

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Social Work and Health

Council: 26 November 2008

Subject: Implementation of Learning Disability Charges

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide Members with an interim update on the implementation of Learning Disability Charges as requested by Council on 27 August 2008.

2. Background

- 2.1** Following a meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council on 14 February 2008 the Learning Disability Charge was implemented. This charge consists of £20 per week for housing support services and £3 per day for day services. Learning Disability Services have been collecting this charge since 1 August 2008. Charges are collected through the existing processes and in conjunction with our partners and provider agencies.
- 2.2** Throughout the period April to August 2008 letters were sent to all carers and service users. These letters generated a number of enquiries which were dealt with by Learning Disability Services. The charging process was explained to service users through their existing forums and carers were kept informed of any developments. In addition, the Learning Disability Service's Welfare Rights Officer responded to individual requests for a benefits check/ability to pay assessment.
- 2.3** The Good Life Group, an independent advocacy/service user project, held two consultation events with Client Councils at Dumbarton and Auchentoshan. They also attended care reviews where the charging policy was explained and discussed.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The Council asked that a further report be completed and that a series of questions were answered in order to clarify the current position.
- 3.2** In response to the above, Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service have been commissioned to undertake a review of Learning Disability Service charges in West Dunbartonshire (Appendix 1). This review will involve both service users and carers and will take the form of focus groups, meetings and postal questionnaires. It is anticipated that this review will be completed by the end of November 2008 and that a further report will be provided to the Council on the review's findings.

- 3.3** This review will allow us to explore any impact which the charges may have had in relation to Learning Disability Services. At the moment, early findings suggest that there has been very little impact on the uptake of services or on the quality of life that adults with learning disabilities enjoy.
- 3.4** It is clear that the review we have asked Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service to undertake is a complex area of work. There is a need to consult on a wide range of issues including user satisfaction and also raise the sensitive issue of the amount of personal income available to adults with learning disabilities. As a result of this, we are not in the position to provide the report at this time but will provide a full report to the December Council. Our ability to meet the original timescales have been further disrupted by consultation exercises over the reprovisioning of services at Auchentoshan and the SWIA Inspection.
- 3.5** West Dunbartonshire Council continues to provide a wide range of services to adults with learning disabilities which are valued by the service users and carers themselves.

4. Personnel Implications

- 4.1** There are no personnel implications related to this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The Learning Disability Charge presents a savings option against the Learning Disability budget of some £123,000. Consideration would need to be given to alternative sources of income should the charge be removed.
- 5.2** Learning Disability Services have been collecting the charge from both Housing Support and Day Services. We are currently on target with Housing Support Services however, the uptake in Day Services has been somewhat lower with approximately 80 of the 100 people eligible to pay the charge doing so. We are taking active steps to resolve this matter however. Political scrutiny of the agreed commitment to introduce charging may have generated uncertainty about the continuation of charging in this area of service delivery. No service user has withdrawn from services as a result of the implementation of the Charging Policy.
- 5.3** Any cases where there has been an issue regarding the ability to pay have received a visit from the Learning Disability Service Welfare Rights Officer. To date, none of these visits has resulted in an assessment that the client did not have the ability or the appropriate benefits to pay the charge.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** As previously stated, the Learning Disability Charge represents a significant savings option within the overall council budget. Consideration would need to be given to alternative sources of funding or savings should the charge not be implemented in full.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The implementation of Learning Disability Charges appears to have had little effect on the uptake of services from across the client group.
- 7.2** A further report will be provided to Council which will outline the findings of the Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service Review.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** Members are invited to note the contents of this report.

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Executive Director of Social Work and Health.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - Contract specification of Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Service

Background Papers:

Wards Affected: