

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT**

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work - Consultation Paper - July 1999
FROM: Jim Dickie Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 23 November 1999	
REPORT AUTHOR: Sandra Mackay	
REF: SM/AG	

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the response which has been submitted by North Lanarkshire Council to the Social Work Information Review Group in respect of the consultation paper "Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work".

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 1998 the National Social Work Information Review was established by the Scottish Office (now Scottish Executive), the Accounts Commission, COSLA and the Association of Directors of Social Work to address long standing concerns about the consistency of social work information used for the purpose of national comparison.
- 2.2 A consultation paper was produced in July 1999 by the National Social Work Information Review Group seeks to identify:
- (a) core information required by each authority in order to plan and manage social work services provided or purchased by the Council, consistent with best value,
 - (b) the sub set of management and performance information required nationally by local authorities by comparison and data - benchmarking purposes, by central government to monitor policy objectives and plan services at a national level and by the accounts commission to support performance reporting and the public accountability.
- 2.3 A copy of the consultation paper has been placed in the Member's Library.
- 2.4 The consultation paper was circulated to all organisations with an interest in social work information with the request that comments be returned to the Social Work Information Review Group by 31st October 1999.

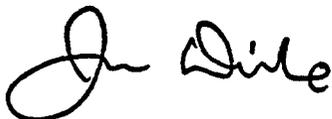
- 2.5 It is hoped that the initiative will result in additional resources being made available to local authorities to develop social work information systems.

3 RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER

- 3.1 A copy of the full response which was submitted by the Director of Social Work can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 While it is noted in the response that the document represents significant progress towards specifying management information for Social Work Departments, a main comment is that a clear link must be specified between the objectives, standards and priorities of Social Work services nationally and for individual authorities.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Social Work Committee is asked to homologate the contents of the response as the Council's position.



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Director of Social Work
15th November 1999

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Social Work Information Review Group

Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work Consultation Paper - July 1999

Comments by North Lanarkshire Social Work Department

This document represents significant progress towards specifying management information for social work departments, and the time and effort put into its production is appreciated and welcomed.

General Comments

1. It is well noted that definitions, classifications and code-lists will be required. This is a vital area of work, which will require to be agreed by all partner agencies. It is too often the case that authorities respond to information requests only to find that the information is not comparable due to definitional, recording or practice differences.
2. The Statement of Requirements proposes a list of core data required to be recorded by each authority. Further work will be necessary to turn this into meaningful management and performance information at local or national level.
3. Although the above are of great importance in the quest to standardise recording between authorities, a key area is missing. This is the rationale behind collecting the data in the first place. There must therefore be a clear link with the objectives, standards and priorities of social work services nationally and for individual authorities.
4. The document would therefore be improved if presented under Objectives headings. This approach is endorsed in:
 - a) Mike Brown's letter of 29 September to SWSLG members - 'Social Work Information Review - Service Plans and Objectives'. The Department of Health consultation document 'A New Approach to Social Services Performance' may be useful as an example of this approach.
 - b) Philip Morgan Klein's paper which is appended to the document quotes Andrew Kerslake by asking three key questions:
 - 'What does the department want to achieve;
 - How will we achieve these objectives; and
 - How will we know whether we are achieving these objectives?'
 - c) the Government's Aiming for Excellence White Paper:
 - '...simple measures of performance which are accessible, measure outcomes not inputs and provide a robust basis for comparison between authorities.'
 - d) the Account's Commission document 'The Measures of Success - Developing a Balanced Scorecard to Measure Performance'

5. Assuming consensus exists about objectives, a limited number of outcome measures (performance indicators) could be set. This in turn would inform what data items are required to provide these outcome measures.
6. The list of performance indicators may best be split into three parts:
 - Statutory Requirements (i.e. PIs, KPIs, etc.);
 - National Comparative Information (information which is/should be made public and can be used for inter authority benchmarking purposes.
 - Local Requirements (i.e. data required for internal performance management and monitoring).
7. The first two of these could perhaps be considered as the minimum national requirements, whilst the third could be used as guidance for authorities to assist with the development of performance management.
8. The suggestions made in the document, and existing performance measures in general, deal with quantitative information. Some level of qualitative information would be necessary when measuring performance, especially for 'Best Value' purposes. Even though this will be complex, it is of great importance and worthy of consideration before the specification of data requirements is completed.
9. The process outlined in the Consultation Paper will take a considerable time. This, combined with any computer system work will make the process very lengthy - in which time management/performance information requirements, and perhaps legislation, may change. It will be important to build in some capacity for change, so that the system is forward looking.
10. It would appear to be essential to prioritise areas of work contained within the Statement of Objectives, and consider removing lower priority areas altogether for the time being.
11. The information items and variables contained within the document could be used to inform authorities of information systems development requirements. One of the major stumbling blocks which authorities currently face in the provision of information is that there are gaps in the data recorded. This could be used to help identify system specifications, and so speed up development time.
12. It would be useful if the document considered how information links with other departments and agencies (Health, Criminal Justice System, Education, Housing) could be incorporated with social work information, particularly with regard to nationally defined priorities and objectives.
13. A fundamental issue which should be considered in this area of work is how to ensure that information from all authorities is comparable. This problem is especially evident with the Accounts Commission Performance Indicators and current returns made to the Scottish Executive. The development of common or compatible information systems will be one of the major issues. It is understood that a number of authorities have recently purchased different IT systems and the task of standardisation may become more rather than less difficult over time.

