



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 June 2015

Wednesday 17 June 2015

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
EARLY YEARS CHANGE FUND	2

FINANCE COMMITTEE
18th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con)

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)

*Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

*Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Amanda Callaghan (Scottish Government)

Fiona McLeod (Minister for Children and Young People)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Finance Committee

Wednesday 17 June 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Kenneth Gibson): Good morning and welcome to the 18th meeting in 2015 of the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee. I remind everyone to turn off any mobile phones, tablets or other electronic devices. We have received apologies from Richard Baker MSP. His train was cancelled so he is running late, but he will try to get here. Lo and behold, he has just walked through the door. Well done, Richard. We have a full complement for the minister.

Our first piece of business is a decision on whether to take in private agenda items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and whether to consider in private at future meetings the draft report on our inquiry into Scotland's fiscal framework and our work programme. Do members agree to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

Early Years Change Fund

10:00

The Convener: Our second item of business is evidence on the early years change fund from the acting Minister for Children and Young People, Fiona McLeod, who is joined by Amanda Callaghan of the Scottish Government. I welcome our witnesses to the meeting and invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Fiona McLeod): Good morning, convener and committee. Thank you for inviting me to give evidence on the early years change fund, which, as you know, is a partnership fund between the Scottish Government, local government and the national health service.

Community planning partnerships submit annual returns to the Scottish Government on their change fund activity. When Aileen Campbell addressed the committee in January 2014, we had information from CPPs about only the first year of the change fund activity, 2012-13. We now have the second year of returns available to us, for 2013-14 activity. I apologise for the delay in making that information available, which was due to the fact that we received the last CPP return only on 19 May this year.

The returns give us an indication of how CPPs are progressing in their journey to deliver transformational change in early years services and the part that the change fund has played in that journey. I have been heartened by the picture from the latest returns, because we can see progress being made in giving the early years the priority they deserve and tangible examples of how CPPs are doing that in their everyday work. This is the very nature of what a change fund is about: delivering a different way of doing things.

For example, in West Dunbartonshire, a speech and language link officer has been attached to each early education and childcare centre, which allows waiting times to be addressed and ensures that the right referrals are made to speech and language services.

This is the first year that we have been able to capture some sense of the actual spend by CPPs. Our calculations indicate that just over £100 million has been invested in early years activity across Scotland through the change fund. That is above the minimum commitment from all partners to spend £89 million in year 2 of the change fund.

However, we must recognise the challenge associated with gathering information on spend in relation to change fund activity. In doing that, we have had to make a number of judgment calls

about what to include in providing an estimated level of spend. For example, one CPP provided figures for its total integrated children's services budget, which we have not included in our total because our judgment is that not all of that money related to the change fund.

The conclusions that we can draw are only as good as the information that we are able to gather. Nevertheless, despite those challenges, we can see real progress this year. All 32 CPPs provided examples of prevention, and in year 2 we have received examples of disinvestment for the first time. For example, in Dundee, the CPP is responding to feedback from the community on the type of services that it needs by moving away from providing stand-alone social work family centres to reinvesting in locally based teams that deliver a family-oriented approach to services.

The early years collaborative, our national quality improvement programme that enables local practitioners to test and develop evidence-based early years services at the local level, was cited as an example of how change is being delivered in every single return. When Sir Harry Burns attended the committee alongside Aileen Campbell, he said:

"I would not be the least bit surprised if, 20 years from now, we shut a prison"—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 15 January 2014; c 3548.]

because of the preventative work that we were doing in the early years through the change fund.

I have been heartened by the progress that I have read about, and I will shortly request the year 3 returns from CPPs, which I am sure will provide yet more examples of how we are giving the early years the priority that the evidence tells us they deserve.

The Convener: Thank you for that helpful introductory statement. You said that the last of the 2013-14 returns was submitted on 19 May. When are the returns likely to be published?

Fiona McLeod: They will be published on the website—is that right?

Amanda Callaghan (Scottish Government): The returns are on the website.

Fiona McLeod: The returns are now on the website.

The Convener: Will a full report be published?

Fiona McLeod: Are we going to provide a summary this year, or will we wait till next year?

