

Social Work Committee
3 June 1998

Irvine, 3 June 1998 - At a Meeting of the Social Work Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

James Jennings, Margaret Munn, Elliot Gray, Patrick Browne, Jack Carson, James Clements, John Donn, David Gallagher, Jane Gorman, Joseph McKinney, Elizabeth McLardy, Robert Reilly, Gena Seales and Samuel Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Social Work; The Head of Service Management; The Head of Planning and Development; C Hamilton, Manager, Area Services (Garnock Valley, North Coast and Arran); G Hart, Project Leader, Dementia Support Services; I Kelly, Welfare Rights Development Officer; C Devenay, Home Care Organiser (Social Work); R Lee, Assistant Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); M McCormick, Media Relations Officer, Marketing and Publicity; S King, Corporate Policy Officer and S Paxton, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr Jennings in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

George Steven and Richard Wilkinson.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Garnock Valley/Largs: Dementia Support Project

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work and received a staff presentation on the Day Care Project, which was established in 1993 to provide a flexible range of support services, including Community Care Assessments and Respite Day Care support, to 60 dementia sufferers and their carers in the Garnock Valley and Largs areas. Around five additional clients per month are referred to the Project, the running costs of which will be £64,520 in 1998/99, with a 70% share being met by Central Government through Mental Illness Specific Grant (MISG). The Social Work Directorate provides the balance of funding, management and supervision and additional Day Care Services. Further expansion of the Project which is planned for the Garnock Valley and the establishment of a similar project in Irvine would however be dependant upon additional resources, including MISG funding, being made available.

The Project has undoubtedly established efficient collaborative working with General Practitioners, Community Psychiatric Nurses and voluntary groups and private and residential nursing home providers. Its flexibility and innovative approach to the delivery of dementia services in rural areas has also gained national recognition.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Project should be expanded if additional finance can be secured; and (b) to authorise the Director of Social Work to pursue further grant aid from the Scottish Office.

3. Assistance to Romania

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on a Study Visit of Romanian Child Care staff to North Ayrshire to further assist staff in their efforts to establish social work practice and training in Romania where economic restructuring has resulted in increased poverty and where very few criminal justice services exist for young offenders. The trip was sponsored by the Christian Children's Fund of Canada and the balance of costs of the visit was met from fundraising activities by Social Work Directorate staff, contributions from Rotary Clubs, and Seminars organised by the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) sponsored by the Scottish Office.

The Romanian delegation visited a range of Child Care and Criminal Justice establishments and projects during their stay and given the success of this initiative, further visits are proposed. Attempts will also be made to encourage the input of a wider range of staff and authorities.

The Committee also noted that the ADSW has asked the Council's Director of Social Work to be its representative in developing social work services in Romania and that in response to a request by the Romanian Government it is proposed to second staff for a two-week period to complete the evaluation process.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the continued involvement of the Council's Social Work Directorate in the provision of assistance to Romania; (b) to authorise the Director of Social Work to act as representative for the Association of Directors of Social Work in developing social work services in Romania; and (c) to receive progress reports in due course.

4. Irvine: 174 High Street: North Ayrshire Carer's Centre

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on the arrangements for the opening of the North Ayrshire Carer's Centre located at 174 High Street, which will provide information to Carers on a wide range of issues including Welfare Benefits and support services.

The Social Work Directorate has entered into a partnership with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, which supports Carers and their families, and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board to establish the Carer's Centre. Each partner will contribute £25,000 over a three-year period to finance the provision and running of the Centre which will be managed by Unity Enterprise, a non-profit making voluntary organisation.

The premises will open during National Carer's Week (week commencing 8 June 1998) but a more formal opening of the Centre, possibly by the Princess Royal, is planned for the autumn.

The Committee agreed to approve the opening arrangements.

5. Revenue Budget Savings Package 1998/99

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on (a) the Orange Badge Scheme; and (b) the payment of "attendance money" of £1 per week to persons with learning difficulties who attend Resource Centres.

