EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 September 2008

Session 3

£5.00

CONTENTS

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EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
21st Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)
*Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Mary Mulligan (Linlithgow) (Lab)
*Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
*Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

*Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)
Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Andy Bruce (Scottish Government Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate)
David Cumming (Social Work Inspection Agency)
Ian Davidson (Scottish Government Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Eugene Windsor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Nick Hawthorne

ASSISTANT CLERK

Andrew Proudfoot

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Wednesday 17 September 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Deputy Convener (Kenneth Gibson): Good morning, and welcome to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee's 21st meeting in 2008. I apologise on behalf of the convener and Christina McKelvie, who unfortunately are held up because of difficulties on the M8. I will chair the meeting until the convener arrives.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take item 3, which is consideration of the committee's forward work programme, in private. Do members agree that it is appropriate to take item 3 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Social Work

10:01

The Deputy Convener: The committee will take evidence from Ian Davidson, acting deputy director in the workforce and capacity issues division, and Andy Bruce, acting team leader in the improving delivery team, both of whom are from the Scottish Government children, young people and social care directorate. We will also take evidence from David Cumming, depute chief social work inspector with the Social Work Inspection Agency. I thank the witnesses for their written submissions.

I welcome the convener, who will now take over.

The Convener (Karen Whitefield): I apologise to our witnesses for being late. The traffic on the M8 was horrendous this morning, which I assume is also the reason why Christina McKelvie is late.

As the deputy convener said, we thank you for your written submissions. We will move straight to questions.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, too, thank you for the papers that you provided in advance. You list some of the improvements and the progress that we have made in recent years. We all know that there were severe problems in social work throughout the country not that long ago, particularly with staff shortages in difficult areas such as east Glasgow. Rather than go through the progress, will you say what the outstanding problems are? Are we still experiencing staff shortages in key areas? Have the programmes that have been implemented, such as the fast-track recruitment programme, been effective? I am not quite sure who should answer that.

Ian Davidson (Scottish Government Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate): That would be me.

The latest statistical publication on staffing in social work services, "Staff of Scottish Local Authority Social Work Services, 2007", which came out in June, demonstrates that considerable progress has been made towards meeting some of the shortfalls in staffing. The general rate of vacancies, which just a few years ago was in double figures—13 or 14 per cent—now stands at less than 8 per cent. That is still not an acceptable level, but the vacancy levels are not as acute as they have been. Some elements of services are more pressured—the statistical publication breaks that down in detail—and the picture is mixed across the country. For example, Orkney has a general vacancy rate of only 1 per cent, but other authorities have rates of roughly 15 per cent.

However, progress has undoubtedly been made in recent years.

The fast-track scheme has now been completed. About 400 new social workers have entered the profession as a consequence of the scheme, which was highly regarded. We learned lessons from it, in that local authorities struggled to take on all the people who could have been taken on. There was an extraordinary degree of interest in the scheme. There were about 1,000 applicants for about 100 places and there was simply not the capacity in local systems to engage all those workers.

The fast-track scheme was also quite burdensome to administer. The systems improved through experience but, as local authorities felt the acute difficulties diminish, they were less inclined to take on the burden of the scheme. Although it has been evaluated as being successful, we have no proposals to continue with such a scheme at the moment. However, we are monitoring vacancy rates to determine whether we need to do something similar in future.

Ken Macintosh: You say that vacancy levels are still running at around 8 per cent but that they vary geographically. Would it be fair to say that the areas where there is greater need have a higher number of vacancies? It was certainly the case a few years back that areas such as East Renfrewshire, which I represent, had a good staff complement and areas with high deprivation and need had great difficulties recruiting staff.

Is there also variation by social work specialism? Criminal justice social work used to have less of a problem, possibly because it was directly funded from the centre. Is that still the case? Is there still a patchwork in which one part of social work services is more secure and has less staff turnover?

Ian Davidson: It is a mixed picture. The statistical publication breaks down vacancy rates according to a range of categories—criminal justice social work, residential staff services for children and so on. From 2002, the vacancy rate in criminal justice social work across the country was 11.3 per cent; that is down to 8.1 per cent. That is, as you say, still a significant rate of vacancy, but it represents progress. The highest proportion of vacancy—just above 11 per cent—is among strategic and central staff. The lowest rate that I can see is for day care staff in services for children, where there is a vacancy rate of less than 3 per cent.

Ken Macintosh: Do the figures provide some idea of turnover or churn of staff or just headline vacancy rates?

Ian Davidson: I am afraid that I do not have a specific picture of churn and turnover rates within

the sector. The statistical publication gives information on leaver destinations and reasons for leaving, but we do not know why 60 per cent of people are leaving, unfortunately. The percentage of leavers going to other social service jobs is 11 per cent. I would say that movement out of the sector is not a significant factor.

There is a significant spread of vacancy rates by local authority. As you probably expect, large urban areas tend to have higher vacancy rates. For example, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Falkirk and Aberdeen are particular pressure areas. It is a mixed picture, but those are the areas where we see the highest numbers of vacancies.

Ken Macintosh: On the big picture, do you get the impression that the changing lives policy is working? It has clearly mitigated the worst difficulties that we had a few years ago. Do you expect to make continued progress on that? If so, when will you reach a satisfactory level of staffing and social work cover throughout Scotland?

Ian Davidson: The second question is quite difficult to answer, to be honest. We are now reaching a period in which the changing lives programme will start to have a significant impact. The range of products that the change programmes have developed is now coming to the point where they can hit the marketplace. There are significant challenges in relation to how we can present those products to the community and how the community uses them.

Also with the work of local practitioner forums and the Association of Directors of Social Work's initiatives to raise the profile of the agenda locally, we are now at a point where we will start to see significant change. I anticipate that, during the next six to 12 months, we will see significant engagement with the changing lives products. At the end of that period, we will want to see the impact that they have had and where we go from there.

Elizabeth Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Mr Davidson, the picture is quite encouraging overall. You have just identified some of the areas in which you feel that there has been significant improvement. If you had to name the top three reasons for that improvement, what would they be?

Ian Davidson: The most significant reason is the way in which the changing lives programme positioned itself in relation to social work. To a significant degree, it was the voice of social work being aired on a public platform. All the mood music since then has been about the positive stories about social work and, undoubtedly, there are many of those. That turned a corner in how social work services were perceived in the public

domain, and in how social workers felt about themselves. That is not to say that all the challenges are not still there, but that was the most significant factor.

The range of things that we have been doing on workforce development with the Scottish Social Services Council has been a hugely significant development. Associated with that is the four-year social work degree; graduates of that degree course are only now starting to emerge from the universities. The performance inspection programme that the Social Work Inspection Agency has been undertaking is, for the first time, providing a valuable evidence base of what is happening on the ground. In addition, activities such as the principles of citizen leadership are starting to emerge and to transform how we think about the delivery of social work services.

