

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 29 MAY 2003**

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 29 MAY 2003**

**SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE – 5 JUNE 2003**

**INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR THE EARLY YEARS:  
CONSULTATION (SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE)  
JOINT REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF  
SOCIAL WORK AND THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES**

**ABSTRACT**

This report advises the committee of the publication by the Scottish Executive of the consultation paper “Integrated Strategy for the Early Years”.

**1 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- [i] notes the terms of the report;
- [ii] approves the officer response (Appendix) to the consultation paper. Copies of the consultation paper are available in the Members’ Lounge).

**2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The consultation paper “Integrated Strategy for the Early Years” has been issued by the Scottish Executive as part of the Ministers’ theme for a Scotland which is built on fairness, equality and opportunity. This vision emphasises the importance of providing every child with the best possible start in their early years.
- 2.2 The consultation paper focuses on those services provided to young children (from pre-birth to 5 years of age) and to their families. It sets out a framework which draws together existing Executive policies in this area – those promoting Childcare, Health Visitor Support, Pre-school Education or broader support for the development of parenting skills. It seeks to promote greater coherence between these Executive policies to give better support children and families and more effective joined-up services in local communities.
- 2.3 The paper describes clearly why support in the early years is so important and effective and why it is necessary to join up available services around the needs of children and their families.
- 2.4 A number of specific objectives under the headings of Children’s Health, Children’s Social and Emotional Development, Children’s Ability to Learn, the Strengthening of Families in Communities and the Reduction in Barriers to Employment – especially for lone parents, provide a basic framework against which performance measures have been set.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Existing Executive programmes such as Sure Start Scotland, the Childcare Strategy, the provision of free pre-school education for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents wish it, and the range of initiatives funded through the Health Improvement Fund, all make a vital contribution to the quality of life for young children and their families and to their future prospects.
- 3.2 Also, appropriate emphasis is given to the range of broader universal services such as those provided by General Practitioners and Health Visitors. This particular aspect of provision was addressed comprehensively in the report “For Scotland’s Children” which, in a similar fashion, enjoins agencies and services to work in a close collaborative manner.
- 3.3 The strategy seeks to encourage more effective, joined-up working by proposing five key building blocks:
- The alignment of Executive policies across departments to enable a co-ordinated and coherent framework for the promotion of the health and well-being of children in their early years and that of their families.
  - The creation of greater coherence in relevant Executive funding to enable fully integrated early years services delivery.
  - The provision of a set of clear outcomes for local partners targeting health improvement and narrowing the opportunity gap for children in vulnerable and disadvantaged families.
  - Supporting joint planning, commissioning and single system service delivery of early years services in local authorities and NHS Boards and Trusts.
  - The provision of a framework to monitor and evaluate impact drawing on an analysis of Children’s Services Plans, the NHS Performance Assessment Framework and Commission Research.

### **4 PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 It is proposed that members endorse the officer response to this consultation paper (attached as Appendix 1) as the council’s reply to the consultation exercise.

### **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **6 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no human rights implications arising directly from this report.

### **7 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

JIM ANDERSON  
DIRECTOR OF  
EDUCATION

ROBERT PEAT  
ACTING DIRECTOR OF  
SOCIAL WORK

JOHN ZIMNY  
DIRECTOR OF LEISURE  
SERVICES

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

APPENDIX

JAA/JN/LJ5827

15 May 2003

Mr Iain McIver  
Children and Young People's Group  
Scottish Executive Education Department  
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Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Mr McIver

### **INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR THE EARLY YEARS: CONSULTATION EXERCISE**

Following consideration of the consultation paper the comments below represent the considered response of Angus Council's Education Service, Social Work Service, Leisure Services and the Angus Childcare Partnership.

The central strategy of the paper is welcomed as it provides a reassurance of the continuing commitment of the Scottish Executive to the provision of coherent, joined-up local services targeted specifically towards the areas of greatest need.

In particular, the attention given to vulnerable children and their families in order to ensure that **all** children get the best possible start in their early years is endorsed.

