

## NATIONAL VOLUNTARY CHILDREN'S FORUM MINUTES OF MEETING

The Scottish Executive, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, 6 October 2003

Present:	Joy Bishop	Children in the Highlands Education Support Service
	Laura Bowden	The Equity Group
	Bronwen Cohen	Children in Scotland
	Marion Davis	One Plus
	Saunada Docherty	The Scottish Society for Autism
	Zoe Dunhill	Child Health Support Group
	Susan Elsley	Save the Children
	May Fong	Homestart UK
	Bryan Gregg	Shelter Scotland
	Elena Groll	Scottish Executive
	Rachel Gwyon	Scottish Executive
	Claire Houghton	Scottish Women's Aid
	Jim Jeffries	Shelter Families Project
	Grant King	Scottish Executive
	Romy Langeland	Aberlour Childcare Trust
	Janet Law	Scottish Out of School Care Network
	Hugh Mackintosh	Barnardos Scotland
	Colin MacLean	Scottish Executive
	Cathy McCulloch	Tasc Agency
	Robert McGeachy	Youthlink
	Ian McLaughlan	Scottish Pre-School Play Association
	Monica Mhojam	
	Catherine Montgomery	Enable
	Pamela Munn	Edinburgh University
	Emma Nugent	Shelter Scotland
	Renee Payne	Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations
	Shona Pittilo	Scottish Executive
	Pete Ritchie	Equity Group
	Euan Robson	Deputy Minister for Education and Young People
	Janet Sanders	The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum
	Sarah Smith	Scottish Executive
	Robert Stevenson	Scottish Executive
	Fiona Strachan	Adoption UK Scotland
	Charlene Tait	The Scottish Society for Autism
	Margaret Tod	Scottish Executive
	Neil Todd	Contact A Family Scotland
	Jennifer Turpie	Children in Scotland
	David Wilson	Children 1 <sup>st</sup>
	Juliet Wilson	National Playbus Association

Apologies:	Karen Baines	Down Syndrome Scotland
	Marion Davis	One Plus
	Fiona MacLeod	Westerton Junior Youth Club
	Mary McKenna	Sargent Cancer Care
	Maggie Simpson	Scottish Childminding Association
	Alison Wales	Childline

## **Welcome and Introductions**

1. **Euan Robson, Deputy Minister for Education and Young People** welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. **Pamela Munn** accepted the Minister's welcome and explained that the meeting was a useful forum to exchange issues and she appreciated the Minister making time to attend.

## **Apologies**

2. It was agreed that the apologies would be recorded in the Minute.

## **Minute of Previous Meeting**

3. The Minute of the meeting on 20 January 2003 was accepted as a true record.

## **Matters Arising**

4. The problems with Disclosure Scotland was raised and the issues surrounding background checks. **Euan Robson** reported that if there were specific examples of problems he would like to hear about them.

**Action Point:** It was agreed that those with concerns would write to the Executive to have them logged.

5. In response to extending tax credit benefits to childcare it was noted that an updated leaflet would be placed on the Childcare Information Service website on 'Children and the Law' in due course.

**Action Point:** A letter would be issued from Early Education and Childcare Division to say when this would be available.

6. **Sarah Smith** reported that a review of the guidance on Children's Services Plans was underway and that a broader approach on how to disseminate information and examples of good practice was being considered. She also reported that the guidance on the Changing Children's Services Fund had issued the previous week and a copy should have been sent to the voluntary sector organisations.

7. **Sarah Smith** was asked to provide an update on the Protection of Children Act and the Child Protection Reform programme. She explained that there was likely to be a parliamentary debate on these issues in the new year (this was actually brought forward to 13 November 2003). She also explained that there had been a guidance note issued on what the implications of the Act meant to the wider audience. There were different workstreams being carried out on IT scoping, links between the referral and decision processes, and ways in which names could be added to the list. The voluntary sector would be engaged in discussions on implementation.

8. With regards to the Child Protection Reform, three meetings had already taken place with the steering group. Work was well underway for the Children's Charter and draft standards to be in place at the turn of the year. Guidance would be issued on the role and scope of Child Protection Committees. The Action Team was visiting all Local Authorities and Child Protection Committees to get their views for the draft standards. The voluntary sector were concerned that they had not been involved at the early stages and the need to ensure that their voices were heard.

