

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Social Work Committee : 25 January 2000	Subject : Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System Arrangements for the Future Delivery of Services
From : Jim Dickie, Director of Social Work Prepared by : John S Scott, Principal Officer, Criminal Justice	

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to :

- inform the Committee of the announcement, by the Minister for Justice, about future arrangements for the delivery of Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System.
- seek approval for comments made, through COSLA, about the consequences for North Lanarkshire.

2. **BACKGROUND**

The future of Criminal Justice Services has been uncertain since the government, in late 1998, published the consultation document - *The Tough Option*. This document considered the future structure of services. Options included a grouping of authorities managed by a joint board, a grouping where one acts as lead authority to the others, including management of all criminal justice staff within the grouping, and the establishment of a national agency.

North Lanarkshire responded to this consultation, comments being approved by the Committee. These comments supported arrangements for improved planning between Authorities, but opposed the development of a national agency, or other arrangements which reduced local accountability or delivery of services. It was considered crucial that Criminal Justice remain integrated with the wider range of Social Work services provided to the public, to ensure consistency of access and service. This recognised that offending cannot be isolated from the wide range of social issues dealt with by Social Work, and that dealing with those who offend is best done within the Social Work ethos of social inclusion.

Other local authorities, ADSW, and COSLA also responded to the document. With only a few exceptions, other local authorities also argued that Criminal Justice Services should remain integrated with the range of other services provided by Social Work Departments. Overall, however, it was recognised that the status quo was not an option, and that it was necessary to demonstrate to the government a willingness to consider improved ways of delivering services.

3. ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE

In October 1999 the Minister for Justice, Jim Wallace, announced that Criminal Justice Services would remain with the Social Work Departments of local authorities, but would be required to plan and deliver services through groupings of authorities. Within mainland Scotland, there are to be no more than 9 or 10 groupings. Arrangements for islands authorities are to be considered separately. The announcement included measures that groupings were to deliver services more cost effectively, provide staff cover across local authority boundaries, and harmonise information systems. One Criminal Justice Strategic Plan will be required for each grouping.

Local Authorities were required to provide a response to the Minister's announcement by early December, this to include proposals for the composition and managerial arrangements of groupings. It was understood that the Minister wanted the revised arrangements to be put in place by summer 2000.

4. COSLA RESPONSE

The nature of the groupings was debated through COSLA, in meetings with the Leaders of Councils, and with Conveners together with Directors of Social Work. COSLA then responded to the Minister's announcement. The view of local authorities was to agree to work in groupings, but that the structure be determined by local circumstances and the preferences of the local authorities within the groupings.

The outcome to COSLA's response will be known early in the New year, in view of the Government's desire to see new arrangements in place by summer 2000. The local authorities believe that this timescale is too short, and should be extended till April 2001.

5. IMPACT ON NORTH LANARKSHIRE

There is likely to be some debate about particular groupings, but it seems likely to be agreed that North and South Lanarkshire are grouped together, with no other authorities involved.

Both authorities believe that the core services of assessment and case management should remain at a local level, integrated with other social work services. Both see scope for the rationalisation of support services such as Groupwork, Court Services, Supervised Attendance, elements of Diversion, and Community Service. Neither authority, at this stage, sees any need to have one managerial structure across the grouping, but both agree that planning arrangements can be made more formal, with the respective roles of Headquarters Criminal Justice staff reviewed to ensure efficiency of planning and service delivery. The eventual outcome will depend on the degree of flexibility allowed to the grouping by the Scottish Executive.

Work has already begun to consider arrangements for the future delivery of services between the authorities. Proposals will be brought forward, for consideration, by the Committee, in the next few months.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to :

- note the announcement by the Minister of Justice.
- approve the response, made by North Lanarkshire, through COSLA.
- note that proposals for future delivery arrangements will be put before a future meeting of the Committee.



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January 6th 2000

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