



DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING DEPARTMENT

CHILD PROTECTION
POLICY DOCUMENT

December 2008

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This policy document should be read in conjunction with the inter-agency child protection guidance published by the Dundee Children & Young Persons Protection Committee. Along with the procedures and guidance of other departments/agencies, these policy documents form the volume of child protection guidance for all professionals who may work with children and young people in Dundee.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Purpose

This policy document sets out procedures and guidance to staff within the Housing Department in reporting concerns regarding children's safety and welfare. The policy will cover the following:

- The context and key principles underpinning the Housing Department's approach to dealing with child protection.
- What staff should do if they are concerned that a child is being abused, or suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm.
- What staff should do if they are concerned that children are affected by the substance misuse of parents/carers.
- Guidance to support staff in recognising and identifying possible indicators of child abuse and neglect and the need to make appropriate referrals to the Social Work Department or Police.

1.2. Context and Legislation

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 has placed a duty of care on all local authorities to protect children from harm and carry out enquiries in relation to concerns or allegations of abuse. As such, it makes it the responsibility of all staff within the Housing Department to make themselves aware of the child protection policy and procedure.

There have been a number of Government strategies and programmes, which aim to ensure that children are protected from significant harm. The Scottish Executive's Child Protection Audit Report (2002) – "It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright" has resulted in an action plan to deliver improvements in child protection services. This report emphasises the need to work together and promote internal and external inter agency working to keep safe the children who are most vulnerable.

Children affected by parents/carers with substance misuse issues have also been the subject of research and public attention. "Getting Our Priorities Right" is the Scottish Executive's guidelines on working with children and families affected by substance misuse. The guidelines are intended to ensure that agencies can assist and encourage children in such circumstances to maximise their potential.

Dundee City Council is committed to ensuring therefore that we have effective procedures and close inter agency working in place to protect the welfare of children at risk of suffering from neglect or abuse. Recognising children who have been subjected to neglect or abuse and working to protect them must rank as a high priority. Housing Department staff have a potentially vital contribution to make in the protection of children.

As a key front line service, Housing Department staff are often well placed to observe situations where a child may be the subject of abuse, neglect or significant harm. It is the responsibility of all staff to report any allegations or suspicions of child abuse to the Social Work Department's Access or Child Protection Team, or the Police, dependent on the circumstances of the case and the immediate risk/danger to the child.

1.3. Key Principles

The key principles which underpin this procedure are:

- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995, which defines a child as being 16 years of age or under. In certain circumstances, such as children with special needs, or children subject to supervision requirements, the upper age limit for protection from abuse or neglect may extend to 18 years of age.
- The child's welfare is paramount at all times.
- All children whatever their age, culture, ability, gender, religious belief and or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- It is not the Housing Department staff's responsibility to investigate or make enquiries on any concerns but it is staff's responsibility to report any concerns they may have.

The following procedure and guidance aims to:

- Ensure that Housing Department staff are well informed and aware of the Child Protection policy.
- Ensure that Housing Department staff can deal effectively with potential child abuse/neglect situations when necessary.
- Provide a framework to ensure that Housing Department staff are aware of relevant steps to take if any indicators of abuse come to light.
- Provide effective procedures for referral and reporting concerns or allegations of child abuse and ensure that all staff are knowledgeable and aware of such procedures.
- Ensure effective inter agency communication and working in promoting children's safety and welfare
- Outline the training programme to raise awareness of the child protection policy and provide relevant Housing Department staff with appropriate knowledge.

2. REFERRAL PROCEDURE – NORMAL WORKING HOURS

- 2.1. During the course of a working day, situations may arise where Housing Department staff are made aware of or have a suspicion, that a child is subject to or at risk of neglect, abuse or significant harm. (See guidance notes – 5.0). In such instances, staff will note and record details on the Housing Department Referral Form (see appendix A) and pass onto Social Work Department Access Team. A copy of the referral should be passed to the Line Manager for information and record purposes.
- 2.2. The member of staff must report what has happened as soon as possible after witnessing the event. In all instances, staff should record the event on the same day.
- 2.3. Housing Department staff do not have a responsibility to investigate the issue in any way and they should not question a child they feel may be at risk.
- 2.4. It is important that where a child indicates that they are being abused or have been abused or information is obtained which gives concern of abuse, neglect or significant harm that the member of staff receiving the information will:
 - Stay calm and not rush into any inappropriate action.
 - Listen to what the child has to say and show them that they are being taken seriously.

- The child should be allowed to speak freely without interruption. **On no account should the child be subjected to questioning by a member of the Housing Department.**
- Record the details on the Housing Department Referral form and pass the original to the Social Work Department Access Team and copy the Line Manager. Where possible this should be via email. For staff who do not have email access, a faxed copy should be sent (Fax No: 435108).

2.5. Housing Department staff should not advise the family or child that they will report the incident unless it is appropriate to do so and will depend on the circumstances of the case (taking into account lone working procedures). A referral being made will allow enquiries to be undertaken by the Social Work Department Access or Child Protection Team and/or Police investigation, dependent on the circumstances of the case and the imminent danger to the child.

