

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

Thursday 28 May 2020

15:00 – 16:30

Online Meeting

The Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Young People

Chair: Iain Gray MSP

Minutes

Maree Todd MSP	Richard Lochhead MSP	Christina McKelvie MSP
Iain Gray MSP	Fulton MacGregor MSP	Brian Whittle MSP
Jeremy Balfour MSP	Cllr Alison Evison	Martin Canavan
Abi Rose	Finlay Slessor	Maya Tams-Gray
Alison Keir	Fiona Nicolson	Meg Thomas
Amy Adair	Gemma Richardson	Megan Burt
Amy Woodhouse	Helen Forrest	Megan Farr
Angus Collingridge Watt	Huw Sherrard	Mhairi Crawford
Angus Maclean	Jane Miller	Mike Strang
Annie McGovern	Jeanette Miller	Naomi Sutton
Beccie White	Jenny Miller	Nina Collins
Bruce Adamson	Jessica Middleton	Olive (C.o.W)
Carlene McAvoy	Joan Mowat	Pam Rigby
Catherine Mcderment	Jodi Gemmell	Paul Bayton
Cherie Morgan	Josh Kennedy MSYP	Rebecca Dawes
Cheryl Rafferty	Joyce Morgan	Regan Jackson
Chloe Riddell	Juliet Harris	Robert Doyle
Chris Ross	Katherine Anderson	Rosaleen Dempsey
Claire Benton-Evans	Katie Docherty	Rosie Pybus
Claire Burnett	Katie Gillies	Salena Begley
Claire Houghton	Kay Tisdall	Sam Harris
Claire Hunter	Kelly Munro	Sara Lurie
Clare Stephen	Kelly Ross	Sarah Anderson
Colin Morrision	Kevin Kane	Sarah McEnhill
Coll McCail	Khaleda Noon	Sarah Paterson
Craig Wilson	Kirsten Shield	Sarah Rogers
Dave Spence	Lindsay Graham	Selina Ross
David Ashford	Lois Marshall	Seonaid Daly
David Brackenridge	Louise Macdonald	Soroush Uthmani
David Mackay	Lucinda Rivers	Stuart Provan
Denise Spence	Margaret Lannon	Sue Palmer
Elaine Kerridge	Marguerite Hunter Blair	Susan Hunter
Elaine Leith	Mariam Tariq	Tamasin Knight
Ellie Roy	Mark McGeachie	Tamsin Gold

Welcome and Introduction

Iain Gray welcomed everyone and gave a brief explanation on how the virtual Q & A would operate and the topic of the meeting. He mentioned that the meeting would take the form of a Question and Answer session with a panel. Questions were sourced and selected before the meeting from organisations and young people who will ask their questions to the panel.

Iain introduced the panel, a range of Scottish Government ministers, and the President of COSLA, who would be taking questions about the current situation with COVID-19 and hear concerns.

The panel included:

Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd, her remit includes early years, child protection, children's rights, children's services, looked after children and protection of vulnerable groups.

Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Richard Lochhead, his remit also includes youth work and community learning and development.

Minister for Older People and Equalities, Christina McKelvie with responsibility for mainstreaming equality, human rights, violence against women and girls, social isolation, and loneliness.

Cllr Alison Evison, President of the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities, former co-leader of Aberdeenshire Council and currently councillor for the North Kincardine Ward.

Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland, gave some additional details about the meeting relating to online etiquette and the possibility for ad hoc questions at the end of the session. She also mentioned that the AGM would be taking place at the end of the meeting, to confirm the secretariat and MSP conveners for the year ahead.

There were no objections to the minutes from the last meeting.

Q&A with Scottish Government officials

1. Katie Docherty, Scouts Scotland

Outdoor Learning is embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence, it contributes to the Broad General Education and has proven benefits to young people's mental and physical wellbeing.

Scouts Scotland has been providing quality outdoor learning opportunities for the young people of Scotland for over 113 years. Due to the current closures of schools and Government restrictions our normal outdoor learning offer has been put on hold placing a significant financial strain on our organisation and similar organisations to ourselves.

As we transition into the COVID-19 Recovery phase we are keen to hear how both local and national Governments plan to support Outdoor Learning Providers to become recognised key partners in the delivery of the Education Recovery Group's published work streams, ensuring the long terms sustainability of the sector and continued provision of high quality learning opportunities for young people.

