



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 12 June 2012

Session 4

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.scottish.parliament.uk or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 12 June 2012

CONTENTS

CHILDREN'S CHARITIES.....	Col. 1167
----------------------------------	------------------

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2012, Session 4

CONVENER

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

*Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Graham Bell (Kibble Education and Care Centre)

Ruth Boddie (Scottish Pre-school Play Association)

Sara Lacey (Care Visions)

Annie Gunner Logan (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland)

Sara Lurie (The Fostering Network Scotland)

Tom McGhee (Spark of Genius)

Jim Sweeney (YouthLink Scotland)

Alison Todd (Parenting Across Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Terry Shevlin

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Education and Culture Committee

Tuesday 12 June 2012

[The Deputy Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Children's Charities

The Deputy Convener (Neil Findlay): I welcome everyone to the 18th meeting in 2012 of the Education and Culture Committee. I remind all members and those in the public gallery that mobile phones should be switched off at all times.

We have received apologies from the convener, Stewart Maxwell. I think that all other committee members are here today.

The only item on the agenda is a round-table discussion on the extent to which the voluntary sector provides children's services on behalf of local authorities and other public bodies. This is one of a series of one-off evidence sessions that the committee is holding. At the end of June, we will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning on the main issues that arise.

On a practical note, the round-table format is designed to encourage a more free-flowing discussion. Please ensure that you indicate either to me or to the committee clerk that you wish to speak. We want to avoid jumping from topic to topic and will try to keep the discussion focused. If possible, we should avoid repetition—we do not need everyone round the table to say that they agree. That will be helpful, as it will allow us to hear more of the evidence that I am sure you want to provide.

We will go round the table to introduce ourselves. I am a Lothians MSP and the committee's deputy convener.

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

Graham Bell (Kibble Education and Care Centre): I am from Kibble.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I am an MSP for South Scotland.

Sara Lacey (Care Visions): I am from Care Visions.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am an MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife.

Ruth Boddie (Scottish Pre-school Play Association): I am from the Scottish Pre-school Play Association.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for West Scotland.

Annie Gunner Logan (Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland): I am from the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland.

Sara Lurie (The Fostering Network Scotland): I am the director of the Fostering Network in Scotland.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am an MSP for Highlands and Islands.

Alison Todd (Parenting Across Scotland): I am the chair of Parenting Across Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am the MSP for Orkney.

Jim Sweeney (YouthLink Scotland): I am the chief executive of YouthLink Scotland.

Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): I am the MSP for Edinburgh Central.

Tom McGhee (Spark of Genius): I am the director of Spark of Genius.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks very much. We have a large number of people round the table. Liam McArthur will ask the first question.

Liam McArthur: A number of you have helpfully provided the committee with written evidence and addressed the question that I would like to kick off with. However, it will be helpful to ask the question in any case to get the discussion under way.

We would like to get a better understanding of the decision on whether a service might be best delivered by the voluntary sector or in-house. If the witnesses could give us a better understanding of the criteria that may be used in arriving at a decision on whether a service could and should be bid for, that would be helpful.

Tom McGhee: I am a bit confused by the terms that are being used. It will be helpful if we can clear up what the term "voluntary sector" means. Do we mean only charities or independent and private bodies? I represent a coalition that includes both charitable and private companies, which is traditionally called the independent sector. I am a little bit confused about what we are talking about.

Liam McArthur: If I may try to speak for the committee, it would be interesting to know whether, when a decision is made to take services out of in-house provision, there is a coalition of interests that spans a broad range of bodies.

The Scottish Parliament information centre briefing showed us that the scale and range of the bodies that are involved in the independent sector are such that they will arrive at different decisions for probably very different reasons. I imagine that you can make the definition as wide as is relevant for the kind of area in which you operate.

Alison Todd: Often it is not clear where or why the decision about what stays in-house or goes out is made. I know of really good examples in which the third sector, which I represent, is at the table at the planning stage and involved in decisions about the services that are required; in other areas, the sector simply does not get a place at the table. There is a perception that certain decisions might be based on cost and the ability to provide a cheaper service instead of being more needs led.

The process should be more outcomes focused. At the moment, we are not very clear about how exactly these decisions are made, even though good practice exists in certain areas.

Annie Gunner Logan: The question is really interesting, and one that many voluntary organisations would like local authorities to answer. As Alison Todd pointed out, the decision-making process is not necessarily clear. However, we can say what we would like the process to be based on. It should be based on the trade-off between cost and quality—in other words, best value; the outcomes that individual providers or services can achieve for children and young people; and the impact of those services in communities and so on.

It might be helpful to separate what I would see as a strategic commissioning decision from a procurement decision. If you are asking only who should provide service X or Y, that is a delivery or procurement decision; however, we want what I would call strategic commissioning, which means having a bit more voluntary sector involvement at a more strategic level and deciding whether it is right to provide service X or Y in the first place before one even thinks about who might deliver it.

The Social Work Inspection Agency, whose functions have since been transferred to Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland, Audit Scotland, the national residential childcare initiative and a number of other initiatives that have produced reports on this terrain have consistently concluded that the criteria are not transparent and that local authorities do not always have the information about cost, quality, outcomes and impact to allow them to make an informed decision. I realise that that is a sweeping statement, because certain authorities are better at this than others, but in general the consistent view of inspection agencies and others is that that information is neither systematically gathered nor

used in those decisions. That is why we are all still in the dark about the precise criteria.

Liam McArthur: I do not want to stray into a discussion on strategic planning, because other colleagues will want to explore those issues. However, according to that description of the situation, the local authority appears to be the driver in all this and, where strategic partnership arrangements are in place, the whole thing works far better. In areas where such arrangements are not in place, are organisations in the voluntary sector, the independent sector or whatever simply waiting to respond to what the local authority puts out, or are they looking at what the authority is doing and saying, “We do that”, “We do parts of that” or “We can do that far better” and then saying to the authority, “We know that you do it like this, but we think that our proposition would deliver better outcomes either for the same or potentially for less—or even for a bit more—than you’re spending at the moment”? Are organisations being proactive in pushing local authorities in a particular direction?

Annie Gunner Logan: We have been trying to do that for quite a long time. The most common commissioning model is that the local authority, sometimes with community planning partners and usually with other statutory organisations, sets out what it wants and asks how cheaply the providers can do it. That is putting it crudely. The model that we want is one in which the local authority considers what outcomes it wants to achieve and what it therefore needs to put in place to achieve those outcomes, and then considers who can do that in the most inventive way, what budget is available and what the providers can offer. The commissioning model that we want would turn the usual process on its head. However, that approach does not happen a lot.

