

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE – 16 September 2002

**REPORT ON:** REVIEW OF WELFARE RIGHTS ADVICE PROVISION ACROSS DUNDEE

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

**REPORT NO:** 692 - 2002

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

This report provides information on the proposed action plan and recommendations following the review of welfare rights advice across the city.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Social Work Committee agree the detailed action plan and the recommendations as contained within the report.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The implementation of the action plan and the recommendations will be achieved within existing budget.

### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The proposed actions will have a direct impact on poverty issues across the city by addressing inequality of access and by making more direct front line services available to the wider Dundee community. The proposals will result in increased income for many service users and will, because of the multiplier effect, benefit the local economy.

### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The proposed action plan will ensure that all citizens across Dundee have improved equality of access to welfare rights advice across the city.

### **6.0 MAIN TEXT**

#### **BACKGROUND**

- 6.1 The review of welfare rights services across Dundee was approached from a positive perspective, recognising that a certain level of overlap will be required to provide co-ordinated, joined-up services. It was also recognised that poverty is common across the city and not restricted to SIP areas and that all citizens should have access to welfare rights information services of a consistently high standard. However, consideration was also given to the sustainability of the SIP funded projects and the need for a mixed economy of service provision if we are to continue partnership working.

The underlying objects of the review were:

- To develop a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services in order that all citizens of Dundee have equality of access to services.
- To develop a common quality standard for all welfare rights/debt advice provision across the city, including statistical recording, casework management and referrals and to take account of the anticipated introduction of community legal services.
- To further develop welfare rights services in relation to anti-poverty strategies.

## **6.2 CURRENT WELFARE RIGHTS PROVISION**

Welfare rights services are currently provided by a variety of agencies, namely Dundee City Council Social Work Department Welfare Rights Services (WRS), Dundee Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Money Advice Support Team (MAST), Ardler Information Point (AIP), Dundee North Law Centre (DNLC) and the Princess Royal Trust Centre (PRT). Appendix 1 gives further details of the range of services provided by these agencies.

### **6.2.1 Dundee Citizens Advice Bureau**

Citizens Advice Bureau provides a generalist advice service across the city on a wide range of subjects. It also provides specialist advice and representation dealing with the full range of welfare rights issues, from income maximisation and completion of benefit claim forms to complex casework including tribunal representation. A debt counselling service is also provided by CAB.

### **6.2.2 Princess Royal Trust Carers Centre**

This project provides a benefit advice and representation service, including tribunal representation to disabled people and their carers across Dundee. The service includes completion of benefit claims forms and income maximisation. This project does not provide a debt counselling service. A contract defining the service to be provided is to be developed in the near future.

### **6.2.3 Ardler Information Point**

Ardler Information Point provides a benefit service and information service to a geographically defined area, which includes Ardler, St Marys and the Brackens. The service provided includes completion of benefit claim forms and income maximisation. A contract defining the service being purchased by the Social Work Department is now ready for discussion with the Management Committee and will be discussed within the next four weeks. The service provided by Ardler Information Point is augmented by the Money Advice Support Team who provide a debt counselling service for the area and by the DCC Welfare Rights Service who provide tribunal representation when required.

### **6.2.4 Money Advice Support Team**

The Money Advice Support Team is a SIP funded project providing a front line debt counselling service to SIP areas only (Kirkton, Ardler, Mid Craigie/Linlathen and Maxwelltown). The debt counselling service includes income maximisation and limited completion of benefit claim forms and court representation for debt cases if required. DCC Welfare Rights Service provides tribunal representation when required.

#### **6.2.5 Dundee North Law Centre**

Dundee North Law Centre is a SIP funded project and provides legal advice, information and support to communities within the SIP 1 and 2 areas. The project also provides general welfare rights advice and information including tribunal representation and debt advice. Several of the welfare rights advice agencies within the city benefit from using the project when consultation is required on a difficult legal problem.

#### **6.2.6 Dundee City Council Welfare Rights Service**

The Welfare Rights Service is based in the Social Work Department and is intrinsically linked with social work service provision. The service provided covers the whole of the city and includes general welfare rights advice and information, a structured income maximisation service and benefit form completion. Tribunal representation is provided across the city and is also provided to service users of Ardler Information Point and Money Advice Support Team when required. The service provides a debt counselling service including court representation if required.