Amanda Callaghan: We will provide a summary. We have not completed it yet, but we will do so over the summer.

The Convener: That is fine. It should be out in the autumn.

Let us get into the meat of the issue. In March, the committee took evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland and the chair of the Accounts Commission on Audit Scotland's report "Community planning: Turning ambition into action". During that evidence, the Auditor General highlighted the fact that,

"despite the focus on this issue and the effort that has been put into it, with policy shifts and the introduction of the change funds, the amount of money that we are shifting is very small and at the margins."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 4 March 2015; c 2.]

She was looking at the £2.7 billion a year that is being invested in early years services and, relative to that figure, the shift is small. What is your view on that?

Fiona McLeod: We are working in partnership with others, with a large fund over a three-year period. The money is being invested and, as I said in my introductory remarks, the returns—especially those for 2013-14—are beginning to show that change is happening and we are beginning to see some disinvestment. There were examples of disinvestment because of the change fund in 10 of the 32 returns.

The Convener: You will know that one of the committee's concerns has been the lack of disinvestment to allow investment in other areas where returns are more significant. I still have concerns. For example, the Inverclyde Alliance said:

"Disinvestment will happen much further in the future once early intervention and prevention approaches take effect. This can be generational, 20 – 30 years."

I take it that the Scottish Government is looking for much more rapid progress across the board. I appreciate what has been said about our not needing a prison in 20 or 30 years' time, but you are really looking for significant changes in much shorter periods.

Fiona McLeod: The change fund is provided over a three-year period to seed fund with the local authorities and community planning partnerships so that there is evidence that moving towards preventative spend is the right thing to do and that it works. As Harry Burns said, we are seeing changes already. However, this is a journey. The three years will allow us to find the evidence to support a roll-out of what works, but it is a generational process. It is about working on the early years to ensure that people in their later years get the benefits of having had a good start.

The Convener: What works Scotland told the committee that,

"if we look at the smoking ban, the impact of that was much faster in some areas than was anticipated."

One of our concerns is that this committee and its predecessors have been talking about prevention

and disinvestment for years, yet only now do we seem to be touching on the margins of the issue. Is there any sense of frustration in the Scottish Government that prevention is not taking place much more quickly and with clearer and more obvious results?

Fiona McLeod: No. I would not say that there is frustration. We are on a journey. I was reading about the wonderful example of the childsmile programme and the money that we have invested in teeth brushing in nursery schools. I will send the committee the figures. There has been a £1.8 million investment in getting every child in nursery school to brush their teeth every day, and we see already that the number of children who need fillings is going down. It is estimated that the programme has saved £5 million in dental treatment for a £1.8 million investment. That has taken place over a few years only, but we are beginning to see the results.

There is another lovely example in my constituency, where the early years change fund has been used to intervene to get pregnant mums to stop smoking. The rate of smoking in pregnancy has gone down—I would have to check the figures—from something like 37 per cent to 20 per cent. Again, we are seeing some very early good returns.

The Convener: A number of projects have been funded by early years change fund moneys, but it is not clear from the returns that have been submitted how many of those projects were already being funded before the early years change fund moneys became available. There is concern that a lot of good projects would have happened in any case and there is not really an additionality factor with some of them. What work has the Scottish Government done on that to find out what difference has been made by new projects being funded rather than by funding being put into existing projects?

Fiona McLeod: That goes to the heart of how we collect and analyse the figures. When the figures come in from the CPPs, there must be a certain amount of judgment about whether there has been a move in funding and whether the early years change fund is involved. That is not always an easy judgment to make, and the analysis that we have done has tended to be quite conservative. Nevertheless, we believe that we are seeing real use of and real benefit from the early years change fund, and we are also seeing existing money being used. Getting it all together is what this is all about.

The Convener: What is happening to the projects that you mentioned that have been successful over the three years of the fund? Has there been any analysis of whether they are continuing to be funded from mainstream

resources or of how many have been stopped? We want good projects to continue over a number of years; we do not want them to end just because the funds have ended.

Fiona McLeod: The partnership money ends this year, but the Scottish Government has decided to put in £8.5 million for the next financial year to ensure that the projects are sustainable and that good projects continue.

