"Our vision is for Scotland to be a world leader in the care and support of vulnerable children and young people"



Scottish Children's Services Coalition

Manifesto for the Scottish Local Authority Elections

May 2017

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As we approach local Council elections, it is important that vulnerable children and young people are center stage in terms of the political debate.

The Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) Manifesto outlines key our key policies and principles. It is important that services for these children and young people are well-resourced and responsive to local needs and demands, addressing both their needs and those of their families.

The SCSC believes in standing up for Scotland's vulnerable children and young people.



About the Scottish Children's Services Coalition

The SCSC is an alliance of leading independent and third sector services providers that care for and support vulnerable children and young people, as well as their families.

Our vision is for Scotland to become a world leader in the care and support of these children and young people. Between them our members deliver specialist care and education services to children and young people with additional support needs. They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation to care experienced children and young people.

Our members are Falkland House School, Spark of Genius, Who Cares? Scotland, Young Foundations, Kindred, Action for Sick Children Scotland.

In our **Manifesto for the local authority elections** we are focusing on two interrelated areas, and urge incoming council administrations to **put these at the heart of future policy commitments**:

Better support and provision for children and young people with additional support needs (ASN)

Delivery of high-quality services for children and young people with mental health needs

Better support and provision for children and young people with ASN

Over 170,000 children and young people in Scotland's publically funded primary, secondary and special schools are classed as having ASN, amounting to **just under a quarter (24.9%)** of all pupils, an **increase of 44% since 2012**[1].

ASN, including poor mental and physical health and long-term conditions, disproportionately affects those children from lower income families and areas of deprivation. An increased pressure on services, combined with budget cuts, means that many children and young people are missing out on the support they vitally need, leading to a potential 'lost generation' of vulnerable children and young people.

Since 2012 the number of specialist ASN teachers in local authority primary and secondary schools has **fallen by 16%**, from 2,146 to 1,799[2], and the number of pupil-support staff, such as ASN auxiliaries or care assistants, has **fallen by 5%**[3].

We are fully in support of the presumption of mainstreaming, that those with ASN be supported in a mainstream classroom environment. However, it is difficult to see this being effectively achieved if there is not adequate support being provided in the classroom.

Local authorities play a key role in meeting the additional support needs of children and young people. We need them to use their budgets to help children and young people in their communities get the best possible start in life and realise their full potential.

Our recommendations:

Increased investment: There must be greater investment in services that care for and support children and young people with ASN, such as additional support for learning services, social work services and early years' services. This will improve educational outcomes, support the closure of the educational attainment gap, and ensure that statutory requirements are fulfilled.

Early assessment and intervention: While those with ASN have poorer educational and employment outcomes than their peers, early intervention and preventative measures can assist in addressing this, preventing difficulties developing later and maximising their life chances.

Greater support and staffing in schools: There must be increased investment to reverse staff cuts and deliver adequate staffing levels, supporting those children and young people with ASN in mainstream education, delivering a fully inclusive experience. This includes specialist ASN teachers and pupil-support staff (e.g. ASN auxiliaries and behaviour support staff), as well as adequate facilities and equipment provided.

Increased specialist provision for children and young people: The educational needs of some children and young people with complex or specific needs, are better met in specialist settings. Local authorities must be assisted to increase the number of special school/unit places available. These places may be provided by the local authority or independent sector, on a wider geographic basis.

Better training: There must be better training of mainstream teachers, social workers, health professionals and other practitioners, including continuing professional development, so that they can adequately support children and young people with ASN.

Greater partnership working: There must be greater partnership working between the public sector and independent and third sector service providers, so that the needs of the child or young person can be properly supported in the most appropriate setting.

Greater independent advocacy: Care experienced children and young people must have access to independent professional advocacy, ensuring that they make informed decisions on matters which affect their lives, and this must be made a statutory right.

Delivery of high-quality services for children and young people with mental health needs

Mental health issues provide one of the greatest health challenges of our time. These include depression, anxiety, suicide, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and self-harm. As demand continues to increase, mental health services are under huge pressure.

Research indicates that **10% of children and young people** (aged five to 16) have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem while **20% of adolescents** may experience a mental health problem in any given year[4]. It is also understood that **50% of mental health problems** are established by the **age of 14** and **75%** by the **age of 24**[5].

While we welcome the priority the Scottish Government is giving to mental health and the proposed increase in NHS expenditure on mental health services, we are concerned about cuts in local authority budgets, and the impact this is having on local services.

More needs to be done to ensure that a wide variety of high-quality, well-resourced and quickly accessible mental health services are available to those requiring it, so they get the help they need when they need it.

Local authorities play a key role in improving the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We need them to use their budgets to help children and young people in their communities stay mentally healthy and reduce the chances of them becoming unwell.

Our recommendations:

Greater investment in preventative measures and interventions: Prevention is always better than cure and ignoring the problem simply doesn't make sense. Investment could stop people who aren't unwell developing mental health problems in the future. By supporting those with mental health problems as early as possible, through greater investment in community based services, this will reduce the need for referral to specialist and often highly costs mental health services.

Better training for those working with children and young people: Those in local authorities involved in working with children and young people must receive the necessary training to assist in identifying and supporting mental health needs.

Expansion of mental health and wellbeing education in schools: Mental health and wellbeing education should be valued alongside academic achievement and physical activity, developing emotional resilience and coping skills. This will serve to boost awareness of mental health issues and encourage open, honest discussions about mental health, increasing early diagnosis and access to help.

Access to experienced counsellors: All secondary schools must have access to a qualified and appropriately experienced counsellor, providing support to troubled and/or distressed children and young people, including those with mental health difficulties. Currently Scotland is the only UK country with no national strategy for school-based counselling services. In Wales, where school counselling is entrenched in law, 86% of children and young people who had access to a school based counsellor did not require onward referral to specialist help after the completion of an average of five counselling sessions[6].

Introducing a local health champion: Local authorities should elect one member champion for mental health. Once a councillor becomes a champion, their role will then include raising awareness of mental health problems in the development of council policies and strategies and in public forums, leading discussions on mental health with NHS organisations in their local area, and speaking with schools, businesses and community groups about mental health.

Securing a better future for Scotland's vulnerable children and young people

SCSC
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References

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[4]Mental Health Foundation, *Mental Health Statistics: Children and Young People*. Available at: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people (Accessed 25th January 2016).
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