Elizabeth Smith: I will come to Mr Cumming in a minute to talk about the inspection process.

I want to go a bit further into the quality of the social work degree, which is obviously encouraging a new approach. Is the degree well recognised by outside bodies and by those who are involved in other areas that might be in partnership with work that is being done?

Ian Davidson: It is early days. As I said, we are only now seeing those graduates starting to emerge. There are undoubtedly challenges around the engagement between universities and employers in relation to social work services, and we want to explore that a bit more in the future. Academics from within social work have an appetite for joining up with other services and the education of other professional groups, although a fair degree of trouble needs to be taken over that. The connections between further and higher education, and the embedding of the recognition of prior learning in the Scottish credit and qualifications framework throughout social work and social care qualifications are positive developments. However, generally, we want more integrated working, education and training than we see currently.

Elizabeth Smith: Overall, do you want more people who are involved in social work to be able to participate in that education process? Would it be an advantage to the network to have more people who have been through academic training?

Ian Davidson: Undoubtedly, it is the case that, through registration, we want to see a fully qualified workforce. I do not want to suggest that we want a degree-educated workforce across social work services; that would be an unrealistic aspiration. We would like there to be a balance between vocational and academic training. There are already vast resources in education and

training for the range of social work and social care staff.

We are seeing the development of more partnerships and innovative approaches. The recognition of prior learning and continuing professional development and the introduction of requirements for post-registration training and learning are significant. We are not interested simply in formal education and learning; we want to see more learning through practice and from colleagues on the ground. The continuous learning framework, which is one of the changing lives programme's key products, will do an awful lot—

Elizabeth Smith: Just for information, how much practical training is available for students taking the degree course so that they can go out and get hands-on experience?

10:15

Ian Davidson: There is a requirement to have a number of weeks in practice—I forget the precise number—including front-line practice. I think that it is 11 weeks, but I would have to double-check that. It is a requirement that every student in every year of training must gain some practical experience. There are challenges, though, around ensuring that there is a sufficient range and quality of practice learning opportunities for students.

Elizabeth Smith: Mr Cumming, there has obviously been considerable progress in the inspection process and the evaluation of social work. Can you give us a little more detail about why you think that that has helped to make the process a bit more acceptable and efficient?

David Cumming (Social Work Inspection Agency): Until the Social Work Inspection Agency was established in 2005, there had not been an effective or robust approach to evaluating services. Our agency was established following particular events, which are summarised in my written submission. Since then, we have had detailed engagement with councils. It might sound burdensome—it is probably better not to use that term too regularly—but our process involves a sizeable contact with councils. We engage with staff and hear from councils about the challenges that they face and about their successes. That is in contrast with times past when, as you will know, any publicity that was attached to the social work service was always negative—properly so when it followed serious tragedies.

Elizabeth Smith: How do you share good practice? Obviously, some councils do fantastic work, but others may have more problems. What is the mechanism for sharing good practice?

David Cumming: Our approach is a collegiate one; it is not just about an external scrutiny body

coming in to make statements or evaluations. We work closely with each council. We acknowledge that it is for the councils to introduce improvements. We monitor how those are taken forward individually and talk with the council about them. Certainly, in the year following an inspection, we have active contact with the council. We also have a link with each council beyond the first year. The process becomes much more risk based and proportionate. Clearly, the more work that needs to be done, the more involvement we might have. However, that would still be done in conjunction with the council.

We are now inspecting the 26th local authority, so our programme is well on target. In achieving that, we have begun to establish a sound body of information and knowledge about what constitutes good practice. However, we need to develop and improve that nationally. We are not a large country, so we could easily consider what takes place in one area and customise it to ensure that it is fit for purpose somewhere else. There are good examples that could be migrated or introduced into adjacent areas.

Elizabeth Smith: In teaching, a debate is taking place with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education about whether more of the evaluation process should be self-evaluation. Would that be appropriate in social work, too?

David Cumming: Very much so. We have always felt that, because a robust, external performance measurement has not previously been applied to social work, the process would shift after the first round of inspections was completed. Indeed, we have been involved with about 21 councils for the past nine or 10 months to develop jointly with them self-evaluation materials in the particular domains of leadership, commissioning and performance management.

Neither we nor the councils feel that there is a schism between us. We have been trying to take the process forward jointly with a view to ascertaining how services might improve. There will certainly be a shift towards a more self-evaluative model.

Elizabeth Smith: So the system is well respected and regarded as fair by social workers.

David Cumming: Yes, I believe so. I think that people have welcomed it. With that, there comes a professional self-confidence and a view that services are being evaluated dispassionately and separately from the quality of the day-to-day activities that people undertake.

Elizabeth Smith: You said that 26 out of the 32 councils have completed the process. What is the timescale for the remaining six councils?

David Cumming: We are well on schedule to finish by next spring. Given that we have had to deal with 32 councils in three years, our timetable has been quite brisk.

The Convener: I want to follow up on Liz Smith's comments. I know that, at the moment, you are in North Lanarkshire Council, which is my local authority. Although you are right to say that people have welcomed SWIA's standardisation of the monitoring and inspection of social work practice, we should ensure that front-line social workers see the experience as something positive, not as something to fear, to worry about or to be intimidated by, so that they can get the most out of it. You are, after all, not looking for things that have gone wrong or that you can haul them over the coals for. How do you get that balance right?

David Cumming: It is not easy. Obviously, we do not call up and say, "Congratulations! You're going to be inspected!" However, we work very closely with people and try as best we can to reassure individual members of staff that we are not examining their personal practices.

Council staff are involved in various parts of the process. For example, we ask them to prepare and submit significant amounts of advance information and to prepare what is called a self-evaluation questionnaire—that is a bit of a euphemism, as the document itself is not just a page and a half long and, indeed, takes quite a while to complete. However, the exercise engages a large number of staff and provides an opportunity for councils to demonstrate some of their competencies and to show what they are doing in some of the areas under evaluation. All of that takes place before we even set foot inside the door.

We usually read about 100 case files. Of course, that figure will vary; with Glasgow and Edinburgh, we read more than that because we needed to have a better spread. The case files are usually split 60:40 between adult care and children's services, and we ask council staff to participate in the exercise. For example, we train the local file readers in evaluating how well services are recorded. Such an approach helps by embedding in the council through the staff who are nominated a good understanding of the significance of recording information and of ensuring that people understand how services are being directed.

With regard to the fieldwork element of inspections, we see people in a variety of settings, partly to inform ourselves of observed practice or of areas of interest that we might have picked up in our file reading. That does not necessarily mean that we have concerns about certain practices; we might well want to explore what appears to be really excellent work.