Sara Lurie: On foster care services, which were examined closely in the Audit Scotland report, first and foremost, local authorities always want to place children in-house and tend to go to independent providers only when a child cannot be placed in-house. It is often thought that children with more complex needs will be placed in the independent sector, and many of the services in that sector have been set up to accommodate extremely traumatised and challenging children who have moved around considerably.

However, at the end of the day, if a local authority does not have a foster carer available, it might go to one of those independent providers. The complexity with that is that those carers have been recruited and trained, or supported, to provide specialist services, such as a wraparound service for a very traumatised child, and their prices are set accordingly. However, they then get a child for whom the local authority perhaps just

does not have a bed and, once a child is placed and settled, nobody wants to move them.

There is no long-term planning about the range of children who might need placements in six months, a year or two years. Local authorities struggle to recruit and support enough foster carers so they tend to look at their own pool; they are not good at giving out information to help external services to plan for what should be developed in the longer term.

Graham Bell: Historically, the charitable sector has been a provider of services for youngsters in trouble. That probably goes back to Victorian days and it has had a strong influence on what has developed. We get into a custom and practice arrangement. Local authorities have tended to withdraw from the area and the commercial sector is now fairly active in it. The answer to the question is that, sometimes, services are provided in a certain way because that is how it has always been done. We all wish that the approach was a bit more scientific, but that is the reality.

Ruth Boddie: The SPPA is lucky to have been involved at the table locally in the south-west of Glasgow in identifying gaps with parents and children's services and working with the national health service on health promotion work in relation to things such as healthy eating. We have taken on that role. The community planning partnership is involved in funding, as is the council, so the approach is fairly diverse. It is a pain in the neck financially, but we have outcomes and a track record. One member of staff has reached 220 parents and 296 families.

We have been doing that for 10 years but, because of resource issues, expanding our work is difficult. It is an impact service, and we are trying to do it in other parts of the country where there is an opportunity, because we know that investment in the early years and strengthening relationships between children and parents really works. However, it is not always top of the local authorities' agenda. Our funding has been squeezed because of the cuts, which is unfortunate, but we are still there, which is important.

Jim Sweeney: I have a couple of points to try to encapsulate some of the issues that have been raised. Often, the cart is put before the horse. We think about the cost and all those elements, when we really should think about the needs of the child or group of children. Whether we are talking about a generic service that is provided in a youth work setting; a service that is provided to a group through the Prince's Trust or whatever; or a more specific service that deals with young people who have complex needs and family issues, we need to get back to what is needed for the young person and how the service will affect them. We also need

long-term planning. None of those issues is new—we have had the same issues and problems for the past 100 years, yet somehow or other we cannot get our heads round taking a medium to long-term view of how to achieve solutions for young people and their families.

10:15

We really need to get it right at the planning stage and get everyone involved. Authorities—including the NHS and so on—should have some notion of what is available in their area, but I do not think that they have. No basic community mapping has been done on the groups and the opportunities that are out there in the voluntary and independent sector. That basic work has to be done.

Tom McGhee: Graham Bell's point is well made—it has always been done that way. On residential care, I back up what was said about foster placements. The gut reaction from some, although not all, local authorities is that, if a troubled, vulnerable child needs residential care, they look first for a placement within their own services, regardless of whether that is the most appropriate placement for the kid. Sometimes they do well with those children, but sometimes they do not. It is a bit like putting the cart before the horse. Local authorities now have a tendering system, rather than a commissioning system, and their own services are not in scope. That means that they ask the independent sector to compete in a way that provides value for money—that is absolutely fair, and I support it—but their own services do not come to the party. That does not seem to be an equitable way forward for the children.

Liam McArthur: Has there been a change over the past three or four years as budgets have started to tighten, or as the prospect of budgets tightening has loomed on the horizon? Has there been much of a shift either way?

Tom McGhee: I have not seen one. I do not know about anyone else.

Annie Gunner Logan: Tom McGhee mentioned tendering. There has been an increase in competitive tendering in children's services. CCSPS covers the range of social care, including the care of adults, older people, those who are involved in the criminal justice area and so on. In adult social care, particularly around learning disabilities and mental health, there has been massive competitive retendering of existing services. Our view is that that has led to significant disruption, discontinuity, anxiety and damage to the market and has created little discernible evidence of any benefit, other than the fact that,

sometimes, the service is a little cheaper than it was previously.

That approach is coming into children's services in quite a big way. As Tom McGhee said, in-house services are rarely involved in that exercise and it tends to be the private and voluntary sector services that are put out to tender. As I said, there is little evidence that that achieves anything other than cost savings.

The message from Audit Scotland and others is that the risk is that the cost savings are achieved at the expense of quality rather than being implemented with quality in mind. Our children's services members have seen what happened in adult social care and can see it coming in their area. They would like to nip that in the bud before it causes the same kind of damage that it did in the adult social care sector.

Sara Lacey: To go back a little to the original point, the services that we offer across Scotland are, typically, spot-purchased placements. I want to represent a clear commitment from my organisation—I know that it is shared by others—to go back to local authorities when spot-purchased placements are made and discuss with them ways in which we can do things better next time.

During the 12 years that my organisation has been around, we have built up a lot of intelligence. The service that we provide for the most vulnerable children and young people is an essential service that cannot always be produced in-house. We have information that we can show to councils that clearly demonstrates that they view us as a necessary service, and that, if a more strategic commissioning approach were taken to placements, we could provide better value and ensure that the service that we provide is more suited to the particular council's needs with regard to the population of children and young people whom they would like to use us for.

Sara Lurie: On fostering services and strategic commissioning, two years ago, we were involved in writing best practice guidance for purchasers and providers. Now, Scotland Excel has taken that further to consider the national fostering contract, which we believe can raise standards for Scotland's children, and we support anything that can do that—for example, it says that providers will ensure that foster carers have one bedroom per child, that 24-hour independent support is available to foster carers and so on. That is excellent, and we should aspire to ensure that Scotland's children in foster care are in placements that provide all that.

The problem is that we are creating a two-tier system. The discussions that are taking place with independent providers on developing the contract

are about how they will ensure that they meet those standards at the costs that will be required. With regard to what is happening with local authorities, just yesterday I met a foster carer who had five children under the age of four in their house. That would not happen in the independent sector. How will we ensure parity across the board? The high standards to which we aspire should not just be for a child who is placed in a particular area or agency.

Alison Todd: Liam McArthur asked whether there had been a change in recent years. As a result of the cuts, many third sector services have been cut and taken in-house. Those services may have been well evidenced and they may have had good outcomes, but they have been taken back in-house as a result of the cuts, so clearly the third sector has been affected.

