

Holyrood 2016: What do you think?

Following our election special where the party leaders had their say, over the next three pages we hear from key sector figures about their hopes for the coming parliamentary term – and if the promises of the new SNP government will be enough to address the current concerns of children, young people and families in Scotland

On Housing...



Adam Lang
Head of Communications
and Policy
Shelter Scotland

Ahead of the recent Holyrood elections Shelter Scotland issued research showing that the majority of people in Scotland (90%) think that the children of today will find it harder to buy or rent a home than the generation before them. The reason people in Scotland are worried about housing is clear – we are currently in the grip of a housing crisis which hits the poorest and most vulnerable in our society hardest, especially younger people.

The high cost of housing and the stuttering supply of new affordable homes set against rising demand are at the heart of this crisis. Our message to all political parties before the election was that, unless they took meaningful action to tackle Scotland's housing crisis as a matter of urgency, we risked creating a devastating generational gulf between the housing haves and have nots.

Our Manifesto for Homes outlined the priority commitments we wanted to see all parties support to deliver positive change including a home for everyone in Scotland; tackling the root causes of homelessness; addressing issues in private renting, and putting housing at the heart of social justice and tackling child poverty.

A good home is central to our wellbeing both as individuals and collectively as a nation. From improving our health outcomes to raising educational attainment, reducing reoffending and tackling poverty and inequality – all of these depend on whether or not people in Scotland have a decent home.

We urge the new Scottish Government to recognise this and adopt the commitments in our manifesto.

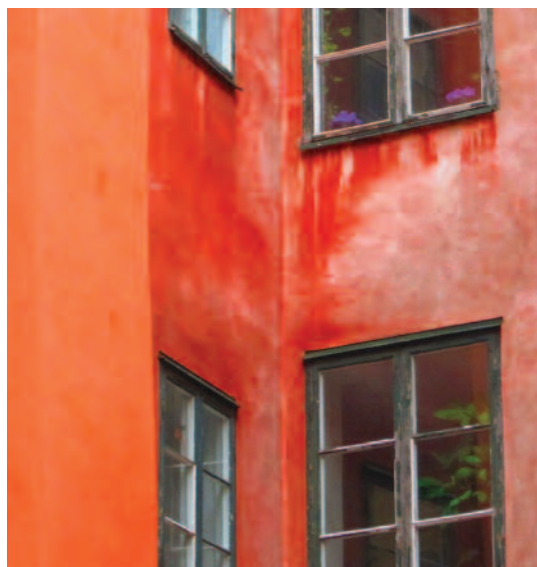
Last year, children living in Scotland suffered nearly 1 million days of homelessness living in temporary accommodation. Tomorrow, nearly 5,000 children will wake up without a home of their own. While temporary accommodation provides an important safety net for individuals and families that have lost their home, extended stays can be detrimental to wellbeing, particularly for children. On average, children in temporary accommodation miss 55 days of school per year.

This is simply not good enough in 21st Century Scotland. We need a new Strategy for Homelessness.

We would also like to see the new Scottish Government take forward the findings and recommendations from the Commission on Housing and Wellbeing, which published its final report, *A blueprint for Scotland's future*, in June 2015. This report laid out a series of actions for housing in Scotland and called for a radical look at the future direction of housing policy - linking the benefits of a safe, secure and affordable home to improved health, equality, wellbeing and life chances for all. It too called for a major increase in the provision of new affordable housing. This landmark report noted that failure to act now on our housing policy would risk the future wellbeing of people in Scotland.

This new parliament represents a major opportunity for Scotland to put housing at the very heart of our political agenda to deliver a more socially just Scotland and a society in which everyone has access to a safe, secure and affordable home.

The election rhetoric and manifesto commitments across parties was positive on many of these core issues. It is now time to turn good words into action and deliver a safe, secure and affordable home for everyone in Scotland.



On Health...