It would be wrong for me to pre-empt the current inspection, but I was in North Lanarkshire both last week and this week. Staff in that area—and, indeed, in all other parts of the country—have generally welcomed this form of service evaluation, even in the most difficult circumstances and even in light of certain negative factors that our findings and reports have documented.

The Convener: I am glad that North Lanarkshire appears to be doing so well. Mary Fegan, the director of social work services in the council, will be delighted by that when she reads the *Official Report*.

You have highlighted good practice in a number of local authorities and are right to say that things are going well in many councils and that there have been many successes that we should be encouraging and celebrating. However, some inspection reports have reached some depressing and dire conclusions, which surely must have had a negative impact on the staff who work in those services. How do you help the morale of those staff while ensuring that services improve rather than deteriorate?

David Cumming: That is a complicated area. We do not get a perverse enjoyment out of pointing out where there are difficulties in a council's performance. Sometimes they are already known to staff, service users, carers and stakeholders. Part of our process involves substantial surveying, by questionnaire, of key contributors to the overall service. We use the term "triangulation." Our findings have to be based on not just one source but several sources, so that we feel that they are valid.

You can see that we have commented adversely on leadership in two councils. One of those reports was published in 2006 and one was published earlier this year, as you will know. The action points in them are already being worked on. We have been involved in working with both councils to try to support an improvement agenda and staff have been supportive of our role in that. They have welcomed the opportunity to say where they think that things can be improved.

Not surprisingly, most staff have a lot of intuitive knowledge, as well as knowledge that is based on their experience, which allows them to contribute to the process. Sometimes, for whatever reason, the way in which the organisation has gone about its business has not allowed that contribution to be made. Our process helps to bring it out in a helpful and constructive way, whereby we engage with staff, from senior managers to front-line staff, and with elected members. It is important that the agenda for making the required improvements is supported by elected members, too.

The Convener: I hope that all those things will help to retain people in the workforce. Ken Macintosh has already touched on the problems with recruiting staff to particular geographical areas. Are there any retention issues or issues with attracting either men or women into different parts of social work? You can correct me if I am wrong, but I get the sense that male social workers are much more comfortable working in criminal justice and that it is harder to attract them into work with children and families. Often in the families concerned, there are no good male role models for the children, so it might be helpful to have men working in that area. Is work being done to encourage men into particular parts of the profession? Is my perception of the situation wrong?

Ian Davidson: Your perception is undoubtedly accurate. The statistical publication breaks down services by gender. Your characterisation of the situation is correct. There are no programmes under way to support more men into the profession which, in essence, is what we are talking about. We have a small scheme in relation to early years, which is slightly left-field, to get more men into child care, because the situation is even more acute in early years settings. Local authorities and others do not generally raise the issue with us in relation to our improvement work. I do not know whether David Cumming wants to say anything about the impacts on the ground that he has seen.

David Cumming: In general terms, your perception is correct. The situation is fluid. The reasons why people went into criminal justice in the 1990s have their origins in the improvements that were made, such as the 100 per cent funding initiative in criminal justice, which went hand in hand with an opportunity to bring into better practice an area of work that was sometimes not regarded as important.

Similarly, the migration of social workers from children and families services may reflect the ages and stages of staff. Perhaps staff are at a stage when they want to move on to a different area of work, such as adult care. The issue is complex; it is difficult to summarise what is happening. Individual authorities have their own experience in this regard.

10:30

Ian Davidson: I have now found the correct page in the statistical publication. The table shows that 35 per cent of criminal justice staff are male and 65 per cent are female. The difference between genders is most acute in the figures for the day care staff who provide services for children, where we find that 6.5 per cent are male and 93 per cent are female. Those kinds of

differences are to be found all the way through the report. That said, it is interesting to note that, as you suspected, criminal justice is the area where the numbers are most even, albeit that a female workforce still predominates.

The Convener: I am interested to hear whether you think Mr Cumming's point is worth exploring. Quite a lot of investment has been made in education to keep teachers in the classroom. The idea is that teachers should see classroom teaching as being as worth while as moving into an assistant headteacher or headteacher post. In other words, career development and advancement would take place not only outwith, but within the classroom. Is it time to consider how our best social workers can be retained to deliver front-line services? I am not saying that it is not important to have well qualified social work managers, but we should give people options and allow them to decide what suits them best.

Ian Davidson: That is undoubtedly the case, as "Changing Lives" identified. We have begun to do a number of things that flow from the report, one element of which is the continuous learning framework. The innovative part of the framework is the notion of looking at competencies across a wide range of soft skills—17 in total—and at various levels of advancement.

Certainly, the case studies that the Scottish Social Services Council and the improving regulation in Scotland unit developed focused on exploiting the opportunities—if I can use the term—that more experienced front-line staff bring to the benefit of other staff. We know of instances where the opportunity has led to the take up of practice teaching or practice learning qualifications.

Another element is our research and development strategy, under which we are trying to encourage services to take on more modest research activities of their own. Again, the area is one in which the skills and experience of front-line staff can be employed.

For a host of reasons, we do not engage at the detailed level with social work services in their workforce planning in the way that happens with education planning. The same pressures undoubtedly apply. However, the continuous learning framework and research and development strategy, amongst others, provide opportunities for more experienced staff to stay at the front line while developing their job and providing leadership to their more junior colleagues.

David Cumming: I agree with that. In speaking to councils, even post the single outcome agreements under the concordat, people told us that they recognise the importance of maintaining front-line services following the removal of ring fencing. Certainly, our recent contacts with local authorities show that, with the support of their political administrations, council staff are placing an emphasis on ensuring that front-line services remain as unaffected as possible by major staffing changes.

Christina McKelvie (Central Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. Please excuse my tardy arrival; the traffic was bad on the M8 this morning.

I return to social work training, which was raised earlier. We tend to forget that social work services are staffed by not only social workers, but a huge army of social care workers. Before I was elected to the Parliament, I was involved in regulation of care issues that related to social care workers becoming qualified to a level that allowed them to be competent, confident practitioners. I seek an update on that work and its impact on the service.

Ian Davidson: As you suggest, a very small proportion of the total work force—which numbers 140,000—is made up of social workers.

The Scottish Social Services Council has done a lot of work on the issues that you raise, looking into many aspects. Registration is probably the key driver. You will be familiar with the way in which different groups have come into the registration process. We will shortly be launching a consultation on introducing end dates for registration. For a variety of reasons, the response to registration from different groups has been mixed.

Associated with registration is a requirement to undertake post-registration training and learning. That amounts to 15 days over the registration period; in other words, 15 days over three years for all registrable groups. Through centres for excellence, we put significant investment into training and development and into other aspects of services.

