



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**30 March 2007**

### **Inclusion of children in rural planning 'must be improved'**

There is huge variation among community planners in their inclusion of children, according to research revealed at a Children in Scotland conference today.

*Planning for better childhoods in rural Scotland*, held today (Friday 30<sup>th</sup> March) in Aberdeenshire, focused on planning for integrated children's services in rural and remote communities.

Bruce Robertson, director of education and recreation at Aberdeenshire council, called for innovative 21st century approaches to the planning and delivery of services for children and young people in rural Scotland to ensure children's voices were emphasised. In particular he identified the challenges of affordable housing, transport, early years, primary and secondary schooling.

He called for public agencies across Scotland to improve their performance and convert the rhetoric of community planning into reality.

He said: "The Scottish Executive needs to recognise there is real exclusion in rural Scotland from early years provision. Families and children cannot access preschool entitlements because transport is not funded or available."

He also called for Scottish Enterprise to follow the example of Highlands and Islands Enterprise in investing in the social and economic fabric of rural Scotland.

"We will be calling on the next Scottish government to review the different roles played by Scottish Enterprise and Highland and Islands Enterprise and how this relates to the priorities and aspirations of the community," he said.

Sarah Gillen, growing up in rural Scotland coordinator, Children in Scotland, presented the research which showed a great variation among community planners in their inclusion of children and young people. The research was conducted through consultation with childcare partnerships across rural Scotland.

She said: "Seventy five per cent of childcare partnerships were not satisfied with the level of consultation with them or with children and families in the development of community plans. Most did not think that community planning took seriously the needs and aspirations of children and young people."

Colin MacLean, head of education at the Scottish Executive, who also spoke at the conference, said: "The Scottish ministers' vision for children and young people absolutely includes everyone growing up in rural Scotland. Implementing that vision depends upon local authorities and local communities taking the initiative instead of just waiting for instructions. They already have the power to do virtually anything to advance the wellbeing of children and young people. We are committed to working with local people to get it right for every child."

Jack Shelton, executive secretary, PACERS, USA, who made a presentation at the conference, said that children, young people and the school were the foundation for thriving and secure communities.

He said: "Young people, communities and schools can and should be equal partners in doing real work that matters locally. Rural regeneration must start with a strong sense of place, a strong commitment to working across the community and a strong involvement of children, teachers and schools in community development."

"There are widespread examples of success, from community newspapers run by students to viable local enterprises created by teachers and young people. The results are better schools, better student performances and better communities."

Henny Aune, project leader of the Bodo municipality in Norway, talked about comparisons with approaches to planning children's services in Norway.

She said: "Bodo has succeeded in being a community that can offer every pre-school child a place and ensure that they feel valued. Scotland must aspire to this but it will require strong and imaginative political leadership at a national and local level."

She also described the Bodo model of an open access family centre, where parents have direct access to doctors and psychologists, as something that should be available to Scotland's rural communities.

The conference follows the publication of a new Children in Scotland report, *Arts for all? Developing cultural entitlements for children in rural Scotland*, which highlights the need for more artists to be equipped with these skills to help deliver new 'cultural entitlements' should the Culture (Scotland) Bill become law.

The conference was held today (Friday 30 March), at Ardoe House Hotel, Aberdeenshire.

**Notes for editors:**

- For more information on *Arts for all? Developing cultural entitlements for children in rural Scotland*, visit [www.childreninScotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk)
- The conference was run as part of Children in Scotland's ongoing Growing Up in Rural Scotland programme
- 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.