



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01369

Name of petitioner

Jodie McCoy on behalf of South Ayrshire Youth Forum

Petition title

Having regard to young people when considering changes to leisure and cultural facilities

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to require local authorities, under the 'Power to advance well-being' provisions (Part three) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to undertake impact assessments and specify how, when, with whom (and certainly community planning partners) and on what they will consult when considering the provision of local leisure and cultural facilities and confirm that it will develop guidance to local authorities on this issue which would assist in achieving its National Outcome on young people.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

We have been working, with the support of South Ayrshire Council following a recommendation by the Ombudsman to the Council on 19 May 2010, to ensure that in the interest of good practice, the Council has a clear strategy to communicate and engage with the community where it is proposed to close a Council facility or centre.

We have contacted 18 local authorities and have found that only Highland Council has consulted young people in any significant way on budgetary issues that would have an impact on services to young people. The chief executive and leader of the council met with young people at its annual conference and discussed in some detail a number of options that could be implemented and still make savings.

Petition background information

Background

Statements from the Scottish and UK governments are indicating that councils and their partner organisations will be under increasing financial pressure to make savings in departmental budgets over the next months and years.

At a conference consultation carried out by South Ayrshire Youth Forum in November 2009 the following issues were of the most concern to the young people involved in the consultation—

- access to leisure and cultural facilities
- the perception by adults of young people
- community safety in relation to young people hanging around the streets

- wilful fire-raising
- health and childhood obesity

We realise that local councils and community planning partnerships (CPPs) will have to make tough decisions in the near future with impending major budget cuts. We understand that savings will need to be made and councils will need to close facilities however if this is done in consultation with local communities and with CPPs, alternative ways of funding or delivering services may be found.

Actions we wish taken

That the Scottish Government amends the Local Government Scotland Act 2003, Part 3 - 'Power to Advance Well-being', to require local authorities to carry out an impact assessment and to consult with CPPs and the wider community when reviewing or significantly amending current provision of social factors such as the promotion of good physical and mental health, good housing, safe communities, looking after the needs of children and young people; access to the arts or leisure facilities; access to education and opportunities for all.

Children's rights impact assessments are a way of looking at decisions, policies or legislation and identifying and measuring their effect on children and young people and their rights. They allow the effect to be predicted, monitored and, if necessary, avoided or mitigated. Child impact assessments, in one form or another have been introduced in several jurisdictions in recent years.

In Sweden, a national strategy for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that all government decisions affecting children be subject to child impact assessments. In England, the National Children's Bureau and the Children's Legal Centre undertook assessments of selected Bills at Westminster to gauge their effects on children and young people.

One of the Scottish Commissioner for Children and young peoples (SCCYP)'s goals is to encourage others, particularly the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Parliament, local authorities and other public bodies, to assess the impact of decisions, policies and legislation on children's rights. SCCYP has developed a model for carrying out children's rights impact assessment and a step-by-step guide. Carrying out impact assessments will have resource implications through the use of staff time; however this cost would most probably be neutralised by a more efficient use of funds.

Why?

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) welcomes the National Standards for Community Engagement and commends them to its members.

However, local councils are currently not required to consult on efficiency measures, prior to making budget decisions by the full council.

The guidance on community planning sets out the framework and parameters for community engagement in the community planning process explaining the purpose of engagement and with whom local authorities should consult:

"this could include a wide range of bodies such as : young people and youth work bodies who already make a valuable contribution to the planning and provision of services through their involvement in youth forums and their active citizenship"

Young people have the right to be consulted on issues that affect their lives, not least under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

Article 3:- States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

If facilities close without services being provided in a different way, there could be negative and costly impacts on other community planning partners. A relatively small amount of funding spent on activity for young people can save considerable amounts of money being spent on health services, the police and justice systems, fire and rescue

and community safety.

At Scotland's first "children's summit" in Edinburgh in June 2010 the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Mike Russell MSP, stated *"with spending getting tighter, we need to look long and hard at how we accelerate work in early years to build better lives for our children and reduce the need for more costly, crisis interventions later on such as putting young people into residential or secure care or dealing with the impact of youth offending. The evidence shows that where we work together, we can improve the lives of children and make public services more efficient too. Every pound invested in early years ultimately saved taxpayers up to £7"*

Offending behaviour

High tariff specialist resources for young people, involved in offending behaviour for example, or who require to be accommodated and educated in out with authority provision, can cost on average £700+ per day; that is approx £5000 per week, amounting to £250,000 per year for a single placement. (Source: South Ayrshire Council's Youth Strategy)

Anti Social Behaviour

The alarmingly high cost of controlling violent or threatening behavior by teenagers emerged when Community Safety Minister Fergus Ewing stated that antisocial behavior orders (Asbo) for children under 16 were costing the public £500,000 each. (Source: BBC News website).

Evidence from South Ayrshire Community Safety research has shown that diversionary activity works. The statistics show that when diversionary youth work activity is targeted effectively, young people are less likely to be involved in criminal activity, fewer complaints are made about anti social behaviour and communities feel safer.