As part of the Social Work Directorate's £815,000 savings proposals (3.2% of the 1998/99 Revenue Budget), a fee of £5 was introduced for the provision and issue of Orange Badges to disabled persons. This would generate income in the region of £8,250. In addition, the payment of "attendance money" to persons with learning difficulties attending Resource Centres was abolished to save approximately £6,000 per year.

(a) Orange Badge Scheme

As from 1 April 1998, a number of local authorities increased their charges for the issue of an Orange Badge to varying degrees. In North Ayrshire the fee was raised from £2 to £5 to cover the

costs associated with the administration, purchase and production of the badge.

Following challenge of the validity of increased fees by disabled groups in other council areas, the Committee instructed the Director of Social Work to clarify the North Ayrshire position with the Scottish Office. The Head of Transport Division was sympathetic to the Council's position, acknowledged that the cost for the administration and issue of an Orange Badge had remained at £2 since 1982 but confirmed that until this was reviewed, the currently regulations must apply and the fee be restricted to £2.

(b) Attendance Money

The savings package had allowed the Directorate to request a contribution of 90 pence per day to cover transport costs for persons using Council transport to attend the Fergushill and Hazeldene Resource Centres. This was unsuccessfully challenged by Enable, a group which campaigns for disabled persons. The Directorate successfully defended the Council's position by reaffirming the voluntary nature of such contributions. The Council Scheme had also been endorsed by the Transport Manager and Transport Commission.

At a meeting with the Fergushill Carers' Support Group in April 1998, Carers agreed with the contribution to the Transport Costs Scheme.

The Group has however, maintained its objection to the withdrawal of the £1 per week attendance allowance which was viewed as a "wage" for attendees to save and spend on various purchases and activities. Since the Carers had expressed a willingness to co-operate with the transport cost issue, the Director agreed to defer the withdrawal of the £1 per week attendance allowance payment, subject to consideration by the Social Work Committee.

As a result of these measures the original savings package will be reduced by some £10,000 which will be offset by reductions in the purchase of equipment and supplies and the delaying of selected staff appointments.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the reduction in the fee for the issue and administration of Orange Badges from £5 to £2; (ii) to reimburse those applicants who had paid the higher rate since 1 April 1998; (iii) to continue to press the Scottish Office for an increase in this fee; and (iv) to defer the withdrawal of payment of the £1 per week attendance money.

6. Welfare Rights Service

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on a Client Representation Strategy in respect of Welfare Rights Appeals, the biggest number of which are concerned with restoring benefit lost through new procedures.

Of the 1068 appeals outstanding in North Ayrshire, the greatest number relate to incapacity benefit where the loss of such benefit can result in a drop of income of between £10 and £78 per week for claimants. The four Welfare Rights Officers, based in the three Area Teams and Ayrshire Central Hospital are now largely concerned with restoring benefit lost through such changes and attending Social Security, Medical and Disability Appeals Tribunals. Only one other organisation viz. the Three Towns Unemployed Worker's Centre currently provides such representation on a regular basis.

Given the importance of this appeal work and the restoration of income to social work clients (in the first three months of 1998 the amount of weekly benefit awarded through successful appeals was £1,763 and in addition £91,290 was also paid as arrears to the 76 clients represented during that quarter), the Welfare Rights Unit has established a system for processing and allocating appeals work and will focus resources on representing clients at appeals. This will result in the loss of some Welfare Rights Officer involvement in Area Social Work Teams. The Directorate will, however, endeavour to compensate for this through additional training for staff and enhanced 'benefit checking' systems.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the strategy of prioritising appeals work in the Welfare

Rights Services Section; and (b) to receive further reports on the outcome of the Representation Strategy.

7. Home Care Review Charging Policy

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work confirming proposals in relation to the future provision of Home Care Services and making specific recommendations on the application of a revised Charging Policy as a first step in that review.

This issue which was the subject of an earlier report to Committee on 20 April 1998 was remitted to a Member/Officer Working Group whose views have been reflected in the current version.

