

**ANGUS COUNCIL****SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE .....15 APRIL 1997****A STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION****REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK****ABSTRACT**

This report informs Committee of the production of an Angus Council "family" of Social Work Information Leaflets.

This report also discusses the need for a strategic approach to the provision of public information about social work services. This would reflect the context of increasing access and openness with regard to local authority services. The report outlines the importance of public information in this context, outlines elements which a strategy might include and recommends that such a strategy be developed.

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee agrees:

- i) to note the content of this report;
- ii) to note the production of an Angus Council "family" of Social Work Information Leaflets.
- iii) to instruct the Director of Social Work to carry forward the development of a strategy for public information, linked appropriately with corporate initiatives, by developing an action plan for public information on Social Work Services;
- iv) to instruct the Director of Social Work to report back to committee on progress on implementing the action plan;

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

The important role of information in the provision of social work services has been increasingly recognised in recent years. This has been as a result of a number of factors including the increasing importance placed on involving service users, carers and their representatives, the growing emphasis on choice and the movement towards openness in local government. These influences have been reflected in legislation and guidance. Section 20 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 places a responsibility on the local authority to publish information about relevant services provided in respect of children. There is a similar statutory responsibility with regard to Community Care services.

All of these requirements mean that the provision and distribution of information is an important aspect of service provision. Service users, potential service users, care providers and the general public all need quality information in order to access services and be involved in the development, planning and evaluation of services.

Information serves a number of functions including:-

- assisting people to understand what services are available and their entitlement to these services
- allowing participation in assessment of need
- ensuring access to and appropriate use of services
- encouraging participation in the delivery and review of services
- widening access to complaints procedures
- providing access to other related services

The provision, design and distribution of information is therefore an integral part of the planning and delivery of services.

## **3. A PUBLIC INFORMATION STRATEGY**

A strategic approach to information is required to ensure that resources are used appropriately and effectively.

A public information strategy should include the identification of need, the development of standards, the involvement of users, carers and other interested parties and the monitoring and evaluation of public information provision.

In order to, within the Social Work achieve an overview the lead responsibility for public information will rest with the Strategic Planning and Commissioning Team. This would ensure that existing quality standards are implemented and that an overview of public information is maintained.

Specific issues which a strategy will address include the following:-

- an audit of existing information
- an audit of social work information points
- the identification of other potential information outlets including Access Points other Angus Council departments and public areas such as health centres and supermarkets.
- the establishment of guidelines for the drafting and design of information to ensure material is easy to read, understand and is easily identified
- the heightening of staff awareness of the range and scope of information available
- the establishment of a distribution database to ensure comprehensive and targeted distribution of information
- the identification of appropriate media for information for those with visual or hearing impairment, communication difficulties and those whose first language is not English
- the identification of strategies for the targeted distribution of information to rural areas

The development of a strategy for public information would require consultation and collaboration with other parties including other departments of Angus Council, Tayside Health Board and those involved in planning for community care and children's services. As a consequence it will be required to reflect the joint planning structures for community care and children's services. As a preparatory exercise the 'family' of information leaflets previously published by Tayside Social Work Department have been redesigned and updated for Angus Council Social Work and will be distributed to members in due course.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications arising out of this report are contained within the Department's revenue budget.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

Proposals are put forward in this report to develop a strategy and action plan for the provision of public information about social work and related services. Such a strategy would reflect the important place of public information for the general public, service users, carers and their representatives.

W B Robertson  
Director of Social Work

Note: 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 this report.