Earlier, I mentioned developments in the Scottish credit and qualifications framework and in the recognition of prior learning. A whole host of things are associated with that. We no longer directly fund training and development activities within local authorities; the resources are now part of the single pot.

We are seeing a range of opportunities for the training and development of social work services staff. The continuous learning framework builds on that and will generate more opportunities. There will never be enough resources to do everything that we want to do, but plenty is going on.

Christina McKelvie: In my experience, things have been really positive for some members of staff. Some people who have been practising for 20 or 30 years might think to themselves, "Why

am I doing an SVQ and an HNC?" That happens, but it then comes down to how the assessor motivates those people.

In your inspections, have you noticed an impact on staff motivation? Do people feel that they are being recognised and rewarded for their good and competent practice?

David Cumming: Aye. Councils are now much more conscious of the importance of recognising good practice. For example, someone might have taken additional qualifications or gone through training for a Scottish vocational qualification. They might also have other achievements. In the past, all such achievements might have gone unnoted and unrecorded, in which case the member of staff might have felt, "Well, I did all that, but no one really praised me." Any organisation can thrive only if its staff are positive about their work. It is all very well for us to go in and look at a council's high-level objectives, but if there is no evidence of those objectives at ground level—which is where contact is made with service users—and if staff do not feel connected with policies or commitments, the vision will be lost.

In our experience, some staff groups are very well-motivated. That can happen in surprising areas. We speak with administrative staff, and we sometimes expect them to talk only about how they assist the organisation or about any problems that they might have, but far from it—they talk about single shared assessments, direct payments, job coaching, and so on. They are familiar with how the service has changed to become much more focused on outcomes. That probably reflects the influence of partnership working. Social workers in councils work jointly with other players such as health colleagues or teaching colleagues. That sometimes happens of necessity, but really it happens because joint working is so important.

I mentioned job coaching. That can be important for some service users, who might otherwise struggle to move into full paid employment or any other kind of employment at all. As Ian Davidson suggests—and this is reflected in "Changing Lives"—it is not always about having a social worker but about having the right sort of support and skills to sustain a person through a new phase of their life. We have seen excellent examples of that.

Christina McKelvie: In my experience, there is a big mesh—lots of people provide a safety net to help others. You touched on job coaching, which I did many years ago at Growing Concern—you and I worked together on that project, which was a fulfilling part of my life. That set me on the path of becoming more qualified and becoming involved in training, because I really liked that. I have seen other staff have that experience.

On inspections, the feedback that I received from Glasgow City Council just before I finished there was that the SWIA report gave staff the opportunity to talk about good aspects rather than all the negativity. People who work in social work know that they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. Getting back that positivity has created a bit of a buzz, which is really good to see.

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP): Staff morale has been touched on. Is there evidence that staff morale is an issue for social work services? In what ways will action in the change programmes address staff morale?

David Cumming: The subject is not quite amorphous—we know when staff morale is and is not good. Sometimes, stability in service expectations for staff is key. In some local authorities, the identity of social work appeared largely to be lost. Leadership was not sound and social work's role was lost among other players, such as health services. Several years ago, an authority invested much time and energy in trying to bring services together. That was all correct in principle, but the consequence was that staff felt marginalised in the process. Social work brings quite a lot to the table, but it is not the only player. The opportunity for staff to feel that they contribute fully to the joint approach to delivering services, coherently and in a joined-up way, to service users through all ages and stages is important.

Each council has its own agenda for engaging and communicating with staff. The common denominator is that if communications are good and are two way, if staff do not feel that they are always on the receiving end of information a month after a decision has been made—if they can contribute properly—that goes a long way. Some of our evaluations reflect the ways in which councils engage with staff and try to ensure that their experience informs how services will change.

I am not sure whether that answers your questions. As you can appreciate, the subject is wide.

Ian Davidson: As I said, one reason for producing "Changing Lives" was to articulate the voice of social work services in a way that the sector felt that it had not been recently. From the sector's perspective, the public dialogue had been negative. The publication of "Changing Lives" had a bit of a bounce effect and we have worked hard to maintain the momentum.

We have a wide-ranging communication strategy that involves the usual elements that would be expected, such as websites and newsletters. We have produced and disseminated widely DVDs that show good practice. For the past three years, we have run annual national practitioners conferences. They involve a small

cross-section of practitioners, and the challenge is to reach everybody, but the reactions and comments from practitioners at the most recent event, which took place only in June, were extremely positive.

None of that denies the challenging circumstances for people who work in the sector. We are maintaining the momentum and talking up social work as often and as publicly as we can. We draw attention to good practice and disseminate that as widely as we can. That is where we are at. We believe that the change programmes and the products that come from them will build on that momentum. We are also working to establish local practitioner forums and working with the Association of Directors of Social Work to get a programme that is owned and run by the association up and running at a local level.

A lot of work is happening and we can be confident that the change programmes have made a contribution in making the staff of social work services feel better about themselves, about where they are, and about the extent to which society values them. However, that is not to say that the issue has been resolved.

10:45

Aileen Campbell: Your submission states that we should not rely solely on the changing lives agenda to create the bounce effect in social work departments that you mentioned. How can you mitigate against over-reliance on changing lives? In a few years from now, its relevance might have depreciated.

Ian Davidson: The branding of the change programmes is a live issue for us. The fundamental issues that are identifed in the changing lives programme and the cultural change agenda that is associated with it will remain long after the branding of changing lives has run its course. However, we are not at that point yet; we know that that is the case, but we do not know what the answer is yet. In six to 12 months' time, when we have seen the key products hitting the marketplace and the work of local practitioner forums and the ADSW is going, there will be a point at which we will need to say collectively, as a system, "Where next? How next?" At present, however, we still have a fair way to run.

Some of the activities that came from the changing lives programme will be sustainable in the longer term, including the continuous learning framework, the research and development strategy, the leadership and management framework and the self-evaluation guide. Those are intended not as short-term activities but as fundamental building blocks that will be in with the bricks in the future. Some of the things that we are

doing will raise the bar generally, but there will undoubtedly come a point at which we will want to think, "Where next? Do we need to develop a big, new, fresh programme of ideas?"

Aileen Campbell: It is largely because of media reports and bad press that I am aware that there has been low morale in social work services. Has there been a concerted effort to address that and talk up social work? Is there a media strategy to try to compensate for the bad press?

Ian Davidson: We have not developed one as part of Government. I have discussed it with ADSW, which is considering the matter. As key changing lives products go out into the system, there is a live agenda for us about articulating them at a local level and using local case studies and scenarios in presenting good news stories to communities. ADSW is alive to the need to work at the local level.

