

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 26 January 2005

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2005, Session 2

CONVENER

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

*Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)

*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)

*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Gill Ottley (Scottish Executive Education Department)

Angus Skinner (Scottish Executive Education Department)

Maggie Tierney (Scottish Executive Education Department)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 26 January 2005

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:55*]

Social Work Services Inspectorate

The Convener (Robert Brown): Good morning. I am sorry to start the meeting late. I, Mr McAveety and, I suspect, a number of others have been the subject of enormous delays on the railways this morning. I was on the 8.15 train from Glasgow, would you believe, and we sat in tunnels for about three quarters of an hour. Perhaps one or two other members who are not with us yet are in the same position.

I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Education Committee. I ask people to ensure that their mobile phones and pagers are turned off, because they interfere with the sound equipment.

Item 1 is an update on the work of the social work services inspectorate. I welcome from the Scottish Executive Angus Skinner, who is the chief inspector of social work services in Scotland; Maggie Tierney, who is head of the workforce intelligence and human resources team; and Gill Ottley, whose precise position I have forgotten. I think that she is the deputy chief inspector. Angus Skinner will make a few opening remarks. We have his report for last year and I am not sure when his new report will come out but it must be quite soon. I invite him to address the committee.

Angus Skinner (Scottish Executive Education Department): It is a great pleasure to be here. I understand that the committee wants to cover workforce issues and child protection in particular. As the convener rightly said, Gill Ottley is our deputy chief inspector; she gave evidence to the committee during its child protection inquiry so we thought that for consistency it would be good to involve her.

I will give a few words of introduction before we cover whatever areas the committee wants to go into. The report of the child protection audit and review, "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright", is one of a series of cross-cutting, interdisciplinary reports that have been led by the inspectorate in the past few years. Other major reports include "The same as you?", on learning disability, and reports on sex offenders, women offenders and others. As members know, "It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright" led to a three-year reform programme that the Executive is

in the process of implementing. A reform team has been taking forward that programme since the report was published and we seconded another deputy chief social work inspector to lead it. Again, the team is interdisciplinary and it includes input from health, education and other departments

An important part of the work is the introduction of new, integrated inspections throughout all the disciplines that are involved. That was led in the report and highlighted in the evidence that we gave to the committee. We set up a new multidisciplinary inspection team that is based at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and is headed by a director of children's services inspection. It has two staff who are seconded from the social work services inspectorate, some staff from HM inspectorate of constabulary, some medical and nursing staff and some assistance from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. That team is up and running—indeed, this week it is conducting its first pilot cross-cutting inspection. Two pilots will be completed in the first few months of 2005, although because they are pilots the reports on them will not be published. The first full set of integrated inspections will happen shortly before the summer.

Good progress has been made on the programme. As the committee emphasised in the conclusions to its report, we need to strike the right balance between continuing to make progress and ensuring that progress is real, in depth and comprehensive. The effort to do that is very much in place.

As with other aspects of children's services, workforce issues are a major concern and are driving the programme forward. Such issues were a significant focus of the committee's inquiry and have been the subject of significant action and concern over the years. It is important to emphasise that the problem has been very much one of managing growth and the increased responsibilities that have been given to social work services and others. In fact, since 2000, there has been something like a 65 per cent increase in the number of social work posts to be filled in local authorities.

10:00

Our approach to that has built on our establishment of the Scottish Social Services Council in 2001 and the launch of the 12-point action plan on the social services workforce in 2002, under Cathy Jamieson, who was then the Minister for Education and Young People, which dealt with such matters as the introduction of a new honours degree for social work, the launch of the highly successful care in Scotland recruitment campaign, the recruitment of graduates with some

experience into a fast-track scheme for training social workers and the introduction of a new leadership and management programme for managers in local authorities and voluntary organisations. Most of those 12 points have been successfully completed. For instance, the fast-track graduate scheme had its second run a couple of weeks ago. There are about 120 places available on the scheme and, by the Monday after the Friday on which the advert appeared, 1,100 applications had been made. Around 2,000 applications are now being considered. There is no doubt that the work is attractive and that we are experiencing a significant increase in the number of people who are applying to local authorities and starting to enter employment.

During the last year, the inspectorate has taken forward all that work in a variety of ways. Last year, we published a report on the Borders case. As a result of that and of ministers taking stock of the position of all of the social work services, it was decided that some new ways forward should be put into place and the 21st century review of social work was launched. That review is under way and evidence is being taken from a wide range of bodies about what the way forward should be and what should be expected in the way of social workers and social work services for the decades ahead.

Ministers also decided that, from April 2005, the social work services inspectorate should become the social work inspection agency. The procedure involved our becoming a shadow agency in summer 2004. At the same time, we set up a new policy division in the Education Department to take forward the co-ordination of all social work services matters that are not otherwise located in the Health Department, the Justice Department or elsewhere. Workforce and education issues have been the responsibility of that policy division since then. Maggie Tierney leads the workforce, intelligence and human resources team in that division and has been taking that work forward in an up-to-date way.

We are currently in the business of setting up the new social work inspection agency, which will operate at arm's length from the rest of the Executive. Its responsibilities will be to concentrate on in-depth inspections of social work services across all local authorities in a planned programme, although, from time to time, its professional staff will be seconded to provide advice to policy colleagues and others on significant matters.

The agency is consulting on its framework document, which has to be agreed with the Executive, and on its corporate plan and other matters, and is on track to be launched as a full agency on 1 April 2005.

The Convener: I want to ask about statistics relating to recruitment and other background issues. I do not know whether you are responsible for collecting the statistics on vacancies and so on, but that was a major issue in your previous report and you have talked about the recruitment arrangements that have developed since that time. I am given to understand that there have been major improvements in establishments across key authorities since then. Can you give us a picture of where we stand now in relation to the extent of shortfalls, whether establishments are at the right level and so on?

Maggie Tierney (Scottish Executive Education Department): You are right to say that, generally speaking, the picture is improving. It was bad a few years ago, but it is now getting better. However, vacancy rates are still unacceptably high.

Our latest figures, which date from the end of October 2004, show that national vacancy rates for local authority social workers are running at 11 per cent. That is a 2 per cent improvement on the rate in October 2003, which is good, but 11 per cent is still too high, so there is no room for complacency. All the measures from the 12-point action plan that were put in place in 2002 are still in place, with the aim of reducing the vacancy rate further. There is room for optimism about how we are addressing key recruitment difficulties. For example, in children's services, the number of posts for social workers has increased by 13 per cent in the past year, while vacancies in the field have fallen by 16 per cent, which suggests that employers and the Executive have taken much action to address the priority difficulties for children and families teams.

The Convener: Do you have a sense of whether the picture throughout Scotland is variable? As I represent Glasgow, I am particularly interested in that city, which is the biggest local authority in the context and in which many of the problems emerged. Are the local authorities that had the biggest difficulties getting on track in dealing with staff levels, particularly in children's services?

Maggie Tierney: There is regional variation, but to answer the specific question about Glasgow, we understand that Glasgow City Council has filled all its vacancies at present. Obviously, the injection of money and energy into the sector keeps generating new vacancies, so we can never say that all the vacancies are filled and that the situation has stabilised. However, Glasgow City Council is not advertising vacancies at present.

The Convener: I am pleased to hear that. You have confirmed what I heard during a conversation in the street with the director of social work in Glasgow, who is one of my near neighbours.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): The new agency will carry out inspections of local authorities, but what powers will it have to take action if an authority receives a bad report? What will be the process for making improvements and what powers will the agency and ministers have to force improvements, compared with, say, those of HMIE?

Angus Skinner: The powers of inspection that the social work inspection agency will have will be the same as those that SWSI has: statutory powers of inspection to investigate cases and to examine all case records and other matters. Authorities must comply with the inspection process, but, like SWSI, SWIA will not have powers to direct local authorities. Improvements are dependent on engagement with local authorities and their response to recommendations. With SWSI, the process has always been that, when a report is published, the local authority is required to state publicly whether it accepts the findings and the recommendations and to say what action it intends to take. No local authority has failed to comply with that approach. However, the Scottish ministers have powers of direction that they could use, if required, to direct an authority to take certain action. Those powers can be used to direct either a single authority, several of them or all of them.

Dr Murray: Will the agency pass judgment on the number of social workers that a local authority employs? The convener referred to problems in Glasgow, but in the past Dumfries and Galloway has had the lowest number of social workers per 1,000 of population, although it has not had a high number of vacancies. The local authority has not deemed it necessary to employ as many social workers per 1,000 of population as other authorities have employed. Will it be within the new agency's remit to comment on whether such judgments are appropriate?

Angus Skinner: The wide variation among local authorities in the quantity of services that are available in community care, children's services and, to a lesser extent, criminal justice has been a feature of all our annual reports. However we present the figures, they highlight such matters, but the basis of the variation is far from clear.