The purpose of the Early Years Strategy is clearly detailed and the proposed linkages with Health Services, in particular, are welcomed. The different operational structures of Health Services and Local Authorities – particularly when there is no co-terminosity of services – can lead to difficulties in achieving the idea of more effective joined-up working. Ministerial direction to promote more collaborative working, the sharing of resources and guidance on joint funding would be helpful. The strategy paper contains much which is correct and, indeed unarguable, but it does on occasion lapse into simplicity. An example of that is the broad objective "*to reduce barriers to employment, especially for lone parents, since work is the best route out of poverty*". Many families, particularly those in rural areas, find that the only type work which is on offer does not in any sense offer a way out of poverty and perhaps a little more sensitivity might be required in promoting that particular objective.

Lessons which have been learned from earlier research documents and reports have, on occasion, failed to result in changes in practice on the ground. A specific example of this is the follow-up, or lack of it, to "*For Scotland's Children, Better Integrated Children's Services*". At the launch of this document particular attention was given to the need to have a joint assessment tool. As yet, no such tool has been provided and the very real gap identified by the authors of the report has still to be filled. It would greatly assist developments in the area of joint working across the country if this particular aspect could be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Helpfully, the summary of the benefits of joint working as described in paragraph 16 are acknowledged. Paragraph 23 was considered to be reasonably accurate in terms of analysis but, again, perhaps too simplistic in terms of describing a strategy for improvement.

Attention has, rightly, been given to the need to align existing policies in a manner which avoids duplication of effort and costs whilst achieving the outcomes described elsewhere in the report. However, it is important to note that certain projects – eg New Community Schools – may well not survive in their present format if the funding streams currently available to local authorities are removed. It is neither helpful nor reasonable for local authorities to mainstream additional services at a time when they face very real constraints in terms of their core service delivery. It is also recognised that, in order to demonstrate success and effectiveness, appropriate outcome measures must be produced. However, the outcomes under the heading “*To Improve Children’s Ability to Learn*” appear too narrow in focus and provide no means of assessing the value added measures which schools provide. More detailed comment on this aspect is made in response to the specific consultation questions.

The reference to the fact that “*many workers are lost to the workforce, often citing poor career prospects or pay as the reasons behind this*” is conveyed in an unfortunate manner. It is an undeniable fact that workers in the childcare workforce in particular remain amongst the most poorly paid – often with limited or no career prospects. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the turnover of staff is high. This is a potentially damaging state of affairs and is surely not a position which can be considered to be sustainable in the long-term.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

**1** *Are the proposed outcomes the right ones to let us measure if we are successfully meeting the needs of children in the early years? Are there any that you think should be added and if so, are they capable of measurement? Will the proposed outcomes allow us to measure if agencies are successfully targeting the needs of more vulnerable and deprived children and families? Is there the right mix between “hard” quantifiable indicators and “softer” quality of data.*

The general outcomes are endorsed as being appropriate and the number of individual outcome measures is probably sufficient. Any further increase in the number of outcome measures would probably be unhelpful and might possibly reduce the impact of the early years strategy document.

The proposed outcomes under the heading “To improve children's ability to learn” were considered to be narrow in focus and disappointing in scope. The emphasis on 5 - 14 attainment data might not be considered to be totally robust given that there is no external moderation of such school-based assessments. A preferable approach would be the use of standardised baseline, entry data to be used with the results of nationally standardised testing procedures throughout a child's primary school career. This approach would provide evidence of the value-added dimension to an individual child’s learning and progress.

**2** *What changes might be needed to planning mechanisms to ensure that the range of early years interest reflected in a strategy are involved fully in service planning? What would this mean for the role of Childcare Partnerships? Would early years planning provide a way forward?*

It was disappointing to note the proposal that Early Years forums be re-established. Angus Council, working in close collaboration with a wide range of partners, has

supported the development of a Childcare Partnership which has a clear place at the heart of the authority's strategic planning system. The Partnership has undertaken extensive consultation exercises with, and through, the various partner agencies, service organisations and partner providers represented on the group as well as working in close collaboration with local community organisations. Senior Council officers play a key role in supporting the work of the Partnership and are well placed not only to enhance the work of the Partnership itself but to ensure appropriate communication in respect of service developments within their own organisations. In addition, the Childcare Partnership officer in Angus has become an integral member of the Joint Strategic Support Unit which aims to integrate the planning of **all** childcare services across **all** agencies. This development will, in turn, strengthen the links between universal service provision and services to vulnerable children and their families.

