

**NATIONAL PRACTITIONERS CONFERENCE
25 JUNE 2008
CARNEGIE CONFERENCE CENTRE, HALBEATH**

OPENING SPEECH BY ADAM INGRAM

Introduction

Good morning. It is hard to believe that it is almost exactly a year since I stood in this same spot in one of my earliest official engagements as Minister for Children and Early Years.

Since my appointment I have been privileged to find out more about the varied contributions that you all make across the social work services sector.

My first formal engagement as Minister for Children and Early Years was to attend the 2007 Care Accolades, and just under a fortnight ago I was fortunate enough to attend this year's event. It was a timely reminder of all the excellent work taking place and the skill, commitment, enthusiasm and creativity of people from across the sector in delivering a wide and varied range of excellent services.

Since that first engagement last year many of you here today have been involved in taking forward and implementing the recommendations of *Changing Lives*, which sets out a vision of the social work services we need for the 21st Century and the workforce that is needed to deliver that vision. As I said at last year's Conference – and have reiterated on a number of occasions since – this Government is committed to the aspirations of *Changing Lives*. I am pleased today to be able to highlight the work that is being taken forward by the Scottish Government – together with key partners from across the sector – to make those aspirations a reality.

However, let me first reflect on the strategic objectives of the Government and the key role of social work services in helping us to achieve those objectives.

Strategic Objectives

This time last year, I set out the Government's commitment to 5 strategic objectives. These are to create:

- A Scotland that is **Wealthier and Fairer** – enabling businesses and people to increase their wealth and allowing more people to share fairly in that wealth;
- A Scotland that is **Smarter** – with increased opportunities for Scots to succeed from nurture through to lifelong learning, ensuring greater and more widely shared achievements;
- A Scotland that is **Healthier** – helping people to sustain and improve their health, especially in disadvantaged communities, ensuring better, faster and local access to health care;
- A Scotland that is **Safer and Stronger** – helping local communities to flourish and become better places to live, offering improved opportunities and an enhanced quality of life; and
- A Scotland that is **Greener** – improving our natural and built environment and encouraging the sustainable use and enjoyment of it.

I am clear that social work services have a significant contribution to make to each of these objectives.

In striving to meet these objectives, we intend to deliver what we have articulated as the Government's Purpose – “to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth”.

Achieving both our Purpose and our Strategic Objectives will be challenging. However, by tackling these challenges with commitment and determination, we are confident we can create a country which all of Scotland's people are proud to call home.

Single Outcome Agreements

We are also clear that we as a Government cannot achieve this vision without the support of a range of partners from across the spectrum of Scottish society. Our commitment to partnership working is enshrined in the Concordat between the Scottish Government and CoSLA, and the move to Single Outcome Agreements. These developments represent a significant shift in the Scottish Government's relationships, not only with local authorities, but also with our other key partners from across the statutory and third sector. However, it is a move that is based on the belief that local authorities and their Community Planning Partners are in the best position to judge what is needed to improve outcomes for people living in their communities.

The Single Outcome Agreements require each of the 32 councils to set out the contribution they will make to the 15 national outcomes, based on local priorities in each council area, and expressed as specific local outcomes. Just as with the strategic objectives, I am absolutely clear that social work services have a vital role in delivering the national outcomes. Several of the national outcomes commit us to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable members of our society. Responding to these needs will require continued effort and commitment from everyone who works with vulnerable groups. I hope that everyone here today is clear about the important contribution that your work is making to the Government's strategic vision for Scotland.

Early Years Framework

One of the first demonstrations of this Government's determination to work together with our key partners was the publication of the Early Years Framework - a joint policy statement by the Scottish Government and CoSLA. As well as representing our commitment to a new way of working, the Early Years Framework also demonstrates the Government's belief in early intervention as a strategy for improving the lives of Scotland's people.

The Early Years Framework will be a central element of our approach to early intervention, not least because the early part of a child's life is a key opportunity to build resilience and seek to prevent the appearance of problems in later life.

Changing Lives

I believe that the same partnership approach behind the Early Years Framework will be needed as we continue to take forward the recommendations of *Changing Lives*. It is an agenda to which everyone here today can contribute and I would encourage you all to use today's event as an opportunity to consider how you make the aspirations of *Changing Lives* a reality in your day-to-day practice.

However, clearly there is a role for Government in putting in place the mechanisms and enablers that will allow change to happen. In keeping with our outcome-focussed approach, the work being taken forward at the national level, through the 5 Change groups, is focussed on the realisation of 2 key outcomes:

- Developing the capacity to deliver personalised services; and
- Building a confident, competent and valued workforce.

We believe these outcomes get to the heart of what we want to achieve with *Changing Lives*. You can expect to see a series of core products emerging from the Change Groups over the coming year, each contributing to one of these outcomes. One of the first of these products is the ‘Principles and Standards of Citizen Leadership’ paper recently published by the User and Carer Forum. Those of you who attended last year’s conference will recall the User and Carer Forum’s enjoyable presentation. I am sure you will be in for another engaging and thought-provoking contribution from the Forum later on today.

I will not go into detail now about each of the core products, as I know that will be the subject of another presentation during the course of the morning. However, I am clear that each product will make a useful contribution to delivering the aspirations of *Changing Lives*.

Throughout our work on *Changing Lives*, the Government will continue to engage with our strategic partners in ADSW, CoSLA and SOLACE and I am delighted that the President of ADSW, Alan Baird, will be providing the closing address to today’s conference.

However, for all the work being taken forward at the strategic level, I believe that we will only be truly successful in changing people's lives for the better, if change is also being driven forward at the local level, at the front line of service delivery. This is where you – as practitioners – have a key role to play. I know that there are already many examples of excellence in social work practice across Scotland – practice that is in keeping with the vision of social work services offered in *Changing Lives*. In these circumstances we must do more to share our experiences, so that users of services across the country can benefit from good ideas and effective practice.

I mentioned earlier that the capacity to deliver personalised services is one of the key outcomes we hope to achieve with *Changing Lives*. Today's conference will explore the theme of personalisation in more detail, but in essence, I believe personalisation means ensuring that users are fully involved in the assessment of their needs and the design of the services they receive. It strikes me that a great number of practitioners are already doing this, simply through the way in which they engage with service users, and in so doing are already helping to make *Changing Lives* a reality.

However, where barriers to good practice do exist, I would encourage you to contribute to finding the solutions that will overcome them. Local Practitioner Fora, where they have been established, offer one such mechanism for engaging in the debate, with their links into local managers and, at the national level, ADSW. However, there are many other ways in which you can resolve to share good practice and help find solutions to problems where they exist.

Conclusion

I want to finish by thanking you all for your continued commitment to delivering services to those who are often the most vulnerable members of our communities. I have been at pains today to stress just how important your contribution is to helping us achieve our strategic vision for Scotland. The job you do is vitally important and in thanking you for it, I also encourage you to continue to help change lives in a way that will make that vision a reality.

I wish you an enjoyable and successful conference. Thank you.

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