Some services must be put in the context of other services in the locality. For example, it is hard to make sense of the pattern of provision for learning disabilities without making sense of the pattern of provision in health and local authority services, including community education and other services. The way in which some of those things are counted can be slightly misleading. That has certainly been a feature, and we expect it to be a feature of the social work inspection agency.

Our general expectation is that the process of focusing on the joined-up, integrated inspection of what children, people with learning disabilities and others receive will continue, because that user-led focus on service delivery and regulation inspections seems to be absolutely the right way forward for 21st century government. With a clear remit from the Minister for Education and Young People, Peter Peacock, we expect the social work inspection agency to focus particularly on leadership and management in the local authority, including its significant role of commissioning services from the voluntary and private sectors.

The Convener: For the avoidance of doubt—I am probably being more ignorant than I should be about this—what exactly do the joint inspections cover? Is it the local authorities or children's services? What is the focus of the pilot studies?

Gill Ottley (Scottish Executive Education Department): Are you asking about the children's services inspections that are currently being piloted?

The Convener: Yes.

Gill Ottley: A three-tier approach is being piloted. The inspections will focus particularly on the outcomes for children, but they will also look to address operational matters and strategic planning for child protection services. They have developed a framework of performance indicators around that three-tier framework, which they are currently using. As well as interviewing staff, the inspectors are also looking to read case records and to talk to people who have been in receipt of services. They will receive feedback from people about how the pilot has gone.

We are at a very early stage. I am told that the inspectors have not had any information that the questions that they are asking are wrong, although many people are saying that the pilot is interesting and asking whether they have thought about certain aspects. A creative dialogue is already going on between the inspection team, the managers and the staff with whom the approach is being piloted.

The Convener: I was trying to get at the subject of the inspections. Is it the local authority or institutions? What is the main focus?

Gill Ottley: The focus is on the services that people receive and the impact that those services have on children and families. The focus is not just on the local authority; it is also on where people are in receipt of services. If people have health needs, health inspectors are on board from NHS Quality Improvement Scotland. HM inspectorate of constabulary is on the team, too. The inspections will consider the outcomes and where multidisciplinary aspects of service provision impact on the outcomes for children.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): My question is similar to Elaine Murray's and the convener's. I still do not have a grasp on the inspections. Most people understand what an HMIE inspection involves and HMIE is considerably bigger than the social work services inspectorate. I also understand the relationship between HMIE, schools and local authorities. Is the main function of the social work services inspectorate to go into local authorities? Do local authorities view you in the same way that schools view HMIE?

Angus Skinner: I do not suppose that they do. HMIE is and always has been significantly larger than SWSI has ever been. We currently have 16 inspectors, whereas HMIE has something like 100. It is important to understand the context. SWSI has been heavily involved in developing some policy issues in the Executive, some of which involve workforce issues, as we mentioned. Other significant things include the setting up of the Scottish Social Services Council and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care and the national care standards.

In some ways, the care commission is slightly more akin to HMIE, in that HMIE inspects schools, which are identifiable units—we can say exactly where they are and what they are doing—and the care commission inspects care services, which are also identifiable. Someone cannot run a care service unless they are registered with the care commission. Of social work services—by which we mean all the services that are provided under the auspices of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 or its related legislation—about 70 per cent are inspected and registered by the care commission. On top of that we have the criminal justice services, where we have a rolling programme of criminal justice inspections. We are about to publish our next report, which will be on the Tayside groupings of local authority criminal justice services. Those services are arranged in groupings of authorities rather than authority by authority.

10:15

There are a number of issues around other aspects of social work services provision, such as field social work arrangements for the provision of care and assessment of children on other matters. Some of that is being handed to the care commission, which is about to take up responsibility for inspecting and registering adoption agencies, for instance, which includes local authorities' work in adoption and fostering.

We need to make sense of all that within the overall management of the social work services functions that fall on local authorities, many of which are commissioned out. More than half of the

services are commissioned from the independent sector—either the voluntary sector or the private sector—so we have a lot of interest in what SWIA is being strengthened to do.

SWIA is being substantially strengthened. Its size will be significantly increased and its responsibilities for policy issues will be significantly reduced, so that it will have the capacity to undertake overarching inspections of social work services functions as a whole.

That is important, and we are in close discussion with the care commission—we had lengthy discussions with it yesterday and last week—and others about how we introduce the changes in a way that results in effective, streamlined arrangements, which are not bureaucratic and that do not duplicate, but which also do not leave gaps. We want to introduce the changes in such a way that we can confidently present to ministers—and, indeed, to Parliament—a coherent, up-to-date picture of the quality and, to an extent, the quantity of social work services that are being delivered throughout the country.

Mr Macintosh: It sounds like you do not descend on a local authority and review that entire local authority's output. You do it across the board, or you do it in groups.

Angus Skinner: We have not descended on a local authority in that way. Up until now, we have descended on them for one day a year—all 32 of them—in order to get an up-to-date picture. However, that is much more akin to the health service's accountability reviews. The intention is that there will be a programme of in-depth inspections of each local authority over the next two to three years. The new SWIA will descend authority by authority. It will not duplicate or second-guess the work of the care commission. For instance, we are in discussions with the care commission about how it timetables its information about a particular local authority and the services that it is inspecting and registering, to inform SWIA's work so that it does not need to do the same again.

Mr Macintosh: On vacancy rates, is there a differential between certain types of social work services? For example, I heard that children and families social work services had far greater difficulties in recruiting social workers than, for example, criminal justice social work does. Is there still huge variation throughout the country? If so, is that being addressed?

Maggie Tierney: You have put your finger on one of the key recruitment and retention problems, which is that the minute we make one area more attractive for people to enter or stay in, we create problems elsewhere in the system. We have discovered recently that the consequence of

tackling children and families with great energy is a rise in vacancies in the provision of services for adults. That might be a direct consequence or it might arise from other circumstances. Addressing that problem then becomes employers' next priority.

Recruiting more people as main-grade, front-line social workers creates a boom of junior qualified staff, which leads to another pressure point. In the past six months, there has been a significant rise in the number of vacancies for experienced line managers. We are talking not simply about an isolated recruitment problem, but about retention and career management. Only by putting all those pieces together will we come up with a decent strategy that holds people in place, provides stability and allows for growth.

The strategy for the development of the workforce, which is currently out for consultation—the consultation period closes at the end of March—is designed to match that dynamic with the training requirements that we think the sector would find attractive and means of support such as the Scottish institute for excellence in social work education's fast-track scheme. Such an approach will ensure that any framework that we set up creates a kind of evolving stability that allows employers to carry out decent local workforce planning.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Although there is great admiration for the work of social workers, there is also great concern about the shortfall of hundreds of social workers in Scotland. Do you have any evidence to suggest that measures such as increased salaries would attract high-calibre staff to the social services profession and ensure their retention? Is the matter currently under review?

Angus Skinner: Salaries and conditions are matters for the employer not the Executive and, unlike in some other professions, there is no essential determination of either aspect. As a result, the matter is for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is the umbrella organisation for the employers.

No doubt representations on the matter will be made to the 21st century social work review, which is examining the future role of the social worker. The review will have to carry out an in-depth study of the significantly increased responsibilities that are being placed on individual social work professionals. We have prepared and are ready to roll out the training programme for local authorities to implement the major piece of mental health legislation that will come in this year; however, as members will know, there has been some delay because of the complexity of the legislation and of implementing it successfully. If its provisions are to be successful over the next few years, we will

have to ensure that the social work profession recruits people of the highest calibre. Indeed, that is why we have introduced an honours degree in the subject.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: So, given changing circumstances and increased responsibilities, local authorities could legitimately consider the matter in a sympathetic light.

Angus Skinner: I think so.

Gill Otley: Some local authorities have sought to recognise the complicated responsibilities that have been put on social workers and to reward some front-line staff by creating senior practitioner scales and agreeing enhanced increments for mental health officers. Traditionally, experienced staff in the profession who wanted to earn more could do so only by gaining promotion away from the front line. One would hope that further representations might be made to the 21st century social work review on that matter.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Are there any difficulties in providing sufficient resources, in the form of lectures and learning materials, for those who want to attain the proposed social work qualifications?

Angus Skinner: It is vital that we invest in educators as well as others. As part of the 12-point plan, we have chosen to set up the Scottish institute for excellence in social work education. That unique collaboration involves nine higher education institutes and universities, including the Open University, and receives substantial funding from the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Getting nine universities to collaborate in such a way has been a major achievement, but they are taking the initiative forward well and are developing a strong, collaborative set of e-programme materials to ensure that no institute has to reinvent its own material. We think that the institute will be successful, and Gill Otley was mainly responsible for that achievement.

