

To: SOCIAL WORK (OPERATIONS AND SERVICES) SUB COMMITTEE		Subject: A SUMMARY REPORT OF WELFARE RIGHTS ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD APRIL 2005-MARCH 2006
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 3 OCTOBER 2006	Ref: GMcl/CMcK	

1. Purpose of Report / Introduction

- 1.1. To advise Committee of the work undertaken and benefit income generated by the Department's Welfare Rights Officers in the financial year 2005-2006.
- 1.2. To advise Committee that the period for the collection of Welfare Rights statistical information has been changed to the financial year April to March.

2. Background

- 2.1. Welfare Rights Officers within Social Work provide support and assistance to staff about the range of state benefits and assist service users claim all benefits to which they are entitled. The main thrust of all Welfare Rights work is the maximisation of income for individuals, for the Council and for the community as a whole. This forms an integral part of the Council's Social Inclusion Strategy.
- 2.2. The complexity of the benefits system, the capacity for the review of assessments and decision making and disincentives to claim benefits resulting in low uptake, ensures that general and specialist welfare rights services are crucial to individuals and families dependent on benefits. Given the poverty indicators within North Lanarkshire, Social Work mobilises its resources to tackle poverty amongst service users and in the wider community.
- 2.3. The Department's Reception Services provide service users and members of the public with advice and assistance with a wide variety of benefit related issues. A full benefits check is offered to all new service users. Income maximisation also plays a vital role in longer term Social Work services such as hospital discharge, Community Care, and Children, Families and Justice.
- 2.4. Services which the Department can offer include:
 - completing claim forms and giving advice on the full range of social security benefits;
 - providing supportive evidence;
 - liaising with the Benefits Agency, Public Utilities and Housing Authorities;
 - crisis intervention to prevent fuel disconnection, eviction, loss of benefit books, etc;
 - challenging unfavourable decisions;
 - accompanying service users to interviews and reviews;
 - resolving a range of other difficulties which claimants can experience.
 - Representation at Appeal Tribunals

2.5. All fieldwork staff undertake a comprehensive training programme delivered by Welfare Rights staff to equip them with the skills and knowledge base to offer a professional service. This training programme is supplemented by specialist courses, seminars and consultation with Welfare Rights Officers. The Training agenda has been expanded under the new management structure and is also, at times, open to voluntary sector staff. Appendix 1 details courses which are available.

3. Proposals / Considerations

- 3.1. It is important to note the distinct role of the Welfare Rights Officers to support the income maximisation service through consultation and guidance for fieldwork staff, training, representing clients at tribunals and hearings, and supporting specialist social work services.
- 3.2. The introduction of Tax and Pension Credits has resulted in massive changes to the way in which Benefits are now calculated and paid. Training materials and courses for Social Work staff have now been completely re-written and extended to take account of the introduction of Working Tax, Child Tax and State Pension Credits in recognition of the significant impact which these benefits will have.
- 3.3. Over the coming year the Welfare Rights Service will be contributing to strategic activity around anti-poverty approaches.
- 3.4. As part of the Department's role in providing support to the North Lanarkshire Information and Advice Forum, (which is an umbrella structure linking voluntary and statutory advice providers) Social Work Welfare Rights staff are involved in establishing and co-ordinating a cross-sectoral Welfare Rights Practitioners Forum.
- 3.5. The period for recording statistical returns has been changed from January to December, to April to March to fall in line with the financial year. The figures below represent the income generated in the period April 2005-March 2006

Income Generated in the Period April 2005 – March 2006

Office	Total
Airdrie	£787,683.48
Bellshill	£1,878,574.09
Coatbridge	£1,558,005.13
Cumbernauld	£654,884.93
Motherwell	£1,238,106.35
Shotts	£1,001,498.12
Wishaw	£1,040,326.84
Hospitals	£176,082.19
Supported Employment	£243,480.23
Total	£8,578,641.36

- 3.6. The variation in returns reflects vacancies, long-term sickness and members of staff undertaking the qualified Social Worker training, and the level of referrals to individual offices. Measures were taken in the course of the year to provide alternative cover to those offices most affected by sickness and training requirements. All offices are now operating at full establishment levels.
- 3.7. Considering the timeframe for reporting to Committee an update of the Area Team statistics for the year 2006/2007 at 31 August 2006 is as follows.

