

# Making It Better Argyll and Bute Children and Families Event



**governance**  
*international*<sup>®</sup>  
Achieving citizen outcomes

# Executive Summary

This report sets out the results from a day of information sharing, thought-provoking discussions and joint planning for the future of Children and Families Services in Argyll and Bute in May 2011, bringing together Argyll and Bute Council, ABSEN, Carnegie UK and over 26 providers of Children and Families Services in the area.

## Priorities for change identified by participants

One of the strongest messages from the group was that they would like to see funding which lasted for more than one year – contracts for 2 or 3 years would enable improved internal planning and greater efficiency, reduce stress, lighten the paperwork burden on staff and provide more security and stability to third sector organisations. Council staff made the point, however, that this would mean that funding decisions, once taken, would not be revisited for several years, with potential severe consequences for third sector organisations not funded the first time round.

Participants were also strongly in favour of moving the application process on-line, with electronic signatures. This would eliminate duplication, save on copying, and provide a portal for all departments to access applications.. It was suggested that the electronic applications process and the application forms should be co-designed by the Council and local organisations.

Participants recommended creation of a central database, which would allow applicants to input and regularly update, information about their organisations, and which all grant providers could access, so that applicants did not have to provide this several times in different formats. An integrated system of information sharing between social work and health was especially stressed.

Local organisations also stressed the importance of getting both their grant notification and (some at least of) their funding before the year starts.

Participants believed the Council should listen to local organisations and value their services – it was felt that the voluntary sector and people who use services do not currently have an effective voice. The Council should visit staff and service users before making funding decisions, to identify services potentially available and service priorities.

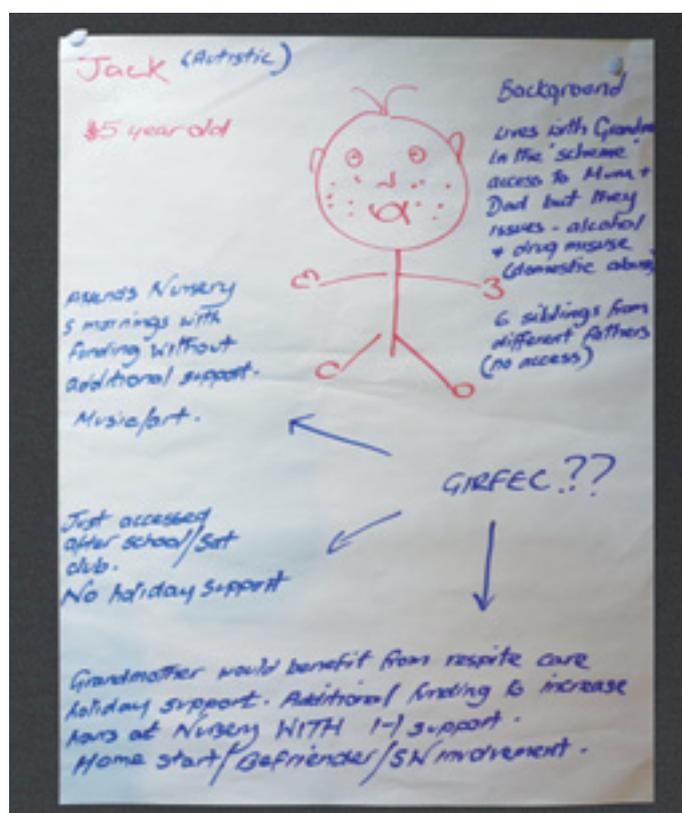
## Handling the reduction of funding from the Council

Participants considered how the funding reduction might be handled. They suggested:

- ▮ streamlining and restructuring of services within organisations;
- ▮ reprioritising by local organisations of their own needs and targets;
- ▮ applying for alternative sources of funding.

They also considered possible non-financial support from the Council to the organisations, including:

- ▮ working in partnership to share knowledge, skills, and resources, and keep money in the local economy;
- ▮ considering possible mergers between similar organisations to create synergy;
- ▮ creating better links to the development trusts that exist in Argyll and Bute;
- ▮ utilising the community more, e.g. through time banks, social enterprises and client-led delivery.



