

Stagnation or Innovation? What will the contract culture bring?

The way services are funded has altered rapidly over the last few years. The introduction of the Supporting People regime heralded a significant change in the relationship between local authorities (as funders) and service providers. The contract culture took a significant leap forward.

“If contracts simply specify in detail today’s service, there may be little room for new thinking and new developments to allow services to evolve and innovate.”

Since then, there has been a steady development of service level agreements, competitive tenders for service provision and now a move towards outcome focused agreements.

Linked to this has been very clear ‘mood music’ about there being too many providers and a consequent

pressure on smaller voluntary organisations to merge, or for contracts to be awarded to larger providers.

Economies of scale do not always result in better practice or better quality of service provision. Traditionally, the voluntary sector has been diverse, ranging from multi-million pound organisations to volunteer led local groups, and everything in between.

As we move towards a more rigorous contract culture, with every aspect of service specified, we need to be careful to allow room for innovation, flexibility and development. If contracts simply specify in detail today’s service, there may be little room for new thinking and new developments to allow services to evolve and innovate.

It is of course a legitimate aim for funders to seek best value from their limited resources. It is also beneficial to benchmark the costs of similar services, and to ensure services are delivered efficiently and effectively.

Elements of competition can lead to welcome service improvements, but we must also beware of unforeseen negative consequences and the potential for stagnation in service development. We must make sure there is still room for small focussed grass roots voluntary groups, pioneering new services, with the ability to adapt quickly.

The voluntary sector must be enabled to do what it does differently to statutory or private providers. It is not simply a cheap provider of services, but can and should be a driving force towards new and better ways of working, delivering better outcomes for those it serves, campaigning for changes in policy and practice to improve the situation of those it serves. The challenge is to make the contract culture flexible enough to celebrate diversity, innovation and campaigning as part of mainstream contract delivery, and not to treat innovation as something which has to be tendered for and funded separately.

Move on Plans

Homeless Link, SCSH’s equivalent organisation in England, has produced a ‘Move on Plans Protocol’ toolkit (MOPP) to assist all partners involved in trying to help homeless people move on from hostels.

Delays in moving on result in financial and social costs for local authorities, frontline services and homeless people themselves.

The MOPP has been piloted in a number of areas of England, and data from using the protocol has been incorporated in housing, homelessness and supporting people strategies.

Although developed in an English context the lessons from the toolkit are likely be useful in Scotland.

The MOPP toolkit and the full report can be accessed at www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/rehousing/mopp

Unlocking solutions



What's New?

New report on street homelessness

A new report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation looks at the impact of different types of enforcement action on 'street users' in five different areas in England. It confirms previous research which showed that most individuals involved in street activities are highly vulnerable, have a history of trauma and homelessness, and almost all have experienced mental health and or drug abuse problems.

Different types of measures have been used to address problems: some local initiatives, some national, some hard enforcement (e.g. ASBOs) and some softer (such as controlled drinking zones and changes to the design of areas).

The research looks at the effect of the different measures on street activities, and also at the effect on individuals engaged in the activities.

In broad terms the findings show that 'soft' measures effectively reduced the visibility of street activities in specific localities, but had no noticeable positive impact on those engaged in the activities.

Harder enforcement action (such as ASBOs) had a marked effect on street activities in the targeted areas. However, in some cases they led to displacement to other areas. Sometimes they also led to a negative change in behaviour (e.g. from begging to acquisitive crime). If other support interventions were integrated, in some cases street users did engage with services and desisted from anti social behaviour.

The report concludes that enforcement is a high risk strategy. Its effects on individuals are

Front line workers need support

Research from England suggests that front line staff in homelessness services face high levels of burn out. The research by Mike Seal suggests that 45% of staff working in hostel type environments face burn out after two years, and 58% after four years.

The report stresses the importance of support for staff both internally in the organisation, and externally. Staff themselves rated external support as particularly valuable.

Amongst important factors to overcome staff frustration is the need for a clear set of values, both within the organisation, and a common set of values when working with partners.

