

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: Progress Report on Member/Officer Group reviewing North Lanarkshire Residential Child Care Services
FROM: Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 24 May 2001	
REPORT AUTHOR: M Fegan	
REF: MF/MM	

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Committee of the progress of the Member/Officer Group established to review North Lanarkshire Residential Child Care Services and to seek approval for the recommendations contained within the report.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 gives Local Authorities powers to provide for children in need. Section 26 of the Act requires Local Authorities to provide accommodation for children looked after by them.
- 2.2 The Act places responsibility on Local Authorities to support young people within their own homes and communities whenever it is safe and reasonable to do so. If young people cannot be safely supported within their own homes, it is preferred that they are cared for within a family setting.
- 2.3 For a small group of young people, it is recognised that the preferred option is to be cared for within a quality residential care setting.
- 2.4 The success of North Lanarkshire's Youth Strategy has meant that an increasing number of young people with complex needs can be supported by a range of multi-agency services within their own homes. The reduction in the number of young people accommodated within residential units is detailed below.

	1996	2001
Children's Homes	77	48
Residential schools/assessment centres	45	28
Total	122	76

2.5 Residential Childcare Services within North Lanarkshire accommodate a significant number of young people whose needs are such that they cannot be safely supported at home within existing resources.

3 MEMBERSHIP OF GROUP

3.1 The group was chaired by the Convenor of Social Work. Members included the two social work vice convenors; elected member representatives who had a Children's Unit in their area; an elected member who is employed within a residential childcare setting; senior social work officers; a representative from the Scottish Residential Childcare Institute and one from 'Who Cares' Scotland.

3.2 The group met on four occasions to review a range of identified issues and to recommend necessary action.

4 PROFILE OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS

4.1 There are five residential childcare units located across the Council which were inherited from the predecessor authority. They are of varying sizes and quality.

4.2 The majority of young people accommodated within the units are teenagers which is consistent with National and Council Policy which is to provide care for under 12's within a family based setting. All come from troubled backgrounds which include one or a combination of the following : sexual or physical abuse; parental addiction or marital violence; family breakdown; truancy etc. Their needs are sufficiently complex to be unable to be supported at home.

4.3 The profile of residential staff is one which is reflected nationally. This consists of a hard working, committed workforce which is demoralised, experiences low pay, long hours, poor recognition and actual or threats of intimidation and violence. Few staff have qualifications and qualified, able managers are difficult to recruit. Physical environments are also poor.

4.4 Staff qualifications, quality of care and environment are issues which will require to be addressed in anticipation of the forthcoming Regulation of Care.

5 KEY ISSUES

5.1 A number of key issues were identified in respect of the Children's Units which are similar to the national picture and are summarised below.

- ◆ difficulties in the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified managers and care staff because of poor working conditions and status.
- ◆ few qualified staff work in the sector, there are high levels of absence and a high dependence on relatively inexperienced temporary staff.
- ◆ the need for more robust care management implementation and community based care strategies (partly because of social worker vacancies)

- ◆ poor environmental conditions
- ◆ the need for improved neighbour relationships

6 ACTION TAKEN TO DATE

6.1 To improve staff/young people ratios :

- ◆ an additional member of care staff has been employed to cover for training absences within each unit
- ◆ within the smaller units cleaning and catering arrangements have been reviewed and additional cover provided to the care staff to spend more time with young people
- ◆ additional staff can be deployed at key times

6.2 To help progress robust care planning and ensure Council compliance with statutory responsibilities.

- ◆ additional services have been purchased from a partner provider (Includem) to work alongside residential and fieldwork staff. Sixteen young people will receive additional support. To-date twelve have been referred.
- ◆ the revised social work structure will create key area team managers who will focus on the residential childcare sector
- ◆ the introduction of the new reception services teams in Area offices will enable childcare social workers to focus on complex childcare cases.

6.3 A number of working groups have been established to focus on key areas of activity which will have an impact on the residential childcare sector.

- ◆ Gatekeeping - avoiding admission to care
- ◆ Care Planning - progressing care plans
- ◆ Youth Strategy - targeting services to the most vulnerable young people
- ◆ Service Development - establishing new resources to avoid admissions to children's units eg. foster carers

6.4 Priority has been given to the allocation of additional social worker resources to the Family Finding section of the Department to actively recruit substitute families for teenagers avoiding unnecessary admission to residential childcare placements.

