LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM EDWARD HUMPHREY

I wish to comment on section 10 of the Non Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill and the proposal to remove eligibility to claim charitable relief from non domestic rates from main stream independent schools.

As the fee paying parent of three children who have either passed through or are still attending independent schools I cannot understand the logic or the financial consequences of asking independent schools to pay more in rates if the relief was to be abolished.

My children could easily have attended the local state schools but as parents we decided to send our children to independent schools and that simple decision meant there were three less children going through the state system which according to the Scottish Government figures is a saving of £6,500 each. It is quite simple that the fewer children that attend independent schools will cost the Scottish tax payer more through their attendance in the state system.

The Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) has onerous conditions that charities such as independent schools have to meet and in particular ensure that “public benefit” provisions match the Scottish Government core purpose of advancement of education. The question has to be asked as to why fewer 60 out of more than 24,000 registered charities in Scotland are being targeted for the removal of rates relief in this manner.

Scottish independent schools are some of the finest in the world and help to attract international students which help benefit independent schools not just through finance but the benefit that students receive as different cultures mix and grow together. We cannot afford the cost of sending children to independent schools to be a disadvantage to parents whether from Scotland or further afield.

Mainstream independent schools should not be singled out for the inevitable fee increases that would result from the removal of rates relief. Independent schools provide a proportionally far larger area of learning support than the state system and this is one of the areas that would be affected if independent schools were forced to make cost savings. On the otherhand schools will look to recoup money in other ways. Perhaps they will have to charge out their football, hockey, rugby pitches, musical facilities, swimming pools, the list goes on, at commercial rates all to be paid for by the local authority. With the Scottish Government aim to cut physical inactivity in adults and teenagers by 15% by 2030 surely the Government should not allow potential charges for use of facilities to the detriment of this core aim.

Independent schools have made huge commitments in extending the use of their facilities to meet the “public benefit” demands of the OSCR rules.
Finally, I implore the committee to remove this proposal to abolish rates relief for independent schools. It is completely wrong to single out fewer than 60 bodies from 24,000 others. The cost to local authorities for every single pupil that comes out of independent schools and back into the state system is clear to see and that alone make no economic sense.