

Integration Joint Board rejects National Care Service plan

The body which oversees social care in West Lothian has added its name to the growing list of objectors to plans for a National Care Service.

While welcoming some elements in proposed national standards the Integration Joint Board has opposed management by ministers and a centrally appointed board.

Members reinforced their belief in the need for local accountability and local solutions to local problems.

At the recent meeting the IJB, which has four West Lothian councillors among its voting members, the Board approved its response to the Holyrood consultation on the second stage of the National Care Service Bill.

The Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament in 2022 has faced frequent delays. Last week it was revealed the total cost of the plans so far had exceeded £28m.

The consultation response had been considered by a sub committee of the IJB but was agreed, with no additional comment at the meeting of the full board.

As with West Lothian's council response there are some elements which the Bill proposals are supported. These include general principles and national agreement on commissioning of services.

However, in response to proposals to reform the current Integration Board system which has only been in place for a decade the Board responded: “reforming current integration authorities, which would be accountable to the National Board, would have implications for local democratic accountability.”

The IJB response called for further clarity of local involvement in new bodies and also clarity on future funding models.

The Board added: “While the IJB recognises that there is a role for a national approach and consistency in relation to national improvement, standards and oversight it is not clear that this is best progressed through the development of a National Care Service Board.

“The provisions for the National Care Service Board to remove members of a National Care Service Local Board, including locally elected members, this proposal has serious implications for local democratic accountability.”

The Board has also rejected proposals to bring Children’s Services and Justice Social Work into the remit of a national service.

On Children’s services the Board said: “The transfer of these services risks creating disconnects with early years provision, education and housing and homelessness services etc. It therefore continues to be the IJB’s view that the inclusion of children’s services should be a decision that is taken at a local level.”

The Board added that justice services have already undergone significant reform and changes in recent years and “, the evidence is clear that better access to welfare, housing, and employability assistance, as well as health care, have an important role in reducing or even preventing offending.

“Similarly, the shift away from short prison sentences needs

effective, evidence-based community interventions. It continues to be the IJB's view that the inclusion of social work justice services should be a decision that is taken at a local level."

The plan has been rejected by many councils individually, CoSLA the umbrella body for Scotland's local authorities and major health unions.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter