



Marlyn Glen

Scottish Labour MSP for North East Scotland

Speech in the Scottish Parliament

04 September 2008

Children's Services

One of the unintended challenges of having wide-ranging debates of this nature when there has been no advance statement on the documentation that underpins the debate is that important things might be missed out.

I will concentrate on getting it right for every deaf child, and on children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse, to ensure that those two areas are not missed out.

Getting it right for every child means delivering what every child needs when they need it.

That is a worthy aim, but a massive task.

There is a long list of attributes for children to attain, to which I add "happy". A child may unfortunately be unhealthy, but they can still be helped to attain happiness.

We all want to give children the best possible start, but some children have great challenges in their lives.

Towards the end of the previous session I, along with many other MSPs, signed up to Mary Mulligan's motion on getting it right for every deaf child, which endorsed the call of the National Deaf Children's Society for national best practice guidance for multi-agency professionals who work with deaf children in their early years.

We need to learn from best practice.

The NDCS knows that in England and Wales there is guidance on how to provide an effective support network, which focuses on developing the deaf child's access to language and communication and on

breaking down any barriers before he or she reaches school age.

In Scotland, there is currently no such national guidance.

I urge the minister to consider that, given the universal newborn hearing screening that was introduced in the national health service in Scotland in 2005, we are missing an opportunity to provide deaf babies and toddlers and their parents with access to the best possible support.

Getting it right for every deaf child means ensuring the best possible outcomes for every deaf child in Scotland from the moment of diagnosis.

Getting it right for every child means addressing their individual needs, whatever those might be, with the same due care and attention. I mentioned the huge challenges that some children face.

Those challenges sometimes arise from birth and sometimes are due to particular circumstances, but children's needs must be met however they arise.

It has at last been acknowledged that there are huge implications for children in families in which there is domestic abuse.

Perhaps that one piece of the jigsaw will mean that everyone will now recognise the essential nature of tackling domestic abuse and putting a halt to violence against women. Gender-based abuse can sometimes seem endemic in our society.

Yesterday, I spoke to a woman from Zimbabwe who works with the organisation FRAE Fife.

She said that she was shocked at the widespread abuse of women in Scotland.

She had expected better, but, sadly, we know the truth.

I welcome the continued commitment to and funding for work to tackle abuse, which has been a priority for the Parliament right from its inception.

It is essential that we break the vicious cycle for children who grow up in abusive families.

Scotland must continue to examine closely how women are treated, and the Government must produce effective proposals to reduce men's violence against women.

If that does not happen, our children will continue to need the protection, provision and prevention that the national domestic abuse delivery plan outlines.

We can learn from the outcome of the pathfinder pilots.

I welcome the fact that the findings of the domestic abuse pathfinder projects have been incorporated in the plan.

Progress is being made, but we need to ensure that work with victims and their families and—very importantly—with perpetrators remains high on the agenda.

An example of good practice is the work of Dundee Women's Aid, which employs three children and young people's workers and a co-ordinator, who all deliver specialised support in the form of refuge, follow-on, outreach and preventive work.

They have developed excellent services in line with the getting it right for every child criteria, with the aim of giving immediate help to identified children.

However, they acknowledge that many children are still missing out and that many voices remain unheard.

There are still gaps between local authority services and voluntary services.

The co-ordination and commitment of joint working with local authority children's services needs to be driven by senior management.

Funding issues are often a concern, as they often create challenges and barriers.

One main issue is how local authorities can incorporate those specialist services within their core service without adequate funding and legislation.

If the vision that has been set out here today is to be a core part of service delivery, legislation is necessary to ensure that it remains a priority even under tight economic circumstances.

I welcome the proposed improvements in information sharing, but it has to be done in an extremely sensitive and careful way.

We have to make progress cautiously, whether in introducing electronic communication—e-care—or the human papilloma virus vaccination programme, which is welcome.

It was promised that the number of school nurses would be doubled, but so far only their workload has increased. The HPV vaccination scheme involves much more than just giving another jab, therefore school nurses need to be trained to deal with young people and to answer their questions.

Dr Richard Simpson : That was a manifesto promise by the SNP.

The numbers, which were given in a parliamentary answer to me, went down between 2005 and 2007, from 300 to 220.

Not only were the figures not going in the right direction in 2007, when the current Government took power, but they are currently going in the wrong direction—they are not doubling.

Marlyn Glen: That concern is shared—and should be shared—on all sides of the chamber.

All those measures must be introduced extremely carefully with joint management, and they need to be properly funded.

I welcome the progress that has been made, but I urge caution.

I support the amendment.

ends

WEBSITE LINK

MARLYN GLEN www.marlynglen.org.uk

