

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE - 11 SEPTEMBER 2000
REPORT ON: CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES
REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 606-2000

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To bring members up to date on the position in regard to Child Protection issues and agree recommendations for action.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 a working group consisting of a representative from each of the Childrens' Residential Units, representatives of the relevant trade unions, managers of the Units and Social Work management and chaired by the Director of Personnel and Management Services or his nominee be established to examine staffing levels, rotas, sickness absence and cover, and training in the Residential Units and to complete the review within 3 calendar months;
- 2.2 monthly meetings between Social Work management and representatives of the relevant Trade Unions be held to discuss issues around the Health and Safety of the staff and reporting procedures thereof;
- 2.3 the Chief Architectural Services Officer in consultation with the Quality Assurance and Inspection Unit of Social Work and the staff operating within the units undertake a survey fabric of each of the Residential Units;
- 2.4 the Head of Children Services meets with the representatives of the Education Department to discuss the educational needs of the young people resident in these units and inform Residential Unit staff of progress;
- 2.5 in order to facilitate the above actions it is agreed to increase interim staffing from 10 full time equivalent to 10.5 full time equivalent in each Unit pending the outcome of the Working Group review.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The cost of any fabric improvements to the Residential Units can be met from the Social Work Department's Capital Budget.
- 3.2 The cost of the additional interim staffing to facilitate the Working Group operation will be met from the Social Work Department's Revenue Budget.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposals within this report promote the principles and values expressed in the Agenda 21 programme.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In line with the Council's Childrens' Services Plan this report continues to redress possible inequalities of access and opportunities and enhance the life opportunities for children in need, including those with, and affected by, disabilities.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Members will recall that a review of Childrens' Residential Child Care Services and the staffing structure for the Closed Support and Secure Unit was agreed at the Social Work Committee held on 21 February 2000. The report sought approval to implement changes to the operational remit and structure of the Residential Units services and also agree to establish a staffing structure for the Closed Support and Secure Unit. There has been unforeseen delays in the opening of the Closed Support and Secure Unit and this has placed particular pressure on the existing Childrens' Residential Child Care Units. This pressure has been exacerbated by a peak in demand for these services.

A number of concerns were raised in the local press which were outwith the normal channels of communication such as line management and the relevant Trade Union representatives. Subsequent to these developments the Chief Executive after consultation with members of the administration and opposition councillors arranged a meeting presided over by himself with representatives from each of the Childrens' Units, their Trade Union representatives and representatives from Social Work management. The meeting was open and frank and conducted in a positive manner from all sides with a number of proposals emitting from both the staff, Trade Unions and management side upon which the following areas were identified for action.

7 PROPOSALS

7.1 Staff Training Working Group

A number of areas of concern were raised by the staff in regard to the operation of the units at a time of high demand. Areas such as ratio of staff to young people, the rota system and how it was operating and the reliance on sessional staff and supply staff complicated by absence through ill health and shift patterns were all raised. Following discussion it was agreed that the best way forward would be to establish a Working Group with membership from each of the Residential Units, Trade Union representatives as appropriate, managers and Social Work management. This Working Group would be chaired by the Director of Personnel and Management or his nominee and look to complete its review within a target date of 3 months. In order to facilitate time for staff within the units to participate in the Working Group it was agreed that there would be an increase in interim staffing from 10 full time equivalent to 10.5 full time equivalent within each Unit during the review period.

7.2 Joint Management/Trade Union Meetings

There were also concerns raised around issues of Health and Safety including violence in the workplace, acceptable restraint procedures, the

personal safety of staff and serious incident reporting procedures. After discussion it was suggested that these matters could be addressed at a monthly meeting between Social Work management and the appropriate Trade Unions and that this could be chaired jointly by a Social Work management representative and a representative of the Trade Union side.

7.3 Building Survey

A number of issues were raised in regard to the fabric of the buildings which staff felt needed to be addressed. The buildings are already subject to a fabric examination by the Quality Assurance Inspectorate which operates at arms length within the Social Work Department and reports from the Inspectorate have been acted on in the past. However, in order to accelerate the process where there are particular problems it was agreed that it would be desirable for the Chief Architectural Services Officer to arrange for a fabric survey of each of the units with staff able to make available to technical officers a list of issues they thought should be included within the survey.

7.4 Education of Looked After Children

After discussion it was agreed that there needed to be better lines of communication between the Social Work Department and the Education Department in regard to the educational needs of young people resident in the units and that staff should be informed if there was a particular problems at school. It was agreed that the Manager of Childrens' Services should facilitate a meeting with the Education Department representatives to discuss educational needs of these young people.

8.0 **CONSULTATION**

8.1 The Director of Personnel and Management Services and the Manager, Childrens' Services, Social Work were consulted during 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).

Chief Executive

Date