

### **3 WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE - SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE SERVICE (AN142-2010)**

Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice services have been introduced by the Scottish Government to provide a framework for the development of effective and efficient services. They were compiled in recognition of the fact that people choose to access information and advice from various sources across the country. To become accredited under the National Standards, an agency must be able to demonstrate that it meets the quality level defined by the Standards and provides an efficient and effective service. When the agency is confident that it can do that, it is audited by an external contractor.

During this calendar year, Dundee City Council's Welfare Rights Service self-assessed the policies and procedures in place within the team and, as a result, felt they were in a strong position to achieve National Standards. The Welfare Rights service subsequently applied for accreditation in all 32 money and welfare benefit advice topic areas. In July this year, over the course of two days, the team's case files, advice, policies and procedures were inspected thoroughly by four skilled information and advice auditors.

The outcome of the audit was a recommendation that Dundee City Council be accredited with National Standards in each of the areas applied for, which was subsequently approved in September 2010. In addition, all welfare rights topic areas were accredited at level 3, the highest level achievable. This accreditation is valid until August 2014.

The Audit report states:-

"Dundee City Council welfare rights officers provide both a welfare rights and money advice service to a high standard and this in itself is admirable. The service has developed a welfare rights recording system (WRACS) that compliments the money advice (MACS) system. The system is impressive and the commitment to continuous improvement of this from the agency is obvious..... the case recording within files was of an exceptionally high standard with all communications with the service user and other agencies well documented."

Dundee is one of only four local authority welfare rights services to have achieved this standard to date with only 21 agencies in total being awarded the standard.