To improve working with the Council, participants asked for:

- l a named contact;
- l training and development opportunities;
- l better cross departmental communication;
- l cost effective use of premises and vehicles;
- l better communication, particularly through ICT, e.g. Skype or video conferencing.

### Setting criteria for deciding who to fund

Participants suggested the following criteria:

- l implementation of 'Getting it right for every child' principles;
- l the service needs to be financially viable and meet a recognised need for the service;
- l fit with Argyll and Bute's overall strategy (balancing critical needs with responsive/preventative services);
- l providing clear and consistent outcomes that the Council agrees with the organisation and its users;
- l client feedback information should be requested and reported;
- l 'level four' rating and above in SCSWIS inspection reports, to demonstrate quality;
- l employment and community sustainability impacts in rural areas from funding decisions.

### What practical steps can the council take?

Suggestions included:

- l 'co-production' by November 2011 of a new system for funding applications, including funding criteria;
- l considering people who use services and carers throughout the whole process;
- l better communications and more listening to providers, including regular updating and asking for views;
- l a streamlined data collection process and development of a central database;
- l one contract or service level agreement per organisation;
- l regular discussions with third sector organisations on a local or thematic basis to look at improved

co-ordination or potential mergers and to disseminate best practice throughout Argyll and Bute;

- l exploring possibilities of using new media like video conferencing to enable cost effective engagement;
- l demonstrating mutual honesty and respect at all times, including the Council working together with local organisations so that they can harness each other's experience and resources;
- l following its review, the Council should make tough decisions to save money and prioritise spending.

### What should local organisations do, moving forward?

Participants suggested:

- l renewed efforts to build positive relationships and regular dialogue with similar local organisations to share expertise, facilities, and resources;
- l recruiting more volunteers to assist in the delivery of services;
- l reducing third sector dependence on Council funding and developing private or social enterprise models.



## Commitments made

Mark Lines said it had become clear that groups can work together better, and that ABLSI partners can provide a brokerage role for this. Moving forward, it will be important to continue to have meetings with representative groups of people and third sector organisations, to inform the Council's work. He committed to widen the groups involved in the consultation process, to include both those groups not currently receiving funding and also children and young people, emphasising that their experiences could inform service priorities. He also made a commitment to a 'clearer, simpler, more transparent and better information flow'. Mark committed to create a working group on changes that should be made to the application process, with a meeting in the autumn to take this forward.

Mark Lines concluded by saying he hoped to have developed a revised system by 1 April 2012, so that by this date third sector groups:

- would know about their funding;
- would know the requirements attached to their funding;
- wouldn't face problems of having to duplicate documents; and
- would have a 'clearer, simpler, more transparent and better information flow'.

ABSEN suggested that this approach should be taken by other departments in Argyll and Bute Council. ABSEN would support the working groups in this engagement process, e.g. by helping with expenses, where appropriate.

## ... and finally

The evaluations of the event by participants (average score: 8.9 out of 10) highlighted the 'open honest discussion', which was 'very interactive' and that 'really got into the issues'. All but two attendees indicated that they wanted to continue to be involved in the consultation. Participant responses made it clear they were pleased that the Council was consulting their organisation but also that they wanted feedback and actions as a result of the discussions.



## Making it Better, Argyll and Bute Children and Families event: Full report

This report sets out the results from a day of information sharing, thought-provoking discussions and joint planning for the future of Children and Families Services in Argyll and Bute in May 2011. *Governance International* was commissioned to provide independent facilitation for this innovative partnership event with Argyll and Bute Council, ABSSEN, Carnegie UK and over 26 providers of Children and Families Services in the area

The Argyll and Bute Children and Families Service directly provides or commissions support, protection and care for vulnerable children, young people and their families. The Council identified a need to change the way its services are delivered and therefore commissioned a one day consultation event to give providers of services – predominantly third sector organisations – the opportunity to explore how services might be delivered in the future. Two of the key areas for discussion were to debate how commissioners and providers might work in closer partnership and to develop a new grant allocation system which will be more appropriate for an era of collaborative working.