I went through one of the monitoring forms. Question 4.2 asks:

“How will you measure the impact of this activity?”

We are beginning to get that information back. Again, the analysis involves some judgment calls.

The Convener: Yes. You talked about the differences in how the money for some of the projects has been accounted for. I looked at the figures for the spend by local authority, which are in paper 1. The Outer Hebrides reported £11.8 million, but Glasgow reported only £4.4 million. It is clear that there are big differences in the reporting. I understand that some local authorities—I assume that the Outer Hebrides is one of them; I do not know why it is referred to as “Outer Hebrides” and not Western Isles Council or Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—include core funding, such as funding for nursery provision, in their reporting. Is the Scottish Government doing anything to look at that matter in greater depth to see where we are with those funds?

Fiona McLeod: The monitoring form was changed between year 1 and year 2. Question 4.4 in the year 2 monitoring form asks:

“Can you provide specific examples of preventative spending?”

In my opening remarks, I talked about the fact that one of the CPPs submitted the global sum that it had spent on the integrated children’s services budget. There was a change in the monitoring form from year 1 to year 2, and the year 2 form asked much more specific questions.

Are we considering asking even more specific questions in year 3?

Amanda Callaghan: Yes—and the questions will relate to the three-year total as well as to the individual year.

Fiona McLeod: We are learning about how we have asked the questions as we go along. In year 1, we learned that it was very complicated for us to read what we were told and for the CPPs to work out which budget they could clearly show the spend was coming from. We changed the monitoring form from year 1 to year 2, and we will change the form again this year.

The Convener: Okay, but it is still not clear why the reported spend over and above the early years change fund was requested by the early years taskforce. What was the thinking behind that?

10:15

Fiona McLeod: The early years taskforce is very much about tests of change—not just stand-alone tests of change but tests of change within the system that we are already working in. Therefore, it was important for the taskforce to ask that question to determine whether the change would have happened without the early years change fund money.

The Convener: Thank you. I open up the session to colleagues.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The convener has raised a number of issues that I am interested in, so I will probably develop some of those points.

On the issue of preventative spend—across the board, not just in relation to children—do you think that it is possible to pin down whether any given pound is a preventative pound? There are two ways of looking at things. If someone is in hospital, that is a reaction to something that has happened beforehand, so that spending is not preventative. On the other hand, it is preventative, because it is stopping something worse happening to them. Is it possible to define all that?

Fiona McLeod: It is difficult to follow the pound and work out what it gave you in terms of prevention and early spend, so it is useful to look at concrete examples. The childsmile programme is a concrete example, because we can see that £1.8 million was spent in nursery schools on toothpaste and toothbrushes and on getting children to use those things, with the preventative result that fewer children need fillings. However, is it possible to say that it is because they brushed their teeth at nursery school that they have fewer fillings, or is it because we did healthy eating programmes with them, with the result that they ate fewer sweets? What I am trying to say is that concrete examples of that kind help us to see clearly what is going on.

John Mason: That is a good example. It is clearer than some examples because, clearly, the money that was spent on getting children to brush their teeth was preventative.

Can you tell us more about the £5 million saving? Does it mean that one or two dentists have lost their jobs, or is it simply a saving in terms of equipment, because they did not have to buy so many fillings and so on? Has work been done on that?

Fiona McLeod: My understanding is that the £5 million figure represents what it would have cost to give all those fillings. Of course, that is the thing about preventative spend. You ask whether the fact that there were fewer fillings might mean that there are fewer dentists. However, I think that around 93 per cent of children are now registered with dentists. That means that, although there are fewer fillings, more children and parents are aware of the importance of going for a check-up every year.

John Mason: That is a perfectly fair answer. However, it confirms my concern that, when we say that there is a saving, it is sometimes not a real saving, as it does not mean that we have £5 million in our pocket at the end of the year that we can do something else with; it immediately gets taken up by spending arising from the fact that more people have registered with the dentist, or spending on other work that the dentist does and so on.

This is perhaps more of a question that I will have to ask John Swinney at some point, rather than you, but I would like to know how we pin that down. Some of those savings can easily get spent again without us doing very much.

