Dear Jane

GETTING IT RIGHT FOR CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

Thank you for sending us the Public Audit Committee’s 3rd report 2011, *Getting it right for children in residential care*, which we read with interest.

We have now considered the Committee’s findings and are pleased to attach our response.

Yours sincerely,

Leslie Evans
Information on outcomes

The Committee requests that the Scottish Government provide information on how it proposes to share with service providers any trends identified in the individualised data and when it anticipates completing any work on linking individualised data to other systems (paragraph 22).

The Scottish Government publishes trends identified from the individualised looked after children returns in its annual Statistical Publication Notices, and accompanying tables. We are currently aiming to publish baseline results on the educational outcomes for looked after children in June 2011 (as set out in the New Reporting Framework published by the Scottish Government in September 2009: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/16092427/0). This work involves linking the necessary 2009-10 individual looked after children data to 2009-10 academic year data provided by schools, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

Work is also commencing as a matter of priority on how we might link individual looked after children data to other systems (e.g. health) for statistical and research purposes only. We would be happy to keep the Committee informed as this important work progresses.

The Committee would also seek an update from the Scottish Government on when the outcomes of the strategic implementation working groups will be known and how this information will then lead to better outcomes for looked after children (paragraph 23).

The Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG) was set up to lead and drive forward an implementation programme to improve outcomes for all looked after children and young people in Scotland. The group, which is made up of senior stakeholders from across children’s services, aims to represent and engage with all those who have responsibility for looked after children.

Regular updates on the work of the Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG), and the working groups - the ‘activity hubs’ - are provided through our LACSIG portal on the website of the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care at http://www.sircc.org.uk/lacsig.

Examples of work planned and underway are briefly set out below, with further examples throughout the document:

- The commissioning activity hub has organised five strategic commissioning events during May and June 2011 in Inverness, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow. These events – which aim to encourage and challenge participants – will help those involved in the commissioning of children’s services to gain a clear understanding of what is meant by strategic commissioning; to share learning; and identify and tackle constraints. They will also inform the work programme, which at present includes the development of national contracts for fostering and residential care.
- The care planning activity hub has recently pinpointed a range of systemic issues which contribute to delays in providing young people in care with a permanent home. This work has informed a pilot a programme in Fife Council social work department to improve long term planning for looked after children and speed up decision making. We
would expect to see demonstrable improvements in care planning systems during 2011-12 and early evidence of impact during 2012-13.

- The workforce activity hub is leading efforts to improve the experiences of looked after children and young people through supporting and developing the workforce. The hub is coordinating awareness-raising efforts with relevant stakeholders to ensure that residential childcare workers meet minimum qualification thresholds by September 2012. As a result, qualification rates are gradually improving and there are systems in place that enable progress to be regularly measured.

Above all, the impact of LACSIG will be felt through demonstrative change across the sector and, over time, improved outcomes for looked after children. Our newly launched centre for excellence for looked after children will have an important role to play in identifying best practice and sharing the lessons learned in the activity hubs so that practice on the ground can be improved.

**Improving outcomes**

The Committee notes the work of the Scottish Government through its universal programmes such as the Early Years Framework and GIRFEC. However, it would welcome information from the Scottish Government on how these programmes will specifically target and benefit looked after children (paragraph 36).

*Getting it right for every child* is at the very heart of our approach to improving outcomes for looked after children to ensure the particular needs and interests of looked after children and young people and care leavers are represented. Most recently, the Corporate Parenting National Training Programme is aimed at corporate parents across public services with a focus on the needs of the individual as the driver for decisions about each child in their care.

The *Early Years Framework* sets out a radical vision for transformational change in and through early years. Underpinning this vision is the principle of early intervention – a shift away from crisis interventions when a child is older, towards identifying early where parents may need intensive support, and providing this support before problems become crises. In some cases, this support may be required at the pre-natal stage.

