

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 25 AUGUST 2011
 SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE – 22 SEPTEMBER 2011

CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND
 VALUES FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND: ANGUS COUNCIL RESPONSE

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

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this report is to advise members of both Committees about the terms of an officer response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Common Core of skills, knowledge, understanding and values for the children's workforce in Scotland.

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 and endorse the overall positive terms of the response (provided in the appendix to this report) to the Common Core consultation document published by Scottish Government in March 2011
- (iii) note that this response – prepared by Angus Council officers and by officers of partner agencies – was submitted to Scottish Government to comply with the deadline of 15 June 2011
- (iv) note that it is the intention of the Scottish Government to publish a report on the consultation exercise on the Scottish Government website (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations>) by late summer and thereafter to publish an implementation plan to support the adoption of the 'Common Core'.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The priority to adopt a **common** core of skills, knowledge, understanding and values for all members of the Children's Workforce was highlighted in the Early Years Framework www.scotland.gov.uk/earlyyearsframework, published jointly by the Scottish Government and COSLA in December 2008.
- 2.2 Reference is made to Report No 59/10 which was considered by the Education Committee on 21 January 2010 and by the Social Work and Health Committee on 18 February 2010. That report sought approval of an action plan and position statement in relation to the national framework.
- 2.3 Arrangements were made by the Angus Early Years Joint Action Group to prepare a multi-agency response to the March 2011 consultation document.

3 THE COMMON CORE: AIMS, RELATED DEVELOPMENTS AND FOCUS OF THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE

- 3.1 The 'common core' is defined as "the skills, knowledge, understanding and values every worker (paid or unpaid) should have as a minimum if they work with children, young people or families".
- 3.2 The establishment of a common core of skills, knowledge, understanding and values aims to:

- remove unhelpful barriers that exist between different organisations, workers and sectors, thus allowing them to work and communicate more effectively and
- equip the workforce with the skills, knowledge, understanding and values needed to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build capacity within children, young people, families and communities to better help themselves.

3.3 It is the intention of Scottish Government that the common core should add value rather than duplicate efforts made within individual professions or sectors. The Government nonetheless recognises that very positive workforce developments are ongoing across children's services.

3.4 Work around a common core will complement sector-specific work, since it will be designed to achieve goals that sector-specific work cannot fully achieve, in particular, the facilitation and promotion of better partnership and multi-agency working, underpinned by a shared commitment to nurturing vitally important generic skills, knowledge and values.

3.5 In order to progress this agenda, a National Common Skills Working Group was established. Its membership was drawn from a range of national bodies including the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Scottish Social Services Council and the General Teaching Council for Scotland. The group was tasked with progressing two workforce actions which were highlighted in the Early Years Framework with a view to informing and shaping the proposed common core. These actions relate to the:

- identification of the core skills that all members of the children's workforce should have and
- the conduct of a skills analysis to identify skills gaps and recommendations about how to fill those gaps

The findings of the national common skills working group were in effect the focus of this national consultation exercise.

3.6 The national consultation document specifically invited the views of respondents on (a) the accuracy and appropriateness of the proposed common skills, knowledge, understanding and values (b) suggestions about how the implementation of the common core might be managed locally and (c) challenges which might exist in relation to local implementation.

4 ANGUS RESPONSE

4.1 As indicated in paragraph 2.3 above, in preparing the multi-agency response, broad consultation took place across partner organisations represented within the new Angus Children's and Learning Partnership. The response, therefore, includes perspectives from Health, Education, Social Work and the Voluntary Sector.

