

Social Work Committee
18 November 1998

Irvine, 18 November 1998 - At a Meeting of the Social Work Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

James Jennings, Margaret Munn, Jack Carson, James Clements, John Donn, David Gallagher, Jane Gorman, Joseph McKinney, Elizabeth McLardy, Robert Reilly, George Steven and Richard Wilkinson.

In Attendance

The Corporate Director (Social Services); P Bryers, Head of Planning and Development; A Hewitt, Head of Service Management; A Beattie, Principal Officer, Specialist Services; C Tsang, Development Worker (Social Services); R Lee, Assistant Principal Officer (Financial Services); and S Paxton, Administration Officer (Chief Executive) and J Chan (Kut-O Buddhist Association).

Chair

Mr Jennings in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Elliot Gray.

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 7 October, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984: Appointment of Mental Health Officers

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the appointment of a Mental Health Officer who provides assistance, in terms of Section 9(l) of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, to persons suffering from mental health problems.

A Social Worker based at Ayrshire Central Hospital, Irvine, Ms Carol Alexander, has completed the requisite intensive training in accordance with the directions of the Central Council of Education and Training in Social Work to qualify as a Mental Health Officer. This brings the current number of qualified Mental Health Officers to 14.

The Care Programme approach which is designed, as far as possible, to facilitate the discharge from institutions of previously mentally ill/disordered persons into the community is now being implemented. This has considerable impact on Mental Health Services and it is proposed to undertake further training of this kind in order to increase the number of Mental Health Officers to 18.

The Committee agreed to the appointment of Carol Alexander (Social Worker, Ayrshire Central Hospital) as a Mental Health Officer in accordance with Section 9(l) of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984.

3. Services to Black and Ethnic Minority Groups

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on work undertaken to develop and sustain services to black and ethnic minority groups in North Ayrshire.

In 1994 Strathclyde Regional Council and Ayrshire and Arran Health Board established a Black And Ethnic Minority Project supported by a development worker to focus on the needs of the Chinese community, North Ayrshire's largest ethnic minority group. The objectives of the project included (a) the provision of information and advice on Social Work and Health Services to people from black and ethnic minorities; and (b) the establishment of a pool of trained interpreters for a range of ethnic minority languages.

The Project has resulted in the formation of two major self-help groups, the Kut-O Lok Fu Chinese Elderly Group and Oi Kwan Woman's Association. An Advisory Group consisting of representatives from Social and Educational Services, Ayrshire and Arran Health Board and the Kut-O Buddhist Society was established to ensure that the objectives of the project were being met. The Project was evaluated between January 1997 and August 1998 and it was found, amongst other things (i) that most common source of referrals related to Health Issues, with Social Services referrals being predominantly benefit enquiries; (ii) that the Bi-Lingual Language Skills Training Scheme, provided in association with Cardonald College, Glasgow did not adequately cover issues relating to statutory services; and (iii) that there is a need for a Sessional Worker to promote insight into health and social needs

Accordingly, a more focused and adaptable Training Scheme for interpreter services will be provided in conjunction with Educational Services and a Sessional Worker, funded by Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, to promote insight into health and social issues. Although the project was specifically focused on the Chinese community, there were expectations that it could be expanded to meet the needs of other ethnic minorities. Operational experience, however, has shown that one worker is insufficient to provide information on Health and Social Services to the entire black and ethnic minority population of North and East Ayrshire Council areas. It is proposed that a further appointment of a worker be made specifically focused for the needs of the Asian community without major cost implications for North Ayrshire Council.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Director (Social Services) seek sources of funding for the appointment of an Asian Worker.

4. Welfare Rights Take Up Campaign

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) regarding a proposed Welfare Rights take-up campaign directed at elderly people who do not receive Home Care Services and who are, accordingly, outwith the scope of the current Income Maximisation System.