One of the main themes of the *Early Years Framework* is building parenting and family capacity. Looked after children benefit in a number of ways when families experiencing difficulties are identified early; intervention is swift and effective; and babies and young children in particular are protected from ‘stressors’. These issues have prompted work to ensure social workers and other professionals have the appropriate knowledge and skills (note, for example, activity by the workforce and care planning activity hubs and the consultation on children and families common core of skills, launched 15 March 2011). We have begun to see evidence of the impact of the *Early Years Framework* through the recently published Children Looked After Statistics (2009-10), which show that fewer children are coming into care and the average age of those children is falling.

Our new centre for excellence for looked after children will promote more actively at local level the early years approach and will see its entire work programme assessed by reference to the *Getting it right for every child* SHANARRI wellbeing indicators.
The Committee would also welcome an update on when the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) will begin carrying out strategic inspections and how the outcomes from such inspections will be monitored and then shared with the agencies involved (paragraph 37).

The new scrutiny body, Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS), will be established on 1 April 2011. During SCSWIS’ first year, inspection activity will be balanced across:

- inspection of **regulated care services** and scrutiny of the performance of large scale providers of care services, including local authorities;
- **completion of joint inspections** of services to protect children;
- inspection of **social work services** and corporate social work functions; and
- **thematic and issue focused scrutiny** activity in line with the national risk priorities and policy drivers, delivering this with an approach based on problem identification and problem solving.

The principal objectives for the new children’s services inspections are:

- To support the **development of robust, evidence based performance management systems** for self-evaluation and continuous improvements in children’s services and to ensure alignment and coherence;
- To **provide, proportionate to risk and being intelligence-led, evidence-based information** to support improvements in practice and development of policy;
- To provide a **child-centred scrutiny** and improvement system which recognises that a single child may receive services provided by a range of different agencies and organisations in line with the core components and wellbeing indicators of *Getting it right for every child*; and
- To consider the **contribution that the current children service scrutiny systems can add** to the process.

The outcome of inspections and how they are communicated to relevant agencies is subject to further work in July 2011 (see table) as part of the development of the inspection policy framework.

**Timescales for SCSWIS are set out below:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>SCSWIS launches and takes over the remainder of the second cycle of child protection inspections from HMIE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Scottish Government establishes working group to produce national statistical framework based on wellbeing Indicators and review/map performance management quality and capacity across different local areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Scottish Government explores scope for an ‘improvement club’ among leading GIRFEC and other areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Scottish Government, in collaboration with scrutiny bodies, identifies what the system will cover; setting out the policy framework and specifying the required outcomes in terms of information gathering and policy implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2011 to end 2011</td>
<td>SCSWIS and other scrutiny bodies develop an agreed approach to inspection, including arrangements for verified self-evaluation with input from Scottish Government and stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2012</td>
<td>Scottish Government completes initial work on engagement with chief officers</td>
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By March 2012
Commence pilot of children’s services, scrutiny and improvement system

During 2012
Launch of children’s services, scrutiny and improvement system

Given the comments of witnesses that better corporate parenting can drive better outcomes for looked after children, the Committee requests an update from the Scottish Government on how it intends to improve the uptake of the corporate parent training course and ensure councils have a corporate parenting policy (paragraph 39).

The Scottish Government has been proactive in generating uptake for the Corporate Parenting National Training Programme. The Minister for Children and Early Years wrote to elected members in December 2010 encouraging them to attend a training session in their area. The letter highlighted that the training “will enable councillors to be better able to hold their executive team to account, to challenge decisions, introduce new ideas and drive change themselves using the corporate parenting approach to positively influence outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers”.

A similar letter signed jointly by the Minister for Public Health and Sport and the Minister for Children and Early Years was issued to NHS board chairs in February 2011 to encourage take-up by health boards.

The Minister for Children and Early Years has recently written to local authority chief executives following the publication of the Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) 2009-10. The letter reminded local authorities of their duties as corporate parents and set out the support the Scottish Government can offer in helping meet those obligations, including this training. This is being followed up by a seminar for heads of service.