4.2 The response noted that:

- Angus Children's Services Partners welcome the approach that the common core advocates in considering the needs of the children's services workforce as a whole and in seeking to introduce a consistent and coherent way of working which will enable that workforce to have access to common learning and development opportunities, thereby embedding from the outset a 'working together' ethos
- the common core proposal makes welcome links to other key national drivers for the delivery of high quality services to children, young people and families, in particular, Getting It Right, The Early Years Framework, Equally Well, Achieving Our Potential and Curriculum for Excellence. (However, further work will be required nationally and locally to ensure that the common core is aligned and indeed enshrined within the national vision for children, young people and families)
- in principle, the proposed common core provides a basic foundation of key skills, knowledge and understanding which will go some way towards strengthening commitments in relation to early intervention, tackling inequalities and building capacity

- there is a need to acknowledge that the diverse children's workforce includes volunteers, kinship carers and professionally qualified workers. Workers across the various agencies will clearly require different levels of competencies, depending on their role, agency and context. At this stage, it is not clear how precisely the common core framework will strengthen or bring added value to skills and competencies which are specific to one or other profession or sector
- the proposed framework may perhaps be of more assistance to non-statutory agencies by assisting them to develop an indispensable 'baseline', thus ensuring uniformity and a minimum standard of competence across the entire Children's Services workforce.

4.3 With respect to the local implementation of the Common Core, the Angus response recommends that steps be taken to:

- review current procedures and practices across agencies in order to achieve consistency and standardisation in relation to the common core, for example, through common recruitment procedures, job descriptions, job adverts and person specifications
- rationalise and streamline multi-agency continuing professional development opportunities
- build on our existing multi-agency training strategy to ensure that there is due focus on these common core skills, knowledge and values.

4.4 With respect to the challenges which might exist in relation to the implementation of the common core, key observations offered in the attached response related to the need to:

- get all organisations to 'sign up' and agree on prioritising the common core agenda, in particular, through current major 'Getting It Right' developments
- bring about genuine cultural change to provide flexible career opportunities for the workforce to practise in different settings across children services
- manage competing priorities at a time of diminishing resources
- ensure that the components of the common core are embedded and fully reflected in the standards of all the relevant regulatory and professional bodies, including the Sector Skills Council.

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 from this report.

7 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The issues contained in the report fall within an approved category that has been confirmed as [exempt from an equalities perspective](#).

8 SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

8.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single outcome Agreement 2011-2014:

- we have a sustainable economy with good employment opportunities
- Angus is a good place to live in, work in and visit

- our children and young people are confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens
- our communities are safe, secure and vibrant
- we have improved the health and wellbeing of our people and inequalities are reduced.
- individuals are supported in their own communities with good quality services.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 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

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DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH

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.

ED/NL/SRD/EJ

Appendix

CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND

ANGUS RESPONSE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Angus Children's Services partners welcome in principle the proposed introduction of the Common Core for the Children's Workforce in Scotland and are pleased to have the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation.
- 1.2 In preparing this multi-agency response broad consultation has taken place across partner organisations within the Angus Children's and Learning Partnership structure and includes inputs from Health, Voluntary Sector, Education and Social Work.
- 1.3 Angus Children's Services partners endorse the main aims of the common core which are:
- to remove the unhelpful barriers that exist between different organisations, workers and sectors allowing them to work and communicate more effectively together
 - to equip the workforce with the skills, knowledge, understanding and values to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build capacity within children, young people, families and communities to better help themselves
- 1.4 We welcome the approach that the common core takes in considering the needs of the broad children's services workforce as a whole and in introducing a consistent, coherent way of working which enables the workforce to have access to learning and development opportunities, that are shared across professions, thereby embedding from the outset a 'working together' ethos.
- 1.5 The common core proposal makes welcome links to other key national drivers for the delivery of high quality services to children, young people and families, in particular, *Getting It Right*, The Early Years Framework, Equally Well, Achieving Our Potential and Curriculum for Excellence.
- 1.6 Staff are one of our most valuable assets. We are therefore committed to investing in workforce development for all staff working directly or indirectly with children, young people and families.

2.0 CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

The consultation has generated a diverse range of responses and views which are captured and summarised below. These are based on the two main aims of the consultation namely:

- the accuracy and appropriateness of the proposed common skills, knowledge and understanding
- and suggestions about the implementation of the common core

The key questions are considered in turn.

2.1 Workers need to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build the capacity of children, young people and families.

To what extent do you agree that the proposed common core equips our workers to do this?

In principle, the proposed common core provides a basic foundation of key skills, knowledge and understanding which will go some way towards early intervention, tackling inequalities and building capacity.

