

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE22 April 1997
27 May 1997JOINT REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND
DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

Report No 438/97

**A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF ACCREDITATION AND VETTING
INFORMATION REGARDING ADULTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND****ABSTRACT**

This report contains a proposed response to the consultation document issued by the Scottish Office on "Proposals for a National System of Accreditation and Vetting Information Regarding Adults Working with Children and Young People in Scotland". The report seeks the approval of the Education Committee and the Social Work Committee to submit this response on behalf of Angus Council to the Scottish Office.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee and Social Work Committee note the contents of this Report and approve the Report as the Council's response to the Scottish Office's consultation document.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In Lord Cullen's report of the public inquiry into the shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996, he recommended that:

"there should be a system for the accreditation to a national body of clubs and groups voluntarily attended by children and young persons under 16 years of age for their recreation, education or development, the main purpose of which would be to ensure that there are adequate checks on the suitability of leaders and workers who have substantial unsupervised access to them"

- 2.2 In its published response to Lord Cullen's recommendation the Government:

- indicated the need for co-ordination of information at national level about persons regarded as potentially unsuitable for work with children and young people.

- accepted the need to ensure that all clubs and organisations providing activities for children and young people should have arrangements to check on the suitability of leaders and workers.
- gave a commitment to a consultation on the proposals for the establishment of arrangements for a national information and accreditation system.

2.3 The Scottish Office Consultation Document invites comments on a number of issues under the following headings:-

- Scope of Accreditation
- National Guidelines
- Accreditation Procedures
- Post-Accreditation Arrangements
- Appeals
- Vetting of adults working with children
- Structure and organisation of a vetting body
- Resources

2.4 Responses are required to be sent to the Scottish Office by 16 May 1997.

2.5 A copy of the Consultation Document is available in the Members' Lounge.

3 COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Scope of Accreditation

3.1 A compulsory system of accreditation is deemed preferable. However, it is recognised that this might pose considerable problems in logistical terms and in enforcement. A voluntary system is acceptable provided that there are appropriate safeguards. There would need to be clarity in relation to statutory arrangements under the Children Act 1989 and how these relate to any proposed new system. With regard to local authority provided activities, it is desirable that they meet, as a minimum, the standards laid down for accreditation by any national body to ensure parity between sectors and confidence in the system. (It should not be assumed that voluntary organisations have lower standards than statutory bodies). This is particularly important if local authorities become involved in monitoring accredited organisations as part of any proposed system, or by default through conditions of let of premises or grant aid arrangements.

3.2 The role of national bodies in accreditation is valuable, particularly in terms of information, advice and support (see The Sports Council's leaflet "Safe and Secure-Young people in Sport"). However, there is a question over the ability of many such groups to meet the

requirements to accredit and monitor their members effectively in terms of organisation structure and resources. In the case of some sports, for example, there are a number of national affiliating bodies in competition to act for that sport in a national capacity.

- 3.3 A differentiated approach to accreditation seems sensible. As noted above, there are serious resource implications for national bodies which would require to be reflected in their staffing and funding arrangements. In order to ensure confidence in the system, some form of independent check on the enforcement of accreditation would be required. There is also a question over the ability of small organisations to accredit and monitor themselves. Again, this is important if a system of accreditation is to have credibility.

National Guidelines

- 3.4 A national body should provide overall guidelines which include core standards. These core standards should not be open to variation or adaptation. Along with these broad but specific guidelines there should be clear supporting material including "how to" guides. There is a clear role for national governing bodies in supporting groups to reach accreditation standards. Any support material should include information on local support for organisations, including local authority departments, local volunteer development agencies and councils of voluntary service.
- 3.5 Post accreditation monitoring is as important as initial accreditation. A system of monitoring should ensure not only adherence to minimum criteria but improvement and development of these.

Accreditation Procedures

- 3.6 Accreditation should be based on a set of agreed principles, include a developmental process and an acceptance of the value of accreditation, as well as the results. Publications of results should be easily accessible to a wide range of outlets. Information about accreditation should be clear and available to parents and potential users of the services and organisations.