These combined efforts have resulted in increased take-up of the training, as set out below:

- Aberdeen City: 16 elected members; one officer
- Dundee City: 10 elected members; one NHS health board member; three directors, seven other community planning partners
- East Ayrshire: 14 elected members; three officers
- East Lothian: seven elected members; four officers
- Edinburgh: 12 elected members; one NHS health board member (31 attendees in total)
- Falkirk: 12 elected members (34 attendees in total, including Provost and chief executive)
- Midlothian: seven elected members; 11 heads of service; three directors; two officers
- Renfrewshire: eight elected members; all others were community planning partners (total of 31 attendees, including chief executive)
- Scottish Borders: 11 elected members; three NHS health board members (50+ attendees in total)
- Shetland Islands: 20 elected members; eight officers
- Stirling: 10 elected members; two officers

The Committee also recommends that responsibility for and the promotion of policies which deliver better outcomes for looked after children should be embedded across the Scottish Government (paragraph 40).

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation. The issues relating to improving outcomes for looked after children extend beyond social work and children’s services.
In terms of key policy areas, providing the right choices and chances for all young people, including looked after children, is central to Curriculum for Excellence. Our More Choices, More Chances strategy is about ensuring the learning and wider support system delivers better outcomes for those young people such as care leavers who may be at risk of moving into a negative destination after school.

We have put in place new measures to improve educational attainment through the Additional Support for Learning Act and we are working to ensure that our major employment and training interventions continue to prioritise looked after young people and care leavers. Specifically, we are:

- supporting local delivery of 16+ Learning Choices to ensure every young person has an offer of post-16 learning and the support they need to progress to positive and sustained destinations. For looked after young people and care leavers, this will often require focused and timely support;
- supporting local authorities and community planning partners, as good corporate parents, to develop employability opportunities to support progression to positive destinations (Our Family Firm: A Working Framework for Community Planning Partners and Employers was circulated to corporate parent lead officers in February 2011);
- working with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and local authorities to improve the gathering, sharing and use of data on young people and their learning choices. A 16+ Learning Choices data hub is being developed to ensure that looked after young people and care leavers are prioritised (the 16+ Learning Choices data hub is expected to go live in autumn 2011; the data sharing pilot between social work and SDS will report in summer 2011);
- supporting Skills Development Scotland to improve their services for looked after young people and care leavers, including incentives for employers who recruit a modern apprentice who has experience of being looked after (evidence of impact will be available during 2011-12).

We have embedded the health needs of looked after children and care leavers in a whole range of health policies and initiatives:

- In February 2011, we announced new nutritional guidelines to improve the health of children in residential care.
- We are continuing to highlight to NHS board chief executives their responsibilities for looked after children and young people and care leavers (CEL 16, 2009). An important part of the action required by CEL 16 is to ensure that all looked after children have improved access to universal services.
- We are currently working with NHS boards and secure care providers to facilitate the implementation of the Local Enhanced Service (this sets out the duties of NHS boards to looked after children in secure units).
- As part of our work to encourage NHS boards to follow GIRFEC principles (CEL 29), we have agreed to take forward work around the early years of vulnerable children.
- We have also seen significant growth in the provision of basic mental health training for residential childcare staff in accordance with commitment 10 of Delivering for Mental Health (2006).

We have embedded the principles of Getting it right for every child in our youth justice policy, ensuring that young people who offend, or who are at risk of offending, get the help they need when they need it, based on their individual circumstances. This will ensure that the specific needs of looked after young people are taken into account by agencies considering how to respond to offending behaviour.
The Minister for Housing and Communities established a short-life cross sector working group to provide recommendations to the Scottish Government on the development of a network of supported accommodation for those at risk of homelessness across Scotland. Over the last year, officials from Care and Justice Division have participated in the working group, highlighting housing and homelessness issues for looked after children and care leavers. A final report from the working group is due to be published in March 2011.

