

# **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 24 October 2007

Session 3

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## AUDIT COMMITTEE 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2007, Session 3

### CONVENER

\*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
\*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)  
\*George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab)  
Jim Hume (South of Scotland) (LD)  
Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP)  
\*Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP)

### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Derek Brownlee (South of Scotland) (Con)  
James Kelly (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)  
Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD)  
\*Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*attended

### THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Miranda Alcock (Audit Scotland)  
Caroline Gardner (Audit Scotland)  
Barbara Hurst (Audit Scotland)

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Tracey Reilly

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Joanna Hardy

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Rebecca Lamb

### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



## Scottish Parliament

### Audit Committee

Wednesday 24 October 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:32*]

### Interests

**The Convener (Hugh Henry):** I welcome everyone to the fifth meeting of the Audit Committee in session 3. We have—yet again, as the deputy convener pointed out before the meeting started—another change in personnel. I welcome George Foulkes to the committee and ask if he wants to declare any relevant interests.

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** Thank you for your kind welcome. I noticed that one of the suggestions in the legacy paper was that this committee needed continuity, so we are off to a bad start, but I promise to stay here as long as I possibly can. To the best of my knowledge, I have no declarable interests that are relevant to the work of the committee.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that. We also have Sandra White at the meeting this morning to replace Stuart McMillan. Sandra, are there any interests that you need to declare?

**Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP):** I have no interests to declare. I am the opposite of George Foulkes—as I am here to substitute for Stuart McMillan, I will not be bringing continuity to the committee.

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

10:33

**The Convener:** Can we agree to take agenda item 7 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## “Police call management - An initial review”

10:33

**The Convener:** We have a briefing on the review, from which some significant issues flow. I am sure that other Parliament committees will have an interest in it. I ask Caroline Gardner to introduce the review.

**Caroline Gardner (Audit Scotland):** I will give the usual short background to the review, and then the team and I will do our best to answer any questions that members might have.

The review of police call management is a joint report by the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission, reflecting the shared responsibility for police services between central and local government. Calls to the police represent an important and heavily used public service. There are about 6 million calls to the police each year, and our survey of the general public found that about a quarter of adults had called the police within the past year. That means that the way in which the police manage calls plays an important role in ensuring public safety, as well as having an impact on the good use of public money by the police service.

All eight Scottish forces have recently centralised their call management functions, with capital investment of about £30 million over the past five years. Running costs for the service are now £45 million a year. Before the modernisation, forces found it hard to cope with the rise in the number of calls that they were receiving, mainly as a result of the use of mobile phones among the population in general. Centralisation was intended to help forces answer more calls and to improve the quality and consistency of responses to members of the public. It was also hoped that more calls could be resolved without a police officer needing to attend, while maintaining the quality of service to members of the public.

We focused on how the changes were managed and on what that meant for performance, cost and callers' experiences. I will briefly draw to members' attention four key findings. First, our survey work found that people are generally satisfied with the response that they get when they call the police. More non-emergency calls are now answered and more calls are resolved without a police officer having to attend. Secondly, the report provides more information about call demand. For example, we now know that more than 85 per cent of calls to the police are not 999 calls and that, of those that are 999 calls, about half are not actually emergencies. The police also receive a large number of calls that are not to do with police

business, but which involve other more general inquiries.

Thirdly, the lack of a national strategy for the new call management arrangements means that forces have developed their own different policies, structures and systems for managing calls. For example, there are now 25 different information technology systems relating to call management throughout the eight police forces. Those differences make it difficult to draw a national picture of the way in which calls are handled and to compare police forces' performance. It is therefore hard to reach a conclusion on whether calls are being managed well throughout the country.

Finally, our report highlights the limited involvement that the police authorities and the Scottish Executive had when the new arrangements were being planned and put in place. The current limitations in performance information now that the new systems are established make it difficult for police authorities and the Scottish Government to be sure whether the new systems are operating efficiently and delivering the anticipated benefits. That highlights the complex accountability that exists for police services in Scotland under the current tripartite arrangements.

