

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 13th May, 2010. - Minute of Meeting of the CHILDREN'S SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE. Present: Councillor Leslie, Convener; and Councillors Cormack, Donnelly, Kiddie, Penny and Kirsty West.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

1. The Sub-Committee had before it the minute of their previous meeting of 2nd February 2010.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-
to approve the minute.

HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

2. (A) Referral from the Homelessness Strategy Working Group

The Sub-Committee had before it by way of referral from the Homelessness Strategy Working Group of 16th April 2010, a report by Paul Hannan, Homelessness Manager which detailed the situation in Aberdeen concerning children who experience homelessness.

The report (a) advised that significant numbers of children experience homelessness within the city; (b) outlined that (1) Aberdeen had 258 households in temporary accommodation, of which 78 had children living in them; and (2) there had been 135 children in temporary accommodation in June, 2009, 107 children at September, 2009 and 114 children at 31 December, 2009; (c) explained that at present 23 families had been homeless for over ten weeks; 14 of these families homeless for over 20 weeks; 3 for over 30 weeks; 4 up to one year; and 2 over one year; (d) revealed that following research it was noted that the main reason for families being homeless for over 20 weeks was due to the families wishing to be re-housed in specific locations; (e) outlined the number of evictions which the Council was dealing with, and explained that the Council did not have any procedure in place to prevent evictions where children were involved; (f) suggested that a joined up approach was required to prevent a situation occurring where a family were evicted and then subsequently the children have to be taken into care.

The Homelessness Strategy Working Group had resolved

- (i) to instruct that regular updates be provided to the Working Group in regards to this issue;
- (ii) to refer the report to the Children's Services Sub Committee for information; and instruct that it be circulated to Councillor Leslie for information;
- (iii) to note Rachel Smith's offer to report back to the next meeting of this Group, and the Children's Services Sub Committee regarding children and families involved in evictions;
- (iv) to request that Rachel Smith be invited to the next meeting of the Children's Services Sub Committee to present her report; and

- (v) to otherwise note the information contained within the report.

The Sub-Committee heard Paul Hannan provide an update since the report was prepared (1) advising that the Council had now increased its allocations to homeless households to 75%, which meant that homeless families were not having to wait very long for the offer of a house; (2) indicating that currently there were no homeless applicants in the queue for 2 or 3 bedroom properties; (3) explaining that there were approximately 12 families waiting for accommodation who had been nominated to new developments; (4) stating that there was one family with 5 children and one with 4 children who were waiting for (scarce) larger properties; (5) advising that several families have had their applications deferred awaiting a decision on support; (6) explaining that the Council was currently establishing a formal system to review the longest waiting cases, which would assist officers to use the delegated powers referred to in paragraph 7.5 of the report; and (7) indicating that the Director of Housing and Environment had established a meeting to be held on 21 May, 2010 with the Heads of Housing & Community Safety and Customer Service and Performance to which he would also be invited to address the issue of rent arrears and court action.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

to note the report and the information provided

(B) Discussion Paper from Rachel Smith

The Sub-Committee had before it a draft report by Rachel Smith, In Court Adviser, Aberdeen Citizens Advice Bureau which provided information in relation to evictions by Social Landlords in terms of families with children.

The draft report (a) outlined the number of Aberdeen City Council tenants who were at risk of homelessness during 2009; (b) described examples of real cases and possible solutions; (c) made reference to the statutory guidance for local authorities on preventing homelessness and the good practice recommendations from the Shelter report entitled "Eviction of Children and Families: the impact and alternatives" dated November 2009; (d) outlined Glasgow Housing Association's new approach to tackling rent arrears; (e) provided a summary of the court process for eviction of tenants; (f) provided information in relation to the Citizens Advice Bureau Court Team; and (g) appended details of the Scottish Government Eviction Statistics, estimated costs of eviction and examples of good practice.

