

NSPCC Scotland response to the Review of The Unified Voluntary Sector Fund and Other Funds 2011-12

February 2012

NSPCC Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the review of the Unified Voluntary Sector Fund (UVSF). We welcome the alignment of the UVSF with the Scottish Government's broader agenda of early intervention and preventative spending.

However, it is important to recognise that the fund currently resources services which form critical aspects of the child protection system; ChildLine is a key example of this. In reviewing and realigning the fund, we should not lose sight of the valuable services currently being funded, but ensure that these are considered in any future decisions.

About NSPCC Scotland

NSPCC Scotland is working with others to introduce new child protection services to help some of the most vulnerable and at risk children in the country. We are testing the very best models of child protection from around the world, alongside our universal services such as ChildLine¹, the ChildLine Schools Service, and the NSPCC Helpline. Based on the learning from all our services we seek to achieve cultural, social and political change in Scotland – influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours so that all children in Scotland have the best protection from cruelty.

NSPCC Scotland response

Q1.

- **In your view, how can any available funding be put to best use to improve outcomes for children, young people, their families and communities?**

¹ Until March 2012, ChildLine in Scotland will be delivered by CHILDREN 1ST, on behalf of the NSPCC.

We welcome the proposed emphasis on early intervention and preventative spending; and the explicit link between the USVF fund and the key themes from the Early Years Framework.

The overarching policy framework around early intervention is clear in Scotland, particularly through Getting it Right for Every Child and the Early Years Framework. Similarly, we welcome the emphasis on early intervention outlined in the Scottish Spending Review, announced in November last year. The prominence given to early intervention in the Scottish Government's top-level policy and spending plans is very encouraging. The challenge now is to ensure that this translates to a shift in resources at the local level, and ultimately to improved support and service provision for our most vulnerable children.

We recently launched our 'All Babies Count' campaign², which seeks to highlight the particular vulnerability of babies to abuse and maltreatment. As part of the campaign we are calling for the Scottish Government to incentivise the reallocation of resources at a local level towards effective and evidence-based early interventions, so the aims of the Spending Review can be realised locally. Focusing the Unified Voluntary Sector Fund on intervention would be one small step towards shifting investment.

In addition, we have recommended that the Scottish Government should carry out a national review of the level and consistency of early years services across Scotland, highlighting good practice as well as gaps in provision. This would enable both local statutory services, as well as those provided by the voluntary sector, to learn from existing practice, replicate services which have been shown to be effective and develop new service models to address current gaps.

In aligning the fund to early intervention and the aims of the early years, it is important to note that early intervention and early years are related, but not the same. The early years are often the earliest opportunity at which services can intervene, however services can also intervene early with older children and young people at the point where difficulties arise. It is never too early or too late to intervene and the spread of investment should recognise this.

The NSPCC is delivering innovative service models, many of which seek to work often with babies and young children, to help prevent the manifestation of negative outcomes which abuse and maltreatment can cause. Nevertheless, our universal services such as ChildLine and the ChildLine Schools Service also intervene early to provide advice and support to children and young people whenever they need it.

In allocating funding from the UVSF, it is important that a proportion of resources are invested in interventions which have an evidence-base, and which have some evaluation or knowledge transfer plan built in so that it has applicability and

² <http://allbabiescount.nspcc.org.uk/>

relevance beyond its own scope. This should be balanced with funding for existing core services that have proven to be effective in supporting children and young people, such as ChildLine.

- **What are the challenges faced in implementing this?**

Shrinking public resources mean that it is important that we invest in services which are effective in working with children and families, and which intervene early to help prevent longer-term, negative outcomes for children and young people. Funds from the USVF could be used to invest in such services, albeit on a relatively small scale.

We recognise that shifting investment from status quo to early intervention and prevention is a real challenge, and one which is not limited to the redirection of this fund, but is a challenge which local authorities, health boards and others are facing. Nevertheless, the required shift will not happen at a local community planning level, but instead requires a national approach, of which the realignment of the USVF would be a small part. We would urge that the Scottish Government is bold in its approach to early intervention, as only then will meaningful change take place.

- **How could any new fund assist the third sector to meet these challenges and improve outcomes for children, young people, their families and communities?**

There are real opportunities in aligning voluntary sector funding to early years and early intervention. Despite the introduction of the Early Years Framework in 2008, progress overall has not been as quick as might have been anticipated³. There may be specific contributions that the voluntary sector can make in providing added impetus.

Voluntary organisations are well placed to work in a flexible and innovative way, particularly so as we are less restricted by organisational and bureaucratic boundaries. Similarly, voluntary organisations can develop different relationships with service users than local authority social work teams and other professionals working in the statutory sector.

ChildLine, for example, offers a unique service in providing children and young people with a safe space to talk through their concerns and experiences, in a way that other agencies may not be able to do.

³ Deacon, S. (2011). *Joining the dots – a better start for Scotland's Children*.

