

Report



Draft 2

meeting ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH
DEPARTMENTAL BRIEFING

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REPORT OF THE SERVICE MANAGERS, WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the work of the County Councils' Welfare Rights Service.

2. Background

- 2.1 Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights Service (NWRS) has been part of Nottinghamshire County Council for the last 26 years. Until 2002 NWRS was located in the Social Services Department but then, as a result of a cross cutting Best Value review, the service was transferred to Trading Standards in Culture and Community Department, only to return to Adult Social Care and Health in October 2006.
- 2.2 Throughout this period the service has adapted and developed to meet the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable residents of the county. In 2006-07 more than £8m was gained in additional benefits for the people of Nottinghamshire.
- 2.3 As well as delivering significant improvements for the individual, the impact of this increased benefit take-up also brings about a positive economic effect for the wider community as the higher incomes enjoyed by previously non-claiming recipients are spent on the purchase of goods and services. Research has shown that the extra money from increased benefit take-up is invariably spent locally and that for every £100,000 spent in local shops and businesses another job is created in the local economy.
- 2.4 Literature indicates the extra benefits acquired by clients can make a considerable contribution to improving the financial situation of a household. Living standards are raised, reducing poverty and social exclusion plus significant improvements in the mental and physical health of clients are achieved.
- 2.5 The staff are experienced professionals, highly skilled and working to the same Legal Services Commission Specialist Help Quality Mark standards as solicitors.

They advise and advocate on a highly complex area of welfare law. The current social security income maintenance system comprises of 28 different benefits and tax credits administered by 5 different authorities. The welfare benefits legislation and case law are 'summarised' into 5 volumes with over 1000 pages in each.

- 2.6 NWRS is integral to the delivery of Adult Social Care and Health's objectives, and also contributes to those of Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) and Communities. In Adult Social Care and Health they work closely with and provide a referral and consultancy service to staff in learning disability, mental health, adult care (both in the community and for those entering care homes), AIDS/HIV, sensory impairment and the financial assessment officers of Adult Care Financial Services. In CYPS with the disabled children's, adoption and fostering teams and in Communities NWRS supports and holds advice sessions at County Contacts. In social care NWRS also provides an invaluable contribution to service development by bringing expertise of the benefit system to new initiatives to avoid duplication of financial provision or to identify possible detriment to the benefits position of service users.
- 2.7 NWRS has targeted its service delivery where gaps in current provision have been identified and thus provides a number of unique advice services in the county. NWRS have developed a second tier focus on advocacy and representation to complement advice and information services delivered by the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the Joint Team and County Contacts.
- 2.8 NWRS generates additional revenue for the County Council by maximising the benefits income of service users of ASCH. For example, by maximising the disability benefit income of users of home care the amount of charge is increased; and by assisting with claims for Attendance Allowance self-funders in residential care are able to continue self-funding for a longer time, without recourse to ASCH for financial assistance. For the Children & Young People's Services the adoption Welfare Rights Officer advises on the technicalities of the benefit system thus reducing the adoption financial support required from the County Council.

An example of increased income to users and Adult Social Care and Health:

A couple in the Mansfield area had both been severely disabled for many years. Their Home Care service was free because they were each only on low rate Care Component of Disability Living Allowance and also had a low income. The Welfare Rights Officer successfully argued the case for the higher rate of DLA for each of them. In addition a successful claim was made for Pension Credit and full Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Their income increased by £207.80 per week and the ASCH were able to receive £55 per week for the Home Care Service.

- 2.9 A daily advice line is provided for social care professionals and the public. This delivers a brokering service to diagnose further actions required and referral to our community or specialist advice services where necessary. Councillors and MP's regularly refer constituents to our helpline. (3,376 queries responded to in 2006-07).

- 2.10 NWRS provides advocacy and representation at social security Appeal Tribunals. The number of agencies undertaking tribunal representation in the county is very limited. There are no solicitors offering representation as this does not attract funding and few not-for-profit advice agencies undertake representation in the county. NWRS takes referrals for tribunal representation from County Contacts, ASCH and C&YPS staff, the Pension Service, adult social care financial assessment officers, and the Citizen Advice Bureaus in Newark, Broxtowe, Gedling, Ashfield & Mansfield (248 tribunals with a 76% success rate and 789 revisions were undertaken in 2006-07).
- 2.11 A home visiting service is provided for housebound service users where other agencies cannot visit or assist due to the nature of the query (2,180 home visits undertaken in 2006-07).
- 2.12 NWRS provides and coordinates training for volunteer advisers and tailored courses for social care staff. For example, NWRS are this year running 3 Disability Benefits training events for ASCH all of which have been oversubscribed. No other organisations in the county deliver this specialist training (599 people trained in 2006-07).
- 2.13 A number of leaflets and a newsletter on specialist benefit related subjects aimed at the public and social care and health professionals are produced to promote the take-up of benefits. These inform on matters not covered by the Department for Work and Pensions or other organisations' information. They are much in demand and have been commended in the recent inspection of services for carers of people with a learning disability. (24,900 printed & distributed in 2006-07).
- 2.14 Consultations and Specialist Casework – involving not only in depth benefits advice with particular client groups, such as people with mental health needs, but also negotiations with ASCH on service user behalf to avoid dispute escalation. Part of this service includes providing consultation for social care professionals in ASCH and C&YPS on complex benefit issues and the interface with Nottinghamshire County Council services. With the development of self-directed care and individualised budgets, specialist casework to maximise resources for service users using these packages is a new area where welfare rights expertise will be valuable. (4610 consultations with professionals 2006/2007).
- 2.15 NWRS has contributed to policy developments by being active participants on a number of countywide boards such as the Fairer Charging Project Board, where their expertise and knowledge of the departmental functions and the interaction of the benefit system and charging regimes was crucial to successful implementation. NWRS have responded to new local and national initiatives e.g. development of shared home ownership schemes for people with learning disabilities, the implementation of the revised Blue Badge Parking scheme and responding to Government consultation exercises on new legislation, such as the Welfare Reform Act.
- 2.16 They increase benefit take-up through talks, promotional events and one off take-up projects. NWRS is currently co-ordinating a campaign with partner organisations such as District Councils, the Pension Service and Age Concern, to

promote the take-up of Council Tax Benefit amongst older people. (99 talk/events to 795 people undertaken in 2006-07).

- 2.17 NWRS have contributed to the effectiveness of partnership working through their input in the form of independent specialist expertise to internal and external partners, such as the Joint Team, the Supporting People Programme, the Meals Service, First Contact Checklist scheme and the Carers Unit.
- 2.18 NWRS contributes to the provision of integrated information and advice in Nottinghamshire. NWRS provides advice sessions at County Contacts, training and support for their staff and leaflets for their displays. The input will be of a similar nature in relation to the roll-out of the Nottinghamshire Customer Service Centre.
- 2.19 Economic wellbeing and access to advice on benefits is a key element of the government's strategy on social care. The Welfare Rights Service's contribution is of particular relevance to strategies, such as the Nottinghamshire County Council Community Strategy Local Area Agreement, ASCH Carers' Strategy, Children & Young Peoples Plan and the ASCH Business plan.
- 2.20 The above service is delivered by 32.77 number of full-time equivalent staff, this includes managers and support staff.

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(Comm/DB12)