### **6.3 EQUALITY OF ACCESS**

A main area of concern is the inequality of access to locally based welfare rights services across the non-SIP areas of the city. This is a key factor to be addressed in the development of co-ordinated welfare rights services across the city. The SIP areas of Kirkton, Ardler, Mid Craigie/Linlathen and Maxwelltown/Hilltown have local access to services via MAST, AIP, DNLC. The Welfare Rights services currently provides outreach services at Menzieshill and Douglas. The North Law Centre provides weekly legal advice sessions at Whitfield, Charleston and Lochee, but other non SIP areas have no local access to services.

Increased levels of welfare rights provision could be achieved by improved co-ordination of existing services. In particular, the Welfare Rights Service, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Princess Royal Trust Carers Centre could address gaps in service provision in non-SIP areas.

Areas of the city that do not have access to locally based welfare rights and debt outreach surgeries have been identified on a ward basis. It should be noted that the Welfare Rights Service and Citizens Advice Bureau provide a service to all areas of the city.

Access to welfare rights information can also be increased by ensuring that all Council offices operate as effective access and referral points. This would necessitate developing and delivering a customer care training programme, which should include information on identifying the appropriate agencies to which to direct service users with welfare rights related queries.

### **6.4 QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE**

One of the key factors to be considered as part of the review is the quality and performance of the agencies involved. To date, measuring this objectively has proved to be particularly problematic because of the lack of common statistics and performance related data. A full detailed examination of the services currently provided would be impossible at the moment given the lack of accepted common standards and the lack of detail in relation to service specifications in service level agreements.

It is important that Dundee City Council ensures that all agencies with whom we contract to provide advice services, understand that the Council is entitled to stipulate not only what service it will contract for, but also the way in which it is provided.

Contracts should clearly define the types of statistics to be collected and the methodology for their collection. In addition to this, procedures for monitoring and evaluating performance of the agency must also be part of the contract.

The key to introducing common quality standards and performance measurement procedures for all agencies providing welfare rights advice services across the city will lie in:

- Determining what can and should be measured
- Defining acceptable performance indicators
- Establishing which agency provides what level of service and agreeing common service types
- Setting an acceptable common standard of training
- Establishing minimum quality standards/identifying and using those already established
- Establishing recognised qualifications for advice workers

The practicality and speed of instituting a common quality standard and performance measurement procedures will be constrained by the complex situation previously described. However, we are committed to putting in place these performance measurement procedures, and voluntary sector partners have recently indicated a willingness to participate in this process. Once established they will allow the agency and the funder to ensure that measurable and quantifiable services are provided, and that the citizens of Dundee have access to quality service across the city.

The performance measures will form part of every contract drawn up with voluntary sector advice agencies funded by the Social Work Department.

One of the most obvious gaps in developing common standards related to quality of service, performance and advice is the lack of a professional qualification. Improved access to academic or vocational qualifications is vital if quality standards are to be achieved. It is hoped that discussions with local educational establishments may progress this.

In line with the recommendations following the initial review in 2000 of welfare rights advice services across the city, a service level agreement was entered into with the Citizens Advice Bureau. This may need to be amended in order to ensure that it links in with the outcomes of the current review in relation to common standards and the need for a co-ordinated welfare rights advice strategy.

## **6.5 ACTION PLAN**

The following actions are proposed to improve equality of access to welfare rights service across the city and to improve the quality of service provided.

- Planned discussions will continue with all agencies to ensure full coverage of the city to provide equality of access and to identify issues and ways forward.
- Priority will be given to extending the coverage of non-SIP areas by the Welfare Rights Service providing more outreach surgeries. Citizens Advice Bureau will be invited to work with the Welfare Rights Service on this. In the first instance, outreach clinics will be set up in Lochee and Stobswell. These areas have been chosen because of the concentration of deprivation and because they are local shopping centres and attract people from other surrounding communities.
- The Welfare Rights Service public advice line will be extended from a part time service to a full time service operating between 9.30am – 4.30pm daily. This will take effect from 1 October 2002.

- Ongoing work to develop common standards and performance measures in line with the anticipated introduction of community legal service will be continued with a view to working towards a full implementation date of April 2003.
- Contracts will be developed or reviewed for all agencies in receipt of funding from the Social Work Department. These will clearly define areas of work, procedures for referrals, statistical recording and casework management.
- The Welfare Rights Service will explore the potential for developing a SVQ in Welfare Rights with local colleges. Staff of all agencies who wish to undertake a SVQ in Money Advice should be supported and encouraged to do so.

