

Social Services Committee  
11 April 2006

**IRVINE, 11 April 2006** - At a Meeting of the Social Services Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

**Present**

Alan Munro, Anna Donn, Margaret Munn, John Bell, Ian Clarkson, Margie Currie, Jane Gorman, Jean Highgate, Elisabeth Marshall, David O'Neill, John Reid, Samuel Taylor and Nan Wallace.

**In Attendance**

B Docherty, Corporate Director and L Skehal, Head of Community Care (Social Services); G Lawson, Head of Corporate and Democratic Support, A Wattie, Communications Officer and M Anderson, Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (Chief Executive's).

**Apologies for Absence**

Drew Duncan, Margaret McDougall and John Moffat.

**1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28 February 2006, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Chair's Remarks**

The Chair referred to correspondence which Members of the Committee may have received in connection with the withdrawal of Council funding to the Red Cross Day Care Centre and Huntington's Association.

The Chair indicated that the Council's recent budget exercise had sought to direct resources to safeguarding the provision of statutory services for those in greatest need. He advised that Social Services would be in contact with the Red Cross and Huntington's Association to discuss possible transitional arrangements and that officers would respond to correspondence from individual service users to offer reassurance that alternative services would be provided based on assessed need.

Noted.

**3. Charging for Supporting People Services**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on a proposed amendment to the charging policy for Supporting People Services.

As a result of a reduction in the Council's Supporting People funding allocation from the Scottish Executive, all care packages have been reviewed and adjusted accordingly. It is now proposed to introduce charges for Supporting People services, where applicable, in line with the charging policy for the provision of mainstream services with effect from 1 April 2006. This will ensure that there is equity in charging for services across all areas of Community Care services.

There will be transitional protection for existing Supporting People-funded service users during the lifetime of current service provision, with only new service users being subject to any charges. Social Services will ensure that all service users undergo a full assessment of financial circumstances and have their income maximised prior to the revision of any charges levied.

In response to a question by Members, the Corporate Director (Social Services) undertook to prepare and circulate to Members of the Committee a paper setting out the detail of the charging policy.

The Committee agreed to approve the introduction of charging for Supporting People Services as described within the report.

#### **4. Hospital Retraction Programme for Adults with Learning Disabilities**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on progress in terms of the Hospital Retraction Strategy for Adults with Learning Disabilities.

The deadline for the completion of the ongoing retraction of hospital-based continuing care services, currently located at Arrol Park and Strathlea hospitals, is 31 March 2007.

Of the 30 people originating from North Ayrshire who were identified as part of the Hospital Retraction Programme, 7 have already come out of hospital and have been accommodated in their own homes, 4 have died and 10 have taken up the following tenancies:-

- Bridgend, Kilwinning (4 tenancies) supported by Key
- Lochwood Gardens, Saltcoats (2 tenancies) supported by Key
- Lawthorn, Irvine (1 tenancy) supported by Cornerstone
- Mount Pleasant, Stevenston (2 tenancies) supported by the Richmond Fellowship
- Fife (1 tenancy) supported by The Kingdom of Fife

Of the remaining 9 people identified, the care needs of 3 can best be met within residential care settings and 2 will move into a joint tenancy in Saltcoats. The "person-centred plans" for 4 individuals still have to be concluded and will take into account significant levels of challenging behaviour and/or complex health care needs.

With the completion of the Hospital Retraction Programme, hospital-based respite will also cease. An independent provider, Choices, has been selected to provide a new respite service for people with complex learning disabilities, associated physical disabilities and challenging behaviours. This 8-person service, based in Beith, should be completed by March 2007.

Noted.

## **5. Social Services Communication Strategy**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on progress to date in implementing the Social Services Communication Strategy.

The aim of the Communications Strategy is to improve Social Services communications, both internally and externally. The Strategy addresses the following 5 key areas:-

- internal communication;
- public information;
- communication with partner agencies;
- public affairs; and
- image and profile.

Monitoring has been carried out during the first year of operation of the Strategy, using a telephone survey and questionnaire. Although there are still areas which require to be addressed or improved, the response to the Communication Strategy has been generally very positive. Six-weekly meetings will be held with the Chief Executive's Communications Team to ensure that Social Services communications are consistent with the wider corporate style and policies and that shared priorities are agreed.

Noted.

## **6. Delayed Discharge of Patients from Hospital**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on new delayed discharge targets set by the Scottish Executive.

A delayed discharge occurs when a patient clinically ready for discharge cannot leave hospital because the necessary care, support or accommodation arrangements are not readily accessible and/or necessary funding is not available. Over successive years, the Scottish Executive has required that the number of delayed discharges is reduced. In February 2006, the Deputy Minister for health and Community Care advised that delayed discharges should be reduced by 50% by April 2007 and eliminated by April 2008.