Parenting Across Scotland and other partner organisations provide a lot of early intervention. In a time of cuts, that service is not seen as critical, despite it being very good at having a long-term impact. In a few cases, as I mentioned, we have seen local authorities work in partnership with partners in the third sector, but many services have been cut and taken in-house.

Clare Adamson: I have a quick question about tendering and continuity of care. Something that has emerged very strongly in our investigation into the attainment levels of looked-after children is the importance of the continuity of the relationship with the adults who are involved in care. Is that given due consideration in the tendering process for children's services? Is there an implication for self-directed support for young people?

Annie Gunner Logan: Continuity of care is one of the things that featured most strongly in the critique of social care procurement for adults, to the extent that the penny has now dropped in the European Commission, which produced the European procurement directives that we are now all slavishly following.

The European Commission's proposal is that local authorities, when awarding contracts, should now have much more latitude than they might have had previously on matters such as continuity of care. Once you get into public procurement rules, you have to go down the tramlines that are set and award the contract to the organisation that scores best. Decisions are largely taken out of your hands. Our critique of tendering is that it is very difficult to test quality, or an organisation's capacity to deliver quality, in a paper tendering exercise. That is why we are so down on tendering. It has its place in any public service reform programme, but in this particular area it is very difficult.

Self-directed support could be one of the answers to our difficulties. A family would be able to take a direct payment and manage the money and resources themselves, or direct the spending of the available resource for their support in ways that would side-step the procurement process, because they would be under the thresholds and the decision would, in effect, be driven by their personal choice of provider. SDS could be the answer to part of the problem, rather than another confusing factor in it.

We know that your colleagues on the Health and Sport Committee are considering the legislation on SDS in detail. There is some very lively interest from children's organisations in precisely how SDS will work with children and families. The SDS model was conceptualised with regard to adult care, and specific areas of adult care at that. The full implications for children and families services are still being worked through, but it could take us out of all the difficulty that we experience around procurement, so I am quite optimistic about it.

Ruth Boddie: I want to say a bit about the childcare sector and tendering, and the difficulties that voluntary childcare organisations have in finding the time and capacity to fill in tendering documents. Recently, some local authorities have allocated places in a block. We have got away from the original concept of meeting parents' and children's individual needs. In my submission, I highlighted 1998's "Meeting the Childcare Challenge", which we all clung on to as a really positive document.

There have been examples in the press of local authorities making decisions based on their allocation and families being inconvenienced because they cannot take their child to a place in their locality. I hope that local authorities are flexible about that—I know that some of them are—but tendering is difficult for small voluntary organisations. Their staff have improved their training tremendously, they are all qualified and they are on a similar pathway to local authority nursery staff. The outcomes-based approach, through the care inspectorate and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, is a great measuring stick for all services. I would like small voluntary organisations to be treated fairly, but we may have got away from that slightly.

Liz Smith: I was interested in Tom McGhee's comment about the problem of definition, which impinges on the difficulties in setting out the appropriate strategy, and who should be involved in the early stages when decisions are made.

Some of the evidence from panel members and elsewhere hints that there are too many barriers between the public sector, the voluntary sector and the independent sector. I wonder whether we

could drill down into what those other barriers are. We had a submission from Scottish Outdoor Education Centres, which has costed the problem and says that too many barriers are in the way of good working practice. Does the panel have any examples of further barriers to partnership working?

Tom McGhee: When it comes to residential care, it is local authorities' money. They get all the money to look after vulnerable children and to educate children. For the most part, they do it very well. There are some young people whom they cannot look after, but they have the entire budget and, historically, they have provided services themselves.

I find tendering interesting. It should have been around long since. I disagree with the previous speaker. I welcome tendering, so long as it is fair—it should include everyone. If local authority-owned services were in the mix, it would be fair and equitable.

The basic difference is that we are outsiders and independents. We are outside the loop. We do not have the money—the money is not given to us to decide what to do with it. It is given to the local authorities.

Liz Smith: Is it a problem that the money belongs to the local authority? If the voluntary sector or the independent sector wants to tender for best practice, is that a major sticking point? Sara Lacey is nodding.

Sara Lacey: Yes, absolutely. When you are an expert in your field—as a lot of third sector and independent organisations are—and you recognise the needs of the children and young people that you are looking after, which are often large populations, it is difficult to present potential new services, have those discussions and be met, quite often, with cynicism about your intent.

Alison Todd: There is a lot of innovation and creativity in the other sectors that is not always embraced.

One of the barriers to partnership working is the short timescales that tenders have, which make it quite difficult to get other people on board. I echo how difficult it is for smaller voluntary organisations to find the resources to do that.

Another barrier is that the costs of things such as pensions, administration and information technology are often hidden in the case of local authorities, whereas the voluntary sector has to include those costs in order to survive. We are not competing on an even playing field, because of the way in which the costs are worked out, and the extra value that the voluntary sector brings through voluntary raised income, expertise and so on is often hidden.

10:30

Graham Bell: Local authorities are involved in public service delivery, but one of the challenges is that commissioning and procurement tend to repeat what has already been done. We just continue to do things in the same way. I am not sure that we are getting the social innovation, the creativity or the move towards preventative work that we need. We really need to shift towards those things.

I represent an organisation that works at the extreme end, but the points that Jim Sweeney made in his submission about preventative work being lost are critical. That is the side where we need to experiment. We, as a society, need to get out of the rut that we are in. As well as all the practical issues of procurement, it seems that it is always just about more of the same.

Liz Smith: Does that tie in with Alison Todd's point that the pressure on local authorities in a time of considerable economic difficulties does not allow preventative work to be done very well?

Graham Bell: Yes, but we end up spending the money at our end if the work is not done on the preventative side. It is everyone's aim that we shift into effective, coherent preventative work but, as a society, we are struggling to do that. It requires social innovation.

Annie Gunner Logan: Local authorities are clearly the democratic bodies that are best placed to manage public funds and so on. I return to what I said about how they do that, rather than simply suggesting that somebody should be doing that work. We need a clear and inclusive strategic commissioning process that considers the outcomes that we want to achieve for children and young people and what we need to put in place to deliver those outcomes. Then we must start to look at transparent decision making. The key barrier is the lack of transparency about why decisions are made to award contracts to or buy services from one organisation rather than another. That is where the fog is.

There are also some serious issues about local authorities being unable to disaggregate and identify their costs, particularly around overheads. That is another barrier.

In response to Tom McGhee's point about tendering, I clarify that CCSPS does not object to tendering per se. It objects to the way in which it is done, because decisions are made on the basis of not which is the best organisation to deliver the service, but which organisation has submitted the best tender; that is not always the same thing.