The convener made the point that, sometimes, the savings will be quite a long way down the line—I accept that the dental savings are quite quick. In some cases, could a case be made for cutting spending on certain things now in order to put more money into preventative spending? It seems to me that we are putting only a little bit of money into the preventative side and that, say, closing a hospital or a prison would be a significant thing to do but would free up resources for intervention.

Fiona McLeod: Is that not the essence of what we are going through with the preventative and early intervention work? We are investing now for a longer-term outcome. It is a generational thing, and we have to accept that and work on that basis. There are difficulties in that. You talked about showing the saving. The word that is continually used is disinvestment; I wish that we could think of a better description for investing in prevention and early intervention so that, ultimately, we do not need to invest in chronic, long-term care.

John Mason: I suppose that my question is about how quickly we try to do that. Do we cut into current services to free resources? There was a case in the United States where people were thinking about building a prison. There was a need for that prison, but they decided not to build it and to put the money into early intervention and preventing young people from becoming part of the system. In the long term that may have been successful, but it meant that there was no prison,

even though it was probably needed. That is an example of more dramatic, painful cuts or disinvestment, and I wonder whether we need to do more of that.

Fiona McLeod: I cannot think of a big dramatic example in my portfolio, but prisons bring to mind the fact that we have decided not to build a women's prison at Inverclyde. That is a long-term change in the way we invest, and it will impact on my portfolio because fewer women in prison means fewer children being separated from their mothers.

The Convener: These projects are being looked at and analysed. Has the Scottish Government made any effort to ensure that successful projects are rolled out across Scotland? If a project is working successfully, how do you ensure that it is picked up elsewhere?

Fiona McLeod: One of the joys that I discovered when I came to this job was the early years collaborative. When folk who are working on something find that it works, they come together and share that. It is not so much about the Government rolling something out as about people on the front line sharing their experiences, taking that home and saying, "That worked there, let's do it here." I went to a learning session of the early years collaborative with 700 front-line professionals. It is a great experience to be part of a system where professionals feel empowered to come up with a project, give it a try and share it; they can also share something that did not work. If we are investing in early intervention and find that something does not work, that is a lesson to share with everybody, rather than let someone else do the same thing.

The Convener: I think that we are all familiar with the early years collaborative, but do you have an example of a project that started off in East Lothian, for example, and is now being implemented in the Highlands or Ayrshire or wherever?

Fiona McLeod: I cannot think of one off the top of my head. We are doing a lot of stuff on play—we have a play strategy and the play ranger toolkit. A couple of local groups said, "Let's do more stuff outside". For outdoor early education there is a risk benefit analysis—that is not the right term, but we need to encourage children to take a risk because that is how they learn, and there is lots of evidence about how that helps children in all sorts of ways. A couple of projects were doing that. It worked, so I launched the play ranger toolkit, which included all that information. Anybody in any local authority, or anyone who wants to take children outside to play, now has a toolkit and can counter the health and safety culture that we live in, which says that we have to wrap kids up in cotton wool. People now have a

toolkit to use around the country that says, "This is how you assess a risk and decide whether something is worth doing."

The Convener: Is there any direction to that? You talk about people getting together, and about what works and does not work, but is there anything that you think you should do? Is there any sense of direction? Is the Scottish Government saying, "This is something that we think you should do", as opposed to letting people do things organically?

Fiona McLeod: At the end of every learning session at the early years collaborative, decisions are made about what we will work on and look at in the future. I can send that information to you, especially from the last meeting. It is about what key changes we need to work on, and that is what we want the collaborative to test over the next period.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): When I was vice-convener of housing at Aberdeen City Council I remember trying to convince other council departments that the concept of regeneration did not just relate to building more houses, but that there was a wider issue into which other departments had a buy-in, too. With regard to the early years change fund, there is a range of services out there that could make changes to the way in which services are delivered in order to facilitate some of the early intervention that the Scottish Government wants to see. You are here as the Minister for Children and Young People, but what level of buy-in do you have from other Government departments, ministers and at a local level? What further buy-in is there beyond local authorities being seen as the drivers of that change?

