

EXCERPT OF MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 1999**WOMEN'S AID**

23. With reference to paragraph 40 of the Minute of the meeting of this Committee held on 16 March 1999 when Committee had considered a joint report dated 16 March 1999 by the Directors of Social Work and Housing proposing that the Departments of Housing, Social Work and the Chief Executive, in consultation with local Women's Aid organisations, work together to bring forward proposals to regularise the funding and service provision arrangements for Women's Aid groups throughout the authority and had agreed inter alia, that the relevant departments undertake the action set out and report to this Committee by August 1999, there was submitted a joint report (docketed) dated 7 September 1999 by the Directors of Social Work and Housing and Property Services (1) advising of the outcome of the review of women's aid services; (2) informing that a series of questionnaires were devised for use with the groups as part of the review process; (3) detailing, in paragraph 5.2 of the report, a number of measures designed to establish more consistent and sustainable arrangements for funding Women's Aid and develop a more standardised approach to monitoring Women's Aid services, and (4) proposing, in principle, to create a temporary development officer post within the Council to help Women's Aid groups develop and deliver services in the Council's area.

Decided:

- (1) that the measures outlined at 5.2 of the report be approved;
- (2) that the creation of a temporary post within the Council to carry out the development work described in Section 6 of the report, and subject to further discussions outlined therein, be approved in principle;
- (3) that the Directors of Housing and Property Services and Social Work be requested to bring forward a further report in due course;
- (4) that the report be referred to the Social Work and Housing and Property Services Committees for their consideration and the Personnel Services Committee in respect of the staffing aspects, and
- (5) that the contents of the report be otherwise noted.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

TO: Policy and Resources Committee	Subject: Women's Aid
FROM: Director of Social Work Director of Housing and Property Services	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 7 September 1999	
REPORT AUTHOR: George McInally	
REF: JD/KS/GMCI/JMCF	

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Policy and Resources Committee of the outcome of the review of Women's Aid services, recently undertaken by officers from Chief Executive's, Housing & Property Services, and Social Work Departments.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The review of Women's Aid services was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 16 March 1999, following a report which highlighted the different funding and service arrangements which existed in the three Women's Aid organisations which operate in North Lanarkshire.
- 2.2 The purpose of the review is to establish more consistent and sustainable arrangements for funding Women's Aid and to help develop a more standardised approach to monitoring Women's Aid services.

3 THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 3.1 In conducting a review of Women's Aid services the Council officers involved in the process were mindful of the Council's commitment to service provision for women experiencing domestic violence and abuse.
- 3.2 To ensure a consistent approach to each of the Women's Aid organisations a series of questionnaires were devised for use with the groups. The questionnaires were designed to cover four main headings:

i) Group Consultation

The questionnaire ranged from the objectives of the organisation, the functions undertaken, the geographic area of service provision, funding resources, staffing levels and functions and links with Council Departments.

In addition, information was elicited on the organisation's use of volunteers, the number of service users, monitoring arrangements and complaints procedures.

ii) Staff Consultation

It was considered appropriate to consult with individual employees and the staff consultation questionnaire provided the framework for staff to comment on development and training opportunities, communication procedures and the working environment.

iii) User Evaluation

Two further questionnaires were developed to gather information from women who had used refuge accommodation or information and advice services provided by Women's Aid. Despite re-assurances that interviews would be voluntary, confidential and carried out by female Council staff all three groups expressed reservations about supporting this aspect of the review. It only proved possible to obtain the views of one woman who has used Women's Aid services in the Motherwell area although she had not stayed in refuge accommodation.

4 THE REVIEW FINDINGS

- 4.1 Overall Women's Aid organisations are providing a much needed service, and are committed to the provision of high quality services for women fleeing domestic violence. Apart from the differences in funding and staffing levels the review has highlighted a number of issues which need to be resolved as a matter of priority.
- 4.2 Motherwell and Monklands Women's Aid groups are affiliated to Scottish Women's Aid and operate on the principle of a collective group with a strong emphasis on self help. One feature of this structure is that no one person is in charge. In the absence of a manager or project leader evident arrangements should be in place to deal effectively with issues of accountability for funding received, as well as problems which arise regarding staff discipline, personnel issues, complaints and budget management.
- 4.3 North Lanarkshire Women's Aid (Cumbernauld) operates on the basis of a Private Limited Company. Currently there is only one employed member of staff who is also a Director of the Company. The Ltd Company in addition to renting a number of houses which operates as Women's Aid Refuge's also has a mortgage on a property which was purchased nine years ago. The combination in one person of roles of governance, employer and employee along with personal interests in the financial assets and liabilities is inappropriate, particularly as the organisation operates outwith the national code of practice of Women's Aid. This is acknowledged by the organisation.
- 4.4 Across each of the organisations it has been identified by the Council's officers that there is a need to review and develop policies in some or in all of the following areas:- personnel procedures, complaints procedures, monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Furthermore, there is an absence of agreed procedures between the Council and Women's Aid on the standard of service which they provide to women experiencing violence and abuse. There is also a lack of clarity on the conditions which have to be met to satisfy the funding arrangements.

5 THE WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 While there is a need to strengthen some of the operational arrangements for Women's Aid organisations, it has to be recognised that for many women who are fleeing from a violent or abusive relationship, the three organisations provide an important and valuable service. It is therefore incumbent on the Council to lend practical support to the organisations with a view to establishing good levels of service for women in the North Lanarkshire area.

