

14 February 2011

Background

The Children's Hearings System is Scotland's distinct system of child protection and youth justice. Among its fundamental principles are:

- That children who offend and children with welfare needs are dealt with in the same system (because they are often the same children)
- That the welfare of the child remains at the centre of all decision making

SCRA operates the Reporter service which sits at the heart of the system. SCRA employs Children's Reporters and support staff who operate throughout Scotland in every local authority area and who work in close partnership with other professionals in service areas such as social work, education, the police, the health service and the courts system. At a national level, we undertake research and data collection and contribute to policy and legislative development on a wide variety of issues relating to the Children's Hearings System.

Detailed response

SCRA welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Commission and to support its timely consideration of this important issue. We have responded individually to each of the three questions the Commission posed in its call for evidence.

- **How best can our public services achieve positive outcomes for and with the people of Scotland?**

The scale of the challenge requires a fundamental rethink of public service delivery in the medium to long term, which presents a challenge if public services are to remain meaningful to local communities. Simpler, more autonomous and agile models, which would be based on a more holistic view of services are required. Broadly standardised national models with some flexibility for local circumstances that allows delivery to be shaped by communities at a local level could be supported by large cost effective 'support' networks.

Cultural change will be a particular challenge which will need leadership to address and it has to be recognised that this is institutionally embedded from the top of government. The big costs for Scotland are health, education and social care, all of which are devolved powers, and so an alternative model of delivery is achievable.

An early requirement will be to provide simple descriptions of what is provided by a public service. This should be based on serious decisions about what does and doesn't add public value. Finding a meaningful way of engaging with the workforce issues will be important as well. In the medium term there is a need for a pragmatic and committed approach by all to review how services are managed with a view to a reduction in the number and complexity of authorities and bodies. Alongside this is a need to recognise the contribution made by professional bodies such as ADSW and ACPOS by granting them a

degree of statutory responsibility, which would also lead to the introduction of increased transparency and accountability.

A real focus on outcomes (with perhaps fewer traditional KPIs), a structured approach to engagement with stakeholders and establishing better links between costs, activity and quality will improve performance monitoring and support improved service delivery. This should be embedded in any reconfiguration of the public sector. Performance has to be managed at local as well as national level - greater transparency and standardisation of performance monitoring would help but government needs to take the lead in setting up structures to achieve robust national performance monitoring.

Finally, meaningful involvement of service users at all stages of planning and delivery is important. This should be based on sound principles, perhaps similar to those developed through the National Youth Information Framework by YoungScot. The National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) is doing some interesting work on co-production and the importance of involving stakeholders in service planning and design as well as delivery.

Part of SCRA's Participation and Engagement project has involved the recruitment of four young people (aged 16-19) as Modern Apprentices. They all have backgrounds in the Hearings System giving them invaluable first hand experience and will be with us for two years while they work towards an SVQ in Youth Work. During this period they will be involved in inspecting Hearings facilities as well as meeting with those services directly linked in with SCRA and the Children's Hearings System and developing a Young Person's Reference Group, to continue exploring ways to improve services from a child and/or young persons' perspective. They are also currently designing new information leaflets, a poster, and, in partnership with Young Scot, a DVD about Children's Hearings.

- **How best can wider organisational arrangements (including functions, structures and processes) support and enable the delivery of effective services?**

SCRA has embarked on a programme of organisational change. This has been initiated for a number of reasons - we need to modernise our practices and procedures, and we need to adapt to the economic climate to ensure we continue to provide quality services to children and families. We are looking at a variety of issues, including making the best use of our properties and developing the roles and technology innovations we will need for the years ahead. Some of these changes we can implement quite quickly to improve our efficiency, whilst others will be for the longer term.

Outcomes

We are currently working with partners to develop shared outcomes across the Children's Hearings System and the first meeting of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) was held in November 2010. This collaborative national improvement partnership was set up with the single intention of delivering better outcomes for children across the whole Children's Hearings System. Its membership is drawn from representatives of the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW), Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) Children's Panel Chairs Group (CPCG), Children's Hearings Training Organisers (CHTO), Scottish Safeguarders Association (SSA), Crown Office, Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP), COSLA, as well as the Scottish Government and SCRA.

The intention is for this approach (developing whole system solutions) to become the norm within the Children's Hearings System. For example, the CHIP group is also looking at sharing research resources so that all members can enjoy its findings. This would assist with decisions about how to target limited resources earlier and therefore more efficiently and effectively. On a more general note, greater national coordination of research across general themes, with the cooperation of universities, would assist with the improvement of public services

Partnership working



Opening up community planning partnerships to organisations such as SCRA would also help develop this more integrated approach. There remains a significant challenge for national bodies to connect meaningfully with all local authorities and Community Planning partnerships in practical terms.

SCRA's Partnership project seeks to address these issues by providing local managers with the training, tools and support to actively influence and engage with partners. For example, by seeking to influence the development of Single Outcome Agreements or becoming more involved in Community Planning processes.

Shared services

Sharing services across organisational boundaries (local to local; national to national; and national to local) should all be explored as a means of delivering savings that can be re-invested in improved frontline service delivery.

