

Getting It Right for Every Child

Response from Community Care Providers Scotland September 2005

Community Care Providers Scotland (CCPS) is the association of voluntary sector organisations providing care and support services in Scotland. 30 of CCPS's member organisations provide services for children, young people and families; in 2003/04, members provided in excess of £65million worth of children's services.

CCPS is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the proposals for improving children's services. These comments reflect general opinions and concerns of members; individual organisations will submit their own, more detailed responses. The CCPS response does not deal with proposals on the children's hearings system, as this falls out with the remit of the organisation. This submission details the views of voluntary sector providers under three main headings:

- The role of the voluntary sector
- Implications of voluntary sector involvement and
- Other issues arising from the proposals.

The key points made have also been reformatted to answer questions 1-6 of the consultation.

The role of the voluntary sector

CCPS is unsure as to the status of the voluntary sector within the proposals. While the ministerial foreword explicitly states that voluntary sector organisations will be affected by the plans, it is unclear whether this is because obligations placed on "agencies" in the document extend to them, or merely in their role as a service provider, as implied in the text box at the end of section 1.

We would welcome clarification on the status of voluntary sector providers in the proposals. For example, are they included in the generic term "agencies"? Is it intended that staff from the voluntary sector could take on the role of lead professional in the integrated assessment framework?

The status of the voluntary sector in all care services is currently under review as part of the Scottish Executive's 21st Century Social Work Review. The First Minister has stated that he would like to see the voluntary sector playing an even bigger role in the provision of services for our most vulnerable children and families. Taken alongside the work on integrated children's services planning, integrated assessment and integrated inspection, and the roles to be played by the voluntary sector in each of these, the time would seem to be right for a discussion of the role of the voluntary sector in children's services generally.

The voluntary sector provides a wide range of diverse services to children, young people and families, from small informal youth clubs to large complex care packages and everything in between. Voluntary sector providers often work jointly with police and health services, and many statutory services are now provided for local authorities by the sector. Voluntary sector services are routinely under funded: for example, the sector accounts for 29% of the spend on residential schools, while it provides 45% of the schools and 40% of the places. Given the diversity of the sector, and of the

services provided, a much larger debate is needed on the role of the voluntary sector in provision and planning of services than can be had within the confines of this paper.

We would urge the Scottish Executive to engage with the voluntary sector in debate about its long term role in the planning and provision of services for children, young people and families.

Implications of voluntary sector involvement

Given the key role played by voluntary sector providers in service provision, it seems reasonable to expect that they *are* included in the term “agencies” in the current proposals, and that staff from the voluntary sector *could* act as the lead professional. In this case, we would like to raise the issues of **authority** and **resources**.

Experience shows that where voluntary sector providers have tried to coordinate services, call case conferences etc, they have not been as successful in, for example, arranging for people to attend meetings, as statutory partners, as they do not hold the same authority as the statutory bodies. In a situation where voluntary sector staff can act as lead professionals, guidance must be clearly given that the authority which lies with the role of lead professional does not vary dependent on who is carrying out the task.

A similar situation may emerge where agencies involved cannot agree on the best course of action for a child. It is easy to envisage a situation where the social work or education department’s view of what is best would supersede that of, say, the voluntary sector.

We would ask for guidance from the Scottish Executive on what happens in a situation where partners cannot agree on an action plan.

New skills may need to be learned by some staff if they are to become involved in the assessment process, or to take on the role of the lead professional. Training will be required for this, and this will require extra resources to be provided. Voluntary sector providers often have training costs cut during contract negotiations with local authorities, making it difficult for them to train staff to the level required to provide services; funds will not be available if staff have additional responsibilities/training requirements. Voluntary sector providers are not willing to use charitable funds to underpin statutory services.

It is also interesting to note in this context that the 21st Century Social Work Review has recently consulted on proposals to add assessment to the list of tasks to be carried out only by qualified social workers. If this were to carry through to assessment of children, not only voluntary organisations but also health boards and education departments would have to employ larger numbers of social workers, at considerable extra cost.

Extra resources would also need to be provided to cover the IT infrastructure needed to implement proposals and the annual reporting on services and support available.

The proposals put considerable obligations on organisations and staff, without the resources necessary to implement them.

We would ask the Scottish Executive to conduct a thorough assessment of the cost of implementing the proposals and to inform stakeholders where this money is to come from.

Other issues arising from the proposals

- We would like clarification on who is covered by the term ‘child’ in the proposals. There is one reference to those 0-18, and another to those 0-16, with those 16-18 with particular needs also included. CCPS members provide services for children and young people up to 18 and beyond.
- Many CCPS members providing services to children and young people also provide services for adults. We would urge that assessment of and creation of action plans for children should also take into account relevant adult services, whether in terms of other family members who may also require help or in terms of the young person’s transition to adult services.
- We would also seek clarification on how the action plan proposed will fit in with existing plans e.g. for looked after children or in connection with parenting orders. In particular, clarification is sought on the fact that the action plan could be referred to as a Coordinated Support Plan; it is CCPS’s understanding that CSP’s are already part of the Additional Support for Learning obligations, and are generally led by education departments.
- It is important to make connections between joint assessment/coordination of services and joint planning/provision of services. Involvement of voluntary sector providers in children’s services planning is still patchy, leaving some gaps in provision identified by the sector unfilled. If the sector is to be involved in assessing need, it is logical that it should also be involved in service planning and commissioning, to ensure that the necessary services are available to which children can be referred. Successful joint assessment and joint planning are also likely to require joint budgeting; incentives need to be given to local authority departments and health boards to pool resources in pursuit of joint goals in children’s services.

Consultation questions

1. We propose that agencies should publish information for children and families about the services and support available and how it can be accessed.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but extra resources would be required to facilitate this if voluntary sector providers are included under “agencies”.

2. We propose that agencies be under duties and responsibilities to be alert to the needs of children, to listen to them and record children’s views, to identify children in need and to act to improve a child’s situation.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but extra resources may be required to train up some frontline staff to identify children in need, particularly if there are to be common definitions of 'need' between different organisations.

3. We propose a new duty on agencies to co-operate with each other in meeting the needs of children and to establish local co-ordination and monitoring.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but seek clarification on the role voluntary sector providers would have to play in this set up.

4. We propose to develop, with agencies, a single integrated assessment, planning and recording tool for use within a framework of co-ordinated meetings, reviews and planning. These arrangements will in time replace meetings about child protection, looked after children, joint assessment, youth offending and other inter-agency arrangements.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but extra resources will be needed to bring in the IT systems required to facilitate this. It will also take some considerable time to get all agencies involved to report in the same way, using the same terminology – this may require training, and additional resources.

5. We propose that where a child's needs are complex, serious, require multi-agency input or are likely to require compulsory measures an action plan must be agreed by all agencies involved and kept under review. The action plan will be the principal source of information for the Reporter if the child is subsequently referred.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but seek clarification on what happens if an action plan cannot be agreed by all agencies.

6. We propose that where there is a need for co-ordinated action, a lead professional from amongst the agencies must be appointed.

CCPS members support this proposal in principle, but seek clarification on whether voluntary sector staff are intended to take on this role in some cases. If they are, authority to carry out the task must be enshrined in the role itself, regardless of who fulfils it. Extra resources may be needed to fund this extra work for staff.