Gill Otley: Prior to SWSI becoming a shadow agency last year, we led a child protection training group that proposed a mandatory requirement for child protection training for all registered social workers and developed a multidisciplinary framework for child protection, with proposals for an accompanying multidisciplinary training package. I am pleased to say that the child protection reform team in the Executive has now assumed responsibility for that work and is taking it forward.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): Page 6 of the 2003-04 report makes it clear that there has been a large increase in social work spend over the past 10 years. However, there has been a sevenfold increase in community care spend compared with

only a threefold increase in children's services spend.

The recruitment and retention issue must be considered in the context of the Executive's pursuit of a number of criminal justice measures that create demands on social workers. Problems with retention, particularly for children's services, are acute. I was delighted to hear of the response to the recent advertisement to attract people into social work. However, we received evidence, particularly from the unions, about people who currently work within children's services who want to train as social workers. They may be more likely to stay in children's services than to go off to community care or criminal justice. Is your strategy reviewing that training aspect? Do you have information about retention in local authorities?

Maggie Tierney: As you say, there is a huge bank of expertise available to employers, whereby social work assistants can be trained to become qualified social workers. That is one major route that employers use. In fact, they have used some of the fast-track graduate recruitment placements to grow their own from within. Our direct spend on social work has increased and we project a 40 per cent increase in our spend on social work in local authorities between 2006-07 and 2007-08.

More generally, I take your point about the importance of retaining staff and giving them an interesting career within their employer's organisation. One of the key ways in which that will happen is not simply about financial resources, although that is crucial, but through providing better people management than has been available, not just in social services but in all sectors, so that human resource management becomes more professional. This summer, one of the work streams of the national workforce group will produce a framework for best people management for the sector, which will be specifically geared towards tactics and strategies that employers can adopt at a local level to increase the retention of staff and better support front-line staff. That is not necessarily related to extra money, but it has implications for training, continuous professional development and so on, which have financial implications.

Fiona Hyslop: We know that local authorities across Scotland spend significantly more than their grant-aided expenditure and Executive funding on children's services—they obviously identify that there is a real need that, in some cases, requires spend that is well over their allocation. Do you report that to ministers as the experience across local authorities?

Angus Skinner: We have set out the expenditure changes across those areas each year and we continue to do that. Clearly, it is difficult to see the pattern in isolation for children's

services and community care. Some local authorities will have functions that they fund under one area, whereas others may fund those functions under another. Therefore, we cannot say straightforwardly, "Well, there's lots of overspend on the children's services and lots of underspend on community care." The sums tend to balance out in the end. However, the way in which different local authorities account for their overall social services expenditure varies.

10:30

Fiona Hyslop: Information on that might be a useful contribution to our on-going study of the issue.

You obviously perform regular, in-depth inspections of local authorities. Themed issues arise across the board and I would like your comments on a couple of them. One is information sharing, an issue that arises repeatedly and that we identify in our report as critical to protection, bearing in mind the fact that children are more likely to be at risk from their families and people whom they know than from strangers. We need to get back on to that agenda.

In your report, you refer to the modernising government scheme. We know that there are concerns in local authorities about accessing that funding. In your report, you say that the use that is made of the scheme differs among local authorities, but that some authorities are using it effectively. Is lack of information sharing one of the biggest barriers to social workers carrying out their job? Can you update us on where things lie? Is there consistency across local authorities? In other words, is the issue a problem for all local authorities? If not, where specifically do we have problems?

Gill Otley: It is difficult to say that information sharing will be a problem in all 32 Scottish local authorities. It certainly is a significant issue in some local authorities and in some parts of some local authorities. As we saw with the Caleb Ness inquiry, it can be an issue even between teams in local authorities or between social workers operating out of the same local authority. That inquiry showed that there were difficulties in communication and information sharing between criminal justice social workers, children and family social workers and alcohol and drug social workers, as well as health staff and others who were involved.

This is a tricky area. I am not sure that information sharing is an issue in all local authorities. The inspectorate is currently involved in an individual investigation in one local authority. We have not yet published our report, but I do not think that information sharing will be the issue in

that case, because information was shared a great deal. It is hard to make blanket statements.

Fiona Hyslop: That is why it is important that we have information on the extent to which there is a problem.

Gill Ottley: We will seek to address the matter in the on-going inspection programme that we are planning, so that we can get a clear fix on it. The Executive recognises it as an issue in its generality and has draft guidance on developing an integrated assessment framework, which it is hoped will promote information sharing at the critical stage of assessing child protection issues.

Fiona Hyslop: The problem is the length of time that that is likely to take. The SWSI annual report was published in January 2004 and reflects previous experience. I understand that the modernising government fund is being accessed to put in place computer systems and that a pilot is on-going. Such systems have a direct influence on policy making, in terms of speed and efficiency. If there is a national problem, we need to know. If the problem is specific to particular local authorities, we also need to know. Would information on that be readily available to the Parliament to scrutinise, or are the documents internal to the Scottish Executive?

Angus Skinner: You are right that there are a number of e-care projects. We are taking those forward from an education and children's perspective and from a health and community care perspective. There is nothing secret about any of that. The documents are available. However, a number of different systems are in play. Different local authorities have different corporate systems and they have different arrangements for dealing with them. Frankly, what is right for Glasgow or Edinburgh is not likely to be right for Orkney or Shetland. Those issues have to be taken into account.

The e-care projects are being taken forward to achieve the objectives in a collaborative way by local authorities, the Executive and the various players in health, education, social work services and the police. That gives rise to lots of potential, but inevitably the key is how information is used, rather than just its availability. We would never want to lose that emphasis.

Fiona Hyslop: Looked-after children are a big issue throughout the country, particularly in relation to their educational underperformance. Will that issue be subject to a themed inspection report? The Minister for Education and Young People has said that he wants all schools to be community schools, which obviously involves health and social worker education. HMIE has produced a report on community schools. Do you expect to produce something that will reflect your

experience from a social work perspective of the effectiveness of community schools?

Angus Skinner: There are two issues there. On community schools, we jointly published a report with HMIE on integrated community schools a few weeks ago, following our joint work on the inspection of all community schools, which we have done for some years. That is the way forward. The commitment is that all schools will become community schools or integrated community schools and we will look to inspect them jointly with HMIE and other players, including doctors, on a cluster basis. I am pleased about that.

We are currently reviewing and considering in depth the issue of looked-after children. Gill Ottley will say a bit more about that matter—I see her smiling. The review will probably be the last thing that SWSI does and publishes. We are concerned about ensuring that looked-after children's success stories are told and are well known; we have 32 stories about how looked-after children have fared and dealt with their lives highly successfully. That will be the focus of SWSI's final report, which we expect to be ready for publication just before the end of March.

Gill Ottley: That is a major piece of work for the inspectorate. We have specifically chosen not to restate the statistics on education outcomes because we think that that scenario has already been well laid out, but we have considered a number of other areas. We have done a literature review on health, undertaken research on kinship care arrangements, considered the legal framework for looked-after children and engaged in a study of the activities of looked-after children—that is, how they spend their time during the day.

Angus Skinner mentioned the importance of the celebrating success project. We invited looked-after children and young people to approach us and tell us stories about how being looked after had worked for them or how it had helped or assisted them. We were pleasantly surprised by a number of people who came forward—in fact, children and young people are still coming forward and saying that they want to talk to us and to tell us their stories. A number of children have said that being looked after worked for them and have talked about what helped them. We are working hard to put together that piece of work. As Angus Skinner said, it will probably be the last themed review that SWSI will produce.

Fiona Hyslop: When can we expect the report?

Angus Skinner: Just before the Easter recess, we hope.

The Convener: In our report, we identified evidence that we had received about the lack of a

single chronology of events coming through in relation to children at risk. That seemed to me to be a crucial matter, which had been mentioned in many reports before. There was concern that there was still an issue about which our witnesses were bothered. Will you comment on that? If there is confusion about the central chronology of events and the information that is available to professionals across the board, that is a major source of difficulty and the problem should be resolved. I would have thought that it could be resolved relatively easily.

Angus Skinner: You are absolutely right—that is a central issue and a top priority. The reason why the problem has become more rather than less difficult in some ways is also the reason why the problem may well be solved. The information technology revolution has led to not less but more paper and certainly to not less but more information. In fact, a lot of information must be de-cluttered to allow us to get to a clear position. If we were to use one set of words about information issues to everybody, it would be, “Read the files.” However, the files are getting bigger. Many e-care projects are focused on how to de-clutter and focus information so that the key story is told on the front page in an obvious way.

The Convener: Are you getting there with that?

Angus Skinner: Yes, we are. The e-care projects are undoubtedly getting there. There have been significant improvements, but that is not to say that there is not some way to go.