The usual challenges apply around media handling—you will be familiar with those—but ADSW has certainly taken ownership of the agenda.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): "Changing Lives" states that there is

"an aversion to risk in society as a whole, which poses a very real challenge for social workers, who must always be making fine judgements about risk."

The latest annual report of the Social Work Inspection Agency identified wide variations in the standards of risk assessment, stating that, where risk assessment models are available,

"application has been found to be variable, adversely affected by lack of training and occasional resistance from frontline staff."

How are you tackling that to ensure that there are equal standards of risk assessment and management throughout Scotland?

Ian Davidson: We are certainly not imposing a single process or system of risk management. That would not be appropriate. In a range of policy activities, including the getting it right for every child agenda, child protection and so on, our colleagues in Government are actively working on risk management issues and developing guidance and support materials for the system. As part of "Changing Lives" we undertook a literature review of risk management internationally, which has been published. The good practice guidance that we generally put into the system covers the whole domain, including risk management.

As part of the research and development strategy, we would anticipate local projects coming forward that will consider experience on the ground and how people have engaged with these issues and disseminate the findings.

A significant element of risk management training is associated with the social work degree. On continuing professional development requirements, as part of registration for new social workers, five days over the registration period have to be dedicated specifically to working with vulnerable groups.

A wide range of activities is under way, but there is no single model that we would like to impose.

David Cumming: Risk management is not a single approach. It has to go all the way through the organisation. As part of our inspections, we sit in on the evaluations that first line managers do, usually jointly with their partners, of complicated situations in which they are trying to provide care. That is an element of risk management. We know that there are formal approaches through either child protection or adult support and protection legislation. That will improve and people will become better attuned to risk.

We published a multi-agency report on learning disabilities in 2006, which highlighted areas where the interplay between social work, health and police services was important. There is not always an overt set of circumstances to suggest that an individual might be at risk, but public services have a duty of care to ensure that we take whatever measures possible, especially when we are talking about people who cannot always make judgments for themselves or when there is a consequence for other people in the community. That is sometimes the way in which risk has to be evaluated.

Front-line staff are attuned to that, but it is important that there is support from senior managers, leaders, directors of social work, chief executives and politicians. Social work is an inherently risky business. Day to day, a number of situations, which would never hit the headlines, are managed effectively and with diligence—they are risk assessed.

We can go further, without becoming risk averse. A measured risk always has to be taken in respect of how services are able to be promoted. The whole question of independent living has to be assessed. We have to consider whether something is right and proper for the individual and what the consequences might be for people living round about. That is a fairly simplistic way of explaining things, but I believe that risk management is a process that will continue to require attention. It is not an area where you can take your eye off the ball.

Kenneth Gibson: You are absolutely right. Balance is important. It is also important that social workers at the front line feel that they have the confidence of their management and the politicians behind them, so that they can do their job. How do you build confidence in social workers at the front line with regard to those issues? When high-profile events happen, there is often a knock to the service. People are working day in, day out in difficult situations and 999 times out of 1,000 a case is dealt with successfully, but the one time there is a disaster, for whatever reason, the whole profession seems to be hounded by elements in the media. How do you deal with that? How do you retain, and continue to enhance, the confidence of your staff in such circumstances?

David Cumming: It is important that there is recognition that no single agency has the full responsibility; it has to be shared. There needs to be a framework for considering risk on a joint basis. Staff need to feel confident that, in anticipating risks, they will be listened to by senior staff at first line manager level and then through different levels of management. We ask how social work is supported corporately. Some of that is about our political leaders and our senior managers being alert to situations that might unravel and become extremely difficult. Are they alerted to such situations early enough? Are they attuned to what might happen so that they can support staff? Although I recognise that none of us is clairvoyant and that we cannot always know what might be round the corner, we can at least take, jointly, whatever steps need to be taken at the front line, by an organisation and, sometimes, by its partners. Sometimes one might monitor risk indirectly, as well as on a statutory basis.

Ian Davidson: In respect of the change programmes, we are alive to such issues. The starting point is that the scenarios that you describe will always have an effect—we all know that. Shortly, we will go to consultation on a paper on the role of the chief social work officer as a leader of practice and a responsible officer in a local authority. That is not new—it is an attempt to get local authorities to think again about the leadership role of the chief social work officer.

The practice governance framework, which we expect to be produced reasonably soon, is another piece of work that will try to anticipate some of those issues. I have also mentioned the research and development strategy. Through that range of products, we hope to raise the bar generally as regards the quality of practice and the professionalism of social workers. We hope that that will develop a degree of resilience that we can call on in difficult circumstances.

Kenneth Gibson: Yes, because you want front-line social workers to know that they have the support of colleagues when they take difficult decisions.

We have touched on the new social work degree. I invite each member of the panel to say how it could be improved.

Ian Davidson: At the last count, 20 evaluation projects on the social work degree were under way. Since its inception, there has been a range of activity to improve engagement with users and carers, to improve the quality of the curriculum and to consider integrated working with other services. We have recently completed the first phase of a major change academy initiative, which has involved all eight university faculties reflecting on the quality of their programmes.

We are not yet in a position to say that there are areas in which improvements should be made, although that is not to say that we will not get to that point. The next step for us is to examine how the degree impacts on the ground—to assess how new practitioners hit practice, how employers use them and what impact they have on the ground. Employers are exploring that area in partnership with the universities. We will undoubtedly still want to consider specific elements of the degree. The territory of integrated working and more common initial education across different professional routes is undoubtedly an area that I would like to explore, but at this stage it is a question of assessing the impact of the investment as it hits the front line.

Kenneth Gibson: So your focus is on improving the degree's practical application on the ground and on making the theory more relevant for front-line practitioners.

Ian Davidson: It is a question of asking what impact the degree is having on the ground. We do not yet have evidence on what difference it has made, but we certainly want to gather such evidence. I would not like to say that changes are required; we need to explore the issue.

Kenneth Gibson: The Scottish Government is funding four learning networks and five centres of excellence as part of the work to develop better partnership working between education providers and practitioners. The Scottish Government has also funded a change academy project to focus on building partnerships between employers and the higher education sector. How do learning networks and centres of excellence work?

Ian Davidson: Historically, centres for excellence have grown up where pressure points in the system, in which we need to put additional capacity, have been identified. I am increasingly considering how they join up and what their collective impact is. The centres have three roles: to be at the cutting-edge of international and domestic research and knowledge in the areas of expertise with which they are associated, and to disseminate that; to be champions for a particular sector, and to work with employers, Government and the Parliament in relation to that sector; and to provide a range of education and training opportunities. Each centre has a three-pronged role.