Fiona McLeod: I can speak as the minister and say that there is buy-in across the Government and the different portfolios. The decision not to build the Inverclyde women's prison is very much a justice issue, but it is seen clearly that that will have an effect on young people bonding and on women's employment. There is that clear, joined-up thinking. As of Monday, that becomes something that will happen much more, not just in Government, but across all agencies, because part 1 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which says that ministers have to give cognisance to the rights of young people, comes into force.

We are talking about interventions in the early years and funding for such interventions. At the bottom of all that is a child's right to get access to services that are best for them. That is embedded in the approach.

One of the returns that I printed out and read in great detail was from North Lanarkshire. It is

interesting to see North Lanarkshire talking about its partner organisations; it is talking about working across the council, the health board, Police Scotland, the voluntary sector, parents and children. From year 1 to year 2, we are seeing in the returns that early years change is becoming embedded in the culture of different organisations.

Mark McDonald: You mentioned that you had seen evidence of disinvestment taking place in 10 local authority returns. The optimist in me says that that is great and the pessimist asks what is happening in the other 22 local authorities and why are they not taking that approach. What work is the Scottish Government doing to interrogate those 22 local authorities further?

If we look at the older people's change fund as an example, one of the concerns that I have heard at a local level is that it was used for three years and then the projects that were funded were packed up once the funding stopped. There was no concerted effort to mainstream those projects and to look at how the funding was being spent in other areas to disinvest and put it into some of the projects. It seems to be a short-term approach, when what we want to do is encourage more long-term thinking.

What work is being done with the other 22 local authorities to persuade them to show some evidence that the funding is not just there as a stopgap?

Fiona McLeod: As I said, we are now in year 3 of the three years of funding, but the Scottish Government has committed £8.5 million for a fourth year. We are not looking to our partners—that funding just comes from us. We are doing that to find ways in which we can ensure sustainability at the end of the three years.

Mark McDonald: Sustainability is fine when local authorities are showing willingness and a move towards mainstreaming and changing ways of working. Are you concerned that the other 22 local authorities, in which there has not been that evidence of disinvestment, are not making those changes, or do you think that they have just not presented the evidence to the Scottish Government as yet, but may well be doing that work behind the scenes?

Fiona McLeod: My suspicion is the latter.

Amanda Callaghan: The interpretation of disinvestment has been applied differently. It is good to see an example of disinvestment, but it is not an indication that none of the others is doing that. Some work is being done with the early years collaborative on support for CPP areas in order to identify some tests of change and what works.

10:30

Mark McDonald: You mentioned childsmile, which is a welcome initiative, and you can identify some quick wins off the back of that, although it will be much longer before you see a benefit from some of this investment. We are talking perhaps about one or two decades before a real shift can be seen. Do you think that there is the mindset out there that we are in this for the long haul with some of the projects and investment? The nature of the political world in which we live is that we look for results that we can present at four or five-year intervals to show that we have made progress. Do you think that there is a collective buy-in to the long haul and that it is accepted that it will be 10 years before the investment shows positive outcomes? Is everybody on the same track?

Fiona McLeod: I think that we are. Within that political cycle, we are beginning to see evidence of benefits to the child and change in the funding, so we probably can trumpet a success within the political cycle. The biggest thing is the generational change. As the change builds up over the four or five-year cycles, within five cycles we have changed a generation.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I was going to ask about the early years collaborative, but the convener started off on that. It is very important to the agenda. I notice that the Edinburgh report says:

"During 2013/14 there were twenty active Early Years Collaborative projects in Edinburgh".

You have said some things about the early years collaborative, but I am interested in hearing a bit more. Is that figure for active projects typical of local authorities across Scotland? There are several questions to ask about the collaborative. It is an improvement methodology, but the key is finding the right activities that will deliver the preventative spend results that we want. Who decides what key actions will be tested?

Fiona McLeod: There are 20 active projects in Edinburgh and, if my memory serves me right, there are about 500 across the country. That sounds like a huge number but they are small tests of change. It is really about local people saying, "Here's a change that we think could work here." The decision is devolved to the folk on the ground who can decide to try things that they think will make a difference. That is the beauty of the collaborative and it is why there are so many projects.

The beauty of it is also that a change can be tested within a short period of time. If it works, continue it; if it does not work, think again.