Gill Ottley: The issue is complicated. It is about what is recorded, who records it and how they access it. As Angus Skinner said, it is not just about information sharing. We see a lot of evidence of people sharing their anxiety and concern, but the important points are how they respond, who makes the decisions and to whom the matter is delegated to take forward.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): Do you have a role in the joint inspections in relation to major capital investment programmes for schools? Schools for children with special needs or disabilities do not feature as prominently as either the primary estate or secondary estate. Can you take a broad view on the equity of that?

Angus Skinner: Not as an education provision.

Mr McAveety: Can you consider the fairness of the youngsters in those schools having reasonable conditions in which to be educated in line with the conditions enjoyed by the youngsters in their peer group who do not have disabilities? Is there any mechanism for that? People seem to be slipping through the slats, because provision is perceived as early years, primary or secondary. The condition of some of the schools for children with special needs in Glasgow is more challenging.

Angus Skinner: I do not know whether I have picked up correctly what you are asking. SWIA and HMIE will have to consider jointly the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and focus on the aspirations and initiatives that flow from it. It is important to emphasise that the new integrated inspection team is designed not simply to focus on child protection, but to develop a programme of inspection of children’s services as a whole. That is partly to ensure that child protection is put in the context of children’s services as a whole and is not separate. At an appropriate point, it will be absolutely right for the inspection team to consider the overall experience of children in the set-up. We know that social exclusion happens predominantly at the transition points of children going or not going to nursery school and going to primary and secondary school. At those points, social exclusion can be identified. That would be focused on. We have focused on transition points in the past and, no doubt, SWIA and HMIE will do so in the future.

Mr McAveety: My other point relates to page 12 of the SWSI annual report, which states, on the long-stay hospital closure programme:

“Ten authorities either have no agreed framework or are in the process of reviewing this.”

I am worried about the 2005 deadline. What actions are being taken to address the issue? I am concerned that some authorities do not have a financial framework in place while others have advanced in that regard.

Angus Skinner: The targets were set in “The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities”, which we produced in 2000. An implementation group, which the Deputy Minister for Health and Community Care chairs, is driving forward the plan. We have seconded to the group staff who have been working with local authorities and health boards to bring the targets back on line for 2005. We are more optimistic now than we were when we published “Progress with Complexity” and believe that, even if the targets are not achieved completely in 2005, we will be a great deal nearer to achieving them by then.

Mr McAveety: Help me out here. Why would 22 authorities have a financial framework in place but seven or eight would not? What is the practical problem?

Angus Skinner: All authorities are taking forward a joint future arrangement with health and community care services and the local authority. Some authorities, such as the City of Edinburgh Council, achieved their long-stay hospital closure targets some time ago; some are significantly behind schedule in a variety of ways. A great many others have made excessive use of the

supporting people finance to take forward the programme. They are having to adjust planning in order to get back on track for the 2005 target.

Mr McAveety: Will we meet the target for 2005?

10:45

Gill Ottley: That is hard to say. There has been enormous progress. I think that we are looking at a number of just under 300 people with quite complex needs who are still in long-stay hospitals. One of the difficulties is that the people whose packages remain to be arranged have quite complex needs, which makes their packages more expensive. There are more complexities around planning the sort of support that those people require in order to live in the community.

I understand that the group is working well. Its members are optimistic and pleased that they have got to the number that I have just given, as that number seems manageable. I imagine that the group will try hard to meet its target in 2005.

Angus Skinner: Mr McAveety asks whether the precise 2005 target of closures will be met. I emphasise the fact that the target, which we will look at again in June, was set when we published "The same as you?" At that time, there was criticism of the fact that our target was behind a similar target that was being set for England. In fact, we are well ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom on a number of issues.

Enormous progress has been made with the implementation of "The same as you?" in relation to the services that are available in the community for people with learning disabilities and the fact that they are not in hospital. We have reduced the number of people who are in hospital to a very small number. There is also the significant increase in employment and other opportunities, which has been quite remarkable.

Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP): First, I apologise for being late this morning. I also apologise if I repeat anything that has been raised already.

Do you have a role in inspecting the children's hearings system and, if so, what is it? Can you identify in local authority social work departments an inconsistency of social work provision in relation to young people because of shortages? What I am trying to get at is whether it is often the case that the social worker who knows about a case is not the one who goes to the children's panel. I understand that often the duty social worker goes before the panel and not the social worker who has been working with the young person. What kind of impact does that have on the service? Can it be viewed as progress? How does it link with the issue of looked-after children and

the inspections that have to be made in that regard?

There is a strong link between the children's hearings system, children's units, social services and schools. I continue to be concerned about the figures that we have received. Gill Ottley said that the Executive has been considering other aspects of looked-after children. We have seen figures on achievement and attainment. Indeed, we have also heard about the other side of the coin—the stories about outcomes that are not so successful and not so good. Is there a focus on the whole system and how those young people go through the system? That is why I mentioned the children's hearings system along with everything else.

In with that is, of course, what happens in schools when young people are in trouble—

The Convener: Can you narrow your questions down a bit, Rosemary? Your line of questioning has got a bit wide.

Ms Byrne: It is difficult, as the whole thing works together. Social workers attend meetings in schools; they talk to parents about young people's futures. How is that looked at and how is it inspected? I know that the question is big and complex, but it is important for the protection of children, for placements and for how the young people go forward.

Angus Skinner: Clearly, you would have to talk to the local authorities about the areas that are their responsibility. The support and services that are provided for the children's hearings system are subject to our inspection. We considered the matter in the child protection audit and review and we covered it a bit in the looked-after children report; it will also be a feature of the joint inspections.

You are absolutely right that, given the complexity of the issue, we have to clarify things so that, as far as is possible, they are simplified and can be understood. At the same time as we have the 21st century social work review, we have the review of the children's hearings system. Those reviews are being carefully co-ordinated to avoid second-guessing and to streamline the system more.

You are right: difficulties have been experienced because of staff shortages in several areas. I met people in the east of Glasgow to discuss that matter just a year ago because of concerns about the lack of a sufficient number of social workers for good consistency and continuity of case management and delivery. We have been addressing those problems. They are by no means solved, but progress is being made.

Ms Byrne: It is heartening to know that the reviews are co-ordinated. That helps to allay fears.

I will return to the retention of social workers in local authority areas. Some areas have great difficulty in holding on to and recruiting social workers, perhaps because they are areas of deprivation. Will the salary differentials that result from local authorities trying to attract social workers by giving them better packages exacerbate such problems? Are you comfortable that the situation will level out in time? Will a proactive step need to be taken in some areas?

Angus Skinner: I will ask Maggie Tierney to talk about that, but I will make an introductory comment. Social workers are motivated by all sorts of matters. Money is undoubtedly one motivation, as it is for all of us, but there are other motivations. Many areas have many attractions for staff. It is not right to assume that simply because an area has difficulties, it will not be at various points in people's careers an attractive place to work.

Maggie Tierney: I echo Angus Skinner's point. Time and again, research finds that the primary driver for wanting to be a social worker is not the salary. The salary becomes the key issue for social workers only when other supports, such as those that intrinsically allow them to do the job that they want to do and have been trained to do, are somehow blocked or not properly provided. At that point, salary jumps to the top of the queue of their concerns. Part of addressing retention issues is considering salaries in the context of other structures to support social workers.

Rosemary Byrne asked about local incentives to move people around. In some areas—particularly in and around Glasgow—local turf wars have been in the news. We have all been aware of them in recent years. Our statistics suggest that poaching is not a national problem and that it is locally based. That does not make it unimportant, but it means that the situation is patchy.

One national attempt to address poaching has been the introduction of a Scottish Executive incentive scheme, whereby we offer local authorities a quota that is based on the national vacancy rate, so that those with the highest number of vacancies receive the largest quota. That scheme offers newly qualified social workers who take up posts in a local authority a £9,000 grant over two years. I said "grant", but that is the wrong term. It is an incentive and is not linked to a way of spending money; however, it is linked explicitly to keeping someone in their post for two years. The employer can declare a priority post, for which it recruits a new graduate, who receives the £9,000 as £3,000 on take-up of their post, £3,000 on completion of their first year and £3,000 on completion of their second full year in the post. If they leave before the two years are up, the money is repayable. That strategy is intended to

grow the labour pool, to even out through Scottish Executive money's local turf wars by offering a national incentives framework and to retain staff.

Ms Byrne: How long has that scheme been in place?

Maggie Tierney: We started operationalising it in June, so it is in its first year of operation. The system is under review and we are evaluating how it is working.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that you have a highly qualified but small inspectorate of about 16 staff, whereas the number of staff at HMIE is more than 100. Given all the challenges that you face and the size of your inspectorate relative to HMIE, is there a case for the Executive to consider sympathetically the expansion of your inspectorate or do you feel that you can cope with everything?