11:00

We are committed to funding learning networks over the next three years. We have told them that our starting point is that we need, at local level, stronger partnerships between employers and providers of education and training. There is a need for better opportunities for employers to share experience and to share their resources for education and training. The learning networks are essentially hubs at which to foster those partnerships and to disseminate information to the various agencies. It is still early days in relation to the impact on the ground of learning networks, but there is no other vehicle in place to foster such partnerships.

Ken Macintosh: I return to risk-averse behaviour, which was raised by Mr Gibson. It has been identified that part of the problem is that social workers operate within a so-called blame culture, as we all do in our society. I cannot recall whether it was "Getting it right for every child" or the report that came out after the death of Caleb Ness, but it was recommended that we change our inquiry system so that our inquiries—for example, fatal accident inquiries—are less adversarial and more inquisitorial, and are less about pointing the finger of blame and more about identifying the issues and finding a supportive way of addressing them. I do not know whether that is your area, but has any progress been made on developing the inquiry model that is used in Scotland following the occasional but very difficult incidents?

Ian Davidson: I am afraid that I do not know. I would be happy to explore that area and to provide information in writing to the committee.

Ken Macintosh: Mr Cumming?

David Cumming: No, not really. As you know, decisions on the form of inquiry can be taken situation by situation by the responsible authority. However, I am not aware of anything that suggests what will happen in the future. There will be other issues. This is not an easy area of our society's care arrangements, and it does not help if blame is attached. No member of staff rests easy when, for instance, we have witnessed the death of a child. Sometimes the term, "learning lessons" can feel glib, but it is important that an inquiry is carried out in a spirit of trying to understand why certain things may have occurred, and why there may have been a failure on the part of an individual agency or member of staff. It is seldom down to one individual. Anything that is in the form of an inquiry has a much better opportunity to teach lessons if it is done in the

round, because we can see the interplay between the partners who have collectively had a responsibility to demonstrate a duty of care.

Ken Macintosh: Perhaps you can provide more information in a letter. I mention that because I am pretty sure that social work services in Edinburgh were virtually paralysed by the reaction to the difficulties in Edinburgh. The difficulty that social workers in general feel is that they are all working very hard, but when one thing goes wrong, everyone is communally blamed. It is not a conducive atmosphere in which to work.

David Cumming: I should say that child protection committee responsibilities are shared by various agencies, which is important. Risks have to be managed and they are more likely to be managed well when responsibilities are shared. Social work might play the lead role, but it is a lead role with other colleagues and partners.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I want to ask a few questions on service development and, in particular, on the move towards personalisation of services—a term that I understand to mean services that are more personal, focused and accessible. Will you say a little more about that agenda? What will it mean for social care, and how will it be implemented?

Andy Bruce (Scottish Government Children, Young People and Social Care Directorate): Within the changing lives programme, the service development group is looking into that issue. Its work is focused on delivering high-level sets of principles on what personalisation means across all three services—children and families, social care and criminal justice. As Claire Baker suggests, the concept is being developed further within service-specific policy areas; for example, the "Getting it Right for Every Child" agenda has a person-centred theme.

I would like to make points about two pieces of work within social care. First, there has been take-up of self-directed support, whereby an individualised budget is paid directly to people who can then make their own decisions on whom they want to employ and on how they want to use the budget. Work has also been done on shifting the balance of care towards more personalised services. The concordat and single outcome agreements enshrine an approach that is focused on outcomes. That has involved putting the service user at the heart of services.

The second piece of work was mentioned earlier—citizen leadership. That work regards the service user as an intelligent and expert client. In the relationship between the user and the practitioner, the user becomes less passive and more active in deciding what is the best package of care for them.

Claire Baker: I would like to explore that relationship with service users. Is there agreement between service users and service providers on what personalisation means? Are there tensions?

Last week I attended two local annual general meetings in Fife. One was held by Community Mums (Scotland), which is an organisation that goes into people's homes and helps parents who have children under the age of one; and the other was held by a project that provides counselling for people—especially teenagers and their families—on drug and alcohol issues. People at both those meetings said that they feel more comfortable engaging with those groups than they do with social workers. There was more suspicion within communities about the kind of help that social workers would offer.

The personalisation and prevention agenda seems to be trying to make social work more responsive to people. So, my first question was on whether service users and providers agreed on what personalisation meant and on what services should be delivered, but I would also like to ask about the engagement that you have had with the third sector. How can social work departments work supportively in parallel with preventive work that is already going on in many communities?

Andy Bruce: There is probably still some way to go before we have a shared understanding of personalisation. I suppose it sounds fairly straightforward, but it becomes more complicated when we explore what it means in a community care setting, or when we explore what it means when there is an element of compulsion—when social workers have to make difficult decisions that impact on people's liberty. The service delivery group is working to develop a shared understanding of what personalisation means, but it is fair to say that work remains to be done.

SWIA has been working to embed the expectations of personalised services into its inspection methodology and self-evaluation methodology. As a result, when providers are assessing the service that they provide, there will be pointers on what is expected in terms of involving service users in designing care packages.

As part of the changing lives programme, we fund a user and carer forum, which the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability facilitates. That helps to provide us with a sounding board and to advise us of how users and carers wish to be involved and how that can be done most effectively. I do not pretend that we are there yet, but the trend that you described, whereby all service providers—whether they are social workers or from the voluntary sector—are part of that movement, is the way to go.

Claire Baker: Crisis services are a core social-work function that will—unfortunately—still be needed, even if a drift to more prevention-based activity occurs. If budgets are being shifted to more preventive work now, are financial tensions arising? Do you expect such tensions in the future, or are crisis services well resourced, so that such a problem will not arise?

Andy Bruce: We are not putting additional resources into such services. Ultimately, it is for the local authority to decide how it resources the requirement to provide a crisis service and the preventive work. We look to the results of inspections and single outcome agreements to tell us whether that is being managed effectively.

Claire Baker: A few questions have been raised about the social work degree—Kenny Gibson asked how it could be improved. To what extent has the prevention agenda changed how social workers are trained? Is it embedded in their training?

Ian Davidson: The standards for social work education are pretty extensive and cover the full range of issues that they would be expected to cover, but I cannot describe precisely the relevant content. It is fair to say that the range of projects that we have considered through the change academy have included some of the issues that you raise. I am happy to share more detailed information about the standards, if you would like to have it.

Ken Macintosh: I have another question about the personalisation agenda. On support for independent living, does the uptake of direct payments vary widely among authorities? If so, are you happy with the reasons for that variation?

Andy Bruce: That does not fall within our policy area—a health directorate team deals with it. That team recently hosted a round-table discussion that involved us, local authorities and organisations that might be funded indirectly through self-directed support, which is direct payments version 2, if you like. That team is conscious of the mixed picture that Ken Macintosh described and has funded research into that. I believe that its next step will be to launch a few pilots to focus on why the uptake of self-directed support payments is not as high as it might be and to consider resourcing them in a way that might increase uptake.

