

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 2 JUNE 2011

SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE – 11 AUGUST 2011

‘JOINING THE DOTS’ – A BETTER START FOR SCOTLAND’S CHILDREN

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
AND THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH

**ABSTRACT**

This report advises elected members about the key messages of ‘Joining the Dots’ - a better start for Scotland’s Children’, an independent report on Early Years services by Professor Susan Deacon.

**1 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

It is recommended that the Education Committee and the Social Work and Health Committee:

- (i) note the contents of this report
- (ii) note that the key messages and direction provided in Professor Deacon’s report will guide, support and inform local developments in respect of early years provision
- (iii) note that an electronic copy of the report is available at:-  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/343337/0114216.pdf>

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In December 2008, the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly published the Early Years Framework, which set out the policy direction for the early years over a ten year period. Reference is made to the meetings of the Education Committee of 21 January 2010 (Article 6 refers), Social Work and Health Committee of 18 February 2010 (Article 4 refers) and Angus Community Planning Partnership of 19 May 2010 when members were advised about the key elements of the National Early Years Framework and approved a corresponding Angus position statement.
- 2.2 Scottish Government published a ‘Progress So Far’ Report in December 2010. Reference is made to Report No 163/11 which was considered by the Education Committee on 3 March 2011 and by the Social Work and Health Committee on 7 April 2011. That joint Committee Report summarised the progress made nationally in delivering commitments within the Early Years Framework as well as highlighting outstanding challenges.
- 2.3 In June 2010, the Scottish Government pledged to renew the national effort on early years. As part of this effort, Professor Susan Deacon was invited to explore current early years activity across children’s services in Scotland and to bring forward suggestions for practical actions to build consensus about the continuing importance and value of investing early.
- 2.4 Professor Deacon’s exploration resulted in the publication in March 2011 of ‘Joining The Dots’ – a better start for Scotland’s children. This publication articulates the main issues for the early years, draws upon evidence and information gathered and concludes by providing suggestions about the way forward.
- 2.5 The key aspects of Professor Deacon’s exploratory work included:-
  - leading an extensive dialogue with professionals, politicians, academics and parents about the critical importance of children’s early life experiences and our shared responsibility to invest in their future

- examining what more can be done across Scotland to ensure that we are ‘getting it right’ for all children, no matter what their personal or social circumstances.
- fostering a consensus about the crucial links between investment in the early years and how Scotland prospers as a nation
- bringing forward suggestions for practical action to deepen and intensify this agenda across Scotland at a time of unprecedented public expenditure pressures.

### 3 KEY MESSAGES HIGHLIGHTED IN ‘JOINING THE DOTS’

- 3.1 Professor Deacon’s report provides a helpfully comprehensive overview of the early years landscape across Scotland and proposes fundamental changes to the way we think and work across early years.
- 3.2 The report highlights the growing need to radically shift energy, time and resource from analysis and research to action and from process to people.
- 3.3 It calls for a clear commitment to putting prevention and early intervention at the core of policy thinking and of future public investment.
- 3.4 In the context of current and future financial constraints, it emphasises the need to think more creatively and to improve collaboration across partners to support and provide high quality early years services.
- 3.5 Professor Deacon’s conclusion about the effectiveness of current early years services in Scotland is unambiguous and is stated in terms which offer local authorities and children’s services partners due challenge. She has concluded that *“even with the pressures that exist, there is much more we can do to give children in Scotland a better start in life. But this will require a genuine and concerted effort and a fundamentally different way of thinking and working. It will also require a degree of collaboration and depth of commitment which has been lacking to date.”*

### 4 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 In teasing out that conclusion, Professor Deacon recommends a number of strands of work which she believes could significantly enhance early years provision. These recommendations are as follows:
- *“we must do more to raise the awareness of the importance of the fundamental needs of babies and young children and in doing so provide the knowledge, encouragement, support and services to ensure that they benefit from positive early years experiences”*
  - *“Scotland still has much to do to give children a better start in life. An array of policies and initiatives has not delivered the improvement we would have liked. There must be a willingness to think and work differently in the future- identifying, exploring and tackling deep rooted cultural issues needs to go hand in hand with better and earlier intervention and support”*
  - *“where data is gathered, or measurement takes place, we should be sure that it is relevant and contributes towards driving improvement”*
  - *“we have yet to tap into the full potential of the wealth of knowledge, experience and commitment that exists in Scotland and to bring people and ideas together to lead and drive change”*
  - *“not everything that matters costs money. It is important to remind ourselves that a lot of things that really matter to babies and young children are not costly”*
  - *“we need to recognise that it is people that make the difference and to value and respect the opinions and strengths of children, families and communities themselves”*

## **5 LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRESS**

- 5.1 The key messages in the Deacon report will be considered in depth by the Early Years Joint Action Group and used to inform and shape local implementation of the Early Years Framework and of the Angus Early Year's Framework position statement and related action plan.
- 5.2 The continuing implementation of the Early Years Framework in Angus will have a major focus on:
- a move away from crisis management to prevention and early intervention
  - the realignment of resources to maximise joint preventative investment in the early years
  - a shift in focus from doing things for or to people towards enabling them to support themselves, their families and communities
  - maximising the capacity of universal services to improve outcomes for children and young people
  - delivering support and services in an integrated way, using a child-centred and multi-agency approach, in line with national and local GIRFEC ambitions
  - support for workforce development to ensure that the people of Angus are served by a well trained and well supported early year's workforce.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The findings of 'Joining the Dots' strengthen the case for preventative investment and enhanced action in Early Years services. This influential report chimes with local thinking, and will prove helpful in emphasising the importance of partner agencies working more co-operatively and creatively than ever before.
- 6.2 The move towards an integrated early intervention approach is not straightforward and will take long-term sustained commitment from all stakeholders. Progress in relation to Angus commitments to the Early Years Framework will enhance opportunities for all children in Angus to have the best start in life. We are confident that, through the joint efforts of local partners, this ambition can be achieved.

## **7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising from this report.

## **9 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The issues dealt with in this Report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective. An [equalities impact assessment](#) is not required.

## **10 SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT**

10.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Single Outcome Agreement:

- children and young people in Angus will have access to positive learning environments and opportunities to develop their skills, confidence and self- esteem to the fullest potential (National Outcome 4)
- children and young people in Angus will live within a supportive family setting with additional assistance if required, or where this is not possible, within another care setting ensuring a positive and rewarding childhood experience (National Outcome 5)
- children and young people in Angus enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health (National Outcome 6)
- children and their families have access to high quality services when required and are assisted to overcome the social, educational, physical, environmental and economic barriers that create inequality (National Outcome 7)

## **11 CONSULTATION**

11.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**NEIL LOGUE**  
**DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**ROBERT PEAT**  
**DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**NOTE:** 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 a material extent in preparing the above report.

**EJ/NL**