### Starting points

The day began with an introduction by Elke Loeffler, Chief Executive of *Governance International*, a social enterprise with international expertise in achieving citizen outcomes. Elke introduced the *Governance International* team and provided an overview of how the day would run.

James Hilder, Chair of ABSSEN, an umbrella organisation, which works to emphasize the important role that social enterprises can play in the Argyll and Bute area and the dividends they can provide in the community, welcomed participants and encouraged them to view the consultation event as an opportunity directly to influence discussions about how to tackle the problems of reduced funding facing everyone in the room. He emphasised that the engagement with Argyll and Bute Council was 'pushing at an open door', as the Council had flagged up its' commitment to actively listening to the views of participants.

### What are the messages from the Children and Families Service Review?

Mark Lines, Service Manager, Children and Families Service, provided the context for why the consultation was taking place. He explained that there is a major reduction in Council funding, with service reviews tasked with identifying 15 percent savings immediately, and further major savings having to be found in future years. From the Children and Families Services budget of £12.4 million, this amounted to a £1.86 million savings requirement. To identify how to make this large scale saving, Argyll and Bute Council undertook a systematic review of the work that it does. This involved reflecting on all the Children and Families services that are provided, asking challenging questions, such as: Why are they provided? What would happen if they weren't provided? And could other groups help provide these services?

The service review identified that over £5 million pounds per annum. is spent on children in care. This is spent on homes, fostering, respite care, and other services. At a time when costs need to be reduced there are increasing numbers of children coming into



care nationally (29% increase in spending across Scotland) and the costs of care are increasing above inflation. Mark also highlighted the fact that the Council has statutory requirements to provide certain services, and in these areas the Council often doesn't have as much opportunity to control costs.

Within Argyll and Bute the increased need for and use of Children and Families services can be caused by a wide range of factors – often involving parental drug and alcohol misuse, coupled with parental mental health, poor parenting capacity, domestic violence, or resistance to support.

Mark indicated that the Council in common with others across Scotland has seen increasing numbers of children coming into care following from the Baby Peter and other high profile concerns as well as increasing numbers of older children whose behaviour placed themselves at risk. Agencies are getting better at identifying and responding to concerns earlier. The Council is aware of the importance of reaching vulnerable children early, so that it can prevent or reduce behaviours likely to lead to future problems.

Within the Children and Families Services, the Council has outlined short-, medium- and long-term priorities. Short-term priorities are based around meeting the needs of children currently being looked after, and securing long term stable futures for these children, either at home with support, through kinship care, or moving to alternative families. Medium term priorities are aimed at developing the capacity of the local authority, and the community to meet more children's needs in the community. This would involve developing the Council's ability to manage risk. It is important to the Council that it improves its capability in supporting challenging behaviours in the community by meeting their needs and keeping them in the community. The Council is also seeking to improve interagency responses to vulnerable children and their families by ensuring that the Council engages more effectively with its partners. The long-term priorities for the Council were to improve prevention through effective targeted early interventions. Other priorities included working to extend targeted activity by universal services, like education and health and balancing statutory duties with a commitment to preventative approaches, within a context of having to make major cost savings.

Anne Paterson, Quality Improvement Manager, who has overall responsibility for Argyll and Bute's Early Years Service, outlined the Early Years Framework, published by the Scottish Government in 2008. The framework highlights that from pre-birth throughout the transition to primary education, the environment

that children experience has an impact upon the outcomes they achieve throughout their lives. The framework stresses the impact of targeted interventions, where appropriate, to ensure that children's outcomes are not jeopardised. The early years work is based around four themes. They are:

- Building parental and family capacity pre and post birth.
- Creating communities that provide a supportive environment for children and families.
- Delivering integrated services that meet holistic needs.
- Developing a sustainable workforce to support delivery of the framework.

