

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 8 NOVEMBER 2001

STRENGTHENING FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Report by the Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Committee authority to implement a range of measures to strengthen the delivery of frontline Social Work services.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The challenges facing local authority social work services at the present time are substantial. In particular, the following issues require to be addressed:

- The level of need for services continues to grow, with specific issues arising from drug misuse having a growing impact on workloads in Children and Families services and the growth in the number of vulnerable elderly people and the impact of learning disability hospital discharge and closure programmes placing ever greater demands on Community Care services;
- Policy initiatives from central government are making major demands in terms of how services are managed and organised, in particular the Joint Future Group agenda, reported to elected members on 29 March 2001, and the Learning with Care initiative in respect of looked after children and young people, reported separately to elected members on the present agenda;
- The resources available to meet need are finite, requiring difficult choices to be made about prioritising service provision within available budget;
- There is a national crisis in recruitment and retention of staff with professional Social Work qualifications, reflected in East Ayrshire in significant vacancies for qualified social workers across the Social Work service;
- In addition, the Best Value regime requires local authorities to achieve continuous improvement in service delivery.

- 2.2 Faced with those challenges, senior Social Work managers within the Council have reviewed current arrangements for the delivery of frontline social work services. That review indicates that there is scope, within the existing structure, to re-configure staffing resources away from first line and middle management activity towards direct frontline service delivery. The review has also recognised the need to make more secure arrangements to ensure a continuing supply of professionally qualified Social Work staff through a recruitment and retention strategy.

3. RE-CONFIGURATION OF STAFFING RESOURCES

- 3.1 Elected members should note that all of the changes described below can be achieved without redundancies and without detriment to staff terms and conditions of employment.
- 3.2 A key priority has been to re-align posts away from middle management infrastructure towards direct frontline service delivery or enhanced resourcing of frontline services. A complementary priority has been to maximise the efficiency of remaining middle management resources.
- 3.3 Those priorities have been addressed in the following ways across the Social Work service:

Children and Families

- Allocation of 5 qualified social worker posts to provide additional resource in addressing substance misuse problems (approved by Council on 25 October 2001);
- Allocation of 4 qualified social worker posts as link workers with the special needs schools in East Ayrshire through re-focusing 2 existing qualified social worker posts and replacement of 2 existing Service Officer (SO2) vacancies with qualified social worker posts;
- Creation of a post of Children's Review Officer to improve performance in respect of reviews of looked after children and children on the Child Protection Register through the re-focusing of an existing middle management post;
- Rationalisation and equalisation of the span of control of Team Leaders.

Community Care

- Deletion of a vacant 0.5 middle management post (SO8) and absorption of workload within the existing management structure;
- Re-configuring staff roles in order to strengthen capacity to work jointly with Health and Housing colleagues and maximise resources for the Council ;
- Re-configuring staff roles in order to strengthen the Children and Families/Community Care interface, thereby ensuring a smooth transition into adult services for children and young people with special needs;
- Rationalisation and equalisation of the span of control of Team Leaders.

Quality and Planning

- Strengthening the quality assurance and performance management functions by re-deployment of an existing Team Leader post to ensure improved co-ordination and to secure added value within existing resources;
- Re-location of Anti-Poverty staff to Reception Services teams and unified management of the Reception Services/Anti-Poverty staff resources under a single existing Team Leader, thereby improving the service for people seeking help from Social Work for the first time, with particular reference to income maximisation and addressing poverty issues in general.
- Deletion of a Service Officer (SO2) post and the re-investment of the resources to enhance frontline services.

Administrative Support

- Review of clerical/administrative support in order to allocate support at appropriate levels to front line services;
- Deletion of 10 whole time equivalent posts;
- Re-organisation of reporting and communication lines to reduce potential for duplication of work and to increase flexibility.

3.4 In summary, the overall impact of the changes is to remove 4.5 middle management posts and 10 whole time equivalent clerical/administrative posts and to re-deploy resources towards enhanced frontline service delivery.

4. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY

- 4.1 In response to the national crisis in recruitment and retention of professionally qualified social work staff, it has been concluded that the prime solution in the medium to long term is to secure future qualified social workers from within the ranks of existing unqualified staff through the re-introduction of a secondment scheme. The Heads of Social Work and Personnel are currently working jointly to design a suitable scheme for consideration by Trade Unions and elected members.
- 4.2 The emphasis would be on meeting the costs of staff undertaking professional training by distance learning, primarily but not exclusively through the Open University, in return for a written undertaking from trainees that they will work as qualified workers in East Ayrshire for a period at least equivalent to the time spent in training.
- 4.3 This approach is cost effective since it allows the Department to continue to benefit from the services of the trainees during their training, thereby minimising staff replacement costs.
- 4.4 The approach also opens up a career development route for unqualified staff which did not exist previously and allows training to be offered to tried and tested

staff with a proven commitment to East Ayrshire, thereby maximising the likelihood of staff retention following completion of professional training.

- 4.5 In the short term, further measures will be required to attract and recruit externally from the pool of social work students currently undertaking/completing professional training courses. A further report on that subject will be presented to a future meeting of Committee.

5. POLICY/FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The proposed measures can be implemented within the existing policy, financial and legal frameworks which govern the delivery of the Social Work service at present.
- 5.2 The Head of Personnel has been consulted and has assisted with the revisions to the staffing arrangements. A separate report relating to the administrative support function mentioned above will be submitted to the Corporate Sub-committee on 20 November 2001.
- 5.3 The proposals have been discussed with the Trades Unions through the normal liaison meetings. Further discussions will take place to provide more detail and to ensure that the Trades Unions are kept involved during the transition period.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Committee is requested to:

- a) approve the measures proposed for re-configuring staff, as set out in Section 3 above;
- b) approve the measures proposed for the recruitment and retention of staff, as set out in Section 4 above;
- c) refer the report to the Corporate Sub-Committee, for its consideration;
- d) note that a further report on external recruitment measures will be presented to a future meeting of the Social Work Committee; and
- e) otherwise, note the content of the report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services
18 October 2001

AGENDA

For further information, please contact Stephen Moore, Head of Social Work (Tel. 6920)

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : STEPHEN MOORE, HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK