

Committee	Cabinet	Agenda Item
Date	9 March 2004	
Title of Report	Partnership Working with The Pension Service	
By	Director of Social Services	
Purpose of Report	To outline proposals for the Financial Services Unit work in partnership with The Pension Service, leading to the creation of a Joint Visiting Team managed in partnership.	

RECOMMENDATION – The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. approve the integration of Social Services visiting officers into a joint visiting team jointly managed with the Department of Work and Pensions from April 1 2004; and**
- 2. agree to a review of the proposals in one year's time to evaluate outcomes for customers and to consider formalising arrangements.**

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 It is anticipated that the integrated team will lead to a more efficient service. However with a number of outstanding financial assessments this efficiency will be utilised to clear the backlog of cases

1.2 The integrated team should lead to a greater take up of benefits, especially in relation to claims for Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance

2. Supporting Information

2.1 Financial assessments of all clients in receipt of chargeable residential, day, homecare and Supporting People services are undertaken by the Financial Services Unit. The gathering of financial information is undertaken by 7 full time and 2 part time Visiting Officers.

2.2 Similar financial information is collected by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through their agencies, The Pension Service and Job Centre Plus (for working age adults) for the delivery of state pensions and other DWP benefits

2.3 On 30 September 2003 the DWP issued a consultation document which proposed closer working arrangements with local authorities leading to more effective delivery of visiting services. This paper followed an Accord, signed in July, between The Pension Service and the LGA calling for closer integration.

2.4 The consultation documents do not identify a particular model of partnership working; this is left to local discretion. Models identified range from integrated joint visiting teams to good interagency links.

2.5 The Operations Manager of The Pension Service for Surrey and East Sussex has approached the Department to establish the manner of closer working that would be most beneficial to both organisations. A number of meetings have been held to explore options for taking joint working forward. These meetings have been supplemented by assessment of models in operation in Wiltshire, Bath and North East Somerset

3. Proposals for Partnership working with the Pension Service

3.1 It is proposed that East Sussex Social Services will enter into a DWP pilot service merging both visiting officer teams into one integrated team with a proposed start date of 1 April 2004. The DWP in East Sussex employs 17 Visiting Officers complementing the 8 employed by the Department.

3.2 The main components of the integrated teams will be as follows:

- Joint integrated visiting teams with staff remaining employed by their respective agency (no change in terms and conditions);
- Co-location of a joint referral process. This is likely to require SSD staff that currently take calls and book the visits moving to Pension Service accommodation in Eastbourne;
- Joint management decisions – one representative from each agency to provide the service steer;
- A joint management board to coordinate strategy with representatives from the DWP and Social Services.

4. Benefits of partnership

4.1 There are many benefits to working as an integrated team for customers, the organisation and officers employed in the new arrangement, some of which are outlined below;

- Providing a single point of contact for all our customers. It is currently possible for a customer to be visited repeatedly by different agencies to collect the same financial information. This confuses the customer and also discourages them from claiming their entitlements;
- Avoiding duplication of resources which results in providing a single seamless service and therefore better customer care and a quicker route to receipt of benefit entitlements;
- As an integrated agency steps can be taken to improving benefit take up through joint initiatives;
- Communicating best practice, experience and knowledge between the agencies leading to a better quality of service and greater personal development for officer employed in the integrated team.

4.2 In the short term the pilot arrangement will enable the Department to clear current outstanding assessments and enable a shorter turn-around time for the calculation and communication of assessments. This benefit has been realised in Wiltshire with the Joint Teams clearing a backlog of assessments and now provide a financial assessment within 5 working days.

5 Conclusions and Recommendation

5.1 By taking forward these proposals the department will be able to provide a better service to customers whilst also improving the efficiency of the overall unit. It will enable customers to access a seamless service with greater opportunities for benefit take up. It is therefore recommended that Social Services enter into the pilot in the terms outlined in 3.2

5.2 As this is a pilot, Cabinet is requested to agree to a review of the proposals in one year's time to evaluate outcomes for customers and to consider formalising arrangements.

David Archibald

Director of Social Services

Contact Officers: Ray Hart, Assistant Director (FABS) 482526/Judith Bradford Knox, Senior Finance Officer 482369