

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: MODERNISING SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN SCOTLAND: DRAFT NATIONAL CARE STANDARDS THIRD TRANCHE
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 25 October 2001	Ref: DOD/EOC	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT / INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report informs members about consultation which has taken place in relation to a third tranche of draft National Care Standards for:
- adult placement services;
 - criminal justice supported accommodation;
 - day care (support services)standards;
 - housing support services;
 - nurse agencies;
 - short breaks and respite services for adults and children;
 - adoption services;
 - fostering services;
 - care of boarding pupils.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The White Paper: Aiming for Excellence, published in March 1999 by the Scottish Executive, set out the intention to develop national care standards, these to be in place for commencement of the proposed Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, in April 2002.
- 2.2. This third tranche of draft standards has been devised by separate working groups accountable to a National Care Standards Committee. These groups have included representatives of service providers, regulators, practitioners and, where practical, service users and carers.

3. RESPONSE SUMMARY

- 3.1. A copy of the Council's response for homologation is attached at Appendix 1 and has also been placed with the consultation papers in the Member's Library.
- 3.2. Moves towards devising national standards are welcomed and in broad terms there is no major criticism of the content of standards. The emphasis throughout continues to be on outcome standards which rightly give a focus to the anticipated benefits of any service to the users. Reference to input standards is included in many standards statements but it must be expected that further work will be required to define the staffing and service requirement necessary to achieve desired outcomes for service users.

- 3.3. With minor exceptions the standards are considered relevant, reasonable and to be written in easily understood language and produced in clear formats. This third tranche of standards relate to several areas where there are few published standards, such as in relation to respite and fostering services, and the work undertaken by the Executive will be valuable to providers, regulators and service users.
- 3.4. In general the third tranche illustrates learning from earlier tranches, giving better context to some of the wider service developments/initiatives taking place, particularly in the learning disabilities field. However, examples are again identified where emphasis is given to traditional service models. Past criticisms expressed by this Council about format and consistency have been partially addressed and when client standards are presented as stand-alone documents then cross-client group introductory information should be fairly consistent. The approach of breaking down standards into stages of pre-service, service use and moving on was considered especially helpful.
- 3.5. This Council's response particularly focuses on several of the standard sets but particularly on currently unregistered childrens services of fostering and adoption. These standards are considered generally relevant but need to be set alongside national strategies which will require support from the Executive.

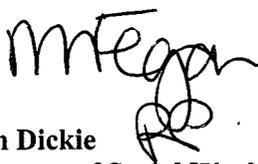
4. CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. There are no immediate implications arising for the Council. Longer term resourcing needs will be more clearly identified upon finalisation of national standards.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Committee is asked to:

- (i) homologate this Council's response to the consultation;
- (ii) remit the Director of Social Work to bring forward further reports as changes in regulation and proposed developments in national standards arise.



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Director of Social Work
12 September 2001

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North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

Introduction

Whilst it is fully acknowledged that there are major time pressures in devising and finalising standards the opportunity for fuller response has been hindered by the brevity of the consultation period and it coinciding with the main annual leave periods. This Council's most detailed response has been reserved for standards on children's services of fostering and adoption and a number of the adult services. Whilst detailed comment is not provided regarding all services, comment from senior officers regarding the standards has generally been very positive and there is broad agreement that with modest revision these standards will provide an initial basis for nationally agreed standards.

