

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE: 14 JUNE 2000

WOMEN OFFENDERS: A REVIEW OF SERVICES

Report by the Director of Social Work

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Committee on the outcome of a review by the Scottish Executive of local authorities' services for women offenders and the implications for East Ayrshire criminal justice services.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 1997 the Scottish Office Minister for Home Affairs directed that the Social Work and Prisons Inspectorate for Scotland undertake a review, and make recommendations about, community disposals and the use of custody for women offenders in Scotland.
- 2.2 The Review was prompted by concerns surrounding the apparent suicides of seven young women in HM Prison, Cornton Vale over a 30 month period. Five of the young women concerned had been remand prisoners.
- 2.3 The Review Team's report "Women Offenders – A Safer Way: A Review of Community Disposals and the Use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland" was reported to the Children, Families & Criminal Justice Sub-Committee of the Social Work Committee on the 30 September 1998 [Page 3840, Item 1].
- 2.4 Following on from the publication of the Report the Social Work Services Inspectorate of the Scottish Executive requested local authorities to undertake a review of services for women offenders in light of the Report. These reviews were undertaken in the first half of 1999 and a report on these reviews was published by the Scottish Executive in January 2000.

3.0 POSITION IN EAST AYRSHIRE

- 3.1 East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services as part of this process reviewed its services for women offenders and a further report has been produced in the light of the National Review (attached as Appendix 1).
- 3.2 This report identifies a range of areas of good practice which currently are being carried out within East Ayrshire but also a range of areas requiring further development. Of particular note is the requirement to improve collaborative practice with voluntary organisations and other services within the Council to ensure that extended resources are brought to bear on the needs of women.

4.0 LEGAL/FINANCIAL/PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 These developments will take place within current resources.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The report builds on the existing policies of the Council across a range of areas and seeks to improve partnership working.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Services will require to improve collaborative practice with voluntary organisations and other services within the Council to ensure that extended resources are brought to bear on the needs of women.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Social Work Committee is asked to:

- (i) approve the developments being sought in Criminal Justice Social Work Services for Women Offenders; and
- (ii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

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List of Background Papers

1. Report on a Review by Local Authorities of their Services for Women Offenders.

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REPORT ON A REVIEW BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF THEIR SERVICES FOR WOMEN OFFENDERS

Implication for East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services

Introduction

The report by the Scottish Executive is structured into 4 sections. This paper comments on sections 3 and 4, Issues and Themes as these sections highlight the issues general to most local authorities.

3.1. Information Systems

East Ayrshire Social Work Department is currently working on the development of the Social Work Information Management System, an IT system that will incorporate a section specific to the needs of Criminal Justice Social Work Services. This is a much welcomed development as up until now, service planning has relied on manual systems for data. The development of the Social Work Information Management System will be less time consuming and improve on accuracy and yield gender specific data that will enable programmes to be developed that meet the criminogenic needs of our women offenders.

3.2. Consumer Consultation

This is essential to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of services to women. East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services does seek the views/comments of all offenders during reviews, but in particular at the final review. The problem with this method of consultation is that to gain a general picture of the services we provide, a trawl of all review minutes would need to be undertaken. Devising an easy to use consumer consultation form, preferably a tick box form, to be given out at the final review should be a priority.

3.3. Access to Specialist Resources

Liaison and advocacy work with other agencies is a big part of the work involved with women offenders. Workers from other agencies are also invited to attend reviews and when this is not possible, to produce a report on their involvement so that this can be taken into account when decisions are taken on future work. Whilst no formal protocols are in place to ease access to specialist services, Social Workers are well aware of local procedures involved when referring women onto other agencies. There have been some difficulties accessing information from medical professionals e.g. Community Psychiatric Nurses, but this is reported as improving since the inception of the Forensic Mental Health Team.

3.4. National Objectives and Standards

Social Workers tend to take a more flexible approach with women offenders to accommodate their family and child care responsibilities for example, most supervision contacts are held within the home setting. There are, however, problems inherent in this flexible approach, most noticeably the work on offending behaviour can at times become less of a priority particularly when supervision takes place with children present. National Objectives and Standards are intertwined, but at times objectives can get lost in the process. The role of Team Leaders is important in ensuring that focus on offending behaviour is maintained and prioritised at each review. This is not to say that other issues that affect women offenders are less important, but that time should be set aside for work on offending behaviour and that this should preferably be undertaken within an office setting to reduce potential for disruption and interference.

