

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 17 JUNE 2002

REPORT ON: NEW MONIES TO COMBAT YOUTH CRIME

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 535-2002

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The report seeks approval of proposals to spend new monies which have been made available to combat youth crime. It provides summary details of the proposed development of restorative justice services. This initiative is part of a range of new services under the umbrella of Dundee's Youth Justice Strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee,

2.1 Notes the contents of the report and in particular:

2.2 Approves payments up to the value of £53,000 for SACRO (Safeguarding Communities: Reducing Offending) to expand its restorative justice service

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Scottish Executive has awarded Dundee City Council the additional sum of £83,230 in 2002/03 as youth crime monies with the specific aim of expanding the provision of restorative justice services. The cost of purchasing this service will be met in full from this award. The Executive has indicated that Dundee's allocation of specific Youth Crime monies will increase by £170,000 for year 2003/04 and as such this will allow this enhanced level of service to be provided through that financial year.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

The proposals in this report promote improved community safety and the feelings of well-being of the citizens of Dundee.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The proposed actions outlined in this report seek to promote the improved equality of opportunity and social inclusion of children and young people at risk of being involved in offending behaviour.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

6.1 Background

Any child over the age of 8 and under the age of 16 who is charged with an offence is liable (unless the offence is of a serious nature) to be reported by the Police to the Children's Reporters for Dundee. The Children's Reporters have duties to investigate and decide whether or not each individual child may be in need of compulsory measures of supervision. Many of the children who are reported are unlikely to be in trouble again. For them, warning letters from the Children's Reporter, or more formal warnings by Senior Police Officers underline the importance of avoiding trouble in the future.

6.2 Some of the children reported may be experiencing difficulties at home, at school or in the community and for them, Dundee City Council makes available support on a voluntary basis. A smaller number of children may be in need of compulsory measures of supervision - perhaps because of the nature of their offending behaviour, the nature of the problems they face at home or school and the inability or unwillingness of the child or family to engage in changing the behaviour. These children will be referred to Children's Hearings where members of the Children's Panel for Dundee decide if compulsory measures of supervision are required, and if so, what form this should take.

6.3 One of the resources used by Children's Reporters is to refer a child to the SACRO Mediation and Reparation service. Mediation and Reparation is a form of restorative justice whereby victims of crime have an opportunity to express their views to a mediator about the impact of the offending on them and their families. The offender is visited by the mediator and is encouraged to accept responsibility for the harm they have caused.

6.4 In August 2001 the Social Work Committee approved the use of £40,000 to purchase this service from SACRO. The full year cost of the service is £70,000, with this cost being met in full by Youth Crime monies from the Executive. The service took its first referrals in November 2001 and in its first 5 months has accepted 51 referrals.

6.5 The main aims of this intervention include the reduction of re-offending, restoration of the relationship between victim and offender, and the improvement of victims' experiences with the justice system. Young people are encouraged to face the consequences of their actions and to engage positively with the victim in a process that seeks to provide guidance and/or promote attitude change.

6.6 This service is consistent with Dundee's Youth Justice Strategy, which was approved by the Social Work Committee in December 2000 and included the following objectives:

To foster and increase community safety in all sectors in Dundee;

To respond to the needs and rights of the victims of youth crime in all aspects of the strategy;

To provide early intervention for children and young people deemed vulnerable to becoming drawn into offending behaviour;

To divert as many children and young people charged with offences as possible from further offending and the need for compulsory measures of supervision and/or prosecution by offering more effective alternatives

6.7 In January 2002 the Scottish Executive published its "Action Programme to Reduce Youth Crime 2002". The Executive indicated its intention to introduce a range of measures that would give victims of youth crime and their communities confidence in Scotland's system of Youth Justice. One of their key action points is to give victims an appropriate place in the youth justice system, with a stated aim to expand provision of restorative justice schemes. Funding to do this was announced in March 2002.

7.0 EXPANSION OF EXISTING SERVICE PROVIDED BY SACRO

7.1 New funding provided by the Scottish Executive will allow the current SACRO service to increase the numbers of cases referred to approximately 350 per annum. Enhanced funding will allow referrals to be accepted from social workers, residential care staff and Children's Panel members. Such referrals can be made in circumstances where the service is complementary to other services that are provided to meet the child's needs. Other services involved with a child might include counselling, independent living training, foster care or residential care. Some of these children and young people have a variety of needs and the referral to SACRO will be made in close collaboration with those who are already working with the child. Referral will, nevertheless, provide an important alternative for addressing the child's offending.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation has been undertaken with all the agencies and organisations represented on the Youth Justice Strategy Group. The Director of Support Services and the Director of Finance have also been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9.0 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.

10.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date

31 May 2002