

Ahead of the Scottish Parliament Election on 5 May 2011 **Children in Scotland** has compiled a manifesto calling upon all political parties, candidates and voters to make a real difference to the lives of Scotland's children and young people. Our recommendations are shared by our members and by many other key organisations and this short briefing summarises these key recommendations.

To read our full manifesto visit: http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/Manifesto2011/Manifesto_FINAL.pdf

1. Children in Scotland calls for universal availability of good quality, integrated, accessible childcare and early learning opportunities that are truly affordable

This means passing Scottish legislation that, within 5 years, gives a legal right to all children between 1 and 8 years old (and their parents) to have access to meaningful early childhood education and care. Universal, subsidised early childhood education and care, and out of school care led by high quality staff, in partnership with parents, benefits children and families. This has been affirmed in the European Commission's recent Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Cost and funding issues can impact upon the wellbeing of children and their families, for example: patchy, unstable services increase parental stress; inconsistent care for young children may damage their emotional development; high prices continue the cycle of child poverty for low income families; and a poorly paid workforce affects the standards of care and support.

The **Working for Inclusion** research programme found that countries with low levels of child poverty and high child wellbeing also have the highest levels of fully integrated early childhood care and education, associated with a generous benefit system and strong income distribution. This

responsibility is reserved to Westminster, but the Scottish Government should work with them to influence welfare reform and make systems such as tax credits less complicated.

The **Scottish Campaign for Welfare Reform** manifesto (originally prepared for the 2010 General Election) asks for a radically simplified welfare system and for benefits for Scotland to be suitable to Scotland. They also call for investment in free or affordable, accessible, high quality childcare focused on the wellbeing of the child, as a right for all parents enabling them to engage fully in society. **Children in Scotland's** recent national survey of the cost of childcare revealed a trend to increased costs and that the overall average childcare cost was more than half the average part time weekly wage (25 hours/week costs £84, average weekly part time wage is £160). There was widespread concern among respondents that non-statutory childcare (anything other than pre-school entitlement) would face cuts.

Around 6000 childminders in Scotland provide a professional quality service for over 28,000 children. The **Scottish Childminding Association** would like priority to be given to raising the profile of childminding, improving quality by the introduction of mandatory training and qualifications, and to the recruitment and retention of childminding professionals. They also report in their manifesto that many parents receive incorrect benefits through the tax credit system.

The **Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN)** believes there should be a place in school aged childcare for anyone who needs it. Children with disabilities or who need extra support, and those from rural or socially disadvantaged areas also need access to play, care and learning after school and during holidays, independent of their parents working status. The **National Day Nurseries Association Scotland (NDNA)**

agrees that disadvantaged and rural communities are especially in need of a real choice of childcare provision.

Parenting across Scotland recommends a review of childcare in Scotland that would result in a new strategy for Scotland, ensuring that adequate, accessible and affordable childcare and out of school leisure activities are available to all families no matter where they live. **SOSCN** believes the new Scottish Government should refresh the Scottish Childcare Strategy, including 'Schools Out' to tie in with related objectives and frameworks. Resources should be allocated to protect existing but vulnerable provision, and work should take place with funding agencies to include school age childcare in future grant programmes. **SOSCN** also call on the incoming Government to work with their UK counterparts to ensure support to parents with tax credits for childcare, and outline steps local government can take in the current economic climate.

2. Children in Scotland recommends strengthening the Early Years Framework by making its implementation a statutory responsibility

Although the Early Years Framework receives cross-party support and the backing of the Scottish Convention of Local Authorities, it is not being given the resources required to deliver the 'transformational change' set out. The **Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA)** looks to collaboration and partnership working as way forward to delivering this change in a time of scarce resources. Voluntary sector providers should be given funding support and the right to equality in the commissioning and procurement process.

NDNA believes that the early years should be a key theme for the incoming government, ensuring effective local implementation of the Early Years Framework. Investment in Curriculum for

Excellence should also extend to early years and childcare providers. **NDNA** also believes that private and voluntary nurseries should be fully included in local child poverty strategies and that early years and childcare providers should be supported in developing their workforce.

