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Ned Sharratt
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

25th April 2014

Dear Ned

PE1057: Response from the Scottish Children's Services Coalition

Thank you for forwarding on to us the response from the Scottish Government on 1st of April with regards to PE1057. Our petition asked for the Petitions Committee to *'write to the Scottish Government requesting it write to all of Scotland's local authorities reminding them of their statutory requirement under Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach, and also the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2009, urging them to protect vital children's services when setting their future budgets.'*

After their consideration of the petition on 4th March, the Committee also invited the Scottish Government take the opportunity to outline to the Committee how the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, passed by Parliament on 19 February 2014, will affect local authorities' duties in providing additional support for learning and the role of the Scottish Government in ensuring that these additional statutory duties are fulfilled by local authorities in the future.

We understand that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill is intended to improve outcomes for children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. It will 'increase transparency, scrutiny and accountability around the public sector's approach to the practical realisation of children's rights'. It is clear that this will have financial implications for local authorities in terms of their ASL provision and it cannot be disputed that local authorities are being asked to do more for more with less. If children are being individually supported under GIRFEC then their needs will be identified earlier with a resultant cost. It is tautological to deny that this would be the case.

However, we read the Scottish Government's response with interest and appreciate that quite significant steps are already ongoing by the Scottish Government in order to address some of the issues that we have raised. We understand this ongoing development to include:

- A quality assurance process around ASL numbers
- New guidance on reporting on ASL numbers
- A report to Scottish Parliament re ASL numbers

- A review of ASL code of practice (to reflect CYP Act)
- Guidance to accompany the CYP Act (to include the way in which CYP Act relates to ASL legislation)
- Statutory guidance on Children's Services Plans

Taking the above steps into consideration, as well as the fact that local authority budgets have already been set for the forthcoming financial year, we wish to withdraw our proposal that the Scottish Government writes out to all local authorities as we have missed the opportunity to be able to influence their budgets for this year.

It should be noted however that the response from the Scottish Government does not acknowledge the impact of reduced resource and an increased workload for local authorities and we remain extremely worried about the detrimental effect that this will have on those with ASN. At best we are leaving them to a postcode lottery, dependent on the individual prioritising of local authorities, and at worst we are creating a lost generation whose cost to society in longer-terms will far outweigh any potential public sector cuts.

As the Committee may already be aware, Liz Smith MSP, in partnership with the SCSC, has organised a seminar with specific purpose of ascertaining the challenges being faced by those dealing with those children and young people with ASN and the impacts that the increase in numbers is having on services, as well as looking at some potential solutions to mitigate this. The event is to include remarks from Colin Spivey from the Scottish Government's Support and Wellbeing Unit and will take place at the Scottish Parliament on Friday 9th of May.

We would like to request that the Scottish Government keep us up to date with the progress of all of the steps listed above, as we feel that these are not just necessary, but critical in ensuring the right support, guidance and resources are available for the vulnerable and increasing number of young people in Scotland with ASN.

Once again, we thank the Petitions Committee for helping us to raise and address our concerns with the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Pilgrim, SCSC member and Director at Kindred
Alex Orr, Policy Advisor, the SCSC