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## EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

### by Bill Alexander

#### Summary

This report updates members on the CoSLA/Scottish Government Early Years Framework.

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scottish Government/CoSLA Early Years framework was published in December 2008. It is available at:  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/08095849/0>
- 1.2 The Early Years Framework is a new type of policy document – one which has been developed jointly by local and national government, and will have to be implemented jointly over next 10 years. The concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA sets the context for this policy development, and this is the first major joint initiative taken forward as part of it, as a long term commitment.
- 1.3 CoSLA has recognised there will be no additional funding to support the Framework, at least in the short term. The Framework itself stretches well beyond the current spending review. CoSLA has therefore endeavoured to ensure any actions in the Framework are flexible, and in the short term will be of relatively low cost – in effect laying the ground work for improvements in later years. The medium and longer term objectives will likely require financial support over future spending reviews.
- 1.4 The Scottish Government acknowledge this will be about prioritising the early years and building capacity in services, but it will also be looking at way of joining up budgets, and shifting resources from acute services to early intervention.
- 1.5 The Framework seeks to maximise positive opportunities for children to get the best start in life. It seeks to address the needs of those children whose lives, opportunities and ambitions are being constrained by Scotland's historic legacies of poverty, poor health, poor attainment and unemployment.
- 1.6 At the heart of the Framework is a desire to see investment in early years focused on building success and reducing the costs of failure. This will mean a shift from intervening only when a crisis happens, to prevention and early intervention. In turn, that will mean providing a supportive environment for children and the earliest possible identification of any is not about throwing new money at old problems, or narrow initiatives. It is about a fundamental shift in philosophy and approach that embraces the role of parents and communities and supports them with engaging, high quality services that meet their needs.

1.7 This very much accords with the GIRFEC model, and indeed the Highland pathfinder experience, and the requirements of the national roll-out of GIRFEC, are described as fundamental to implementation of the Framework.

## **2. The Early Years Framework**

2.1 The Framework makes a compelling case for improving support to children and families in the early years. However, it recognises that there is no single programme or approach that can deliver the improved outcomes we seek. It will take a concerted and long term effort across a range of policies and services to achieve a transformation in outcomes. The scale of change that will be needed to shift the focus from crisis management to prevention, early identification and early intervention will be considerable, but the rationale for doing so is indisputable.

2.2 The Framework is divided into two sections. The first part of the document concentrates on the purpose, which is to deliver transformational change in outcomes for children. It also sets how partners – both local and national – should approach delivering this radical change. The message that in this first part of the document is that no one action or series of actions will deliver the improvement in outcomes we want.

2.3 To avoid the ‘tick box’ approach, the Framework is clear that the actions are not ends in themselves and other efforts will be required over the next ten years. The Framework therefore sets out ten broad areas which, taken together, are a model for delivering a cohesive approach to transformational change in outcomes. At the national level, Local and Scottish Government will work alongside partners on all 10 areas. At a local level, Community Planning Partnerships would be free to look at how each area comes together and can be translated into appropriate local action. However, the Framework emphasises that the successful delivery of transformational change will be demonstrated by improvement to outcomes, and not the implementation of individual actions.

2.4 The ten areas are:

- A more coherent experience of early years services for children and families;
- A focus on building the capacity of children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves;
- Getting to the root causes of success, failure and inequality;
- A focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities;
- Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention;
- Putting quality at the heart of service delivery;
- Services that meet the needs of children and families;
- Improving outcomes and children’s quality of life through play;
- Simplifying and streamlining delivery; and
- More effective partnerships.

- 2.5 Within the 10 broad areas of work detailed above, the Framework does suggest some actions that partners should consider very carefully. These stem from the work of managers and practitioners, including Highland representation, in the task groups. The priorities for action set out what CoSLA and Government believe partners should look at in the short term, but also what they could aim to achieve in the medium and longer term.
- 2.6 The second part of the Framework describes each of these areas in more detail and, as a result, is probably most relevant to practitioners.
- 2.7 The Executive Summary is reproduced in full below:

### **Why an early years and early intervention framework?**

What happens to children in their earliest years says much about our society and is key to outcomes in adult life. This is now supported by a wide range of research evidence from education, health, justice and economic experts. This framework at its simplest is about giving all our children the best start in life and the steps the Scottish Government, local partners and practitioners in early years services need to take to start us on that journey.

### **Early years and early intervention**

For the purposes of this framework, we are defining early years as pre-birth to 8 years old. This broad definition of early years is recognition of the importance of pregnancy in influencing outcomes and that the transition into primary school is a critical period in children's lives. Many aspects of this framework are equally relevant to children beyond the age of 8.

