

## **Eligibility Criteria for Social Work Services**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 What are eligibility criteria?**

**Eligibility Criteria** are statements about the conditions and circumstances which allow access to social work services. They are of interest to service users and the public to whom they might be applied and to staff who will make decisions about allocating resources based on the criteria.

Whether or not a service is provided will depend on an individual's assessed need; the availability of resources and the urgency of response required to meet need. Each of these elements is not static and will vary over time. Eligibility criteria assist local authorities to demonstrate equity, consistency and transparency in how decisions about resource allocation are taken.

#### **1.2 Why do we need eligibility criteria?**

There are four main reasons why we have eligibility criteria as part of the system for accessing social care.

1. Social work resources are finite and variable and should be targeted fairly and on those with the greatest need, by using the same criteria for prioritising the needs of everyone who requests or requires a service.
2. The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 requires local authorities to assess need. Once needs have been identified there is an obligation to provide, through a care plan, appropriate services to meet needs or to make alternative provision until these can be provided, having regard to the 'greatest need' when allocating scarce resources (McGregor v South Lanarkshire Council, 2000). Eligibility criteria clarify the link between needs and resources, and urgency and risk.
3. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 requires local authorities to publish information about services, for whom they are intended and how to access them. Published eligibility criteria are a public statement of how social work will respond to needs by establishing different levels of priority for access to care. Eligibility criteria create transparency about the basis on which decisions are made by practitioners about providing services.
4. On 28 September 2009 the Scottish Government and COSLA issued guidance for local authorities on national eligibility criteria and waiting times. Aberdeenshire Council's eligibility criteria have been revised in accordance with this national guidance

### 1.3 Principles that Underpin Eligibility Criteria

- Eligibility criteria should be applied only after an appropriate assessment of an individual's needs, taking account of the apparent urgency of their situation. Good quality assessment practice is vital to achieving better outcomes for people with social care needs
- They should be applied fairly across all care groups and all existing as well as new service users. Application of these criteria should not discriminate between people's needs on any other basis apart from risk to independent living and wellbeing
- There should be one eligibility decision, based on the criteria – “Should a person receive help from social work services to meet a need or not?”
- Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria may not simply be placed in a date order queue. Response to need should be informed by the continuing systematic review of each person's needs, including consideration of how urgently a service is called for and what interim measures may be appropriate pending a longer term response
- People who are not eligible for services under the criteria should be offered advice and information or be directed to alternative sources of assistance.
- Unmet needs must be recorded for review and planning purposes. Similarly, a person's eligibility category must be recorded on Care First for monitoring purposes.
- All those with assessed needs should be subject to regular review to ensure that their changing needs and level of priority for services are taken into account and care plans/services adjusted accordingly
- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** There will be some people whose needs are changing frequently or rapidly and whose level of service will need to change accordingly. Where a current assessment places needs in a category which would not warrant particular services being provided, consideration should be given to provision as a preventive measure or in anticipation of an imminent need for increased service, rather than wait until the situation deteriorates. This applies particularly when admission to hospital or a care home, homelessness or loss of liberty might be prevented.
- **Involving people:** The whole process of assessment, care planning and review is a joint effort, based on collaboration and communication with the person at the centre and their carers. Their own priorities and preferences about how their needs might be met and about the resources available to them, must be evident. Where possible, people should have a choice about how their needs will be met.

- **Maximising income:** Ensuring that people are aware of their benefit entitlement and supporting people to take this up should be a feature of every social work intervention. It is especially important when eligibility criteria are being applied to target those in greatest need. People with lower level needs and those with needs that are not eligible for social work support may have to use alternative routes. As well as offering prompts and checks on benefit take-up, staff should direct people to the benefits agency, local advice centre or CAB for more specialist assistance, as appropriate.

#### **1.4 How Do They Work?**

Aberdeenshire Council's eligibility criteria addresses both the severity of risks and the urgency of intervention to respond to risks. Some levels of risk will call for services or other resources as a high priority whilst others may call for some services/resources, not as a high priority but managed and prioritised on an ongoing basis. Some may not call for any social care intervention as engagement in local community activities may be the most appropriate way of addressing the need. In other circumstances the assessment may indicate a potential requirement for service provision in the longer term which requires to be kept under review. As part of the assessment and care planning process, it is for relevant social work practitioners to consider how each individual's needs match against eligibility criteria in terms of severity of risk and urgency for intervention. The eligibility framework prioritises risks into four categories: critical, substantial, medium and low.