The Home Help Service is the principle provider of support at home to individuals. Some clients have low dependency needs, such as meals preparation, shopping and pension collection while others have much higher needs such as assistance in getting in and out of bed, shaving, washing, toileting and feeding. Increasing demand for the service cannot, however, be met from existing resources and in an attempt to ensure domiciliary care services are able to respond effectively to the needs of the most vulnerable and highly dependent persons in the community, it has become necessary to review the Home Care Charging Policy.

Under the current policy inherited from Strathclyde Regional Council, the majority of clients pay less than £10 per week for the service while almost half pay nothing. Charges are based on an increasing scale based on income which is in excess of a basic "income threshold" of less than £113 per week for a single person and £128 per week for couples. Clients with an income in excess of £297.60 pay the maximum current charge of £27.10.

The amended proposals would address inequalities in the current arrangements which favour single people rather than couples. The "threshold income" would be reduced to £90 per week for single persons and raised to £140 per week for couples. This is based on the Income Support level for 75 to 79 year olds with a "buffer" to cover additional expenditure items. Income such as earnings, private pensions and payments from annuities will be taken into consideration when determining the level that a client should pay for the service. When calculating a person's disposable income, War Widows Pensions and Mobility Allowances will be disregarded. Provision will be made for the cost of caring for children, rent and mortgage interest payments. At the lower end of the assessed scale, above the income threshold, there would be a standard charge of £5. For single people with assessable income of more than £100 and couples with more than £150 there would be a charge of 50 pence per £1 on income above the threshold income. The maximum charge under the revised scheme would be £50 per week.

If these proposals are acceptable, the Director of Social Work will advise all domiciliary care service users of the changes to the Home Care Charging system. An information leaflet which has been prepared will be widely circulated.

The Committee agreed (a) to introduce the new charging system with effect from 30 June 1998; (b) to, as far as possible, use additional revenue generated to develop Community Care Services; (c) that the Director of Social Work continue his review of Home Care Service provision; and (d) that further reports be submitted as the new Charging Policy is implemented.

8. Admissions to Nursing Homes and Private/Voluntary Homes for the Elderly

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work regarding the current situation relating to admissions to nursing homes and private/voluntary homes for the elderly. The current waiting list for funding for placements is 80, despite the admission of 30 elderly persons into residential care during the winter months. It would cost around £800,000 to clear the waiting list and the Council does not have the resources to do so.

In order to address the current waiting list for funding, the Social work Directorate will continue the current Admissions Group system whereby admissions are prioritised, monitored and rationed in terms of finance available. The Admissions Group is currently authorised to admit six persons per

month to residential and voluntary/private nursing homes. It is proposed that 15 persons be placed immediately in nursing homes and private/voluntary residential homes for the elderly. Five places will be allocated to persons on the waiting list for funding who are currently resident in hospital or in the community and one place to a person already in a nursing home or residential care who was previously self-funding but whose Capital has subsequently reduced to a level eligible for Council assistance. Persons requiring admission will be assessed and placed on what should be seen as a waiting list for funding rather than a waiting list for admission.

The Committee agreed (a) that the Director of Social Work (i) continue the existing admissions monitoring system; and (ii) control and where necessary adjust the level of monthly admissions in accordance with the budget available; (b) to endorse the approach adopted by the Social Work Directorate whereby the current waiting list is viewed as a waiting list for funding rather than admission; and (c) to instruct the Director of Social Work to continue to inform Committee of any major difficulties encountered.

9. Local Planning Agreement for Hospital Discharge

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work recommending adoption of a revised Hospital Discharge Planning Agreement between the three Ayrshire Councils, the three NHS Trusts and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board.

Prior to local government reorganisation, Strathclyde Regional Council and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board negotiated a Local Planning Agreement for Hospital Discharge which was then transferred to the new councils. For numerous reasons however that Agreement has been limited in its effectiveness and as a result a joint working group of the three Ayrshire Councils, NHS Trusts and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board has drafted a revised Local Planning Agreement.