Research has confirmed that the largest group who do not claim benefit are the over 60's, over a third of whom do not claim their Income Support entitlements. It is proposed in order to maximise the income of this group to mount a Welfare Benefits take-up campaign which will include a feature in Look North, a general press release to local newspapers and the possibility of staging a "phone-in" on local radio.

Accessing Income Support for eligible pensioners could also act as a trigger to other benefits such as fuel payments, Social Fund awards and free eye tests. The Benefits Agency supports the campaign which is in line with the Government's Policy of targeting and encouraging benefit take-up amongst pensioners. The result of the campaign will be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that the Corporate Director (Social Services) initiate a Welfare Rights Benefit take-up campaign and report.

5. Residential Schools and Resource Centres

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) regarding measures taken or proposed to reduce the number of placements in Residential Schools and Resource Centres.

The Corporate Director (Social Services) has met with the Children's Panel, Children's Panel Chair and Authority Reporter regarding the high number of residential orders issued by Children's Hearings. A Senior Social Worker has been redeployed for a period of three months to review and monitor current cases in residential care and to pursue early discharge as soon as appropriate. Following a careful review of the Care Plans for young people in residential schools, the total number accommodated has been reduced from 37 to 29. This has been achieved by (a) ensuring that young people who were considered able to leave residential school appeared at an early Review Children's Hearing; (b) by ensuring that appropriate accommodation was available for young people leaving residential schools; and (c) requiring that Social Workers in their reports to Children's Hearings provide clear action plans with an emphasis on community-based recommendations.

The Children's Panel have made fewer residential orders but there still remains an unacceptably high number of young people in residential care. Further reports will be submitted to the Committee on this matter in due course.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve the steps being taken by Social Services to reduce the number of young persons in residential schools; and (ii) that the Corporate Director (Social Services) continue to monitor levels of admissions to residential schools and report.

6. Foster Care Recruitment Campaign

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on a proposed campaign to recruit (a) four Special Needs Carers to look after children with profound physical and/or mental difficulties; (b) nine Carers for Teenagers (recruited over a three year period) to offer one or two places to young people who are currently being accommodated in local Children's Units; and (c) four weekend or Respite Carers to offer up to four places to enable children currently placed in Children's Units to experience family life and to move on to temporary or permanent Foster Care.

Extensive editorial cover to the campaign will be given in local newspapers throughout November 1998 and January and February 1999. The Fostering Campaign will also be featured in the Council's Look North publication and will include details of the revised fostering rates. Westsound Radio featured the Campaign at the end of October and this has already generated 12 enquiries. A reception for Foster Carers has been arranged for the beginning of to be December hosted by the Convener. Further reports on the outcome of the campaign will be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

The Committee agreed (i) to approve arrangements for recruiting additional long and short-term Foster Carers; and (ii) that the Corporate Director (Social Services) report on the number of additional Foster Carers recruited.

7. Physically Frail Elderly and Elderly Mentally Infirm: Resource Transfer

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) regarding the distribution of additional Resource Transfer monies of £186,226 from Ayrshire and Arran Health Board which were negotiated following closure of continuing care beds. The proposals, which are in accordance with the Community Care Plan 1998 -2001, are as undernoted:-

Project	Contribution

Care Point Day Care for Frail Elderly, Irvine	£17,693
Alzheimer's Harbour Day Centre, Ardrossan	£20,171
Augmented Home Care, Three Towns	£100,000
Elderly Day Care, Irvine	£24,000
Flexible Budgets - Purchase of Services/Care Packages	£24,362
Total	£186,226

Two of the projects, the Augmented Home Care Project, Three Towns and the Elderly Day Care Project, Irvine have staffing implications which will be considered by the Support Services Committee.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the implementation of these proposals for alternative services for physically frail elderly and elderly mentally infirm persons based in the community; and (b) to remit the staffing implications of the enhanced services provided by the Augmented Home Care Project, Three Towns and the Elderly Day Care Project, Irvine to the Support Services Committee for consideration.

