

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE – 13 JANUARY 2015**

**WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE REVIEW**

**REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR - PEOPLE**

**ABSTRACT**

This report advises members of the outcome of the Welfare Rights Service Review.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee approves the recommendation that the Welfare Rights Service move to a localities based approach in the delivery of their services.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/ CORPORATE PLAN**

2.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

**Community Plan Priorities**

We are committed to the development of a new area based approach to the planning and delivery of services. This will offer communities a better way of working with the council and our partners to develop plans that focus on the economic, social and physical aspects of their area;

**Single Outcome Agreement**

We have improved the health and wellbeing of our people and inequalities are reduced

Individuals are supported in their own communities with good quality services

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Welfare Rights Service was recommended for a service review following the budget-setting process for 2014-2017. As with all service reviews the opportunity to deliver service efficiencies and savings was integral.

3.2 A review group was established, led by the Principal Contracting Officer, and comprising Revenues & Benefits Service Manager; Senior Housing Officer (Strategies and Plans); Service Manager (Children's Services); Welfare Rights Manager; Citizens Advice Board Manager; Chief Executive Officer Voluntary Action Angus; and a Welfare Rights Officer. The review group considered what the Welfare Rights Service do now and explored what the service could do better in the future as part of the continual improvement process to ensure a more efficient and effective service and better outcomes for individuals, families and our communities.

3.3 This review was undertaken at the same time as a multi-agency group were working to develop an Angus-wide Financial Inclusion Strategy, Report No 391/13 Transforming Angus – Shaping Services To Meet The Welfare Reform Challenge – Service Review Update, refers. It was acknowledged that the findings and recommendations of that review group would also inform the future role of the Welfare Rights Service (Report 391/13). It is also recognised that the Integration of Social Care and Health, with the move towards greater locality working, will impact the future design of services.

#### **4. CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 There is no statutory requirement to provide welfare rights advice to individuals; however, the need for such a service is not in doubt. The Christie Commission noted that the greatest challenge facing public services was to combat the negative outcomes for individuals and communities arising from deep-rooted inequalities. The effects of the Welfare Reform agenda have exacerbated these inequalities.
- 4.2 The welfare rights service in Angus has long been recognised as a service which aids social inclusion and reduces poverty by providing free, confidential, quality advice and information to the citizens of Angus. The service also provides welfare rights training to Angus Council staff and workers in the third sector.
- 4.3 The Welfare Rights Service is currently based in Forfar and has a net revenue budget for 2013/14 of £502,000. It is estimated that the financial gains received by service users as a direct result of welfare rights input in 2013/14 amounted to £4.21 million; with additional gains £1.36 million for those affected by cancer in partnership with the Macmillan project.

#### **5. OPTIONS**

- 5.1 The review group considered a range of options for service delivery, all of which are detailed below. In carrying out the options appraisal the following criteria were used and a scoring matrix developed.

- Policy Fit - contribution to the Council's key policy objectives as set out in the Council Plan
- Performance - high quality provision, customer centred services, accessibility to customers, good outcomes for individuals, families and communities
- Savings/Costs - potential savings/additional costs associated with the option
- Risks - any substantial risks/uncertainties associated with carrying out a particular option

##### 5.2 Maintaining the Current Service Provision (Do Nothing)

- 5.2.1 There were no particular problems identified with the current service provision. The service is very effective bringing in over £4 million in client gains for 2013/14. Feedback from service users and staff alike has been very positive;

##### 5.2.2 Potential Savings

There would be no immediate savings from maintaining the current service provision; however there will be opportunities to revisit the provision following the completion of the Financial Inclusion Strategy. Angus Council Report 391/13 recommended that ownership of the financial inclusion agenda needs to be allocated to a specific service and proposed that this be led by Welfare Rights who are already providing a number of the support elements. The report, which was approved, went on to say that this would require a change of emphasis and a realignment of resources within welfare rights. We cannot at this time predict the implications for the welfare rights service from this review.

