

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL
REPORT**

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: PRIORITISATION OF SOCIAL WORK RESOURCES
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 12 JANUARY 2005	Ref: DM/AB	

1. Purpose of Report/Introduction

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the widening gap between assessed need and available Social Work resources, and to seek approval for an eligibility framework to prioritise the use of such resources.

2. Background

2.1. In common with the experience of Social Work services across Scotland and the United Kingdom, the gap between assessed need and available resources is widening. Consequently the capacity of Councils to meet a high proportion of assessed need is declining. In the absence of sufficient additional resources to address the gap it is necessary to provide staff with guidance as to the prioritisation of need and use of resources.

2.2. There are well documented reasons for this situation, primarily:

- The impact of demographic change, such as increase in the population of older people
- Changes in health care which mean, for example, that many children with significant disabilities not only survive infancy where they may not previously have done so, but can expect to live with those conditions throughout adulthood
- The impact of societal changes such as parental drug misuse
- Chronic under-funding of core services, such as those for children
- Rising public expectations and demand for highly personalised services

2.3. In this context the 21st Century Review of Social Work is expected to acknowledge this gap in its forthcoming report. COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and ADSW (Association of Directors of Social Work) have called for a national review of Social Work funding. The C21 review is also expected to support principles of early intervention to prevent crisis as the basis of best social work practice, a position that is increasingly jeopardised by resource constraints.

3. The Current Position

- 3.1. Committee is aware, from regular reports, that there are significant areas of budget pressure facing Social Work. In all sectors of activity difficult decisions are made to try and balance competing demands against available resources.
- 3.2. Many Councils are tackling this problem by introducing eligibility criteria and/or charges for some or all services. Officers recently contacted all Councils in Scotland and only two said they had no criteria either in place or being developed. There is no specific national guidance or policy from the Scottish Executive on the matter.
- 3.3. In England, the government policy "Fair Access to Care Services" requires Councils to produce and publish eligibility criteria for services. The eligibility framework is typically constructed by:
- Identifying four factors that are judged key to maintaining an individual's independence, namely autonomy; physical and mental health and safety; the management of daily routines; home environment and involvement in family and wider community life
 - The level of impact faced by an individual if the issues relating to independence are not addressed. That level of impact is critical, substantial, moderate or low.
- 3.4. In North Lanarkshire staff use priority indicators to guide timescales for undertaking assessment. They operate without a formal eligibility framework but within the context of available resources. Circumstances that may appear to be of pressing need at the point of referral can, once assessment is completed, assume a lower priority. There are inevitably subjective elements to meeting assessed need as no two individual's needs or circumstances are identical. When services are not provided, the decision of officers may be subject to challenge by individuals, carers and elected members. In reality the capacity of a Council to meet assessed need is always a relative one - relative to the amount of presenting need and the extent of available resources.
- 3.5. Whilst it is, therefore, difficult to adopt and apply comprehensive eligibility criteria, it is evident that Councils with agreed criteria are able to provide staff with a Committee endorsed, decision making framework. Consequently it is proposed to introduce a prioritisation framework to govern eligibility for services, as a means of managing the allocation of scarce resources.
- 3.6. The likely consequence of this is that some services that are currently provided or purchased may not be considered essential to fund, whilst some areas of unmet need may not be prioritised in future.
- 3.7. There is also a need to examine income generation, for example, by reviewing charging policies, to maximise capacity to provide or purchase services.

4. Proposed Prioritisation Framework

- 4.1. The proposed prioritisation framework is set out at Appendix 1. The extent of the Council's ability to meet need is governed by the availability of resources. Eligibility for services will be awarded to needs considered to fall into Priorities 1 and 2. It is the need and not the person that fall into the eligibility band. Not of all a person's needs will necessarily fall into the same banding (eg some needs may be a higher priority than others). Priority 3 needs will seek to be met where possible, but this will be subject to available resources. Priority 4 needs will not be met.

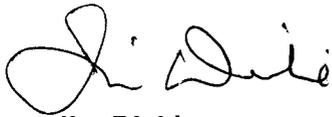
- 4.2. Whilst it is proposed that the framework takes immediate effect, further work on more detailed guidance to staff will be required and the impact of implementation monitored with a view to periodic review.

5. **Financial/Personnel/Legal/Policy Implications**

- 5.1. There are already major management challenges in managing need within available resources, as well as significant, identifiable future pressures. The adoption of a prioritisation system will have further implications that require to be rigorously assessed.
- 5.2. In terms of legal responsibility, the Council is required, under the terms of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, to assess need. There have been various legal judgements about a local authority's obligations once need has been assessed. *MacGregor v South Lanarkshire Council (2000)* determined that, where needs have been assessed and services were not immediately available, the local authority must consider what alternative services could be provided, that may meet some or all of the assessed needs until such time as the appropriate services become available. The judgement also stated that, in such circumstances, the local authority should control access to scarce services on the basis of comparative "greatest need" and not on any other basis such as waiting time for services.

6. **Recommendation**

- 6.1. Committee is asked to:
- (i) Approve the prioritisation framework set out in Appendix 1; and
 - (ii) Request a future report from the Director of Social Work on the impact of implementation; and
 - (ii) Otherwise note the contents of this report.



Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
8 December, 2005

For further information on this report please contact Duncan Mackay, Head of Social Work Development, telephone 01698 332024

Appendix 1

Priority 1 Critical risk where serious harm or loss of life may occur

- There is an immediate risk to the person's survival
- Serious abuse to self or others has occurred, or is suspected to the extent that protection measures are required
- There are extensive and constant care and support needs on an ongoing or time limited basis that, if not met, present an immediate risk to the person or others
- The carer relationship(s) has collapsed and there is a need for immediate care and support

Priority 2 Significant risk where harm may occur now or in the near future

- Abuse to self or others has occurred or is at risk of occurring
- There are extensive care and support needs on an ongoing or time limited basis
- Absence or inadequacy of care and support is causing the person significant distress and their health to deteriorate
- The carer relationship(s) is at risk of collapse and the person needs care and support

Priority 3 Moderate risk where harm may occur if action is not taken in the longer term

- There are some care and/or support needs that will, if not met, impair the person's longer term capacity to regain, maintain or sustain their independence or living arrangements
- The person can make their needs known and ask for appropriate assistance when needed
- The carer relationship(s) is strained and unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term

Priority 4 Low risk where a person may be disadvantaged, or their quality of life reduced, if needs are not met

- There are some care and/or support needs but the person can maintain their independence or living arrangements if these are not met, or can make other arrangements to have them met
- The person can make their needs known and ask for/arrange appropriate assistance
- The person has a support network
- The needs are such that they can be met by provision other than social care services