

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 13 SEPTEMBER 2001**

**ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITY : ANNUAL REPORT 2000/2001**

**Report by the Director of Educational and Social Services**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide information to elected members on anti-poverty activities undertaken by Social Work staff during the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Maximisation of income from benefit in respect of vulnerable individuals and families continues to be given a high priority, as it is recognised that this can assist in improving quality of life, increasing choice and reducing levels of indebtedness.
- 2.2 A strategic and co-ordinated approach to this work has been developed, as this is essential both in terms of providing a good quality service and in complying with timescales for making benefit claims and challenging decisions.

### **3. INCOME MAXIMISATION**

#### **3.1 Home Care :**

- 3.1.1 Provision of Home Care Services assists the most vulnerable individuals and families to remain within the community and the principle of seeking to maximise income from benefit in respect of the service users wherever possible continues to underpin delivery of these services.
- 3.1.2 During the course of the last financial year, Home Care and other relevant staff assisted service users to access additional benefits with an annual value of **£341,557.80**.

#### **3.2 Reception Services:**

- 3.2.1 All referrals to Social Work are initially dealt with by Reception Services staff who as a matter of course will, in addition to other services which they provide, undertake a benefits check and progress any appropriate follow-up work required.
- 3.2.2 During the course of the last financial year, benefits with an annual value of **£1,241,840.82** were obtained by this staff group for service users.

### 3.3 Welfare Rights Services

- 3.3.1 Provision of tribunal representation for individuals seeking to challenge adverse benefit decisions continues to play a major part in the workloads of Welfare Rights Officers.
- 3.3.2 During the last financial year benefit awards, and relevant arrears to the value of **£626,372.07** were obtained for individuals through provision of Tribunal representation.
- 3.3.3 In addition to the tribunal outcomes indicated above, Welfare Rights Officers also assisted individuals on their caseloads to access additional benefits with an annual value of **£83,505.91**.

### 3.4 Crosshouse Hospital:

- 3.4.1 The link between ill-health and poverty is well documented and there is also a growing recognition that those who work in the health setting can play an important role in ensuring that individuals suffering from ill-health are provided with appropriate benefit advice.

The Social Work team based at the hospital, supported by a Welfare rights Officer, regularly provide such advice and assistance, resulting in benefits to the value of **£410,568.87** being accessed for individuals attending the hospital.

### 3.5 Money Advice/Debt Counselling:

- 3.5.1 Individuals and families dependent on benefits or low earnings have little or no capacity to save money for unanticipated expenses and frequently take on personal debt which they may subsequently have difficulty repaying, particularly if there is an unhelpful change in their circumstances.
- 3.5.3 Part of the process of assisting individuals who are experiencing debt problems involves the Money Advice/Debt Counsellor in considering whether there is any scope for benefits to be claimed.
- 3.5.4 Over the last financial year, Money Advice/Debt Counsellor staff have assisted individuals to claim benefits with an annual value of **£77,183.38**.

### 3.6 Fieldwork Staff:

- 3.6.1 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.

- 3.6.2 Although most Social Work staff regularly undertake benefit checks in respect of cases allocated directly to them on referral to the Department or, through reviewing their existing caseload, there is a tendency not to record the outcomes of this work.
- 3.6.3 Two Community Care teams based at Balmoral Road continued to record the outcomes of their income maximisation work during the last year, and these members of staff were successful in generating additional benefits to the value of **£114,285.71** 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.
- 3.6.4 The Community Care team based at Dalsalloch Centre undertook, as a pilot exercise over the last financial year, to record income maximisation work and these members of staff were successful in gaining additional benefits to the value of **£26,722.96** for their service users.

### **3.7 Cumulative Total 2000/2001:**

- 3.7.1 The cumulative total of benefits gained for individuals over this period through the income maximisation activities outlined in this report is **£2,920,972.52**.

## **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, while others who are experiencing difficulties often arrange to borrow again in order to clear a number of existing debts.
- 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 276 new service users whose total level of indebtedness was **£1,581,180.46**.

## **5. CUMULATIVE TOTAL**

- 5.1 Since local government re-organisation in 1996, income maximisation activity has generated benefit awards with a total value of over **£12,753,992.92** for vulnerable individuals, see Appendix 1 for details.

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

- 6.1 Nil.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- i) requires the Head 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.

**John Mulgrew**  
**Director of Educational and Social Services**

IG/AS(Enc1)

**13 September 2001**

### **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).

**IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : IAN GEMMELL**

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL : DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL & SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**ANTI-POVERTY ACTIVITIES FROM INCEPTION OF COUNCIL**  
**1 APRIL 1996 - 31 MARCH 2001**

PERIOD	AMOUNT RAISED
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
1 April 2000 – 31 March 2001	£2,920,972.52
Estimated in respect of Miners' Roadshows in 1997	£600,000.00
Estimated in respect of Miners' Roadshows in 1998	£150,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£12,753,992.82</b>

**AGENDA**