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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Council Review 2007: Organisation and Management of Social Work Services - Update

The City of Edinburgh Council

18 March 2004

1 Purpose of report

1.1 To update the Council on progress made in considering the organisation and management of social work services following my report to the Executive of the Council of 16 December 2003. Other reports on the Council's agenda cover a range of social work related issues.

2 Summary

2.1 When I reported to the Executive of the Council on 16 December 2003, I stated my intention to review the organisation and management of the Social Work Department, as a priority. The key messages in my report were that:

- the review would sit within the context of major policy initiatives being promoted by the Scottish Executive and developed locally in such areas as children's services, joint service planning, community planning, Joint Future, community care and anti-social behaviour;

- in determining the organisation's "fitness for purpose" in future years, I emphasised the importance of local service delivery, neighbourhood management and joined-up inter-agency service delivery (especially with NHS Lothian and the Police);

- the emphasis would be on children being at the centre of the Council's approach as has emerged in the recently published English Children's Bill and in Scottish policy papers;

- this was a complex issue and consultation within the Council and with key stakeholders was essential;

- introducing significant changes to the way in which the Council delivers its social work services could take up to a year to implement;

- the status and professionalism of both social work services and social workers employed by the Council were fully recognised and endorsed; and

- there was a need for a full assessment of the Social Work Department and this would be carried out by the Acting Director.

2.2 Since then, considerable work has been undertaken, including initial consultation with stakeholders and research into the arrangements in and visits to social work/services authorities in Scotland and England. This report provides an update on the current position and outlines my proposals for progressing the issues, with a view to making firm recommendations to the meeting of the Council on 29 April 2004.

3 Main report

3.1 From an analysis of the policy environment within which social work services are delivered, and an examination of the pressures upon the Department of Social Work, I previously presented four main organisational and management options. These were: the status quo with further joined up working; the establishing of joint responsibility for children's services between the Education and Social Work Departments; the creation of a new department bringing together children's services in a new Education and Children's Services Department, while retaining a Department of Social Work; and a fourth option which would also create a Department of Community Services. This last option would combine activities within the Housing Department and those social work services not included in the proposed Education and Children's Services Department.

3.2 In approving my report, the Executive:

- recognised the need for change in the organisation and management of social work services within the Council;

- approved a period of consultation on the options;

- noted that I would submit a further interim report to the Council within approximately six weeks and a more detailed report in approximately ten weeks;

- asked me to liaise with COSLA and consult with all Scottish councils on the possible development of a Scottish Local Government Training Facility; and

- asked me to bring forward an early report on a new framework for joint working on children's services between Council and Health Services in Edinburgh; the report to address the need for formal and informal joint working and the scope for joint training of professionals.

3.3 The sections below outline progress to date. I shall report to the Council in April in more detail with recommendations for approval.

Consultations

3.4 The Council has repeatedly emphasised the need for consultation on the pressing issue of the future organisation and management of social work services. Consequently, I initiated an initial round of consultation in the period

to January 2004 with staff in the three potentially affected departments and with a number of stakeholder organisations. The purpose of this exercise was to provide a mechanism to identify what the main issues of concern were so that further work could be undertaken to address these, prior to decisions being taken.

3.5 Within the Social Work Department, more than 600 managers and relevant front line staff attended 21 consultation sessions. Briefing sessions were held for staff in day care and residential units. In addition, over 320 consultation proformas were returned. The Housing Department made use of three focus groups, together with feedback from teams through the normal team briefing process. In the Education Department, 136 staff attended consultation meetings and 28 written responses were received. Fifteen responses were received within the deadline from stakeholder organisations, including a detailed and helpful contribution from UNISON.

3.6 Unsurprisingly, there was a general request for a fuller description of the options and these will be developed as the next phase of the task. The points raised by staff and stakeholders will be considered in the context of an appraisal of the options which will be set out in my next report to the Council.

3.7 Continuing consultation with staff and stakeholders will take place as part of the process of selecting an option and implementing any organisational changes.

Disseminating information

3.8 As part of the consultation process, I believe it is important that members have the best information available to them when they are asked to make a decision on this complex issue. As an alternative to providing the Council with an interim report in February, I have produced an information file to meet that intention. This will be supplemented as new information becomes available but it currently includes:

- a description of the existing policy frameworks in both Scotland and England;

- information on the services currently provided;

- Joint Future and other initiatives being pursued by the Council and NHS Lothian;

- performance information relating to the departments of Education, Housing and Social Work;

- summarised consultations from staff and stakeholders; and

- frameworks for the evaluation of the future options.