The report found that often frustration with partner organisations was largely a reflection of broader frustration with the care system itself – i.e. structural rather than within the control of any of the partners.

The report: 'A study of the demographic makeup, working conditions and attitudes of workers in the homeless sector accessing short courses' can be obtained via Homeless Link: info@homelesslink.org.uk

unpredictable and can be very negative (diverting some into dangerous activities or places or even prison). They suggest enforcement should only be used as a last resort and never with vulnerable street users such as those with severe mental health problems.



Further info: www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/2074.asp

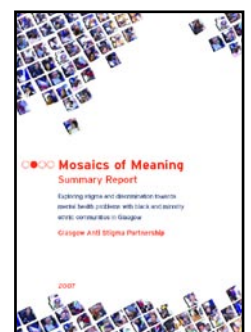
Stigma and mental health in BME communities

A new report from the Glasgow Anti Stigma Partnership explores knowledge, beliefs, awareness and attitudes towards mental health problems amongst black and ethnic minority communities. 'Mosaics of Meaning' gives an insight into different beliefs around mental health in different communities, and the different approaches to treatment adopted by them.

The report states for example, that holistic approaches, where body and mind are treated as one, are common in Chinese communities, and that religious leaders might be the first point of contact for Indian families and some Muslim families.

Some groups had concerns about confidentiality consulting doctors, while others might use a number of treatments concurrently (both traditional and modern psychiatric).

The report points to the 'dual stigma' faced by many BME people in Britain, who not only have to manage stigma around their mental health problems, but also deal with discrimination and racism.



The report concludes with a series of recommendations based around the general themes that solutions must be constructed in partnership with the various communities, and in the context of the diverse beliefs surrounding mental health which are current in the communities.

The full Mosaics of Meaning report is available on www.seemescotland.org

Welfare Reform – the Government’s Next Steps

On the 18 July 2007, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) launched the Green Paper ‘In work, better off: next steps to full employment’. The consultation paper follows the Freud Report “Welfare in the Future” published earlier this year and aims to build on reforms already made in the Welfare Reform Act 2007. The Government aims to reduce the numbers of working age people dependent on benefits, close the employment gaps between different groups and raise the employment rate to 80 per cent.

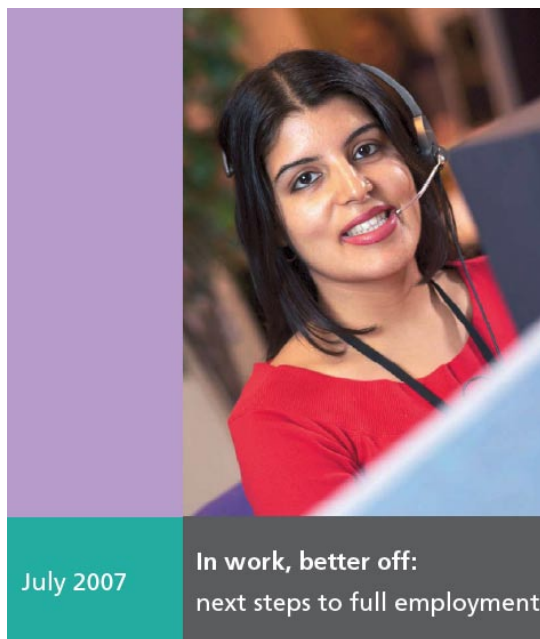
Although the details of the paper relate to England, it refers to discussions with the Scottish Executive around how its aims may be extended to Scotland (and other parts of the UK).

The paper proposes a new ‘jobs pledge’, designed to encourage major employers to “offer a quarter of a million job opportunities to the long-term out-of-work”. Other proposals include “a new social contract with lone parents which expects an eventual move into the labour market in return for the necessary personalised support” and “a more personalised, flexible and responsive New Deal”.

Pathways to Work offers a package of support for individuals aiming to get back to work as early as possible after a period of worklessness (who may have had a health condition or disability) and provides tailored, flexible support and information at an early stage. It is proposed within the paper that the Pathways to Work scheme will be rolled out nationally.

