

Social Services Committee
14 November 2006

IRVINE, 14 November 2006 - At a Meeting of the Social Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Alan Munro, Margaret Munn, John Bell, Ian Clarkson, Margie Currie, Drew Duncan, Jane Gorman, Jean Highgate, Alan Hill, John Moffat, David O'Neill, Samuel Taylor and Nan Wallace.

Also Present

Tom Barr and Ian Richardson.

In Attendance

B. Docherty, Corporate Director, S. Paterson, Head of Service (Children, Families and Criminal Justice), L. Raeside, Head of Service (Finance and Performance), and S. Gault, Head of Service (Community Care) (Social Services); A. Grossart, Finance Manager (Finance); J. Stevenson, Communications Officer, G. Lawson, Corporate Support Manager and M. McKeown, Corporate Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

Chair

Councillor Munro in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Jack Carson, Margaret McDougall, Elisabeth Marshall and John Reid.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 26 September 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Service Performance Reports for 12 Months Ended 31 March 2006

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the performance of Social Services in the year to 31 March 2006.

Performance reports have been prepared which summarise the performance of each of the 3 areas within Social Services i.e. Community Care, Children and Families, and Criminal Justice Services, in the 12 months to 31 March 2006. The Corporate Director presented the Committee with a summary of performance highs and lows in each of the 3 areas. Based on a review of performance, a number of key priorities have been identified for Social Services as a whole for 2006/07 i.e.

- continuing initiatives to support frontline staff including retention and recruitment
- the effective management of staff absence
- upskilling the workforce to meet the requirements of the Social Services Council
- continuing to develop services to meet care standards
- implementation of the communication strategy and
- development of a financial strategy that considers resource allocation and competing demands while simultaneously acknowledging the finite resource envelope

In addition, specific priorities have been identified for each of the main client areas i.e.

Community Care

- implementation of the redesign of Community Care Services to better meet the needs of service users
- continuing to shift the balance of care to support more community care service users in the community
- ongoing focus on the development of a person-centred planning approach for people with complex needs

Children and Families

- replacement of existing children's units with accommodation that is purpose-built and which meets the standards of the Care Commission
- recruitment of 'fee based' foster carers
- increase the number of qualified social workers to meet the increasingly complex needs of families and children assessed as requiring support within their own homes

Criminal Justice

- continue to provide effective community disposals and reduce unnecessary custodial sentences
- increase community safety and public protection through rigorous supervision of offenders
- contribute to the development of the Community Justice Authority

The Committee agreed to (a) note the performance of Social Services in the year to 31 March 2006; and (b) approve the service priorities for 2006/07, as set out in the report.

3. Revenue Budget 2006/07: Budgetary Control

Submitted report by the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) on the budgetary control position for Social Services at the end of September 2006, and on projections to the end of financial year 2006/07.

Taking account of adjustments made during the financial year, the budget for Social Services at the end of September 2006 was £57,091,000. The report summarised variances and highlighted the action undertaken by the Corporate Director (Social Services) to address budgetary pressures reported to the last meeting of the Committee. Projections indicate a potential overspend in Social Services of £100,000 by the end of the financial year.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the budgetary control position for Social Services at the end of September 2006 and the projected year-end overspend; and (b) that the Corporate Director (Social Services) take appropriate action to bring the budget back on target by the financial year end.

4. Kilwinning: Hawthorn Court

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on developments within the Learning Disability Service and on the proposed closure of Hawthorn Court, Kilwinning.

Hawthorn Court, Kilwinning, was opened in 1974 as a residential hostel for adults with learning difficulties. The Unit currently provides registered residential care for 3 adults and has a further 3 rooms available for people requiring respite care. The facility was, however, not purpose built and poses significant difficulties for people with mobility problems to the extent that it would not meet new standards for registration as a care home set by the Scottish Care Commission. The level of adaptations that would be required to bring the facility up to standard is significant and, because of the design of the building, would not be guaranteed to meet residents' future needs.

As part of the hospital retraction programme, the Council will assume responsibility for respite provision for a number of adults with learning disabilities who currently access respite care from Arrol Park Hospital in Ayr. Adults with learning disabilities have a range of respite care needs and a variety of services exist to meet these needs. Building work is due to commence in December 2006 on a new residential respite care facility in Beith which will provide residential respite care for 8 service users with complex learning disabilities and associated physical disabilities or challenging behaviour. The facility is due to open in June 2007 and will meet all current and anticipated standards for the provision of respite care for adults with learning disabilities. It was proposed that on completion of the new Beith facility, Hawthorn Court be deregistered with the Care Commission and the unit closed.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the closure of Hawthorn Court, Kilwinning, on completion of the new respite care facility in Beith; and (b) that the Corporate Director (Social Services) work with the 3 residents living in the unit to identify alternative care provision, taking account of their personal preferences and needs as far as possible, and consider the most suitable respite options for the people who currently use Hawthorn Court.

5. Change to Charging Policy in Respect of Food Preparation

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on proposals to amend the charging policy to withdraw charges for food preparation under the Free Personal Care regime.

Since the introduction of the Scottish Executive's Free Personal Care for the elderly initiative, there has been no consistent practice by Councils in respect of charges made for the preparation of food. Guidance produced by the Executive in 2002 advised that food preparation and the provision of a meal did not constitute Free Personal Care. Assistance with eating, assistance to manage specialist diets, and assistance with the preparation of specialist meals (e.g. pureed foods) was, however, classed as Free Personal Care. Local authorities were able, but not obliged, to charge for the former, but not for the latter. The Council, in common with others, charges for the preparation of food.

In view of the continuing confusion among service users on the issue, and in light of the decisions taken by other local authorities to cease charging for the preparation of food, it is proposed that North Ayrshire Council should discontinue charges for food preparation. The implications for the Council were set out in the report. As it will take some time to carry out an assessment of all individuals who may be affected by this decision, it is proposed that the eligibility for non-charging should be effective from 14 November 2006 and that individuals should be rebated for overcharging in the interim on completion of the assessments.

The Committee agreed to cease charging for food preparation under the Free Personal Care regime on the terms set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 3.00 p.m.