Concerns about confidentiality must not obstruct the exchange of information between agencies. Sharing professional concerns is essential for the protection of children. The rights of children should be considered at all times, ensuring that information is exchanged sensitively and on a “need to know” basis.

2.6. If a Housing Department member of staff identifies a situation that requires an urgent response (e.g. the child or young person is in need of urgent medical assistance or there is an immediate threat of violence) then the Police and Ambulance Service should be called immediately. A follow up Housing Department referral form should also be sent to the Social Work Department Access team for information purposes.

3. **AFTER THE REFERRAL HAS BEEN MADE**

- 3.1. If further action is necessary, the family will be contacted by the Social Work Department. Housing Department staff will maintain normal contact unless otherwise advised. It is possible that the referrer may be asked to attend an Initial Referral Discussion (IRD). The IRD is convened jointly by Social Work and Police. Its purpose is to assess the initial referral information and make decisions on the form of intervention, if any, that should be taken to best meet the needs of the child.
- 3.2. In all cases, confidentiality relating to the case is of paramount importance. The Social Work Department will endeavour to ensure that all details including the name of the referrer are kept strictly confidential. In the event of the referrer’s name becoming known to the family involved, the Social Work Department will contact the referrer immediately.
- 3.3. In all cases, the Social Work Department will advise the member of staff who made the referral, of the outcome of their enquiries (which includes whether no action was required in the case). Initially, an acknowledgement will be sent within 48 hours to confirm receipt of the event, with a follow up report in due course.
- 3.4. There may be a need for the Housing Department member of staff who made the original referral to be involved again in the case at a later date, dependent on the outcome of the Social Work Department’s and/or Police investigations. The staff member may need to:
- Give an eye witness statement of the event.
 - Provide further written information, if requested, to supplement the original referral.
 - Attend a child protection case conference to provide further information. Such conferences include members of all the relevant agencies involved in a case and can include representatives from Social Work Department, Education Department, Housing Department, National Health Service and members of the child’s family (often including the parents).

(See inter-agency guidance issue by the Dundee Children & Young Persons Protection Committee).

- 3.5. Where necessary, or requested by a member of staff involved in a child protection case, professional counselling will be available.

4. **OUT OF HOURS REFERRAL PROCEDURE**

- 4.1. Should there be a suspicion of or information available suggesting the neglect/abuse or possibility of significant harm to a child outwith normal working hours – the Social Work Department Out of Hours service should be contacted by telephone (No: 436430) and a Housing Department Referral form sent by email or fax. (Where there are concerns of imminent danger to a child the Police should be contacted immediately).
- 4.2. Dependent on the nature of the concerns to the child, the Social Work Out of Hours Team will either deal with the referral immediately or pass the referral on to the Access Team or Child Protection Team the next working day.

5. **GUIDANCE**

5.1. **What is Child Abuse?**

Child abuse is the term used to describe ways in which children are harmed, usually by adults and often by people they know and trust. There are five main types of child abuse:

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Neglect
- Non-organic failure to thrive

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is where someone inflicts injuries on a child, or knowingly does not prevent such injuries. This includes injuries caused by hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning, biting or by giving children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is where adults (or other young persons/children), both male and female, abuse children for their own sexual gratification. This form of abuse is wide ranging and may include adult exhibitionism (commonly referred to as flashing), fondling, masturbation, exposing a child to sexually explicit language or material (including stories or jokes), sexual exploitation (pornography, prostitution or internet sites), rape or sodomy.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs where there is a persistent lack of love and affection and where a child is exposed to family violence, or constantly the subject of threatening behaviour, taunting, sarcasm, resulting in low self esteem and confidence, thus making the child nervous and withdrawn.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child's essential needs are not met and this is likely to cause impairment to physical health and development. Such needs include food, clothing, cleanliness, shelter and warmth. A lack of appropriate care, including deprivation of access to health care may result in persistent or severe exposure through negligence to circumstances which endanger the child.

Failure to Thrive

Children who significantly fail to reach normal growth and developmental milestones (ie physical growth, weight, motor, social and intellectual development) where physical and genetic reasons have been medically eliminated and a diagnosis of non-organic failure to thrive has been established.

5.2. Recognising Abuse

Dealing with child abuse is rarely straightforward. Even for those experienced in working with child abuse on a regular basis, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or already has occurred. It is recognised that Housing Department staff are not experts in this field but all staff have a corporate responsibility to ensure the safety of children. Any concerns of child abuse or child protection issues should be discussed with the Social Work Department Access Team who can provide guidance and support if required.

It is very difficult to give a prescriptive and definitive list of potential indicators of abuse, given the way such indicators can manifest themselves. The following list, although not exhaustive, highlights the potential indicators. The presence of one or more indicators is not proof that abuse is taking place but awareness is important.

It is also accepted that some of the indicators would be difficult to assess where a Housing Department member of staff is making a "one off visit" to a house, as opposed to those in regular contact with families and children or those staff working in Supervised Accommodation Units.

