



PRESS RELEASE
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New family law must improve early support to avoid courts

Children in Scotland is calling on the Scottish Executive to address the lack of universal support for families with children who are experiencing family break-down, to reduce the number of family disputes that end up in court.

Local authorities in Scotland should be held more accountable for the provision, at an early stage, of services for parents who are struggling to cope or facing separation. This should include services specifically for the children involved, to ensure their views are heard and taken into account. Such preventative support services are crucial in ensuring that parents find ways of supporting their children without resorting to the courts. The services could include family mediation, contact centres where children can meet family members, family group work and individual counselling for children and young people.

Children in Scotland, the national agency for children and their families, has submitted its evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Justice 1 Committee, which is scrutinising the Family Law (Scotland) Bill at Stage 1.

Shelly Gray, policy officer at Children in Scotland, said: "It is imperative that support is available to all families experiencing parental separation due to the detrimental effect this can have on outcomes for children. Early intervention and non-stigmatising services are the key to providing adequate support.

"There is merit in considering a power or statutory duty on local authorities to provide such services to ensure they become part of mainstream funding.

"There is concern that the views of the children involved in separation cases are currently overlooked and mechanisms must be in place to ensure the child's views and interests are properly and accurately heard. "

Children in Scotland is also calling for better education and training of the professionals who make decisions relating to children and their contact with family members following parental separation. Minimum standards should be set in this area.

The Judiciary, legal practitioners, Children's Hearing System panel members and other professionals should all be able to communicate effectively with children, have a good understanding of child development and be fully aware of the dynamics and effects of domestic abuse on children.

Notes for editors:

- The Family Law (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on February 7, and proposes to better safeguard the best interests of children, promote and support stable families and reflect the reality of family life in Scotland today.
- A full copy of Children in Scotland's written evidence can be downloaded from the policy section of our website at www.childrenin scotland.org.uk.
- Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.