The implementation of the Early Years strategy document might be made easier by ensuring that individual Childcare Partnerships have a strengthened role within each individual local authority. There is no doubt that the local Childcare Partnership has been extremely successful in delivering upon a number of the Executive's declared priorities eg the development of out of school care provision, the extension of pre-school educational provision, the provision of training opportunities in childcare and the support of voluntary organisations. It is also worth highlighting the fact that the agreement of childcare partnerships is not exclusively confined to early years but also covers the each spectrum of zero -- 14. This point is important as the development of services for very young children should be closely aligned to the development of services for other children in the five -- 14 age group.

Angus Council has developed a corporate and strategic approach to planning for the development of services and the Childcare Partnership occupies a key role in the Council's planning structure. The proposal to introduce an early years forum would be strongly resisted as being inappropriate.

**3** *What barriers are there to developing and delivering integrated early years services in your area? What changes and actions would remove these barriers and improve service deliver? How far would the proposals in this draft strategy help?*

There are two principal barriers to developing and delivering integrated early years services in Angus. These are the rural nature of the authority itself in which economies of scale and the disproportionate costs associated with establishing provision for very small numbers of children make the costs of developing new provision prohibitive. Secondly, the lack of sufficient appropriate physical provision within existing buildings and facilities means that large sums of money must be found to pay for the capital costs of developing new provision.

In addition to these features which would require substantial amounts of financial investment, there are also other difficulties associated with multi-agency working. There is still a fair amount of professional or organisational loyalty to individual services (and service budgets) which can hamper developments. It is possible that some of these organisational barriers might be reduced if there was evidence of more coherence from the Scottish Executive when major initiatives are launched. This is particularly true when individual services are set performance targets which tend to be agency specific and without any reference to other services. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that individual services might focus their energies on these tasks rather than considering how to work in a multi-agency context.

The proposals in the strategy which are endorsed can best be delivered through the Childcare Partnership.

**4** *Are the proposals on monitoring and evaluation sufficient to ensure we are making progress against the set of outcomes? What might agencies need to help them adequately monitor their performance?*

The proposals on monitoring and evaluation are sufficient but, given the nature of the work which will be undertaken to achieve these outcomes, it should be emphasised that the targets are medium-long term in nature. If the focus is on upon short-term achievement it is likely to lead to disappointment and criticism of the strategy itself.

It will be important to ensure that the data obtained from performance monitoring is robust. The data gathered from one authority area must be directly comparable with that obtained from any other area otherwise comparison and evaluation will be rendered meaningless or of little value.

**5** *How can existing good practice and research relating to integrated service provision in the early years be better shared and disseminated to and between all service providers and agencies? It would be helpful if you could give any examples of service provision that, in your view, particularly demonstrates good practice.*

The concept of promoting good practice and research relating to integrated service provision in the early years is endorsed. It would be helpful if Scottish Executive staff, having considered all of the Children's Services Plans from each authority, could select issues which would merit wider consideration.

It would also be helpful if newsletters from individual Childcare Partnerships along with the details of their training programmes, their work with other organisations and their linkages with other Scottish Executive initiatives could be shared.

One particularly good example of a local development which could be shared would be the local early years co-ordinating team which is a multi-agency body established to ensure that support for pre-school children who have special educational needs and other support requirements is provided.

We trust you find the above comments, which are the result of consultation and collaboration amongst the agencies and services noted below, to be helpful. If, however, you require any further information or clarification I would ask you to contact the Director of Education.

Yours sincerely

Jim Anderson  
Director of Education

Robert Peat  
Acting Director of Social Work

John Zimny  
Director of Leisure Services

Eleanor Mands  
Chairperson  
Angus Childcare Partnership