



## Scottish Government

# A Scotland for Children: Consultation on the Children and Young People Bill

September 2012

### *Introduction*

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

This is achieved in a number of different ways - through roadshow, round table, conference and celebratory events. Following each event a report is compiled and issued to women who attend and relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

### *SWC Evidence Source*

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events throughout Scotland, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. During these events concerns have been raised regarding a number of issues relevant to childcare provision and funding. This submission paper provides the views of women throughout Scotland and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to this consultation document.

### Purpose of the Consultation

The Scottish Government are committed to addressing the challenges faced by children and young people who experience poor outcomes through their lives. To do this, they need services that are child-centred, responsive and joined up. Children and young people deserve services that can intervene more effectively and earlier in their lives and that listen and take full account of their views. Achieving this involves a programme of change that is not limited to any one service, but embraces a change in the culture and practice of all services that affect the lives of children, young people and their families.

The consultation sets out the Scottish Government's vision and how they propose to achieve that vision through legislation.

## **2. A SCOTLAND FOR EACH CHILD**

### ***Improving access to high quality, flexible and integrated early learning and childcare***

#### **Q12. Do you agree that the Scottish Government should increase the number of hours of funded early learning and childcare?**

The availability of affordable, accessible, wraparound childcare is one of the main issues for parents accessing education and employment in Scotland. There is a real lack of suitable provision throughout the country, particularly in rural areas, where women often have to travel long distances to access childcare. The proposal to increase the number of hours of funded early learning and childcare to 600 hours is therefore undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

It does not, however, equate to wraparound childcare. Many parents will still be forced to rely on private nurseries and childminders to 'top up' their childcare requirements. This is also the case for parents of children under three and those who require after-school care. The cost of childcare is a huge barrier. Reliance on private nursery provision is expensive for all families but especially those with a disabled child, more than one child and lone parents.

Families who qualify for assistance towards childcare costs through the childcare element of working tax credits rely upon the money they receive. It is a vital source of income and without it many parents would be forced to stay at home. Recent changes to entitlement to tax credit through the Welfare Reform Act 2012 will have a significant impact on this.

While the Scottish Government does not have control over those changes, it is vital that they ensure there is more funded Local Authority childcare available, rather than parents having to rely on money from tax credits for expensive private provision. This will require more than 600 hours provision for 3-5 and looked after 2 year olds.

It is also commendable that the Scottish Government is imposing a statutory duty on Local Authorities to provide funded early years education and childcare. This will not, however, be of assistance to families with children who are not 3-5 years old.

**Q13. Do you agree that the Scottish Government should increase the flexibility of delivery of early learning and childcare?**

It is vital that the Scottish Government increases the flexibility of delivery of early learning and childcare. Provision must be available which fits the lives of women in Scotland. At present, services from private nurseries and childminders offer the greatest degree of flexibility. The hours available, ranging from 7am – 7pm, are still not necessarily sufficient for women who work part-time or on a shift basis. Again, this is particularly the case in rural areas, where many parents have to travel in order to access childcare. Public transport in more remote parts of Scotland is poor, which makes it extremely difficult for women without cars to take their child to nursery and start work any earlier than 9am. Much of the work available to women in rural areas is seasonal and part-time in the hotel and leisure industry. Shifts often start early in the morning. As a result, there is a strong reliance on informal caring from friends and family. Greater flexibility in the delivery of early learning and childcare would, therefore, be welcomed.

**Q14. Do you think local authorities should all be required to offer the same range of options? What do you think those options should be?**

It is important that the level of funded early learning and childcare suits the needs of the area. For example different options may be necessary in more rural parts of the country than those available in urban areas. The most effective way to determine the range of options required in local areas is through consultation with local parents and early years education and childcare providers.

**Q16. Do you agree with the additional priority for 2-year olds who are 'looked after'? What might need to be delivered differently to meet the needs of children?**

Priority for looked after 2-year olds in early years education and childcare is important. However, the SWC believe that universal, affordable and accessible childcare should be available to all parents and children in Scotland.

[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)