At the heart of this framework is an approach which recognises the right of all young children to high quality relationships, environments and services which offer a holistic approach to meeting their needs. Such needs should be interpreted broadly and encompass play, learning, social relationships and emotional and physical wellbeing. This approach is important for all children but is of particular benefit in offering effective support to those children and families requiring higher levels of support.

Early intervention has relevance to a wide range of social policy but it is particularly relevant in early years, which will often be the earliest and best opportunity to intervene. We have identified 4 principles of early intervention. In short, these are:

- we want all to have the same outcomes and the same opportunities;
- we identify those at risk of not achieving those outcomes and take steps to prevent that risk materialising;
- where the risk has materialised, we take effective action;
- we work to help parents, families and communities to develop their own solutions, using accessible, high quality public services as required.

### **A new level of ambition in early years**

This framework starts from an analysis of the type of experiences that will support positive outcomes for children, based on evidence from research and from work with parents and children. This provides the basis for a new vision for early years that reflects the high ambitions that the Scottish Government and local government have for early years.

The vision establishes a new conceptualisation of early years - that children should be valued and provided for within communities; the importance of strong, sensitive relationships with parents and carers; the right to a high quality of life and access to play; the need to put children at the centre of service delivery; to provide more support through universal services when children need it; and that children should be able to achieve positive outcomes irrespective of race, disability or social background.

Parents and communities play a crucial role in outcomes for children. That role needs to be valued by parents and communities themselves, but also supported by the community planning process. The vision also highlights the importance of high quality, flexible and engaging services delivered by a valued and appropriately qualified workforce in delivering the ambitions of this framework.

### **Putting the vision into action**

These ambitions cannot be achieved by a business as usual approach. Transformational change is required, and 10 elements of transformational change have been identified. These are:

- a coherent approach;
- helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves;
- breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years;
- a focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities;
- using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention;
- putting quality at the heart of service delivery;
- services that meet the needs of children and families;
- improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play;
- simplifying and streamlining delivery;
- more effective collaboration.

### **Moving forward**

Single outcome agreements and the community planning process will be the key local mechanisms for putting this framework into practice. In doing so, the focus will remain on outcomes rather than inputs, and we will work to develop better indicators of outcomes from early years policies and services. The Scottish Government and local partners will continue to work closely in partnership in taking forward action, some key elements of which are likely to include:

- more help to develop parenting skills within antenatal and postnatal care and developing the capacity needed to deliver this;
- a renewed focus on 0-3 as the period of a child's development that shapes future outcomes;
- breaking down barriers between education and childcare through a move towards more integrated, flexible services;
- improving play opportunities and addressing barriers to play;
- more consistent access to intensive family support services in the early years;
- more help for informal support networks;
- nurseries, schools and childcare centres developing their role in family and community learning;

- adult services such as housing, transport and development planning putting a greater focus on the needs of young children and families;
- developing common values in the workforce, enhancing workforce skills and developing broader workforce roles;
- building on work already in progress through *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide child-centred, outcome-focused services

### **Resources**

We recognise that these are high ambitions at a time when there will be no new money available for implementation. This framework can only be taken forward by realigning and prioritising resources to offer more effective support to all families and to enable help to be provided earlier to children and families requiring additional support. We believe that the improvements that are envisaged offer significant economic as well as social dividends for communities - in the short and medium-term helping to support employment and enhance productivity and in the longer term to improve a range of outcomes and reduce the need for costly crisis interventions. A simpler, integrated structure of services also has significant potential to deliver greater value for money. We do not underestimate the challenge of reallocating resources while continuing to help those who need our support now; but we believe that it is essential that we strive to do so.

## **3. Implications for Highland**

- 3.1 Highland agencies will be entirely supportive of the principles of the Early Years Framework, as part of the implementation of *Getting it right for every child*. It addresses many of the key themes that have been integral to integrated children's services planning in the authority: supporting families and sustaining community-based services; delivering improved opportunities for play; reducing the need for referrals to targeted services through strengthening universal services; improving access to integrated pre-school and childcare services; and improving local partnerships.
- 3.2 Like other authorities, given current budget pressures, we are constrained in our capacity to achieve further development in services at this time, but *For Highland's Children 3* will set out a programme for service improvement across the early years.

### **Recommendation**

The Joint Committee is asked to consider and endorse the Early Years Framework, and note that *For Highland's Children 3* will include specific proposals for service improvement in line with this policy initiative.

### **Bill Alexander**

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