Richard Lochhead noted that feedback from those in the youth work and community learning and development sectors have moved to other duties to help tackle COVID-19. Funds have been made available to help organisations through this crisis, but in terms of going forward, a high level group has been established in Further Education and Higher Education, and Richard has made sure that community learning and development is represented on that group.

Maree Todd recognises how important outdoor education is, particularly for the younger age groups. Their judgement is that outdoor activity is lower risk in terms of transmission of the virus, so places like outdoor early learning and childcare centres will be reopening in June. In terms of the educational offer from 11th August, when children return to school, they believe that outdoor education should be a part of that. She is keen to hear and engage with organisations like Scouts Scotland.

Alison Evison agreed with Maree. Local councils across Scotland have a strong tradition of working with outdoor education organisations. With pressures on mental health and wellbeing during lockdown, outdoor education is even more important now. Councils are engaging with partners locally to consider the offer for outdoor education. Alison suggested contacting one's local council.

Some members of the CPG did not feel that this question had been adequately answered. The Secretariat will follow up on this question after the meeting.

2. Joan Mowat, Senior Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Strathclyde

The impact of social distancing, home confinement, lack of opportunities for social interaction (other than digitally) and, for some children, lack of access to outdoor spaces and internet provision/computer access, coupled with increased stressors in the family home as parents deal with financial worries, puts the emotional wellbeing of children at risk, particularly those already disadvantaged through poverty or other circumstance. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people during and in the aftermath of the pandemic and to what extent will these approaches be research informed?

Christina McKelvie noted that this is an important question they have been working on for a while. She mentioned the Clear Your Head campaign, which is working alongside other youth organisations. Christina's work comes into this in terms of protected characteristics, where the deepest inequalities come into play. Her team have been looking into loneliness and isolation for a while and they developed a strategy, but they are now also faced with people who are experiencing these issues for the first time. She has been meeting with organisations across all sectors, and they have been looking into how they adapt the existing plan to accommodate this

new situation. The main strategy was published in Christmas 2018 and the update will become part of the renewal work.

Resources:

Young Scot have been supported to develop resources focused on emotional wellbeing of young people in relation to COVID-19: called #AyeFeel. [Click here for more information.](#)

RCPCH have been compiling studies that are looking at the experiences and insight of children and young people. [Click here to find out more.](#)

3. Clare Hunter, Red Harbour

On the return to school, can the focus for all children, not just those who are perceived as vulnerable, be on relationships and mental health over academic attainment and formal learning?

Alison Evison responded that they are aware of the pressures on mental health and wellbeing. Looking after vulnerable children of any description is crucial and local authorities are aware of that. Some vulnerable children who have been attending hubs on a regular basis will be used to the continuous school-based environment and this needs to be built on going forward. Teachers and support staff will be working on a local level decide what is right for the children and reaching out to parents and carers. Alison has heard anecdotal evidence which shows that some children with particular needs are coping better without the stress of the school environment. There needs to be more research into this, and the learning will need to be brought forward into the next stage.

Maree Todd added that the Curriculum for Excellence does recognise that mental wellbeing is just as important as academics. That will be even more important going forward as children cannot fulfil their potential if their basic needs are not met.

4. Susan Hunter, Citizens Advice Scotland

We have seen an increase in the numbers of Kinship Care families requiring additional support both financially and emotionally during this time and have also seen a lack of school placements for these families. Are there plans to increase the numbers of school placements available to Kinship families, no matter the legal status of the child, if they need them at this time?

Maree Todd responded that Scottish Government were very clear that children in kinship care are included in the definition of vulnerable children. The availability around the country is variable and the local authorities interpreted the definition in different ways. Most local authorities had capacity available. These hubs were put in place over a short period of time during a critical situation. Their first concern was oversubscription, but the reality was spare capacity. However, they have nearly doubled the number of vulnerable children attending hubs across the country, so she hopes that the situation is improving for kinship families. Kinship families should be

able to access support through those hubs and if there are continuing problems, Scottish Government want to know about it.

Alison Evison agreed that hubs are doing a great job. However, she sees advantages in having local decisions made on this matter. She urged anyone who needs the support to approach their local authority.

5. Craig Wilson, Prince's Trust Scotland

I am sure the panel would agree that the youth work sector - expert in delivering flexible, informal learning beyond the classroom - is uniquely placed to contribute to the change our education system requires as we move beyond this crisis? What is the government's plan to ensure youth work can support, both at a national strategic level as well as practically on the ground - so for example, strategically, how will the government enable national third sector organisations to contribute to the work of the Education Recovery Group? Or on a practical level, should youth workers be classed as key workers supporting children and young people to thrive beyond social distancing?