The Convener: That is a terrible invitation to anyone.

Angus Skinner: Thank you for the question. An element of funding is set aside for growth in the inspectorate's size both in the plans for the establishment of the new agency and in the spending review plans in "Building a Better Scotland: Spending Proposals 2005-2008: Enterprise, Opportunity, Fairness".

There are several issues to bear in mind. One is that a number of policy responsibilities will go, so the inspectors will have more time to concentrate solely on inspection. We will be recruiting additional inspectors from the field—we are advertising at the moment—so SWIA will be strengthened.

Dr Murray: I was interested in your annual report's comments on the problems of drugs and alcohol—the narrative indicates that the situation is patchy. Although recent figures show that in Scotland overall there was a decrease in drugs misuse between 2000 and 2003, certain parts of the country—notably the south-west—have particular problems and have experienced massive increases in such misuse. I am thinking of Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire and Inverclyde.

On drugs and alcohol awareness, you comment on training, but you give the caveat that

"progress overall is currently very limited, perhaps stalled."

You say that

"It is time for a new, more confident approach"

and that

"That is next year's work."

That was in 2003, so I presume that "next year" was 2004. What progress is being made? It is a

major concern in my area that there are significant problems with availability and suitability of treatment for drug misusers.

Angus Skinner: You are right—the reference to “next year” was to 2004, but we still think that the problem is significant. Regardless of how we address it, we have great concerns about it. Children in the care of their parents suffer from neglect and developmental delay if their parents are not fully able to attend to them. Drugs and alcohol misuse are significant considerations in how children’s development is handled. The question of whether professionals and other people who are involved have confidence that Scotland can beat the problem is also significant. That is what we are trying to get at, because we think that the problem is national and needs to be tackled centrally in a strong way.

Gill Ottley: The Executive recently published its response to a report from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs that was entitled “Hidden Harm: Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users”, which set out the challenges that the UK faces. It contained a separate section on Scotland. As well as detailing the issues, it gave statistics on the children of drug-misusing parents. A series of roadshows around Scotland have been planned; they will allow practitioners and managers to discuss the issues and the strategies that the Executive has in place to tackle the problem.

Before “Hidden Harm” hit the streets, SWSI published its own advice and guidance, which was called “Getting our Priorities Right: Good Practice Guidance for working with Children and Families affected by Substance Misuse”. Although it included examples of excellent practice in Scotland, the situation is patchy; that is not a new story. We have recently reprinted that guidance because it has been in such demand.

There is no doubt that local authorities, social workers and the many staff who deal with the issue in the voluntary sector are well aware of the huge challenges that face them.

The case of Caleb Ness and the O’Brien inquiry highlighted many of the difficult issues for practitioners, which is why the child protection training group, which existed at that time, recommended mandatory child protection training for all practitioners so that staff in the criminal justice service and community care services would also be aware of child protection issues, especially regarding the children of drug-misusing parents.

On the back of the O’Brien inquiry, the Executive increased its funding for Scottish training on drugs and alcohol—STRADA—which is a unit that operates out of the University of Glasgow. It is now going around the country training social work

practitioners and voluntary sector staff and highlighting issues in respect of children of drug-misusing parents.

11:00

Dr Murray: The work of the multi-disciplinary inspections could be broadened out even further than issues of child protection, although we know from our inquiry that those are important. Drugs misuse is an issue not just for social services, but for health services and the drugs action teams. Might you consider how the gamut of drugs-related services is operating within a local authority area?

Angus Skinner: Yes—and across local authority areas. Part of the Executive’s response to “Hidden Harm” has been to ensure that SWIA will have responsibility to lead interdisciplinary inspections and reviews of services throughout the country. The issue that we think will arise is availability of rehabilitation services in addition to treatment on prescription. We have also seconded an inspector to work part-time with HM prisons inspectorate for Scotland on its inspections of prisons, specifically to address drugs issues not just in prison but on offenders’ discharge and return to the community, which is a high-risk transition point especially for young men, but also for young women.

Gill Ottley: Cathy Jamieson recently announced in parliament that there will be independent audit and evaluation of alcohol and drugs services in Scotland. The new SWIA has been tasked with developing a joint inspection framework in which to implement that. [*Interruption.*]

The Convener: We can carry on after that test of the fire alarm.

Gill Ottley: We will develop a joint inspection framework in which to implement that independent audit and evaluation work. We will do that with colleagues from the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, from NHS Quality Improvement Scotland and from whatever other regulatory bodies feel that they can offer necessary input.

We have already done some work on developing a joint inspection framework for people with learning disabilities. In addition to carrying out the rolling programme of inspection of social work services in the 32 Scottish local authorities, we will undertake themed joint inspection work. Inevitably, that will focus not just on delivery of social work services, but will consider how people receive the care that they need, including health and education aspects and so on.

Mr McAveety: There is a lovely paragraph on page 13 of SWSI’s annual report. It starts off being

quite positive, stating that the STRADA project "has proved very successful." It continues:

"However, despite some examples of good service development, progress overall is currently very limited, perhaps stalled."

If the problems are increasing, what more confident approaches are we putting in place to address them?

Angus Skinner: Our work with STRADA, which brings together work on issues that exist across health and social work in local authorities, is key. It is about building confidence among professionals, organisations and managers that a situation can get better rather than worse and it is about ensuring that we are taking initiatives at the interstices between organisations and in people's lives, which is where so many problems arise. That goes back to the point about social exclusion happening at transition points. We must target the issue that way. This is par excellence an issue on which we must have an integrated approach across a range of services, which must be focused specifically on risk points.

Mr McAveety: How do we shift the debate? For example, in the past couple of days the media have focused on statistics about the location and social background of people in prison. A fair number of council wards in the area that I represent are prominent in those figures. That is not only the case on that issue. We could barely go through any report from social work or education, or anti-poverty reports, without hearing mention of the same places in Scotland. One of the big debates in the past few years is about whether we are shifting resources dramatically enough or whether we need to confront the issue. Page 14 of the SWSI report states:

"It is time for a new, more confident approach."

How do we persuade parliamentarians and senior decision makers to change resource allocation to target specific areas? We know that that might create difficulties for other parts of the budget, but the reality is that the statistics show that problems are concentrated in certain areas.

Angus Skinner: Getting that information much more clearly articulated and targeting resources at the clearly identified risk points in people's lives as well as according to their location and their other social and economic circumstances is the only approach, but it needs to be done in a joined-up way. We must say that this is a problem that we will solve and that we will not take the view that we cannot tackle the problem.

The Convener: A lot of this is to do with risk analysis. You have identified clearly that there are people on supervision orders, children at risk and so on. It is clear that those people have been identified as having problems of one sort or

another that require suitable interventions, yet page 17 of the SWSI report identifies that in 2003

"half of local authorities were able to give effect to supervision requirements with no condition of residence within 15 working days".

I presume that that means that the rest of the local authorities could not do that.

The report continues:

"Some authorities were unable to provide information on their performance in relation to this standard."

The report also mentions failure to meet standards that have been set for production of reports for courts and panels. You have identified that people need the services, but it appears to be the case that we are not meeting standards by a long chalk. Has there been improvement in the past year? What lessons can we learn? What can we do if we are unable to do something for the children who have been identified as being most at risk and most in need of care and protection, or who are most likely to commit offences and have been brought to the attention of the children's hearings system?

Angus Skinner: There has been improvement. Just before publication of the report we met and engaged with consultants, and the Executive has hired consultants to work with local authorities and other agencies to ensure that there is better information and that action is taken locally to meet targets.

There is another point to the paragraph that was quoted, which is that in respect of court appearances by adults, local authorities achieve 95 per cent or above in delivery on time of court reports, but the figure is significantly lower than that in respect of children's hearings. There are two messages. First, local authorities were not giving their attention to where the risk is perhaps highest but, secondly, they can do that. They do it for adult courts, so there is no reason why they should not also be able to do it for children's services.

Mr Macintosh: I have a question on an entirely separate matter. I apologise if you cannot answer this question. We are obviously focusing on child protection and related issues and my question is about direct payments. I have lodged a couple of parliamentary questions on the matter, so you may get questions about this via another route. I am concerned about how direct payments are playing out across the country and whether the policy, which is a very encouraging one, is being taken up. Is it having the impact that we would like it to have on people with disabilities, their carers and so on? Some local authorities may be waiting for more comprehensive guidance from the Executive. I do not know whether you perform such a role, but is such guidance forthcoming? I

would welcome comments on the overall picture and in particular on guidance.

Angus Skinner: The overall picture is that progress is variable, as the figures in the report suggest. Some authorities are progressing the policy much faster and more widely than others—we highlight Fife in that regard. I am not aware that anyone is waiting for guidance, but I did not check that before the meeting.