Q2.

- **We would value your views on how the third sector could have an even greater impact.**
- **How could any future fund better support more developed partnership working and coproduction in improving outcomes for children, young people, their families and communities?**

There is real potential for the third sector to innovate but, in this challenging economic climate, a focus on the design of systems and services, through the perspective of the needs of the child, is essential in any change investment.

The NSPCC is testing and developing new ways of working that can be evidenced to improve outcomes and we believe this will have most impact if it is part of a process of partnership, particularly statutory partners. There may be a role for the fund in promoting cross-sector proposals, where appropriate.

Q3.

- **What are the key outcomes and activities that the fund should aim to support?**

As outlined above, the fund should provide both core funding, balanced with funding for innovative service models. It is important that the activities funded deliver on the early intervention agenda, both in terms of the age and stage: targeting the early years and/or intervening as early as possible with children and young people of all ages where difficulties arise.

Specific activities could include therapeutic interventions that support for our most vulnerable children. In resourcing more innovative services, it will be important to invest in evaluation to ensure that any learning can be more widely disseminated.

Q4. Based on the outcomes you have set out, what would you set as the criteria for any awards to be made?

We would suggest that any award criteria should include consideration of:

- For long-standing services, evidence of its track record in engaging with and supporting children and young people;
- For newer service models, the evidence-base for and/or the theory behind the service model being proposed; and the extent to which the bid includes proposals for evaluation and knowledge transfer, so that the service contributes more widely to the knowledge base of what works in supporting children and families.

Q5. If the funds continue, how should they be administered in future to ensure transparency, best value and sustainability?

It is important that grant awards demonstrate a long-term commitment to effective services. Therefore grant awards should be awarded for longer periods of time – ideally for a minimum of three years. Year-to-year allocation can be disruptive and can inhibit proper service planning, delivery and evaluation.

Similarly, best value considerations are not just about cost but also about potential impact. This is why we recommend for the evidence base for proposals to be an explicit consideration in determining grant allocations, so that investment can be made in services which have been shown to be, or are likely to be, effective in supporting children and young people.

- **What support, if any, should be available to ensure recipients get the most from the funding they receive?**

We would suggest that having a nominated Grants Officer would be very useful for those awarded funds, to ensure that organisations have one point of contact who can deal with any queries.

Q6. If your organisation is currently in receipt of funding from the funds in question, how do you assess your impact and whether you have improved the outcomes for the children, young people, families and communities with whom you work?

We currently receive funding for ChildLine. As ChildLine offers telephone and online counselling, it can be difficult to evaluate the difference we make for young people who talk to us. However, we gather a range of information, including statistics on the number and types of contacts, the number of referrals and other softer outcomes expected for children and young people, as well our the volunteer counsellors. We know from the consistently high volume of calls that children and young people continue to rely on the service as a valuable source of support.

Q7. What do you think are the successful and less successful aspects of the funds currently?

As outlined above, the funds currently support valuable services. We have received continued funding for ChildLine which has meant that we can continue to develop the service so that it can best engage with children and young people, and children and young people can continue to rely on ChildLine as a trusted source of advice and support.

However, the current structure of the funds means that funding has been allocated for periods of one year, with decisions then being made about extending this in future years. While we are grateful that funding for ChildLine has been continued, we would welcome longer-term allocations which would provide additional security and enable us to plan further ahead for the service.

Q8.

- **What do you see as the role and value of core funding in contributing to improving outcomes for children, young people, families and communities?**
- **In your view, what types of funding should any future fund provide? E.g. core funding, supporting innovation, project funding with a view to mainstreaming learning and outcomes? Why?**

We believe there is value in offering core funding to key services; as stated above, the funds currently provide core funding to a number of valuable services, including ChildLine. This core funding guarantees the continuation of such services, which may not be available otherwise.

As stated above, in allocating funds in future, it will be important to strike a balance between providing continued funding for valuable existing services, and enabling investment in innovative service models. We would welcome investment in service models which are innovative and seek to improve current provision and knowledge; services which are grounded in evidence and which have an element of evaluation and learning built in. However, the fund also has a role in providing core funding to existing services that have been shown to be effective in working with children and young people.

Q9.

- **What in your view would be the best way to provide transitional support for moving from the current system to any new system?**

A long lead-in time will be important in the transitional period. We would welcome early information about outcome of the consultation, any new processes for accessing future funds, and ultimately any decisions on grant allocation for the year 2013 / 2014 in good time. This would allow organisations to fully prepare for the grant processes, and give those who are not successful to consider options and look for opportunities for replacement funding.

Conclusion

We welcome the alignment of the UVSF to the principles of early intervention. In determining which services should be funded in future, we believe a balance should be struck between core funding and funding for innovation. It will be important to provide a long lead-in time for any changes to ensure that organisations are prepared and can engage with the new processes.

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