The report sets out a total of 18 recommendations, which are aimed at the Scottish Government, police authorities and forces and which are intended to improve the effectiveness of call management and ensure that the public get the service that they need. Perhaps most significantly, we recommend that the Government should clarify which policing decisions require a national strategic approach and which should be left to the eight police forces and their authorities.

I have one further point, for information. Members will be aware that the Justice Committee is holding an inquiry into the effective use of police resources. The Auditor General and the Accounts Commission have agreed to provide evidence to the committee's inquiry, on the basis of the information that is included in the report.

I hope that that has been helpful. We will do our best to answer any questions that the committee may have.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that succinct summary.

You have raised some significant issues. I do not dispute what you say about people being satisfied, but I suspect that most members, or certainly those in some parts of the country, receive complaints about difficulties with getting through to the police when an issue arises. Those are not necessarily life-or-death issues—they might be antisocial behaviour or acts of vandalism

or criminality near where people live or work. There is frustration about how difficult it is to get through to call centres. In some cases, the changes are relatively recent and will take time to settle in. It is clear that the old systems could not cope. However, I suggest that the issue should be considered carefully, either by relevant committees of the Parliament or by the police boards. We should not take public satisfaction for granted. It might well be that, when a real emergency occurs, people are satisfied, but I do not accept that that reflects the level of satisfaction for all people who need the service. We need to think that through.

The third and fourth points that you make, about the lack of a national strategy, are probably the critical ones. Frankly, in a country of the size of Scotland, having 25 different IT systems is a disgrace. It means that, if there is a problem in one area, it is difficult to get back-up from another area. I question whether we are getting value for money in terms of procurement, maintenance and support. I do not think that it would be right to impinge on local accountability or decision making; however, if we are to get the best systems and the best value and if the police boards are not going to try to establish a degree of consistency throughout Scotland, the Government should try to do that. Ultimately, the Government provides a significant part of the investment for the systems. If the Justice Committee is not going to look into that, we should discuss—when we go into private session—whether there is a value-for-money issue that we want to pursue further.

Your point about accountability is pertinent. We have accountability structures that reflect the political structures of the mid-1970s—structures that have disappeared. We are left with the legacy of joint boards that reflect the geographic boundaries of the structures that were in place at the time and do not reflect adequately the structures of today. There should be further reflection on how investment goes in, how we get consistency and how the public is able to influence decision making. Ultimately, not only the police boards and the police, but we are there as guardians of the public interest. I am not persuaded that complex accountability, as you describe it, is good accountability from a public interest perspective. Therefore, I suggest that, although the issue that has triggered this discussion is the provision of a call management system, there are some underlying issues that need to be explored further.

**Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP):** I agree with you, convener. The report's recommendations are eminently sensible and would lead to improvements in the call management system. However, call management is only part of a more general system—it is a means to an end, and the

end is a response to the needs of the general public. I have personal experience of phoning in and getting transferred. I was reporting an Angus situation, but I was talking to somebody in Fife. I also had to listen to a standard, repeated message that told me that my call would be dealt with. The underlying problem is that there are no police in local police stations.

The recommendations on appropriate staffing resources for the call centres are correct, but they should also be linked to resources for delivery. The recommendations are sensible, but there are fundamental questions about the police resources that are needed to meet the demand that is created by the incoming calls. The report looks in isolation at a system that must be reformed and makes sensible recommendations, but that system should be considered as part of the more general system of delivering for the general public, which should be the end product.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I want to ask Caroline Gardner a specific question about part 2 of the report, which concerns the nature of calls to the police. You point out that more than half of all 999 calls are not emergency calls and that many people dial 999 because they do not have immediate access to a non-emergency number for the police force. You touch on the interesting issue of whether we should have a national non-emergency number—888 or whatever—that people could dial to contact the police, which would apply nationally, just as 999 does.

I do not see this from the report, but I wonder whether you have any feel for how the cost of that might work out. Clearly, we would need to put in a new national system. First, have you looked at the cost of having all non-emergency calls to 999? There is clearly an administrative burden; how does that work out in cost terms? Secondly, what work, if any, have you done or what thoughts do you have about the likely costs of a national non-emergency number and how it might tie in with the current 999 set-up that deals with emergency calls?

