**Moderator,**

One of the hallmarks of the Social Care Council and its predecessors has been its reputation for pioneering work, innovation and creative responses to the needs of our society.

We are still doing so! For example:-

In the **Daisy Chain Early Years Project** in Govanhill we are working with, and supporting, families from diverse cultural backgrounds helping to build positive relationships in their community.

Yasmin who attends the project with her daughter says that the most important change in her life has been the bond developed between her and her daughter. She has also made new friends within the community through coming to the play sessions and loves having a safe place to relax.

At **Perth Prison Visitors Support and Advice Centre** we work with prisoners and their families helping to increase self-esteem, maintain communication and, in doing so, also help reduce re-offending.

One family member told us…”The Visitor Centre is a very relaxed place with very welcoming staff.  It helps me calm down for the visit.  The Centre is very much appreciated”

Now in 11 locations across Scotland our **Heart for Art** projects offer a friendly environment where people with Dementia can take part in therapeutic art sessions. The artwork produced is astonishing and enables people with dementia to express themselves through art.

Ian, one of the attenders at a Heart for Art class, remarked - “I can say things with lines and colours that I couldn't say any other way”

The Social Care Council is proud that it’s work is a vital and essential contributor to the Church of Scotland’s wider mission as it continues providing support and services in Christ’s name. It is for this reason that the Council set up Business Strategy Group whose remit is set out on page 10/2 of our report to the Assembly.

As a result of its work, the strategy group made a number of recommendations to the Council in relation to its future direction of travel which are reflected fully in our report. Of particular concern to the Council is the fact that we are operating in a sector that is in significant transition, overlaid by financial constraints the likes of which we have not seen before. This has proved extremely challenging for both the Council and staff over the past year. These challenges, which I’m sure will continue into the future, will, likewise, continue to be addressed as they arise.

A particular characteristic of the Council is its resilience in the face of such change and challenge and one of the major elements of our report is the development of new models of service delivery and the exploration of potential areas for cross directorate working, growth and development. Such innovative initiatives will be underpinned by revised financial principles designed to help closely monitor performance in the pursuit of long term sustainability.

The Council’s review has again re-affirmed its mission to offer it’s services in Christ’s name Similarly, its Christian Ethos Statement which it believes to be the bedrock of the work of CrossReach states that :-

**‘We aim to show the practical side of our Christian faith by reflecting Christian love to the people we support, though our leadership,** **management and working relationships’**

In order to ensure that the ethos is reflected across the work of the organisation the Council has, to date, operated a recruitment policy that required all care and support, supervisory and management staff to have a Christian Commitment.

Current employment legislation allows an employer, under certain circumstances, to make it an occupational requirement that employees, having regard to the ethos of the organisation and the nature or context of the work, must be of a particular religion, in this case Christian.

However, the law also states that the application of this requirement ***must*** be ‘a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim’. The Council, therefore, has carried out a review of its recruitment policy to ensure that the requirement for all staff to be Christian is indeed proportionate.

Arising from this review, the Council is committed to continue to require management and supervisory staff to be Christian in order to ensure that the Christian Ethos is maintained and upheld in the delivery of services to people of all faiths and none. However, having consulted widely and having sought employment law advice the Council does not believe that the requirement for all care and support staff to be Christian is a ‘proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim’ in terms of the current legislation. Accordingly the Council has agreed a policy that will no longer require the majority of care and support staff to be Christian but ***will***require them to give a commitment to be respectful of our Christian Ethos and commit not to undermine it.

Assembly should be assured that the Review Group and the Council had a number of heart searching discussions before agreeing this revised position as a response to ensuring that its policies comply with its understanding of current employment legislation.

PAUSE

We continue to welcome the steps that the Scottish Government has taken to make funding available to CrossReach , thus enabling us to pay all care and support staff in the organisation the Scottish Living Wage. This goes a long way to meeting the position of the Assembly that all people employed by the Church should be paid the Scottish Living Wage. In reporting on this matter at the Assembly last year, we were asked to work with the Council of Assembly to enable payment of the living wage to all employees as soon as possible. Our report covers this matter in detail and makes clear that the church through the Council of Assemby has made additional financial contributions of over £452,000 over the past two years to fund low pay. It is with considerable regret that neither Council has access to resources to enable the payment of the Scottish living wage to all CrossReach employees. Reasonable salary differentials must be maintained in terms of the Council’s pay structures. Indeed differentials ,in some cases, have been eroded, by almost 25% over the past 3 years as a result of the increases to the living wage. Both Councils are committed to the principle of paying the Scottish living wage to all employees, but unless funding agencies include this in the purchasing of the services we provide for them, the costs are prohibitive. While we sincerely regret this position, we will continue to make representation at the highest levels of funding bodies on this matter.

