

Social Work Committee
26 August 1998

Irvine, 26 August 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, Jack Carson, David Gallagher, Elizabeth McLardy, Robert Reilly, Gena Seales, George Steven, Samuel Taylor and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

The Director of Social Work; The Head of Planning and Development; The Head of Service Management (Social Work); R Lee, Assistant Principal Officer (Financial Services); M Hewitt, Corporate Policy Officer and S Paxton, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

Chair

Mr Jennings in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne, John Donn, Jane Gorman and Joseph McKinney.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3 June 1998, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Ms Fiona Evans BSc: Occupational Therapist

The Committee received Ms Fiona Evans, an Occupational Therapist within the Social Work Directorate and congratulated her on the award of the degree of BSc in Occupational Therapy (with distinction) and the Smith and Nephew Prize for Excellence in Occupational Therapy.

The Committee noted that Ms Evans had now been deployed to the Three Towns area.

3. Advisory Committee on Inspection: Minutes

Submitted report by the Chief Executive, being the Minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Inspection of 15 June 1998.

Noted.

4. Children's Safeguard Review

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work regarding further action taken in relation to the recommendations contained within the Children's Safeguard Review Report, published by the Scottish Office in December 1997.

In January the Committee established a short-life Working Group to implement recommendations within the Review document. To date, the Group has re-examined Council policies, practices and procedures designed to safeguard children and young people and the Social

Work Directorate has already implemented nine of the Review's recommendations. The report confirmed details of the Working Group's proposals covering issues relating to recruitment, selection, performance appraisal and guidance in relation to the use of temporary staff and the maintenance of employee records, given the emphasis which the Review places on these issues in terms of standards of care.

The Committee agreed (a) to authorise the implementation of the Working Group's proposals relating to the recruitment, selection and training of staff subject to the identification of adequate resources; and (b) to receive further progress reports in due course.

5. European Research Project: Young People in Residential Care

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work outlining the findings of the EC funded study to explore the experience of young people aged 11 to 18 in residential care whose report is entitled "Care to Listen?". North Ayrshire Council participated in this academic research which was also undertaken in England, Finland, Ireland and Spain, as these five countries were believed to encompass a broad representation of the care models which operate at present within the Union.

The main findings of the report highlight issues already identified by the Directorate and conveyed in the Council's Children's Services Plan and Child Care Development Programme, and do not provide any new items of significance for North Ayrshire. The recommendations arising from the research are once again in accord with established Council policies but they will nonetheless assist in the prioritisation of action in terms of the Children's Services Plan.

The Committee agreed to approve the use of the research findings to inform child care policy in North Ayrshire.

6. Income Maximisation

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on the progress of the Income Maximisation Initiative in the first quarter of 1998/99.

The report confirms that home care and welfare rights staff are continuing to give a high priority to increasing the income of home care clients and that in the first quarter of 1998/99 306 claims were submitted (as opposed to 253 in the corresponding period in 1997/98) on behalf of 196 home care service users for a number of benefits including Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax. This has resulted in a total weekly increase of £2,773 in welfare benefits secured for clients, giving a projected annual increase of £144,240.

Analysis of the caseload demonstrates that the system is focused on those who are most vulnerable to poverty and it is evident from the figures that over one-third of the claims have been for Attendance Allowance which not only provides a tax-free weekly income but can also act as a trigger to other benefit entitlements such as Income Support.

Discussion ensued on the level of take up of welfare benefits by people in North Ayrshire and it was suggested that a publicity campaign on local radio be organised to urge those who are eligible for benefits to take up their entitlement.

The Committee agreed (a) to confirm the priority given by the Welfare Rights Section to elderly persons especially those who receive home care services; and (b) to instruct the Director of Social Work to (i) submit a half-year report on the operation of the amended Home Care Charging Policy; and (ii) arrange a radio publicity campaign for the Welfare Rights Service and report.

7. Voluntary Organisations: Uplift in Rates

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on procedures to be applied in relation to setting rates for residential accommodation and related services provided by voluntary organisations.

Under current arrangements recommended by COSLA the Council is responsible for the setting of charges with appropriate voluntary organisations based within its boundaries and for notifying their counterparts to allow these rates to be applied nationally. Accordingly, when the Committee approved revised rates for Geilsland School, Beith which is managed by the Church of Scotland all other Councils in Scotland were advised of the amended charges. In turn the Social Work Directorate has been advised of rates increases already agreed with or recommended by voluntary organisations elsewhere.

Against this background, it is proposed to adhere to current procedures and where appropriate to establish rates which would then apply to this and other councils. Additionally it is intended to have the Social Work Directorate accept only those rates increases which are in accordance with the current level of inflation, i.e. 3%. An exception is, however, sought in the case of Red Cross House, Irvine where it is considered that an increased rate of 10% for residential and respite care services is acceptable in view the specialist nature of the care provided and equipment used. The increase in rates for community day services at Red Cross House would however be kept to 3% in line with general proposals.