10:45

**Caroline Gardner:** I will have a first stab at that and then ask the team to fill in the background.

Murdo Fraser is right that one of the most significant issues that the report highlights is that such a large number of 999 calls are not emergencies. That appears to happen because people do not know what other number to call. There is a real opportunity cost in that, because if a call comes in on 999, the line is tied up until the call ends, even if it is transferred somewhere else. That could bar a real emergency from making contact with the emergency services.

There is a lot of activity in police forces to consider alternative numbers. As we say in the report, the current proposal is around a series of consecutive 0845 numbers to help people to become more familiar with the number and to deal with the limitations of referring to geographically based call centres. However, I know that there is a concern that 0845 numbers cost more from mobile phones and may therefore be less accessible to members of the public than an 888 or other similar number.

There will be a cost to using a non-emergency number, and I will ask the team to talk about that, but we should not lose sight of the fact that we are already spending money on a system that does not work very well for the public.

**Miranda Alcock (Audit Scotland):** There are a couple of points to make. First, not all forces are able to identify the 999 calls that they receive that are not emergencies, so there are problems for the forces in understanding the extent of the problem. We got our information from the various sample work that we did. There is an issue for forces to get their own information systems up and running so that they can understand the extent to which there is inappropriate use of 999 in their areas.

Secondly, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland has gone down the route of using an 0845 number, but it is more of a partnership issue. There are pilot programmes in England and Wales using 101 as an antisocial behaviour non-emergency number, and the Scottish Executive did some work on that about a year ago as part of public service reform. It considered some pilots in England and Wales, and we have summarised some of its findings.

Basically, the research highlighted an unmet demand for information. Rather than reducing the number of calls to 999, the non-emergency line increased the number of calls to the police because there is an unmet need for information about services within communities, which is also what the 101 pilot programmes illustrated. Forces in England and Wales are now considering what to do about that because there is a cost, particularly in routing mobile phone calls. For 999, that cost is covered by the licence that British Telecommunications and Cable and Wireless have to pay for. If the Scottish Government set up a number such as 101, it would have to pick up the cost of routing mobile phone calls to the appropriate police station. As I understand it, that is one of the biggest and most difficult costs to extract.

Unless my team, as the technical experts, have anything to add, I think that that covers the main points.

**Murdo Fraser:** I would like to ask a short follow-up question because your comments on the 101 number were interesting. Correct me if I am wrong, but you seemed to suggest that if we introduced a new national non-emergency number the public would become very aware of it and would make far more calls to it than the current number of non-emergency calls, so the cost might be higher than we would expect.

**Miranda Alcock:** The non-emergency use of 999 might reduce, but the total number of calls would increase hugely. That has happened under the new system. The convener spoke about the number of callers who had difficulty in getting through. One difficulty that every force had was in estimating the number of calls that it received before centralisation. All the forces underestimated the number of calls, so they were stuck with systems that were geared to dealing with the number of calls that they thought they would receive, while they were dealing with far higher call numbers than expected. That has been a huge change for all the forces, which they are still struggling to cope with.

**The Convener:** The point is relevant. Problems and demand have not necessarily increased but, because the new centres have higher capacity, they are meeting the previously unmet need. As I and, I am sure, others know from talking to constituents, if people wanted to report something that was not a life-or-death issue, they often became so frustrated that they just gave up, so the incident was never recorded. Once the system can cope with more calls, more calls inevitably get through. That has produced an upsurge in some areas.

Murdo Fraser makes a relevant point. People aspire to having a simple number, because that can be easily remembered and dialled when people know that it is not a life-or-death issue, so it does not mean a 999 call. Murdo Fraser has suggested that having such a number could have significant cost implications. We would need to consider carefully whether alternatives exist.

I have an antipathy to public agencies using 0845 or 0870 numbers, which cost a significant amount of money to call from mobile phones. Often, the poorest sections of the community have to use mobile phones to make such calls, and they can least afford that. Some households make the mobile phone their main phone to avoid paying line rental and we could burden those people with significant costs. I had to dial the 0845 number for NHS 24 when I was out with my wife and she was taken ill, and I was on the phone for a considerable time. I could afford that, but not everyone is as well placed.

