

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL  
REPORT**

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE	Subject: CHILDREN'S PANEL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHILDREN'S PANEL TRAINING ORGANISERS' SYSTEM
From: DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION	
Date: 1 October 1997	Ref: JAF/IL

**1. Background**

- 1.1 In May of this year the Chair of the Children's Panel Advisory Committee received a letter from the Scottish Office Social Work Services Group advising that, in light of local government reorganisation, and of the inclusion of the former Tayside authorities into the national training system, it was necessary to review the responsibilities and distribution of duties of the Children's Panel Training Organisers.
- 1.2 Training of members and prospective members of the Children's Panel is, under Schedule 1 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, a statutory requirement. The Secretary of State for Scotland funds a national network of training organisers who organise and conduct training courses. Local authorities meet the remaining costs of those training courses including accommodation, speakers, meals etc. and, also, reimburse panel members their expenses in attending such courses.
- 1.3 The purpose of the review proposed by the Scottish Office Social Work Services Group was to consider adjustment of responsibilities among the Training Organisers to ensure that an effective, efficient and balanced service continued to be provided across the whole of Scotland. It was indicated that the review was proposed in light of the need to
  - (a) provide the service within available resources;
  - (b) create equitable workloads among the Training Organisers;
  - (c) ensure a consistent national training system; and
  - (d) utilise the collective resources of the Training Organisers effectively.
- 1.4 For North Lanarkshire Children's Panel, training is currently provided by the Training Organisers attached to Glasgow University. In terms of the review it was proposed to reorganise the training services into four units corresponding to the Reporter/Manager boundaries of the Scottish Children's Reporters administration. Under that proposal North Lanarkshire was to be linked, with Angus, Dundee, East Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, Fife, Perth & Kinross and Stirling, to the St. Andrews University Training Unit. It was indicated that accessibility to Panel members of Training Organisers and travelling time for those Organisers had been taken into account in devising the proposed structure.
- 1.5 The proposals extended to the method of delivering training including induction training, in-service training, training materials and course design. It was proposed that a significant number of Panel members assist or facilitate this training and that the enhanced role of those Panel members be recognised by the payment, by the relevant local authority, of honoraria. It was proposed, also, that there be Area Training Committees, again based on Reporter/Manager boundaries, which the Training Organisers would attend.

## 2. Response of North Lanarkshire Children's Panel Advisory Committee

- 2.1 Following meetings with representatives of the Children's Panel, North Lanarkshire Children's Panel Advisory Committee responded to the consultative document on 13 June 1997. In that response the Committee indicated that North Lanarkshire's links were with the West of Scotland rather than with the east or the north. The travelling distance to St. Andrews was considerable. Public transport moves, generally, east to west rather than north to south, and public transport links between the towns of North Lanarkshire and St. Andrews were non-existent. The proposal would lead to a considerable increase in travel costs, the budget for which was, already, over stretched. Having regard to those considerations the Children's Panel Advisory Committee found it impossible to accept that accessibility to Panel members and travelling time for Training Organisers had been taken into account in formulating the proposals.
- 2.2 The Children's Panel Advisory Committee supported the proposals for induction training, in-service training and the development of training materials to provide a bank from which Training Organisers could draw to develop best practice. The Children's Panel Advisory Committee response emphasised, however, that the development of a national curriculum must retain flexibility to cater for local circumstances and numbers.
- 2.3 With regard to the greater use of Panel members to provide training, the Children's Panel Advisory Committee considered that the level of remuneration be agreed nationally. In their response they indicated, also, that the honoraria should be the responsibility of the Scottish Office and should not be an additional burden on local authorities.
- 2.4 In their response, the Children's Panel Advisory Committee confirmed their support for Training Committees to advise on the delivery and organisation of training for Panel members and indicated that, in North Lanarkshire, there is already such a Training Committee. The Children's Panel Advisory Committee did not, however, support the proposal that Training Committees covering Reporter/Manager boundary areas be established. It was considered that the establishment of such Committees would provide no appreciable benefits and would constitute an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy.
- 2.5 Finally, the Children's Panel Advisory Committee response expressed concern that the review had failed to address the continuing issue of Children's Panel Advisory Committee and Sub-Committee training.