David Cumming: We probably comment on commissioning in every inspection report. That reflects the balance of provided and commissioned services in almost every council, at the level not only of strategic commissioning decisions, but of how they are informed by individual assessments of need. We ask councils to advise us of how they operate. For instance, carer assessments are an important part of supporting people informally, as members know. Sometimes, councils are not very good at promoting those assessments—they are seen as an adjunct to the service user's needs assessment, whereas carers sometimes have distinct needs over and above those of the person for whom they care.

On the approach to outcomes, we talk about the outcome focus. The subject can be laden with jargon. At times, it is important to ask, "What are we trying to achieve through provision of these services?" We need to question whether we are trying to enable someone to become more independent by encouraging them to avail themselves not only of local—albeit that they might be good—services, but those that offer more opportunities. This service area will continue to develop in line with changing expectations.

11:15

Supported employment schemes can be key to enabling people to become fully independent financially, including in respect of accommodation. Those schemes also give reassurance to families who may have thought that they would always have to provide direct care for that family member. By virtue of being focused on the individual, such schemes remove many such worries.

That approach is, however, only as good as the information that councils and their partners can aggregate. The situation is similar to that in community planning, in which areas of recognition are being developed. For example, in planning service delivery for the next 15 to 20 years, we now know that the process has to be informed by what is happening on the ground and what peoples' aspirations are for that period of time. That process is complex, but not impossible. It needs to be followed incrementally and not as a big bang, so to speak. People need to work step by step in trying to improve the uptake of individual-focused services. They need to ask how those services can reflect shifts in the balance of care, by which we mean how change can be achieved in a way that is more personalised and person centred, now and in the future.

Ken Macintosh: Direct payments have been around for some time, but it is clear that uptake in some authority areas has not been great. Is that because authorities are institutionally hidebound? Are they thinking only of their systems and operations—in other words, are they producer dominated? If not, is it because of client fears? Where is the balance to be found?

David Cumming: People do not always think of future options. Services that might be quite good at the moment may not be quite as fit for purpose or high in quality in years to come. A balance has

to be struck: there has to recognition that service planning needs to be informed by individual need. We cannot simply guess what people need; we have to ask how they can be supported.

We have seen huge changes, for example in the development of assistive technologies. Perhaps 20 years ago, we would not have thought that it would be possible to support people to remain in their own homes safely and with dignity. Most people do not want to move into residential or institutional care, but want to be supported in their homes, although they also want to know that assistance will be made available to them when they need it.

Christina McKelvie: I turn to practice governance. I understand that the role of the chief social work officer varies among authorities. I seek insight into that and on whether greater consistency would result from guidance.

Andy Bruce: There is a statutory requirement on authorities to have in place a chief social work officer. The role varies depending on how the social work function is distributed across an authority's departments, and on whether there is a single social work department or a separate approach is taken to children and families. David Cumming will be able to update you on that. In some authorities, the chief social work officer and head of service are one and the same person. Other authorities have a head of service who is a non-qualified social worker, while a chief social work officer provides that professional leadership role within the management structure.

"Changing Lives" identified the need for such a professional leadership role to be put in place. It did so partly in response to the ways in which risk can be managed that we discussed earlier. A decision was then taken to strengthen the role of the chief social work officer. Indeed, some SWIA inspections identified a requirement on councils to put in place such a professional leadership position.

The guidance will be coming out for consultation fairly shortly. Rather than addressing structural issues such as where the chief social work officer should sit in the management structure, it sets out that person's roles and responsibilities in providing oversight of values and standards and in fulfilling a senior social work adviser role in the council. The guidance also covers access requirements with respect to the chief executive and the officer's responsibility for reporting on elements of the profession of social work to councils' senior management boards.

David Cumming: The post of chief social work officer was introduced under the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 in recognition of the fact that organisational structures were going to change. It has been our experience that, in structures where there might not be a director of social work, it becomes even more important for the council to have a reporting mechanism for the person who is termed the chief social work officer. We have seen good examples of that in some councils, where the chief social work officer has to oversee work in children's services as well as in adult care—albeit that their substantive post might be in one area or the other.

A formal reporting mechanism—usually an annual report—and the opportunity to respond to issues that lie with the council as a whole, through direct access either to the chief executive or to senior politicians, aid understanding. The arrangements might have serious implications for the discharge of responsibilities by the council. We have found such a formal approach to be helpful, not by making social work any more special than some other functions of councils, but in recognising that some aspects of social work require an understanding of the council's corporate responsibilities. We have found that those responsibilities have been better understood in recent years, taking into account the chief social work officer's role. As Andy Bruce said, the definition of responsibilities will probably improve things further.

Christina McKelvie: You have explained some of the reserved functions of social work. How will the production of guidance contribute to better outcomes for service users, given that some of the functions are reserved?

Andy Bruce: The work that was done on reserved functions is another output of the same group that produced the chief social work officer paper and which will be producing a practice governance framework. Practice governance could be described as a way of enabling practitioners to exercise their professional responsibilities, and it covers the responsibilities of both the employer and the practitioner.

Currently, just one reserved function is legislated for—around the mental health function. The group has been considering an extension of the number of reserved functions, not in legislation but by way of further guidance. The key element to that piece of work lies in viewing social work as a profession that contributes to outcomes, alongside the work of other professionals. The flavour of that paper will not be about social work acting in a territorial way and claiming that there are things that only it can do. Rather, there will be a recognition that social work departments work in partnership with a range of agencies and that successful outcomes depend on a successful fusion of various roles.

At the sharp end of social work, the difficult decisions that are made by social workers, for example the decisions that impinge on someone's

liberty, should be overseen by a lead professional, for reasons of safety and accountability. That would be the correct approach. I have described the need to ensure that the process is fully joined up within that dynamic. The guidance will seek to show that, in certain circumstances, for given reasons, there are some roles for which the social worker should retain responsibility.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): I return to the issue of structure, which Mr Cumming spoke about and Mr Bruce has just touched on. In the wake of the Caleb Ness tragedy, there was a change of structure in social work services in Edinburgh. That was, and remains, quite controversial for some people. The SWIA paper covers the different structures that exist around the country. I appreciate that Scottish Government officials might not see it as their role to tell local authorities how they should structure their social work services but, from the inspections that you have done so far, have you learned any lessons about which structures are working most effectively? Is it too naive to say that a particular structure looks like the best-practice structure for linking social work and education services or social work and health services?

David Cumming: Do I have only two minutes to answer that? You are right: the situation is complicated. Of course, we have got to where we are over a period of years. We must recognise that partnership working has become better embedded not only in local authorities but in health authorities and voluntary organisations. However, a lot can always be done to improve such working.