We will continue to promote the need to improve outcomes for looked after children and will ensure policy is embedded consistently and informs practice across Scotland. Since Scottish Government officials appeared before the committee in December, the Scottish Government has been restructured, with the Accountable Officer for Education now also having responsibility for Justice issues. This will help ensure that these issues are embedded across the Scottish Government.

The Committee would welcome confirmation from the Scottish Government of when its throughcare and aftercare programme will be implemented and how the outcomes from this programme will be monitored (paragraph 46).

Work on the throughcare and aftercare improvement programme began in September 2010 and will run for two years. The work is split into three distinct stages:

- Preparation/scoping – initial contact with local authorities, health boards and other partners (this phase is due to finish in April 2011);
- Development of planned work and resources and delivery of bilateral support (April to Dec 2011);
- Learning from stage two; evaluation; sharing of information to inform strategic planning (Jan to Sep 2012).
- Final evaluation by Mar 2013.

Ongoing monitoring of the programme will take place on a quarterly basis, through a reporting framework and governance meetings. An independent evaluation will be carried out to measure the impact of the programme.

The Committee requests information from the Scottish Government on how it is supporting other councils, health boards and service providers to work together collaboratively in commissioning care (paragraph 69).

Following the publication of the National Residential Child Care Initiative’s commissioning report in December 2009, we acted swiftly to establish a Children’s Services National Commissioning Steering Group. This brought purchasers and providers of care around the same table for the first time. Its aim was to drive strategic commissioning of specialist residential services for children and young people, with an initial focus on secure care.

The steering group worked collaboratively to produce a service specification for secure care that has outcomes for looked after children at its heart. After a year of intensive work and engagement, Scotland Excel has now issued a contract on behalf of the Scottish Government and local authorities by way of a competitive tender process. The advert for the contract appeared on the Public Contracts Scotland website on 18 February 2011.

We are committed to promoting strategic commissioning across a whole range of children’s services and have set up a commissioning activity hub as part of the Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group to lead and drive forward change. The hub, whose remit is
steered by the NRCCI recommendations and Audit Scotland’s *Getting it right for children in residential care* report, brings together councils, care providers, health representatives, regulators and policy makers. It will continue the work started by the steering group.

The Scottish Government also funds a national commissioning officer for children’s services (based at COSLA) and a regional childcare commissioning officer (in Renfrewshire Council) to promote and encourage collaborative approaches to commissioning. As stated above, we are also running a number of regional workshops on strategic commissioning to share learning on these approaches. Our newly launched centre for excellence for looked after children will collate good practice from authorities adopting a strategic commissioning approach and will share relevant learning with other authorities over 2011-12 and 2012-13.

**The Committee would welcome an update from the Scottish Government on the outcome of the tendering process for the national contract for secure residential care (paragraph 71).**

As indicated above, final negotiations between COSLA and Scotland Excel on the tender have concluded and the contract notice issued on 18 February 2011, inviting expressions of interest from providers by 4 March 2011 for a process likely to culminate later this summer.

The Committee notes evidence from Renfrewshire Council stating its “Achieving step change in children’s outcomes” project may be able to be utilised nationally if it can be delivered successfully in one location. **The Committee would seek further information from the Scottish Government on how it proposes to monitor the outcome of this project (paragraph 72).**

The Scottish Government does not fund this particular project: it is funded by Renfrewshire Council with a grant from the Big Lottery. However, because it is an innovative project with a focus on prevention and early intervention, officials have remained in contact with Renfrewshire Council to see what can be learned from it. Karen Nowland, the regional childcare commissioning officer at Renfrewshire Council, is a member of the commissioning activity hub and her involvement will ensure that relevant learning from Renfrewshire’s project, and from the Clyde Valley councils’ approach to regional commissioning, is disseminated more widely.