## 3. Scottish Office Reaction to Consultation

- 3.1 Following receipt of responses, the Scottish Office Social Work Services Group invited those involved in the training of Panel members to a meeting on 28 August. At that meeting further information was given on the factors leading to the review. As indicated in the initial document, one factor was the inclusion of the former Tayside authorities but a major factor, not sufficiently highlighted in the initial document, was the extra demand for training arising from local government reorganisation which had led to unsustainable pressure on the Training Organisers. The proposals contained in the consultation paper had sought to address this problem, within the level of current resources, by the proposed use of joint training and by the greater involvement of Panel members in facilitating training sessions.
- 3.2 It was indicated by the Scottish Office representatives that expenditure on Training Organisers (most of which was absorbed in staff salaries) had increased by 75% in real terms since 1990. Given that real increase - and given the continuing pressure on public funds - the review had proceeded on the assumption that there would be no increase in Scottish Office funding. The Scottish Office representatives advised, also, of their view that Scottish Office funding is discretionary. They considered that the statutory duty to provide Panel member training was, in terms of the Local Government Etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, a local authority responsibility. It is, however, to be noted that the letter of 9 May 1997 from the Scottish Office Social Work Services Group had accepted that, in terms of Schedule 1 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, statutory responsibility for the training of members and prospective members of the Children's Panel is shared between the Secretary of State for Scotland and local authorities.

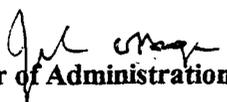
- 3.3 At that meeting it was identified that there was considerable support for the delivery of training by Training Organisers but it was noted that, in certain areas, joint training posed difficulties. It was indicated, also, that the proposals in the consultation document would lead to a significant increase in costs to be borne by local authorities.
- 3.4 Against that background it was the conclusion of that meeting that a more fundamental review of the provision of training for members and prospective members of the Children's Panel was required. That review should not be confined to the parameters of the original consultation exercise although it was accepted that any review must proceed on the presumption that there was unlikely to be any increase in Government funding available. It was agreed, also, that such a review required to take account of the need to maintain quality standards of training and to continue work on the development of the national curriculum. As a first step the meeting agreed that the Scottish Office should approach COSLA to discuss arrangements for such a longer term review.
- 3.5 Against the background of the proposals for a longer term review, the meeting considered, also, options which might be pursued in the short term. Those options included the return of East Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire to the grouping served by the Training Organisers attached to Glasgow University, the abandonment of joint training on Scottish Children's Reporter/Manager boundaries and a review of training groupings in the West of Scotland.
- 3.6 On 9 September 1997 the Scottish Office Social Work Services Group wrote to advise that no clear consensus had emerged from the consultation exercise. Discussions will, accordingly, take place between the Scottish Office and Training Organisers over short term arrangements. It is understood that it is the intention of the Scottish Office that the proposed short term arrangements be in place by the middle of October. The Scottish Office have indicated, also, that they did not propose to pursue a national scale or policy on honoraria but, rather, propose that local arrangements continue. It is proposed, also, that Training Committees be established in areas with joint training arrangements. The establishment of such Training Committees would not, however, prevent individual areas such as North Lanarkshire retaining local Training Committees already established.

#### 4. **Current Position**

- 4.1 The Training Committee for North Lanarkshire has had meetings with the Training Organiser attached to Glasgow University and a training programme, involving joint arrangements with East Dunbartonshire, has been identified for the remainder of 1997/98.

#### 5. **Recommendation**

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the action taken by North Lanarkshire Children's Panel Advisory Committee and support the efforts of the Advisory Committee to retain North Lanarkshire within the West of Scotland grouping for the purposes of training of members and prospective members of the Children's Panel.

  
Director of Administration

Members seeking further information on the contents of this report are asked to contact Bob Parry, Chief Committee Services Officer, on Extension 2248.