

PE1369/A

**Local Government and the Third
Sector Directorate**

Local Government – Outcomes and
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Mr Fergus Cochrane
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Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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19 November 2010

Dear Mr Cochrane

PETITION PE1369

I refer to the above petition, presented by Jodie McCoy on behalf of South Ayrshire Youth Forum calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require local authorities, under the “Power to Advance Wellbeing” provisions (Part Three) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to undertake impact assessments when considering the provision of local leisure and cultural facilities.

Firstly, I was pleased to read from the Public Petitions Committee report of the 29 October meeting of the enthusiasm from the young people who participated in the meeting and to hear about their local involvement. It was also encouraging to read the positive examples of local authorities consulting with young people to help inform service provision.

The Scottish Government signed a Concordat with COSLA, on behalf of local government, in 2007. This agreed the Scottish Government’s role as setting overall policy direction, whilst freeing up local authorities and their partners to deliver local outcomes which best meet local area needs. It would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to issue specific requirements in relation to the Power to Advance Well-Being (PAWB) because, like the Community Planning legislation, the PAWB legislation was drafted in such a way that local authorities have considerable discretion in how they use it. It is intended as an enabling power, to encourage innovation and closer partnership working between local authorities and other bodies in better responding to the needs of communities.

I have set out our response to the petitioner’s specific questions below which include examples of how Scottish Government is working with local authorities.

Will you require local authorities, under the 'Power to advance well-being' provisions (Part Three) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to undertake impact assessments and specify how, when, with whom (and certainly community planning partners) and on what they will consult when considering the provision of local leisure and cultural facilities and confirm that it will develop guidance to local authorities on this issue which would assist in achieving its National Outcome on young people as requested in the petition?

Effective community engagement is one of the key parts of Community Planning. The Scottish Government recognised the importance of engaging with young people when it published specific guidance on this - Engaging Children and Young People in Community Planning - Community Planning Advice Note, 2006:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/09140609/0>

In addition, the UK Government's Equality Act 2010, which we expect to come into force from April 2011, will include a duty on public authorities to assess the impact of their proposed policies and practices on equality groups (including young people). Scottish Ministers are currently consulting on UK proposals (closing date is 26 November) and the consultation document is available online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/09/13094828/0> "

Scottish Government's *Getting it right for every child* national programme is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Among other things, it encourages the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. We recognise that different Community Planning Partnership areas are at different stages in implementing the programme and we have a project under way to embed *Getting it right for every child* within the community planning process.

In the current climate with budget cuts and reductions in the provision of some local services what approach is it taking to really encourage local authorities to change the way they communicate and enter into dialogue with local people and agencies about the provision of local leisure and cultural facilities e.g. tap into the ideas which local people may have about how to maintain or enhance such services for less money?

The Scottish Government already requires Creative Scotland, the single national body for the arts and culture, to work with local authorities on the provision of cultural services for local communities. In doing so Creative Scotland must work with all its partners, and in particular local councils, to increase the diversity of people who access and participate in the arts and culture in order to maximise the opportunities available for creative engagement. The Government certainly expects local authorities to consult with, and respond to ideas generated within, local communities about the provision of services in the current economic climate.

Is there a risk of making financial cuts in the provision of local leisure and cultural facilities which simply then pass on a cost elsewhere e.g. anti-social behaviour, health as outlined by the petitioner?

Councils have been given more freedom and flexibility to allocate their resources as they see fit with the introduction of the Concordat. Locally elected representatives are best placed to make decisions on matters of local importance including what

leisure and cultural facilities their communities need and possible effects of any reduction in facilities.

What is your response to the point that ‘every £ invested in early years ultimately saved taxpayers up to £7’?

In terms of investment in the early years, the research firmly points to that investment being cost effective and paying benefits for individuals and society. The £1:7 mentioned in the question comes from international research and is one quoted by the Scottish Government in reports and correspondence. Some other studies have followed subjects beyond the age of 21 and the rates of return can be as high as 1:17. Up until recently, we have lacked bespoke Scottish research to show what savings might be possible here from investing in the early years, but we now have a report showing that savings are possible in the short, medium and long terms. We estimate that savings of around £130 million might be possible in the medium term: a substantial sum by any measure. We are continuing to make the case and to provide evidence as we engage with local authorities, NHS Boards and others around the early years agenda.

Can you demonstrate that local authorities are ‘thinking out the box’ about how to make savings?

Wherever possible, we are urging all public service organisations to think creatively about how to respond to the funding pressures we all face, so that they can direct resources to the frontline. A number of local authorities are working together to look at innovative models for service delivery. For example, the Clyde Valley Councils recently announced they expected to save at least £70m through their shared services projects, whilst East and Midlothian Councils recently announced they will explore joint educational services and other opportunities with a view to delivering efficiencies. I am also aware that Highland and Argyll and Bute Councils in partnership with NHS Highland are in the early stages of looking at opportunities to share services to ensure efficient and effective service delivery.

Reference was made during the discussion to the consultation carried out by Highland Council on the provision of local sport and leisure facilities. Is that a good model? What could others learn from that?

The work underway within Highland Council is one example of the work going on across all local authorities to consider mechanisms for ensuring continued delivery of high quality culture and leisure services and to provide integrated provision where possible. The HMIe Quality Improvement Framework "How Good Is Our Culture and Sport?" has been drafted to assist local authorities and other service providers to evaluate the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness of their culture and sport provision. There are examples of best practice from across Scotland. For example, a number of local authorities are establishing community sports hubs and partnerships to ensure improved community engagement in relation to leisure provision and also to widen access to these facilities.

What consideration and encouragement is it actively giving to fully utilise school facilities (e.g. gym halls) within local communities?

The School Estate Strategy, entitled Building Better Schools, published in September 2009, sets out the Government and COSLA's joint vision for the future of Scotland's schools to ensure that they are equipped to meet the needs of children,

teachers and local communities alike. Central to the strategy's guiding objectives and principles is the concept of community use of school buildings and facilities. It provides an opportunity to encourage all of our partners to create schools which best serve their communities and also to re-emphasise the need for local authorities to provide high quality facilities that are accessible to all. It is however a matter for local authorities to decide, based on local circumstances and needs, the extent to which upgrading of facilities is necessary to support and encourage the use of school facilities within communities. You may find the link to the School Estate Strategy, Building Better Schools – Investing in Scotland's future, helpful. In particular, Section 5 - Guiding Principles, highlights how schools can best serve their communities:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/22154600/0>

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Carrol Herbertson