3.5. Equal Opportunities

Whenever possible steps are taken to ensure women offenders can have equal access to services to male offenders. However, there are instances when this is outwith the control of the Criminal Justice Social Work Services. Examples of inequality of access can be seen in relation to:

- Access to the Airbourne Initiative
- Group Work
- Focused one to one work
- Bridge Project
- The Social Inclusion service is mainly outward bound activities that do not always suit women.
- Community Service – East Ayrshire Council’s response to recommendation 4 contained in the Scottish Office Review “Women Offenders – A Safer Way” identified the need for Social Workers to be alert to the need for Community Service Orders to be given equal consideration as a recommendation in Social Enquiry Reports as it is for men. The use of the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R) reconviction predictor at the point of Social Enquiry Reports being compiled for Court will help identify those women who should be recommended for a Community Service disposal. East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services should also consider the benefits, particularly the appropriate use of resources, to developing a Targeting / Social Enquiry Reports Recommendation matrix that will bring a greater consistency to Social Enquiry Reports recommendations across Social Workers and ensure that the most appropriate community sentence, based on Risk of re-offending and offence seriousness, is put forward to the sentencers.

East Ayrshire placement practice in relation to Community Service Orders for women offenders discriminates in favour of agency placements for women whenever appropriate. Currently the ratio is twelve women in agency placements and five women in project teams. No structural barriers exist that we are aware of that could mitigate against women offenders being placed on Community Service or completing their Orders. Child Care arrangements, when required and appropriate, are available.

Diversions from Prosecution

Few women offenders are referred for Diversion Assessments to the Social Work Department and consequently few are placed on Diversion to receive a service from us. At end February 2000 East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services has six Diversion cases receiving a service and only one of these is female. Clearly a greater number of women should be targeted for Diversion from Prosecution particularly when you consider the number of women offenders being sent to custody often for far less serious offending than men.

To date the low number of women offenders being worked with at any given point militates utilising the structured group work approach with women offenders. The research currently available on women’s criminogenic needs is conflicting. Recent research findings from Peter Davis, Director – Cognitive Foundation Centre, highlights that women offenders needs are similar to those of men who offend. The one area of difference identified was in the emotional/personal category where women are found to have a higher incidence of need than men. This is a particularly interesting finding as problems in this emotional and personal field is more likely to reduce progress being made in the other criminogenic need areas as it is well understood that emotional/mental health problems will permeate detrimentally all other areas of the individual woman’s functioning.

East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services should undertake a Risk / Needs assessment using the LSI-R tool on all women offenders currently receiving a service to generate a women offender general profile for the authority. The findings from this profiling exercise will inform the nature/intensity of the future service delivery. Should the findings from this profiling exercise concur with Peter Davies' research findings then clearly women offenders' needs will be better met via the one to one approach. East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services should concentrate in applying the 'What Works' principle with the same rigour that is currently applied to the focus groups in their programme development initiative.

Supervised Attendance Orders

The programme of work that women subject to Supervised Attendance Order are expected to undergo is tailored specifically for women offenders. Whenever appropriate child care arrangements are set in place and attendance at the groups is organised around women's/child care needs, ensuring that a flexible approach is utilised to help increase the likelihood of a successfully completed Order. Supervised Attendance Order groups are mixed sex, as there are too few women to support single sex groups at any given time. No problems with this mixed gender approach have been identified. The women themselves are encouraged to express their views/concerns over mixed gender groups at the initial interview before placement. There is currently only one woman subject to a Supervised Attendance Order included in the group run by the Supervising Officer based in Kilmarnock.

3.6. This section highlights the various components that make up good quality comprehensive supervision practice with women offenders.

Social Workers do not consistently take this broad approach to their work with women offenders for a variety of reasons. The work tends to focus on the practical problems women encounter and much of the work is reacting to crisis. Also, little focus is placed upon vocational training generally in our work with women offenders. This is an area that requires to be addressed if women's employment prospects are to be enhanced, particularly for those women who do not have responsibilities for pre-school children. Creative and self development activities is another area where Social Workers can be inconsistent in their approach. There are examples of excellent work being done in this area, but more generally little focus is placed on self development / creative activities. There is a role here for Team Leaders within supervision with Social Workers to identify cases that require prioritising the links with Community Education / Colleges / Social Inclusion etc.

3.7. This section refers to the work done with women during supervision to address abusive and violent relationships.

One to one casework appears to be the main method of intervention with women who have identified needs in this area. The timescales of most Probation Orders can pose difficulties as abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can be difficult to disclose early on in the course of an Order before any quality relationship has had time to develop. Also, gender of the Social Worker holding the case can be a barrier to disclosure. In these instances having a knowledge of local resources/services that can be utilised is of vital importance. The development of a directory of resources for working with women who have been abused physically and sexually, should be compiled, which would detail services on offer and the referral process entailed.