The **EIS** asks for a guarantee that every 3- to 5-year-old will be able to attend a nursery school or class and taught by qualified teacher. This requires a commitment to funding to ensure sufficient nursery teachers, and that staff in early years establishments have access to quality professional development linked to appropriate qualifications. **NDNA** feels child carers should have the time they have to spend on administration tasks minimised and that nurseries should be given relief on business rates so they can use their resources to open up access and keep fees affordable.

Play is an essential component of good child development. **Play Scotland** looks for a pledge on a statutory duty for play, the creation of child friendly communities, the inclusion of children and young people in the planning and provision of play space, and for a highly skilled play workforce. The **SPPA** manifesto for the Early Years encourages a culture of collaboration and support across the early years sector with increased emphasis on the value of voluntary sector community-based services offering flexible, engaging, innovative and holistic approaches. It also backs increased opportunities for all children to play, through developing new facilities and maximising the use of existing ones.

The **EIS** believes there should be a guarantee to increase staff to help those with additional support needs, and for those staff to be given CPD opportunities. **Enable Scotland** echoes this call for all teachers and assistants to receive training in additional support needs. The **Scottish Parent Teacher Council** (SPTC) seeks a commitment to early years support for children and families and for Scotland to set definitive targets to reduce the level of illiteracy and ensure parity of outcomes.

3. Children in Scotland calls for investment in preventing problems, not fixing them later

It is widely understood and accepted that investing in preventing problems – especially those with their roots in prebirth and early childhood – is the best way to reduce suffering, promote wellbeing and save taxpayers' money in both the short and longer term. **Children in Scotland** believes leadership is now needed to translate good intentions into action. Improving the health of women of child-bearing age in Scotland is beneficial to them, to their children and to society. Good antenatal care (once pregnancy is confirmed) is important but issues such as fetal alcohol harm can happen before this begins. There have been a raft of recent Scottish Government policies and frameworks launched in recent months including the Refreshed Framework for Maternity Health; Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action; A Pathway of Care for Vulnerable Families; and A New Look at Hall 4. Keeping the issues contained in these documents at the fore should be of key importance to the incoming Government.

The **British Medical Association Scotland** recommends that the Government gives consistent and clear advice to healthcare professionals and the public regarding the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and ensures that support is available for women who stop smoking during pregnancy, with the aim of preventing relapse. The **Royal College of Midwives (RCM)** points to the importance of getting maternity services right and believes each NHS Board should have a named executive director with specific responsibility for the service. Specialist midwifery services should be rolled out to work with families most in need of help. The **NDNA** asks the new Government to support early intervention by enabling the workforce to develop the skills and

services capable of meeting every child's need, and to encourage interagency working.

Spending labelled 'preventative' need to be more closely collected, collated and monitored. There is support for evidence-based decision making but less so for the rigorous gathering, analysis and reporting of such evidence about the actual outcomes of most public spending.

4. Children in Scotland recommends supporting innovative projects that accomplish work with children and families, and can be adopted widely

Parenting across Scotland calls on the next Scottish Government to develop a family and relationship support policy and to invest in the importance of parenting (including recognising the importance of fathers). Parents and families need information and support especially in challenging times such as the early years – for example re-instating universal health visiting, and providing high quality parent education and resources. Good parental relationships (whether together or apart) are fundamental to good outcomes for children.

Children in Scotland's 'Making the Gender Equality Duty Real' project promotes the value and importance of involving fathers (biological and *de facto*) positively in their children's lives. More generally, preparing prospective parents and better supporting parents should be understood and treated as a universal good, rather than as a penalty for 'bad' parenting.

The **SPPA** calls for increased support to services that focus on pre-birth to 3, support to parent and carers and for a focus on service developments that engage and empower families and strengthen communities.

The **Royal College of Midwives** has found that mothers want more support from professionals post-birth, and notes that maternity services should seek to involve fathers and families as well as mothers.

For further information about this briefing or Scotland's Children's Sector Forum please contact policy@childreninscotland.org.uk or phone 0131 222 2412.

Published by Children in Scotland – working for children and their families (SC003527)