9, which acknowledges "people to live without fear of personal violence in crime and persecution".

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This response does not have any implications for the Council Equal Opportunities Policy.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 In January 1998 the Minister for Home Affairs announced that the Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWSI) would inspect all sex offender cases supervised by Aberdeen City Council Social Work Department and also those supervised by a further seven local authorities across Scotland.

6.2 Managing the Risk is the report of the SWSI and it looks at the quality of work in the local authorities and at the extent to which they are making the improvements called for in A Commitment to Protect (SWSI 1997) and the McManus Report (J McManus 1997).

6.3 The main inspection took place between April and October 1998 and examined:

- All adult sex offender cases
- Court and parole reports prepared by social workers
- Case files of children who had committed sex offences and who were sexually aggressive

- 6.4 The report made five recommendations, which are addressed in the attached response. The main themes arising are:
- A need to train all staff within agencies who work with and who have a responsibility for sex offenders and sexually aggressive children.
 - That the National Objectives and Standards for Social Workers in the Criminal Justice System now require strengthening to meet the challenges presented by this group of offenders.
 - Protocols should be developed to allow information sharing between all agencies involved with this group.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chief Executive, the Director of Support Services, and the Director of Corporate Planning. The Director of Housing, Director of Neighbourhood Resources Development and the Director of Education were included in the consultation. Outwith Dundee City Council, comment was invited from the Police and Barnardo's Bridge Project and their senior management.

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. However reference has been made to Committee Report No. 728/2000

9.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date

20 December 2000

Mr Angus Skinner
Chief Inspector
Social Work Services Inspectorate
Area 1C
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ

If calling please ask for
Our Ref ARW/PB

Mr A Baird. Tel: 435001
Your Ref

Date 31 May 2001

Dear Mr Skinner

The Social Work Services Inspectorate invite a response to Managing the Risk by January 2001. As the management of sex offenders in the community is the responsibility of a number of agencies it was decided to consult with the following: -

- Barnardo's Bridge Project
- Tayside Police
- Social Work Children's Services and the Education Department
- Dundee City Council Neighbourhood Resources
- Dundee City Council Housing Department

The views contained within this response are that of Dundee City Council but have been informed by a wider consultation.

Recommendation 1 - Interface between Prison and the Community

The Scottish Executive should require local authorities to nominate a supervising officer at the start of sentence in all cases where a sex offender is imprisoned for four years or more, and should also require them to promote the use of voluntary social work assistance for all sex offenders sentenced to shorter periods of custody. The Scottish Executive should provide additional funding to support such work.

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Mr Angus Skinner
Chief Inspector

20 December 2000

We agree there should be a requirement within the National Objectives and Standards for Social Workers in the Criminal Justice system to nominate a Supervising Officer at the start of all cases when a sex offender is imprisoned for four years or more.

We would also agree that voluntary Social Work assistance in some instances could be offered to all sex offenders sentenced to shorter periods of custody. It is, however, a concern that voluntary contact has no statutory powers or sanctions. Implementation of this recommendation would incur additional expense and we agree the Scottish Executive should provide additional funding to support such work.

The reasons for our agreement with this recommendation are detailed below: -

The contact process will enhance Risk Assessments. In the past the passing of information between Prison and Social Work has been patchy. This is, however, improving. Information gained from closer contact with the prisoner in addition to informing the risk assessment would be a source of important information to the police and child protection services. There was a suggestion from the wider consultation that a Police Liaison Officer be involved with the prison throughout the sentence. It was emphasised that great care would have to be exercised about how certain information was to be managed. The management of information of a sensitive nature has issues under the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act and it needs to be clear who has the responsibility of collating and disseminating the information. The effectiveness of this process will have implications for public safety and it is expected that the McLean Committee Report will address a national strategy for this group of offenders, with a Risk Assessment Authority already having been proposed.

Recommendation 2 - Information about Children's Cases

Local authorities should take steps to ensure that they have access to the best possible information about the scale and severity of sexually aggressive behaviour by children and young people in their area, on both an individual and aggregate basis.