Jim Sweeney: I thank Graham Bell for the plug on prevention. When we read the Christie commission report, the work by the Smith Institute,

the getting it right for every child documents and all the other documents that have come out, it is clear that we are intervening too late. We need a range of generic services to pick up children, young people, and families and get to them long before we spend mega-amounts of money on specialist services. There will always be a need for those, but we have to turn the coin the other way and start to take a long-term view.

Annie Gunner Logan mentioned the short-termism of the contractual arrangements. If we are to build community capacity, we need to build the capacity of the organisations that are best placed in the community to deliver a range of services.

We have to get into a real partnership, have mutual trust, and get beyond the contractual arrangement to an arrangement that is about services and quality, not just about quantity. We need to get beyond the output to the outcome, as was mentioned earlier. We must take the long-term strategic view that community planning in its essence allows us to do, without forgetting the generic end of things, where we spend a relatively small sum of money on delivering a range of local services for every young person.

Tom McGhee: I back up what Annie Gunner Logan said about strategic commissioning. One of the roots of the problem is the fact that the independent sector is not in the room when these discussions are happening. We are invited afterwards—we are invited to comment and we can be partner members of committees—but Scotland Excel, a local authority organisation, is pushing the agenda. Everything else that I see around this is local authorities pushing what they need to do to manage their budgets and look after the social care sector—that makes complete sense.

In children's services—I bow to the other panel members who deal with adult services—we are dealing with some of the most difficult problems in Scottish society. That should not be underestimated. The problems are not easy to fix. Early intervention is the mantra that everyone comes out with: we need to intervene early and make everything work from early on. I am an ex-teacher and I am here to tell you that it is not as easy as that. How do we do these things? How do we intervene early enough to make a difference to a difficult family in Ferguslie Park, which is where I am from, so that the kid does not end up in residential care or in the jail?

The problems are not easy to solve and they need a lot of thought. At the moment, this sector is the watcher at the gate. We are not as involved as we should be, and I totally back what Annie said about strategic commissioning and our involvement in that.

Ruth Boddie: I want to put in another plug for preventative work. The SPPA believes that keeping a child within the family, and working with the family and the child in a preventative way, is the best way to move the family on. We have lots of examples of families in difficulty who have got sensitive information from a voluntary organisation such as ours that they have trusted, which has taken them through small steps to make things better.

I recall a young homeless lady who had a baby. She was supported by her health visitor and joined a toddler group. Now she will tell you how her life has turned around. She has been to some of the shared workshops that we do with children and made a major remark about bonding with her child. If such people can realise that this activity is positive, that gives them the foundation and strength to deal with other problems as a family later on. We often meet children again when they are teenagers and it is better to have a wee bit of groundwork that was done in the early years.

I have spent 24 years doing this sort of thing and I am very passionate about working with young families.

Sara Lacey: One of the issues that gets in the way of proper and effective early intervention is the ability of local authorities to get the right service in at the right time. They have to stay in-house and consider the cost or the fact that some services have been cut. They cannot get the right community-based service for the family that will be more effective at building up engagement.

We should concentrate on not just early intervention, but what happens after the period of care. Children often come to us far too late. They have might have had 20 placement breakdowns and come to us as a last resort at the last gasp. They are then well looked after and their outcomes become much healthier and more positive, but they are expected to leave our care very quickly. We are going back to the situation as it was many years ago when I first started in residential childcare and children had to leave far earlier than they should have. Those decisions are, again, based on cost, or the child hits a certain birthday and is expected to leave. Any organisation should be flexible enough to offer on-going support to make sure that children get the right, consistent care after they leave and that we do not lose all the investment. That is often not the case, or there is cynicism when the organisation wants to discuss what it can do next for the child.

Neil Bibby: We obviously want the voluntary sector and the public sector to work more in partnership. I am hearing that that has to happen right the way through the process, not just at the end of it. Tom McGhee said that the independent sector is not in the room when the planning

decisions are being made. How can the planning process be improved to involve charities and the voluntary sector more? What would you like to see changed?

Tom McGhee: I am talking about the independent sector, not just charities—I am talking about the whole sector generally. The best way to go ahead would be to involve us right from the ground floor in strategic commissioning. Give us equal partnership in it and an equal voice along with the local authorities. At the end of the day, it is the local authorities' money and they have a public responsibility to manage their money well, which they predominantly do. However, if you are talking about involving the independent sector, rather than be invited guests once the decisions have been made we need to be involved right at the start, and that has not happened so far.

Graham Bell: It is not always the case that the charitable sector is not involved in ground-floor planning—it often is. Our organisation also runs a specialist high-security facility. A number of years ago, the Scottish Executive decided that in Scotland it was preferable that the public and charitable sector continued to deliver secure services, which was distinct from what was happening in England, where commercial companies were running secure services. A strong commitment was made to that and charities such as ours were deeply involved in the planning and delivery of that.

Subsequently, a partnership agreement that was established to deliver those services resulted in commercial borrowing by our organisation of £7 million to deliver an integrated service whereby secure services would be delivered alongside preventative and rehabilitative services. That was how the whole thing was structured. The financial package was arranged commercially by our volunteer board and they signed on the dotted line. Unfortunately, a year ago, the rules were turned on their head and commissioning/procurement was introduced, which means that our board is now left with a 12-month contract and a debt of £5 million. Volunteer directors of charities committed their names and reputations on the basis of what was perceived to be a partnership arrangement with the Government but they are now being given terms that, frankly, no commercial operator would be given. If a train operator buys a train, they at least have the guarantee of being able to sell it on to the next operator. Yet in this country we have asked charitable providers to lay out a huge amount of money and commit for the long term only to tear up the rules and give them a 12-month contract—and the contract is only the opportunity to sell places on a spot-purchase basis.

Some of the things that are happening are deeply affecting the volunteer members of charity boards and their trust in the Government to deliver.

Liam McArthur: I want to flip around Liz Smith's question about obstacles. An obstacle may be an enabler as well. You have talked a bit about structures, what does and does not work and where we would like to see this going. My experience is that whatever structure is put in place, it is the personalities operating within that structure that will determine its success. Is that a fair reflection of what happens nationwide? It is not an argument for not changing the structures, but what works or does not work is often down to the force of personalities. Certain organisations work because the personalities within them gel.

