The previous Scottish Government said that: “Preventative action is integral to the approach to government in Scotland and delivering the outcomes set out in the National Performance Framework”. What spending commitments and priorities would you like to see in the 2012-13 draft budget and spending review in order to ensure that progress is being made on preventative spending and, in particular, Early Years intervention?

Orkney Islands Council generally welcomes the Finance Committee report on preventative spending. The focus on early years is understandable given the compelling body of evidence that pre-three interventions make the biggest impact on future outcomes. However, given that arguably the greatest challenge facing the Scottish Government over the next twenty five years is how we are going to support our ageing population, a broader exploration of preventative spending in this area would have been welcome. An exploration of policy approaches to supporting people with learning disabilities would also have informed the committee in consideration of preventative spending.

The Scottish Government has emphasised an outcomes based approach through both the National Performance Framework and Single Outcome Agreements. What, if any, additional national and local indicators would you like to see as a means of supporting the shift towards a greater focus on preventative spending?

The focus of any preventative spending depends on local priorities and can only be determined locally. Selection of performance indicators should be at the discretion of local authorities and CPPs in the context of their existing arrangements for SPI and SOA indicators.

The Scottish Government / Audit Scotland continue to require collection of a substantial range of input and output data in relation to social work services (including child protection, looked after children (CLAS), and learning disabilities (E-say)); much of this is of dubious validity and usefulness. It would be very helpful if a comprehensive review of non-statutory reporting were undertaken and a limited number of meaningful outcome indicators developed for these service areas, to replace the existing set.

The Scottish Government’s response to the Committee’s Report on preventative spending stated that: “The Spending Review that will follow the Scottish elections in May will provide another opportunity for the Scottish Government to support delivery agencies in their efforts to increase the proportion of their budget dedicated to preventative activity.” What support should the Scottish Government provide in its spending review to support delivery agencies in increasing preventative activity?
As noted by the Scottish Government in its response, “preventative spending is often an integral part of policy and service delivery and as such does not have a separately identifiable budget”. It further notes that there is no support among delivery agencies for a more prescriptive approach. Other than specific projects, most of the Council’s preventative spending in Orkney is mainstreamed within its service budgets. It is important that councils should not be required to report separately on preventative spending since this would necessitate an arbitrary and bureaucratic exercise of no value to service delivery.

What long term planning is carried out to fully deliver on preventative spending strategies and how do you plan for this within short term budget periods?

Orkney Islands Council recognises the critical importance of preventative services in long term planning, and the need to redirect resources away from crisis intervention to crisis prevention. We welcome the recognition in the report that existing social problems which need reactive services and budgets will not disappear in the short term (para 134). We agree that this and other barriers can partially be overcome by delivering mainstream services with an eye to prevention and there are some very good examples of this underway in Orkney such as the introduction of ‘reablement’ across our home care services.

What baseline evidence is used to measure preventative outcomes?

Local authorities and CPPs are outcomes-focused, but it is recognised that the outcomes from preventative spending may be several years down the line and not necessarily within the 3-year planning horizon of an SOA. Short term input and output measures are legitimately be used as “proxies”, where research evidence has established a causal link between an intervention and a positive long term outcome. For example, Orkney’s SOA reports on the numbers of parents accessing the Positive Parenting Programme (based on evidence of linkage to reduced offending behaviour in the long term), and the proportion of women still breastfeeding at 6 weeks or more (based on well-evidenced lifelong health benefits). These are output measures from which the long term benefits may not be apparent for many years, and not capable of measurement.

In oral evidence to the Committee, COSLA stated that: "we want budgets to be thought of more as being part of the public purse than as belonging to the council or NHS". To what extent are you able to pool your budget, or even reallocate budgets to other agencies, and make joint spending decisions through initiatives such as the Integrated Resource Framework?

Orkney CPP is a strong example of how the Early Years Framework has become embedded in local planning and services, and how communities are engaged in contributing to the development of services for their locality to ensure the right preventative services are offered for each area. Orkney Health and Care, our Community Health and Social Care Partnership, is another example of how local delivery vehicles can be shaped by the statutory agencies to meet local circumstances. This partnership is forging ahead with the Change Fund as a means of shifting resources through ‘Reshaping Care’ and has given substantial funding to
third sector services to further develop preventative resources. It is currently developing an Integrated Resource Framework to map assets across the NHS, Council and Third Sector in Orkney.

The Committee will be writing separately to individual Community Planning Partnerships but would welcome views from other interested organisations on what elements should be in the spending review and the 2012-13 draft budget to support more effective collaborative working in moving towards a more preventative approach to public spending?

This is a long term shift in policy and cannot readily be addressed by short-term changes in budgetary policy. This Government has already helped agencies to take a longer-term view by reducing ring-fenced funding and minimising the reporting of short term outcomes. Further progress in either area is always welcome.

How can good examples of collaboration be encouraged and shared nationally across key agencies and what is the role for the Scottish Government here?

SOA annual reports are an effective mechanism for concise reporting of good practice. The Government’s summaries/analyses of SOA reports are always useful and enable a spotlight to be shone on particular areas of policy. A future focus on collaboration in preventative spending would be one way to help share good practice in this area.

Orkney Islands Council
2 September 2011