

Media Release

05/05/2010

Election 2010

Party manifesto pledges confuse reserved and devolved issues affecting children and families, analysis shows

Scottish parties are running the risk of misleading the electorate by mixing devolved and reserved matters in their manifesto promises, analysis by Children in Scotland and the National Children's Bureau has revealed.

Issues concerning children, their rights, care, and support for their families, are framed by Westminster tax and employment legislation that limits the extent to which a Scottish government can determine the level of services available.

Yet the main Scottish party manifestos refer to policies on education, health, the environment, transport and housing – without making it clear that Scottish MPs at Westminster will not be able to legislate on any of these matters because they are devolved to Holyrood.

In the manifestos 23% of Labour pledges, 18% of Conservative pledges and 8% of Liberal Democrat pledges relate to devolved issues. The Liberal Democrat and SNP manifestos were slightly better than other parties at separating devolved from reserved issues but the SNP still refers to current and future work in the Scottish parliament rather than Westminster, and the Green Party makes policy statements on education.

Sarah Burton, Policy Development Manager for Children in Scotland, said: "Scottish MPs of all parties should be making clear their understanding of devolved government, how reserved and devolved issues interact and why they are committed to their party's UK-wide agenda. The parties should be taken to task on their presentation of devolved and reserved matters in the choices facing the Scottish electorate. It's as if parties are using their manifestos to test public opinion on policies ahead of the Holyrood election in 2011 rather than outlining what they can actually achieve."

All the parties offer gains to families in areas such as parental leave and flexible working, but it is harder to predict whether low income families will be better off and child poverty reduced. Tax and credit policies targeted at families will need to be supported by reduced unemployment.

Chief Executive Bronwen Cohen said: "It is good to see children's rights explicitly mentioned by the Liberal Democrats, who would bring the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child into UK law, and we are pleased to see the pledge to end detention of asylum-seeking children in detention centres by both the SNP and the Liberal Democrats.

“We are concerned the Conservatives’ promise to replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights would weaken children’s rights. Though we are pleased the Labour party proposes to keep the Human Rights Act, we would urge them to go further and join the Liberal Democrats in proposing to adopt the UN Convention.”

Notes to Editors

1. Children in Scotland analysed the manifestos of all the Scottish parties for issues relevant to children and families. These findings were combined with a similar analysis of the full UK manifestos carried out by the National Children’s Bureau in England. Further details are in the attached briefing document and the full 40-page analysis is available on request from Children in Scotland on 0131 222 2419.
2. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children’s sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

For more information contact Tracey Francis at tfrancis@childreninscotland.org.uk or call 0131 222 2419