

<i>item:</i>	9
<i>report:</i>	CYP24/07

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

**By Bill Alexander**

### **Summary**

This report addresses the request of the Joint Committee for an impact assessment framework to take account of planned changes to policy or service provision.

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The primary purpose of an Impact Assessment Framework is to establish a thorough procedure of analysis: to assist in ensuring that any planned change in policy or service provision has a positive impact if possible; and where this can not be achieved, that any negative effects are minimised by informed and transparent decision making.
- 1.2 This Impact Assessment Framework is designed to provide a consistent method of risk assessing the effects of decisions (and in some cases non decisions) when financial constraints impact on services for children and families overseen by the JCCYP.
- 1.3 Therefore, for example, if the JCCYP is asked to change policy, or change or withdraw a service, an assessment will be made of the likely impact of this decision.
- 1.4 As the Framework will show, there are a number of levels of assessment ranging from:-
  - The effect on the quality, scope and quantity of the future policy/service.
  - The effects on the future viability of any service and the service provider.
  - The effect on equality and diversity and a sense of fairness.
  - The broadly political – likely to engender public or interest group concerns.

### **2. Why Is An Impact Assessment Framework Of Particular Importance For The Joint Committee?**

- 2.1 The JCCYP represents a broad range of partners and it is important that decisions on policy and service funding are assessed equitably and agreed jointly by all partners.
- 2.2 Of particular importance is that a significant number of Highland's Integrated Children's Services are wholly or partly provided by the

voluntary sector. It may be fair to say that many voluntary sector providers are vulnerable in their relationships with the statutory sector. An Impact Assessment Framework should help to ensure that voluntary sector providers are treated fairly and that the sustainability of this sector is properly considered.

### **3. When Is An Impact Assessment Required?**

- 3.1 An impact assessment can be undertaken when there are significant changes to policy that may impact in practice, or alternatively where there may be financial implications for any new or existing service. Normal good practice and particularly Committee scrutiny already ensures that a good level of risk assessment takes place. The adoption of a framework should provide consistency and transparency to Committee deliberations on the likely impact on service provision.

### **4. An Impact Assessment Should Be Based On the Following Structure**

- 4.1 Factual information about the service and the service provider
- Services supported through the JCCYP should be able to provide detail on their service delivery and operational structure. In the case of the voluntary sector partners this should be under a Service Level Agreement.
  - In practice it is likely that a level of checking and even gathering of information on a service provider's current operational arrangements will be required.
  - While a self assessment by the service provider should be possible there is a danger that this will result in a quality of information which will make comparison between providers very difficult. The accuracy of baseline information and the ability to present informed analysis will vary between providers. The need for an impact assessment may reflect the fact that the main funder has to make a difficult choice between service providers.
  - Additionally every effort should be made to avoid an impact assessment becoming a lobbying tool for resources.
- 4.2 Alternative actions available to the service provider
- Compile a list of alternative actions.
  - A number of potential actions may be possible to take account of the financial constraint on the service. These can vary across a wide range of areas such as reducing staff numbers; reducing the range or number of service users; reducing the geographical area covered by the service provider; a change of premises etc.
  - Note that while the above concentrates on internal changes for a service provider, in some situations an alternative action could be external: including transfer of the service to another provider or an amalgamation of services.

### **5. Impact on Equality Duties**

- 5.1 The impact assessment should include ensuring that account is taken of the impact of any policy or service change with regard to matters of equality and diversity. This would involve assessing the impact of the change with regard to the general duties under equalities legislation, and how it might impact on different diversity groups, including: racial groups; disabled people; faith groups; or groups defined by age, gender or sexual preference

## **6. Analysis of Each Recorded Alternative Action**

- 6.1 A list of questions should be applied to each action and the answers, with a detailed explanation, recorded.

Will the action result in:

- Any benefits
- A change in quality of service
- A change in quantity of service
- Damage to the viability of the service
- Damage to the viability of the service provider
- Discriminatory practice
- Concern from service users or members of the public

The answers to each question could be given a rating according to:

- The likelihood of this occurring
- The seriousness if this does occur

- 6.2 There is an established procedure for this type of risk assessment which gives a final score for each action and therefore provides ready comparison between the alternative actions. While this approach has merit in certain situations, it is suggested that a narrative summary will often be appropriate and sufficient for informed scrutiny at the Joint Committee.
- 6.3 It is therefore proposed that future reports on changes to policy or service provision should therefore include an impact assessment.

## **Recommendation**

Members are asked to agree the framework, and that it is used in future reports to Committee about changes to policy or service provision.

**Bill Alexander**

Head of Integrated Services