10:45

Ruth Boddie: With regard to committee structures, committees can make decisions through working with sub-groups, which can come up with good ideas. They can work with a budget that is perhaps for delivering a new service, but at the end of the day decisions revert to the council committee, so there are time delays on things. Voluntary sector organisations can get caught up in that and think that they will get funding to do a particular piece of work, only for the council committee to decide that it will not give them the required amount of money, which can then be diverted to something else.

Lots of exciting things happen when you are waiting for money from a council.

Alison Todd: What was said about personalities and relationships is true across the board. Certainly, young people, children and families would say that the most important bit about the service is often not what is delivered but the consistent relationship with the particular person who delivers it.

Graham Bell referred to spot purchasing, which is relevant to self-directed support. If we do not make the third sector or the independent sector sustainable, there will be no real choices for people to make when we have choice and self-directed support. We have a valuable sector that is innovative and that provides services and long-term relationships that people trust. We need to find a way to make that sustainable.

The Deputy Convener: I will take Annie Gunner Logan, then we will move on to the next question, if you do not mind.

Annie Gunner Logan: The question was about what involvement in planning we would like. We made the point in our written evidence that there are some quite good partnerships for specific

service interventions. For example, an organisation might approach a local authority with evidence about what a service can do and propose that they work together to deliver it—quite a lot of that goes on.

There are interesting things called public social partnerships, which involve a voluntary organisation working with a local authority to design a service response rather than the authority doing it, then asking who will respond to it through a tender. There is an interesting example in Dundee at the moment involving four very large children's organisations that worked separately within the same authority but with some overlap and duplication. They have got together with the council to plan a collaborative response, which I think is unique in Scotland, but we would want to see more of that.

An example from adult care and support is the reshaping care for older people programme, which I am sure colleagues will have heard about. It is supported by a significant amount of money in a change fund, and the change fund spend must be signed off by the local authority, the NHS board, the third sector and the private sector, so it is a four-sector response. I am not saying that everything is brilliant about that, because we have been at it for only a year and there are already some complaints from the third sector that some of it is about paying lip service rather than having actual involvement. However, it is an interesting model.

The third sector and the private sector locally have responded to the programme by organising themselves in such a way that they can provide a coherent response and view. It is not about who will provide services but what services should be provided. The reshaping care agenda is very much about shifting the balance from institutional care to community care and having community capacity to prevent people from getting to the point at which they need emergency hospital admission.

We can see some parallels with what we have been talking about. There are local bodies that could facilitate that kind of engagement. For example, there are local childcare partnerships and places where the third sector and the private sector come together. What is really interesting about the reshaping care agenda is the requirement that the change plans are signed off by private and voluntary organisation representatives as well as by the statutory partners.

There are partnerships in other areas of the social care world, so I do not see why we cannot do the same for children's services.

Joan McAlpine: We are talking about a large range of services, but what evidence is there that

voluntary sector delivery is better than in-house delivery for certain services, leaving aside the cost issues that a number of people have raised?

I was concerned to see from the CCSPS's written evidence that Audit Scotland has highlighted the failure of councils to collect and apply evidence. How do we build a proper system of evaluation?

Annie Gunner Logan: The quote in the submission came from Audit Scotland's "Commissioning social care" report, which included children's services, among others. A key finding from its investigation was that local authorities do not always collect or have available the full range of information about cost, quality, impact and outcomes that will enable them to make decisions. To make another sweeping statement, many voluntary organisations have invested considerable resources—I am sure that is the same for colleagues in the private sector—in evaluations, research and quality assurance systems that generate the evidence that will tell authorities that information.

To return to one of my critiques of tendering, often what happens in a tendering exercise is that if like-for-like evaluation evidence cannot be compared across all bidders, it cannot be considered for any bidders. That seems to me to be utterly bizarre, but there you go.

We quoted some stats from the care inspectorate's gradings information, which is a starter for 10. The inspectorate—certainly for registered services—goes out and applies an inspection methodology that results in a grading, and that can be compared right across the board. We put forward an amendment to the relevant legislation a couple of years ago that put local authorities under a duty to look at care inspectorate information when they are making commissioning decisions, because we were getting intelligence that, extraordinarily, they were not always doing that.

Joan McAlpine: Does the care inspectorate look at outcomes as well as whether the service has been delivered?

Annie Gunner Logan: The care inspectorate inspects against a set of agreed national standards, some of which are outcomes based and some of which are not. The standards are up for review—I do not know if that has been announced yet, but there are noises that the care standards will be subject to a process of review this year. I think that that will move us much further towards an outcomes-based approach, so that is another reason to be cheerful.

Ruth Boddie: The care commission has been looking at the quality of care and support, environment, and staffing and management

leadership in the child care sector. Obviously, that applies to local authorities, the voluntary sector and private provision. The voluntary sector has to work to outcomes and we succeed in getting funding by meeting those outcomes, so we are used to that approach. The focus on our outcomes starts with families—we consider how to make a difference to a family and we build our services around that. Local authorities are at a disadvantage because they deal with quantities of children, and they try to fit children into generic services. The voluntary sector is much more able to provide individual support that is tailored to the needs of small numbers of children. Councils have a big job, and, to be honest, I am sympathetic towards them.

Tom McGhee: Joan McAlpine asked about outcomes. First, I guess that some local authorities probably know very well what residential care and education costs them. However, the Audit Scotland report from a couple of years ago pointed out that most of them do not. In terms of best value—which is the starting point—the independent sector knows exactly what it costs to deliver services.

Secondly, Spark of Genius is probably the most regulated body in Scotland. We have eight services—the number is growing—and we are regularly inspected by the care inspectorate. The grading system used is neutral and unbiased. However, the children that Spark of Genius gets—which are similar to some of the vulnerable young people that Graham Bell looks after at Kibble—are often tremendously challenging and they have had very tough lives. They can be difficult to deal with compared with children who are in local authority residential care, yet the grading system is exactly the same. We have had an issue with that for a long time, as have others within the sector.

Graham Bell: The quest for evidence and evidence-based practice has become a bit of a holy grail. There is a huge debate about which aspects of the various interventions work. It is probably fair to say that we know much more about the evidence and what works on the preventative side. We know what works well when we intervene early, when we build in good community support, when good education and leisure facilities are provided, and so on. The evidence about what works gets progressively thinner the more complex the cases become. That is partly to do with numbers and so on, but it is probably fair to say that our current inspection regimes are not geared towards a rigorous evaluation of longer-term evidence on what is working.

Jim Sweeney: The majority of organisations in the youth work sector at national and local level are subject to HMIE inspection on a rotational

basis. It is fair to say that almost every grant that organisations in the sector receive, whether from the Big Lottery Fund or elsewhere, is geared towards outcomes and so on to an incredible extent. Youth work organisations are evaluated endlessly on all sorts of issues to do with their delivery of services. There is much more evaluation than you would believe. I think that people have got better at dealing with that. We have had a lot of help from bodies such as Evaluation Support Scotland, which is a Government fund to help large and small groups with that process. There is a lot of evidence out there on what is delivered, whether it is good or bad.