Dr Steven Turner
Scotland Officer
Royal College of Paediatrics
and Child Health

We know that the days between conception and a child's second birthday are crucial to lifelong health and wellbeing. In a similar manner what a government does in its first days of being is important to what it achieves in a term. Scotland has much to be proud of in terms of improving outcomes for infants, children and young people – Getting It Right for Every Child, the Patient Safety Programme and the Children and Young People's Act Scotland (2014). However, there is still much to be done and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is disappointed that details on how the new government will significantly and measurably improve the health of children, is severely lacking. Therefore, we challenge the SNP government with four major goals:

1. Tackle child health inequalities. Currently more than 210,000 of our children still live in poverty and one third of all hospital admissions come from the poorest 20% of communities. We want a national strategy for looked after children and those at risk of becoming looked after; high quality research dedicated to interventions to reduce health inequalities and robust transition plans in the new Strategy for Disabled Children.

2. Prevent ill health, acting early and intervening at the right time. Twenty eight per cent of Scottish children are overweight or obese and 20,000 children start smoking each year in Scotland. We want to introduce the "daily mile" for all primary school children. Legislation which prevents cigarettes being sold to under 18s needs to be rigorously policed.

3. Reduce the number of child deaths. Each year between 350 and 450 infants, children and young people die in Scotland. We call on the government to; implement a robust, consistent child death review system for Scotland, restrict access to alcohol by children and young people and ensure equitable access to the Family Nurse Partnership scheme throughout Scotland.

4. Make the NHS a better place for infants, children and young people. One in every five children in our schools has additional support needs and we know there is a huge unmet need for help with anxiety and depression. The new Government must increase the proportion of the NHS budget dedicated to children and adolescent mental health services, ensure that GP training includes a strong focus on child health and effectively engage children, young people and their families in all matters relating to their health and wellbeing.

Nothing ever stays the same, and the demands for maintaining the health and wellbeing of our nation's children are ever-changing. A successful policy which reacts to (and hopefully anticipates) need demands a joined-up approach that blends seamlessly with general practice, maternity services, mental health services and schools. There can be no ceiling to ambitions for our children's future, and there is always room for improvement.

On Children's Rights...



Juliet Harris
Director
Together (Scottish Alliance
for Children's Rights)

Children's human rights are finally getting the attention of our politicians. The previous Scottish Parliament demonstrated a commitment to 'make rights real' for children and young people through the passing of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act in 2014, which enshrined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law for the first time. The extension of voting rights to 16 and 17 year-olds in the referendum and the subsequent Scottish Parliament cemented the importance that politicians must place on involving, consulting and valuing young people.

But despite this progress, there is recognition across political parties that more must be done to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights. There were strong commitments to children's rights across many party manifestos; incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law featured in the Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos and the Green Party committed to support the incorporation of international treaties. The SNP has pledged to use the Parliament's new powers to establish social and economic rights for Scotland and to further embed the European Convention on Human Rights. Specific commitments to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and give children equal protection from assault were included in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, reflecting calls from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. There is cross-party agreement to oppose the repeal of the Human Rights Act by the SNP, Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat parties. Twenty-four MSPs have signed up to our Child Rights Manifesto and pledged to be #childrights champs in the new Parliament.

Recommendations are about to be made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which will identify where more needs to be done to take forward the UNCRC and provide a road map for action for Scotland and the UK. Clearly, closing the educational attainment gap will be a priority. But the UN Committee will also stress that children's rights need to be recognised more widely than just within education: most decisions made by MSPs affect children and young people and their rights, from housing to justice, climate change to broadband access.

I hope that in the new Parliament, children, young people and their rights will be at the centre of every debate and decision made. Our MSPs need to recognise all children and young people as active rights holders whose best interests come first, whose opinions are valued and who are supported to thrive and reach their full potential. In doing this, the Scottish Parliament can help to lead a culture change towards children and young people across government, public services, the media, schools and families. Only then will Scotland's ambition to 'make rights real' become a reality for children and young people.