We need to do further work to ensure that we have proper accountability, proper accessibility

and proper management of costs. A balance must be struck in having an alternative to 999 and achieving public access. Perhaps we could come back to the separate issue of public access to public agencies that use such numbers.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Has any work been done on police response times to attend incidents? I talked to the chief constable of Strathclyde Police some years ago, before the new system was introduced, when the intention was to improve the response time to incidents. I have looked through the report, but it does not seem to address that. Is considering that part of the Justice Committee's inquiry remit?

The big model of how the system works on page 9 of the report shows that as soon as an incident is classified and passed to a local officer to attend, that seems to be the end of recording anything. That tells a tale. How long an officer takes to attend an incident, if they ever manage to do so, is not fed back into the system for reporting purposes. That is the biggest problem that my constituents describe. They make calls, but often the police cannot attend or the public are not informed about an incident's classification. At that end of the system, there is a big problem to solve in management and reporting and in police response times. Those times need to be put back into the system, so that we can see what is happening.

**Caroline Gardner:** You are quite right to spot that the report does not examine the incident-handling part of the system but only the call handling. Because it was our first significant piece of work on the police, we wanted to ensure that its scope was manageable and that we would come up with some useful findings. We may well consider incident handling at a later stage, but the report focuses on call handling.

One of the interesting findings from our survey of the public was that, although people were generally satisfied with the way in which their calls were handled initially, they were less satisfied with the information that they got about what happened next—about the way in which the incidents were handled. That throws up a question about the next stage in the process, which is the one that is most significant in its effect on people's lives.

**Willie Coffey:** If we do anything as a committee—even within the scope of the examination just now—we could perhaps emphasise the absolute need to feed back into the system some information on response times, so that we can see that such systems really make improvements.

**Caroline Gardner:** Miranda Alcock has some information to add to that.



**Miranda Alcock:** As Caroline Gardner said, we focused on the call management side; we deliberately did not include the time that it takes for the police to attend an incident. There are a couple of important points to make. First, moving to a common call grading policy will help to manage the public's expectations. If the caller knows that their call is a grade 2 or 3 call, they will know that the police will attend within a certain time.

Secondly, there is the new Airwave system, which was also one of the triggers for centralisation. It is a digital radio system that all forces now have, which records the attendance time automatically when the police arrive. A lot of forces are now incorporating those figures in their performance reports, but we did not include them in our report because we were not looking at that. Forces are now able to record attendance times far more systematically and rigorously than was possible before Airwave.

Response times are dependent on what else is going on at the same time as the incident to which the call relates, and it is a complex area on which to report. Nevertheless, it is an area that Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in England and Wales has considered, although HMIC also found it difficult to report on because it is so dependent on what is going on at the same time. The forces have only just got the systems in place to generate that information, but they have it now.

**George Foulkes:** Everyone is talking about the police: the ambulance service and fire brigade seem to be an afterthought in all of this. Am I misjudging the way in which you are dealing with the issue?

**Caroline Gardner:** We focused on the police for this study. We took a careful step back to see whether considering the police in isolation from the fire and ambulance services made sense. Given the changes that were already under way in the centralisation of police call management, we thought that it did. Nevertheless, you are right that there are links between the different emergency services and similar questions relating particularly to the fire service, with the number of call centres that it has. We are just starting a piece of work on civil contingency planning, which is likely to consider some of the questions around the links between the different agencies that respond in the event of emergencies. However, the review does not cover those questions.

**George Foulkes:** But 999 is for emergencies that the fire and ambulance services deal with as well as those that the police deal with.

**Caroline Gardner:** We focused on the subset of 999 calls that are routed to the police and the way

in which they are managed. The decision was part of scoping the piece of work.

**George Foulkes:** In my experience, the problem arises in communications between the three services—the methods of communication and, sometimes, the lack of communication—but you did not look at that at all.

**Caroline Gardner:** You are right. There are issues there, but we scoped this study to focus on how the police handle the calls that come to them.