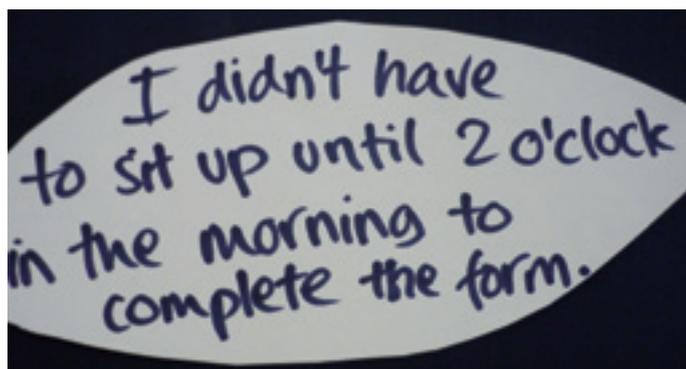
In Argyll and Bute the Early Years Service has an important standing. The Council has developed an integrated service which was informed by three priorities:

- Quality of service
- Engagement of all actors involved with a child receiving support.
- Prevention to stop children being a problem to the community in their late teens and early adulthood.

The Council provided over £650,000 in funding to third sector organisations in Argyll and Bute in 2010-2011. Funding is distributed through various mechanisms and 9 budget streams

The Council decided there would be a 15 percent cut in overall grant funding over the next 3 years. The state of future funding levels for the third sector is unclear, and any new system developed would have to be able to cope with further funding reductions in the





## Raising the sights: Identifying potential ways forward from experience elsewhere

Professor Tony Bovaird of *Governance International* and the University of Birmingham outlined how the Council and local organisations in Argyll and Bute could learn lessons from elsewhere in order to find interesting and radically new ways forward.

Budgetary pressures now mean that it is time to create real partnerships. This could take many different forms – for example, it would often involve improved co-operation between the Council, citizens and third sector organisations. However, it was also important that third sector organisations learnt to work more closely in partnership with each other, e.g. through sharing services and resources or through joining up services to make a more attractive offer to citizens.

A critically important opportunity now facing all the commissioners and service providers in Argyll and Bute was co-production of outcomes with users and communities. This usually requires support and mobilisation through third sector organisations but vitally depends on the Council and other public agencies being open to harnessing the vital contributions which users and communities can make. It involves the Council and other public agencies being prepared to change the relationship between themselves, their communities and the people using services. Co-production involves the use of society's resources – not just resources provided by the public sector, to improve the effectiveness of public services and quality

future. In this climate of uncertainty the Council emphasized that it was keen to improve its relationship with its partners to ensure the most effective support. Mark and Anne drew particular attention to several issues that were highlighted in the service review, including:

- the current application process with multiple mechanisms and budget streams is inefficient and liable to cause confusion;
- currently funding allocations and Service Level Agreements have been liable to emphasise activity at the expense of outcomes;
- the current system has not always ensured best value, benefit or impact for service priorities;
- funding priorities have not been systematically reviewed to ensure alignment to changing priorities;
- supporting new services from limited funding – funding tends to be allocated on a yearly basis to a similar range of groups and organisations. The Council is keen to explore how its funding system is able to facilitate innovative or new initiatives.

To address these issues the Council aims to develop a new approach in time for the April 2012 funding process. This new approach would involve: a streamlined and efficient grant application and assessment process; funding provision aligned to service priorities; a greater outcomes focus; services being personalised to circumstances and needs.

The Council made it clear that it would not simply dictate this new approach. Instead Mark Lines emphasized that he wanted to engage with groups to explore together the best way forward to meet these outcomes. Indeed, this event had been organised with the express intention of helping to devise a new way of delivering services and allocating resources. It is part of an early consultation process, with a number of events designed to allow groups and individuals to be more closely involved in the decision making process.



of life for all citizens. Often service users know many things professionals do not and are prepared to devote time and energy to improving outcomes, in ways that can help services to become more efficient. This is often also true of their families, friends, communities and possibly their carers.

