

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 4 FEBRUARY 2003

FAST TRACK CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

Report by Director of Educational & Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise Elected Members of the progress made to date in developing the Fast Track Children's Hearing Pilot in Ayrshire, and to seek approval for the continuation of developments in the direction so far taken to implement this enhancement to the management of young people, engaged in persistent offending, within the Children's Hearing System.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Throughout the past year the Scottish Executive has announced their intention to develop a number of new initiatives aimed at reducing serious and/or persistent offending by young people (Social Work Committee 7th November, 2002). Amongst these was a proposal to develop a speedier response in dealing with young people, who are persistent offenders, through the Children's Hearing System.
- 2.2 Ayrshire is one of three sites selected by the Scottish Executive to pilot Fast-Track Children's Hearings. This new initiative will last for a two year period beginning 1st February, 2003. Dundee City Council and Scottish Borders/East Lothian Councils are the other two sites.
- 2.3 Although the Children's Reporter may exercise some discretion the principal target group are those young people, aged between 12 and 16 years, who have five episodes of offending reported to them during the preceding six months. An episode may contain more than one offence.
- 2.4 At present the average time taken to process young people from point of being cautioned by the police to an actual Children's Hearing is 130 days. The pilot schemes seek to reduce this to 80 days.
- 2.5 The initiative however is not just about ensuring a faster response time. It is also concerned to ensure that consistent structured risk assessments are undertaken on each young person referred to the pilot scheme that clearly defined risk management plans are produced for Children's Hearings, and that effective intervention programmes are available to Children's Panel members that focus on the offending behaviour and on those factors that contribute to it.

3.0 PROGRESS

- 3.1** To ensure a consistency of approach across the three pilot sites, and to assist in the evaluation process, the Scottish Executive convened, and chaired, an implementation group. Representatives on this group were drawn from the various statutory and voluntary agencies who would be key players in delivering the anticipated outcome, a reduction in offending behaviour, expected of the pilots. The group's task was to reach agreement on definitions, interpretation and direction across the three pilot areas, to consider resource issues and to agree a start date. In addition the group considered and agreed a set of standards to be applied throughout the period of the pilot scheme.
- 3.2** An Ayrshire implementation group, drawing local representatives from the same body of key players, was set up and ran parallel with the one convened by the Scottish Executive. The group's remit was to put a local perspective on the issues raised within the larger implementation group, to consider and plan necessary training requirements, and to agree procedures and protocols between the various concerned agencies that ensures adherence to the approved standards.
- 3.3** Although not fully finalised considerable new funding will accompany the introduction of the pilot scheme. This will be directed in part to individual local authority developments, and in part to Ayrshire-wide initiatives. From an East Ayrshire perspective 2 additional social workers (or equivalent) are currently being recruited who will work exclusively within the pilot scheme providing risk assessments and intervention plans for the Hearing system, who will attend all relevant Hearings, and who will deliver appropriate intervention programmes to the young people concerned. East Ayrshire will be in a position to meet all its requirements by the start date of 1st February 2003.
- 3.4** A service level agreement with N.C.H. is progressing through South Ayrshire Council in relation to the Ayrshire-wide provision of services supporting the aims and objectives of the pilot scheme. These additional supports will include residential accommodation offering intensive structured support including appropriate educational provision, community-based services involving a mentoring approach, education/training, employability, supported accommodation and forensic psychological services.

4. PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

- 4.1** On 19 November 2002, the Corporate Sub-Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee in approved the recruitment of the additional staff required for the pilot scheme.

4.2 All costs associated with the pilot scheme will be met by the Scottish Executive. To ensure effective monitoring of this funding a separate cost centre code has been set up.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Through the work of the implementation group's agreement has been reached, locally and across the three pilot sites, in relation to entry criteria to fast track hearings, standards to be applied and the additional service provision necessary to meet the aims and objectives to the pilot schemes.

5.2 East Ayrshire has yet to complete the recruitment process but will be in a position to meet its obligations to the pilot by the start date of 1st February 2003.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

6.1 It is recommended that Elected Members:

- (i) endorse the progress made to date;
- (ii) approve the continuation of developments in the direction so far taken;
- (iii) require the Director of Educational and Social Services to report back to Committee on further progress; and
- (iv) otherwise note the content of the report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

20 January 2003
SM/MK

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : BILL EADIE