

**Barnardo's Scotland Briefing: Scottish Government debate on
Scotland: the best place in the world to grow up**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes this debate and the commitment shown by all parties in the Parliament to making Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up.

However, for many vulnerable children in Scotland the biggest challenge will come from growing up in poverty, and in particular the impact of welfare reform, which we believe will push many more children and families into poverty, create new kinds of destitution and stretch already financially pressured children's services. When over one in five children in Scotland are growing up in poverty, how can we hope for it to be the best place in the world to grow up?

Barnardo's Scotland supports the aspirations of the proposed Children and Young People Bill, with its focus on children's rights, Getting it Right for Every Child and increasing children's wellbeing. However, new legislation needs to relate clearly to the wider context of change for public services and the impact of welfare reform on the most vulnerable.

Three key areas we would wish to highlight for debate:

- **There needs to be greater focus on the needs of particularly vulnerable groups of young people, such as care leavers;**
- **The relationship between the proposed Children and Young People Bill and other policy and legislation aimed at delivering public service reform needs to be more clearly defined;**
- **The role of the voluntary sector and other non-state bodies in making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up needs to be more fully explored in legislation and policy.**

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Needs of care leavers

The poor outcomes for children and young people in the care system were recognised in the recent Education and Culture Committee [report on the educational attainment of looked after children](#) and the current [inquiry into decision making on whether children should be taken into care](#).

We welcome the commitment to strengthening the understanding of the role of 'corporate parent' for the children the state takes into its care. The draft Children and Young People Bill defines 'corporate parenting' as "the collective responsibility of all public bodies to provide the best possible care and protection for looked-

after children and to act in the same way as a birth parent would". While this is very positive, there is always a danger that a collective responsibility can become nobody's specific responsibility. There must be clear lines of responsibility to named individuals who must be held accountable for looked after children in their care. There also needs to be much greater awareness of corporate parenting among all public bodies, not just local authority children's services.

However, the responsibilities of corporate parenting should not end when a young person leaves care. We welcome the recognition by the Scottish Government that care leavers need support for longer and we support its proposal to raise the age that care leavers can ask for support to 25. Nevertheless, we believe that this needs to go further and that there should be a duty on local authorities to provide support to care leavers who need it up until at least 25. The support provided by the state should also extend beyond education and training and include health, housing, travel and other areas of need.

Housing options for care leavers are often unsuitable and inappropriate to their needs. In our experience a lack of suitable accommodation can have a particularly negative impact on the life of a care leaver and can lead to extremely poor outcomes including failed tenancies homelessness. Care leavers often come from chaotic and vulnerable backgrounds and on leaving home or care lack the life skills to support themselves independently. They will often need to be in housing that can support them into independent living. Bed and Breakfast accommodation should therefore never been seen as appropriate for care leavers and the Scottish Government must take steps to end this practice.

Young care leavers are often in need of frequent support, and this support can be most crucial at times of the day and week that are not during office hours. Unfortunately, from our experience of working with care leavers, far too many services only operate 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Good parents are there for their children all day, everyday and if the state is to strive to be the best corporate parent it can be then services for care leavers must be provided when they need it most, which often means evenings and weekends.

We would also like to see the deaths of recent care leavers treated with as much seriousness as the death of a child in care. We must make sure we all learn the lessons, through proper case review, of these tragic occurrences.

We must make sure that Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up for every child, whatever their circumstances.

The Children and Young People Bill and wider public service reform

The Scottish Government has a very positive cross-cutting focus on outcomes, effective joint working, preventive spend and early intervention. These principles are evident in a variety of current proposals for legislation which will also affect

services for children and young people, including the Integration of Adult Health and Social Care Bill, the Community Empowerment Bill and the Procurement Reform Bill, as well as the new round of Single Outcome Agreements. The recently passed self-directed support legislation will put those who rely on care, and their families, at the centre of decisions about how care budgets are spent.

However, there is a lack of clarity about how all these proposals relate to each other, and the future pattern of services for children and young people that is envisaged. The proposals set out in the Bill to integrate adult health and social care will also have an impact on how children's services are delivered locally, but it is not clear in the proposals who will be responsible for delivering them and how the needs of children and young people will be appropriately prioritised. Equally, if the vision of children's rights in the Children and Young People Bill is to be realised, proposals for community empowerment must recognise children and young people as distinct communities, as well as communities of place. If the integrated planning of children's services suggested in the draft bill is to be delivered, procurement reform proposals must take on board the distinct nature of social care procurement, in particular the need for strategic procurement. Self-directed support, while very welcome, will create very different financial models for service delivery, in ways that have not yet been fully explored for children and young people.

There is a need for a vision for the services that will support children as they grow up that combines the principles laid out in the Children and Young People Bill with an understanding of how services will be provided, by what public body, what degree of involvement there will be by children and young people and, where commissioned, how commissioning will avoid simply being on a least-cost basis, especially given current financial constraints.

Recognising the role of the voluntary sector

Within the vision described above there needs to be consideration of what bodies beyond statutory agencies can contribute to making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. We welcome the proposals to put GIRFEC on a statutory footing, including proposals for a single child's plan, named persons as gateways to public services and consistent outcomes frameworks.

However, the proposals do not currently take into full account the role of the voluntary sector. The single child's plan aims to be a single planning framework for all services delivered to a child. But not all these services will be delivered by public bodies, and it is not clear how plans prepared by these non-statutory bodies will be incorporated, let alone how the child and their family will fully participate in the process. The role of a named person is designed to act as the single gateway to public services, envisaged usually as the health visitor for children under 5 and a senior teacher once a child is at school. It is not yet clear what the relationship will be with the lead professional in a child's life, especially

when this person is employed by a voluntary organisation rather than statutory services.

There is therefore a need for a more comprehensive understanding of the potential roles of all the bodies that will support children as they grow up, recognising the role of family and friends, statutory agencies, and other actors such as charities, churches and community groups. All of these bodies need to cooperate effectively to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up.

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