Co-production is different from traditional public service provision because it:

- sees service users as asset-holders and active service creators, not simply submissive consumers;
- promotes a cooperative rather than paternalistic relationship between service providers and users;
- improves quality of life by aiming to provide outcomes that citizens have prioritised, rather than simply service outputs valued by managers and professionals

Co-production involves active involvement by people who use services and by their communities in:

- **co-commissioning**, which means supporting people who use services and other citizens to help in prioritising services – this comes naturally to people who have individual budgets but can also be achieved by giving children and young people a voice in setting priorities in services which affect them and in ‘participatory budgeting’ approaches
- **co-design**, which involves changing how services

- are designed by bringing in user involvement right at the start of service design rather than at the end. Using co-design, public authorities see the public service experience from the point of view of users and communities. This means: services are personalised to be delivered in the most convenient way; quality of life is improved by tackling the problems that people most care about; public agencies are presented with a wider range of innovative practice to use; and costs are reduced by cutting services that services users don’t value.
- **co-delivery**, which gives people who use services and other citizens an important role in actually carrying out the service (e.g. peer support networks, self-managed conditions, etc.)
- **co-assessment**, which gives people who use services, carers and other citizens a major say in the monitoring and evaluation of how services contribute to outcomes.

Each of these elements of co-production already exists in almost all public agencies – but they have not typically been identified, systematically managed and made the most of, in order to improve outcomes and to reduce the amount of hassle and time wasting which users and communities experience when they try to work with public agencies.

One participant commented that co-production between the Council and the community in Argyll and Bute is ‘long overdue’. Other participants chipped in to say that third sector organisations and the Council are now beginning to share their assets, but that the basic relationship between the sectors still had to be significantly improved, particularly by ensuring that local organisations have appropriate information on their side of the table.

**Box: Re-designing website for young people with young people**

In Italy, the local council of Modena has been one of the front-runners in co-creating a website for young people with young people. The resulting website [www.stradanove.net/v3/](http://www.stradanove.net/v3/) provides relevant information in an accessible language to young people. The co-operation of the young team of website journalists with professionals from a range of public agencies ensures that the information is accurate. The high number of users from all over Italy proves that the website reaches its target group. The same principle has been applied by the local council of Stockport when it co-designed its website on adult social care with a user group. The result: efficiency savings for the council of about £300,000 and much better support for local people are seeking information on available services and support networks. See: [www.govint.org/](http://www.govint.org/)



## Mapping existing processes

Participants were asked to highlight the existing processes that they were required to follow in order to receive funding from the Council. It was immediately clear that tight timescales and paperwork were a challenge. The processes required were described by one organisation as a *“Jigsaw of different funders which don't always fit well together.”* This organisation wanted to start by talking to families to see what they wanted and needed, and then to meet with their own staff to discuss priorities for the following year, which would then result in a plan which would meet the needs of families as well as the criteria of different funders – although it was recognised that sometimes these were mutually exclusive.

Generally organisations commented that the timescale for the processes was too short – with applications forms not arriving till January (and some applicants having to phone the Council to chase up the forms) and the form needing to be submitted in February. Most organisations needed approval and engagement

from their own management committee, which required reasonable timescales.

There were also huge demands for paperwork, which had to be re-submitted every year, even when the Council already held most of this information. Depending on the funding stream, most applications were on paper rather than on-line. Some organisations felt that communication was poor and information about successful applications was sometimes delayed, leading to organisations not knowing about their funding situations, even though they were already delivering the services required. One organisation drew a complex chart outlining the process followed and highlighted the fact that even though they completed their application by February, funding had still not been confirmed by June and emergency funding had to be provided while decisions were finalised.

Some providers acknowledged that they did receive 3 year funding, which was reviewed every year, and others felt that communication with the Council had been effective.



## Priorities for change

Participants were asked to think about the ideal grant allocation process and their suggestions were prioritised using a scoring system.

One of the strongest messages from the group was that they would like to see funding which lasted for more than one year. It was felt that contracts for 2 or 3 years would enable improved internal planning and greater efficiency, reduce stress and lighten the paper burden on staff. A number of participants indicated that three year funding would be key to providing third sector organisations with the security and stability they needed to deliver complex services. Council staff made the point, however, that this would mean that funding decisions, once taken, would not be revisited for several years, with potential severe consequences for third sector organisations not funded the first time round.

