

NATIONAL PRACTITIONERS CONFERENCE  
20 JUNE 2007: BLCC, HALBEATH

OPENING SPEECH BY ADAM INGRAM

Good morning. I'd like to preface my remarks with an apology. My schedule only allows me to be here for half an hour or so today. So I'm sorry I won't have the opportunity to join you for the full conference and meet people individually. But I do look forward to hearing a report back on how the day goes.

That said, I felt your event today was an opportunity not to be missed – no matter how briefly I could attend. I felt it important to signal my support for the difficult and often complex work you do and share my initial thinking on priorities for our work over the period of this administration.

I'm sure all of you are well aware of the key messages that came from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review of social work services. These were that:

- Social Work Services don't have all the answers – **so we need to build capacity to deliver personalised services;**
- We don't make the best use of social work skills – **so we need to build the capacity of the workforce;**
- As demands increase and become more complex, doing more of the same won't work – **so we need to build capacity for sustainable change.**

Why is this important? There is compelling evidence that we face a future that looks vastly different from the past. And we need to make sure our people and services are fit to meet these challenges.

Straight away to avoid any uncertainty, I should confirm that we in this administration are committed to the aspirations of *Changing Lives*. This provides a direction of travel for all of us – those who develop policy, those who deliver services, and those who use social work services.

As you may know, we have set out our high level strategic objectives for this administration and are committed to delivering on these. These are to make Scotland's people:

Wealthier & Fairer  
Healthier  
Safer & Stronger  
Smarter, and  
Greener.

Clearly social work services, and their partners, have a significant role to play on delivering on all of these aspirations for Scotland's people (except maybe on Greener but welcome any suggestions!).

There is no doubt that we face changing demands and increased expectations of our social work services.

The rise in chronic mental health conditions, the continuing gap between the affluent and the poor, demographic changes in the workforce and wider community, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour all point to the need for us to build the capacity in individuals, communities and in the workforce to deal with complex changing, and challenging, demands.

While recognising the need to tackle the high tariff and crises end of the scale, we have also signalled the importance of prevention and early intervention if we are to tackle some of these problems at their root.

But it is not all doom and gloom. I am clear we do not start from a poor baseline. There is a lot of excellent work being done – little of which is often recognised, much less reported on.

That's why I was particularly pleased that my first formal engagement in my new role was attending the Care Accolades just over a week ago. The sheer enthusiasm and professionalism of those involved in the various entries was evident. The examples of working together to achieve better outcomes, putting the person at the centre of services,

trying out innovative and interesting approaches and literally going that extra mile to help, were very impressive.

So I get the sense there is a great deal of good work being done by all of you. There is a great deal of professionalism and commitment. There is a willingness to move forward. There is a recognition of the need to work with others if people are to get the kind of help and support we would like for ourselves and our own families. And we need to build on all of this.

*Changing Lives* gives us a platform, direction and some mechanisms to help move forward. A question for all of us is how can we make sure this opportunity is seized upon and we increase the momentum?

How can you, the people who are already changing lives every day as you go about your business, move this forward?

What can you, and the rest of us do, to ensure you get the opportunity to influence, at local and national level?

I hope your input to the workshops this afternoon will help address some of these issues - as will the further development of Local Practitioners Forums.

But we have to be clear. Making the aspirations of *Changing Lives* a reality for those who deliver services, those who use services, and partners - can only happen if you and your colleagues make it so.

It's not about waiting for pearls of wisdom to be handed down from the Scottish Executive or the Change Programmes – though we will be looking to support you and put in place the frameworks and mechanisms to do so. It is about you - who shape, develop and actually engage in the conversations with individuals - taking this opportunity to challenge and influence policy and practice and help make a difference.

Recognising this, I'm very keen that our work at the centre has a focus on developing a workforce and support systems which are able to deliver good quality help and services for Scotland's people. Building a confident and competent workforce which is well led and managed seems key to me.

In addition to this, engaging with citizen's and putting people at the heart of services must be the basis of service design and delivery. Listening to, and acting on what people tell us they need to give them the best opportunities and outcomes – after all we are impacting on people's lives. And you clearly have a key role in this.

We must talk up good practice and performance while ruthlessly tackling bad practice and poor performance. Not by looking for someone to blame, but by learning from mistakes and giving people the space and support to do this.

I recognise this agenda involves a significant culture change for individuals, for leaders and managers, for organisations, for all of us – and this doesn't happen overnight. But we need to continue to work to increase the momentum of change and further improvement at all levels and across all the agencies we work with.

I hope you have a good event today and you go away keen to look at what you and your colleagues can do to help achieve the aspirations of *Changing Lives*. I look forward to working with you to help achieve this. Thank you.

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