Sara Lurie: There is a lot of good practice among local authorities. In the context of looking at how local authorities work together on commissioning and long-term planning, a few years ago we got some funding from the Scottish Government to bring together four local authorities on a foster care services pilot, which involved looking at the recruitment and retention of foster carers. A large local authority can have a bigger campaign or provide more training, which a small local authority can ride on the back of, or vice versa. Some smaller local authorities have cheaper housing, so there are prospective carers with spare bedrooms and so forth.

The pilot was heavily evaluated and it proved to be extremely successful, but the funding came to an end. A key finding of the evaluation was that without an independent organisation—in this case, it was the Fostering Network—leading the pilot, no one had the energy, because they were so pressured with their own areas of work, to bring the local authorities concerned together to look at what outcomes they sought, what barriers there were to the achievement of those outcomes, to what extent neighbouring local authorities and charities or independent providers in the same area could have done some of the work that they were struggling to do and what work they did well.

That takes us back to the short-term nature of funding for the voluntary sector. Momentum was created, but then the issue was, “Where else can we get funding for that?” The pilot did not continue. It would have been interesting, two or three years on, to see what happened once joint recruitment took place and how other services developed further.

Neil Bibby: I want to follow up on Jim Sweeney’s point about youth work services. My understanding is that youth work services do not have to register with the care inspectorate, but Jim Sweeney mentioned HMIE. What is the balance between youth work services that register with the care inspectorate and those that are inspected by HMIE?

Jim Sweeney: I think that there is dual inspection of some organisations, depending on the services that they offer to young people. I am sure that many of them are inspected by both organisations. It sometimes depends on where the core funding comes from. For example, a raft of members of YouthLink get a small core grant from central Government. Over the past five years, every one of those organisations has been inspected and is now being inspected again. Some of the local services that they provide will also be subject to inspection by the care inspectorate.

11:00

Annie Gunner Logan: I am aware that I have a full-time job promoting the virtues of the voluntary sector so, for the avoidance of doubt, I make it clear that in responding to Ms McAlpine’s question the position that I am advancing is not that everything will be great just because we are talking about the voluntary sector. I am saying that voluntary organisations frequently put a lot of effort into demonstrating how good they are, so we would like authorities to take account of that information when they make decisions about funding those organisations, and to make the link with the cost input that is needed to produce that level of effectiveness.

We are increasingly seeing across-the-board cuts: the voluntary sector in our area—good, bad and indifferent—will be cut by 5 per cent. Authorities need to find out which organisations they need to protect. If organisations cannot produce evidence of effectiveness, quality and good outcomes, that becomes a different conversation.

Joan McAlpine: All the evidence seems to show that the evaluation exists and is quite high quality, but the information is not being adequately considered.

Annie Gunner Logan: It is inconsistent.

Alison Todd: I would echo what Annie Gunner Logan has said.

Another issue concerns preventative or early intervention services from the voluntary sector, which is where Parenting Across Scotland partners come in. It is quite hard to prove what has not happened, which makes it quite difficult to compete with crisis intervention services. We have all the figures for the money that is saved if we intervene early and prevent things, but it is difficult to demonstrate and compare outcomes on a like-for-like basis.

Somebody said at a conference recently that when we started the national health service we did not wait until we had a whole lot of long-term

outcomes to decide what we were going to measure—we knew that it was a good thing. We need to take into consideration when we are looking at some of the services that are being provided that we know what is good. We know that community and working with families is good, so we need to get on and do it without looking at what will happen in the long term and trying to prove things.

Liam McArthur: On Annie Gunner Logan's remarks about what voluntary sector organisations are able to do to evidence the impact that they are having, is that being done across organisations of various sizes, or does it largely involve larger-scale organisations, which can afford to invest in the processes, training and all the rest of it in order to build up that body of evidence? Is the logical extension of what you are saying that a lot of the smaller players would, by necessity, have to take a back seat, as bigger organisations that have the opportunity to put in place that framework would—more often than not—win out?

Annie Gunner Logan: That is potentially the case. A balance has to be struck between what an individual organisation can produce and the type of things that Alison Todd talked about. Doing any of that stuff will be better than not doing it.

The message is—from the national residential child care initiative reports, for example—that outcomes and quality are not looked at and measured consistently across providers even within one specific type of service, let alone right across the board. There has to be a sensible balance.

Audit Scotland and others are saying that there is sometimes very little attempt to look at any of the available evidence, and that is where we have difficulty.

Ruth Boddie: In SPPA's experience, small amounts of funding are linked to measuring outcomes. We have to put in place systems to collect evidence, and it must be gathered from those who are actually receiving the service.

There has been a tendency for local authorities—and health boards, I have to say—to be quite happy with numbers, but they are now looking for case studies and focus groups made up of people who have been involved. That is really good, and we are happy to do that because it makes for really good-quality voluntary sector work.

Jean Urquhart: On Annie Gunner Logan's last point, we cannot have the same everywhere—that is not going to happen. It is often about professional judgment on whether things are working, because children are different and the whole service should be geared for that—"at the point of need", as we say.

Annie Gunner Logan spoke earlier about the tendering process. I understood what she said to mean that someone could tender for work and be more creative in their tendering, but some things are just not considered. Am I right that if they cover areas outside the points raised, those areas would not be considered?

Annie Gunner Logan: That would depend on how the tender was structured. However, we have examples—principally in adult care—where there is plenty of evidence of organisations achieving good outcomes and all the rest of it, and investing in that, but that is not being taken into account in the tender scoring-evaluation process because the other bidders have not done the same thing. It sounds bonkers—to be honest, it is—but that is how a number of local authority procurement departments, rather than professional departments, approach the process.

Jean Urquhart was absolutely right to mention professional judgment; increasingly, however, tendering is not in the hands of what you might call social work professionals, but in the hands of procurement professionals. One of the big questions that we must face is about how to get an appropriate mix. Social workers do not necessarily know how to do tenders, and procurement officials do not necessarily know anything about social work. How do we mix together the expertise from those two completely different ways of looking at the world to make a sensible decision, which is a mix of professional judgment and tendering rules?

Jean Urquhart: Graham—do you agree with that?

