

AG/LSM/505

20th October 1999

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Dear Nicki

**SOCIAL WORK INFORMATION REVIEW CONSULTATION PAPER:
*LOCAL AND NATIONAL INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK***

I refer to Mike Brown's letter to me of 30th September, enclosing a copy of the above document and inviting this association to comment on it.

Can I first of all thank the Review Group for including the voluntary sector, albeit somewhat belatedly, in the list of consultees. The need for a sound information base for social work services in Scotland is indeed pressing and CCPS supports the work of the Group as it develops proposals to correct the deficiencies identified by the Accounts Commission and others.

Given that I did not receive the document until the first week of October and your deadline is 31st of this month, you will appreciate that I am unable to offer detailed comments. CCPS has 32 members across Scotland and I am afraid it has not been possible to seek and collate their views in such a short space of time. I very much hope, however, that we will be offered the opportunity to comment on the revised version when it is ready. In the meantime, I can offer the following brief comments on those elements of the document which immediately caught my attention:

- In Section 5.2.2 and elsewhere, the document refers to the collection of information relating to external suppliers of care services, including the qualifications possessed by the care staff that they employ. Whilst CCPS agrees that such information is important, it urges the Review Group to co-ordinate its recommendations in this area both with the proposed provider registration requirements of the forthcoming Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, and with the ADSW Community Care Standing Committee's core vetting standards for providers (currently in draft form), and to ensure that there is a minimum of duplication in the type and amount of information that providers are required to submit to each body. Your consultation document acknowledges the costs of providing and collecting information, and the waste involved in duplicating information-related tasks; these costs are no less onerous for voluntary sector organisations, especially those national organisations which work in several local authority areas and which are at present frequently asked to provide the same or similar information by each of those authorities.
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- In Section 5.2.3 and elsewhere, it is proposed that information about unit costs is collected. First, CCPS would fully support the appended comment that traveling time, service and department overheads and so forth be taken into consideration when a unit cost is calculated. It is the experience of some CCPS members that purchasing authorities are not always willing to meet such costs when dealing with external providers; we would therefore urge the Review Group to ensure that where a recorded unit cost for a purchased service *does not* include these elements, that this is made clear.

Second, given the document's repeated references to Best Value, we would express a degree of caution about the use which may be made of raw data relating to unit costs. A number of the members of the Review Group will have received copies of our publication, *Best Value and voluntary sector community care services*, in which we outline our concerns about placing too much emphasis on the cost, and not enough on the quality, of a given service. Clearly, it is essential that local authorities are able to identify and compare the costs of each service by provider; however that data must be complemented by information relating to the quality of service offered.

Finally, CCPS would support the Chair of the Review Group's comment that both central and local government must be 'open and accountable for all they do'. In the light of this comment, does the Review Group have specific proposals about the format in which information on social work services, once collected, might be published, and which organisations or individuals might have access to it?

I hope that these comments are of some use to the Group. Once again, many thanks for the invitation to respond to the Group's proposals.

Yours sincerely

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