Malcolm Chisholm: That sounds very decentralised, but are there not some kind of

objectives that are accepted that everyone should try?

Fiona McLeod: No, no. We set out—what do they call them?

Amanda Callaghan: Key changes.

Fiona McLeod: We set out key changes that we want to explore in the next period, but the collaborative decides on those key changes. When I was at the last learning session, I went to the discussion about whether play should become a key change. It was interesting to sit there and listen to the discussion. In the end, it was decided that it would be a key change. We will now see a lot more work on play as part of the early intervention agenda because the early years collaborative decided that it should be a key change.

Malcolm Chisholm: The Dumfries and Galloway return said:

“Initially it was assumed that spreading the Improvement Methodology ... would lead to changes in services which would impact positively on families. This approach had previously worked well in the NHS Patient Safety Programme”.

It continued:

“However, we have learned that in a multi-agency context it is necessary to provide more structure to the proposed changes”.

Has there been much discussion of how easy local authorities have found it to adopt the methodology, which started very much in health? The early years seem quite different. I do not know what the background is to that quote from Dumfries and Galloway.

Fiona McLeod: I will get Amanda Callaghan to come in on that, but I would think that that kind of thing would be discussed at the level of the early years task force. I have attended it once, but I am sure that Malcolm Chisholm will have been at more of its meetings than I have.

Amanda Callaghan: Within the work of the early years collaborative and the parts that our team supports, work is going on with improvement advisers within regions. We are at quite an early stage in that. We are in the process of testing to see what works and what can be scaled up in local authority areas. The idea is that that will spread and we will provide support to local authority areas on the key changes that we have identified nationally as being the big things that will make the biggest difference. The idea is also to ensure that that is applied in a way that is appropriate locally, because different things work better in different places. We are on that journey, and we should make a lot of progress on it in the next year.

Malcolm Chisholm: Perhaps I should go to one of the collaboratives. I have been to a health one, but I have not been to the early years collaborative. It is obviously important, and it would be good if MSPs knew more about it, because people are pinning a lot of faith on it.

Fiona McLeod: I can highly recommend a visit.

Malcolm Chisholm: The issue of disinvestment has been well dealt with, but I have a point on it. I have been looking at something that your predecessor minister said to the committee about the issue. She said that she

“does not consider disinvestment alone to be a key indicator for prevention.”

However, in the change fund returns, local authorities were asked to provide specific examples of disinvestment. Is there some tension between those two statements, or is there not really any tension there? You say that disinvestment is not an indicator, but you still want to see an indication that it is taking place.

Fiona McLeod: Yes, you are right. On the monitoring form, question 4.4 is:

“Can you provide specific examples of preventative spending?”

Question 4.5 is:

“Can you provide specific examples of disinvestment?”

That comes back to what the change fund is for. It is about trying to move the way that we fund services to early intervention, rather than always thinking about how we react to a crisis. I do not think that there is an inherent tension there.

Malcolm Chisholm: No, there probably is not. There might appear to be one, but perhaps there is not.

John Mason dealt with savings. To what extent do we think of savings as financial and to what extent do we have a broader view of savings in the sense of saving lots of undesirable things happening to people in the future? Is it a bit of both?

Fiona McLeod: When it comes to the money, we should not talk about saving; we should talk about disinvestment or reinvestment in early years. I would like a better word than “disinvestment”. In financial terms, it is about moving money to the right place to deliver the long-term outcome. In terms of the outcome for young people, there is a saving, because it is saving them from their mother smoking in pregnancy and all that follows for the child in the rest of their lives. It is a saving, or an investment in their early years to ensure better later years.

Malcolm Chisholm: On the example of toothbrushing in nursery, we could argue that that

is still preventative spend, even if it does not save a penny, although you argue that it saves money. Either way, we could argue that it is still preventative spend.

Fiona McLeod: It is two things. The toothbrushing saves children from tooth decay, so there is a saving, but it also moves money from fillings to better support for oral health.

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): What happens to the early years change fund now? You mentioned the £8.5 million from the Scottish Government, which is presumably for 2015-16—is that right?

Fiona McLeod: Yes.

Gavin Brown: Other than that £8.5 million, are we at the end of the early years change fund, as we know it?