### **Topic for discussion**

#### **Scotland's Action Programme to Reduce Youth Crime**

9. **Hugh Mackintosh** reported that the Scottish Executive had launched Scotland's Action Programme to Reduce Youth Crime in 2002. The document laid out the Action Programme in terms of specific measures to be introduced. This presentation was to provide a reminder of the proposals and an update on the measures already implemented or in the process of being implemented.

- Increasing Public Confidence in Scotland's Youth Justice System – there had been a wealth of proposals in this area, some of which were part of long-term developments and some which were ongoing work. There had been mixed reactions to the Tackling Anti Social Behaviour consultation and it would be interesting to hear the outcome of the consultation and the Scottish Executive response.
- Giving Victims an Appropriate Place in the Youth Justice Process - the wider application of restorative justice had generally been welcomed, however there was a need to monitor the implementation to ensure that the response to low level offending behaviour was proportionate to the offence.
- Easing the Transition Between the Youth Justice and Adult Criminal Justice Systems – the proposals to children's hearings for 16/17 year olds had not progressed and this was regretted. At this stage it was too early to evaluate the impacts of the Youth Courts
- Encourage all Children and Young People to Thrive – this was a major task to co-ordinate service developments because of the wide range of policy initiatives. The role of youth services had the potential to have significant impact dependent on the appropriate development of services. It would remain to be seen whether other initiatives would have measurable impacts on levels of offending behaviour.
- Effective Early Intervention - early intervention developments take time to show impact and be capable of long-term evaluation, however early signs were encouraging in terms of targeting services. An overarching strategy was required regarding the wider support for the promotion of good parenting behaviour.

10. **Hugh Mackintosh** also reported that there was a lot of activity around the offending behaviour and it was a high priority for the Scottish Executive. There had also been a lot of publicity given to young people and their anti social behaviour, this had been welcomed by the voluntary sector. There were, however, messages of caution around the issues of dealing with young offenders outwith the hearing system; electronic monitoring; dispersal of groups; and shortage of resources at local level. The voluntary sector would continue to play a critical role in providing specialist services for young offenders and to strike a balance between statutory obligations and effective delivery of service and results.

11. **Euan Robson** thanked **Hugh Mackintosh** for his presentation stating that is had been stimulating and offered challenges for the future. **Euan Robson** confirmed that, as mentioned in the presentation, there had been major shifts in policy and this had come about due to the stability of the partnership agreement of Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Executive. He confirmed that it was a good time to have the review of the hearings system as it provided an opportunity to look back over the last 30 years and to come up with ways to establish stronger links with other Departments such as Justice and Health. The announcement on the outcome of the review would be made early in 2004.

12. **Neil Todd** raised the issue of children with disabilities who were, as a result of their condition, noisy and the implications this could have in the Anti Social Bill in regard to housing issues and noisy neighbours etc. **Charlene Tait** also questioned for those with suspected Asperger's Syndrome but whose condition had not been formally diagnosed. **Euan Robson** explained that there was no policy intent to penalise those with medical conditions. **Pamela Munn** explained that medical conditions would have to be taken into account and causes and cures understood.

13. **May Fong** stated that she say the linkage between behaviour and lack of play areas / facilities for children. **Colin MacLean** reported that this was an issue for local authorities to make space available and that the resources for this would come through Community Planning. **Rachel Gwyon** also reported that extra annual funding had been given to local authorities for youth work, available through the community education service. **Susan Elsley** reported that children's and parents' needs should be the issue and not their behaviour. This would tie in with the Parenting Strategy currently being developed.

14. **Euan Robson** closed the discussion by confirming that the Bill was currently with the Presiding Officer and it was hoped to be announced in mid November. He also explained that further evidence would be presented to the Committee and legislation could still be changed.