Indicators

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns particularly if situated on a part of the body that would not normally be affected in this way.
- An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent.
- The child describes an act of abuse involving them.
- Someone else expresses concern about the welfare of the child.
- Unexplained/uncharacteristic changes in behaviour (e.g. becoming quiet and withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper).
- Inappropriate sexual awareness and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviour.
- Fear or distrust of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- The child has difficulty making friends and is always alone and/or is prevented from socialising with other children.
- Over eating or loss of appetite.
- The child becomes increasingly dirty or unkempt and/or is inappropriately dressed.
- Nervousness or flinching when touched.
- Domestic abuse in the family (primarily to mothers) which causes physical or emotional abuse to the child.
- Children of parents involved in substance misuse.

5.3. **The responsibility for referrals**

The decision to react to allegations of or suspicions about abuse can be a very difficult one for staff. However, all staff have a responsibility to protect children to ensure that appropriate agencies can then make enquiries and take necessary action. It is therefore essential that Housing Department staff make referrals where appropriate, to inform other agencies such as the Social Work Department or Police, who may also have suspicions in particular cases. The more information gathered can provide an overall picture of an event or an ongoing problem with a child. Where a member of staff is uncertain whether to make a referral, they should talk to their line manager or liaise directly with the Social Work Department Access Team for help and assistance. It should be noted however that time is an essential factor in any referral.

6. **TRAINING SCHEDULE**

Training Programme.

A programme of Child Protection training and raising awareness commenced in the Autumn of 2005 and by December 2008 approximately 250 Housing staff have completed Stage 1 training.

Induction Pack

Information to be included in induction pack for any member of staff:

- The Dundee City Council – Housing Department Child Protection Policy
- Document and Guidance notes.

At induction, attention should be drawn to the Referral Procedures.

Stage 1 – Induction

A half-day awareness-raising workshop will be held for all members of staff who are in contact with the public, with priority given to housing officers carrying out home visits.

Aim:

Participants can identify when a child/young person is at risk of harm.
Participants can take the appropriate action to protect them.

The training should include:

- Background
- What is Child Abuse
- What are the effects of Child Abuse
- Understanding the Dundee City Council – Housing Department Child Protection Policy Document and Guidance notes.
- The role of Housing staff in relation to Child Protection issues

Following the initial programme, the workshop will be delivered when required, to include new staff and staff who have changed their job.

Stage 2 – Foundation

This would be a 1-day course with more detail, for team leaders and sections with more direct involvement with the social welfare of tenants (ASBT, HSU, HSUP).

Stage 3 – Roles & Responsibilities

This course is delivered within a multi-agency setting and run over 4 half days to develop the confidence and practical skills of the staff member to progress (or support other staff to progress) a child protection case if required.

Aim:

To enable participants to develop an awareness of the child protection process, and their role within that process.

To develop participants' confidence in undertaking a role within the child protection process.

To Improve participants' understanding of the roles to other professionals.

Stage 3 – SVQ

This SVQ level III is delivered within a multi-agency setting and run over 7 days. This Training will be targeted at members of staff who are involved in policy, procedure and training work on child protection for the Housing Department. After evaluation, this could be extended for members of staff that are more involved with family units.

Identified Childcare Posts:

Concierge

Caretaker

Assistant Housing Officer – Homeless Unit

Homeless Officer – Homeless Unit

Senior Investigation Officer – Anti Social Behaviour Unit

Investigation Officer – Anti Social Behaviour Unit

Assistant Investigation Officer – Anti Social Behaviour Unit

Supervised Accommodation Officer – Homeless Unit

Assessment Team Leader – Homeless Unit

Housing Support Officer – Housing Support Team

Housing Officer who carries out Home Visit

7. SUMMARY

All Housing Department staff have a corporate responsibility for children and should make themselves aware of the policy. As written, the protection of children is of paramount importance to Dundee City Council and the Housing Department have a key role in ensuring the safety and security of children in the city.

ESSENTIAL CONTACT NUMBERS

**Social Work Department Access Team
(referrals during normal working hours)**
☎ 435106

**Social Work Department
(outwith normal working hours)**
☎ 436430

Tayside Police
☎ 08456005705 (Non-Emergency Number)

**For Children in Immediate Danger or Emergency
Call 999**

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF READING AND REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Dundee Children and Young Persons Protection Committee Inter-Agency Child Protection Guidance.

Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards.

“It’s Everyone’s Job To Make Sure I’m Alright” – Report of the Children Protection Audit and Review.

HOUSING DEPARTMENT REFERRAL FORM



CHILD PROTECTION ISSUE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Name of Referrer: _____

Job Title and Contact Number: _____

Date of Referral: _____

DETAILS OF THE EVENT / INCIDENT

Name of Child: _____

Address: _____

Date on which event / incident occurred: _____

Details of Event / Incident:

**Medical Treatment Required?
If Yes, what was needed?**

Details of Any Witnesses:

What Action Was Taken: _____

Referred To: **S.W.D.** **Police** **Education** **Other** **No Referral**

Signed By Referrer: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS CASES FLOWCHART