Income Generated up to 31st August 2006

Office	Total
Airdrie	£318,922
Bellshill	£895,394
Coatbridge	£835,998
Cumbernauld	£427,456
Motherwell	£335,777
Shotts	£348,355
Wishaw	£361,270
Hospitals	£84,716
Supported Employment	Separate figures for this period not yet available
Total	£3,607,888

- 3.8. It should be noted that these figures are based upon known, and a small number of outstanding claims with potential income where claims are lodged but the outcome is unknown. Actual figures for such potential income will be reflected in the figures for the next annual report. Many people assisted by the Welfare Rights Service to lodge, and follow through, claims for benefit do not return if the outcome is successful.
- 3.9. Also not recorded are the returns from giving advice and information at talks and other events such as Redundancy Support, through the PACE initiative, as the nature of such information and advice giving does not lead to the collection of such information without excessive use of resources.
- 3.10. A result of a successful Welfare Rights intervention, where individuals are awarded extra benefit, frequently means that because of increased income they are better able to manage their own affairs and do not require further Social Work services.
- 3.11. Given that more than half of DLA claims appealed are successful, representation is a core element of a WRO's work. In the year April 2005-March 2006 WROs represented at over 900 appeals.

4. Financial / Personnel / Legal / Policy Implications

- 4.1. The activity of Welfare Rights Officers assists the Council promote its Social Inclusion policy by enabling individuals to increase income and therefore user choice.
- 4.2. There are no Financial/Legal or Policy issues.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Committee is asked to note the contents of the report



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Director of Social Work
4 August 2006

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Appendix 1

Welfare Rights Training Plan 2006/2007

C – Course B - Briefing

Topic	Aims & Objectives of the Course and Learning Outcomes
5 Day-Additions to pack. 1. WRO Role & Remit 2. Tutors Pack (including more new exercises/activities)	1 To clarify the role, remit and responsibilities of the WRO for all Area Team and HQ staff 2 To assist all presenters of the 5-Day course by giving a template for them to follow.
Entry to Residential Care (C)	To enable workers to do a full benefit check in order to maximise income for the service user which will reduce Council expenditure. To be confident and accurate in completion of paperwork, e.g. FA 1. To be able to identify and calculate, the benefits which should be in place, the charge to the service user and cost to the Council
Throughcare (B)	To be able to identify those service users, 16/25s whose incomes are now the responsibility of the Social Work Department after transfer from the DWP under the Regulation of Care (Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland). To identify those who still remain within the normal benefit system. Advise of procedures for such identification. Identify which benefits are available to each group.
Industrial Injuries (C)	To identify the conditions, medical and administrative, for award of an IIDB for Industrial Accidents and Diseases. To understand how interaction between conditions can affect an award of percentage disablement. To assist service users in preparation of claim and possible appeal.
DLA for Children (C)	To give an overview of DLA in general, then relate it specifically to named groups. To identify the special requirements needed for the award of DLA for children and how to address them.
DLA for Sensory Impairment(C)	To give an overview of DLA in general, then relate it specifically to named groups. To identify the special requirements needed for the award of DLA people with sensory impairment and how to address them.
Supported Employment (C)	To identify the benefits which people in supported employment can carry with them, the interaction between benefits and the Tax Credit system. To highlight the benefits which they may lose and linking periods if the placement is not successful. To underline the positive effects of working and retaining benefits and the interaction between benefits and work. The effects on income for families and carers.
Link Carers (B)	To identify the requirements for payment of, and internal procedures for, Link Carers Allowance and the interaction with the benefits system, and LA systems.
ILF Presentation	Presentation from ILF to WR meeting. To identify the criteria for award of ILF and the interaction with Council systems and the Benefit system.
Mental Health/SMI (C)	To identify the benefits which someone suffering with a mental health difficulty may attract, and the processes for claiming them. To identify the specific requirements of the benefits and show how someone in such a position might meet the criteria. Specifically DLA, Incapacity Benefit and the criteria for SMI and the procedures for application for Council Tax Exemptions and for the Mobility Component of DLA.
Cancer Patients (C)	To identify the special circumstances, and needs, which may apply to cancer patients and the benefits to which they may be entitled. To explain the application procedures and the criteria for these benefits.
Prison Discharge (C)	To identify the benefits which may apply to discharged prisoners and criteria for award. To differentiate between those on remand and those who have been sentenced and the differing entitlements apropos each group.

Topic	Aims & Objectives of the Course and Learning Outcomes
Disabled Young People (C)	To identify the benefits available to disabled young people and the effects of claiming these benefits on their, and their carers, income. In the Community, in Residential Care, Roles and Responsibilities of Appointees etc.
HB/CTB (C)	To identify the basic requirements for award of benefit. To explain the procedures for claiming both benefits and the associated schemes, e.g. Discretionary Housing Payments, CTB Discount Schemes. The associated Appeal procedures, what to look for, technical requirements etc. HB/CTB Appeals protocol.
Criminal Injuries Compensation (C)	How to identify possible claimants. To identify the criteria for award and to explain the application criteria and procedures.
Welfare to Work (C)	To identify the criteria for the Welfare to Work and all associated schemes and how they impact upon benefit entitlement. To communicate the interaction between these schemes and income maximisation.
Correct completion of FA1	To indicate how the FA1 form should be completed correctly. To ensure that all appropriate staff are aware of, confident and competent in filling out the form