LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM FRANCESCA COLQUHOUN

The stresses and strains on the Education systems in Scotland and the rest of the UK are a hotly discussed and highly emotive issue. I have been fortunate, as an army wife, to have worked extensively in both systems and there is one common theme. There is not enough funding and staff and schools are greatly overstretched.

Whilst working in Paisley Grammar School (Renfrewshire Council) I witnessed the withdrawal of funds for the school library and a colleague lost her role as they reduced the amount of hours available for the school Librarian role. This was one of a multitude of ‘changes’ that occurred which were in fact cost-cutting measures. We live in the Highlands, and it has become apparent that there are not enough teachers to teach at the local primary schools in Kenmore, Tyndrum, Crianlarich etc and supply teacher turnover is out of control. Students I have spoken to recently express frustration and their parents are very disappointed with some of the situations their children are finding themselves in.

Ardvreck School is small and the impact of these proposed rates will cripple it financially. There is a good chance that the school will have to put up fees or face closure. As an Army family we rely on the service this boarding school provides and we struggle (financially) to send our children there. It is the best we can do for their education and given we have moved house fourteen times in fifteen years it is indisputedly the best decision for our children. If the school closes, our children will be moved into the Scottish state system or we will have to move them away from Scotland and educate them in England. Both of these scenarios will have an impact on Scottish tax payers.

We run our home in the Loch Lomond National park as a Holiday Rental which brings an income to the Tyndrum area in the form of tourism. We will have to sell up and move away from Scotland if our children cease to attend Ardvreck as it is impractical for me to be stationed away with my husband (potentially on tour for months at a time) and trying to run a business in Scotland whilst my children are based in England. Alternatively, I will have to go firm in Crianlarich which takes the house off the holiday market and places my three children in the state education system. I have the utmost respect for the work my colleagues do and I intend to work at Mclaren High when we leave the army however, I do not understand how forcing schools to close or making them financially inaccessible to families who need their services, can benefit the already beleaguered education system as more children are forced out of the private sector into the state sector. Both of our choices incur a cost to the Scottish tax payer where arguably we are currently contributing significantly to the local economy in the Highlands as well as in Crieff. For people like us, the closing of private schools is not merely a matter of moving the children into the local schools but moving them out of Scotland.
We wanted our children to be educated in Scotland and the Scottish Independent Boarding School system has allowed my husband to serve his nation and our children to be brought up in their home country. It should be protected and not penalised for providing an extremely important service for people like us who want a stable and Scottish education for our children.