

## EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 4 MAY 2000

ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITY : ANNUAL REPORT 1999/2000

### Report by the Director of Social Work

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to Committee on a range of anti-poverty activities undertaken by Social Work staff and the outcomes of those during the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000.

#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Over the past year maximisation of income from benefit in respect of vulnerable individuals, families and service users has continued to be given a high priority within the Social Work Department.
- 2.2 This is evidenced by the consolidation and further development of existing income maximisation systems and processes and through the setting up of entirely new initiatives which have taken on this task as part of their overall responsibility.

#### 3. INCOME MAXIMISATION

##### 3.1 Home Care Services:

- 3.1.1 Home Care Services are provided to the most vulnerable individuals and families within the community and the principle of seeking to maximise income from benefit wherever possible continues to underpin delivery of these services.
- 3.1.2 During the course of the last financial year benefits with an annual value of **£509,908.70** were obtained for these service users.
- 3.1.3 When added to the value of benefits generated over the past three years, the total value of benefits obtained since the inception of the Council is **£2,655,635.38**.

##### 3.2 Reception Services:

- 3.2.1 An important part of the remit of these teams is the provision of advice and assistance, where appropriate, to individuals who are the subject of initial referrals to the Department with the objective of maximising their income from benefit.
- 3.2.2 Since the establishment of these teams in June 1999, the value of additional benefits generated by staff involved in this systematic income maximisation process is **£510,143.25**.

### 3.3 Representation:

- 3.3.1 Preparation and provision of tribunal representation for individuals seeking to challenge adverse decisions on their benefit entitlement continues to play a major part in the workloads of Welfare Rights Officers.
- 3.3.2 Over the past year there has been a decrease in demand for this service, resulting in fewer appeals being undertaken. This decrease in demand, however, has also been noted by colleagues delivering these services in neighbouring authorities and appears to be reflected across Scotland as a whole.
- 3.3.3 Success at many of these Tribunals continues to depend very much on the availability of strong supporting medical evidence and Welfare Rights Officers often play a vital role in assisting appellants to access such evidence.
- 3.3.4 During the last financial year benefit awards and relevant arrears to the value of **£596,489.43** were obtained for individuals through provision of Tribunal representation.
- 3.3.5 When added to the value of benefits generated over the previous three years, the total value of benefits accessed through Tribunal representation since the inception of the Council is **£2,930,162.81**.

### 3.4 Crosshouse Hospital:

- 3.4.1 Accessing the additional benefits available to those who suffer from ill-health or disability can play a vital role in improving the life circumstances of these individuals and, therefore, also contribute towards reducing social exclusion.
- 3.4.2 The link between ill-health and poverty is already well documented and, in recognition of the importance of ensuring that individuals suffering from ill-health are provided with appropriate benefit advice, a Welfare Rights Officer is deployed to provide support and assistance to the Social Work Team at Crosshouse Hospital.
- 3.4.3 Over the last financial year patients have been assisted to access benefits to the value of **£798,233.43**.
- 3.4.4 Since the recording of this work first commenced in January 1997, benefits to the value of **£1,576,043.64** have been generated for patients.

### 3.5 Working Families' Tax Credit:

- 3.5.1 Working Families' Tax Credit was introduced in October 1999 and replaced Family Credit as the main benefit for families where parents are in full-time work.
- 3.5.2 This new benefit is more generous financially than its predecessor and, in recognition of the fact that the Council is the largest employer in East Ayrshire, a take-up campaign involving distribution of information and the availability of a telephone helpline, was targeted towards all employees.
- 3.5.3 The campaign was well received by employees and weekly benefit awards ranged from £1.99 to £98.35, with the total value of benefits claimed being **£28,391.48**.

3.5.4 It was also evident from responses that many individuals were unable to access the Child Care Tax Credit Benefit, because relatives or friends, who were not registered as required by Working Families' Tax Credit legislation, looked after their children while they were at work.

### **3.6 Money Advice / Debt Counselling:**

3.6.1 Individuals and families dependent on low earnings or benefits have little or no capacity to save money for meeting unanticipated expenses and frequently require to take on personal debt which they may subsequently have difficulty repaying.

3.6.2 Money Advice/Debt Counsellors assist individuals to review their personal finances and to present information to all agencies involved, prioritising needs and obligations and negotiating a resolution of their debt problems according to their financial capacity.

3.6.3 Part of the process of providing assistance to individuals who are experiencing debt problems involves the Money Advice/Debt Counsellor in considering whether there is any scope for benefits to be accessed.