8. Registration and Inspection of Day Care Services

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the requirement in terms of Section 61 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 as amended by the Registered Establishments (Scotland) Act 1987, to commence registration and inspection of Day Care Services.

The Council is required to inspect 44 residential establishments including 3 large residential schools (Seafield, Geilsland and Kerelaw, including the Secure Unit) and around 31 additional Day Care Services. The Council, unlike most other authorities, does not currently inspect Day Care Services and the addition of these for inspection will result in a major increase in workload for the Inspection Unit. The Accounts Commission's Performance Indicators recommend that two inspections per year be carried out (one announced and one unannounced). The Council has, in the last financial year, only managed an average of one inspection per year. Despite having one of the largest numbers of residential establishments in Scotland, North Ayrshire has the smallest Inspection Unit and no Head of Inspection.

Social Work is preparing a phased implementation programme which will allow the Council to commence inspecting Day Care Services. This will start with an identification of local authority and independent sector Day Care Services which should be subject to registration and/or inspection, and a workshop on guidelines, standards and procedures scheduled for December 1998. The implementation of these proposals will have a significant resource implication and will require the appointment of:-

- a full-time Head of Inspection/Registration;
- 2 additional Registration/Inspection Officers; and
- 1.5 FTE clerical posts.

The total costs of these staffing measures, which include travel and subsistence costs, will be around £109,000. The full financial implications of additional staffing resources will be included

in the 1999/2000 Revenue budget preparation exercise.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the introduction of registration and inspection procedures for Day Care Services; and (b) to remit the staffing proposals to the Support Services Committee for its consideration.

9. Irvine: 24 Kilwinning Road: Land at Children's Home

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on land surplus to the requirements of Social Work at 24 Kilwinning Road, Irvine.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the piece of land at 24 Kilwinning Road, Irvine as surplus to requirements; and (b) to remit the matter to the Support Services Committee for consideration.

10. Women Offenders: A Safer Way

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the findings contained in a Scottish Office report entitled "Review of Community Disposals and Use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland" which had been commissioned by the Minister for Home Affairs following concern over the number of suicides at Cornton Vale Prison, Stirling.

The vast majority of women offenders are not a risk to the public. Women constitute both a small percentage of offenders and of the prison population. Despite the development of additional community-based court disposals however, the number of women in custody has risen. Some women have been given custodial sentences for fine defaults following relatively minor offences and the majority are in custody for short sentences of three months or less.

The report highlighted a number of issues including (a) that almost all women offenders could be "treated" or "punished" in the community; and (b) the need for (i) the establishment of a range of community options to meet the needs of female offenders both pre-court, within Diversion from Prosecution Schemes, or in court disposals; and (ii) for further research to establish the links between suicide risk and drug misuse.

The report recommended amongst other things (A) that the Scottish Office should examine increased service requirements including the development of bail services; (B) that all local authorities should review services to women offenders and report to the Scottish Office; and (C) the Scottish Office should consult widely regarding alternative accommodation to prison for offenders aged under 18.

A detailed review of Council services for women offenders will be undertaken in consultation with appropriate women's groups. The review will cover a range of issues including proposals for alternatives to custody, the identification of new initiatives and proposals to develop a suicide prevention strategy. A further report will be submitted to Committee in due course.

The Committee agreed to authorise the Corporate Director (Social Services) to (I) undertake a detailed review of current services to women offenders; and (II) submit specific proposals and recommendations for service improvement in due course.

11. Customer Comments Scheme

Submitted report by the Corporate Director (Social Services) on the handling of Customer Comments from July to September 1998.

In this period 36 compliments and 35 complaints were received and all have been addressed within target timescales.

Noted.

12. Exclusion of Public

The Committee resolved, in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude from the Meeting the press and the public for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Act.

13. Social Work Complaints Review Sub-Committee

Submitted (a) the annexed report (SW1), being the Minutes of the Meeting of the Social Work Complaints Review Sub-Committee held on 10 November 1998; and (b) report by the Sub-Committee.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the report.

The meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.