General points regarding format and content

1. North Lanarkshire Council welcomes the draft standards, acknowledges the efforts of the many work groups in defining these standards and recognises that a number of the previously proposed format changes have been taken into account. For the most part there is little to disagree with in terms of standards content, these largely alluding to commonly agreed desired outcomes for service users. Similarly, the adoption of a set of common principle/value statements at the commencement of each set of standards emphasises the commonality of social care services and on that basis alone is helpful.
2. Whilst the removal of the tabular format allows easier reading of the standards, where it has continued to be applied (in the Criminal Justice service example), there was a clearer link to input standards relevant to each outcome being sought. A hybrid solution, through removal of the tables but inclusion of general reference to input standards required in each of the client service sections, may be the best option.
3. Presentation of many standards in the context of phases: pre placement, placement and moving on, provides an organisational framework which will be helpful to service users/carers and regulators. Similarly the summary of standards statements in the introduction to each section is positively helpful.
4. Preambles to the standards for services for adults now sufficiently acknowledge the service diversity in that field but some examples can still be found in the detail which give emphasis to more dated models of care.
5. Whilst much has been done to achieve consistency in format and language there is scope identified for identical wording to be used in relation to standards definition common to all groups. A good example would be the wording of standards in relation to complaints, which is similar in each section but in fact varies.

CHILDRENS SERVICES

General comments

It was considered that the main principles were clear and focused. This reflected their relevance to all parties involved in each of the services and the rights of birth parents, for example, to be regarded positively whilst accepting that agencies responsibilities and duties have to consider the child's needs as paramount.

Where standards are not specifically referred to it should be presumed that there is agreement with the proposed standards.

North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

Services for children and young people who are adopted

Standard 2

It should be noted that not all plans for children who are unable to return home are for adoption. The same standards should be in place for all permanency plans, for example, Parental Responsibilities Orders.

A 12 week time-scale is short. In North Lanarkshire the time-scale is currently 14 weeks. That time-scale takes account of work required at each stage of the process and would fail to meet the proposed time-scales for a large number of children. Delays for children at this stage in the adoption plan process must be monitored to avoid drift. It is also important that recognition is given to the time-scale where decisions are made about permanency in the LAA process.

Standard 4.2

Agencies are often unable to recruit a range of families to meet the current and projected needs of their children. This resource issue is on the National Adoption agenda in terms of resource sharing between agencies and inter-agency sharing of policies. The wording of this standard is not clear.

Standard 5.5

There needs to be clarity about the purpose of children attending the Adoption Panel and members would need to be clear about their expectations where children were present.

Standard 8.1

Agreed. It is recognised that delays can occur at any or every stage of the process and this can lead to considerable delay in achieving the final outcomes for children. In setting this standard it should be noted that the Agency does not have any influence over delays which occur through the Childrens Hearing System or court processes. These issues are being raised through the BAAF Committee, the BAAF Legal Executive and ADSW and should be taken forward by the Scottish Executive.

Standard 9.2

Smaller agencies will not have well developed adoption support services and will need to have service agreements in place with other agencies. There are resource and funding issues which must be taken into account to ensure that services are available in a consistent format in Scotland.

*** Standard 11.2**

This issue of a national adoption allowances scheme has been raised with the Scottish Executive through the BAAF Committee. There is currently inconsistency in the implementation of adoption allowance schemes in Scotland which financially disadvantages adopters in certain areas.

* North Lanarkshire has a flexible adoption allowance scheme and support services which recognises that adoption for the group of children who cannot return home is complex.

Standard 14.6

It must be acknowledged that birth parents are not always able to recognise the importance of providing up to date information for the benefit of the child in later life. They may not want to maintain any contact with adoption agencies where their children have been placed for adoption or they may move frequently or outwith the area. This can be developed through the implementation of past adoption plans including contact arrangements.

Standards 15.3 and 16

To achieve these standards smaller local authorities, which may not have prioritised specialist adoption services due to the small number of adoption enquiries, may have to consider entering into service agreements with adoption agencies.

North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

Services for birth relatives

Standard 17.1

Birth parents currently often receive advice, information and support from the same Social Worker who is also providing services to the child. Recognition needs to be given to the particular needs of birth families - in particular birth parents, during this process and following the adoption order being granted, and including the allocation of the birth parents' case to a separate worker.

Standard 18

There are resourcing and matching issues to be addressed if this standard is to be achieved.