11:00

**Sandra White:** I have read the report, even though I am here as a substitute member and probably will not be here at the next meeting. There are some interesting issues in it. I know that, this being the Audit Committee, we must concentrate on the costs and accountability, but we should also consider the cost and accountability to the general public who pay for the service through their taxes.

Did you look at the situation concerning the 999 number? You spoke about perhaps introducing another number for antisocial behaviour et cetera. I wonder if it is wise to have specific numbers for specific issues. Would it not be better for people to know the number of their local police station? In researching this report, did you check with the public how many times they had phoned their local police station and their call had gone somewhere else, as in the situation that Andrew Welsh mentioned? In Glasgow's case, the calls go out to Motherwell, where they do not know Glasgow's geographical area. Did you examine how many times it has been problematic for police to answer a constituent and carry out their duties?

The other issue that I want to raise—which Willie Coffey has also raised—regards the follow-up to calls. The public are rarely told that they can ask for an incident number, so that when they phone again they can quote that number and the information on the incident will be available. Did you check on those issues?

**Caroline Gardner:** On the first question, the issue of the best way for people to access the services that they pay for and depend on was at the core of what we looked at. There is no simple answer. You are right to say that a lot of people were comfortable when they knew the number of their local police station and they could ring it, but it was increasingly the case that the rising number of calls meant that police stations were unable to respond to those calls quickly and consistently. If there was a big volume of calls—perhaps five or 10 people on mobile phones reporting the same incident—they were just not able to cope. That was one of the drivers for centralising call management, but doing that means that staff must

be much better at taking details from people, at ensuring that the right information is handed to police officers, and at letting people who call know what has happened.

The police forces still have more work to do on training call handlers to collect the right information and pass it on, and on keeping members of the public informed about what has happened with their call. We make recommendations in that area for improvements in the future. It is probably fair to say that it would not be feasible to go back to the old arrangements in which local police stations handled calls, because the number of calls from mobile phones is so great now that they could not do it well.

The second part of your question was about satisfaction—is that right?

**Sandra White:** Yes.

**Caroline Gardner:** We surveyed 2,500 members of the public and, as I said in my introduction, most said that they were happy with the way in which their call was answered, but we know that, in general, if you ask people about their use of public services they give you quite positive responses. We matched that survey with the available data on the number of unanswered non-999 calls. Throughout Scotland, the figure is now above 90 per cent, which is much higher than it was before centralisation—only one force is below that figure. However, that means that 10 per cent of calls are not being picked up, which is too high. Whether those calls are for an emergency or not, that is still not good enough.

That relates to Miranda Alcock's point about forces' difficulty in predicting the volume of calls and ensuring that they have the right number of staff in place to deal with them, particularly at peak times, given that there can be variability. We have made recommendations on ensuring that police forces get better at understanding the pattern of calls and that they are staffed to deal with them.

**Sandra White:** You mentioned that more than 90 per cent of 999 calls are not replied to.

**Caroline Gardner:** Non-999 calls. All 999 calls are replied to.

**Sandra White:** My point is that people phone their local police station—they still know the number—and their call is farmed out. How many times did the police not turn up because, even though people phoned their local police station, the respondent did not get back to the caller or did not know exactly where they were? Have you done any work on that, because that is a common concern of my constituents?

**Caroline Gardner:** I will pass the question on whether we have the numbers to Miranda Alcock, but I know that one of our recommendations is that

call handlers—the people who answer calls—need better access to information on what happens next and how calls are handed out. Miranda, do you want to pick that up?

**Miranda Alcock:** Yes. We did not go into detail on the numbers. The police receive 16,000 calls a day. There are two interesting points. First, we did some work in which we interviewed attending officers. They mentioned call handlers, which led to our recommendation that more needs to be done to give call handlers training on geographic areas. A lot of quite sophisticated systems are available for that, but there is still more to be done. The attending officers—the cops who go out—were aware that there was a problem.

Secondly, our focus group work with people who had experience of calling the police led to quite a change in the forces' approach. One finding was that people wanted to know where their call was going. They did not like the idea that they thought they were calling the local station but their call was being answered in Govan or Motherwell. That was a fairly universal finding, and the forces were interested in it. People want to be told where their call is being answered; they do not want forces to pretend that it is being answered in a local police station when it is not. The forces are changing their whole approach so that it is clear where calls are being answered.