On Early Learning and Childcare...



Jean Carwood-Edwards
Chief Executive
Early Years Scotland

The Scottish Government has promised to double the amount of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 140 hours for every three- and four-year-old and every eligible two-year-old in Scotland by 2021. There is also a promise that by 2018, each and every nursery in our most disadvantaged areas will have an additional qualified teacher or early years graduate. Here at Early Years Scotland we welcome these manifesto commitments and consider this to be a modern and progressive direction of travel. Any manifesto pledge that supports improving quality in our ELC provision is of high importance and will potentially reduce the attainment gap for Scotland's children experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

If someone had said to me when I first entered early years work in 1981 that this level of expansion of ELC would be on offer for all children during my working life, I would have relegated it to the wish list! At that point there was no universal entitlement for every child, and funded nursery provision was a postcode lottery where some children got some and many got none – how far we have come!

At Early Years Scotland, we are acutely aware however, that being able and ready to deliver in the pressing timescale will be hugely challenging for providers. It will also be difficult for staff working in local authorities, as this is where the responsibility to provide rests. Doubling the hours for children, of course, means almost doubling the staff hours and accommodation across the country. 2021 isn't far off, so assuming resource is committed, we will all need to pull together, work together and make it happen.

This commitment is unprecedented, both in terms of scope and scale. However, a transformational change of this nature requires careful planning and consideration from today. We know that any positive transformational change can be tough at the start, as new systems and capacity have to be built, often bringing unforeseen hitches along the way.

But at last Scotland is serious about moving towards world-class, flexible, affordable early learning and childcare for all of our children.

The additional SNP pledge of universal 'baby boxes' which are designed to be converted into cots for newborns, is an exciting new development with very positive research to date from Finland. We welcome this new initiative for all babies, and the simultaneous corresponding message that we want all of our children to have an equal start in life.

I am sure that, with our exceptionally dedicated workforce and downright determination to give every child the best start, that we will all collaborate to ensure that these aspirational assurances become an everyday reality for young children and families across Scotland.

On Inclusion...



Sally Covers
Manager
Enquire

Scotland has always been aspirational in its hopes and ambitions for all learners. Efforts to change the special educational needs framework and the way we meet the needs of children who require extra support were realised with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 and the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004, which both aimed to assist children reaching their full potential, recognising that additional support may be needed, for a wide range of issues, at any point. We have seen the introduction of the Equality Act, the Getting it Right for Every Child framework, transformational changes to the curriculum and, most recently, the Education Act 2016. We now have a government that is saying the things we want to hear about equality of opportunity and equity in life chances.

The appointment of John Swinney as Cabinet Secretary for Education was said to demonstrate how important education was to the First Minister. With manifesto commitments including ensuring that every child in early education in the most deprived communities has access to an additional teacher or childcare graduate by 2018, and expanding the Attainment Fund with an additional £750m in the next parliament to close the gap in educational attainment, there is much to be done.

It is essential that the focus on attainment recognises what attainment looks like for every child; and in addition to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds we are aspirational for learners with learning disabilities, social, emotional and behavioural needs and additional support needs.

We need to be able to share practice in a way that sees improvement across Scotland and better consistency in meeting needs, for example, learning from the Calderglen learning community which is a case study for the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education project on Raising Achievement for All.

Through the Enquire service we hear too often about the challenges faced by children and young people whose educational, social and wellbeing needs are not being met and the impact this has on their learning outcomes and on their families. Challenges are reported to the For Scotland's Disabled Children's Parent Participation Project and now Enable Scotland's *Included in the Main* campaign is revealing that the mainstream education experiences of young people with learning disabilities do not fulfil our expectations for education for all pupils.

We will be looking for the government to listen to children and young people and their families, focusing on what needs to be done to make our education system the best that it can be for every child, and supporting the implementation of legislation and policy to ensure the desired impact.