Cost of under age drinking

Patients under 16 years admitted to Ayr hospital with a diagnosis of alcohol misuse and patients under 16 years presented at Ayr Hospital A & E without admission as a result of alcohol misuse cost NHS Ayrshire & Arran £41,8934 from 2007-09. (Source: NHS Ayrshire & Arran response to freedom of information request).

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue

"South Ayrshire had 646 recorded fire related anti-social behaviour incidents during 2009, predominately involving youth fire setting. The social, economic and environmental costs are extremely high and at peak times place an unacceptable strain upon the finite operational resources of Strathclyde Fire & Rescue." William Davidson, Group Commander, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue

The total cost for malicious calls, secondary fires and open hydrants in 2009 came to a massive £1,153,372 in South Ayrshire. (Source: Review of service reform in Scottish Fire & Rescue Authorities prepared accounts for Accounts Commission by Audit Scotland)

Vandalism

Vandalism can give the impression that an area is unmanaged and out of control: seeing an area treated with disrespect makes everyone feel uneasy when they are out and about because it sends out the message that this is an area that no one cares about.

From 2007-09, vandalism cost £146,576 for South Ayrshire Council buildings alone. (Source: South Ayrshire Council – Corporate Repairs Account)

Health

The benefits of access to leisure and cultural facilities go far beyond physical fitness. It is acknowledged that wider societal, environmental and economic benefits will be gained from getting the Scottish population more active. There is increasing recognition that people's health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of interconnecting factors. Indeed, the World Health Organization suggested over 50 years ago that health is a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.

This definition acknowledges that good health and wellbeing are reliant on an array of multiple factors, not just physical, but also psychological and social. Dr Harry Burns, the Chief Medical Officer interviewed for the Holyrood magazine on 25 June on the need to adopt a health asset model of health improvement said—

“The deficits model basically says, ‘you are no good at this so we have come to do it for you,’ and it leaves people disempowered and passive. Whereas there is lots of evidence now that actively involving people in decision making and so on is very health improving and health creating.” By way of example, Burns describes a recent television documentary that focused on one man’s efforts to turn a group of young people who had no experience of singing - or more accurately had had no opportunity to learn— into a choir. *“It was teaching people that they had a talent,”* explains Burns. *“Ordinary people who thought of themselves as being worthless suddenly found that they had a talent and it was a talent that connected them with other people. It was a talent that brought them happiness, and so on, and it seemed to transform lives.”* While he insists he is not proposing that we go out and teach everyone to sing, although music is a particular passion of his, he says *“the point is that if you concentrate on building capacity in individuals and communities and empower them to take control of their lives, health and wellbeing will improve”.*

“ there is a lot of evidence now that actively involving young people in decision making and so on is very health improving and health creating. (We should) start talking about life improvement because everything we do in life contributes to our sense of wellbeing and, therefore, we should be thinking about what does that.” What contributes to our sense of wellbeing is not just *“holidays and chocolates,”* he says, adding that if individuals understand the world they live in and find life worthwhile, manageable and comprehensible then they are more likely to value it and choose healthy behaviours.

The Arts Council England, the Department of Health and many leading healthcare experts firmly believe that the arts have an important part to play in improving the health and wellbeing of people in many ways.

Summary and Conclusion

Due to planned unprecedented budget cuts in the near future, CPPs need to think ‘out of the box’ about how and where to make savings. The costs stated above are already extremely high, and may indicate we need more diversionary activity in place to save money, not less. Reducing facilities without assessing the impact it will have on communities and Partner organisations budgets will lead to even greater costs. There is an overwhelming “spend to save” argument. To paraphrase the writer and organisational guru Charles Handy, we need to view our expenditure not as a cost, but as an investment.

The Scottish Youth Parliament, as part of the *“Picture the change consultation”*, is asking young people their views to include in its manifesto, that:

“All young people should be involved in the services which affect them and should have the opportunity to get involved in local decision making opportunities”

In Tarbolton and in Dailly, two villages in South Ayrshire, the council needed to make savings and decided to close the activity centres which were under used. After consulting with the local community, local user groups accepted responsibility for key holding and were trained in health and safety issues relating to the opening of the centre. The centre remains open to groups and the council made some savings in their budget.

Some local authorities are currently consulting with communities about their budget decisions. East Lothian Council ran a month long consultation exercise and encouraged many local residents to express their views about the forthcoming council budget. Consultation was based on a number of specific options, contained in a ‘spending options’ paper and the results help to demonstrate people’s views about the proposals outlined.

Responses were made in a number of ways including pre-paid postcards, letters, petitions, email, blog entries and public consultation events. The feedback was

used to produce reports for decision makers.

Simply putting a consultation online however is not enough, promotion and support is required to ensure there is a viable response rate Says Who? is a national online consultation toolkit, created by Young Scot, the Scottish Government and Storm id and is available to use and could be utilised by local authorities in conjunction with the SCCYP children's rights impact assessment to ensure that local councillors are fully aware of the decisions budget reductions will have on children and young people.

Communities need to be involved in this process to ensure that cuts do not create a false economy by making one saving that will then cost another service considerably more money. Clear guidelines on how to involve communities would ensure that there is transparency and consistency in engagement.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01369>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

NO

How many signatures have you collected so far?

129

Closing date for collecting signatures online

N/A

Comments to stimulate online discussion