Clerk to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Room T3.60 Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

13 March 2013

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Delivery of Regeneration in Scotland

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee’s inquiry into the delivery of Regeneration in Scotland.

Children in Scotland very much endorses the principle of the Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy in trying to link up various strategies and policies across different portfolio areas. Whilst Children in Scotland’s focus is on policies and outcomes for children and young people, the success or otherwise is influenced and shaped by the wider policy landscape and social and economic context.

It is vital that regeneration is viewed, not just in terms of the physical improvement of an area but in terms of expanded opportunities and improved life quality and chances for those living there. A good childhood for every child depends, first and foremost, on what happens in each child’s family and community. Properly supporting them is the way to help all children thrive.

Whilst successive Scottish administrations have put in place sound aspirational policies and the right direction of travel represented by the Early Years Framework, Curriculum for Excellence, Getting it Right for Every Child, the Additional Support for Learning Act and Equally Well for example. The Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy document is largely a restatement of existing strategies rather than offering much discernibly new. The pressing need is to ensure these aspirations are properly resourced and implemented.

Children in Scotland believes there is considerable scope to harness the principles of the regeneration strategy with wider aspirations of enabling the best possible childhood for every child. This could be achieved by making childcare from the early years through to adolescence a focus for community regeneration.
More equal societies with less child poverty benefit everyone and can be achieved by **progressive universalism**.

Affordable access to good quality, integrated early childhood education and care as a **universal entitlement and a child’s right**, will immediately benefit children, parents and carers, the Scottish economy and wider society.

Good quality early learning opportunities and high quality out of school services must also underpin a longer-term strategy to end child poverty, worklessness and dependency on benefits. Research shows fully integrated early childhood education and care services to be more cost effective and better at reaching disadvantaged groups. In particular we are keen to ensure universal availability of good quality, integrated, accessible childcare and learning opportunities that are truly affordable. Childcare costs for parents in Scotland are amongst the most expensive in the UK\(^1\). The cost of out of school activities and holiday clubs is prohibitive for many parents. This is reinforcing the intractable inequalities which we see in Scotland’s educational outcomes: 80% of our children do really well in our current system, around 20% leave school with minimal, if any, qualifications\(^2\).

What has not been explored fully is the potential for local community engagement and regeneration approaches to play a full role in planning and potentially delivering care and learning opportunities.

Our proposal is that expanded childcare and out of school play and learning and provision would provide a valuable and effective framework and focus for regeneration and community engagement, underpinned by the national strategies outlined above. Strong communities are built around “social hubs” bringing a range of people and support services together often around recreational as well more formal services. They play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion, breaking the cycle of deprivation and preventing poverty.

Community schools which allow for integrated provision of school and education, family support, health services and promotion by using the existing school estate as wider community assets are an excellent way of putting this principle into practice and have received historic support from Scottish Ministers.\(^3\) Even where this level of integration does not (yet) exist, out of school hour extra-curricular provision such as breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs can greatly improve employability of parents who otherwise find the cost of childcare prohibitive as well as being of considerable merit in terms of children’s attainment and development in themselves.

We do not shy away from the fact that, taken together, these initiatives could require a greater financial commitment but we think there is also merit in testing the scope for rationalising the range of funding streams available from government,

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Community Planning Partnerships and also funders, such as Big Lottery, which could then focus around specific communities and their particular priorities in relation to childcare and out of school learning opportunities. Of course, the longer term returns on the investment, both socially and financially can be much greater.

Whilst recognising the current global economic climate presents severe challenges in this regard, exacerbated by budgetary and welfare decisions of the current UK Coalition Government, we note the current Scottish Government has itself chosen to freeze the council tax at 2008 levels until at least 2016. In acknowledging the attraction to both governments and taxpayers of an across-the-board tax cut at a time when many families feel squeezed, given that services for children and young people are overwhelmingly delivered via local government, this is undoubtedly adding to pressure on these services, particularly in areas of (increasing) economic and social deprivation.

Reconnecting in the public’s mind the connection between taxation and good quality public services from which all people benefit either directly or indirectly is a challenge not just for the current Scottish Government but all political parties.

We are also keen that the current constitutional debate does not have the effect of kicking important funding decisions until after a referendum. The Scottish Government currently has powers over many of areas relevant to children, young people and regeneration more generally while the Scottish Parliament already has flexibility through tax powers, which are due to be expanded regardless of the outcome of the forthcoming referendum by virtue of the Scotland Act 2012. As a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report recently noted, it is important that the discussion of this issue does not obscure the need for current policy development and investment in all these areas to tackle problems that will exist whatever decision Scottish people take constitutionally. Children and young people especially cannot be expected to wait until after 2014 or 2016.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Children in Scotland would therefore ask the Committee to take particular account of the following points and proposals in its deliberations:

- Services for and benefitting children and young people are vital to community resilience and regeneration yet are facing unprecedented pressures due to unsustainable budgetary decisions from governments at different levels.
- The shortage of good quality affordable childcare and out of school provision is a barrier to employment and therefore economic and social regeneration.
- Learning opportunities and care from an early age are crucial for children and young people’s long-term outcomes.

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• There remains a strong inverse link between deprivation and educational attainment with around one in five of children currently leaving school with few or no qualifications at all.
• Parents and carers in areas of deprivation are deeply concerned at the lack of opportunities that they can provide for their children and the impact this will have on their long-term future.
• Schools perform an important role in community cohesion but their facilities can be empty and unused for 13 weeks a year, most weekends and from 3.30pm during the week. Where they do remain open, their charges can often be prohibitive.
• Whilst existing funding for services of children and young people should be protected, Scottish and local government should work in partnership to explore further ways of better utilising the capacity of the school estate as a relatively cost-effective method of expanding childcare and recreational opportunities outside of normal school hours and during weekend and holiday periods.
• Government at national and local level should further consider revisiting and refreshing Scotland’s New Community Schools initiative and other examples of extending learning activities beyond the school timetable both national and international, as part of wider regeneration and social inclusion initiatives.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Brock

Chief Executive

Children in Scotland is the national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including most of Scottish local authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children’s agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children’s services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland’s largest independent education mediation service.