### **Update on Early Years Strategy and HALL4 – Health for all Children**

15. **Elena Groll** explained that as set out in the Early Years Strategy framework document, a consultation paper had been issued in March and had focussed on services from pre-birth to age 5. 119 responses had been received and in general the paper had been welcomed and agreement given to the five building blocks. Comments had been received on particular issues such as age, on-going support, aims and visions and concern over the indicators set. To explore these issues further, 4 regional seminars had been arranged by Children in Scotland and a report on the outcomes would be received shortly. The finalised strategy would be issued by the end of March 2004. An area which played a big part in the early years was in Health and the HALL4 – Health for all Children report (HFAC).

16. Dr Zoë Dunhill, from the Child Health Support Group thanked the group for the opportunity to share the thinking on how the recommendations of the HFAC report might be implemented in Scotland. She reported that traditionally health visitors have been trained in looking after child and family health and child behaviour. They see children between birth and school age and look out for any developmental difficulties. The current checks have been in place for the last 30 years and Professor Hall and colleagues have examined the evidence of their effectiveness. Under the proposals resources would be targeted effectively to those children and young people in greatest need covering, not only the early years but, school years and into teenage years. Guidance would be issued and the purpose would be to draw together national streams of activity across departments and enter into dialogue with families and young people regarding their health.

17. In Scotland, there was a tradition of excellent population data relating to health. By looking at the most needy on the deprivation scores, it had been found that around 10% of such children didn't have their first check up at 6 weeks; 25% of them were not attending for the universal checks at 2 years. There required to be a change in the interaction with health visitors and it was thought that during the pre-school period the focus should be on vulnerable children and families. Improvements in the screening processes, e.g. early detection of hearing in newborn babies, would release health visitor time to focus on the more vulnerable families and children.

18. There would be an enhanced dialogue between parents and health visitors. The record book given to all new parents would be re-written to be more user-friendly and more meaningful. It may be possible to have a "smart card" for data issued with the book. This would help parents when presented to professionals as all their information could be held centrally allowing information to be shared and more accessible to those who needed to know it. The current Child Health Information Systems would also be reviewed and it was hoped that it being open and honest with parents would be beneficial, particularly in relation to those requiring enhanced support.

19. All of this would mean that there would be a slight reduction in the universal checks currently carried out but more effective working across disciplines in the early years could compensate. Work would be carried out closely with child family centres and there would be close liaison between named health visitors and early years staff in nurseries and centres. Material was being looked at to provide support for older children and their families and schools were urged to provide information and promote good health. There was still work needed to be developed further for SEN issues, but the principles did fit with the new community approach.

20. It was hoped that, given the family's consent, information could be shared by health and education professionals on a need-to know basis to deliver appropriate services effectively to individual children. A dialogue between professionals would be encouraged to ensure that this would be delivered. **Zoë Dunhill** also confirmed that there were inter-agency implementation groups in most areas linking into the Children's Services Plans.

21. **Fiona Strachan** asked about the support that would be available to parents of adopted children. **Zoë Dunhill** reported that the onus would be on the health visitor to make sure that the family were not in need. Additional support and surveillance would be provided until assumed otherwise. A task would be to inform and educate parents to know their rights.

## **Points for Information**

### **Progress on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Bill**

22. **Euan Robson** confirmed that the Bill was currently with the Presiding Officer and it was anticipated that it would be introduced during the week beginning 27 October. He reported that it had changed significantly since the draft as a result of the consultation process. **Shona Pittilo** confirmed that a report on the consultation process would be available at the same time summarising the comments received and the changes made.

### **Status on the Adoption Policy**

23. **Euan Robson** confirmed that the report from the working groups for the second phase of the review is due by the end of 2004. The phase two working groups have all met and a discussion paper by the group's independent legal adviser was published on 11 September for consultation. A copy of the consultation is available on the Scottish Executive website.

### **Any Other Business**

24. The issue of the timetable for notification of grants was raised. The sector felt that not enough time was allowed for internal discussion or to prepare and submit a bid for funding. **Sarah Smith** confirmed that the Executive was aware of the time needed for consultation and she hoped that the introduction of the new Unified Fund would help to address these issues.

25. **Euan Robson** suggested that a topic for future discussion may be a Delivery Group on Children's Issues.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

26. **Action Point:** The Forum secretariat would liaise with Children in Scotland to find a suitable date for the next meeting.

27. **Pamela Munn** thanked the Minister for attending and being so receptive.