6.5 Young people are actively encouraged to attend school, seek or attend employment. An additional two temporary staff have been recruited to support young people who attend emotional, behavioural Units (EBD Units) and avoid exclusion.

- 6.6 Links have been established with the Scottish Institute for Residential Childcare (established by the Scottish Executive to be a centre of excellence). The feasibility of seconded, experienced residential childcare managers was proposed, but not available. A 'whole unit developmental programme' is being promoted. A further meeting with senior officers has been arranged for 21st May 2001.
- 6.7 Partners who manage residential schools were also approached on the potential for seconding senior managers to no avail, as the schools are experiencing their own recruitment difficulties.
- 6.8 Approximately thirty temporary social work assistants have been appointed to help address some of the difficulties being experienced by the Council as a result of recruitment and retention of social workers. These staff should allow social workers to focus on more complex cases such as accommodated young people.
- 6.9 To help ensure a more timely and proactive response to repairs within the Units the following arrangements are being introduced in partnership with Housing and Technical Services.
- ◆ a single nominated liaison officer has been identified within both Social Work and Housing and Technical Services to address issues, thus improving communication.
 - ◆ arrangements have been developed to monitor response times from referral to repair.
 - ◆ alternative responses are being developed for repeat repairs.
 - ◆ budget allocations have been reviewed to enable units to arrange some minor repairs themselves and additional monies made available.
 - ◆ a small number of handymen have been appointed to assist building and ground maintenance.
 - ◆ monitoring meetings by senior officers have been introduced.
- 6.10 Part time admin staff have been added to units which will be linked to e-mail thus making communication easier and more efficient, reducing demands on care staff.
- 6.11 Training for care planning and managers will be developed further.
- 6.12 A temporary senior officer post has been created and filled within the Headquarters, Child Care Team to drive the Action Plan developed by the member/officer group in respect of residential child care.

7 ACTION PROPOSED

- 7.1 An able qualified manager is the key to the successful management of residential child care units, The Department as other local authorities has experienced significant difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff. A key issue for qualified unit managers is better conditions of service within other settings with perceived, less responsibilities. For many experienced managers, there is a lack of incentive to assume additional responsibility.

To enable the Council to carry out its statutory responsibilities, we need to be able to attract good managers. It is proposed to regrade the unit managers posts within departments residential child care sector to P05 - P08 subject to relevant experience and qualifications. The cost of the is £12, 972.

- 7.2 Following discussion with the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care regarding likely qualifications required by regulated residential care staff, consideration to be given to reviewing grading of staff subject to relevant qualifications.

The review will require that the Department consult with Central Personnel and with the trade unions regarding grading and other issues and it would be hoped that a report could be brought to next Social Work Committee on 23 August 2001 of the findings on the proposals.

- 7.3 Administrative support to units to be reviewed consistent with the findings of the Accounts Commission document; "shifting the balance" which focused on residential nursing home accommodation for older people. This will free the staff to spend more time with young people.
- 7.4 The recommendations contained within this section will require consultation with the trade unions.

8 SUMMARY

- 8.1 Residential Child Care supports some of the most troubled young people in our communities. Whilst the actions proposed within the report will improve the quality of care provided, it will never remove completely occasional disruptive behaviour/incidents or normal adolescent behaviour.
- 8.2 The proposals contained within the report will assist the Council meet its statutory responsibilities and will anticipate matters to be addressed by the new Regulation of Care requirements.
- 8.3 The restructuring of the Social Work Department will have a positive impact on the development of the child care services identified.

9 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 9.1 The proposals are consistent with the Council's statutory duties as well as National and Council Child Care Policy.

10 FINANCIAL

- 10.1 Additional funding will require to be pursued to achieve 7.2 and 7.3 contained within the report. The funding for the regrading of unit managers of E12 972 can be met from the Children's Services Development Fund.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 Committee is requested to :
- (i) Note the progress achieved in Section 6 of the report;
 - (ii) Request Director of Social Work to bring forward grading proposals for residential childcare staff in line with section 7.2 for early implementation.
 - (iii) Request the Director for Social Work to take the necessary action to implement the recommendations contained in section 7.3 and 7.4 of the report, and report to a future committee on the progress of the proposals;
 - (iv) Request the Director of Social Work to progress section 7.1 of the report to regrade unit managers;
 - (v) Remit the report to the Policy and Resources (Personnel) Sub Committee for consideration;
 - (vi) otherwise note the contents of the report.



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May 2001

For further information on this report please contact M Fegan, Head of Social Work Services.
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