

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 17 NOVEMBER 2003**

**REPORT ON: THE RESPONSES OF THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT AND DUNDEE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE TO RECENT CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW AND INQUIRY REPORTS**

**REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK**

**REPORT NO: 762-2003**

### **1.1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update members on new initiatives and developments within Dundee City Council Social Work Department and Dundee Child Protection Committee in response to recent review and inquiry reports.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee: -

2.1 Notes and approves the initiatives as detailed in 6.2 and 6.4 currently being taken by Dundee City Council Social Work Department to develop child protection services in line with recommendations in recent child protection inquiry reports and the National Child Protection Audit and Review Report.

2.2 Note and approve the initiatives as detailed in 6.3 and 6.5 being taken by Dundee Child Protection Committee in response to the recommendations of the independent review of the Committee and its core activities.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The initiatives outlined within this report are aimed at improving the quality of child protection services across Dundee, furthering the Council's commitment to protect vulnerable children and young people. Furthermore, these initiatives are consistent with the Council's objective to ensure that people in Dundee live without fear of personal violence and abuse.

### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This report takes account of the rights and needs of vulnerable children and young people, including those from minority ethnic communities and those with disabilities. The report promotes the principle that child protection services must be provided and developed in ways that promote social inclusion and equality of access to services.

### **6.0 BACKGROUND**

- 6.1 Local authorities have an obligation under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to promote and safe guard the welfare of children in need, including those who are in need of care and protection.

In Scotland each year, about ten children are killed by a parent or parent substitute. Following the report into the death of one child, Kennedy McFarlane, the (then) Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, ordered a review of child protection across Scotland.

As a result of this review, in November 2002 the Scottish Executive published a national Child Protection Audit and Review report: *"It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright"*. The central part of the review was an audit of the practice of police, medical, nursing, social work, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and education staff. The audit was based on a sample of 188 cases, covering a range of possible concerns about children from early identification of vulnerability to substantiated abuse or neglect.

In October 2003 the Caleb Ness Inquiry Report was published. This inquiry was commissioned by Edinburgh and the Lothians Child Protection Committee and was concerned with the death, and the circumstances leading up to the death, of an eleven-week-old boy. The report contains 35 recommendations, which identify specific issues which need to be considered by all agencies who have a responsibility to care for and safeguard children and young people.

This committee report updates members on local practice, service delivery and proposed developments in those services designed to keep children and young people in Dundee safe.

## 6.2 **SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS**

### **The Joint Social Work and Police Child Protection Team**

Dundee City Council Social Work Department receives many referrals each year concerning the safety and welfare of children living and growing up within the City. Between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003 and 30<sup>th</sup> October 2003 there were 116 formal child protection inquiries. There are currently 58 children on the Child Protection Register. All child protection inquiries are led by professionally qualified, experienced and trained social workers. Dundee operates a joint Social Work and Police Child Protection Team based at Seymour Lodge. The Team is fully staffed, with an additional team member currently being recruited to increase the size of the Social Work part of the Team. The medical facilities at this location have been developed and there is a proposal that a Community Paediatrician will operate from there in the future.

All Child Protection Team members have undergone a week-long training in the *Forensic Interviewing of Children*. The joint team are currently involved in piloting *Mechanical Recording of Child Investigative Interviews*. These interviews will be recorded and stored on DVDs. This pilot, one of two being undertaken nationally, is noted within the new *National Guidance on Interviewing Child Witnesses in Scotland* and is linked to the *Video Interviewing Project National Steering Group*. This pilot should lead to national changes with regard to the evidence of child witnesses and the recording and storage of investigative child interviews.

The Department is currently developing, along with local Health maternity services, a preventative procedures and protocols aimed at improving practice in pre-birth assessments. A joint proposal will recommend the establishment of a service to co-ordinate pre-birth joint assessments, particularly in potentially high-risk situations such as those concerning pregnant women who are known to have a problem with drug or substance abuse.

## **Audit of Child Protection Practice**

The Council has authorised an external audit of childcare cases and has commissioned Professor Norma Baldwin, of Dundee University, to lead the audit and reporting process. This builds on a previous audit undertaken in 2000-2001. The audit process will review the recommendations from the previous external audit, inspect a range of child care case files, interview a sample of service users, conduct a staff survey and carry out a statistical analysis of child protection referrals. The outcome of the audit will be reported to Committee in the future.

