

Community Services Department: Review of Social Work Services

Internal Audit Report June 2008

BACKGROUND

This report has been prepared as a result of the Internal Audit review of the Social Work Services Review as part of the 2007/08 Internal Audit programme.

A report to the Council on 9 February 2006 highlighted significant unmet cost pressures on the Social Work budget for 2006/07. The members approved a scrutiny review of the Social Work Services.

As part of this scrutiny review, Brodies LLP and Hope Consultancy were appointed in May 2006 to carry out a review on a joint basis. A report was issued in September 2006, recommending changes in policy, practice, management arrangements and budget configuration.

As a result of our Audit work, findings were generated. These findings were subsequently discussed with management and a report produced.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Our initial audit work was carried out on a desktop review basis, obtaining a copy of the Brodies/Hope Consultancy report, checking that all of the recommendations therein were incorporated in the implementation plan. Thereafter we checked that the report and implementation plan had been formally approved by the Council and a procedure implemented for the plan to be reviewed and updated on a two weekly basis by the Departmental Management Team, with progress being reported to members on a half yearly basis.

The Brodies/Hope Consultancy report prefaced their detailed recommendations with the identification of two issues of genuine concern with regard to the provision of Free Personal Care as follows:

- ‘.....by far the most important is the level of unmet need...’
- ‘ the second issue...is one of reputation management’

These two issues were not directly cross referenced to the Implementation Plan but were of underlying significance due to the Ombudsman’s findings against Argyll and Bute Council in November 2006 for failing to provide Free Personal Care in a specific case.

A judicial review in October 2007 found in the Council’s favour, in that they did not need to pay for the provision of Free Personal Care in this particular case, where the care had not been provided by the local authority.

A subsequent Free Personal Care paper to the Executive, on 15 November 2007, noted that 'the present figure stands at 52 (clients waiting for community based packages) which is a matter of concern as the home care budget is fully committed...' Accordingly, the Executive decided to refer this matter to the Social Affairs Policy and Performance Group ("SAPPG"), and to request 'that this matter is given high priority within the Policy Performance procedure given the high profile of both the political and financial issues involved.'

The SAPPG at their meeting on 14 January 2008 deferred consideration of the Free Personal Care position until June and it is not clear that the reputation management issue has been specifically addressed.

In the interim, the sensitivity of the issue has been decreased with the publication, on 27 April 2008, of the Sutherland review. This highlighted rising costs and a funding shortfall in line with the country's ageing population. However, in response to this report, the Scottish Government have agreed to provide additional funding of £40million, and further consultation is anticipated with individual Council leaders.

Our subsequent review of the SWIA report and Performance Inspection Improvement Plan focussed on the three areas which had been identified as weak:

- Impact on adults, carers, children and young people who use services
- Delivery of Key Processes
- Leadership and Direction

We are satisfied that the Performance Inspection Improvement Plan addresses the weaknesses in each of these areas with:

- The implementation of a systematic and comprehensive approach to the assessment and management of risk
- Appropriate shared access to social work assessment and electronic case records
- The development of a comprehensive range of leaflets about social work services
- A need to sustain commitment to change and continuous improvement
- A more robust communication approach between senior managers and staff

It is recognised that in addition to the Social Work restructuring exercise there have been changes to staff contracts under the Single Status arrangements. There is therefore still a settling in period for all these changes, and despite the additional contact and consultation there are still likely to be staff members whose comments may not reflect the generally positive feedback that has been associated with the changes implemented.