

AGENDA ITEM No. 10

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: SUPPORT AND ADVICE SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD A LARYNGECTOMY AND OTHER CANCER RELATED DISABILITIES
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 26 AUGUST 2004	Ref: dm	

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT / INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the support and advice needs of people who have had a laryngectomy following cancer of the larynx (voice box), and other cancer related disabilities.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In June 2004 Macmillan Cancer Relief published a report that showed over £126m of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance went unclaimed by people with a terminal diagnosis of cancer. In Scotland 64% with a terminal cancer diagnosis did not claim the benefits to which they were entitled. Anyone given a terminal cancer diagnosis with a life expectancy of less than six months automatically qualifies on application for the higher rate of one or other of these benefits.
- 2.2 One group of people who have particular difficulty accessing benefits are people who have had a laryngectomy following a diagnosis of cancer of the larynx. A total laryngectomy involves surgical removal of the larynx. In this event people have to breathe through a permanent opening, or stoma, in the front of their neck, which can be a source of great exertion and discomfort. They also have to learn to talk in a different way, either through surgical voice restoration, artificial voice aids or what is known as oesophageal voice.
- 2.3 Despite the physical and psychological problems associated with this operation, people who have had a laryngectomy often find that they are denied benefits as the extent of their difficulties may be less visible than other forms of disability.
- 2.4 Locally the Lanarkshire Speak Easy Group support people who have had a laryngectomy, of whom there are 100 in Lanarkshire. Their secretary, Ann Muir, is on the Management Committee of North Lanarkshire Carers Together, an umbrella organisation funded by Social Work. Speak Easy are supported by Speech and Language Therapists employed by NHS Lanarkshire. The group have made representations on the subject to Tom Clarke MP, and he has met with the Convener of Social Work to explore ways of improving the situation.

### **3. PROPOSALS / CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1. The Social Work Department provides benefits advice and support to claimants across all parts of North Lanarkshire. In 2003/04 £4.5m of benefit was accessed as a direct result of this service. As in other parts of the country, there remain issues about targeting this service at the most vulnerable sections of our communities. Clearly, this includes people who have cancer related disabilities who may not be aware of their correct entitlement. The Department will continue to promote early intervention so that vulnerable people receive advice and support at the most appropriate time. There is scope to heighten awareness of the entitlement to benefit amongst relevant NHS staff, and for this reason it is proposed to remit this report for the consideration of the North Lanarkshire Health & Care Partnership.
- 3.2. As part of the range of efforts to address this problem, MacMillan Cancer Relief fund three posts based in the Citizens Advice Bureau in Airdrie. Funding is for three years and started in 2003. The service is Lanarkshire-wide and has worked with over 800 people to date.
- 3.3. The Council's Scrutiny Panel – Strategy and Policy Implementation, has established a Review of Information and Advice Services in North Lanarkshire. It is proposed that this report is remitted to the Review Group, to ensure that the needs of people with cancers are recognised and promoted within these services.

### **4. FINANCIAL / PERSONNEL / LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. There are no direct financial, personnel or legal implications for the Council at this stage.

### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1. Committee is asked to:
- (i) Note the national position in relation to benefit claims for people with cancer; and
  - (ii) Remit this report to the Scrutiny Panel – Strategy and Policy Implementation Review Group on Information and Advice Services for their consideration; and
  - (iii) Remit to the North Lanarkshire Health & Care Partnership for their consideration; and
  - (iv) Otherwise note the contents of this report.



**Jim Dickie**  
**Director of Social Work**  
**12 August 2004**

*For further information on this report please contact Duncan Mackay, Head of Social Work Development TEL: (01698 332024)*