It would be difficult to capture the number of cases in which the issue that Sandra White raises is a problem.

**The Convener:** I will come back to the issue of investment. You spoke about the lack of a national strategy and the fact that there are 25 different information technology systems. Do the current accountability structures allow for effective scrutiny, effective consideration and effective decision making? Can boards make and properly examine the investments that need to be made to not only keep the system working properly but achieve the best use of public money?

**Caroline Gardner:** As the report exemplifies, we think that there is a question about that. The tripartite arrangements exist for good reasons, but it is clear that, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some policing decisions probably have a strong national dimension. Investing £30 million in how police forces handle calls from the public is one example of that, but there are others.

In this case, it is fair to say that before the investment was made there was consensus that there should be a national strategy and a national steer for the investment and the systems that were put in place. In practice, all eight police forces made their own decisions, and we found limited evidence that the police boards and the police authorities had played much part in decision

making. As the report demonstrates, that means that it is not possible to make easy comparisons between the eight police forces in Scotland, so one of our recommendations is that the Government should consider which decisions have a strong national component and need a strategic steer and which ones should rightly be left to the eight police forces and authorities to deal with.

**Andrew Welsh:** The 18 recommendations are excellent, and I would like them to be implemented. However, this specific service raises wider issues, and it probably cannot be dealt with on its own, because it has to be handled in co-ordination with the other emergency services. Nevertheless, the task is straightforward: it is about contacting the police in an emergency situation, rather than making general inquiries.

One danger is that false expectations could be raised: the public might expect that any inquiry can be dealt with. Open-ended resource costs are also an obvious danger. Another issue is the distinction between 999 calls and general inquiries. Some people feel that they have to contact the police about an issue and would be satisfied with a general answer. To make progress, there must be clarity in the public mind about the use of the service and about how it fits in with the more general police system and the other emergency services.

The recommendations are great on their own, but they have spin-off effects, so it is difficult to get a focus and to decide which committee should deal with the matter. In themselves, the recommendations are excellent and should be implemented if possible, but they raise wider issues, and I am not sure how best to take them forward.

**Caroline Gardner:** You are right that there is room for improvement, but that is also a symptom of a wider question about how we plan and manage police services in Scotland. We cannot unpick the two issues, but I hope that the report provides a useful example of why some of the questions matter and how we get the best from the investment that we are making in police services throughout Scotland.

**George Foulkes:** Convener, do we pick up Andrew Welsh's points under agenda item 7?

**The Convener:** Yes, we pick up what we will do under item 7.

**Willie Coffey:** I want to pick up on the point about the multiplicity of IT systems and, specifically, improving the public reporting of performance. We all know that there is a big job to do. However, if work is going to be done, is it possible to persuade our colleagues in the police forces to liaise with local authorities and the

Procurator Fiscal Service? Each body deals with different boundaries—the procurators deal with sheriffdoms and jurisdictions, while the local authorities and police have their own boundaries.

My experience is that those bodies find it difficult to produce and provide decent and meaningful public information because they all deal with different boundaries. If an opportunity is being taken to look at data management and performance reporting, perhaps we could extend it and, if not agree common boundaries, at least consider the problem, so that information can be delivered to the public far more effectively.

**Caroline Gardner:** Communication with the public is a big issue that covers Mr Welsh's point about people's expectations of the police services and your point about how they are performing. I am not sure that there is an easy answer, but we are fully behind you in saying that getting it right matters.

**The Convener:** I conclude the discussion—I thank everyone for their contributions.

## “Dealing with offending by young people”

11:11

**The Convener:** We move on to item 4. We have received a response from Philip Rycroft, the accountable officer in relation to the Auditor General for Scotland’s report “Dealing with offending by young people”. Do committee members have any comments to make on the letter?

**Andrew Welsh:** I have a question of clarification. In the third paragraph, Mr Rycroft says:

“As a first step, they have decided to move on from the problematic persistent offender target and seek a more efficacious approach to measuring the impact of youth justice activities.”

What does that mean?