Post Accreditation Arrangements

- 3.7 Post accreditation monitoring is essential and should include a twin approach with arrangements for local and national monitoring. There will be resource implications in any effective monitoring system.
- 3.8 Although Education and Social Work Departments have appropriate expertise and experience, additional funding would be required to support an additional monitoring role.
- 3.9 Alternative arrangements could include locating monitoring within local intermediary bodies such as Councils of Voluntary Service, or Local Volunteer Development Agencies, although it needs to be established whether such organisations have appropriate staffing,

organisational structures and expertise to take on such a role in the short term.

- 3.10 Whatever post accreditation monitoring procedures are put in place, training and resource implications will require to be addressed. It is essential that any monitoring system should be thorough and should have a developmental as well as an inspection function. This would lead to increasing quality of provision as well as meeting minimum standards.

Appeals

- 3.11 In the interests of natural justice, groups should have a right to appeal to the Accreditation body.

Vetting of adults working with children

- 3.12 Wider access to Scottish Criminal Records Office checking procedures is desirable. There is a strong case for SCRO checking to be extended to those with substantial unsupervised access to **vulnerable adults** also. Appropriate safeguards to ensure such information is dealt with in confidence are necessary. Meeting the requirements for such safeguards, (such as those recommended in "On the Record in Scotland") should be a condition of accreditation.
- 3.13 A national agency to collate and disseminate such information would be essential. Any widening of access to information should be accountable, monitored and controlled to ensure that such a process has public confidence.
- 3.14 Information on the suitability of individuals working with children and young people should be collected centrally.
- 3.15 Individuals should be informed when they are placed on a register and have a right to challenge the information held.
- 3.16 A vetting organisation should be a separate body and not part of the accreditation body.
- 3.17 Comprehensive checks are desirable - a central point for collation and enquiry would reduce duplication and the risk of information being missed if different agencies are involved.
- 3.18 Such a service should ideally be free of charge to ensure wide access and full participation. If access to such information is a condition of accreditation, organisations should not be expected to pay. Any charging regime (for accreditation or access to information) would ultimately result in requests to funding bodies (including the Scottish Office and local authorities).
- 3.19 All accredited organisations should be eligible to make enquiries of the vetting body. Other groups and bodies where staff and volunteers have substantial access to children and young people should also

have access to the vetting procedure. In every case organisations should comply with the set procedures, clearly establish that individuals have substantial unsupervised access, and the subject of the enquiry must have given permission for such a search.

Structures and Organisation

- 3.20 From the range of options put forward in the consultation document, the most effective structure would be one where the accreditation and vetting functions are undertaken by two separate bodies i.e.
- a A National body with responsibility for the accreditation of organisations and groups only. This body would determine guidelines and retain the national list of accredited organisations. It could also have powers to delegate to local authorities that part of the accreditation process dealing with local inspections.
 - b A National body with responsibility for the vetting of adults. This body would provide information to all accredited organisations and would hold the equivalent of the Consultancy Index and be able to access information from SCRO.

Resources and Fees

- 3.21 Accreditation and vetting should not be dependent on a fee. The most vulnerable groups, which have few resources both in financial and people terms, are most likely to find payment of fees a problem. Such groups are also likely to be serving more vulnerable young people. Payment of fees should be seen as a disincentive to accreditation or vetting, or indeed to the protection of children and young people.

4 SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

- 4.1 A comprehensive monitoring system of accreditation of statutory and voluntary organisation should be set up to provide safeguards for young people and children.
- 4.2 The accreditation system should be easily understood by the public, groups and organisations, and potential users of the service.
- 4.3 The benefits of accreditation should be obvious to organisations to encourage participation.
- 4.4 A separate vetting system should complement the accreditation system, but have wider provenance.
- 4.5 The vetting body should be accountable and open to challenge.

- 4.6 Any system of local monitoring, either within or outwith the local authority, must be fully resourced.
- 4.7 Access to vetting or accreditation services should be free, lest this act as a disincentive and lead to children and young people being put at risk.

5 CONSULTATION

The above responses to the Scottish Office Consultation Paper have emerged from discussions undertaken in a short life working group which has included representation from Tayside Police and also the following Council departments:

Chief Executive's, Cultural Services, Education, Law and Administration, Personnel, Recreation Services, Social Work.

In addition, the Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of the final report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.