PAUSE

Commissioners will note from the report, the wide range of issues covered by the business strategy review which also included an appraisal of all operational areas. As a result, we are particularly keen to see the development of an integrated service or HUB model, initially in Services to Older People as outlined on page 10/11 of the report. Progress in this area will be closely monitored with a view to exploring all opportunities including, in some cases, across different service areas. Other issues covered by the review include Business Development, Support Services and the future of digital technology all of which will be further considered in depth over the coming year by the Council.

The Council, in its report, records its huge appreciation and respect for all our committed and devoted employees. In order to address the external funding challenges of recent years, significant cost efficiencies have been implemented. Many of these have been achieved through changes to conditions of service for staff. In the face of these changes it is of supreme credit to staff that they have once again provided the high quality of services as outlined in the Review and Performance Section of the report on page 10/15.

A significant impediment to the achievement of a break even budget is the ongoing requirement to meet past service pension deficit payments of over £1m per year. We are grateful to the Council of Assembly for their support in meeting 50% of this sum for the current year and again in 2018 and we very much welcome the commitment to ongoing joint discussions to find a sustainable solution to this situation. Achieving such a solution is crucial to the long term sustainability of the organisation and thus its continued delivery of life saving services.

The impact of the financial challenges faced over the past year are no more clearly evident than in the decisions which the Council has regrettably taken in relation to the services at Auchinlee in Campbeltown, Achvarasdal in Thurso and Eastwoodhill in Glasgow.

The sale of Eastwoodhill to another reputable provider is currently making good progress with all interested parties. Final agreement will see continuity of care for the residents and employment for staff.

We are pleased to report that, as a result of ongoing negotiations with the Argyll & Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, agreement has been reached that Auchinlee will continue to provide care for its existing residents until the Partnership can provide alternative provision in the area. This is likely to be completed by March 2018 at the latest and will ensure that no residents will need to be placed out of area as a result of the closure of Auchinlee. We are continuing discussions with representatives of the Health and Social Care Partnership to explore alternative local employment opportunities for our staff in the social care sector following closure.

In discussions with NHS Highland, they have confirmed that they see Achvarasdal in Thurso as a being important in the development of alternative forms of service delivery for older people in the area. In view of this we are entering into a partnership agreement with them that sees the continuation of Achvarasdal in the immediate future and commits both parties to explore together the alternative models of care needed to meet the needs of older people in the future. This outcome will, again, see the continuation of care for existing residents as well as employment for staff.

PAUSE

Over recent years we have highlighted the fact that many churches are providing social care services within their own communities. As well as these well-established projects there are many other churches who want to develop projects as part of their local mission. Our supplementary report reviews our past year’s work with four local projects selected to receive support either in developing a new initiative or in supporting an existing one. This work and reports received from the participants endorse the Council’s belief that there is a key role for the Social Care Council to:-

* Support the Church in areas of social care delivery
* Host and develop an online Social Care Forum providing universal resources and a platform for mutual support, advice and knowledge sharing.
* Facilitate the establishment of social care networks that bring together individual churches on matters of mutual concern such as dementia

In view of the success of the pilot projects at and the exciting opportunities identified at congregational level, the Council is delighted to agree to continue resourcing Social Care Mission support for a further two years.

Moderator, I started my speech today referring to the churches historical record of pioneering work in the field of social care.

With fingers behind me poised over buzzers, you’ll be pleased that I’m almost finished but I want finally to highlight the fact that continued application, enhancement and development of our existing services together with innovative projects going forward and, by being willing to explore new channels, I believe CrossReach, as a national provider, continues to help our Church of Scotland to be in the vanguard of Social Care here, as we continue our journey which began in the 19th and now progresses through into the 21st Century.

Bit about Viv

Moderator, as I am a Commissioner at this Assembly, I move the Report on behalf of the Social Care Council