**The Convener:** I am showing my age here, but it is redolent of “Lily the Pink”.

**Andrew Welsh:** Is Mr Rycroft really saying that ministers will dump the target and seek a more efficacious approach to measuring the impact? Another bit is just about as vague:

“Locally we will seek to support local arrangements that help agencies to better understand their performance”

and what the local problems are. That is the most convoluted sentence, and it does not take us anywhere.

**The Convener:** Not only is it a convoluted sentence, it is an extremely vague response.

**Murdo Fraser:** I want to comment on the point that Andrew Welsh just made. A target was set to reduce the number of young offenders, but the number actually increased. Call me a cynic, convener, but the reason why the target was problematic was that it was not met. It might be worth probing further whether the reason why ministers consider the target to be problematic is that meeting it is a problem, as opposed to the target itself being problematic. We need more clarity about what the letter means.

**The Convener:** It is worrying. As Andrew Welsh pointed out, the letter says:

“Locally we will seek to support local arrangements that help agencies to better understand their performance”.

Oh my God—if ministers have to step in to help local agencies to better understand their performance, there is something seriously lacking at the local level. They might want to think about better management and accountability systems, never mind being able to address solutions.

**George Foulkes:** I have a point about procedure. I agree with what has been said about the letter. I presume that we cannot ask Philip Rycroft to come and talk to us?

**The Convener:** We could.

**George Foulkes:** Is this not a matter for another committee, for example the Justice Committee?

**The Convener:** It might be, in terms of developing a comprehensive investigation of or response to youth offending, but on the response to the letter that the previous convener wrote to Philip Rycroft, we can certainly invite him to come along and give us more detail.

**George Foulkes:** That seems to be the obvious next step, if it is within our remit to do so.

**The Convener:** I am happy to go along with that.

**Andrew Welsh:** There is form here, in that the previous information that we received was just as waffly as the letter. It could be that we are being told about work in progress. If so, why not just tell us that? If we get someone here from the Scottish Government they might just tell us that, when it could be put in writing. It is clear that proposals are being worked on. However, when we ask for specific information, we should get it. If development of the recommendations is a work in progress and the Scottish Government cannot tell us about it right now, it should say so and be much more open with the committee. After all, we are trying to seek out the facts of the situation and the truth of the matter.

**The Convener:** Are we agreed that we will invite the accountable officer to the committee to give a further explanation?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## “Community planning: an initial review”

11:15

**The Convener:** The next agenda item is about community planning. Again, we have a response from the accountable officer. Are there any comments on the letter from Andrew Goudie?

**Andrew Welsh:** We asked about timetables. We are getting answers to the questions that we posed, which is progress.

**The Convener:** Although there is greater detail in this response, I have a more fundamental question: what exactly are we getting from community planning in return for the considerable effort and investment in time and money? I accept that an outcomes-based approach might make a contribution. I do not know whether it is for us or another committee to explore, but some fundamental questions need to be asked about exactly what community planning is delivering.

**Andrew Welsh:** The Crerar report is mentioned in the letter, and it is clear from my reading of it that the matter is under consideration.

**The Convener:** Is there anything for us to do at this stage? If not, are we happy to note the contents of the letter and leave it to others to follow up?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Free Personal Care (Independent Funding Review)

11:18

**The Convener:** Are there any comments on the letter from Lord Sutherland?

**Andrew Welsh:** We could refer him to the previous committee's recommendations. I note that Audit Scotland is due to publish a report on free personal and nursing care in January 2008. We will want to see Audit Scotland's detailed consideration of those matters to help us in our deliberations.

**The Convener:** At this stage, I suspect that there is nothing for us to do, but we will have to come back to the matter.

**George Foulkes:** I presume that the clerk's paper was written before the Macphail judgment, which throws everything into the air, does it not? I am concerned about making open-ended commitments, as should be the committee. Andrew Welsh raised that point in the context of police call management. There is no more open-ended commitment than our commitment to free personal care for every person, irrespective of their income. We need to examine the matter in much more detail. We need to know more about local authorities' responses—I do not know whether it is appropriate for this committee to deal with the matter. We also need to know the implications of the Macphail judgment. It might not be this committee's responsibility, but Parliament needs to examine what would be the implications of targeting.