3.9 The file was distributed widely on 4 March 2004 and placed on the Council's website. Although not complete, it seeks to meet consultees' concerns that decisions should not be taken on the basis of inadequate information. It will be supplemented as further information becomes available and will be re-circulated at a later date.

Evaluation by the Acting Director of Social Work

3.10 My report of 16 December 2003 required the Acting Director of Social Work to undertake an assessment of the Department early in the New Year and that assessment is attached as Appendix 1. This is a sensitive issue and I am fully aware that social work staff are concerned about the future of their service and their own positions within it. I believe, however, that the Acting Director's assessment is both balanced and fair. It identifies strengths within Social Work, as well as areas requiring improvement and enhancement. The key points emerging are that:

- the Department has a good Best Value Review system but it remains difficult to determine quality in terms of service delivery in some areas;

- lack of ICT and information systems (a national problem) hampers the ability to monitor service delivery;

- service planning, communication and information cascades all work well although the ICT problem is a hindrance;

- consultation with staff and more listening are all highlighted for improvement;

- heavy workloads for senior manager affect management's visibility and engagement with staff;

- a culture of supportive team working needs to be encouraged;

- there is a debate to be held on the centralisation/decentralisation issue within Social Work;

- the Department operates prudent financial systems and is well managed in this respect; and

- there is a clear management capacity issue which requires to be addressed.

3.11 It is important that, in considering the future direction of social work services in Edinburgh, sight is not lost of the continuing operational management of the Social Work Department over the last six difficult months. Despite the inevitable uncertainty which always surrounds any suggestion of large scale change, services continue to be delivered on a daily basis and notable successes include an improvement in dealing with delayed discharge from hospitals in Edinburgh and progress towards the establishment of an additional 240 care home places to provide for those elderly people. For example, in the period October 2003 to January 2004, the total number awaiting discharge fell by 10% and the Department achieved a 22% reduction in the number awaiting discharge for social care reasons alone.

3.12 The Council will also wish to note that the Scottish Executive's consultation on the reform of the criminal justice system in Scotland *Reduce, rehabilitate, reform* was launched on 2 March 2004. Views have been invited on what is good about the present system, what can be improved and how offenders can best be managed in prison and in the community so that the likelihood of their

offending in future is minimised. The consultation is being undertaken to meet the Executive's partnership commitment on proposals to establish a single agency to deliver custodial and non-custodial sentences. Proposals on the future of criminal justice social work services will result from the consultation and it will, therefore, be necessary for the Council to come to a view on the best way forward and on local changes which may be required in the future.

Resources for Social Work

3.13 My report in December 2003 and the Acting Director's evaluation point to the need for further resources for Social Work. Reports and presentations to the Council following my report on 16 October 2003 on the O'Brien Report have also highlighted the staffing, training and ICT issues which must be addressed. In finalising the budget for 2004/2007 the Council accepted that requirement and allocated the following resources for Social Work purposes:

- £0.8m per annum to implement the O'Brien Report recommendations;

- £1m per annum to recruit and retain Social Workers;

- £1.2m per annum to meet fostering commitments; and

- from 2005/06, £1m per annum for IT infrastructure (amounting, in total, over an eight year period, to £14m).

3.14 This major investment in the replacement of ageing ICT systems in Social Work is potentially a huge step forward. As part of the Smart City agenda I am keen to see systems provided that will allow for the delivery of effective services. Information and decision making will be supported by new joined up processes to ensure that staff have access to the tools needed for their work. I am convinced that this major investment is essential for the delivery of social services and the perception of the Council as a key change oriented authority.

Scrutiny and the visits programme

3.15 My December 2003 report to the Executive of the Council was called-in to Scrutiny, with the Children and Young People Panel taking the lead role, on behalf of the Community Services and Social Justice and Older People Panels.

3.16 At its meeting on 26 February 2004, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel expressed concern that, in the interests of openness, the Council should avoid a foreshortened decision period and a 'rush to judgement'. I agree fully with that and have indicated above my intention to report to the Council, with recommendations, in April, two months later than originally intended. As a consequence, the temporary arrangement for the management of the Social Work Department will be extended for a further short period. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel will meet again on 15 March 2004 to hear the views of other agencies and councils on the issues faced by the Council.