SCRA is fully signed up to the shared services agenda and is already utilising such arrangements to drive efficiency savings. We are involved in collaborative contracts with other public bodies including the Scottish Government on such things as: translation services, IT and telephony, electricity and gas, confidential waste disposal, stationery, drinking water, taxis, equipment and furniture, cleaning, post, recruitment advertising, occupational health services and building maintenance.

Work is also underway to enable SCRA to share "back office" services, and possibly property and facilities, with Children's Hearings Scotland (the new NDPB tasked with supporting children's panel members).

In readiness for shared services, work has been undertaken in four areas. These areas are:

- Benchmarking shared services in the Public Sector;
- Reviewing SCRA's legal position (in relation to the sharing of services);
- Building an integrated model of support/shared services; and
- Engaging with Scottish Government.

A review of the Scottish public sector landscape in respect of shared services points to a number of initiatives. SCRA has made contact with a number of organisations who are currently providing some form of shared services to identify the key enablers and constraints from their experience.

We are also exploring opportunities for shared service agreements with other bodies both within and outwith Scotland. We recognise that this may require adjustments to legislation and would encourage the Scottish Government and the Parliament to ensure that legislation is drafted in a way which facilitates sharing of services as widely as possible across the public sector (subject to legitimate constraints regarding independence of some key functions). The order making powers in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act provides a route to make any changes necessary to existing legislation to enable this to take place.

Finance

When a major cost of social care is in relation to the workforce, the ability for leaders to properly utilise pay and reward to support change is fundamental. Constraints through pay regulations limit organisations as employers from exercising full flexibility to reduce overall costs. The process in itself is also unnecessarily burdensome and costly. Greater autonomy over pay bills could actually support cost reductions as part of the change agenda.

About 70% of SCRA's budgeted gross revenue expenditure is on salary costs. Increases in pay, pensions and national insurance will be unavoidable over the next spending review period and these additional costs will need to be funded from efficiencies and different ways of working.

We are exploring with our staff the potential of flexible working: both in terms of where people work, including home working, and also the hours that people work. There are challenges (and outlay costs) for home working but benefits for costs in buildings - where people work, and benefits for the service if staff have flexible work patterns.

Key to minimising risk to services and service users is organisations' ability to plan effectively. For this we require as much clarity as possible of the financial position into the future and, subject to Ministerial approval, the freedom to develop and implement three year plans with guarantees over associated funding.

We believe there should be a priority-based review of all capital programmes/projects and once completed, public bodies should have flexibility to move resources within and across programmes and between years within a spending review period.

Constraints in Framework Documents should be considered and where appropriate relaxed. Reference has already been made to pay and reward constraints but other restrictions such as moving resources between capital and revenue (to support one-off spend to save initiatives), access to leasing, loans and other sources of finance subject to value for money tests, insurance (again subject to a value for money test) and retention of efficiency savings, including disposal of assets (in particular property) surplus to requirements.

These changes are all about pushing decision making and accountability as close to the frontline as possible thus providing the greatest chance of delivering efficiency gains and achieving cost reductions.

As mentioned above greater access to finance via leasing and loans should be considered. Pooling resources and giving them to the lead body best placed to effect change on a particular project may work in some cases. Greater collaboration with the third sector can sometimes bring in additional resources at lower cost, for example this model has been utilised by SCRA's Engagement with Children and Families project.

Technological solutions

SCRA has a number of projects which seek to maximise and improve service provision through modernising its use of IT/IS systems. For example, we will deliver a new case management system which includes the development of new business processes to assist in flexible, efficient and accurate use of information along with an integrated electronic filing system for case files. The paper 'light' approach will save on stationery, storage and property costs but more importantly will enable us to share information electronically with our partners. The system will mean a reduction in data entry and manual processing and will offer options for online delivery of panel papers and other information with partners. Within this project, a specific workstream aims to improve processes for the management of high priority children so that decisions are reached for these children at the earliest possible opportunity.

In advance of the case management system's introduction, SCRA has developed a new system to electronically receive reports from the police. The project gained final ACPOS approval in December 2010 and the aim is to have all forces submitting reports in this way by March 2011.

- **What shared values and ethos should underpin Scotland public services, and how best can they be embedded in the delivery of public services in the future?**

SCRA, along with all other public bodies, has aligned its business plans to ensure that it contributes to the relevant national outcomes. Increasingly, the main challenge that SCRA and its partners will face is the alignment and agreement of shared actions within a complex set of competing priorities for children and young people. As stated above, the CHIP group is developing a set of shared outcomes for the Hearings System which will help to ensure that this takes place and that the interventions received by children are those which can make a positive difference to their lives.

Alongside this focus on shared outcomes, it will be important to rationalise and streamline information and data recording. Agreement on what information needs to be recorded (linked to the agreed shared outcomes) and which organisation is best placed to do so, would help to reduce the burden on agencies (potentially freeing up resources), prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and ensure that information is only held where it is serving a particular purpose.

Standards across the board need to be set with the meaningful involvement of those actually doing the work, alongside contributions from service users. Government has a clear role in providing a lead on best practice with sufficient force to ensure that it is adopted.

SCRA agrees with the conclusions of the recent Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee report which highlighted the importance of preventative spending, particularly in relation to the early years. There are opportunities to address this through implementation of the Early Years Framework and the GIRFEC programme and it is these values, alongside the Kilbrandon principles upon which the Children's Hearings System is based, that should underpin those public services that relate to children and young people.

SCRA
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