

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**REPORT**

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: SOCIAL WORK INSPECTION AGENCY
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 10 MARCH 2004	Ref: DM/AB	

**1. Purpose of Report / Introduction**

This report advises Committee of the establishment of a new Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) and seeks homologation of the Council's response to a draft Framework document issued for consultation.

**2. Background**

2.1 The Scottish Executive has announced plans to replace the Social Work Services Inspectorate with a Social Work Inspection Agency in April 2005. It has invited comment on a draft Framework document setting out arrangements for the new agency by 4 February 2005.

**3. Proposals**

3.1 SWIA has been established to carry out the following functions:

- Inspection, review and reporting across social work and social care services
- Sectoral and aspect evaluations of social work and social care services
- Commissions from the Scottish Ministers, relevant Departments of the Scottish Executive and other bodies
- Provision of professional advice to Scottish Ministers and others.

3.2 The new agency will focus on inspection and will be at arms length from policy responsibilities. It will be directly accountable to Ministers and lie within the Children, Young People and Social Care Group of the Scottish Executive Education Department.

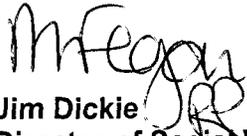
#### **4. The Council's Response**

- 4.1 The Council's response (attached at Appendix 1) welcomes robust inspection of Social Work services. The main issues raised are concerned with how the agency will relate to the significant number of other bodies who audit, inspect and regulate Social Work and partnership working. There is already overlap between the functions of, for example, Audit Scotland, the Mental Welfare Commission, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, the Care Commission, the Joint Future Unit etc.
- 4.2 The Council's response emphasises the need to avoid duplication and be clear about wider governance arrangements. It also queries whether the intention is for the new agency to inspect all Social Work services, or just those run by local authorities. The language of the document appears to leave this open to different interpretations.

#### **5. Recommendations**

Committee is asked to:

- (i) homologate the Council's response to the draft Framework document for the Social Work Inspection Agency;
- (ii) provide a further report once the agency is established to a future Committee; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

  
**Jim Dickie**  
**Director of Social Work**  
**3 February 2005**

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

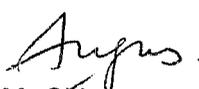
## Appendix 1



Our Ref: DM/AB  
Your Ref:  
Contact: Duncan Mackay  
Tel: 01698 332024  
Fax: 01698 332095  
E-Mail: TierneyL@northlan.gov.uk  
Date: 27 January 2005

Mr Angus Skinner  
Chief Social Work Inspector  
Social Work Services Inspectorate  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Social Work  
Jim Dickie, Director  
Scott House, 73-77 Merry Street  
Motherwell ML1 1JE  
[www.northlan.gov.uk](http://www.northlan.gov.uk)

  
Dear Mr Skinner

### **Social Work Inspection Agency**

I write in response to your request for comments on the establishment of the new Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) from April 2005 and the Draft Framework document.

North Lanarkshire Council welcomes the steps taken to create robust and independent arrangements for the inspection of Social Work. There is a strong culture of best value and achieving continuous improvement within the Council and this sits comfortably with the aspirations of the new agency.

Whilst there seem to be explicit governance and accountability arrangements for the new agency within the Executive, what is much less certain is how it will relate to a number of other bodies which carry out a range of audit, review, evaluation and inspection functions.

Social Work is at present under a significant degree of scrutiny both in the media and through processes such as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review. Ministerial responsibility for Social Work is already dispersed across a number of portfolios. The number of different bodies assessing performance and services has never been greater and, whilst supportive of the drive for performance improvement, it is not helpful or sensible to be accountable to so many different bodies. Apart from blurring lines of governance this brings additional burdens to local authority Social Work in terms of resourcing and capacity.

In this respect there is already some overlap amongst the work of bodies such as Audit Scotland, The Care Commission, NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and the Mental Welfare Commission. The Joint Future Unit carry out annual evaluations of partnership working in community care and the NHS Performance Assessment Framework also concerns itself with some aspects of this. The Draft Framework omits reference to the critical relationship the new agency must have with these bodies. This is of great importance to local authorities for clarity of purpose and avoidance of duplication, as it is far from uncommon to be asked for similar information by a number of different agencies.

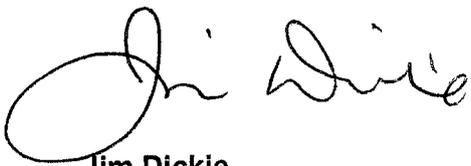
The language in the document is ambiguous about whether the agency will inspect only local authority Social Work services or include services provided by others as, for example, happens for Education. Annex A Page 14 under "Functions" states that "SWIA's new programme of inspections of local authority social work services will provide an independent audit to inform policy and practice across all social work services." It clearly won't provide such a comprehensive audit if it confines itself solely to local authority services. Elsewhere it is possible to interpret the language of the document in a different way. This will be an important point to clarify.

It will be, of course, essential for the new agency to ensure that service users and carers are facilitated to participate effectively in its work.

I trust you find these comments helpful and that they will be taken into full consideration when finalising the Framework.

Finally I recognise that you will not be part of the new agency and would like to convey my best wishes to you for the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Dickie', written in a cursive style.

**Jim Dickie**  
**Director of Social Work**