The purpose of the document is to set out the principles and values to underpin activities in relation to discharge from hospital. The new Agreement identifies six principles of good practice and specifies tasks associated with admission and discharge as well as assigning responsibility for these tasks. Protocols for each hospital will be negotiated separately and the revised Agreement will be reviewed after six months of operation and will be adjusted as necessary.

The adoption by all signatories of common criteria for care services is essential to the success of the Planning Agreement. The Directors of Social Work and Housing Services are in the process of finalising a system of joint Social Work and Housing assessments, as appropriate, to establish individual accommodation needs. Work is also continuing on the criteria for residential placements and the definition of continuing care. This will be reported further at a later date.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the adoption of the revised local Planning Agreement for Hospital Discharge; (b) to authorise the Director of Social Work, (i) in collaboration with the Director of Housing Services to negotiate protocols with individual hospitals; and (ii) to review the operation of the revised Planning Agreement after six months and adjust the procedures as necessary; and (c) that a further report on the criteria for care placements and joint Social Work/Housing assessment arrangements be submitted to a future meeting.

10. Maintenance Rates for Geilsland and Ballikinrain Residential Schools (Church of Scotland)

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on the proposed increase in the weekly costs for 1998/99 in respect of the Geilsland Residential School, Beith and Ballikinrain Residential School, Balfron both of which are owned and managed by the Church of Scotland and provide guidance and support to children who display difficult behavioural and personal problems. There are two types of maintenance fee:- (a) block contracts which commit the Council to purchasing a set number of places in a particular establishment for 12 months where a lower weekly rate applies; and (b) spot contracts, which involve the Council purchasing places for individual children as orders are made by Children's Hearings, where a higher weekly rate applies. There are currently five young people from North Ayrshire in Geilsland School and two in Ballikinrain School.

The Church of Scotland has proposed an increase from £1,015 to £1,044 per week for a block purchase and £1,128 per week to £1,160 for a spot purchase for places in Geilsland School which is in line with the rate of inflation. At the reorganisation of local government in 1996, Ballikinrain School delayed a planned reduction in the number of residents for one year at the request of the Directors of Social Work Group but has now reduced the number to 40. Staffing levels at the School have however remained at 1996 levels. In 1997/98 the School managed to restrict increases to normal inflationary levels but for this financial year has proposed an increase from £863 to £986 for a block purchase and £960 to £1,095 for a spot purchase.

The Committee agreed (i) to authorise the new supplementation rates for Geilsland and Ballikinrain Schools for 1998/99; and (ii) to instruct the Director of Social Work to (A) inform other local authorities of the recommended rates for the Schools for financial year 1998/99; and (B) enter into appropriate contracts with both Schools in block purchase terms wherever possible.

11. Safeguarders, Curators Ad Litem and Reporting Officers: Scale of Fees

Submitted report by the Chief Executive on a revised scale of fees recommended by COSLA Safeguarders, Curators Ad Litem and Reporting Officers.

There are currently 2 Curators Ad Litem and Reporting Officers and 14 Safeguarders on the North Ayrshire Panel who have been re-appointed for the period 1 April 1997 until further notice. The Scottish Office has yet to issue guidance to councils on these appointments and the previous legislation in this regard will remain in force until that guidance is available.

In the past fees have been reviewed by COSLA on a two-yearly basis, but given uncertainties surrounding local government reorganisation, the effect of the implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 on the appointment of Safeguarders and the financial constraints affecting Councils this year, fees will be increased by the level of inflation for 1998/99. COSLA will undertake a further, more comprehensive, review of the scale of fees in consultation with the Scottish Safeguarders Association during the course of this financial year.

The Committee agreed the revised scale of fees recommended with effect from 1 April 1998.

12. Conferences and Seminars

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on invitations to attend numerous conferences and invitations.

Noted.

13. Urgent Items

The Chair agreed that the undernoted item be considered as a matter of urgency.

14. Land Surplus to Requirements

The Committee agreed to remit to the Chair, Vice-Chairs, appropriate local members and officers to visit the Fergushill Adult Training Centre and the Hazeldene Centre, Kilwinning and Burnside Children's Home, Irvine to ascertain the extent of surplus land and report.

The meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.