The representatives were strongly in favour of moving the application process on-line. One participant indicated that they felt the current application process was 'steam driven' and that it was time to go digital. It was felt that this would save on photocopying, and problems with having to decipher somebody else's handwriting. Several participants said their organisations had to provide two copies of an application and then further copies to the legal department. Using an on-line system would reduce this paper trail and provide a portal for departments to access an application.

Participants felt that the Council's demand for a physical signature on applications (rather than allowing an on-line signature) was onerous, and prevented moves to a electronic system. Local organisations felt that this made the application process unnecessarily cumbersome. Combined with this was strong pressure amongst the group for less duplication of paper work when applying. It was suggested that application forms and electronic applications process could be improved if the Council co-designed them with local organisations.

Another important priority was that local organisations should receive both their grant notification and (some at least of) their funding before the year starts. Participants commented that their organisations may be informed by the Council that they will receive funding but then can wait for between two and five months before the money is received. Participants felt it would be a major improvement if they receive the funding at the time that the award is granted. Local organisations emphasized the need for an integrated system of information sharing between social work and health.



Participants felt that communication, partnership working, the setting of realistic time-scales, honesty and transparency were other important principles the Council should uphold. They believed it was important for the Council to listen to local organisations and value the services they provide. Several participants felt Argyll and Bute Council was already good at doing this, while others believed it needed to improve.

There was a general message that people wanted the Council to acknowledge the time and pressure the application process places on local organisations, and that steps should be taken to alleviate this. Some participants indicated they would like to be fully informed of progress and that deadlines should be clear and adhered to. Shorter waiting times for decisions about funding would also reduce stress for all concerned. Two participants suggested that more realistic time-scales for the application process would enable case studies to be provided, which would give decision makers better detail.

Another important suggestion was that people would like to see the creation of a central database. The proposed database would allow applicants to input information about their organisations and regularly update this so that grant providers could access the information, rather than the applicants having to provide this several times in different formats.

## Handling reduced funding

Participants outlined what they considered the best ways to handle the funding reduction. They included:

- Streamlining and restructuring of services within organisations (although some organisations felt that they have already completed all the restructuring open to them).
- Reprioritising by local organisations of their own needs and targets.
- Applying for alternative sources of funding (this applied to both the Council and local third sector organisations)

### Box: Restructuring services around peer support networks

When teenage pregnancy became a major problem in the London Borough of Lambeth around 2002, it redesigned its approach to focus on peer support networks. Over 200 young people in the borough (aged 14–19) have been trained to go into schools and youth clubs and they lead over 100 workshops per year, which explore why teenage pregnancy happens, its potentially destructive consequences and how young people can ensure that it doesn't happen to them. These have been evaluated by the young people themselves as very effective. Moreover, teenage pregnancy in Lambeth has fallen faster than elsewhere in London. This peer support principle has already been successfully used in Argyll and Bute – an autism group in Oban met on a regular

basis (the 'pool evening') for some time, providing not only a fun night out but also giving support to each other. See [www.govint.org/](http://www.govint.org/)

## Possible non-financial support from the Council to the organisations

- Working more in partnerships to share knowledge, training, skills, and resources, and to reduce the amount of money leaving the local economy – examples given included sharing web design or human resource management services or payroll systems.
- Considering possible mergers between similar organisations to create synergy, e.g. through sharing of training and skills.
- Creating better links to the development trusts that exist in Argyll and Bute.
- Utilising the community more, e.g. by creating time banks.
- Considering social enterprise options which could lead to income generation and promote large scale fundraising events.
- Designing client-led delivery in response to self directed support.

Workshop discussions suggested that the Council has a strong role to play in co-ordinating the use of resources, streamlining activity and reducing paperwork.



