LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM SIMON AND FRANCES LITTLE

We are writing in response to the call for evidence regarding the proposed rise in non-domestic rates for independent schools. As parents we have chosen to send our children to an independent school however, our financial situation is such that if this goes ahead we are likely to be directly affected by the decision. We recognise that it is our choice to send our children to an independent school rather than a state school but also recognise that this choice may be taken away from us.

Despite the perception of many people, a lot of families make many sacrifices in order to send their children to independent schools. Our experience is that families from across the social spectrum have access to independent schools which contribute to the overall diversity within the school. It is not an elitist environment which only the wealthiest benefit – far from it.

All children have the right to a local authority school place, in part funded by taxes. Parents of those attending independent schools pay their council tax but choose not to take this school place. By choosing not to use this place we are saving councils a considerable amount of money. A rise in non-domestic rates would inevitably see a proportion of parents unable to afford the subsequent rise in school fees. These children would then have a legal right to be taught within the state sector. This will undoubtedly lead to greater pressures on an already overstretched system.

The relocation of children whose parents are on the margins of being able to afford independent school fees back into the state system will leave children from wealthier families within the independent system which will inevitably lead to a greater class divide and negative impact social mobility.

Our experience is that the school not only benefits its pupils but the surrounding community, including local state schools and contributes significantly to the local economy. It is possible that implementation of the bill will lead to:

- Lower school roll and less income to the school,
- Potential job losses both direct and indirect and subsequent impact on the local economy,
- A greater demand on the already struggling state system,
- Reduction in collaboration between the school and the local community with associated negative impact, and
An overall widening of the social divide with independent schools ultimately becoming elitist.