

## **ADES Response to the Scottish Parliament Education & Culture Committee Request for Further Information on the Draft Budget 2015/16**

### **The National Performance Framework/ measuring outcomes**

- What evidence is there to demonstrate that the NPF has helped to improve outcomes in school and has informed spending allocations by Scottish Government and local authorities?

The NPF focuses on – improved children’s services especially in early years; increased numbers of good inspection reports; and improved attainment and better outcomes for young people: in all these areas, strategic planning supported by community planning and driven by local priorities has demonstrated measurable improvement.

The priorities for local and national government have in turn been targeted through funding and resource allocation, planning and deployment.

ADES believes strongly that there is room for a much more strategic and effective outcomes framework for Scottish education and children’s services whereby we can truly say that we measure what we value using outcome measures to target improvement particularly the attainment and achievement of the least advantaged young people in Scotland, whilst avoiding the adverse effects of such measures on objectives and on the organisation of the system e.g. course options in secondary schools.

There is also scope for better use of benchmarking within the education system and with other systems and nations; relating these to spending and to costed interventions.

### **Consultation and accountability**

- Do ADES’ comments about draft budgets being kept largely confidential and pre-budget discussions being curtailed apply across all local authorities?
- Do local authorities have a clear and shared understanding of the rationale for consulting with parent and community groups about their spending decisions? How do councils ensure that consultation or engagement is meaningful and not simply a ‘box ticking’ exercise?

- Can recent variations in change in school revenue expenditure all be explained as reactions to local circumstances?

Some local authorities have a comprehensive and effective approach to consulting on the specifics of budget reductions as they relate to the education and children's services within the council. This will be shaped by the wider council and corporate approach.

However, the level of detail that is needed to fully understand the impact of planned budget reductions; full risk/benefit/cost analysis of options; and consideration of the alternative options that are feasible, are often not available owing to the timescales involved and to the political and sensitive nature of the more challenging options.

Local authorities have a well developed understanding of the importance of consultation and a wealth of experience in consulting effectively. In the best cases, an infrastructure will have been developed over many years with representative groups engaging in the detailed analysis of proposals on the basis of trust and confidence. However, it is difficult to see how councils could consult individually on alternatives that have national implications (e.g. changes to the school day, school week, school year; changes to the learner journey, system wide change) which could improve outcomes as well as providing greater efficiency and potential cost reductions. ADES understands why Local Authorities consult on their current set of locally delivered education policies, however we feel there are opportunities for some significant system improvements and efficiencies which would impact on local education authorities as well as on national agencies.

Recent variations in school revenue expenditure result from a variety of factors - from the GAE assessment to the actual budget allocations within councils and across services; from national and local priorities to local pressures; from the capacity within education authorities and within schools to decision making at these levels; from the (sometimes historical) starting point for budget decisions to consideration of what might be accepted or feasible locally (e.g. level of charges). The size and capacity of the council may also have a bearing on budget decisions relating to economies of scale.

**John Stodter**  
**ADES Secretary**  
**November 2014**