Susan Devlin advised that to influence operations effectively, there was a need to take forward the issue of evictions where children and families were involved. She explained that this would be done via Integrated Children's Service Planning structures, in particular the Achieving Our Potential Group (Corporate Parenting), and the Homelessness Strategy Working Group.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

- (i) that a report be submitted to the Social Care and Wellbeing Committee and to the Housing and Environment Committee as a matter of urgency and certainly within two cycles on establishing a joint Eviction Policy, specifically where children and families are involved;
- (ii) that the above joint report be prepared by the Directors of Social Care and Wellbeing and Housing and Environment;

- (iii) to request that a senior officer from the Social Care and Wellbeing service be represented at meetings of the Homelessness Strategy Working Group;
- (iv) to note that the finalised version of Rachel Smith's report would be submitted to the Homelessness Strategy Working Group for consideration; and
- (v) to seek clarification on the role of the Housing Support Assistants.

CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL HOME AT 8 MARCHBURN ROAD, ABERDEEN - SCW/10/049

3. The Sub-Committee had before it a report by the Director of Social Care and Wellbeing which outlined progress in planning and building a children's residential unit at 8 Marchburn Road, Aberdeen

The report (a) advised that the Social Care & Wellbeing Committee approved the building of a residential home for Looked After and Accommodated children at 8 Marchburn Road, Aberdeen on 3 September 2009; (b) indicated that an Officers Working Group chaired by Susan Devlin, Head of Children's Services had been established to progress the build and service development in line with National Care Standards and Care Commission requirements; (c) stated that consideration was originally given to develop the existing building, however since a site visit by staff, it was revealed that the building was in a state of considerable disrepair, having been flooded during the winter months due to burst pipes and vandalised due to break-ins; (d) explained that the current condition of the building would result in increased costs for conversion and was no longer considered a viable option; (e) advised that the building was most recently used as a residential home for adults with mental health issues; (e) indicated that plans for a new building had been presented with the cost of converting the existing building and erecting a new building being comparable, although the exact cost would not be known until plans had been finalised; (f) explained that a new building ensured the design of a residential home which would meet best practice specifications and standards and take into account recent developments and best practice in other Scottish local authorities; (g) advised that a new building would not be restricted by the existing structure and layout and its limitations but would be subject to current planning and building regulations and relevant legislation (including Disability Discrimination Act); (h) stated that the new building would be on 2 floors, have 6 bedrooms all with en-suite facilities and was in keeping with neighbouring buildings with ample garden space around the building and parking space; (i) indicated that children who were resident in other children's homes were actively engaged in the process including children in The Willows Children's; and (j) explained that the time-scale for completion of the building was Spring 2011.

The report recommended:-

that the Sub-Committee:-

- (a) note the progress to date; and
- (b) request a future progress report when plans have been finalised.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the recommendations; and
- (ii) to receive a presentation at the next meeting in terms of the building layout plans for the new children's residential unit.

LONDON 2012 YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME - SCW/10/060

4. The Sub-Committee had before it a report by the Director of Social Care and Wellbeing which provided information in relation to

The report (a) advised that In early 2010 Aberdeen City Council was asked to submit a selection criterion that would be used to nominate young people who had experienced disadvantage with the priority being given to young people who are as follows:-

- Looked After
- Carers
- Affected by substance misuse
- Have a disability
- Have experienced family breakdown
- Are not in education, employment or training;

(b) indicated that requests for nominations were issued to Children's Services in Social Care and Wellbeing, Education Culture and Sport and to the Third Sector with nominations being received from Social Care and Wellbeing, Middlefield Community Project and the Youth Participation Officer; (c) explained that all young people who were nominated had been accepted on to the programme; (d) stated that they would join the other Young Leaders from Hull, Canary Wharf and Sunbury-on-Thames as the programme focus was around the BP hubs; (e) revealed that the 100 Young Leaders would be a part of the 70,000 strong volunteer workforce that would participate in the Olympic events but would receive significant training and coaching to support them in their volunteering role; (f) advised that the Young Leaders were committed for the duration of the programme which would start in April 2010 and conclude in September 2012; (g) indicated that each Young Leader would sign a letter of agreement that they would adhere to the Olympic principles and act as positive role models in their communities; (h) stated that the training would be offered to each Young Leader which has been designed to improve their inter-personal, communication and leadership skills; (i) explained that the training programme began in April 2010 when the Young Leaders had flown to London to participate in a residential weekend; (j) revealed that an integral part of the programme would be to undertake volunteer roles in their local communities and act as ambassadors to encourage other young people to become involved; and (k) advised that coaching and mentoring would be offered by workers from BP, Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust and the worker from Aberdeen Foyer In addition to the local athletes who would also act as mentors.