Mr Macintosh: I should not spring such questions on you out of context.

Angus Skinner: If there is formal guidance, it will have to be considered. However, the policy is in place and nothing should prevent local authorities from implementing it. Some authorities are clearly taking the policy forward. The policy needs careful local attention, because it will be part of the social capital as it operates in communities. That is how communities should address the matter.

Mr Macintosh: The policy is important. At national level, which part of the civil service in which department is responsible for driving the policy? Is it part of your function to promote, develop or guide the policy, or is that entirely a matter for individual local authorities? What directions are local authorities given? I am trying to build up a picture of the context around direct payments.

Angus Skinner: Following advice from me, the Health Department issued guidance, but I do not think that more up-to-date guidance has been issued.

Gill Ottley: I am not aware that local authorities are waiting for guidance, but the Health Department has the lead on the matter, so we might have to respond to the committee in a note. When we were writing the document, “The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities”, it was clear that direct payments could make a huge difference to people’s lives. We went south and visited a local authority in England that has been highly effective at implementing direct payments for a great number of people. We are well aware of the tremendous interest in and support for the policy among people with learning disabilities and, wherever possible, we have encouraged authorities to implement the policy. We are not aware of specific obstacles to implementation, although anxiety has been expressed that people with learning disabilities might choose to purchase care from unregulated people or services. I suppose that in a way, the object of the policy is to give people with learning disabilities choices about whether to purchase care from a service that is regulated—

Mr Macintosh: That is the nub of my concern. I am concerned that a local authority might not

necessarily approve of, or have a say over, the people from whom individuals might purchase care. I have a case in mind, which I can pursue separately with you or with the minister, but I wanted to get an idea of the bigger picture.

The Convener: Rosemary Byrne has a question.

Ms Byrne: You have covered the point that I was going to make, convener.

Fiona Hyslop: We have the report, “Progress with Complexity: the 2003 National Overview report”, which was published in January 2004. I understand that this year’s report will be the last to be published in the current context. Is that the report that Angus Skinner said would be published before the recess? Did you mean the February recess or the Easter recess?

Angus Skinner: The intention is that SWIA will not produce individual reports for each local authority. Instead, SWIA will try to produce reports on three or four authorities a year, rather than on all 32 authorities. The celebrating success report on looked-after children, which was mentioned earlier, will be produced before the recess. We will also produce a final overview report, which will be like the “Progress with Complexity” overview, around the same time.

Fiona Hyslop: Which recess?

Angus Skinner: The Easter recess.

Fiona Hyslop: A review of social work is going on. Following his statement on the Borders case in May, the Minister for Education and Young People said that he would reflect on the need for legislative powers of intervention. In an answer to an earlier question, you described the powers that you have. What is the timescale for a decision? The minister will make the decision and I do not want to put you in an awkward position, but where does the decision fit into the overall plans?

11:15

Angus Skinner: The decision will come at the end of the 21st century social work review. That report is due at the end of the autumn, possibly November. There are powers of direction and there are also powers under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, but that act is now almost as old as I am.

Fiona Hyslop: Are we meant to guess your age?

Angus Skinner: What I said was not quite right.

Fiona Hyslop: If there were to be a ministerial time for reflection, as it were—

Angus Skinner: The decision would be at that point. It is part of the function of the social work

review group to consider the framework for developing social work services over the next few decades and what statutory underpinning that needs. The statute needs to be clear, to work well and to be joined up, as well as to be supported by the new approach to integrated services.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I apologise for being late.

My question arises from the local reports that you kindly sent us, which link with your main annual report. I refer in particular to the time lags involved in the work of the children's hearings system. The report on Renfrewshire, my area, states:

"three-quarters ... of its reports to children's panels ... are late".

That refers to 20 months ago.

As far as Glasgow was concerned,

"No information was available on performance in relation to Standard 2 of the Time Intervals Report".

There was a claim that

"40% of reports meet Standard 3",

but children's reporters suggested that merely

"10% of reports are sent in within that time."

Could you write to us about what progress has been made in the 20 months since then in those two local authorities? Your main report states that

"Most authorities succeed in submitting only around a third of reports on time ... Around half of local authorities were able to"

act on other aspects, and

"Some authorities were unable to provide information on their performance in relation to this standard."

Two years on from your identification of that in local reports, what mechanisms are at your disposal to ensure that data are at least available? It is frightening to read about the amount of data that are not collected and that only 10 per cent of reports were submitted on time in 2003 when it is shown in the universal report two years later that

"Some authorities were unable to provide information".

Is there any certainty about when we will know what the levels of performance have been authority by authority? The initiative is not new—the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 and the associated procedures are about 40 years old.

Angus Skinner: Something like that.

We have invested heavily in working with local authorities to ensure that information at least exists. We can certainly write to the committee with updates on all the figures. There will be progress to report on that.

Ms Alexander: Given the visibility of non-collection and the success rate of 10 per cent, and

considering that perhaps the only sanction is visibility of performance, it would be helpful if you could write to us saying where we are in 2005, or even where we were according to the 2004 reports, compared with where we were in 2003.

The Convener: That discussion touched on a central issue. I was struck by the fact that the report contains a number of references to the need for central directives or the existence of varying practices between different local authorities. In particular, I noticed that

"Payment structures for foster carers vary across Scotland."

We have considered that matter before. Also mentioned is

"the absence of a central directive"

and a "lack of focus" on people with sensory impairments. I have had dealings with that matter in connection with the right to read campaign and the varying provision of talking books and so on.

It seems to me that much of that provision ought not to vary among local authorities, and that a national standard should be set, in particular for foster carers. It is difficult to see how there can be a case for different payments in different parts of Scotland. Although I accept that there will be local authority autonomy, do you make recommendations to the Executive—based on your reports—about areas where it should consider policy developments and so on?

Angus Skinner: Yes. We have not used overview reports such as the ones that are before members specifically to do that, but it is worth saying a couple of things on the issues that Wendy Alexander mentioned. We have highlighted sensory impairment before and we have now seconded an inspector for that; in fact, we have recruited the previous chief executive of the Royal National Institute for the Blind Scotland, who has been seconded to work on the eye care review. That seeks to ensure that there is good joining up among the various professions and that consistency of provision throughout Scotland is being sought at the point of diagnosis and thereafter. That will include an audit and review process that will be carried out across health and social care services, which should be completed later this calendar year.

We discussed learning disabilities and the targets that were set in the report "The same as you?" which were in part about hospital closures. There are also a series of central measures that aim to improve community services. At one time, the Government set levels for the provision that there ought to be in particular fields, so that the community provision for people with learning disabilities, such as supported living, was set. However, that has not been a feature in recent

years' policy, partly because variation in services has meant that, rightly, the way in which services are organised in parts of Scotland varies. However, it is crucial to ensure that the ultimate quantum is the same, whatever the variation. In highlighting the problems of variation in our reports, we have sought to say that those matters must be addressed.

The Convener: The final point that I want to raise is on provision. We have talked about looked-after children and the children's hearings system. Page 15 of your report states:

"In only three authorities are all looked after children, including those on home supervision, receiving full-time education; part-time provision abounds and is of vague definition in many cases."

I accept that that is perhaps not your central responsibility, but the report continues:

"Several hundred looked after children and young people in Scotland have no social worker. Many others complain that they see their social worker far too seldom. Around 60% of young people leaving care are not in education, employment or training".

That is the transition issue again. There is nothing new about the looked-after children issue, but that is a pretty stark rendering of the position in 2003. Have the initiatives that have been put in place since then improved matters? To what extent do you focus on that crucial issue? We know about the number of looked-after children who end up homeless, with mental health problems or committing crimes and that that gamut of issues is much more common among those who were looked after than they are among the population at large. Clearly, we need to target the issue and deal with it much more efficiently than we have done in the past.

Angus Skinner: I agree, which is why we described the situation as we did. SWSI has no power of intervention; our reports are based on annual visits to local authorities and discussion with them about the figures, although SWIA operates differently. In our consideration of looked-after children, the children's hearings system and educational attainment, a number of local authorities have been visited twice. I am not sure that two visits from SWSI is onerous, but it emphasises to local authorities that we give those issues considerable priority.

The problems are resources, recruitment of staff and the number of social workers on the ground. I emphasise that the fast-track scheme that was mentioned is targeted at areas in which there are specific shortfalls. The fast-track graduates are additional to the other social work graduates that are coming through. The first 95 or so fast-track graduates who came through this year were placed in children and families teams.

The Convener: The number of staff is an input, but can you judge whether that input has had an effect on the output, such as the number of people who are seen and the number of positive interventions?