##### 5.3 Locality Based Provision

- 5.3.1 This option is for the welfare rights service to develop a new area based approach to the delivery of their service. This approach will make the service more accessible and enable the team to better support individuals in their own communities. It will help the service link with other area based social care services, health and the third sector to provide better outcomes in future years for individuals, families and communities.
- 5.3.2 This model was the preferred choice of the review group which thought that it could offer a more effective way of partnership working with opportunities for better outcomes.

5.3.3 There are a range of potential savings that could be made when implementing an area based approach to the Welfare Rights Service. Given that the full impact of the review of the financial inclusion strategy is not complete and that the integration of social care and health is still in it development, it is not possible to identify exactly what savings could be made but the potential savings are likely to be up to £75,000.

#### 5.4 Outsourcing Model/Approach

5.4.1 This option is to outsource the service which would require a tender exercise to be carried out. The intelligence gathered by the group identified that it was unlikely that an alternative provider would come forward at this time and that other authorities who had gone down this route had not found it to be successful.

#### 5.4.2 Potential Savings

Outsourcing the service would require a tender exercise and the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations would apply with staff terms and conditions having to be being maintained. Accordingly, there would be no immediate savings from this option.

#### 5.5 Integrated Internal Model/Approach

5.5.1 This option looked at merging the roles of the People Directorate's Welfare Rights Officers, the Housing Rent Arrears Officers and the Revenues and Benefits Liaison Team Visiting Officers.

5.5.2 This option followed on from Angus Council Report 391/13 "Transforming Angus and Shaping Services to meet the Welfare Reform Challenge-Service Review Update". The report recommended an integrated Housing and Revenues and Benefits visiting officer and collection service. The welfare rights review group considered whether this approach could be widened to include the welfare rights service visiting function. There was general agreement that Option 4 was not feasible as there would be a legal conflict for welfare rights officers being authorised money advice workers and rent/council tax collectors for the council. Welfare rights also represent Angus residents in relation to housing benefit/council tax benefit and Social Welfare fund decisions and it was thought that integration would cause a conflict of interests. We were advised that housing management and technical roles could not be included in the new visiting service as these are specialist roles, therefore the number of visits to peoples homes would not necessarily be reduced. The review group did not consider this option to be viable.

#### 5.6 Evaluating the Options

5.6.1 The group agreed to measure the viable options against the Transforming Angus key priorities/objectives and the key priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2014-2017. The options were assessed on performance; savings/costs; policy fit; and risk. Moving to a locality based provision received the highest combined score from the eight group members and is therefore the recommended new service delivery approach option.

5.6.2 This approach will enable the team to support individuals in their own communities and link with other area based services including health and social care services and the third sector to provide better outcomes in future years for individuals, families and communities.

5.6.3 The details of the new way of working will be determined by, and based on, the role of the welfare rights service as set out within the Financial Inclusion Strategy; the level of need identified within the localities and any agreed requirement for welfare rights provision as part of the Health and Social Care Integration agenda. This approach will provide a local welfare rights service for all citizens of Angus, however, the implementation of the approach can be staged if required to take account of any specific service requirements of particular services.

### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There will be no immediate financial implications arising from this report. There will be opportunities for savings following the implementation of a localities model of provision through identification and take up of match funding opportunities with the third sector and the use of volunteers to carry out low level support and reduced travel costs as well as possible

management and administrative cost. Any savings identified will be included in the Council's budget setting process for 2016-17 and beyond.

## **7 RISKS**

7.1 This report does not require any specific risk issues to be addressed.

## **8 CONSULTATION**

8.1 The Chief Executive, Head of Corporate Improvement & Finance and Head of Legal & Democratic Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**NOTE:** The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

Angus Council Committee Report 391/13 "Transforming Angus and Shaping Services to meet the Welfare Reform Challenge - Service Review Update."

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