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**CHILD PROTECTION – REQUEST FROM SCOTTISH MINISTERS FOR LETTER OF ASSURANCE**

14. With reference to paragraph 27 of the Minute of the meeting of this Committee held on 15 June 2004, when it was noted that the North Lanarkshire Joint Statement of Assurance had been submitted to the Ministers for Children and Young People, Justice and Health and Community Care, there was submitted a report (docketed) dated 12 May 2006 by the Chief Executive (1) advising that the Scottish Ministers for Children and Young People, Justice and Health and Community Care had issued a further request for a Letter of Assurance in respect of child protection activity, to be submitted to them by 31 May 2006; (2) indicating that, following submission of representations from various agencies, a further letter had been received from the Ministers clarifying their requirements, and (3) intimating that the North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee had co-ordinated a response, to be entitled "A Joint Statement", which had been submitted by the due date.

**Decided:**

- (1) that the request for a further Letter of Assurance from the three Ministers and the collective response from the Chief Officers/Leaders from the key agencies, submitted by the required date of 31 May 2006, be noted;
- (2) that following receipt of feedback from the three Ministers regarding the Joint Statement, a further report be submitted to this Committee;
- (3) that the report be remitted to the Social Work, Community Services, Housing and Technical Services and Education Committees for consideration, and
- (4) that the report be otherwise noted.

## REPORT

To: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE	Subject: 'LETTER OF ASSURANCE' RECEIVED FROM THE MINISTERS FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE, JUSTICE AND HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE, 22 <sup>ND</sup> MARCH 2006 – CHILD PROTECTION	
From: CHIEF EXECUTIVE		
Date: 13.06.06	Ref: GW/FS/MF	

## 1. Purpose of Report/Introduction

To advise Committee of a further request for a 'Letter of Assurance' received from the Ministers for Children and Young People, Justice and Health and Community dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006 in respect of child protection activity and of the collective response from Chief Officers / Leaders from key agencies which was required for 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006. A copy of the Ministerial letter and the response have been placed in the members library.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. Following the publication of "It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright" in 2002, the report of the national audit and review of Child Protection, the First Minister launched a national Child Protection Reform Programme.
- 2.2. As part of the Reform Programme, the Ministers for Children and Young People, Justice and Health and Community Care distributed a letter to Chief Executives and Leaders of Local Authorities, Chief Constables and the Chief Executive and Chair of NHS Boards seeking reassurance regarding Child Protection. The letter was dated 11<sup>th</sup> November 2003.
- 2.3. The response to this request was co-ordinated by the North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee and submitted to the Scottish Executive by the due date of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2004. The response which was titled 'A Joint Statement' (not a letter of assurance) was signed by: the Leader and Chief Executive of North Lanarkshire Council, the Chair and Chief Executive of NHS Lanarkshire, the Chief Executive NHS Greater Glasgow and the Chief Constable, Strathclyde Police. The letter requested that the 'Three Minister' feedback to the signatories any gaps identified or areas for improvement.
- 2.4. The response to all submission was a 'round robin letter' to all Local Authorities, highlighting general observations / concerns. Following pressure from local partnerships for specific feedback on their individual submissions, members of the Reform Programme provided verbal feedback to the Chairs of local Child Protection Committees. There were no concerns raised in the feedback to North Lanarkshire on child protection activity.

- 2.5. A further letter of Assurance was received from the 'Three Ministers' dated 22nd March 2006 seeking assurance in respect of the following. That:
- (i) the revised guidance, Protecting Children and Young People: Child Protection Committees, Scottish Executive, 2005 has been implemented with appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the Child Protection Committee functions are effectively carried out and an indication of how the guidance is being applied in practice in ensuring effective joint working
  - (ii) all reasonable steps are being taken to ensure the identification of all children adversely affected by drug abuse or who are involved in drug abuse and that their needs are assessed and a plan implemented to meet the identified needs
  - (iii) all reasonable steps are being taken to identify every known drug abuser and the children adversely affected by their drug misuse and that the needs of these children have been assessed and a plan which meets their needs implemented
- 2.6. A response to the letter was required by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006.
- 2.7. Following representations by a range of agencies regarding the 'Letter of Assurance', the Head of the Children and Young People and Social Care Group issued a further letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 2006, clarifying the expectation of the Ministers.
- 2.8. Agencies had expressed concerns about the requirement to submit such a 'Letter of Assurance' since it coincided with the timescales for the submission of:
- (i) updated Children's Services Plans
  - (ii) Annual Reports and Business Plans from Child Protection Committees
- 2.9. The North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee co-ordinated the response to the 'Three Ministers' letter on behalf of the key agencies, which was submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006 as requested.
- 2.10. As with the response to the first 'Letter of Assurance' the North Lanarkshire response will be titled 'A Joint Statement'

### 3. North Lanarkshire Context

- 3.1 The joint response from key agencies within North Lanarkshire notes the following:
- (i) a review of the operation of the Child Protection Committee has taken place with new arrangements consistent with the guidance for Child Protection Committees issued in 2005
  - (ii) the response reflects an ongoing commitment by agencies to further develop joint working within a context of continuous improvement to improve outcomes for children and young people
  - (iii) drug **and** alcohol misuse both have a significant impact on families in North Lanarkshire and this is reflected in the response
  - (iv) that no agency is in a position to provide a definitive guarantee that all children who are misusing substances or have parents / carers who are misusing substance have been identified. We can give a commitment to work together to reduce the risk of harm to children including those affected by substance misuse.

- (v) a commitment by agencies to review existing arrangements to ensure better targeting and co-ordination of services to improve outcomes for children affected by substance misuse which will include quality assurance arrangements.

#### 4. Financial/Personnel/Legal/Policy Implications

4.1 The ability of agencies to respond to the child protection agenda have significant resource implications which include:

- (i) the ability of all agencies to recruit and retain a confident, competent workforce
- (ii) the ability to provide and fund a range of quality care alternatives for children, particularly from substance misusing families

#### 5. Recommendation

5.1. Committee is asked to:

- (i) note the request for a further 'letter of Assurance from the Three Ministers' and the collective response from the Chief Officers / Leaders from the key agencies submitted by the required date of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006
- (ii) request a further report following feedback from the 'Three Ministers' regarding the joint statement
- (iii) Remit the report to the following Committees – Social Work, Community Services , Housing & Property Services and Education Committees for consideration
- (iv) otherwise note the report



**Chief Executive**  
12<sup>th</sup> May 2006

**A copy of the 'Three Ministers Letter' dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006 and the Joint Statement dated May 2006 have been placed in the members library.**

For further information on this report please contact Mary Fegan, Chair, North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee on telephone 01698 332001