The Caleb Ness Inquiry Report includes a recommendation that regular internal and independent audits of child care and protection cases should take place. Prior to the publication of this Report, the Department had already commissioned two independent reviews of its child protection services, which provides evidence of its commitment to continuous improvement and open scrutiny (641-2003). Furthermore, the Department recently appointed an experienced practitioner and manager as the Senior Officer - Child Protection, within its Strategy and Performance Service. This officer will conduct regular audits of individual cases and reviews of child protection case conference minutes. The other recommendations within the Caleb Ness and other recent reports are also being used to review current practice within the Department.

Following the publication of the Child Protection Audit and Review Report a decision was taken by Dundee City Council Social Work Department to develop an audit tool, which would allow the comparison of local practice with the recommendations contained in the national report. This work has also incorporated all the recommendations from recent Inquiry reports in England and Scotland. Work is in progress to incorporate the recommendations from the Caleb Ness Report and the recent inquiry report in Aberdeenshire. The final audit tool will be used to examine practice locally within the authority and with planning and service delivery partners, including Health. An action plan will be developed and implemented following the audit exercise.

### **6.3 Dundee Child Protection Committee**

Dundee Child Protection Committee, which has been chaired by the Council's Director of Social Work since August 2003, is going through a significant period of change and development. The Child Protection Committee is working to improve its effectiveness, as a multi-agency group, by increasing the provision and quality of multi-agency training and practice development forums, along with the development of joint protocols and procedures. To help achieve this the Committee has been reconstituted as an executive body Committee so that only senior managers, who are able to make decisions, access resources and implement procedures, are involved. This was a recommendation within the independent review report and is in line with the Scottish Executive paper on proposed standards for Child Protection Committees.

Dundee Child Protection Committee is to introduce an annual reporting process to local Chief Executives and the Chief Constable. The Committee's sub-groups will provide annual reports of their work to the Committee. Both of these measures are in line with the national review's proposed standards for Child Protection Committees and form two of the recommendations from the recent independent review of Dundee Child Protection Committee.

Dundee Child Protection Committee is committed to becoming an effective multi-agency group, which has over-riding child-centred principles at the core of its constitution. It will prepare business and action plans, with clear objectives, and will work to inform other strategic planning groups. Its aim will be to continuously improve all services in Dundee which are involved in protecting, caring for and educating children and young people.

A recent external review of the Dundee Child Protection Committee endorsed the proposal that a Multi-Agency Lead Officer should be appointed, along with a Staff Development

Officer and clerical support. These posts have now been established, having been approved by the Council's Personnel and Management Services Committee (641-2003). These posts will be based within Corporate Planning and the Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) will ensure that new developments will be linked to wider multi-agency child protection initiatives and planning. The Lead Officer, once appointed, will report directly to the Chair of the Child Protection Committee and will be responsible for monitoring and developing inter-agency child protection procedures, systems, practice and training.

#### **6.4 Sexual Exploitation**

A Child Protection Committee sub group, which is concerned with vulnerable children and young people who are being sexually exploited, has taken the lead in the formation of a national Inter Authority group. This group has now become the *National Steering Group on Vulnerable Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation*. The sub-group has also produced a Joint Protocol, on behalf of the Child Protection Committee, on this issue. This *Joint Protocol* is to be presented to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee in December. Multi-agency procedures designed to identify and protect vulnerable children are currently being drawn up. The aim of these procedures is to encourage all childcare professionals to take personal responsibility for initiating the collation of information and the calling of professional network meetings. These actions should take place when there are concerns that a child or young person is becoming increasingly vulnerable, because they are running away from home or being abused through sexual exploitation.

#### **6.5 National Developments**

One recommendation of the Child Protection Audit and Review Report was the establishment of a National Child Protection Reform Programme and Action Team. This is now in place. The Programme's initial objectives include the drawing up of a National Children's Charter and Child Protection National Standards. Members of Dundee Child Protection Committee are working in close partnership with the Action Team to provide a Dundee based perspective on the Children's Charter and the National Standards.

#### **6.6 CONCLUSION**

This report highlights a range of measures being taken by Dundee City Council to continuously improve the quality and range of services provided to vulnerable children. It is vital that these changes continue to strengthen partnerships across departments of the Council, Health, Education, Police and voluntary agencies, ensuring that the needs of children and young people are at the heart of these improvements.

#### **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning), Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Director of Education 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**

Alan G Baird  
Director of Social Work

Date