3.6.4 Over the last financial year, Money Advice/Debt Counsellor staff have assisted individuals to claim benefits with an annual value of **£50,174.88**.

### **3.7 Promoting Benefit Take-up:**

3.7.1 Although the role of the Welfare Rights Officer based at the Civic Centre focused mainly on preparation and delivery of a variety of customised training packages, along with undertaking a range of promotional and developmental activities, income maximisation work was also carried out.

3.7.2 This income maximisation work was mainly in respect of children with learning difficulties who were the subject of Pre-Scat referrals and their parents, and over the period April to September 1999 additional benefits to the value of **£31,744.32** were gained for these families.

3.7.3 It should be noted, however, that in August 1999, this Welfare Rights Officer was successful in obtaining a promoted post as Service Officer Development and that there is now no longer any intention to have practitioners operating from a base within the Civic Centre. All operational work is now progressed from centralised locations at Balmoral Road, Kilmarnock and Barrhill Road, Cumnock.

### **3.8 Fieldwork Staff:**

3.8.1 A key issue for Social Work staff involved in the provision of support and assistance to vulnerable individuals and families is to ensure that income from benefit is maximised where possible.

3.8.2 Although most Social Work staff regularly engage in income maximisation work as follow-up to benefit checks undertaken in respect of cases allocated directly to them on referral to the Department, or through reviews of their existing caseload, most tend not to record the outcomes of this work.

3.8.3 Two Community Care teams and a Welfare Rights Officer undertook to record the outcomes of their income maximisation work over specific period last year, as a pilot, and these members of staff were successful in generating additional benefits to the value of **£80,408.25** for vulnerable individuals and families. The Head of Anti-Poverty will link with Team Leaders to ensure that the outcomes of all income maximisation activities are recorded.

### **3.9 Cumulative Total 1999/2000:**

3.9.1 The cumulative total of benefits gained for individuals over the previous year through the income maximisation activities outlined in this report is of **£2,605,493.74**.

## **4. MAXIMISING USE OF AVAILABLE INCOME**

4.1 Although most people, regardless of income levels, will have debt of some kind those on low incomes will generally have more difficulty servicing these debts and, if due to a change in circumstances their income should decrease, are more likely to become unable to comply with repayment arrangements.

4.2 Easy availability of credit results in many individuals being tempted to take on debt and others who are experiencing difficulties will often borrow again to pay off existing debt.

4.3 Personal indebtedness levels of £20,000 to £30,000 are no longer unusual and, over the last year, Money Advice/Debt Counsellors provided assistance to 345 individuals whose total level of indebtedness was **£1,518,348.81**.

4.4 Credit Unions provide an opportunity for individuals on low incomes to save small amounts on a regular basis and subsequently to borrow at comparatively low interest levels.

4.5 Volunteers with Cumnock and District Credit Union are now close to completion of the required training programme. Premises have now been identified and funding is currently being sought to enable this to go ahead.

4.6 The Kilmarnock Credit Union, based in shop-front premises in Burns Mall, Kilmarnock now has in excess of 300 members and is currently seeking to increase membership through engaging in a variety of promotional and awareness raising activities.

4.7 A Service Officer and a Community Worker from within the Social Inclusion Unit are working with both Credit Unions to support these initiatives.

## **5. CUMULATIVE TOTAL SINCE 1 APRIL 1996**

5.1 Since local government re-organisation in 1996, income maximisation activity has generated benefit awards with a total value of **£9,832,920.30** for vulnerable individuals.

## **7. FINANCIAL / LEGAL / PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Nil.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- i) requires the Director of Social Work to bring forward further reports on Anti-Poverty activities on a regular basis, and
- ii) otherwise notes the content of this report.

**Douglas Bulloch**  
**Director of Social Work**

IG/AS(Enc1)

**26 April 2000**

### **List of Background Papers**

**Nil**

For further information on this report please contact Ian Gemmell, Head of Anti-Poverty, Civic Centre, Kilmarnock (Telephone Number: 01563 576908).

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL : SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

**ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITIES FROM  
INCEPTION OF COUNCIL**

**1 APRIL 1996 - 31 MARCH 2000**

<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>AMOUNT RAISED</b>
1 April 1996 – 31 March 1997	£1,773,990.13
1 April 1997 – 31 March 1998	£2,203,687.82
1 April 1998 – 31 March 1999	£2,499,848.61
1 April 1999 – 31 March 2000	£2,605,493.74
Estimated in respect of Miners’ Roadshows in 1997	£600,000.00
Estimated in respect of Miners’ Roadshows in 1998	£150,000.00
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b>£9,833,020.30</b>

**AGENDA**