Fiona McLeod: Yes.

Amanda Callaghan: Yes, that was the original agreement.

Fiona McLeod: It was only set out as a partnership for three years, and the Government decided to put in extra money for the fourth year in order to get sustainability.

Can a change fund last for ever? It has to be in place for the period over which you are trying to effect the change.

Gavin Brown: The Government's intention is that that is the end of the change fund, as such.

What mechanisms are in place to judge the success of the change fund over the three-year period? Clearly, you have identified individual successful projects, and I concur with the remarks that have been made on them. However, the fund as a whole will have to be judged. What have we actually got for the expenditure of £274 million over three years? How will the Government report back on that?

Fiona McLeod: We are just thinking about what we will do at the end of the project. We will commit to an analysis of the returns that we have had and the changes that we have seen. This is not just about Government money; it is also about local authority and NHS money, so we will work with partners to analyse what has happened over the period and learn lessons.

Gavin Brown: Obviously, you do not have the 2014-15 returns in yet, but you have the returns for the first two years. Although you will not have been able to do a full analysis, you must have a feel, as the minister who has read all the returns, for how successful the change fund has been over those first two years. Of course, I accept that you cannot capture all the benefits, as some of them will be benefits only in the longer term.

Fiona McLeod: Is it fair to talk about having a feel for something, rather than looking at the evidence that we have and analysing that? My feeling is that we are moving in the right direction and that the small tests of change by front-line practitioners give us a successful way to effect change. Those are my gut feelings, and the analysis will show whether they are right. However, what we have from years 1 and 2 is enough to show that the returns are giving more data and more examples of change.

Gavin Brown: You give some specific examples of successful investments. Not every project will be successful, though. There will be a degree of failure, and you said that people were happy to stand up at the early years collaborative and talk publicly about things that had failed. What projects have not worked and should not be continued?

Fiona McLeod: Being an optimist, I have written down only the ones that have worked. Can I get back to you on that?

Gavin Brown: Of course. I just think that it is important to think about the projects that have not worked, if we are going to learn lessons.

Fiona McLeod: Absolutely.

Gavin Brown: We hear about lots of good things, but one of the committee's frustrations is that nobody is prepared to say what things have not worked and that need to be stopped so that we can prioritise our efforts. Until we start doing that, it will be difficult to make progress.

Amanda Callaghan: I cannot think of the names of any such projects off the top of my head, but we have a couple of video clips of people talking about things that have not worked. We can send the committee those examples and pull out any others that we have.

Gavin Brown: I have asked you about disinvestment. I accept that you do not like that word, but we will have to stick with it until we come up with a better one. Earlier, you mentioned a project—in Dundee, I think—in which there had been disinvestment. Could you explain in more detail what happened there? I did not quite follow what you were saying. What savings have resulted from that disinvestment? What fundamental change was made?

10:45

Fiona McLeod: Can I write to you with the details?

Gavin Brown: Sure.

Fiona McLeod: What I have is a couple of lines on the subject. I have asked that question about a few of the examples that I have been given.

There is a really good example in Clackmannanshire. Again, I cannot give you figures, but I asked for them. Clackmannanshire put in a mental health worker to work with parents in services that they were attending, rather than the parents having to go to mental health services to get support. Clackmannanshire was able to tell us that, because of that, some parents had come off benefits because they were able to go back to work. Some had returned to work, some had gone to college and it had been possible to remove some children from the child protection register, all because the mental health worker had been put in so that the parents could access them. However, when I asked, "Can you tell me how many parents came off benefits and how many children were affected?", I was told, "We can't be as specific as that."

We come back to whether something is working and we can put pounds and pennies on it or whether we are going in the right direction and we will be able to see the results in the long term. For example, in Clackmannanshire, we might be able to see that the number of children on the child protection register had dropped over a period of time. However, that takes us back to whether that happened because of the access to a mental health worker or because of something else.

Gavin Brown: I accept that causation is never absolute and straightforward, although we can often make links.

You explained that, in Clackmannanshire, mental health workers were made available to families more readily. Without looking at the detail, I can see why that would help, but that is not the disinvestment. The disinvestment is what Clackmannanshire stopped funding and stopped doing in order to free up the money to do that. That is where, from my point of view, there have been no details over several years.