The paper’s main focus is on people with disabilities, lone parents and ‘couple families’, ethnic minorities and job seekers. However, it also

proposes a revised New Deal programme will allow for individuals facing severe barriers to work to gain access to fast-tracked help, but where appropriate, also see those who have history of long-term reliance on benefits, facing ‘tougher responsibilities’ at the start of the claim.



Finally, for the ‘lowest skilled’ people, the DWP wants to create much closer integration of employment and skills provision. This will be achieved through more joined-up working between the welfare to work and skills services to provide individuals with faster access to training opportunities.

Consultation responses for the Green Paper are required by 31 October 2007.

Download the full document at: www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/in-work-better-off/

To discuss this article in more detail please contact Daniel Coote, Policy Officer, on 0131 2264382 or daniel@scsh.org.uk

Web Links

Links to all documents referred to in this issue of *inhouse*, and to back copies, can be found at www.scsh.org.uk

Do mixed neighbourhoods relieve poverty?

New research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that creating mixed neighbourhoods has little or no discernable effect on an individual’s prospects. A thorough review of research evidence in the US, Canada and UK suggests that there is no positive net outcome from moving poorer people into wealthier neighbourhoods. Those who moved did not become better off.

The report states that there is persuasive evidence that the character of the neighbourhood you grew up in 10, 20 or even 30 years ago has no impact on current prosperity. It also states that there is little evidence that living in poorer neighbourhoods makes people poorer and erodes their life chances. Indeed, it suggests that ‘specialised neighbourhoods’ can provide both economic and welfare benefits (including informal and formal methods of accessing jobs).

It concludes that creating mixed neighbourhoods treats a symptom of inequality, not its cause, and identified the problem as poverty. The report adds that trying to create mixed neighbourhoods costs substantial resources that could be used directly to relieve poverty.

The report’s main focus was on policy initiatives aimed at moving poorer people into wealthier neighbourhoods. Clearly the report does not argue for the development of new ‘sink’ estates.

The research findings can be accessed on www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/2114.asp



CIH Getting Attitudes Right - Joining Up Services for Homeless People

**Wednesday 8th August, Aberdeen
& Wednesday 22nd August, Inverness**

Details at: www.cih.org/scotland/training/



Leaving Home and Housing Education Conference Friday 31st August

Second national conference on leaving home and housing education. Details and booking form at www.scsch.org.uk



Engaging Young People Training Rewards for Learning and Service User Involvement Thursday 6th September, 9.30am-12.30pm, Edinburgh

Details and a booking form at www.scsch.org.uk



A Healthy Glasgow – Our Business Tuesday 11th September

A look at the health impact and diverse role of the voluntary managed organisations across the city.

Details at: www.gcv.org.uk



Scottish Youth Housing Network Consultation Tuesday 25th September, Dundee

SYHN talk to young parents about their housing issues. Details to follow or check in at www.syhn.org.uk



SCSH Health and Homelessness SCSH with Health Scotland

Wednesday 26th September, Apex, Edinburgh
Details and a booking form at www.scsch.org.uk



Scottish Housing & Support Conference Thursday 4th & Friday 5th October, Dunblane Hydro Hotel

www.joa.co.uk/shasc.html or mailshasc-conf@yahoo.co.uk



CIH Getting Attitudes Right - Joining Up Services for Homeless People

Thursday 18th October, Edinburgh

Details at: www.cih.org/scotland/training/



SCSH National Homelessness Conference Thursday 8th & Friday 9th November, Apex, Edinburgh

Get the dates in your diary.

SCSH is the membership body for organisations and individuals working to tackle homelessness in Scotland.

Full membership details are available on 0131 226 4382 or on our web site: www.scsch.org.uk

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Engaging Young People

6th September 2007

9.30am-12.30pm, Edinburgh

SCSH is running a half day training session on two different ways of engaging young people. Drawing on two recent SCSH reports, 'Rewards for Learning' and 'Service User Involvement', the training will look at a range of approaches for involving service users and for recognising learning.

For further information, download a booking form at www.scsch.org.uk or contact Wendy Devall, 0131 226 4382, wendy@scsch.org.uk

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