3.8. Creative and Art Skills

There was little reference in the reviews by local authorities to Creative and Arts Skills development with women offenders. Whilst some excellent work focusing on the area has

been done, it generally depends on the interests of the Social Worker with casework responsibility. A good start to making the practice more widespread would be to ensure teams have access to what is available in their local areas for women e.g. College / Community Education prospectives. If it can be identified that attendance at creative / art classes would help increase confidence / self esteem and reduce the likelihood of re-offending then money should be available whenever required to fund such attendance.

3.9. Money management

Money management if identified as a criminogenic need, would be the focus of work during supervision. In most instances this work is carried out by the Social Worker with casework responsibility, however, there are instances when referral onto a more knowledgeable / skilled resource is required, e.g. Money Advice / Welfare Rights.

3.10. Advocacy Work

Advocacy work is an area where Criminal Justice Social Workers are particularly skilled. Also, it is the Team Leaders responsibility at reviews to identify instances where advocacy is required and include it in the action plan.

3.11. Substance Abuse

The level of substance abuse counselling skills within Criminal Justice Social Work Services in East Ayrshire is high. There have been some new recruits into the service, however, that may still require to go through some basic training in this area.

3.12. Unpaid Work

This area has been discussed in section 3.5.

3.13. Offence Focused Work

Offence focused work is always the top priority in work with offenders, including women offenders within East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services. The problem identified by Social Workers is the difficulty in arranging uninterrupted supervision sessions with women, most of whom have child care responsibilities.

Making funds available to pay for child care to allow time for focused interventions would help resolve this problem.

An Ayrshire wide approach to providing group work for women may be the way forward given the low numbers of women offenders worked with in each authority.

3.14. Access to Resources

Access to resources poses particular problems for women offenders. In the area of employment and training most schemes are on a very limited budget and no crèche facilities are available for women with child care responsibilities. Addressing health needs with women offenders is not routine and would only be raised if there is an identified health problem. This is an area that needs a more proactive approach. Firstly, Social Workers need to incorporate health into their overall strategy of work with women offenders; raising awareness of what's available for women and disseminating this information to women worked with is important.

4.1. Social Enquiry Reports

Highlighting the need to monitor Social Enquiry Reports is important. All Social Enquiry Reports on women offenders should be monitored by Team Leaders. As there are low numbers of these reports monitoring all of them should not be an onerous task.

4.2. Review of Needs

Reference has been made in section 3.5. to the need for East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services to carry out a full review of the needs of women offenders and the services currently available. This will inform our future service delivery and provide a more comprehensive approach to our work with women offenders.

The programme development exercise currently being undertaken by East Ayrshire Criminal Justice Social Work Services does include a risk / needs assessment of all offenders, including women. The tool utilised for this exercise was the RA 1-4 forms devised by the Scottish Office based on the Management of Risk material (Hazel Kemshall).

The data generated from this exercise is now 9 months out of date. Carrying out a similar exercise now using the Level of Service Inventory – revised predictor tool will not only give us up to date information on women offenders, but would yield more sophisticated detailed data.

4.3. Partnerships

Developing stronger partnerships with other services / agencies / local authorities is very much to the forefront of our work in Criminal Justice Social Work. Much has been achieved in this area e.g. the newly set up addiction development service remit spans the three Ayrshire authorities. This service will no doubt be addressing the needs of women offenders with addiction problems. Another example is the partnerships working between the Community Forensic Mental Health Services and Criminal Justice Services.

Summary of areas requiring development

1. Develop computerised information system.
2. Develop a consumer consultation form for use with women offenders.
3. Ensure that the emphasis is on offending behaviour and a link maintained with criminogenic needs, in work with women offenders.
4. Ensure LSI-R reconviction predictor is used on all Social Enquiry Reports being compiled on women offenders.
5. Give consideration to the development of a targeting / Social Enquiry Report proposal matrix in order to bring greater consistency to Social Enquiry Report recommendations.
6. Promote an increase in the number of women placed on Diversion.
7. Develop a profile of women offenders for East Ayrshire utilising the LSI-R tool (reconviction predictor) to inform future service delivery needs.
8. Strengthen links with other agencies i.e. Employment Agencies / Community Education / Colleges / Social Inclusion to ensure women have every opportunity to secure employment or training/develop interests.
9. Development of a Directory of Resources available for women who have been abused or are in abusive relationships.
10. Ensure Criminal Justice Social Workers are skilled in welfare rights/money management.
11. Consider the need to adopt an Ayrshire wide approach to providing group work for women should the profiling exercise identify the need for group work.
12. Develop a more pro-active approach with women offenders in relation to health issues.
13. Closer monitoring of all Social Enquiry Reports compiled on women offenders.

AGENDA