

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Social Work Committee : March 1998	Subject : Report on the Investigation into Aberdeen City Council Social Work Department's handling of the Case of Steven Leisk
From : Jim Dickie, Director of Social Work Prepared by : John S Scott, Principal Officer, Criminal Justice	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to :

- Advise the Committee of the implications of the report for North Lanarkshire Council.

2. BACKGROUND

The report was commissioned by Mr. Peter Cassidy, the Director of Social Work in Aberdeen City, following the conviction of Steven Leisk for the murder of Scott Simpson, aged 9.

Steven Leisk, at the time of the murder was the subject of a Supervised Release Order, and the Director made arrangements that an external enquiry be held to :

- Review all matters relating to the practice, supervision and management of the case by the Social Work Department.
- To examine the quality of practice in relation to National Standards and Guidance for Social Work Services in the Criminal justice System.
- To provide comments, advice and recommendations to the Director of Social Work in relation to areas of learning and proposals for future developments.

Following publication in January 1998, Mr Cassidy circulated a copy of the report, and a copy of the subsequent report prepared for the Aberdeen City Council Social Work Committee, to all local authority Social Work Departments.

A Supervised Release Order is a discretionary order imposed at the time of sentence, by the Sheriff, when it is felt that the offender is likely to pose a risk to others when released. This identification of risk is a factor which should be noted by social workers when constructing arrangements for supervision. In addition to the conviction in 1996, Mr Leisk had a history of convictions for sex offences.

It should be noted that two further reports have been prepared for the North Lanarkshire Social Work Committee in relation to work with sex offenders. These should be read in conjunction with this report to provide a more full picture. These concern :

- Measures in existence - the introduction of the Sex Offender Act in September 1997 and proposals for joint work, in relation to the finding of accommodation, between the Social Work and Housing Departments.
- Proposals to extend the measures available to deal with sex offenders - in relation to the Scottish Office Report 'A Commitment to Protect' and the Crime and Disorder Bill.

3. CONCLUSIONS OF THE REPORT

The report provides an exhaustive examination of the handling of this case by the Social Work Department and reaches a number of conclusions. The main findings are noted below :

- Aberdeen City Council Social Work Department were commended for the open manner in which they undertook examination of their handling of the case.
- It was noted that Steven Leisk was sentenced in 1996 to an 18 month prison sentence, plus a 9 month Supervised Release Order following conviction for two charges of lewd, indecent and libidinous practices and behaviour. Assessments undertaken by the social worker preparing the Social Enquiry Report, and by the prison based Social Worker, before Leisk's release on December 4th 1996 properly reflected the risk posed by him.
- Following release, Mr Leisk was seen as required and seen a further four times in the first two weeks of his period of supervision.
- Arrangements could not be made for Mr Leisk's accommodation before his release from prison and he was accommodated in temporary accommodation by Aberdeen City Council till he found his own accommodation at the end of December. It should be noted that the social worker involved did not consider factors such as the proximity of the accommodation to a school and play areas, but Dr. McManus, the author of the report, notes that aerial photographs of the locus contradict the media assertion that the matter was obvious.

Concerns expressed in relation to the handling of the case include :

- A readiness by the social worker involved to accept the word of Mr. Leisk in relation to his living circumstances.
- After the first two weeks, failures to maintain contact in accordance with the requirements of National Standards.
- A reduction in the frequency of contact with Mr. Leisk without management sanction.
- Lack of arrangements for cover of cases when the supervising social worker was on holiday
- Management of the case by a worker acting alone.

Comment was also made on the pressure of work on the social work team, on the understanding of staff concerning the nature of Supervised Release Orders, on arrangements for the allocation of cases, on arrangements for the monitoring of standards, on arrangements for holiday cover, and on arrangements for the delivery of programmes outwith normal office hours.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTH LANARKSHIRE

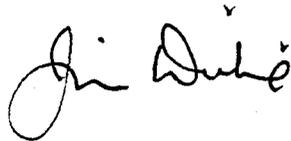
The report has a number of implications for North Lanarkshire. The following are noted :

- First line managers are expected to review each criminal justice case, in a formal supervision meeting with social workers, every three months.
- External monitoring of compliance with standards is undertaken by the HQ Criminal Justice Unit on a regular basis. To date, three exercises have been undertaken since April 1996. This samples a minimum of 10% of cases, which may include sex offenders.
- Following publication of the report on Steven Leisk, the Director of Social Work has determined that an inspection of the handling of all cases which involve sex offenders will be undertaken. This will be managed by the Principal Officer, Criminal Justice and the Senior Child Care Officer, Child Protection.
- The training needs of staff will be considered further, in the light of the findings of the inspection.
- The structure of criminal justice services is the subject of current review. The findings of this report will be considered in relation to this review.
- Groupwork programmes for adult sex offenders are currently run in the evening to ensure availability to all. Currently, these concern offenders referred by the courts, but further measures are at an advanced stage to develop a systematic approach to the assessment of and intervention with sex offenders. This will include work with those identified by other routes e.g. child protection.
- The Scottish Office does not currently provide sufficient resources to ensure the allocation of a second worker in all cases involving a sex offender. The implementation of recommendations contained in the Scottish Office Report 'A Commitment to Protect' demands the allocation of additional resources.
- As noted earlier, arrangements have been put into place by the Social Work and Housing Departments to ensure a measured approach to the provision of accommodation for sex offenders. These arrangements are the subject of a separate report to the Social Work Committee, but it is noteworthy that Dr McManus' report underpins the need for certainty in knowing the whereabouts of sex offenders in order to make effective those controls which are available.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to :

- Note the contents of the report and the implications for North Lanarkshire.
- Approve the action already being taken by the Director of Social Work.



J Dickie
Director of Social Work
February 2nd 1998

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