

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE**  
**PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**  
**SUBMISSION FROM CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND**

Children in Scotland is pleased to submit evidence to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. Many of the points made here echo those we submitted as evidence and in response to the Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services.

We believe that public services have a moral responsibility (underpinned, in some cases, by legislation) to promote equality and fairness. These values would be well served by realignment of resources and priorities in support of good early years services. This would benefit all children, but would generate the greatest positive change for those in greatest need. Services based on rights and entitlements for parents and children will support and empower them in ways that 'one-off' events and activities will not. The ethos that should underpin public services should be, wherever possible to prevent harm, to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to do well, and that public funds are used as wisely and constructively as possible in so doing.

**Partnerships and outcomes**

Outcomes in public services must be defined as the achievement of positive and sustainable change brought about by the intervention provided by those services. The provision of a service is not, in itself, an outcome for a child or family. There are certainly elements of public services that can be shown to perform effectively; a real difficulty, however, is that information that demonstrates change, for good or ill, and clearly establishes some degree of attributability to the intervention, is often not available or is too unspecific.

The public sector must take a leadership role in emphasizing the importance of preventative spending (as recommended by the Christie Commission, Susan Deacon's report *Joining the Dots*, and Finance Committee Inquiries), with the voluntary sector taking a prominent role in both the planning and implementation of these desired actions to prevent harm rather than primarily responding after the fact. The Government has also stated its support for preventative spending, and it needs to be made clearer how this national rhetoric translates into spending by, for example local authorities and health boards. Preventative spending is also key to realising many of the Government's National Outcomes and Indicators in areas including health and employment and economic growth.

Mother/fathers/carers -- and children and young people themselves should be involved - not merely as clients, cases or service users, but rather as people with significant rights and roles in making needed public service reforms a reality. There is a good deal of rhetoric in favour of participation and partnership, but this is too rarely reflected in the

operations of the public sector. That positive rhetoric must now start to be matched by the ways in which the public sector thinks, plans and behaves.

In terms of national and local accountability, there are clearly areas of activity to which only government at national level can be held accountable. When delivery in support of a national policy takes place at more local level, there should be explicit and ambitious expectations agreed as to how and what the local bodies contribute. Single Outcome Agreements have not, by and large, set challenging local targets, nor have they prioritised effectively among the (often hundreds) of actions and intended outcomes.

### **Benchmarking and performance measurement**

Research evidence is also important in ensuring that best use is made of public funds. Children in Scotland's recent research project 'Working for Inclusion' looked at children's pre-school experience in several European countries. It was evident that significantly better outcomes were achieved in countries with universally available, integrated pre-school education and childcare, where staff were qualified to degree level. Minimising the risk of later problems and costly interventions contributes substantially to the financial sustainability of public services. Good early support provides benefits that have positive and life-long impact on education, health and well-being.

We are, of course aware of the statutory duties placed on public bodies and the limitations this can place on strategic decision-making. We would, however, argue that more innovative, creative and responsive approaches can be taken to the discharge of statutory functions, particularly if information on what works, and what does not, underpins resource allocation decisions. Outcomes for young people leaving residential care, for example, are significantly better in Germany and Denmark than they are in Scotland.

This is despite the fact that staff/child ratios are substantially lower, though again the staff are better qualified (usually as a social pedagogue) and turnover is much lower. Better outcomes could therefore be achieved, and statutory duties more effectively fulfilled, by having fewer but better trained staff. Mainstreaming what has been found to work well in pilot and time-limited projects (within and outwith the public sector) should also happen more often than it does.

### **Developing new ways of delivering services**

Delivery models are much less important than what is done, and what impact services have. There are, however, a couple of key points of which any model should take account. Firstly, there should be a 'level playing field' in terms of service provision and commissioning. The public sector as provider should not be the default position. Services should be provided by whoever can deliver the most effective outcomes with the most efficient use of public funds. Of course this requires collection of data, as stated above, that can provide this information across all sectors of provision. Secondly,

better integrated services produce better results. While management structures are part of this, communication, collaboration and shared planning at all levels are much more important.

Schools should be treated and funded as community resources that should be the hub of creative, mutually-reinforcing public services across ages and that should promote intergenerational cohesion and collaboration. This, in turn, should lead to the implementation of promising, already evidence validated ideas about changing the children and young people's workforce in efficient and effective ways. This is particularly relevant to the ongoing discussion around rural education, and the future of Scotland's rural schools.

Probably the main challenge facing public services both at present, and looking to the future, is how to respond to continually increasing demand. Continually increasing supply is neither an affordable nor a sustainable response. The only other possibility is therefore to reduce demand. We know that early intervention, in particular in the very earliest years of life, will incrementally reduce demand for interventions such as social work and health services, for additional support in education, and for police and criminal justice provision.

Commissioning processes are unlikely to ensure optimum service quality if the outcomes achieved by services are not known for all potential providers. An equitable approach should underpin all commissioning activity thus ensuring the best return on the investment of public money. The relationship between public services and those from whom they commission services must be fair, clear and open. Real and meaningful partnership is not possible when, for example, voluntary sector agencies are dependent on the statutory bodies with whom they are in 'partnership' for their continued existence.

Please also see.

Evidence submitted to the commission on the future delivery of public services:  
<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/CommissionontheFutureDeliveryofPublicServices-2.pdf>

Written evidence to the Finance Committee on the spending review 2011 and draft budget 2012-13:

[http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/PreventativeResponse010911\\_000.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/PreventativeResponse010911_000.pdf)

Supplementary written evidence to the Finance Committee on the spending review 2011 and draft budget 2012-13:

<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/ChildreninScotland281011.pdf>

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Children in Scotland is the national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including the majority of Scottish local authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.