Recently, I spoke with social work people about their interplay with colleagues in education. The latter recognised that the skills mix in schools has also shifted—the committee has been considering issues related to that. The situation is quite fluid. We talk about having universal services that enable young people to remain in day education rather than ending up in residential schools furth of their families and homes, for example. However, that must be done in a joint and shared way, so that it is not something that is advocated by social workers but regarded by teachers as difficult in day-to-day terms. Some changes to the school curriculum have probably improved matters by providing better vocational opportunities for some young people, not necessarily by taking them away from academia but by ensuring that they are retained within universal provision.

A structure can be very good and can be made to provide a good-quality service but, equally, an integrated service may not perform well though the structure is ostensibly fine. Our view is that, by virtue of the nature of social work services, a strong element of cross cutting is involved. That is a jargon term, but what I have said is true. Two

years ago, we undertook an inspection of substance misuse services. Those services do not apply only to adults; the people involved must also have an eye on the implications of adult substance misuse on families and children, who might have to go into long-term care. Equally, support for Scotland's growing older population should be considered. As we have said, we want to attract the best young school leavers into the caring professions, whether as informal carers or as people pursuing a career in those professions.

There is a complicated mix, and the structures can sometimes allow us to lose focus. As a result of our inspections, we have tried to bring out the differences in how councils have formed services, which must reflect local circumstances. We have seen quite a lot of alterations 12 years on from the inception of single-tier authorities. Our view is that social work provides quite a lot of different ingredients to support people in their local environments, but support is effective only if it is provided in partnership with the individuals and other supporting services in the local authority and other public or voluntary services. Community planning goes some way towards achieving such support.

Margaret Smith: Given what you have said about the essential cross-cutting nature of social work, are you confident that, although there is a range of different structures throughout Scotland, no structure is detrimental to getting the best possible services from social work leaders, whether they are chief social workers or social workers in teams of people in wider departments? Are you absolutely confident that the structures that have developed are the best possible structures to deliver social work services?

11:30

David Cumming: In the main, the structures are delivering. I said in my submission that our evaluations are skewed more towards the positives than the negatives. There is no doubt about that, but it can clearly get better. We have particularised in some areas where we felt that structures that are not serving local people well enough need to be reappraised. Earlier this year, we produced a report that highlighted that we felt that a council was not providing what the service was intended to provide.

In our inspection reports, we have tried to bring out some of the issues that we feel impede good-quality service. They are not usually structural, but structure is sometimes a feature. If a structure is adhered to slavishly and if that gets in the way of flexibility and of making services freely available across different areas of a council's responsibility, one might say that it is so rigid that it is not reflecting the needs of individuals.

Margaret Smith: One of the things that struck me when there was a change in Edinburgh was the impact that the changing role of the chief social work officer had. There were issues around accountability, the clarity of the role and how trained social workers felt about their service. What are the key problems in leadership and management of social work services in local authorities? How will the change programme influence the management and support of services that local authorities commission from outside agencies?

David Cumming: In the main, we have evaluated leadership more positively than negatively. You will know that we have made evaluations of unsatisfactory leadership in two Scottish councils. Each of those councils took seriously the importance of changing and improving in that aspect, as did other parts of government.

It is important that there is a clear lead and that there is a clear identity for social work. I touched on that earlier. In an earlier part of the programme, we came across a situation in which identity had largely been lost and people who were working within a combined service largely felt that their contribution had been lost.

Councils make decisions on how to improve services following events such as the Caleb Ness case. The chief social work officer role came about in 1995, as you know. I am not sure whether some of the situations that now need to be addressed were foreseen then, but it is clear that there must be interplay between adult care and children's services. A chief social work officer whose role straddles those responsibilities in a single council that perhaps has separate services—as is the case in Edinburgh—must ensure that there is a corporate understanding of the consequences of a failure to provide joined-up care. Sometimes, we have parents whose care requires more support. If the services are divided in how they understand and are informed about the care—in short, if they are not joined up—it is all the more likely that some of the difficulties that have arisen in various parts of Scotland will recur.

I appreciate that that is a grossly sweeping summing up and I am not trying to pick out any one council. I am happy to do that at a separate time. We must recognise that social work straddles a range of responsibilities. The significance of the chief social work officer is that they try to ensure that that range is appreciated in the council's corporate responsibilities.

Ian Davidson: Margaret Smith asked specifically about the change programmes. As part of the suite, there is a range of activities to do with leadership. They are generic activities rather than activities that are focused on leadership in particular aspects of services. Through that work, we focus on leadership at all levels in organisations rather than only at the top levels of services. There are a number of reasons for that, and we could argue about the focus.

Through our leadership management framework, we hope to put in place a wide range of resources that will stimulate thinking among practitioners about the range of leadership challenges that they face in their working lives and give them tools to enable them to work through some of the issues, which are applicable in a range of practice settings. We have invested a considerable amount of money—£500,000—in developing the leading to deliver postgraduate programme for a range of practitioners. Unfortunately, that high-quality programme, which has been excellently received in the sector, does not reach enough people. That is a real issue for us. We are thinking about how we can learn the lessons of the programme and apply them more sustainably.

We have started to develop leadership communities, in which we bring together leading to deliver graduates and their peers to stimulate thinking about the range of leadership challenges in practice settings and how they can engage with those. A range of interesting work is under way in relation to leadership that we hope will stimulate leadership capacity across the system more generally and blend with the other changing lives products, specifically the role of the chief social work officer.

Andy Bruce: I will say a few words about commissioning. We referred earlier to how well personalisation was understood. One of the areas on which personalisation has had an impact is commissioning. The group that has been considering personalisation is now beginning to think about the impacts on commissioning. For example, instead of commissioning for a set number of hours, we can think about how we commission for outcomes. That is having an impact.

In addition, moving towards having money reside with individuals will have implications for how we maintain a marketplace. For example, for people with an individualised budget who receive self-directed support and direct payment, the question is how they can have a marketplace from which they can viably choose. As we develop the personalisation agenda, we can see that there are impacts for commissioning. That will be the subject of an additional piece of work that will explore some of the issues a wee bit further.

The other major bit of commissioning, which was referred to earlier, is around self-evaluation. Work on that is being led by SWIA. The work will obviously have a local authority audience, but it

will be developed in partnership with service providers in order to give balance.

The particular circumstance of the chief social work officer in Edinburgh was referred to earlier, too. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the guidance on the role that has been produced came from the practice governance group. The current chief social work officer in Edinburgh has been a key member of that group and has helped to develop the guidance.

The Convener: That concludes the committee's questions to the witnesses. I thank them for their attendance and for their answers.

11:39

Meeting continued in private until 12:04.

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Friday 26 September 2008