**Cost and quality of services**

The Committee is very concerned that the expenditure on looked after children has significantly increased despite the number of looked after children remaining relatively steady. This level of expenditure will become increasingly difficult to sustain given the financial pressures facing local authorities. **The Committee notes that savings can be achieved through the work being carried out at a national level, and therefore recommends that the Scottish Government deliver the outcomes of this work as quickly as possible (paragraphs 80 and 81).**

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation in part and would like to make an important distinction. While numbers in residential care are declining, the number of looked after children has increased every year since 2001, and is at its highest since 1982. The factors driving increased costs in the residential sector are that more children with complex needs are entering residential care and require more specialist interventions; and there is an absence of strategic planning.
The Scottish Government is well aware of the urgent need for more effective commissioning of children’s services. That is why the LACSIG commissioning activity hub has an ambitious programme of work that includes promoting national and regional commissioning approaches; improving local authorities’ access to tools and support; improving understanding of what is meant by strategic commissioning and its benefits; and encouraging the sharing of contract templates to reduce duplication of effort. The hub’s role is to ensure a steady pace is maintained with commissioning activities across the looked after sector.

Work on national commissioning of secure care services is well underway and we are establishing a subgroup to monitor the effectiveness of the contract to ensure it continues to deliver both improved outcomes and value for money. It will take time before councils achieve real savings. However, we have confidence that strategic commissioning will result in more effective delivery of services. Consequently, the commissioning activity hub is now considering other high cost, low volume services that can be commissioned nationally; as well as services that would be more appropriately commissioned on a regional or local basis.

The hub is also considering the roll-out of recently completed good practice commissioning guidance on foster care. The guidance was funded by the Scottish Government and is a joint effort by the Fostering Network and Scotland Excel. The hub intends to pilot the guidance with a handful of councils before promoting it more widely. This has the potential to improve value for money and lead to better, child-centred, commissioning.

**Value for money**

The Committee invites an update from the Scottish Government on the evaluation of the Loughborough University model including any proposals for a pilot of the model. The Committee would also welcome an update on how the Scottish Government aims to monitor the outcomes of the model (paragraph 91).

Since the committee session in December we have considered both the Loughborough University model and another costing model developed by Jennifer Beecham at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Should Loughborough prove to be practicable for use in Scotland, implementation with links to the Children Looked After Statistical return would take until February 2014, with evaluation being possible by the end of 2013-14.

Given the time needed to implement the Loughborough model, we are exploring the Beecham model as an interim measure. This is a more targeted model which is simpler and may be easier to implement and this should help secure earlier results. More work is needed to establish the requirements of both models and the outcome of any piloting work would be subject to normal procurement rules.

**Given this model is still being evaluated, the Committee would request information from the Scottish Government on what other ways it proposes to support councils to better understand and identify the full costs of care they provide (paragraph 92).**

As highlighted above, initial scoping work would suggest that the Beecham model may be simpler to implement. The strategic commissioning workshops we are facilitating during the summer will allow us to hear how council officers are currently identifying and managing childcare costs. Our new centre for excellence will have a role in sharing more widely any innovative practice and lessons learned.
Early intervention/preventative measures

Given the current financial climate, the Committee requests information from the Scottish Government on how it aims to support public services to deliver programmes aimed at preventing children going into care whilst also meeting the costs of those children already in care (paragraph 102).

The long-term benefits of effective interventions in early years should include a reduction in future in numbers of children requiring costly interventions by local authorities. A recent economic modelling study produced by Scottish Government analysts showed short term savings of investing in effective early years services could be up to £37k per annum per child in the case of children who have complex health and social care needs, and that failure to intervene effectively could result in a ninefold increase in costs to the public purse in the long term. Further modelling work is being published shortly.

In social terms, the long-term aim of effective interventions in early years is to build the capacity of parents to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for their children without the need for support services, including local authority care. There is a wealth of work ongoing in local authorities across Scotland to implement parenting strategies and programmes in support of this aim.

International comparisons

The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Scottish Government looks at international models for residential child care to identify those which are delivering successful outcomes. This would then enable benchmarking against the outcomes of existing care models in Scotland to identify whether services can be improved (paragraph 112).

