

# NSPCC Scotland's response to the Christie Commission

30<sup>th</sup> March 2011

The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children in the UK. In pursuit of our vision, we will:

- Create and deliver services for children which are innovative, distinctive and demonstrate how to enhance child protection most effectively.
- Provide advice and support to ensure that every child is listened to and protected.
- Provide advice and support for adults and professionals concerned about a child and if necessary take action to protect the child.
- Work with organisations which work with children to ensure they effectively protect children and challenge those who do not.
- Campaign for changes to legislation, policy and practice to ensure they best protect children.
- Persuade everyone to take personal responsibility for preventing cruelty to children.

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

Public sector budget reduction dictates that we must find new and better ways of developing public services. Maintaining the status quo is not an option, NSPCC Scotland therefore believes that a fundamental shift in philosophy is necessary to develop public services that address the causes of social problems rather than the consequences.

The Scottish Government, in partnership with COSLA, can achieve positive outcomes for children and young people by redesigning services to facilitate a culture change which will:

- Prioritise early years intervention initiatives for national and local Government
- Invest in multi-agency working to deliver innovative, evidence-based services
- Adopt an early intervention 'bias for action' that follows a common policy framework to allow comparison and shared learning across local authorities

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<sup>1</sup>. Renfrew, deCaestecker: 2009. Mind the Gaps

2. Cuthbert, Rynes: 2009. Thriving; Scoping Report – under ones

3. Prof. S. Deacon: 2011. Joining the Dots

4. Scottish Government; 2010. The Financial Impact of Early Years Interventions in Scotland

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

NSPCC Scotland believes that those who shape public policy have a moral obligation to create services which give more children a better start in life. Fiscally, if real efficiencies are to be made, there is a need to reduce demand on public services. Considerable evidence suggests that investing in the right support and interventions for children and families now is the most effective way that we can achieve this<sup>1</sup>.

Timely, positive progress must be made towards ensuring that at risk children have access to effective and appropriate services at the earliest possible stage. Existing services offer limited opportunity for early intervention, responses usually occur when children have suffered developmental consequences. At that point responses are more costly and less effective than early intervention would be<sup>1</sup>.

The consequences of late intervention include educational failure, anti social behaviour, crime and violence. Responding to these problems consumes increasing sums of public money and increases the risk of relentless intergenerational deprivation. Children with persistent antisocial behaviour aged 10 **cost society ten times as much as children without the similar difficulties by age 28**<sup>1</sup>. As Professor Susan Deacon observed in her recent report, the energy and investment that has gone in to youth justice, antisocial behaviour, and criminal justice would have been transformational if applied to early intervention.

We therefore believe that a fundamental reform of services - with resources concentrated in early years - is necessary if we are to provide services which are proven to improve the life chances of vulnerable children. The reduction in public spending should act as a catalyst to facilitate this change.

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

Scotland's public services should reflect the values intrinsic to Scottish society. At its core, service provision should encapsulate integrity, objectivity, accountability, equality and a bias towards protecting our most vulnerable. A shared commitment to these aims will enrich Scottish society and will create a meaningful set of social protections which can be held up as a model of excellence across the UK and beyond.

NSPCC Scotland believes that any reorganisation of services must extend responsibility for children and young people to all relevant partners and require that they must 'have regard' to them in all planning processes. This expectation needs to be upheld by national and local governments and all other relevant stakeholders.

We also believe that a new legal duty may be required to ensure long term commitment to preventative approaches from all agencies moving forward, particularly in maintaining support for the early intervention activities which are otherwise likely to be lost as national and local government are increasingly faced with competing budgetary and resourcing demands.

Requiring all agencies and sectors to adopt an early intervention bias that follows a clear and common policy framework will also allow for a greater degree of national and regional comparisons and importantly a basis for areas to learn from each other<sup>2</sup>.

**Give examples of projects, services, innovation or improvement work, including evaluation or assessments, which may be relevant to the work of the Commission**

NSPCC Scotland calls for a concerted effort to redirect people, skills and resources to drive improvements and to deliver evidence-based services that have a meaningful impact on people's lives. It is widely recognised that better integration and joint working is necessary if we are to give children and families the support they need, as well as making best use of resources<sup>2</sup>.

We believe that in order to deliver valuable, responsive and evidence-based public services, national and local government need to be clear about the extent and nature of need and also how effective services are in supporting children and families. It is therefore imperative that processes are in place to gather good data, which can be analysed and fed back into the development of public policy as well as the commissioning of evidence-based services at a local level.

NSPCC Scotland are keen to work in partnership with local authorities and other leading children's charities to fund and introduce new evidence-based services to add value to the existing provision and to make a genuine improvement to some of the Scotland's most at risk children.

**Give their views on the obstacles to and opportunities for improvement**

NSPCC Scotland believes there are real opportunities for Scotland to lead the way in developing and delivering innovative public services. We believe the voluntary sector has an important role to play in this transformation as we can provide innovative and flexible services, enabling new approaches to be piloted in ways that can be difficult for core services to undertake. We will work in partnership to support and improve frontline services and to ensure that evidence-based work becomes the norm for frontline practice.

We have some concerns that micro economic issues, such as welfare reform and reductions in other services will negatively impact on vulnerable children and their families. Evidence has shown a correlation between child maltreatment and domestic violence, substance misuse, child poverty, disability, trafficking and asylum seeking status<sup>3</sup>. The link between these issues is complex and research shows that factors causing stress are likely to increase parenting difficulties, thereby increasing the risk of child maltreatment. We are concerned that cuts in welfare payments, job losses and potential cuts to other services such as substance misuse or domestic violence, will result in an increase in child maltreatment.

We believe that strategic reform will require buy-in at a UK level and a commitment that, when identifying savings, representatives at all levels of Government carefully think through the potential impact on the welfare of vulnerable children and families.

Strong leadership at all levels of Government is required if we are to achieve the ambitious aims set out here. There must be a pooling of skills, resources and expertise,

and a commitment to reform, across all sectors, if we are to put in place the world class services our children deserve.

### **Give their views on the options for the future**

NSPCC Scotland is optimistic about the future of public services in Scotland. Whilst undoubtedly there are a number of challenges ahead, we believe that these challenges oblige us to think afresh and force us to embark on a new, more imaginative course of action.

We welcome the consensus which currently exists amongst political parties in Scotland – that there is a compelling case for early intervention to prevent the devastating impact of childhood abuse and neglect – and we consider this cross party support to demonstrate a willingness to engage in meaningful collaboration which could revolutionise how we deliver public services in Scotland.

Without a fundamental shift in values, cultures and behaviours, and the vision and investment required to support this, we will continue to perpetuate structural flaws which systematically lock thousand's of Scotland's children into a relentless cycle of poverty, poor health, deprivation and abuse.

All stakeholders have a moral obligation to work quickly to translate knowledge into action and build real and practical mechanisms to facilitate genuine change which will shelter Scotland's most vulnerable children and improve and enrich the fabric of Scottish society as a whole.

### **For further information, please contact:**

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