Participants asked for:

- I A named contact:**  
Access to a designated member of staff to help with specific areas would be helpful. For example – a named member of staff to help with business development and funding bids.
- I Training and development:**  
The Council should continue to provide training possibilities but should consult local organisations to attempt to cater more to their training needs.
- I Cross departmental communication:**  
The Council should try to avoid processes which mean that the money they give to local organisations is then taken away by another part of the public sector (e.g. minibus hire costs are funded by the Council but then have to be paid to another part of the Council).
- I Cost effective use of premises:**  
The Council should attempt to enable local organisations to use Council buildings free of charge or at a subsidised rate. There should be clear information on what Council resources, such as premises and vehicles, are available and under-used.
- I Communication:**  
As part of ensuring that a greater culture of engagement of local organisations is fostered, it was suggested that Argyll and Bute Council should explore the possibilities of more use of ICT. As organisations

within Argyll and Bute are dispersed over a vast distance, use of applications such as Skype or video conferencing could provide a cost effective alternative to the need to travel long distances for meetings.

### Criteria for deciding who to fund

The participants were asked in groups to debate what criteria they felt the Council should use when deciding on who should get funding. The following criteria were suggested:

- I Implementation of ‘Getting it right for every child’ principles.**
- I The service needs to be financially viable and meets a recognised need for the service.**
- I Funding has to fit with Argyll and Bute’s overall strategy (balancing critical needs with responsive and preventative services).**
- I Funding decisions should be based upon clear and consistent outcomes that the Council agrees with the organisation and users.**
- I Client feedback information should be requested and reported.**
- I SCSWIS inspection reports should demonstrate quality – the Council should consider funding providers with level four rating and above.**



- Employment and community sustainability aspects of service provision in rural areas should be considered, recognising the possible detriment to the community if funding isn't received.

The participants felt that the voluntary sector and people who use services do not currently have an effective voice. Therefore, the Council should visit and talk to staff and service users before the funding application process. By consulting these groups the Council will be able to gain more knowledge of the services potentially available, and be better at identifying its priorities. This could be done through working with groups of people who use services to design assessment processes.

#### Box: Moving to outcome-based funding

Some public agencies, such as the partnership for Pan-London Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) provision, are already reconsidering the movement in recent years towards 'procurement' and 'project-based funding' and moving to outcome-based funding, based 'black-box commissioning', in order to achieve innovation and flexibility. This is because, in some services, it is still not possible to write a convincing specification for achieving outcomes. Here, the agencies have simply asked third sector organisations how much funding they would need to achieve desired levels of outcomes and they have funded those with

the most convincing 'story'. The outcomes will be monitored carefully and those who achieve will be further funded, those who don't will lose all funding. This cuts down bureaucracy and concentrates funding on those who can deliver outcomes that matter. See <http://bit.ly/oqsw2l>

#### What can the Council do?

Participants from the third sector organisations outlined what they believed the Council could do to improve working relationships with them.

- Communicate with and listen to providers.
- Meet and agree a new system for funding applications, including essential criteria for funding applications – i.e. to 'co-produce' a new system by November 2011. This would require agreement on a process for developing proposals over the summer and then in the autumn putting a draft funding application system to a sub-group of those willing to work on this.
- Streamline the data collection process.
- Develop a central database for information to be uploaded.
- Provide one contract or service level agreement per organisation, issued following a clear application process.



- Following the review of spending and priorities, the Council should make tough decisions to save money and prioritise spending.
- Consider people who use services and carers throughout the whole process.
- Organisations would benefit from a facilitated discussion on a local or thematic basis to look at improved co-ordination or potential mergers of local organisations, and disseminate best practice throughout Argyll and Bute. The Council should explore the possibilities of using new media like video conferencing to enable cost effective engagement.
- The Council should be less judgemental of other agencies. It should also work together with local organisations using non-Council employees' experiences and resources (time and energy) and give help in kind by sharing knowledge and experience.
- Demonstrate mutual honesty and respect at all times.
- Participants also suggested that the Council should regularly update them on developments and ask their views on future steps.

## What should local organisations do moving forward?

Given the seriousness of the funding situation, one of the representatives commented that local organisations had to adopt a "wartime" mentality and 'keep calm and carry on'. Participants at the event emphasised that they should now make renewed efforts to build positive relationships that involved regular dialogue with similar local organisations to organise how they can share expertise, facilities, and streamline resources. As part of this, one participant said they would speak to other voluntary early years groups in their area to see if they could establish regular 'liaison' meetings. Local organisations also made it clear that they would have to look for more volunteers to assist in the delivery of services.