Fiona McLeod: What jumped out at me from that example is that Clackmannanshire said that there was less social work input to those families and that some children had been removed from the child protection register. The disinvestment is that fewer children will end up as looked-after children, so we will not have to spend money to support them outwith their homes. However, how do we put pounds and pennies on that?

Gavin Brown: I accept that you said that you have only minor details just now, but anything that you can share with us, particularly if you get follow-up responses, would be hugely helpful.

Amanda Callaghan: We have agreed with the task force to delve into the disinvestment examples that we have in more detail, and we are working with it. We will make that information available to the committee as well.

Gavin Brown: That is helpful. Thank you.

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Minister, you mentioned outdoor education in one of your examples—I think that that was in answer to the question about rolling things out nationwide. You also said, "We have produced a toolkit". Who is that "we"? Is the fund held centrally and do local authorities apply with different ideas? How does the toolkit fit into the fund? Does everybody buy into it? Is it imposed or sold to everybody as a really good thing that works? Is there a central fund, or is it done through a different fund?

Fiona McLeod: The play ranger toolkit was produced through a different fund. Was it the inspiring Scotland fund? I cannot remember. I will check and come back to you on that. I used that as an example. What came back from a small attempt to create change through outdoor education was that we needed a manual or a handbook. We call it a toolkit because we are not saying, "You have to do it this way." If something that is done using a central pot of money proves to be good, we can use another pot of money to produce a toolkit so that everybody has it.

Jean Urquhart: Is it the same for the toothbrushes and toothpaste?

Fiona McLeod: No. The childsmile programme is done through NHS funding, so that is clearly a central fund.

Jean Urquhart: Has getting it right for every child spawned a lot of the ideas about collaborative working? Has GIRFEC now been rolled out throughout Scotland?

Fiona McLeod: The principles of GIRFEC have been used for about 10 years across different local authorities. We put it in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 because we wanted everybody to take it on, and we wanted to give it a statutory footing. GIRFEC will come into effect in August next year as a legislative programme.

Jean Urquhart: Looking forward, the prediction is that the number of children who live in poverty in Scotland is on the rise. Whether we blame the austerity agenda or whatever, that will have some effect. We are talking about an increase of 3 or 4 per cent on what is already approaching a quarter of a million children in Scotland. That is going to bring a lot of pressure for priorities and so on. Realistically, the predicted cuts for local authorities are fairly severe. How can you feel confident that some of the changes and disinvestments are reasonable, practical and possible?

Fiona McLeod: This is going a bit beyond the early years change fund, but I am on a ministerial working group on child poverty with the Minister for Housing and Welfare and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and

Pensioners' Rights. It is a bit outwith what we are talking about today, but the lessons that we can learn from any of the early years change fund projects can be fed into that. We hope that that will become part of our way of tackling child poverty.

Jean Urquhart: Preventative spend is a really sound philosophy and a good basis for any budget. People understand it, although it is sometimes hard to articulate what it looks like in every service.

Fiona McLeod: That is why we have had the change fund for three years; it is about that. Everybody's gut feeling is that if you spend on prevention, that is better than letting the accident happen. We have had three years in order to test the changes. We can do the analysis with our partners at the end of the three years and get things embedded.

Jean Urquhart: Finally, you mentioned Dr Harry Burns and his enthusiasm. Has he been actively involved in some of the reports or the evidence?

Fiona McLeod: He was involved when he was the chief medical officer; he was intrinsic to the whole process. He is no longer the chief medical officer, but you will know that he was appointed to the Council of Economic Advisers. That sends out a very positive message, and it will keep his enthusiasm involved in the work that we are doing.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That concludes questions from the committee. Are there any further points that you would like to make before we wind up?

Fiona McLeod: No, except to say that I will follow up with the things that I said that I would send on to you.

The Convener: Thank you very much for answering our questions.

Fiona McLeod: Thank you.

The Convener: We agreed earlier on that the following items would be taken in private, so that ends the public session.

10:53

Meeting continued in private until 11:17.

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 978-1-78568-890-4

Revised e-format available
ISBN 978-1-78568-904-8