Angus Skinner: Yes, we believe so. Our next report will highlight some of those issues, but it takes time for the figures to come through in the statistics.

Maggie Tierney: It is a bit soon to say whether changing how we manage the workforce in residential child care will change educational outputs for the children in those units. However, there is raised morale among the 4,000 staff who work in residential child care. As the convener knows, we are investing a lot of money and political energy in ensuring that the workforce is radically upskilled in the next three or four years. Under the partnership agreement, our target is to ensure that, by 2008, 67 per cent of the workforce are qualified to higher national certificate and Scottish vocational qualification 3 level. If the workforce is aspirational, empowered and upskilled, we can have aspirations for improvements for children in care.

The Convener: That is probably an appropriate point at which to end the session, which has been fairly lengthy. I am sorry about that, but it has been useful for the committee. We are grateful to the witnesses—no doubt we will see them again in the not-too-distant future.

11:25

Meeting suspended.

11:38

On resuming—

Non-departmental Public Bodies

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is on the reports of various non-departmental public bodies. Members will recall that we asked for those reports to be put before the committee. The reports are laid before Parliament in various forms and at various times, but we are trying to keep a more comprehensive eye on them. In the first instance, we need simply to note the reports, but we might want to consider whether it would be worth while to examine any of them more closely and to ask the agencies for more detail on their work. We should consider whether there are issues that are relevant to our work.

We heard today from the social work services inspectorate, so we have had a shot at that one. The Gaelic Media Service is relevant to our report on the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill, and I thought that the General Teaching Council for Scotland report was the most interesting of the other reports that we received. We have had quite a lot of dealings with HMIE. I suggest that we should consider either the Gaelic Media Service report or the GTC report, depending on what members think. Do members have views?

Fiona Hyslop: I notice that there is variability between the reports and that Learning and Teaching Scotland supplied its accounts. It would be interesting to find out from the clerks the implications of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Bill in relation to the organisations and their constitutional set-up. It might be worth while for us to be aware of that.

The GTCS report, in particular, gives a clear indication of its work. In pursuing the accountability of important organisations in the development of educational policy and practice, we should give those organisations the opportunity to state their views and opinions to the Parliament and we should have the opportunity to question them. I suspect that we will want to consult the organisations anyway during our inquiry on pupil motivation. If we invite them as part of that inquiry—

The Convener: Sorry—are you talking about the GTC?

Fiona Hyslop: I mean both the GTCS and Learning and Teaching Scotland. If we consult both bodies during our inquiry, we could use part of the session to ask for their views on their progress during the year. That would be an effective way to use their time and it would give us an opportunity to find out more about what they

do: their contributions, challenges and opportunities.

The Convener: I agree that Learning and Teaching Scotland is relevant to our inquiry on pupil motivation, but the work of the GTCS is slightly broader and it might not fit into that.

Ms Byrne: I agree that we should invite Learning and Teaching Scotland. We should invite HMIE for the same reason; it will be able to give us a good overview of the progress that it is making, which is relevant, given what we have just heard from the social work services inspectorate about working together. There are some matters in which we are all interested—looked-after children, for example—and we could probe those a bit further with HMIE.

Dr Murray: It depends on the context in which we want to see people. I agree with Fiona Hyslop's suggestion that Learning and Teaching Scotland should be consulted in relation to our inquiry. To a certain extent, it is more useful to get information in the context of an inquiry than to get information on its own and then not know what to do with it.

The Gaelic Media Service report is interesting, but perhaps we should have spoken to that organisation before we compiled our stage 1 report on the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill rather than now. It is almost too late in the passage of the bill to get the most out of that investigation.

On the GTCS, it might be worth while to examine issues such as teacher qualifications at some point, although not necessarily straight away. That would include, for example, the fact that people are now expected to have studied a subject at university for three years before they can teach it at any level in schools. Is that really appropriate?

The Convener: We will begin our pupil motivation inquiry on 23 February. At the moment, we plan to have a relatively short meeting to consider a summary of evidence and to discuss visits. However, we should see most of the bodies at some point, in the interest of accountability, and if we are minded to interview one of them in relation either to the pupil motivation inquiry or to more general things, the meeting on 23 February might be a reasonable time to do that.

Mr Macintosh: I echo Elaine Murray's point. When we take evidence, it is important that we are focused. We definitely plan to hear from the organisations at some point. I support those who said that the GTCS should come in, not least because we have not heard its views on the question of teacher supply in relation to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. As it happens, Matthew MacIver, who is the chief executive of the GTCS,

is the author of one of the textbooks on Gaelic-medium education and I am sure that he will be able to speak to us about the role of the GTCS in supplying Gaelic-medium education teachers.

The Convener: I note that the GTCS has a working group on the problem of indiscipline in schools, which has been the subject of recent publicity. That might be an interesting aspect as well. I take the point about focus, but on the other hand it seems to me that there are a number of reasonably clear themes in the GTCS report that we might want to take up. That will form a useful introduction to both the pupil motivation inquiry and the more general issues, including budgetary issues, that we have considered. I am beginning to detect agreement that it would be worth while to invite witnesses from the GTCS, and I suggest that we invite them to come on 23 February. I am not so bothered about whether we do so as part of the inquiry.

I think that there was also some support for inviting Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Fiona Hyslop: Can we ask whether it has a report rather than just its accounts?

The Convener: Yes. I think that we need something a bit better than that; I am sure that it will be able to provide something else. The new chief executive has been in post for around 18 months now and should be able to do something for us. There would be more of a focus on the pupil motivation inquiry.

I think that we probably agree that we could leave the other bodies this year but come back to them. Rosemary Byrne mentioned HMIE, but we have had quite a lot of interplay with HMIE. In any event, that organisation might well have things to say to us as one of our witnesses on pupil motivation. We can discuss that as part of our forward plan.

11:45

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I support what the convener said about the GTCS and Learning and Teaching Scotland. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill provides a theme of encouragement for Gaelic this year and at least four of the organisations that are listed on our agenda are relevant to the development of Gaelic. As Ken Macintosh suggested, the GTCS deals with teacher supply. We should clarify how Learning and Teaching Scotland will work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support the learning of Gaelic in all areas. It would be interesting to know how the Scottish Qualifications Authority intends to develop Gaelic qualifications to respond to the new and varying language needs that will obtain as a result of the bill. It would also be interesting to hear from the Gaelic Media Service on the possibility of

having a dedicated Gaelic television channel or having more Gaelic programmes at peak viewing times.

Might it be possible to ask those four organisations for written evidence that would then enable us to form a view on whether one of them should be asked to come in and discuss matters with us?

The Convener: Are you talking about Gaelic in particular?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes—it would be relevant to the bill.

The Convener: Did we take evidence from any of those bodies in our stage 1 inquiry? I do not think that we heard from the Gaelic Media Service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My point is that if the bodies sent in brief written evidence on this theme, the committee could then decide whether to seek further evidence.

The Convener: In general terms, getting such evidence would clearly be helpful to our stage 2 consideration—and the stage 1 debate that will come before that. Perhaps because broadcasting has not been our central concern, we have felt that Gaelic broadcasting has not had as much attention as it might have had in the evidence that we have received.

I doubt whether we would hear evidence from the Gaelic Media Service; I think that we have been through the exercise. However, do members agree that we should ask for written evidence on the Gaelic aspects?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We will ask for written evidence on the Gaelic issues from the bodies that we have mentioned. We will work out a format for the GTCS and Learning and Teaching Scotland so that they can give us some input—probably on 23 February. As I said, we will try to come back to some of the other bodies in future years, and see whether we can get through them all.

Proposed Early Years Inquiry

11:47

The Convener: The final agenda item is our early years inquiry, the terms of reference for which have been amended following our discussion last week. There is a draft pro forma that needs a bit of filling in with details of what we might be looking for from our adviser. The clerks would appreciate any thoughts.

Is the remit now broadly as members would like it?

Fiona Hyslop: I am still unhappy with bullet point 2, which we discussed last week. I do not think that the wording reflects my concerns. I do not think that the parents and children of Scotland will thank us for making a judgment on whether it is more appropriate for children to be cared for collectively or individually. That is not our role.

There is academic research that we might want to pick up on. Our job is to look at the policies that are needed to support the development of children who are cared for in both collective and individual settings. We can then decide whether the balance is right or whether one side or the other needs more support. It is not our job to make a judgment on the appropriateness of the care that parents choose to give their children.

The Convener: Was it you who raised this issue last week?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, and our discussion has not been reflected in bullet point 2.

The Convener: Do you have a wording that you would like to suggest?

Fiona Hyslop: I think that we should replace the wording at bullet point 2 with, “the policies needed to support the development of children who are cared for in both collective and individual settings”. If any themes come out of that, we can then—without prejudging—reflect those themes.