Standard 19.3

Greater clarity is required about the purpose of the birth parent's presence at the Adoption Panel. It is an agency decision-making process and birth parents have the opportunity to make representations through the Childrens Hearing System, LAA Review system and the court process.

Standard 19.4 -7

It is important that birth parents' views are clearly understood, recorded and represented at each formal stage of the process, ensuring that decisions which are made ensure that the child's needs are paramount.

Standard 21.4

It is important that birth parents/families are given every opportunity to let the child know that they support the child's move to an adoptive family and this would include meeting the prospective adopters. There will be circumstances where it will not be in the child's best interest for the adopters to be identified to the birth family.

Standard 22.2

Agreed. Whilst birth parents are important the needs of the child must remain paramount.

Services to adoptive parents and prospective adopted parents

Standard 25.1

To achieve this standard funding for a National Campaigns should continue to be on the Scottish Executive agenda but must take account of the local needs as well as national gaps in resources.

Standard 25.4 - 5

The recruitment strategy needs to identify the most inclusive way of ensuring that people are not disadvantaged by their ethnicity. In areas where the ethnic population is very small there will be a resource issue for the Executive in supporting the production of a wide range of information.

Standard 35.1

There may be circumstances where it is not in the best interests of applicants to be advised at the Panel of the recommendation. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that information is shared with applicants sensitively.

Standard 44.8

It is recognised that health issues not known at the time of placement but found at a later stage are of importance to the child. It is vital that full medical information is available about both birth families but this is often difficult to obtain about birth fathers. The importance of this needs to be stressed to birth parents in ensuring the ongoing health of their birth child.

Standard 46

This standard does not relate to overseas adoption.

North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

Foster Care Agencies

Standard 1.2

The issues of competency based assessments and other professional qualifications for foster carers is being addressed on a national level with each authority responsible for setting competencies. Further discussion will be welcomed to take forward nationally agreed competencies and the resource rates linked with competencies.

Standards 16 - 17

Agreed in principle. However, there is currently no reward scheme in operation.

Standards 18.2 - 6

Recruitment campaigns and the national strategy to develop the fostering service must continue to promote the range of foster carers. This will be more difficult in some areas and recognition needs to be given to resource sharing and the costs attached to the payment of inter-agency fees.

The Care and Welfare of Boarding Pupils

Standard 1.3

More specific standards should be considered in relation to quality of accommodation, sharing facilities - definition of home comforts, numbers sharing bedrooms, personal space and privacy issues.

Standard 4.1

The need for updated checks on a regular basis also needs to be considered in its wider context, for other residential settings and for foster carers and members of their families.

Standards 9.2- 9.5

Arrangements are in place to ensure appropriate checks are undertaken where staying with friends and others outwith the establishment.

Short Breaks and Respite Care

General Comments

The introduction sets out clearly the purpose of introducing the standards and the benefits and responsibilities attached to the standards for service users and service providers. It goes some way to promote the use of respite and short breaks for carers who have reservations about the benefits to the child or young person and themselves.

In particular the standards promote the qualitative assessment of establishments/substitute carers in meeting certain criteria including issues of safety and protection.

Due to the inclusion of resources both for children and adults the language is not always acceptable for the purposes of childrens services and while it promotes advocacy it might be difficult for children and young people to feel they are being heard.

Standard 10

Agreed. Consideration needs to be given to the different statutory requirements which will impact on the different types of establishment/care arrangements.

North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

Standard 16. 4

Wording is unclear.

STANDARDS FOR ADULT SERVICES

Criminal Justice Supported Accommodation Services

In the North Lanarkshire area and that of our grouping partner, South Lanarkshire, Criminal Justice Supported Accommodation is virtually non-existent. The preamble states quite clearly that the bulk of supported accommodation for offenders is based in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Highlands and Orkney.