These increases, costing around £16,000, would be met from the Social Work budget for 1998/99.

The Committee agreed (a) to remit to the Director of Social Work to accept and implement rates adjusted in accordance with the recognised level of inflation; (b) that the Director of Social Work inform the Committee of any increases in rates requested in excess of the recognised rate of inflation; and (c) to approve an increase in rates for the residential and respite care facility at Red Cross House, Irvine in excess of the current rate of inflation.

8. Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System: Planning Statement 1999/2000

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work concerning the Annual Planning Statement on Criminal Justice Services for 1999/2000 and providing details of the current position.

The Criminal Justice Services provided by the Social Work Directorate are fully funded by the Scottish Office on the basis of an annual Planning Statement and details of service proposals for 1999/2000 require to be forwarded to them by 1 September 1998. The information contained in this Annual Plan has however been significantly reduced over the previous two years as a result of the removal of sections on the setting of objectives and information on non-funded aligned services since such detail is to be included in the three-year strategic plan which will be considered by Committee prior to its submission to the Scottish Office by 31 December 1998.

During discussion of this item the Committee considered pilot Restriction of Liberty Orders introduced at some Scottish Courts, which involve the electronic tagging of offenders and intimated its opposition to the proposals.

The Committee agreed (a) to authorise submission of the Planning Statement to the Scottish Office; and (b) that the Chief Executive write to the Minister for Home Affairs, Devolution and Local Government intimating the Committee's opposition to electronic tagging.

9. Admissions to Residential Schools and Resource Centres

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on (a) the projected budget overspend resulting from an increase in admissions of children and young persons to Residential Schools and Resource Centres; and (b) measures designed to reduce the projected overspend while improving services through the introduction of alternative facilities.

North Ayrshire has had a traditionally higher number of children in residential care than most other authorities in the Strathclyde area. Despite action to reduce these figures, the number of children and young people from North Ayrshire Council subject to Supervision Requirement Orders with a condition of residence in Residential Schools made by Children's Hearings, continues to rise.

In addition the Council has inherited a high number of school exclusions and this has had a major influence on admissions to residential care.

There are currently 36 children in residential care in North Ayrshire at an average weekly cost of £1,000, and increasing numbers could result in an overspend in the region of £600,000 in financial year 1998/99. The Social Work Directorate has however no control over this element of the budget since orders made by Children's Panels and Courts are legally binding on the Council.

Recent research studies have highlighted the value and cost effectiveness of day assessment as compared to residential assessments and on this basis it is proposed to open a Day Assessment Service at the Rosemount Centre, Irvine on 1 October 1998 at a total cost of £106,000. This will provide new places throughout the year and the costs will be offset by savings made when the Council withdraws from the Joint User Agreement with Renfrewshire Council on 1 October 1998. A report on the staffing issues involved will be submitted to the next meeting of the Support Services Committee.

Additionally, a series of meetings with the Panel Chair, Panel Members and Authority Reporter has been arranged and the Directorate has produced a leaflet to encourage the Children's Panel to consider using the Rosemount Day Assessment Service as an alternative to residential assessment. A Senior Social Worker will also be redeployed for a period of three months in Headquarters to review and monitor current cases in residential care to pursue early discharge as soon as appropriate. Finally, the Social Work Directorate will work closely with the Education Directorate in the implementation of the Social Inclusion Strategy which is designed to reduce the level of school exclusions and maintain children in mainstream schools through the establishment of Educational Support Units and participate in measures designed to prevent children and young persons coming before Children's Hearings.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the opening of a community assessment service at the Rosemount Centre from 1 October 1998; (b) to approve the further measures proposed to reduce the overspend; (c) to endorse the Social Work Directorate's participation in the Social Inclusion Strategy; and (d) that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Support Services Committee on the staffing of the Rosemount Centre.

10. Scottish Office Reports

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work confirming the results of research studies by the Scottish Office entitled "Staff of Scottish Social Work Departments" and "The Careers and Experiences of the Staff of Social Work Departments" which looked into staffing issues affecting (a) Scottish Social Work Departments, (b) their findings in relation to North Ayrshire and (c) the action proposed.

The research found that the North Ayrshire Social Work Directorate structure is highly decentralised when compared with similar authorities in Scotland. Social Work staff nationally, however, suffer a high level of physical and verbal abuse and in order to tackle this the Social Work Directorate has introduced counselling services for staff and procedures for dealing with violence to staff. The research also highlighted the need for training for residential staff which is currently being addressed by the Directorate. At the request of the Minister for Health, the Association of Directors of Social Work will review systems and methods of supporting front-line staff and report by the end of the year.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed (i) that the Director of Social Work give a greater priority to the training of residential staff; and (ii) to approve the Directorate's involvement in the Association's Working Group.