Graham Bell: I agree absolutely. One of the plans under the sustainable procurement bill is that much more consideration will be given to the wider impacts. The debate is on how to include those wider impacts—what will be covered, and what extra value will be added in terms of community benefit and community impact? Everyone understands that there is a commitment to try, but there is a lot of uncertainty about how it will be done.

Jean Urquhart: What is the first thing to do? I am interested, because clearly there are barriers to, and frustration around, making this work.

Graham Bell: Our view is that people need to take a much wider look at procurement and at how the behaviour of their organisations impacts on wider society. There is asset lock in the charitable sector—the resources are there for the long-term benefit of communities. Charities should be held to higher account in terms of their relationships with local communities and so on. Their buying arrangements, how staff are trained and developed and other issues could begin to come into procurement. There should be a much wider

look taken in procurement, and not the current race to the bottom in terms of price.

The Deputy Convener: Before I bring in Clare Adamson, the main point of today is to tease out points to put to the cabinet secretary when he comes to give evidence. After Clare's question has been answered, I will ask people to talk briefly—for 30 seconds or whatever—about points that they want to put to the cabinet secretary. People can start thinking about that now.

Clare Adamson: Originally, I was going to ask a question about how fully the voluntary sector and the private sector are involved in the planning process. We have touched on quite a few of the issues around that. Graham Bell mentioned innovation in the sector. Is the current planning process being used to its best advantage? Where is innovation happening? We heard the example of groups coming together in Dundee, but is there enough innovation?

Graham Bell: It is easy to focus on all the negative things that happen, but we should remember that we have a fantastic country and that there are many small-scale local initiatives and bigger-scale initiatives across Scottish life. Perhaps we do not try hard enough to see what works in small communities, for example, but I certainly would not want a doom-and-gloom picture of social innovation to come out. On the preventative and community-building sides in particular, charities in Scotland are simply fantastic by international standards.

Annie Gunner Logan: In our evidence, there is a case study of an organisation that works in youth justice. That is one of the incredibly successful examples that Graham Bell mentioned. That is the cheery bit; the doom bit is what will happen to that organisation in the current cuts environment. Loads of incredibly good stuff is happening; our worry is about how it will be protected.

Sara Lacey: Care Visions has a quite long-standing contract with one local authority that was originally for a crisis service for three years. The service had to fit in with the local authority's understanding of what it needed but was unable to do itself. Just before the contract came to an end, a joint decision was made that it had been successful. The local authority was able to meet the need that it had previously, but it had a different need and asked whether we could work with it to meet that need. The service was expanded, which has continued to save the council a lot of money, and it is generally regarded to be the case that there have been excellent outcomes for children and young people.

Ruth Boddie: I am pleased that we have got round to talking about community groups, because the playgroup and toddler group movement is

based on them. We have more than 1,100 members that provide services, although possibly not in the strictest terms in which we are talking about children's services. However, if those groups did not exist, communities would not flourish. Enablement of people who are involved with them to do things better for themselves and their families is fundamental to our society. I would like people to think about that.

Tom McGhee: Lots of innovation is happening. Local authorities are full of highly moral and hard-working people. We deal with vulnerable and underachieving children, mostly. Local authorities' work in that regard is often first class, as is the work of many people in the independent sector. We know organisations that use cloud computing for delivery of education to young kids who are phobic, and we have done that for a while. Many organisations are developing small and beautiful homes to completely change the model of residential care, which has always been a campus-based model. I know that Care Visions does that, as does Spark of Genius, to a certain extent.

It is important that organisations find solutions to the problems. People who work with children who have difficulties need resources to do that, but should not constantly go back to local authorities with a begging bowl to ask for more resources. They should try to find ways to do things within the budgets that they have. I will cite one example. We have a programme running called the kith and kin programme. "Kith and kin" is a pretty archaic term, but basically, the programme supports children who have left our residential care to integrate back into their families. We do not ask for any more money for that because we would not get it, but we really need to do that work, because it means that the weans will stop bouncing back into bad situations and bad lives. Organisationally, we need to take responsibility for such things and stop looking to other people.

Jim Sweeney: There are fantastic examples of long-term partnerships having produced a better range of services across the board. I think that we have cited the Edinburgh youth work consortium, which has worked very much as a partner with the council. The key issue was to take a strategic view of the city, to establish where the needs and gaps were, and who was best placed to fill them. It sounds so simple, but the consortium has been working at that for 12 or 15 years now and has evolved some really good practice.

The two Lanarkshire councils, too, are doing some amazing things not only with very vulnerable young people but with the more generic stuff. We need to keep building on those examples and telling other people about that kind of good practice.

It is not always about money; very often it is about relationships, mutual respect, getting on with things and ensuring that the child and the family are at the centre instead of worrying about bureaucracy and organisational kudos. I do not care who gets the credit as long as the service is delivered.

11:15

Clare Adamson: I wonder whether I can bring the discussion back to planning. We have heard that if the sector is not engaged very early on in the planning stage the local authority simply puts in place a repeat of what it thinks has constituted the best service. Of course, there are good examples of work and involvement in planning, but are there local authorities with black holes of innovation? Am I being too prescriptive about the situation?

Jim Sweeney: There is good and bad everywhere, but there are certainly examples of long-term relationships. I worked with a local authority for 30-odd years as a community education principal officer, and always felt that part of my job was to build the voluntary sector's capacity and not just to take money away but to give things to ensure that there was a basis for improvement and involvement by local people. I wanted that to be seen as an investment, not as a disinvestment or my giving the budget away, and as something that was designed to be a long-term fix, not something to plug the gap in the short term. We were getting communities involved in their own issues.

At the end of the day, council officers bugger off—pardon the language—at 5 o'clock or whatever. Community workers, youth workers and residential care workers might be there a bit longer, but the fact is that the majority of services simply disappear. If the community is involved in examining its own issues with its own young people, it will sometimes provide a much cheaper and better long-term solution than the big hitters. We need to get to that point—in fact, that is what I think the Christie commission is all about.

Alison Todd: If we want to harness creativity and innovation, we must ensure that we get the right people around the table at the strategic planning stage. If they are not and if certain relationships or partnerships are not in place, we will have the black hole to which Clare Adamson referred. However, there are ways of ensuring that before any decisions are taken on services, communities and the whole sector are involved so that we can find the right solutions.

Sara Lurie: I share Alison Todd's views on this matter. Foster care requires a very robust partnership involving local authorities, charities

and independent providers. It is actually illegal in Scotland to operate a profit-making fostering service and for a child from Scotland to be placed with a foster carer from such a service; in fact, many such services that have opened in England and have then come to Scotland have had to re-register as not-for-profit organisations—although I am not going to get into that this morning.