These actions will be taken forward by the Social Work Department.

## **6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are also made.

- 6.6.1 It is recommended that an appropriate Service Level Agreement for 2003/03 for Citizens Advice Bureau be developed over the current year. This should fully reflect the actions detailed above and ensure accountability for the quality of service provided.
- 6.6.2 It is recommended that the Social Work Department works with Neighbourhood Resources and Development Department and Personnel and Management Services to develop and implement a training course to ensure that all Dundee City Council front line staff are able to identify welfare rights/debt related issues and signpost appropriately.
- 6.6.3 It is recommended that Dundee City Council considers the long-term sustainability of the provision of welfare rights and debt advice through SIP funded projects.
- 6.6.4 It is recommended that future consideration be given to the need for restructuring of the existing welfare rights service within the city council, should this appear necessary following implementation of the Action Plan.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 The Director of Finance and the Director of Support Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

## **9.0 SIGNATURE**

Director of Social Work

Date

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**APPENDIX 1**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Area Served/Client Group</b>	<b>SLA</b>	<b>Amount and Source of Funding</b>	<b>Services Provided</b>	<b>Service Delivery Methods</b>	<b>Services not provided</b>
DCC Welfare Rights Service	City wide, all client groups	N/A	Mainstream £346,700	General welfare rights Tribunal representation Debt counselling Income maximisation	Telephone advice, home visit, duty appointments, outreach surgeries	All welfare rights related services provided
Money Advice Support Team	SIP Areas, all client groups	Yes	SIP - ends March 2004 £124,169	Income maximisation Debt counselling Benefits related advice and information.	SIP area surgeries, telephone advice, home visits, office appointments/drop-in	Tribunal representation not provided
Citizens Advice Bureau	City wide, all client groups	Yes	Mainstream (Finance) Annually agreed £101,850	Income maximisation Tribunal representation Debt counselling General welfare rights.	Telephone advice, drop-in/office appointments, outreach surgery	All welfare rights related services provided
Dundee North Law Centre	SIP Areas 1 & 2 All client groups	Yes	SIP £98,921	Legal advice sessions General welfare rights. Debt problems Tribunal representation.	Outreach surgeries, office appointments, home visits	All welfare rights related services provided.
Ardler Information Point	Ardler, St Mary's, Brackens, West Kirkton All client groups	Yes	Mainstream (SWD) Agreed annually £22,700	Income maximisation Benefits related advice and information.	Drop-in/office appointments, telephone advice, home visits	Tribunal representation not provided. Debt counselling services not provided, not licensed to provide debt counselling.
Princess Royal Trust Carers Centre	City wide, disabled individuals and carers	N/A	Consortium funding, Carers Strategy. Lloyds TSB National PRT Young Carers Partnership £17,000 (approx)	Income maximisation Welfare rights Tribunal representation	Drop-in/office appointments, telephone advice, home visits	Debt counselling services not provided, not licensed to provide debt counselling. Services restricted to disabled people or carers.

**DEFINITIONS**

General Welfare Rights	This covers all aspects related to social security legislation including researching legislation and case law, social policy comment on proposed legislative change and advising service users of many different aspects of the numerous social security benefits. It also includes providing a full casework service where service users are provided with ongoing support until their particular difficulty is resolved.
Income Maximisation	Income Maximisation ensures that the service user is receiving all the welfare benefits to which they are entitled. This entails the advisor interviewing and/or assessing the clients income and personal circumstances in order to determine whether there is a potential benefit entitlement.
Completing Benefit Claim Forms	This entails an advisor interviewing the individual in either their home or an office and completing complex claim forms, some of which can take 1 or 2 hours depending on the type of benefit.
Tribunal Representation	The need for Tribunal representation occurs when an individual has been refused benefit and after the full review procedure has been completed. It entails researching legislation and case-law, preparing a written submission based on legal argument and precedent, accompanying the service user to the Tribunal and advocating on their behalf. This process can go as high as the Social Security Commissioners and can create legal precedent.
Debt Counselling/ Money Advice	Debt Counselling is a licensed activity under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Debt Counselling can cover either dealing with simple one off debts or dealing with complex multiple debts. It is defined by the Scottish Executive as “a series of tools and professional strategies used by advisers to counter the problems encountered by clients in debt”. This process includes income maximisation, minimising expenditure, prioritising debts, checking liability for debts, working with the individual to calculate a budget, negotiating with creditors, calculating offers of payment and representation and advocacy if required.