3.17 As indicated above, the Scrutiny Panel has considered the experience of a number of social work/social services authorities. At its meeting on 10 February 2004, the Executive of the Council approved member and officer study visits to a number of local authorities which have adopted different approaches to the

provision of children's services. One such authority, Brighton and Hove, has moved from a traditional structure of Education and Social Services Departments to an integrated Children and Families Services Department. The other two authorities visited, Highland and South Lanarkshire Councils, have devoted effort to integration and partnership, rather than structural change.

3.18 Common themes emerged during the visits. The role of key officers and members as 'change masters' was apparent as was the need for continuous communication through all levels in all organisations. These are authorities which have a long term plan for the key social work services they provide. They may pursue different approaches but the importance of having a well articulated corporate vision was clear.

3.19 All three councils are actively pursuing a close partnership with their local NHS organisations. That relationship varies from the development of a Children's Trust in Brighton and Hove to moves towards the integration of decision making structures and budgets in the other two councils.

Supporting reports

3.20 The other Social Work related reports on the agenda further elaborate the progress achieved since the publication of the O'Brien Inquiry report. They also illustrate, in stark terms, the pressures faced by colleagues in the Social Work Department and, in doing so, underline the urgency of the resource requirement I have referred to above. Members will also be aware that the results of the staff investigations into the actions of the five Social Workers most directly involved in the case of Caleb Ness and his family was released on 5 March 2004 by the Director of Corporate Services in his role as nominated officer for the investigation. The Director has offered to give a fuller explanation of the outcome of his investigation to each of the three political groups. The agenda report covers:

- staffing levels and cases carried within the 12 Children and Families Practice Teams;

- proposed changes in policy, management and practice in Child Protection work in Edinburgh;

- progress in developing a standardised assessment of children in need and their families; and

- proposals for establishing a Social Work Standards Committee.

Contact with Scottish Executive

3.21 Close contact has been maintained with the Scottish Executive over the past several months, with regular meetings taking place with the Head of Children and Young People and the Chief Social Work Inspector. The Council, along with NHS Lothian has also met recently with Peter Peacock MSP, Minister for Education and Young People. This contact is valuable and will be sustained as proposals are developed.

3.22 Members will recall that, at the Council meeting on 16 October 2003, assurances were given by me and by the Chief Executive of NHS Lothian that our two organisations would work closely together in following through on the O'Brien recommendations, breaking down barriers to joint working and planning together for the future. In the period since then, many meetings have taken place and NHS Lothian and the Council have been key partners in various working groups.

3.23 Looking ahead, there are a number of key national initiatives which the Council and NHS Lothian need to consider locally. They include:

- Joint Future – this is being "re-launched" by the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care on 10 March 2004;

- child protection – the First Minister has announced that the next "annual summit" will be held on 22 March 2004;

- Community Health Partnerships – a Circular is expected on this in the near future;

- children's services; and

- care in the community.

3.24 I also intend to report on the possible development of a Scottish Local Government Training Facility to the next meeting, following discussions with COSLA and all of the other Scottish Councils.

3.25 To explore all the relevant issues and consider the implications for the future delivery of services, a half-day seminar has been arranged for senior representatives from the Council and NHS Lothian. This will be an important step towards the finalisation of recommendations for the April Council meeting and the Board of NHS Lothian.

4   Recommendations

4.1 Considerable progress is being made in following through on the O'Brien recommendations and in reviewing the current arrangements for the future of social work services.

4.2 It is recommended that the Council notes this report and my intention to submit a comprehensive report with firm recommendations to the next meeting.

Tom Aitchison
Chief Executive

Appendices	Appendix 1	Evaluation by the Acting Director of Social Work
Contact/tel	Tom Aitchison	469 3002/Brian Farrell 469 3177
Wards affected	All	
Background Papers	Report to Executive	16 December 2003

SERVICE PLANNING AND DELIVERY

The Service Plan is drafted by circulating the previous plan with a summary of key objectives so every member of staff can contribute. The draft plan is then further discussed with Managers.

The plan is clearly set out, each section is monitored on a quarterly basis in relation to developments and the plan is used by each team to develop a timetable for implementation. These plans are then used as a performance management and framework for individuals.

Whereas the plan has key objectives and targets in some cases these are not clearly defined especially in terms of meaningful, objective targets. There is insufficient information on measurement and therefore the effectiveness of the objectives. The lack of sufficient quality assurance systems (see later) also affects the plan.