Susan Devlin advised that the city would be sending twelve participants.

The report recommended:-

that the Sub-Committee –

- (a) note the content of the report; and
- (b) request a further update in nine months time on the participants progress.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

to approve the recommendations

UNALLOCATED CASES AND PRE-REFERRAL SCREENING – SCW/10/046

5. The Sub-Committee had before it a report by the Director of Social Care and Wellbeing which informed the Sub-Committee of the unallocated cases in Children's Services over a 12 month period to April 2010 and of the establishment of a pre-referral screening system.

The report (a) made reference to the Children's Services redesign, the previous Social Work Inspection Agency inspection reports, the increasing numbers of referrals, the establishment of the Social Care and Wellbeing Service and the significant staffing vacancies in children's services; (b) outlined the quarterly figures for allocated and unallocated cases across Children's Services; (c) outlined the unallocated figures which included the following:-

- Report requests from SCRA (Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration) which were awaiting allocation (on occasions these could be requested in batches).
- Cases where assessments and reports had been completed with no work outstanding but were open and awaiting a disposal from SCRA.
- Police reports which were allocated to a team but not to a particular social worker but where circumstances were being investigated.
- Cases in which the referral information would indicate a lower priority.

(d) outlined details of the Reception Service which will commence operation on 17 May 2010 and was a single point of access to children's services; (e) advised that the Reception Service would assess all referrals and would apply the agreed eligibility criteria to determine the level of service required; (f) explained that the team would carry out assessments and short term work up to approximately 3 months and the work would underpin the principles of 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC); (g) stated that assessments would be prepared in collaboration with other partners and using the single plan which would ensure that multi-agency integrated working was at the heart of practice and service delivery; (h) outlined the purpose of pre-referral screening which was to ensure that the presenting issues for children referred could quickly be considered by the relevant agencies coming together to share and review information; (i) stated that children's cases were then able to be dealt with according to this collective assessment of the information available and early intervention could prevent cases from escalating by diverting these away from becoming statutory referrals to SCRA; (j) made reference to the Pre-referral Screening Group which would meet daily to consider children and young people irrespective of the presenting concern; (k) advised that there would be an initial filtering process wherein certain cases may be fast-tracked to a specific intervention, eg child protection investigations; (l) indicated that it was anticipated that referrals made would be dealt with by the Pre-referral Screening Group within 5 days; (j) described the Impact and Management of Unallocated; and (k) explained that it was anticipated that the establishment of the Reception Service and implementation of multi agency Pre-referral Screening would impact positively on numbers of unallocated work and referrals to the service.

The report recommended:-

that the Sub-Committee –

- (a) note the progress made to date in establishing pre-referral screening; and
- (b) request a progress report detailing impact in 12 months time.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve the recommendations; and
- (ii) to receive a progress report on the staffing levels of the Reception Service at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

SUB-COMMITTEE BUSINESS STATEMENT

6. The Sub-Committee had before it for consideration, a statement of Sub-Committee Business prepared by the interim Head of Democratic Services.

The Sub-Committee resolved:-

- (i) to remove item 1 (Unallocated Cases and Pre-Referral Screening) from the Statement, referred to at Article 5 of this Minute;
- (ii) to note that in terms of item 3 (HMIE Action Plan and Review – Performance Reporting), that an overarching performance report would be considered by the Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on 3rd June 2010;
- (iii) to note that in terms of item 4 (Children's Services - Kinship Care), that a report would be considered by the Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on 3rd June 2010; and
- (iv) to remove item 5 (Child Protection Summit) from the Statement as a presentation was received by Councillor Kirsty West at the meeting.

- COUNCILLOR GORDON LESLIE, Convener.