In March 2006, there were a total of 49 delayed discharges in North Ayrshire. The approximate additional cost of providing funding to allow all current delayed discharges to proceed into care homes would be £537,000 on a full-year basis. The Scottish Executive has provided additional funds to address an increase in care home fees, but in North Ayrshire this would still leave a shortfall of approximately £370,000. There is also an issue surrounding the capacity in the care home sector, which involves more expensive care home options being introduced.

The Council is in receipt of funds of £354,950 transferred from NHS Ayrshire and Arran in connection with the closure of Holmhead Hospital and a further £137,700 is being transferred to the Council in relation to the closure of Brooksby Hospital. These resource transfer funds are recurring. It is proposed that the Holmhead monies are used entirely to fund care home admissions and that funds relating to the closure of Brooksby Hospital are transferred to support home care services. Consideration will be given to the care home sector and discussions within the Partnership Group for Older People will examine further commissioning of services for the longer term.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposals for addressing delayed discharges as set out in the report.

## **7. Mental Health Officer Staffing Survey 2005**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the findings of the 2005 Mental Health Officer annual staffing survey.

The volume and complexity of work carried out by MHOs has increased recently and there have been concerns that there would be insufficient MHO capacity to discharge duties under relevant legislation. Accordingly, a National Survey of Mental Health Officers staffing was carried out in March 2005.

The National Survey found that at March 2005, across Scotland, 553 social workers were practising as Mental Health Officers. With North Ayrshire, there are currently 20 social workers practising as MHOs, with a further social worker undertaking training.

The Council has the 5th lowest number of social workers per 1000 of the population, but is middle of the range across Scotland in terms of the number of MHOs per whole time equivalent social workers.

In anticipation of the increased time demands on Mental Health Officers, the Council has been seeking to increase the number of active MHOs and it is proposed that the pool of MHOs continues to expand. A payment of a premium of £1,477 per annum to MHOs has helped to bring some stability to this workforce.

The Corporate Director (Social Services) indicated that, at the next meeting of the Committee, a Mental Health Specialist would present a number of mental health case studies for the information of members.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the approach used to date to ensure that the Mental Health Officer staff group is capable of addressing the new legislative requirements; (b) that an evaluation of the impact of new working practices and new investments in service delivery be completed; and (c) that any necessary action arising from the evaluation be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

## **8. Review of Older People's Services**

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on progress in the redesign of residential care facilities.

Following the strategic review of older people's services in North Ayrshire, Canal Court residential unit in Saltcoats was identified as the first unit for conversion to an intermediate care unit and the unit. The new unit, named the David White Centre, was opened in August 2005.

Montgomery Court, an 18 bedded residential unit based in Kilbirnie, will be the second unit to be redesigned and will offer intermediate care to frail older people and people with dementia. A planning day was hosted by the Council in March 2006 to consider how best to develop intermediate care for people with dementia and a further day is planned.

The redesign of Caley Court, a 26 bedded residential unit in Stevenston, was also part of the original review's recommendations. However, recent budget decisions have resulted in a different option being considered. The new facility will now assist older people by offering good information and clear advice on all types of services and it is also proposed that a cafe will be available to enable older people and carers to socialise and gain support while receiving information.

In addition to the redesign, the existing day service, Thistle Day Care, will be expanded and will be able to care for 16 frail older people and 8 people with dementia. It is proposed that a steering group be established to look at the feasibility of the resource centre being funded from external sources while maintaining the central aim of providing a facility for older people.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals for the development of intermediate care services in North Ayrshire, particularly as they relate to dementia services at Montgomery Court; (b) that members be invited to submit suggestions to the Corporate Director (Social Services) on a new name for Montgomery Court; and (c) to approve the proposal to consider the viability of an older people's resource centre at Caley Court.

### **9. North Ayrshire Council Safeguarders and Curators ad Litem: Fee Increase**

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a proposal to apply an inflationary rate increase to the present fee structure for Safeguarders and Curators ad Litem.

The Council is responsible for the appointment of Safeguarders and for arrangements to secure their services when asked to do so by a Children's Hearing or by a Sheriff. Curators ad Litem are solicitors employed by the courts in adoption cases. The local authority has responsibility for the payment of fees for both types of service.

COSLA previously provided guidance on an annual uprate in respect of a variety of allowances and fees, including those for Safeguarders and Curators ad Litem. COSLA has advised, however, that a recommended rate will no longer be provided and it will be for individual Councils to decide what rate is appropriate. Given that the previous practice was to apply an inflationary increase to the fees, the Chief Executive has authorised a similar increase with effect from 1 April 2006.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm.