

REPORT

To: SOCIAL WORK (OPERATIONS AND SERVICES) SUB COMMITTEE		Subject: SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE PROVIDERS	
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK			
Date: 5 DECEMBER 2006	Ref: JD/GM/JC		

1. **Purpose of Report/Introduction**

The purpose of the report is to advise Committee of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice: topic specific competencies for advisors and agencies, which will be a necessary accreditation for all information and advice advisors in the future.

2. **Background**

- 2.1. These topic specific competencies are part of a composite quality framework Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Services, which has been in use in housing advice services since 1995. The Standards have identified as the appropriate framework for agencies engaging "Approved Money Advisors" under the Debt Arrangement Scheme
- 2.2. The programme is being lead on behalf of the Scottish Executive by Homepoint Scotland (Communities Scotland), whose remit is to improve the scope and quality of housing information and advice services in Scotland.
- 2.3. Michael Bell Associates, on behalf of the Scottish Executive after detailed consultation developed the topic specific competencies for advisors and agencies operating welfare rights/benefits, income maximisation, money advice or debt counselling services.
- 2.4. Eighteen organisations from Welfare Rights, Trading Standards, Citizen Advice Bureaux and other voluntary sector agencies have been piloting the organisational standards.
- 2.5 The Standards framework is in three parts, comprising:
 - **Organisational standards**
 - **Topic specific competencies for advisors**
 - **Good practice guidance.**
- 2.6 The competencies detail the skills and knowledge which people giving advice or information on welfare rights/benefit, income maximisation, money advice and debt counselling should have in order to practice effectively.

2.7 Whilst all advisors and agencies must meet the generic competences, the topic specific competencies have three different levels:

- Type 1 – Active information, sign-posting and explanation
- Type 2 – Casework
- Type 3 – Advocacy, representation and mediation

Advisors who are type 2 or 3, also have to satisfy type 1 and 2 respectively.

2.8 The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers will be launched on 21st November 2006, at the Money Advice and Financial Inclusion conference being held in Glasgow.

3. Financial/Personnel/Legal/Policy Implications

3.1. The Council successfully bided for funding from the Scottish Executive Financial Inclusion budget to establish a project and employ a Financial Inclusion Development Officer and a Support Worker, who will ensure that the internal and external Information and Advice providers in North Lanarkshire meet the Standards.

3.2. The project based in Trading Standards, started on 9th October 2006. The project also has a budget to meet the demands of any training required by organisations in order for them to meet the standards / competencies.

4. Recommendation

4.1. The Standards when met, will ensure that any resident of North Lanarkshire Council will receive a high quality service from any Information and Advice agency funded by the Council.

4.2. The Committee is requested to note the report.

M Fegan RP.

Director of Social Work
2nd November 2006

For further information on this report please contact George McNally, Manager Social Work Strategy on telephone 01698 332555