11. Review of Foster Care Allowances

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on proposals to amend the Scheme of Payment of Foster Care Allowances.

There are currently 41 foster carers looking after 50 children in North Ayrshire which is not sufficient to meet demand since the majority of children being "looked after" by the Council do not require specialist residential resources.

The current system of foster care allowances is based on that used by Strathclyde Regional Council whereby rates can be enhanced in certain circumstances and a range of additional payments can be made. Fostering Allowances are paid for 56 weeks per year. This covers an extra one week's allowance for Christmas and birthdays and an extra two weeks holiday allowance. Adoption Allowances, Link Carers and Custody Allowances are linked to the fostering rates. The system, however, has been marked by a significant amount of discretion and it has become apparent that some Social Workers and Foster Carers seek additional payments while others do not. This has resulted in a wide variation in the level of allowances paid. The Directorate has undertaken a review of the system to enhance its effectiveness as undernoted:-

(a) Basic Allowance

All discretionary allowances, including the existing enhancement, would be abolished and the consequent savings added to the standard Fostering Allowance which will result in an enhancement to the basic allowance of 30%.

(b) Emergency Care

There are currently no designated Emergency Foster Carers in North Ayrshire, although 95% of Temporary Foster Carers provide an out of hours' emergency service. Temporary Foster Carers currently receive a minimum three days Fostering Allowance for placements up to three days. Emergency Foster carers would now receive the appropriate Fostering Allowance plus an additional three days allowance for the first payment only.

(c) Care for Older (teenage) Children

In order to recruit Foster Carers to care for teenage children with challenging behaviour who are currently in residential care it is proposed to introduce a Carers for Teenagers Scheme. These Carers would receive the new standard fostering rate plus 40%.

(d) Children with Severe Disabilities

A small group of Foster Carers capable of providing care for children with severe disabilities (e.g. those requiring considerable assistance and/or specialist equipment to tackle personal care tasks i.e. mobility, feeding, toileting, washing and dressing) would be created. These Carers would receive the new fostering rate plus an additional 50% allowance and be provided with respite sitters and home support where required.

The new allowances, details of which are contained in Appendix SW1, would be introduced from 1 October 1998. Foster Carers "looking after" children would continue to receive the current rates but as these placements end, new placements would be paid at the revised rates. It is anticipated that the majority of Foster Carers would be paid the new allowances within 18 months. All Foster Parents would be in receipt of the new allowances by April 2000.

The Committee agreed that the Director of Social Work (i) implement the revised Fostering Allowances as from 1 October 1998; and (ii) submit further progress reports on the implementation of the Scheme.

12. Customer Comments Scheme

Submitted report by the Director of Social Work on the Directorate's handling of Customer Comments Scheme from April to June 1998.

In this period, 39 compliments and 45 complaints were received and all have been addressed

within the target timescales.

Noted.

13. Conferences and Seminars

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

The Committee was advised that the Chair had agreed to authorise attendance at the undernoted Conferences since they were likely to be over-subscribed if bookings were delayed:-

“The Crisis in our Prisons” to be held in Oxford between 8 and 9 September 1998; and

“Crime and its Consequences - Priorities for a Scottish Parliament” to be held in Peebles from 20 to 22 November 1998.

The Committee agreed to homologate these decisions.

14. Community Care Plan 1998 - 2001

The Committee noted that the Community Care Plan 1998 -2001 had now been published and copies were available from the Head of Planning and Development within the Social Work Directorate.

15. COSLA Visit to North Ayrshire

The Committee noted that delegates from COSLA had congratulated the Council on the high standards of the facilities at the Disability Resource Centre and the Care Point, Irvine. The Committee agreed that both projects should be nominated for a COSLA Quality Award.

The meeting ended at 3.25 p.m.

Social Work Committee
26/08/98

Appendix No
SW1

(a) Basic Allowance

Age	Present Rate £	New Rate £
0-4	55.79	72.53
5-10	69.23	90.00
11-15	86.17	112.02
16-18	111.58	145.05

(b) Emergency Care

Age	Weekly Rate £	Extra 3 Days £	Total £
0-4	72.53	31.08	103.61
5-10	90.00	38.57	128.57

(c) Care for Older (teenage) Children

Age	Rate £	40% £	Weekly Total £
11-15	112.02	44.81	156.83
16-18	145.05	58.02	203.07

(d) Children with Severe Disabilities

Age	Rate £	50% £	Weekly Total
0-4	72.53	36.27	108.80
5-10	90.00	45.00	135.00

11-15	112.02	56.01	168.03
16-18	145.05	72.53	217.58