However, it is important to recognise that the framework requires to align with the Scottish Government's vision for children, young people and families enshrined in, for example, *Getting It Right*, the Early Years Framework and Health For All Children.

There is a need to acknowledge that the "children's workforce" includes a diverse group which includes volunteers, kinship carers and professionally qualified workers. Workers across the various agencies will require different levels of competencies depending on their role, agency context and so forth. At this stage, it is not clear that or how this generic common core framework will strengthen or bring added value to what exists currently.

This general/generic framework may perhaps be of more assistance to "non-statutory" agencies by assisting them to develop a 'baseline', thus ensuring uniformity and a minimum standard of competence across Children's Services workers.

2.2 What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "sound observation, judgement and decision making?"

Under each skill set it is our view that the generalised statement "workers will need anything from an awareness of these areas to a deep understanding depending on their role" is not particularly helpful. It is not specific enough to make a difference to what already exists.

For some single agencies, in particular, Social Work it is felt that specific areas were implicit; they need to be more explicit, i.e. risk assessment, risk management and assessment skills used in making judgements.

When adopted, the key elements within the common core will require to be promoted within the context of support and supervision arrangements and indeed appraisal/professional review and development procedures.

2.3 What specific comments do you have around the skills and knowledge associated with "appropriate and effective communication"?

We would welcome clear guidance or a statement on "confidentiality and consent" – this is often cited as a barrier to sharing information. (Degree of "openness" varies from one agency to another).

2.4 What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "effective partnership and multi- agency working?"

Effective partnership & multi- agency working at all levels is generally strong across Angus.

However, it is recognised that a better understanding of each other's roles and how they support one another would be helpful.

The statement "advantages of utilising the latest tools from the National policy context to improve your practice" would be helpful if this was more explicit around the 'Getting It Right' practice model and tools, integrated working and person-centred approaches.

In terms of different professional terminology & language – *The Getting It Right* approach should assist with moving towards a standardised approach.

2.5 What if anything is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?

The statements are very general and would benefit from more detail, depth and more specific definitions, for example, tiered levels of competency and skills ranging from basic awareness to advanced/specialist levels.

As the 'Getting It Right' values underpin all our work, they should come first and not at the end of this section of the document.

It is our view that the format and layout of this section is not particularly helpful and is open to misunderstanding and different interpretations. Reformatting this section would prove beneficial.

It is suggested that there is a need to include a greater focus on intended outcomes for children, young people and their families. It would be helpful to make reference to appropriate tools, for example, by being explicit about the impact of our interventions and the difference we can make.

It will also be important to look beyond the common core and consider qualities, values, personality and attributes, for example, empathy, patience and understanding

In addition to what is listed it is important that members of the workforce have knowledge and understanding of the national context including key policy drivers for example:-

- *Getting it Right*
- Early Years Framework
- Equally Well
- Achieving Our Potential

It will also be important for the workforce to have an understanding of legislative frameworks including regulation and inspection requirements, child protection policy, procedures and processes. Basic awareness and understanding of data protection, human rights and equalities legislation would also clearly be desirable.

With regards to the development of babies, children & young people we cannot over emphasise how important it is to gain a comprehensive understanding of key milestones. It is apparent that too many members of the workforce particularly in the private sector do NOT have this level of knowledge. Given the focus and importance of 'getting it right' for the birth – three age group, a particular focus should be given to 'Early' childhood development including knowledge of the theories of play.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED COMMON CORE

2.6 Describe briefly how, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values?

- Work with partners to develop a generic induction for children's services staff that is based on the common core framework.
- Review current procedures and practices across agencies to achieve consistency and standardisation in relation to the common core, for example, recruitment procedures, job descriptions, job adverts and person specifications
- Rationalisation and streamlining of multi-agency continuing professional development opportunities
- Continue to build on our existing multi-agency training strategy to ensure that the common core skills and knowledge are duly integrated.
- Explore opportunities to bring children's services staff together to share good practice, expertise and knowledge, for example, at development events, mentoring networks and shared service events.
- Secure local agreement on the adoption and implementation of the common core at a strategic multi-agency level. Develop a local implementation plan informed by the national plan likely to result from this consultation.