Access to these resources for North Lanarkshire offenders is extremely limited, with many hostels refusing to consider residents from this area. It is hoped that this resourcing issue will be addressed by the Scottish Executive Justice Department, within their future consultation exercise, "Strategy for Criminal Justice Supported Accommodation Services".

The standards were considered to be relevant and comprehensive offering offenders and social workers greater scope for more structured, focused assessments and developmental work in relation to addressing offending behaviour.

The use of common terminology and lack of substantial distinction between criminal justice standards and those in other sections recognises that people should not be pigeon-holed into set categories of care, but can progress through different resources.

Issues of restraint, mediation and accessibility of services to people from minority ethnic backgrounds were not considered to be adequately dealt with and it is this Council's view that these be given focus in any revision.

Day Care (Support) Services

The day care services preamble captures the desirable individualised characteristics of support and the need to move away from traditional ways of delivering services. However, the standards themselves are largely pitched at very obviously measurable (and often building-based) levels.

Standard 3 (Page 62) which is specific to buildings, refers to a "non-stigmatising environment." Many day centres, by their very nature, would not meet this standard. The component parts of this standard well illustrate tensions set out in this Council's response to 2nd tranche standards that person-centred plans and outcomes often conflict with grouped methods of service delivery. It is therefore unhelpful that standards include references such as "*the kitchen* will be designed to....." Such statements promote an approach that day services will, essentially, continue to be building-based, when in fact that it is the approach providers and purchasers are trying to move on from. The remainder of that sentence is appropriate.

Housing and Support Services

Standards in this area are welcomed. – It is accepted that the range and diversity of provision will require application of standards to be undertaken through a well-considered, "fit for purpose" approach.

The emphasis on outcomes for this group is as relevant to all other services. However, given the nature of adult placements the difficulties likely to be experienced in users' reporting shortcomings must be recognised. In these circumstances the need for clear input standards is apparent for service users, regulators and providers.

North Lanarkshire Council Comments on the Third Tranche of Draft National Care Standards

The wording of the text of Page 87, final paragraph, refers to decisions on registration of housing support services. The wording appears to emphasise that registration will be a phased process, subject firstly to tests on management and staff suitability. It is suggested that in assessing whether to register or not, emphasis should be given to user vulnerability and level of care/support requirements. Further clarification on this would be beneficial.

Standard 4 may create confusion in relation to roles and responsibilities between service providers and purchasers (usually local authorities). The detail in the text of this standard refers to care management information and changes in service levels or support plans, without clearly defining where these responsibilities lie.

Short Breaks and Respite Care

An edit issue is identified in that repeated reference is made to "child and young person" as the primary service user within the adult respite standards.

It is noted that similar but separate standards are provided for adult and childrens respite services. An existing model in North Lanarkshire is for units to accommodate adults and children in the same unit but at separate times. In such circumstances the advantage of "specialist respite staff" who can effectively manage turnover and short-term care inputs has to be measured against the loss of "specialist client sector staff" and difficulties in creating adult/child cultures within a single service. Particularly in residential/nursing settings the need for clear and specific input standards will be pertinent, given its unique features of turnover and group compatibility.

Whilst the introduction to standards in this area reflects the wide diversity of the options to be made available the content tends to relate to the more traditional residential and nursing models. It is acknowledged that devising a single set of standards in this area inevitably cannot cover all service options.

Page 132 Homely Environment - illustrates the Executive's understanding of the problems which can arise from using "spare capacity" in residential and nursing homes for respite purposes. This Council's view is that there is a clear need for alternative types of short break developments, currently more prevalent in the disabilities field, to also be translated into services for older people and their carers.

The focus within the standards is generally on the person receiving the service, this despite the objectives of short term and respite placements equally being relevant to carers' needs. Consideration should be given to re-examination of whether certain key components could also be linked to standards most relevant to carers, for example, carers being consulted about their relative's preferences or written information being submitted post placement on any specific aspects of the placement.

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17 September 2001