The review raises huge issues, so responding to the letter by Friday 9 November, as requested, will not be easy. I am not sure whether Stewart Sutherland feels that the Macphail judgment throws his whole review up in the air—maybe I will have the opportunity to talk to him some time—but it appears to me that it does.

**The Convener:** I am aware that the Health and Sport Committee has also been asked to respond. There will be further opportunities for our committee to get into some of the issues, not least when we have seen the Auditor General's report. The issues that George Foulkes raises are entirely pertinent to this committee. What will be the financial implications, not only of Lord Macphail's judgment but of increasing the amounts that are available? How far will those increases go? What are the financial implications of the on-going dispute in a number of authorities over who should pay for the preparation of meals and whether that should be considered as part of free personal care? What implications for the Scottish budget

and other spending areas will arise given the population growth that we know is coming and the increase in care needs as people live longer?

Issues for the Health and Sport Committee and future policy issues notwithstanding, there are significant budgetary implications on which it is relevant for us to comment. I do not know whether we want to say to Lord Sutherland that we think that those questions should be considered, and that we will come back to them at a future time—just to put down the markers—but it would be premature for us to get into any of the detail just now.

**Murdo Fraser:** I agree with Andrew Welsh, and George Foulkes raised some important questions, but I am not sure that this committee should be driving the agenda forward. We need to look forward to the work that Audit Scotland is doing in the area and then follow up on it. In the meantime, as Andrew Welsh said, we should reply to Lord Sutherland, drawing his attention to the recommendations that this committee made in its report on free personal care, and leave it at that for the time being.

**Andrew Welsh:** We will get the Audit Scotland report in January 2008. Audit Scotland reports are this committee's stock in trade. We tend to deal with issues after the event. It is important that we do not interfere with the remit of other committees that are dealing with live issues, and that we act accordingly. Since we will have an Audit Scotland report in January, we will follow through on the issues then. The Audit Scotland team has raised some important matters today. We will see the actual practice in Audit Scotland's analysis, which should help us to be positive about the whole issue.

**The Convener:** Does anyone from the Auditor General's office want to comment?

**Caroline Gardner:** Barbara Hurst will outline the work that we are doing.

**Barbara Hurst (Audit Scotland):** The committee has had an interesting discussion. We kicked off the work that we are doing now just before the Sutherland review was announced, so we have liaised closely with the review to ensure that our work—which will be quantitative, as it is based around data that we are collecting directly from councils—can inform it. There will be enough in that work to enable the committee to discuss a lot of issues that lie within its remit.

The January reporting deadline is challenging for us, given the scale of the work, but we deliberately pulled it forward so that we could be seen to contribute to the Sutherland review and so that we would not put too much of a burden on councils by asking them for different types of information. The committee will be interested in the report.

**George Foulkes:** Andrew Welsh said, rightly, that the Audit Committee deals with issues after the event. The Auditor General reminded me of that recently—I corresponded with him about current events, which I am still pursuing, but that is another matter.

The purpose of looking at issues after the event is surely to inform Parliament in making decisions. Those decisions might be made by other committees, but the purpose of our work is to say, "Hey, wait a minute—something went wrong in a decision that was made previously. Let us learn lessons from that and pass it on to the other committee that is making the decision." Is that not the case?

**The Convener:** To some extent. I suppose that we can reflect on what has already been done. We are able to look through the work that is currently being done by Audit Scotland in order to examine the number of people who qualify, the current costs, the future projections of need and demand, and the financial implications and the implications for the budget as a whole. Once we have the report from the Auditor General, we will be better placed to do that.

I will write to Lord Sutherland to draw his attention to the previous Audit Committee's report; to highlight some of our concerns regarding implications, which we will come back to; and to ask that those points be taken into account in the work that is being done.

**Andrew Welsh:** It is important that we do not duplicate effort across committees, and that we provide the specialist service that this committee has always provided.

**The Convener:** Okay. That concludes the public part of the meeting. Item 7 will be taken in private.

11:26

*Meeting continued in private until 11:39.*

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