It was also proposed that local organisations needed to be working towards reducing their dependence upon Council funding and looking to develop business towards private or social enterprise activities.



## The final word and commitments made

Mark Lines indicated that it had become clear that groups can work together better, and perhaps the ABL-SI partners can provide a brokerage role within this process. Moving forward, he reiterated how important it was to continue to have meetings with representative groups of people and third sector organisations, to inform the work that the Council does.

Mark also made the commitment to widen the groups who would be involved in the consultation process, to include those not currently receiving funding. He stressed the importance of ensuring the greater involvement of children, emphasizing that their experiences could inform service priorities. He explained that the Council was working to improve this. He also made a commitment to a 'clearer, simpler, more transparent and better information flow'.

Mark committed to create a working group of those people who agreed to be involved to work on changes that should be made to the application process. He would set up a meeting in the autumn to take this work forward.

ABSEN made it clear that it sees this as just the start – the organisation wants to see this approach taken by other departments in Argyll and Bute Council. ABSEN also stressed it would seek to help and support the working groups involved in this engagement process, e.g. by ensuring that expenses or other issues did not get in the way of participation.

Mark Lines concluded by saying he hoped to have developed a revised system by 1 April 2012, so that by this date third sector groups:

- would know about their funding;
- would know the requirements attached to their funding;
- wouldn't face problems of having to duplicate documents.
- 'clearer, simpler, more transparent and better information flow'.

## Evaluation forms

In their evaluations participants gave the event positive feedback giving it an average score of 8.9 out of 10. When asked to highlight the positive aspects of the event participants praised an 'open honest discussion', which was 'very interactive' and that 'really got into the issues'. Another member of the group commented there was a 'stronger sense that things will be achieved'

They also praised the facilitation of the event for not being 'protective or defensive of the Council'. One individual 'liked the fact that views of the 3rd sector have been recorded and hopefully used constructively'. All but two of the attendees indicated that they wanted to continue to be involved in the consultation. Another participant said they would 'like to see more involvement from the voluntary sector in events like this as all the decisions made by the Council have an effect on us'.

Mark Lines and Anne Paterson's presentation was described by participants as 'clear and concise' with 'room for debate and discussion'. Another participant commented that Council 'priorities [were] clearly set out' and there was a 'clear explanation of the Council position'.

Participants felt that the discussions during the day were 'very useful and informative' and 'allowed different ideas to come through'. They allowed the groups 'time to think and listen to other organisations and Council' and were designed 'for us to come up with solutions not just identify problems'. Participants made it clear in their responses that they were pleased that the Council wanted to be involved in consulting their organisations but wanted to have feedback and actions as a result of the discussions. For example, one participant commented **'Thank you to the Council for showing respect as it does not often take place. Now I look forward to action.'**

## Appendix

The consultation event was attended by representatives of:

### ABSEN

Achievement Bute

Argyll and Bute Council  
(including a councillor)

Befrienders

Blue Triangle (Glasgow) Housing Association Ltd

Escape (out of school care project)

Family mediation Argyll and Bute

Happy House Christian Preschool

Help (Argyll and Bute)

Homestart Majik

Homestart OLI

Innellan & Toward Family Centre

Jigsaw

Kanga Rhu Preschool

Kidlywinks Nursery

Kintyre Toy Library

Meadows Under Fives

Mulberry Bush Children's Nurseries

NHS Highland

Patchwork 2 to 5 Group

Patchwork 2 to 5 Nursery

Riverside Rascals Day Nursery Ltd

Scottish Society for Autism

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland.

Soroba Young Family Group Development Worker  
project

### Contact:

#### Governance International

Shahana Ramsden and Frankie Hine-Hughes

2nd Floor, 3 Brindley Place  
Birmingham B1 2JB

Email: [shahana.ramsden@govint.org](mailto:shahana.ramsden@govint.org)  
[frankie.hine-hughes@govint.org](mailto:frankie.hine-hughes@govint.org)

Web: [www.govint.org](http://www.govint.org)

