

The Highland Council

Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee
18 November 2013

Agenda Item	14.
Report No	CS 45/13

Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid – Service and Funding Overview

Report by Director of Health and Social Care

Summary

This report provides Members with an overview of the governance framework of Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid. Members are invited to note the close work that has taken place and the funding and monitoring arrangements in place.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Scheme of Delegation, Area Committees can 'invite groups/ bodies funded by Highland Council or with an Elected Member on their Board, to submit an update report to the relevant Area Committee should the Committee consider it necessary'.
- 1.2 This will be the first time this power has been used, the request being prompted given the significant level of funding provided and the recent organisational challenges and changes to the service.

2 Background

- 2.1 Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid (CASWA) operated a refuge in Wick and an Outreach service in both Caithness and Sutherland.
- 2.2 In 2012 CASWA faced serious financial and governance issues. To ensure the continued viability and existence of the service, Scottish Women's Aid provided assistance, together with Ross-shire Women's Aid, for the service to be completely restructured. The Council's interest in the organisation was monitored by the Area Children's Services Manager, Health and Social Care and the Area Contracts Officer.
- 2.3 **Appendix 1** contains the report provided by CASWA. This includes a summary of the restructuring that took place to address issues that had arisen. Members will see that the service has been retained but is provided on an outreach model. The report also outlines current activity levels and the monitoring framework now in place, including examples of the outcome-focussed feedback provided.

3. Governance and Funding

- 3.1 CASWA is funded by the Highland Council via Health & Social Care Central Services (formerly Supporting People Grant) and the Scottish Government.

3.2 In order to ensure that Highland Council funding delivers the desired outcomes, the Council has developed a new Service Level Agreement with all Women's Aid groups in Highland, including CASWA. This SLA includes a requirement for CASWA to submit quarterly returns. The Area Contracts Officer is responsible for the contract monitoring. In addition, Scottish Government has commissioned Voluntary Action Funding to monitor the funding and provide support to organisations on governance and development. The monitoring of the organisation will be carried out jointly by both the Area Contracts Officer for the Council and the Voluntary Action Fund for the Scottish Government. The most recent monitoring meeting was held at the end of October 2013, with the next monitoring meeting due in late March 2014.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Members will note that, whilst CASWA underwent a period of significant change, close working with partner agencies, including the Council, has enabled the organisation to restructure and address issues. The SLA and monitoring arrangements in place provide a robust framework which ensures that the Council's interests are protected, whilst key services to a vulnerable group of people are maintained.

4.2 Members will also note from the CASWA report provided that they are currently working closely with the Voluntary Action Fund & the Violence Against Women Programme to develop a robust 3 year Business Plan to support further development of the service and ensure continued financial viability.

5.

Implications

5.1

The Council continues to provide financial and wider support to Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid.

5.2

There are no other known legal, climate change, carbon clever or equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note:

- (i) the report provided by CASWA; and
- (ii) the close working that has been undertaken to secure the long-term viability of CASWA and the services it provides.

Designation: Bill Alexander, Director of Health & Social Care

Date: 7 November 2013

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Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee

Report on Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid

October 2013

Background

In 2012 CASWA, working as a Collective, experienced serious financial difficulties and, following the resignation of the existing Board, a new Board of Directors was appointed and agreed a financial package with existing funders and Scottish Women's Aid to continue providing a support service.

Restructure & Current Service Model

As agreed as part of the package, a new hierarchy structure was rolled out and became operational in July when the new Manager came into post. She is supported by a new Admin/Finance worker. There are currently 3 Women's Support workers and 4 Children's workers (one of whom is on maternity leave). In addition, a part time Women's Support worker has just been recruited to support MARAC working. There has been turnover on the Board since the latter half of 2012, and, as such, there are currently 4 Directors, all of whom sit on a voluntary basis. CASWA is in the process of appointing 3 new Directors, two of whom are ex -Service users.

Current Activities

CASWA operates a unique outreach service in the local communities which is accessed on a pre-arranged or drop-in basis. It continues to provide support to women and their children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. It is open to all women irrespective of race, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, political beliefs, social background or disability.

Organisation

CASWA focus in the last few months has been on stabilising the internal restructure and embedding new ways of working, in addition to continued tight financial control, whilst maintaining an excellent service to support existing and new referrals. CASWA is building on existing relationships with other agencies and forging new working relationships to extend the service provided in the local communities and to increase awareness of Domestic abuse and the service throughout the region. For example, the Manager has recently joined the Youth forum in Kinlochbervie, with a subsequent invitation to CASWA to provide self-awareness/ healthy relationship training in the area. New ties are being established with, amongst others - Home Start, CCP, CCSAT, New Futures.