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation in part. We agree that much can be learned by looking at other models, particularly where other countries report positive results.

However, countries vary widely in their welfare systems, in the systems of residential care and how they are used. This makes direct comparison a challenge. Initial investigations have shown that it would not be possible to carry out a research project directly comparing costs and outcomes of residential care for children for a number of reasons:

- Other countries do not publish accessible costs of services, and it would not be easy to gain access to figures and interpret them without a research partner in the relevant country.
- Similarly, when it comes to outcomes; other countries do not necessarily have similar frameworks and may not use the term ‘outcomes’. To extract such data and put together a report on outcomes resulting from a particular system would necessitate the help of a partner in another country.
- Conducting such an inquiry would require significant time and resources and may not produce useful results.

An alternative approach being explored with our centre for excellence and which may deliver comparative information is that we host an international seminar in Scotland. The proposal is that we invite colleagues from various countries as a means of learning from them and making comparisons. Our centre for excellence already has established contacts in Denmark, Netherlands and Germany, where the social pedagogy system is used and which offers significant scope for learning.
Secure care

The Committee therefore seeks further information from the Scottish Government on how it is supporting local authorities and other service providers to develop and deliver alternative approaches to secure care (paragraph 122).

The Scottish Government’s Young People Who Offend project, which is part of the Reducing Reoffending Programme and Youth Justice Strategy, is producing guidance for local authorities and community planning partnerships on alternatives to secure care and custody. This guidance recommends that alternative credible services that meet the specific needs of young people should always be available to decision makers as alternatives to secure care and custody.

To support local authorities to implement this guidance, the Scottish Government has introduced pilot schemes in various local authorities with high secure care usage to offer alternative services. These schemes have been in operation for the past year and will be evaluated upon completion in March 2011. Continued sustainability was built into these schemes to ensure that they continue to be offered.

The Scottish Government is also supporting implementation of the ‘whole system approach’. This is an approach to improve all services for young people involved in offending behaviour and specifically tackles the issue of secure care and the need for alternatives services to be offered. Nine local authorities are currently at different stages of implementing this approach, with the direct support of the Scottish Government.

The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government encourages further debate on how best to support vulnerable children and young people with complex needs (paragraph 123).

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

We would wish to highlight a number of areas of work which are underway to support vulnerable children and young people with complex needs.

- As part of the whole system approach, which encourages a more streamlined and consistent response to young people who offend (under 18 year olds) that works across all systems and agencies, local authorities are being supported and encouraged to meet the specific needs of young people with complex needs who are involved in offending. By following the GIRFEC approach, local authorities are being encouraged to provide individualised packages of care to meet the differing and specific needs of young people. Meeting the individualised and complex needs of young people is included within the guidance produced by the young people who offend project. This includes within the community, prison environment and upon return to the community from secure care or prison.

- The Scottish Government is hosting a practice improvement event, Celebrating Success in Residential Childcare, in Glasgow on 22 March 2011. This event has attracted delegates from across the residential care, social work, health and education fields and provides an excellent opportunity for practitioners to share ideas and innovative practice, particularly on how best to support those with the most complex needs such as young people in residential care.
In partnership with COSLA and For Scotland’s Disabled Children (fSDC) coalition, the Scottish Government published a national review of services for disabled children at the end of February 2011. The review was a much needed piece of work, and ranged widely across the landscape of children’s disability. It contains a detailed strategic assessment of services for disabled children as well as children and families’ experiences of them, and concludes with seven top-level principles for action to which the three lead partners subscribe, as well as 15 significant points for action.

The principles include creating a single system for the delivery of flexible child-centred services within the Getting it right for every child model, and fully engaging with young people in taking forward actions in the review. The actions include investing an additional £2m in short breaks for families; piloting the fSDC charter for Scotland’s disabled children; developing a practice briefing demonstrating how the Getting it right approach applies to disabled children; and embedding disability issues in a range of other work such as child poverty and self-directed support.