Ms Alexander: I suggest an alternative wording. The point that we are trying to get at that is not mentioned in the draft terms of reference is the question: what does the recent work on child development tell us? That is all. We do not want to find out whether there are overlaps in provision; we want to find out what the recent work on child development tells us about the first five years. My suggestion, which plays a little bit into what we want the inquiry to do, is that the second bullet point should read, “the recent insights in child development and their potential implications for future Government policy”.

The Convener: That is a slightly different issue from what Fiona Hyslop wants to address, although they overlap.

Ms Alexander: Yes. We should not talk about individual and collective care settings. The most important point is to find out what the child development work tells us and what implications that has for policy. That is a higher-level issue altogether and I think that it addresses Fiona Hyslop’s concern, but it means that, when we think about appointing an adviser, we will be looking for somebody who is interested in what the recent child development work tells us.

The debate is confused by two objectives. The first is how child development should be supported and the other is how to increase female participation in the labour force. My hypothesis is that most of the policy is being driven by the desire to increase female participation in the labour force rather than by a social inclusion perspective on what the child development literature tells us. One of the five bullet points in the draft terms of reference should be, “the lessons from recent child development work and their implications for Government policy”.

The Convener: We should try to keep it reasonably short, if we can.

Mr McAveety: I will make a third attempt at the wording: “to examine the variety of approaches in child development work and their implications for future policy”.

Members indicated agreement.

Mr McAveety: I cannot repeat that, so somebody had better have written it down.

The Convener: It has been written down.

Dr Murray: I am still not completely happy with the final bullet point—“provision in low income areas”—because the point that I was trying to make last week was about provision for low-income families. A low-income family in a remote area might have considerably more problem in accessing services than a similar family in a low-income area.

The Convener: I think that we can readily agree on “provision for low-income families”. However, I am not sure that we have not lost something in Frank McAveety’s rendering of the earlier bullet point. I saw Fiona Hyslop nod in agreement with his suggestion, so perhaps I should not go back over it, but it seemed to me that the impact on children of their being cared for collectively or at home was an important and reasonably high-level issue.

I ask the clerk to read out Frank McAveety’s rendering of that bullet point again.

Martin Verity (Clerk): I have: “to examine the variety of approaches in child development work and their implications for future policy”.

The Convener: Does that satisfy everybody?

Mr McAveety: When we have our briefing session with the adviser, we can discuss the nuances of the terms of reference with them. The adviser will have read the *Official Report* of the committee’s discussions before that and will know that our consideration of the variety of child development work is part of a wider approach. The critical point, which Wendy Alexander and Fiona Hyslop have been trying to identify, is that there are two different impulses in child care and we need to try to reconcile them if we can.

The Convener: We can probably agree now. The bullet points are indicative anyway; they are specific examples of the general points. It is reasonably clear that the terms of reference include where we are at with child development research; whether that means that any changes to policy are needed; the broader issues of flexibility of child care provision and availability of choice; and to what extent children should be cared for at home, collectively or in a mixture of the two environments. All those issues emerge from the terms of reference. Is that okay?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Are there any other points?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a subsidiary point, would it be worth including something about skills and ability? I was thinking of experience of research, child care, social work and child protection legislation; and the ability to interpret and summarise written information consistently and thoroughly. Perhaps we should consider skills and ability.

The Convener: That is quite a wide issue.

Mr McAveety: I think that Lord James is referring to the pro forma, which deals with the person specification for the adviser.

The Convener: Is that what you referred to?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes.

The Convener: We will come back to that in a second, but first I want to be clear about the terms of reference. Have we now reached agreement on the terms of reference?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Let us consider the skills that we are looking for in an adviser. The clerks seek guidance on the knowledge that the adviser should have. What is the general thrust behind what we are seeking? Do we want someone with knowledge in public sector finance or health or

more general research? What is the person specification? I put those questions to Wendy Alexander, given that she raised the issue initially.

Ms Alexander: I meant to bring with me, for circulation, the two-page essay on current challenges in child care that was produced by one of the London think-tanks. Basically, as well as providing information on a slew of new research from North America, the essay outlines the two competing views in the United Kingdom on child care policy. The issue is whether child care should be driven by the need to tackle social exclusion—because a child’s first five years matter most—or whether it should be seen as a way of driving universal female labour force participation. Those are not one and the same objective, so there are significant choices to be made. However, the essay is lying on my office desk. That is no use.

I intended to suggest that I should give the essay to the clerks. Given that the think-tank has had a project up and running for three years, I suspect that the combination of that short two-page essay—which I will circulate to members—and a brief conversation with either the Social Market Foundation or the Institute of Public Policy Research would help the clerks in the drafting of a person specification.

Our budget advisers might be able to suggest a suitable candidate from the educational policy field in Scotland. In my view, the ideal person might be a former director of education—there are a slew of such people now—or a former director of children’s services. The balance will be between getting someone who is interested enough to get up to speed with the insights from the new literature and getting someone who is close enough to the practice that is developing on the ground to make the research more than just an intellectual exercise. I suggest someone such as Eleanor Currie, who used to be director of education for East Renfrewshire Council. Those are my thoughts on who the person should be.

In writing the specification, I would err on the side of saying that we want someone who can deal with the big policy issues. Frankly, the two-page essay on the challenges in child care policy would provide enough information for the clerks to write the specification, which should be policy oriented, but we could solicit applications through a combination of asking our budget advisers and exploring the possibilities with former directors of education and children’s services who might have taken early retirement but know their way around the system. I suggest that those are two possibilities.

The Convener: We need to avoid two extremes. We want to avoid people who have determined views about research who just want to push a particular line. We need someone who can assess

the research. However, although we need someone with sufficient knowledge of the research, they must be able to relate the research to reality rather than let it remain way up in the sky. Too often before in education, one has seen situations in which, as far as the layperson can gather, things have been driven by people who have no knowledge of the coalface.

Ms Alexander: We have only three major teacher education faculties. I cannot believe that we could not find a couple of people from them. We could then make a judgment.

The Convener: In addition, the adviser must add value to the committee's work. We can make some of the other judgments based on the evidence that we receive. I think that the area that Wendy Alexander identified is the key point on which we want guidance.

Fiona Hyslop: With great respect to Wendy Alexander, most of us know the parameters within which the major debates in child care and education take place. A huge range and volume of information has been produced by the different think-tanks both down south and in Scotland—much of the work from Scotland is worth paying attention to—but we do not want some intellectual treatise that just reinvents the wheel by restating all those academic studies. We want something that deals very much with current practice.

Given our need to hold the Executive to account on the partnership agreement, we need someone who has a grasp of what is being delivered on the ground, especially in relation to child development. The focus should be less on budget streams and where the money goes and more on what practical services are delivered in relation to child development. On the funding, the local authorities that deliver services should be able to give us a fairly good overview of current practice. We need to bridge the gap between what is happening and where we want to be.

12:00

The Convener: We must be careful to distinguish between two strands. It seems to me that the first is that we need somebody who can comprehensively assess the evidence. Despite what Fiona Hyslop said, I understand that there is dispute within the field on the precise direction that we should be taking. That was the first point that Wendy Alexander made. Secondly, we need someone who can help us to analyse the plethora of bodies and projects on the ground. In a sense, those are two different things and we will not get one adviser to cover them both. On which of those issues should the adviser focus? On which do we need advice and on which might we not be able to assess for ourselves the evidence that we hear?

Mr Macintosh: The former.

The Convener: Yes. I think that the adviser should focus on the research.

Dr Murray: It depends on what we want the outcome to be. If we want our outcome to be simply a snapshot of what is happening, we should choose a director of education, who will be able to find out about what is happening in other parts of Scotland through the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. If we want to make recommendations, perhaps we need someone who has more of an academic background.

The Convener: That is probably the proper focus, as we can take evidence on the other issues. We may or may not get it right, but we can assess the current provision from the evidence that we hear from directors of education and others. For the adviser, we should emphasise research. Is that the view of other members?

Fiona Hyslop: We need someone who can relate the theory to the practice, so the emphasis should be on neither one thing nor the other. We do not want an academic researcher who gets bogged down in the theory. We need that link. Wendy Alexander is right in identifying the person as someone who is likely to have worked either in one of the children's organisations in Scotland or at academic level in one of the education faculties. The adviser should have practical connections with those who deliver the provision, which could perhaps include the professional organisations that specialise in this area.

The Convener: The faculties of education have some people who were formerly practising teachers, so they might double up in that respect. That is probably the grounding that we want in this context. I think that we have probably given enough guidance to the clerks on where we are trying to go. Do they need guidance on anything else?

Martin Verity: No. We shall draft a paper, which can be circulated and agreed through correspondence.

The Convener: Thank you.

Meeting closed at 12:02.

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