## RISK CATEGORIES

Following completion of an individual assessment of need

### **Category 1. CRITICAL RISK:** **Services required now or within approximately 1 – 2 weeks (*immediate*)**

#### ***Neglect or physical/mental health***

- major health problems which present immediate threat of harm to self or others
- serious harm or neglect has occurred or is strongly suspected (including financial abuse and discrimination)
- palliative or end of life care needs

#### ***Personal care and domestic environment***

- unable to meet vital or most personal care needs causing major harm or major risk to independence
- unable to meet vital or most aspects of domestic routines causing major harm or major risk to independence
- homelessness of a vulnerable person
- extensive/complete loss of choice and control over vital aspects of home environment causing major harm or major risk to independence

#### ***Participation in community life***

- unable to sustain involvement in vital aspects of work/education/learning causing severe loss of independence
- unable to sustain involvement in vital or most aspects of family/social roles, responsibilities and contact causing significant distress or risk to independence

#### ***Carers***

- major health difficulties due to impact of their caring role causing life threatening harm or danger
- complete breakdown in the relationship between carer and service user and carer is unable to continue in their caring role
- carer is unable to manage vital or most aspects of their roles and responsibilities

**Category 2. SUBSTANTIAL RISK:**  
**Services required now or within 6 weeks** (*imminent*)

***Neglect or physical/mental health***

- harm or neglect has occurred or is strongly suspected (including financial abuse and discrimination)
- significant health problems which cause significant risk of harm or danger
- palliative or end of life care needs

***Personal care and domestic environment***

- unable to undertake many aspects of personal care causing significant risk of harm or significant risk to independence
- unable to manage many aspects of domestic routines causing significant risk of harm or significant risk to independence
- substantial loss of choice and control managing home environment causing a significant risk of harm or danger to self or others, or a significant risk to independence

***Participation in community life***

- unable to sustain involvement in many aspects of work/education/learning causing significant risk to independence
- unable to sustain involvement in many aspects of family/social roles, responsibilities and contact causing significant distress or risk to independence

***Carers***

- significant health difficulties due to impact of their caring role causing significant risk of harm or danger
- carer is unable to manage many aspects of their caring, family or employment responsibilities
- significant risk of breakdown in the relationship between carer and service user and carer is unable to sustain many aspects of their caring role

**Category 3. MODERATE RISK:**  
**services may be required within next 6 months** (*foreseeable future*)

***Neglect or physical/mental health issues***

- some health problems indicating some risk to independence and/or intermittent distress. Potential to maintain health with minimum interventions
- need to raise awareness of vulnerable person to potential risk of harm

***Personal care and domestic environment***

- unable to undertake some aspects of personal care indicating some risk to independence
- able to manage some aspects of domestic activities and/or home environment indicating some risk to independence

***Participating in community life***

- unable to manage several aspects relating to work/learning/education that, in the foreseeable future, will pose a risk to independence
- able to manage some aspects of family roles and responsibilities, posing some risk to independence

***Carers***

- main carer able to manage some aspects of caring and family/domestic roles, posing some risk of breakdown in their own health
- relationship between carer and service user under strain at times, limiting some aspects of the caring role or creating some risk of relationship breakdown

#### **Category 4. LOW RISK:**

**Low risk to individual's independence, health or wellbeing with very limited, if any, requirement for social work services. (required within 12 months or subsequently, subject to review)**

##### ***Neglect or physical/mental health***

- few health problems indicating low risk to independence. Potential to maintain health with minimum interventions
- preventative measures including reminders to minimise potential risk of harm

##### ***Personal care and domestic environment***

- difficulty with one or two aspects of personal care or domestic routines, indicating little risk to independence
- able to manage most basic aspects of domestic activities and environment

##### ***Participation in community life***

- difficulty undertaking one or two aspects of work/learning/education responsibilities, indicating low risk to independence
- difficulty undertaking one or two aspects relating to family responsibilities or social support networks, indicating low risk to independence
- able to manage most aspects of family responsibilities and social support networks, posing some risk to independence

##### ***Carers***

- carer able to manage most aspects of their caring and domestic role and responsibilities, indicating low risk
- carer is able to manage most aspects of their family and work responsibilities, indicating low risk
- relationship is maintained between client and carer by limiting aspects of the caring role

## 2.8 Process of applying eligibility criteria