Statement of Requirements - Detailed Comments

14. In the main the information items and variables listed appear comprehensive. If anything, there is too much detail and lesser priorities should be dropped.
- 15 Data on carers should perhaps be included as a distinct care group.
- 16 Timescale information should be added to client based services e.g. time from referral to assessment start, time to complete assessments.

17 Section 2 Finance and Planning

2.1 Finance

- Clear definitions (especially client group) are crucial for comparison purposes. This is evidenced by the diversity of Accounts Commission PI1 returns. This is also important for matching budgets and actual expenditure, expenditure and income etc.
- Information on GAE allocations should be included.
- It is essential to define relevant and objective measures of need when dealing with Geographical Equity (especially if this is used in future on a national basis).
- Benchmarking experience to date suggests that this will in itself be a major task, with significant resource implications.

2.2 Staffing

- Details on staff training provided/undertaken would be useful (numbers involved, type of training, costs etc.).
- Information on the staffing of other care agencies is not appropriate to include.

Annex Population Needs Assessment

- GRO(S) provides yearly updates of population estimates.
- The report underestimates some of the long standing difficulties with small area statistics.
- It would perhaps be of use to develop a standard method of breaking population MYEs across all authorities. This would be especially useful when working in collaboration with other authorities (e.g. across health board areas).
- This exercise may provide an opportunity to combine existing prevalence rates (as listed) with client based information. More generally, it is important for community care prevalence information to be jointly agreed with health interests.

18 Section 3 Services for All Care Groups

3.1 Out of Hours Social Work Services - Not a priority.

3.2 Welfare Rights / Income Maximising Services - Not a priority.

3.3 Registration and Inspection - There should be consultation with the new agency to define requirements prior to specification being completed.

19 Section 4 Children and Families Services

- This section contains a very high number of data requirements. Consideration should be given to reducing them to a manageable number.
- There are many items in this section which will require clear definitions, which will have obvious time and resource implications for authorities.
- At least part of the resource information could be removed (or be given low priority). Numbers of users of service users should come from client based counts, and resources are not necessarily located within an authority's own boundaries.
- Information on children with/affected by disability should be separated.
- Young carers information should be removed due to the complexity of defining them.

20 Section 5 Community Care Services

- Some services are not provided by authorities (e.g. in North Lanarkshire sheltered housing is now managed by Housing Department). It would be worth ascertaining the extent of this situation nationally, as it may not be worth collecting data on some service areas nationally.
- Care package information (especially complex community packages) could be recorded in some way.
- Residential resource information should be removed for the same reason as described in Section 4.
- Due to the variety of supported accommodation types (especially if the client is the tenant), it may be sensible to limit information on this area to registered services only at present, until there is some clarification of this area.
- Addiction services seem to have been omitted from the document.
- It would perhaps be of use to have some data on planned hospital discharge programme populations, either as a variable, or under a separate information item.

21 Section 6 Criminal Justice Services

- This section contains a high volume of data requirements. As Criminal Justice services are not well catered for in computer systems yet, this represents a substantial amount of time and resources.
- Scottish Executive information requirements are contained in two sections of the report - quarterly claim data and the aggregate return. It is unclear why this is the case. It would be beneficial if these could be rationalised into the same format, along with information required in the Annual Planning Statement, which is used in bidding for resources. It would be desirable to have guidance from the Scottish Executive on this matter.
- It would be useful to consider the Criminal Justice System as a whole within this section i.e. the link between social work services and as part of overall system e.g. the balance between the use of custody and the use of community based disposals as part of a national strategic objective to deal with offenders within the social exclusion agenda. At a slightly lower level an example of measuring the effectiveness of Criminal Justice services would be to look at reconviction (or re-offending) rates for different types of community disposal (and compare this if possible with custodial disposals).
- The value of including such information as the number of Social Enquiry Reports submitted to court and reports allocated within two working (both KPI requirements) is unclear when considering whether the service is meeting wider strategic objectives, although of interest at a local level.