Following an expected quiet period over the summer and period of readjustment, CASWA is seeing referrals steadily increase in both the women's and children's services. 103 service users (women and children) have been supported in the current period (Jul – Sep 2013) and there have been 40 new referrals in the same period.

An Organisation Health Check has recently been undertaken by VAF and an Action Plan is currently being produced. As part of this, the Manager is currently updating work plans in relation to VAW and Children's Outcomes for government funding, with intense VAF support, to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet service requirements.

Board

The existing Board have recently undertaken a skills analysis with VAF and this has also been used as part of the recruitment of new Board members. Based on the analysis and the OHC, VAF will be working with the Directors in 2013/14 to address skills gaps, ensure a robust induction process and provide support and learning where required in governance and strategic planning.

SLA & Funder Requirements

CASWA continues to adhere to the terms of the SLA and measured outcomes which focus on JARS principles. This is highlighted below. (Copies of the SLA and September's report are available if required)

Justice – Support work has provided better access for users to legal protection, housing, financial assistance and health/education/social services

Examples: Service user supported in successful housing requested and received CCG award £1100.

CASWA working with the SWA Gathering in Access to Legal Services Monitoring Project

Autonomy – Support work has helped women become confident and assertive and take control over their lives. CASWA are also engaging service users in CASWA development.

Examples: Ex -service user application accepted for Director appointment, service user supported using specific toolkits to gain confidence to leave house, speak to people and to be able to tolerate male presence in rooms.

Restoration – Service user knowledge re VAW affects is increased. Health and wellbeing improved, they are less isolated and using coping mechanisms.

Examples: service user accompanied to social event in local community and successful in making new friends; service user supported by worker with close working ties with CPN which has enabled her to have confidence to make statement to the police re DA.

Safety – women are supported to feel safer and are better able to protect themselves. In addition MARAC training and profile by the Manager to support workers has seen an increase in multi-agency referrals providing quick and effective outcomes for high risk users.

Examples – effective MARAC working has enabled police safety checks and measures to be put in place; personal safety plans have empowered a woman to be confident outside her home and to tolerate unlocked doors/ windows.

CASWA works within GIRFEC and child protection guidelines to develop the service and meet aims and objectives of funders. All support plans are person centred, consistently used by all workers and reflect outcomes required by main funder (children's service – Scottish Government). Continued training is provided to support workers to ensure specialist support services are provided and developed to meet diverse needs, e.g. disclosure of childhood sexual abuse, telephone support session coaching. Family sessions (child/CYP & mother) are used appropriately in recognition that support from non-abusing parent is very important. This is recognised within the support plan, e.g. – working with primary school child and mum to understand DA and misplaced anger/ guilt issues successfully with recognition from child of outcome achieved.

Highland Council and VAF are regularly monitoring CASWA on a quarterly basis to ensure outcomes and financial obligations are being met. Current SLA return is available, and regular meetings are undertaken to ensure compliance with agreed process and outcomes.

Finance

New accounting software has also been installed to record and monitor all income, expenditure, budgeting and funding stream spending. A new customised Shared Access Computer System should be in use by the end of December 2013, to record staff hours, support sessions with service users and any other non-financial data required by funders on their quarterly and annual returns.

All of the above changes will enable CASWA to increase speed and efficiency in providing Financial Returns and Support Services for women, children and young people who experience domestic abuse.

We are currently in the process of reviewing annual budgets, funding streams and forward planning. The Statement of Financial Activities for the period 1st April through to 30th September 2013 is attached.

The Future

CASWA is currently working closely with the Voluntary Action Fund and the Violence Against Women Programme to develop a robust 3 year Business Plan to support further development of the service and ensure continued financial viability. VAF will also be providing support to CASWA in relation to fund raising strategy, monitoring & evaluation and building reserves, etc., through training and monitoring and support of the new management structure.

VAF will also be working closely with and providing guidance to the new Board of Directors and Manager to ensure strategic planning and fundraising strategies are in place; governance re policies, monitoring & evaluation processes, etc. are strong and CASWA fulfils all regulatory commitments.

CASWA will continue to build on existing connections and forge new links to increase referrals and also work within the local communities to increase awareness of domestic abuse. In particular, CASWA is looking to increase coverage within the more remote areas in both the Women's and Children's service. Short term highlights include presentations to Volunteers in Home Start (Caithness), planned media coverage, Healthy relationship workshops to be offered in Kinlochbervie and surrounding area.

CASWA will continue to build on MARAC working and is planning to take an active part in the CEDAR Highland project currently under consideration. CASWA will also have access to the services of an Eastern European Worker should the Highland Women's Aid bid (of which CASWA are part) for lottery funding be successful.