As I said earlier, although the national contract aspires to offer excellent support and care for foster carers who look after some very vulnerable children, we would like that aspiration to be taken up across the board, including by local authorities. The emphasis on what is expected from voluntary organisations with regard to service delivery and the outcomes that they deliver is not the same as the expectations for children who are placed in local authority care. I do not think that that is acceptable.

Tom McGhee: In response to Clare Adamson's question, there is no innovation black hole in local authorities. For two or three years, I sat on the panel for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities excellence awards until it ran out of money and demanded too much for our involvement to continue. Those guys were bringing some fantastic projects to the party. I remember, for example, a wonderful cooking and baking project for families in Ruchazie—it did not win, but got a silver award. A lot of the stuff coming out of local authorities is first class; indeed, it should be, because they have got the money and people to do it.

The independent sector can add a lot of value if we have certainty about resources. If we have long-term contracts, are involved in strategic commissioning from the get-go and have income going down the years—properly managed, of course, so that if we do not provide the correct value we do not get the money—why not build in added value as part of any procurement or tendering situation? Graham Bell mentioned that. Why not ask people what they can do, if they are given the money, in addition to the basics of residential care, adult care or whatever? That tends not to happen at present. Usually, the decision on a specific service is a straight one that is based 70 per cent on quality and 30 per cent on price, and added value is ignored. Spark of Genius has had added value ignored several times. We provide post-16 education that is funded in a different way, but we are not even given a mark for that, because it is not right on the money in relation to the specific tender.

The Deputy Convener: I ask the witnesses to drill down into specific points that you would like us to raise. When we have finished that, I will be happy for members to ask questions for clarification.

Graham Bell: I will pick up on the point about the social glue that charities bring. With children's services, we need to consider whether we are doing enough to celebrate that work and to ensure that it is sustainable.

Sara Lacey: For me, the important points are those about long-term funding, strategic commissioning and having a range of people at the table in order best to plan services for children and young people. We talk a lot about local authorities not knowing the cost of the services that they run. That is the case, but there is also a point about local authorities not valuing every pound that is spent out of house and what comes back from that. The authorities perhaps do not value the amount of flexibility and innovation and how far the third and independent sectors go to help to look after children.

Ruth Boddie: To summarise, my points are about reaching children and families and consulting them about the types of services that make a difference. We need to recognise that the voluntary sector has a clear role in continuing to provide those services and being innovative with them.

Annie Gunner Logan: I have drawn up a small shopping list. First, on the first page of the SPICE briefing that was produced for this meeting, there is a quotation from the Scottish Government's spending review. It states:

"We will be working across Government ... to ensure that the third sector's role can be maximised, supporting greater collaboration between the public and the third sectors".

My question for the cabinet secretary would be to ask him to set out more precisely how he intends to drive that through in relation to children's services when local authorities—not the Scottish Government—have the spending and decision-making power.

Secondly, how would the Scottish Government push through improvements to strategic commissioning? We have been told many times by the care inspectorate, Audit Scotland and everybody else that there are real capacity and capability problems.

Thirdly, how do we ensure transparency in decision making on service delivery so that the impressions, either real or perceived, of protectionism in relation to in-house services can be addressed once and for all?

Finally, how could we ensure that the public procurement programme does not promote the race to the bottom—or what I call the process of being dragged to the bottom—particularly in relation to the terms and conditions of childcare staff in the voluntary sector? That has not been mentioned, but it is a big issue that I would like to get on the table.

Sara Lurie: I would like consideration to be given to the need for collaborative and robust partnerships, which are crucial. There has to be transparency. Local authorities must be open about their requirements for the short and long terms and they must project what their requirements might be.

We also need more trust in the services that are provided: we need acceptance that we are dealing with vulnerable children who often have individual needs and require individual services to meet those needs, and that those services will not always be the cheapest option.

Alison Todd: I am happy with Annie Gunner Logan's shopping list, so I will just underline her points. In summary, my key requests are for a strategic place in planning services and service provision, particularly based around the child's and young person's needs. On transparency, we need a level playing field so that we measure the same thing in relation to outcomes, and the same costs. We need to be clear about the difference between quality and cost because, for all the reasons that have been set out, it is dangerous to try to drive down the costs of the third sector.

Jim Sweeney: Two wee quotes encapsulate the matter for me. One is an African proverb, which says that it takes a whole village to educate a child. Nobody—but, nobody—has all the answers. We need to work together.

Another proverb says that none of us is as smart as all of us. For the cabinet secretary, it is about keeping the service user at the centre, about how we build medium and long-term continuity to stop us wasting resource or reinventing the wheel, about having proportionate evaluation and about keeping our eye on the preventative spend and local community involvement agendas. If we do that, we could go further in the right direction.

Tom McGhee: I emphasise that the independent sector is a broad church of both private and charitable organisations. The Scottish Children's Service Coalition, which I represent today, is that sort of mix. Generally, the independent sector has a lot of innovation; it looks after a lot of children and should be at the centre of this. It would help a lot if we were at the top table for strategic commissioning. Long-term finance being derived from that, based on the positive evaluation of outcomes, would be absolutely crucial. We can continue to add a lot to what Scotland is about.

Liam McArthur: I have a couple of points to make. The first is on Annie Gunner Logan's comment about the quotation in the SPICE briefing. Is there anything about single outcome agreements—across the board, or in specific

cases—that specifies a commitment in language that binds local authorities?

The other point follows on from something that Tom McGhee said about the way that procurement tendering currently works. The Scottish Government has gone down the competitive dialogue route—for example, in the tendering for ferry services in my constituency. The advantage of that—which I can certainly understand—is that broad criteria are set and it is then up to those who bid to say whether they can achieve them, and say how they can innovate in order to better achieve them. The potential downside is that after people have signed on the dotted line they do not necessarily see what they are buying until the end of the process. In a sense, that allows those who bid to be more innovative and creative in how they propose to meet certain criteria. I do not know whether that is being used by certain local authorities for some services.

The Deputy Convener: If anyone would like to submit any further points, they can email the committee clerks, who have asked me to appeal to you to be brief in your submissions. I warmly thank everybody for coming today. It has been a very interesting and informative discussion, which I hope you have found helpful.

Meeting closed at 11:28.

Members who would like a printed copy of the *Official Report* to be forwarded to them should give notice to SPICe.

Available in e-format only. Printed Scottish Parliament documentation is published in Edinburgh by APS Group Scotland.

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

For details of documents available to
order in hard copy format, please contact:
APS Scottish Parliament Publications on 0131 629 9941.

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk

e-format first available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9089-2

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-4061-9103-5

Printed in Scotland by APS Group Scotland