The plan is related to financial planning and information and is used for constructing the budget and identifying priorities. Like most plans, however, there is insufficient connection between three year budgeting and service planning.

The Accounts Commission indicators show progress in terms of service delivery and give very positive results. The evidence would suggest there is good delivery but there are still some major gaps highlighted in the O'Brien enquiry as well as other evidence.

Quality Assurance and Quality Frameworks

The overall lack of national systems of quality indicators is a major handicap to the Social Work Department. There is a very good Best Value Review system which has improved effectiveness and efficiency.

The department does not have a sufficiently developed self-evaluation and quality assurance system in place and therefore it is difficult to determine quality in terms of service delivery in some areas.

A staff appraisal system has been developed and progress is good, however it still does not cover all members of staff although plans are in hand.

Customer surveys have shown high levels of satisfaction and could be complemented by quality assurance.

The lack of information systems (particularly IT) hampers the department's ability to monitor service delivery in order to allow improved appraisal of staff to take place. This is also a national problem – the creation of better benchmarks would be of huge help to the department.

Communication, consultation and involvement

The department has produced a communication strategy which meant there was more consultation on the Service Plan and the budget. Cascading of information has been encouraged and the Best Value Reviews involved a great deal of consultation and feedback. There are proposals to set up focus groups and wider meetings of managers. Very recent information bulletins have been well received. There is good consultation with service users and partner providers. Consumer involvement officers used a wide range of strategies and initiatives particularly in community care. The self advocacy group for people with learning disabilities was the first in Britain and there have been other positive moves with partner agencies.

The lack of IT systems means that communication is made more difficult particularly with 'outlying' units. Regular communication bulletins through e-mail would bring a greater sense of consultation and communication.

There is a general feeling that there has been too much central control and therefore insufficient involvement in policy and decision-making processes. Recent staff meetings provoked comment on the lack of consultation and the lack of visibility of key managers from headquarters. The reliance on cascade is not sufficient and more needs to be done to listen to the views of staff. The current workloads for very senior managers have severely hampered the ability to visit establishments and listen to staff – see reference in management and leadership.

Staff expressed the view to me that the lack of involvement can lead to feelings of being vulnerable and a blame culture although much of the feeling of blame does not necessarily come from the department but external sources.

Continuous Improvement

There is no doubt a great commitment by staff to the people and services they provide. Many staff are genuine about change and the concept of continuous improvement.

There is no one culture but a series of sub-cultures within various parts of the department. Colleagues are very supportive of each other but more emphasis is needed on team working both at senior levels and across branches. There is a great deal of professional commitment but on occasions this means that accountability systems are more difficult and there are frequently questions of both management and the authority. A better balance of central control and staff involvement would help to change this culture. There needs to be more clarity in terms of

accountability and risk procedures in order to avoid the prevalence of a blame culture.

Senior colleagues believe that the former district management structure allowed for localisation but budget decisions left the department with a heavily centralised system. A return to more neighbourhood management is now needed with both budget and managerial delegation within a quality framework. A fresh look is also needed to avoid the 7 layers between practice team social workers and the Director.

Many staff feel that they need to communicate more clearly with local elected members, whilst recognising current accountability systems and this is being encouraged. A more sophisticated system of targets would help improve performance.

Resourced Financial Management

The overall impression is that the department is well managed in terms of resources and finance. The best value and other systems have led to improved performance and better use of resources. The department has consistently kept within its budgets and there is a clear understanding of the need for sound financial management. Specific issues are also reported to the Executive or Council. There is an increasing degree of expectation from service users of what will be provided to them and work on the budget is well managed.

Over recent years, however, there have been some underspends in the department's budget and more work needs to be undertaken to re-align the budgets in accordance with the service needs.

Management and Leadership

The Social Work Department has the second largest budget amongst council departments but has a small management team. There is a real capacity issue and allied with the view there has been too much centralisation this has meant that the department has been 'under-managed'. This lack of capacity has not helped the need for a collective approach and work needs to be done to realign both levels of responsibility and total workload.

As a result more attention needs to be given to encourage career development and succession planning. The lack of management capacity means a lack of visibility and hampers policy development and decision-making.

Key Issues

1. Management capacity
2. Improved consultation and involvement
3. IT systems
4. Internal communication
5. Budget re-alignment
6. Target setting
7. Quality assurance systems
8. Neighbourhood management
9. Continuous improvement