

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: SOCIAL WORK COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
FROM: Jim Dickie Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 30 March 1999	
REF: DOD/LK	

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose the adoption of revised procedures for receiving and dealing with complaints made about the services provided by, or on behalf of the Social Work Department

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Section 52 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 required authorities to establish a complaints procedure for all social work functions.
- 2.2 Circular SWSG5/96 revoked earlier guidance and improved directions on arrangements for receiving and dealing with complaints.
- 2.3 The circular was wide ranging and sought to ensure that procedures would:
- ◆ include an element of objectivity, be accessible to service users and be easily understood;
 - ◆ operate uniformly throughout the Department and identify designated officers to receive and investigate complaints;
 - ◆ ensure initial responses to complaints were dealt with as close to source as possible;
 - ◆ include explicit arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of the procedures;
 - ◆ set timescales for dealing with complaints and publicise results;
 - ◆ specify arrangements for Complaints Review Committees;
 - ◆ specify measures for dealing with persistent complainers, and
 - ◆ be discrete, self contained and separate from disciplinary or grievance procedures or other means of redress.
- 2.4 A report adopted by Social Work Committee in November 1996 approved interim procedures which satisfied the requirements of the Circular SWSG 5/96.

3 REVISED PROCEDURES

- 3.1 Following review, the complaints procedure has been revised to enable the Department to improve its handling of complaints. The proposed new procedures reflect the principles underpinning the Circular outlined at 2.3 above. A full copy has been placed in the members' library for reference.
- 3.2 The revised procedures reflect the experience gained by the Department in operating the complaints system over the past three years and the proposed changes will improve the effectiveness of the system.
- 3.3 In line with the Circular, as from 1 April 1999, in addition to current arrangements for dealing with formal complaints, the Department will record and analyse complaints/ concerns raised informally by service users or their representatives. This will enhance existing arrangements and inform service developments within the Department.
- 3.4 It is also proposed to increase the numbers and wider availability of designated officers authorised to receive, investigate and respond to complaints. Appendix one sets out a listing of officers previously approved to receive and investigate complaints and the designations of officers newly allocated to undertake complaint investigation duties. All staff added to the existing list will undertake relevant training.
- 3.5 Complaints processes are already publicised throughout the Department and at all service points. Committee's endorsement of the revised procedures will be followed by a programme of training for staff at all levels throughout the Department.

4 RECOMMENDATION

Committee is asked to approve the revised complaints procedure.

Katrina Somers

PP

Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
March 1999

For further information on this report please contact Dennis O'Donnell, Principal Officer (Registration/Inspection)
(TEL: 01698 332058)

The Social Work (Representatives Procedure) (Scotland) Direction 1996, issued under Circular SWSG 5/1996, in Section 4, directs the local authority to designate an appropriate number of Officers of the Social Work Department to receive and investigate complaints

Proposed designations of officers to receive complaints have previously been approved as follows:

Head of Social Work Services
 Head of Social Work Development
 Head of Social Work Resources
 All Principal Officers
 All Area Managers

Proposed designations of officers to investigate complaints and co-ordinate a response to these are as follows:

All Principal Officers
 All Area Managers
 All Area Service Managers
 Hospital Services Manager
 *Senior Community Care Officers
 *Senior Child Care Officers
 *Senior Social Workers
 *Senior Resource Officers
 *Unit Managers
 *Home Care Co-ordinators
 *Co-ordinator Criminal Justice

* Denotes staff at PO 2 grade and above, who will undertake future training on handling and investigating complaints.