

ANGUS COUNCIL

Housing Committee – 3rd June, 2004

PILOTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS - EVALUATION REPORT

REPORT by DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

ABSTRACT

This report advises Committee of the Housing Department's participation in the Communities Scotland pilot for "National Standards for Housing Information and Advice" and also the outcome of the evaluation final report.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended Committee note and welcome the involvement of the department as outlined below.

2. BACKGROUND

The Housing Department was one of 20 organisations which, during 2000, volunteered to pilot the implementation of the Communities Scotland National Standards for Housing Information and Advice. This was carried out via staff at the Carnoustie and Monifieth ACCESS Offices.

The motivation behind the pilot was to draw lessons from the implementation process that could inform and assist the wider adoption of the standards across Scotland.

When the pilot began there was no duty on local authorities to provide housing advice, nor was there a requirement that housing advice services should meet the national standards. The Housing Act 2001 has produced a radically changed environment with new duties on local authorities to provide housing advice. Section 2 of the Act requires authorities to secure that information and advice relating to homelessness and its prevention is available free of charge in their area.

Subsequent guidance indicates authorities should ensure provision meets the national standards and that progress to meeting this will form part of the regulatory framework. It also says that local authority funded services must meet equality thresholds, which, ideally, should be the national standards. Therefore, the standards have moved from being a measure of best practice to having a statutory context and consequently bringing within their scope a very wide range of organisations across Scotland.

The National Standards

The National Standards were initially published by Home Point in 1995, revised, and re-issued in 2000. They are in three parts:

- Part 1 - containing the National Standards,
- Part 2 - containing the Information and Advice Competencies, and
- Part 3 - containing the Good Practice Guidance, plus Self-Assessment Checklist on disc.

The standards are divided into six key areas:

- General Management,
- Planning Services,
- Accessibility and Customer Care,
- Providing the Service,
- Competencies for Staff and Agencies,
- Resources.

Each of the standards is followed by a set of indicators that highlight the evidence services must provide to demonstrate compliance with the standards. Indicators for each standard differ depending upon the type of service offered by the provider. Type 1 indicators are relevant for information providers, Type 2 for those offering a case service, and Type 3 indicators for those offering representation and advocacy services.

Evaluation

Home Point was commissioned by Communities Scotland to support the pilot and carry out an evaluation audit. Only four of the participating organisations (including the Carnoustie/Monifieth ACCESS Offices) were selected for the evaluation audit which was carried out during the autumn of 2003.

Case Study - Angus Council – Carnoustie/Monifieth ACCESS Offices

The outcome of the evaluation was positive. The office piloted standards for a Type 1 service. Among the main points highlighted were:-

- the workload and timescales involved as was recognition that all 14 staff were covered by the Standards.
- an acknowledgement that the implementation process took longer than expected, mainly due to the time needed to draw together information and procedures.
- the initial self-assessment exercise and the need to involve staff throughout the process for proved challenging in an already busy service.
- a recognition that some difficulty had been encountered in adopting the standards due to this being undertaken within a local authority structure. This was no criticism of the local authority itself but was part of the piloting outcome indicating clearly that the standards were very much designed for a “stand alone” organisation and did not fully recognise the particular circumstances of local authorities.
- the need for any participating organisation to budget for continuing development of staff skills and knowledge.

Appreciation/Outcomes

Communities Scotland acknowledged that many lessons have been learned during the three years of the pilot. They also acknowledged the active participation of the department and especially the Carnoustie/Monifieth staff directly involved.

Resource input, corporate considerations, time taken, defining the process, acknowledging that one size does not fit all, partnership working etc. were all issues benefiting from the range of pilots undertaken. The conclusions reached will assist progress, training and preparation of standards manuals, as well as Home Points work on implementation plans and reactive support services.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications directly arising from the terms of this report.

4. CONSULTATION

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

5. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no human rights implications arising from the terms of this report.

6. CONCLUSION

The Carnoustie / Monifieth ACCESS staff are to be congratulated on their involvement. Participation in the pilot has been time consuming but of benefit to the department and staff. The findings will support Communities Scotland's efforts to develop the national standards.

A rolling programme of training for other housing service points is active and the potential for accreditation over the department rather than individual offices is being explored.

Ron Ashton
Director of Housing

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 upon to any material extent in preparing this report.