2.7 What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels?

Strategic Management

Integrating the common core within existing inter-agency and multi-agency arrangements will require a strategic overview.

We are well placed in Angus to provide strategic support and direction to this initiative through the work of:

- the Children's and Learning Partnership Executive Group
- Joint Action Groups
- the Angus Community Planning Partnership
- the Adult Protection Committee
- the Child Protection Committee
- Angus Voluntary Sector Children's Forum
 - Single agency Senior Management Teams
 - Strategic Support/Planning Officers

Operational Management

Opportunities exist locally to raise awareness and promote the common core by engagement with the following groups:

- Service groups

- Practitioner forums
- the Educational Development Service
- Head Teachers

and through

- Continuing professional development plans
- Appraisal/ Professional review and development schedules

Day to day working with children, young people and families

Opportunities exist locally for frontline practitioners to gain greater knowledge, understanding and practice skills via: -

- Form Tutor training
- Continuing professional development plans
- Supervision appraisal / Professional review and development
- Modelling of good practice
- Mentoring and coaching skills
- Observation and feedback
- Induction
- In-service training
- Multi-agency training

2.8 What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations/sectors to implement the common core?

The common core undoubtedly brings a number of opportunities to strengthen further the successful partnership working that is already in existence across Angus.

The Children's and Learning Partnership will be instrumental in taking this work forward and in developing the common core approach in particular, through the work of the Early Years and Childcare Joint Action Group and the Inter-agency Workforce Development Group.

This approach links and dovetails with other key local priorities, for example, Getting It Right, the shared services agenda, and recent research on the 'Link Up' initiative (CAPSM). This led to a multi-agency action plan to promote best practice.

There will be opportunities to work alongside further education providers to offer students practice learning opportunities across agencies.

Greater multi-agency working arrangements should also be developed to provide members of the workforce with opportunities to shadow colleagues and support the easy movement of staff across services in order to broaden skills, knowledge and experience.

2.9 What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

Particular challenges around implementing the common core are likely to include:-

- Getting all organisations to 'sign up' and agree on prioritising the common core agenda; however, *Getting It Right* developments will assist in this process
- Uniformity and the rationalisation of job titles across all children's services staff will be challenging. Currently there are hundreds of different job titles describing

members of the workforce who work with children, young people and families across Scotland. Is one size likely to fit all?

- The logistics and management of providing flexible career opportunities for the workforce to practice in different settings across children services will be challenging in the absence of genuine cultural change
- Tension between resourcing 'generic' skills, knowledge and understanding and the need to support workers with their continuing professional development/post-registration training and learning requirements in relation to 'specialist' skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Managing competing priorities at a time of diminishing resources – will the common core skills be guidance or mandatory?
- It will be important to be clear how the common core will integrate with other workforce development plans and other national frameworks which are currently in operation, for example, the Continuing Learning Framework
- It will be important that the components of the common core are embedded and fully reflected into the standards of regulatory and professional bodies including the Sector Skills Council.
- There are likely to be significant implications for the voluntary and private sectors in participating in this agenda, these will need to be addressed at the implementation stage.
- There will be a need to be creative in delivery methods and rolling out training to enable the whole workforce to access learning opportunities including through easier access to each other's training/professional learning programmes and resources and the use of e-learning.
- It is the view of a number of key partners that, as it stands, the common core framework will not provide "added value". It is suggested that it be developed further into a workable/usable framework, linked to specific outcomes. This will allow agencies to duly plan and to evidence that staff have acquired skills, knowledge, understanding and values with reference to agreed standards, for example, the Continuing Learning Framework.

3.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion:-

- 3.1 A consistency of approach in implementing the common core across the country is key to developing the children's workforce in the ways envisaged in the consultation documents.
- 3.2 It will be crucial that a strong commitment is given at a national level to the introduction, implementation and further development of the common core.
- 3.3 Greater clarity and detail around the content, delivery and implementation of the Common Core would be welcome. We look forward to receiving in the autumn a copy of the implementation plan which takes detailed account of responses to this consultation exercise.