Mr Angus Skinner
Chief Inspector

20 December 2000

We agree that it is essential to have accurate contemporary information about the incidence of sexually aggressive behaviour in the local area to inform risk assessment, and risk management and as a source of management information in the planning of services, and training. Provided there is no inappropriate infringement of an individual's human rights or data protection legislation, a database to store information on young people who commit sexual offences may merit further discussion.

From the wider consultation it was felt that the report was unclear on the definition of sexually aggressive behaviour. There would, clearly, be training implications for Reporters Administration to ensure they were able to make informed decisions which were consistent across the country.

Recommendation 3 - Improving Practice with Sexually Aggressive Children

Local authorities should ensure that their work with sexually aggressive children and young people is informed by emerging knowledge about effective practice in addressing offending behaviour whilst continuing to safeguard and promote their welfare and take account of their needs. Training for Children's Panel members should include information about tackling sexual aggression and offending by young people. The new Scottish Initiative for Training in Residential Child Care is tasked to deliver core and specialist training for care staff including work with sexually aggressive young people. In collaboration with the Initiative, local authorities should assess the training needs for staff currently looking after sexually aggressive young people in residential settings and make this an early priority.

It is encouraging that this report recommends active steps which may be taken to improve practice when dealing with sexually aggressive children. It was felt that this training should be extended to foster carers and it was noted in the wider consultation that there was no mention of the Children's Reporter in the recommendations.

Social Work in Dundee is in a strong position to implement this recommendation. Criminal Justice Social Workers are offered training by the Tay Project but it was recognised that there is a need for all Social Workers to undertake further training after qualifying to increase their level of knowledge. This should, eventually, be award-based training for workers who are delivering direct services to sex offenders and shorter term courses for Social Workers who have a monitoring function only.

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Chief Inspector

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It was further suggested in the wider consultation that there should be a good practice template produced for a national approach, possibly developing and delivering specific training modules. The possibility of setting up a working group to look at this issue nationally may be an option, if it is not already being considered by the McLean Committee.

We welcome the new Scottish Initiative for Training in Residential Childcare, which should give a consistency of training across Scotland and that this training should be made available to appropriate Dundee City Council residential staff.

Recommendation 4 - Social Work Records

Local authorities should institute recording policies which will ensure that social work case records are more clearly focused on the reasons for intervention, the expected outcomes of such intervention and the methods for achieving these. Such policies should also ensure that information relevant to the management of the case is readily accessible, and that recording methods are consistent across the department.

Following a recent audit by David Briggs, Consultant Forensic Psychologist, the Social Work Criminal Justice Service in Dundee is in the process of revising all paperwork relating to potentially dangerous offenders.

It was emphasised in the wider consultation that information management was a matter for all the agencies involved with this group and that protocols should now be agreed on systems to record sensitive information. It was also an issue for the wider consultation that human rights may be infringed if correct information is not being recorded. It was further acknowledged if recording is undertaken in a haphazard manner, important information may be lost. It is suggested that the issue of recording sensitive information may be appropriately dealt with by local Public Protection Fora.

Recommendation 5 - Quality Assurance

Local authorities should put in place quality control and quality assurance systems for social work practice in respect of both criminal justice and children's services, to ensure that practice is of the best possible standard and is appropriately focused on risk.

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In Dundee, Criminal Justice Social Workers who are involved with sex offenders undertake specialised training offered by the Tay Project. At present this training is not offered to Children's Services, as the Tay Project would find it very difficult to meet such a demand. This situation is being reviewed. It is also noted that many sexually aggressive children are referred to the Barnardos Bridge Project, as well as the Criminal Justice Service. The young person's Social Worker would benefit from training on risk assessment and risk management as they have the ultimate responsibility for the child in the community.

Quality assurance within Criminal Justice cases is overseen by the following process: -

- Adherence to the National Standards
- The introduction of Local Standards which specify monitoring in excess of the National Standards
- Audits of potentially dangerous offender cases
- The Tay Project have access to a specialised Clinical Psychologist for consultation and programme improvements

Notwithstanding the above quality assurance process, it is a concern that The National Objectives and Standards for Social Workers in the Criminal Justice Service have not been updated to include specific guidance on the management of sex offenders.

Yours sincerely

Ms J Roberts
Director of Social Work