5.2 As a first step in this process the Council in consultation with the Women's Aid groups should agree the service standards and funding conditions. The framework for core funding would be based on harmonisation between the various groups and this would be achieved by:

◆ **Information and Advice**

Subject to agreement being reached about service standards and funding conditions, it is proposed that Women's Aid organisations be funded to provide an information and advice service in three localities, Monklands, Motherwell and Cumbernauld. This will consist of funding for an Advice Worker post and office running costs to enable the delivery of the advice service. It is proposed to develop a service level agreement for the information and advice component of core funding, accompanied by appropriate monitoring arrangements.

◆ **Refuge Accommodation**

The availability of a range of good quality accommodation is an important part of the overall service provision for women fleeing domestic violence. The Council will help Women's Aid organisations develop suitable refuge provision which is well managed and offers women access to support and assistance. It is proposed that the core costs of managing and maintaining the refuges, including appropriate staff support for women in the refuges, should be met from rental charges, funded through housing benefit.

◆ **North Lanarkshire Monitoring Group**

A monitoring group be established to monitor and support the work of the Women's Aid organisations in North Lanarkshire. The membership will be drawn from Council officers and other appropriate agencies, and will meet regularly with Women's Aid. The monitoring group will assist the Council in contributing to the development of a multi-agency strategy to tackle violence against women as currently proposed by the Community Safety Task Group.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The review of Women's Aid services in North Lanarkshire has identified a number of important issues:

- (i) There are different funding arrangements in operation between the three Women's Aid organisations and these need where possible to be standardised.
- (ii) There is a need for services in the North Lanarkshire area for women who are experiencing violence or abuse.
- (iii) There needs to be a service location in the three main geographical areas of the Council.
- (iv) The Women's Aid groups need to be given practical support, to develop policies in the areas of personnel procedures, complaints procedures monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- (v) The Women's Aid groups require more regular support from Council Officers to help them develop and deliver services in the Council's area. It is therefore in principle proposed to create a temporary development officer post within the Council. The objective of the post would be to promote interagency liaison and assist each of the Women's Aid organisations achieve acceptable service standards within agreed operational procedures.

- 6.2 This proposal would be subject to further discussions on cost sharing between Departments and on the location of the post, and consultation with Personnel Services and Women's Aid groups.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Currently the Women's Aid organisations in North Lanarkshire receive a total of £137,995 in funds made up as follows:

	Monklands	North Lanarkshire (Cumbernauld)	Motherwell
Section 10	£21,600	£31,600	£7,200
Social Inclusion Partnership	£72,600		£4,995
Total	£94,200	£31,600	£12,195

- 7.2 In addition, Monklands and North Lanarkshire Women's Aid receive varying levels of rental income from the residents who occupy their refuge accommodation. This revenue is used to maintain and operate the various refuge premises. It should be noted that the Social Inclusion Partnership resources are time limited, and Monklands money is scheduled to end in March 2000.
- 7.3 In the future, it is proposed that Women's Aid Groups would have a similar core funding structure, comprising three distinct elements, namely:

(i) Refuge Provision and Support

Housing Benefit for rent and eligible charges. Monklands refuge funding to be phased in over a timescale consistent with termination of regeneration programme funding. The impact of these proposals will be to increase housing benefit funding of direct accommodation and related service for three existing groups with the possibility of extending refuge provision in the future from a secure funding base.

The refuge accommodation premises operated by the Women's Aid Groups require to be properly managed, maintained and secure and refuge staff should be appointed for this purpose. The cost of such staff should be met from rental income which is eligible for Housing Benefit.

ii) Information and Advice Workers

3 APIII Women's Aid posts to be funded through Social Work Section 10 across the Council's area, one in North, Central and South at a cost of £23, 704 per annum (total £71,112) APIII grade and an amount for an information and advice budget. It is proposed that this expenditure be met by realignment of the existing Section 10 payments (£60,400) plus an additional allocation from the Section 10 budget of £10,712 per annum.

The impact of the proposed changes to Section 10 grants are to increase funding for Monklands and Motherwell and decrease Section 10 funding to the North Lanarkshire (Cumbernauld) Women's Aid. The latter decrease will be offset by housing benefit in respect of refuge provision.

As indicated, Section 10 funding for information and advice would be subject to monitoring arrangements and it is hoped to develop a standard service level agreement for the future, in consultation with Women's Aid groups.

(iii) Office Accommodation - Information and Advice Service

An essential element of the information and advice provision entails the provision of office accommodation, which can be accessed by women who experience violence or above. There is a requirement for such a facility in each of the three areas of the Council. It is therefore proposed that funding for this purpose be made available through Housing and Property Services Department. A detailed report on the actual costs will be submitted in due course to the Housing and Property Services Committee for approval.

- 7.4 It is proposed that funding for the proposed temporary Development Officer post will be the subject of further discussion regarding cost sharing between Departments and detailed proposals will be brought forward in due course.
- 7.5 The additional costs identified in this report can be met from the various Departmental budgets.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Committee is requested to:

- i) Approve the measures outlined at 5.2 of this report;
- ii) Approve in principle the creation of a temporary post within the Council to carry out the development work described in Section 6 of this report, and subject to the further discussions outlined therein;
- iii) Request the Directors of Housing and Property Services and Social Work to bring forward a further report in due course; and
- v) Remit this report to the Social Work and Housing and Property Services Committees for their consideration.

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 Director of Social Work

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