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| Report to: | Social Work Resources Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 7 February 2007 |
| Report by: | Executive Director (Social Work Resources) |

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| Subject: | Evaluation of Airdrie and Hamilton Youth Court Pilots |
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Advise the Committee of the outcome of the evaluation of the Airdrie and Hamilton Youth Court pilots.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the findings of the evaluation of the Airdrie and Hamilton Youth Court pilots be noted.

3. Background

3.1. As part of the Scottish Executive's strategy to address the issue of youth crime a pilot Youth Court was established in Hamilton Sheriff Court in June 2003. The initial pilot was for a two year period however, during the course of the first year the Scottish Executive agreed to extend the pilot to Airdrie Sheriff Court that commenced in June 2004.

3.2. The objective of the Youth Court was to:

- Reduce the frequency and seriousness of offending amongst young people
- Promote social inclusion and citizenship and personal responsibility
- Establish fast track procedures in the court process
- Enhance community safety and provide respite to communities
- Examine whether legislative change is required.

3.3. The pilot in Hamilton concluded in June 2005 and an interim report was prepared. The pilot in Airdrie concluded in June 2006 which resulted in a full evaluation of the Youth Court process.

4. Current Position

4.1. The evaluation found particular strengths in fast tracking young people and advantage from the availability of a wider range of services in supporting young people to address their offending behaviour. It was more difficult to report on some of the other objectives because the impact of the Youth Court will not be known for a longer period of time and therefore it relies on anecdotal evidence. Therefore, although some anecdotal evidence exists to suggest that the Court was able to promote social inclusion amongst young people and that there was a reduction in

fear of crime it would be difficult to attribute that at this stage to the impact of the Youth Court.

- 4.2. The evaluation found that the young people dealt with were mostly male age 16 and 17 and although the majority had no previous convictions in the Adult Court many had been known to the system previously and had been referred to the Children's Reporter because of offending behaviour.
- 4.3. Most young people came from difficult backgrounds where difficulties at school, problems within the family situation and substance misuse were issues. The most common type of offences young people were involved in were breach of the peace, petty offending, carrying offensive weapons and possession of drugs.
- 4.4. More use was made of community based disposals in Hamilton than Airdrie.
- 4.5. Both Courts appear to be more efficient in fast tracking young people allowing a connection to be made between the offence and the sentence. The cases were more likely to be resolved by a guilty plea without going to trial and concluded at an earlier stage.
- 4.6. The Youth Court was also characterised by good working relationships between the different parts of the system and good understanding of each others role and responsibilities.
- 4.7. There were some differences commented on in the report. In Airdrie, a larger number of young people appeared before the Court who had not been involved in persistent offending. There was some concern expressed about the potential for net widening.
- 4.8. There was a greater use of probation in Hamilton perhaps reflecting the fact that the target group more appropriately met the criteria.
- 4.9. The dedicated social work team that works on Youth Justice in South Lanarkshire was seen to facilitate improved communication with the other key players in the system.

5. Implications for the Council

- 5.1. The Youth Court will continue allowing a focus on young people in difficulty and with resources that are able more appropriately to respond to their need. The fact that many young people appearing before the Youth Court were known within the Children's Hearing System are issues that South Lanarkshire Council addresses in the context of its Youth Justice Strategy. The Scottish Executive have recently produced a report of the Youth Justice Improvement Group which amongst other things is encouraging effective management of young people between the two systems.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. None although the contribution that the Social Work staff in South Lanarkshire have made to provide an effective service in partnership with other agencies should be noted.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. South Lanarkshire Council will continue to receive funding for the Youth Court from the Scottish Executive.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. None

9. Consultation

- 9.1. The outcome of the evaluation has been considered by the Youth Court Steering Group.

Harry Stevenson
Executive Director (Social Work Resources)

8 December 2006

Link(s) to Council Objectives

- Healthy and Safe Communities

Previous References

- Previous Committee Reports - 24 August 2005

List of Background Papers

- Scottish Executive Publication 24/11/2006
Evaluation of Airdrie and Hamilton Youth Court Pilots – research findings

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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