Richard Lochhead responded that they were having discussions before COVID-19 around bringing youth work closer to schools, and activities that local authorities are bringing forward where the youth work sector feel excluded. COVID-19 has made these issues even more urgent and this is something that Richard would like to take forward. He will look at the definition of youth workers to see if they are key workers.

Maree Todd replied that the more key government body for them to engage with would be the Communities and Public Services Ministerial Group. The first key issue of this group is summer provision. They need to provide a holistic offer to children, especially those who are vulnerable and have suffered the most in terms of their attainment over the last few weeks.

6. Tamsin, aged 13, Children and Young People's Panel on Europe

We have been working from home for almost 10 weeks now, so our education has been badly affected already, including things like exams and Primary 7 transition. So, what are the Scottish Government going to do to make sure that Primary 7 transition and exams are affected as little as possible and to make sure that our return to school on August 11th is as safe and low-risk as possible?

Maree Todd responded that Scottish Government are working closely with partners in the Education Recovery Group. One of the steps they will be taking is that teachers will be assessing what they can do to make the school environment as safe as possible. They are keen to avoid using masks in schools. It will be difficult to have social distancing rules for younger age groups, so there will be smaller groups. For older children, it should be possible for them to stay 2 metres apart most of the time.

They will probably need to look at blended learning going forward. There will be room for fewer children in each building, so school may need to be part-time going

forward. People are going to be asked if they have had contact with the virus; children will be asked to stay at home if they have come into contact with the virus. There will also be children in the shielding category who may need to use online learning for longer.

Alison Evison responded that they recognise this is a difficult time. They are working at a local level at each school, but children themselves should also be involved in discussions.

Iain Gray asked Tamsin what would make her feel ready for school, and she replied that she would feel ready if she knew that plans were in place and that they would be safely distancing from each other, so that school was as safe as possible.

7. Kelly Munro, Carer's Trust

A significant and reoccurring issue raised by young carers is access to supermarkets during lockdown. Some are being challenged when accompanied by family members or denied access despite having some form of carer identification and they struggle to meet the minimum expenditure of online shopping or even delivery slots. Ilse Cuthbertson MSYP, Carers Trust Scotland and Aaran McDonald MSYP, Cunninghame South, have worked with Carers Trust Scotland on a campaign titled "#Supermarkets4Change". It aims to raise greater awareness of young carers and young adult carers to all supermarkets and asks for these unpaid carers to be included in the hours set aside for vulnerable groups. Will the Ministers and COSLA support this campaign and offer greater support on this issue to protect these unpaid young carers and respect their right to non-discrimination during lockdown?

Christina McKelvie responded that they have been working on supermarkets since the beginning, especially for older people and people with disabilities. They did some work with supermarkets around carers, both formal and informal. However, Christina has not had any correspondence on young carers, so she would be very interested in the campaign and would like to take this forward.

8. Denise Spence, CEO, Girlguiding Scotland

As a volunteer led charity, we provide more than 50,000 girls and young women a safe space to be every week in communities right across Scotland.

My question is about the provision of guidance to local authorities to help support and encourage the access for volunteer led youth groups back into council owned buildings. I thank them for their support with access to small grant schemes which local guiding has been able to use, but we are anxious about the what the guidance and practical arrangements will be and how we will be able to operate in local communities again.

Alison Evison thanked Girlguiding Scotland for their work. She noted that these issues will be happening on a local level, so it is important to work with local authorities to see what is possible. The guidance will be the general guidance issued for safe

working practices. Some guidance has been issued recently, including physical distancing guidance and safe working practice in schools. This will apply to volunteer groups working in local communities. She urged organisations to look at guidance that is already on the Scottish Government website.

9. Mark McGeachie, Youth Scotland

A significant proportion of voluntary sector community-based youth work has continued to support young people and communities throughout the Covid-19 crisis, with many groups adapting their provision to meet the immediate needs of young people. However, as we look to re-open our communities and society, do you have specific guidance which can allow youth work to plan how to support young people face-to-face over the summer months, and when will this be available?

This will enable community-based youth groups to support young people's health and wellbeing, address holiday hunger and support their emotional transition back to school in August. This is critically important given that many young people have been experiencing social isolation, suffering from food and data poverty, and had minimal contact with peers or adults outside their home.

Richard Lochhead responded that a lot of the guidance will be general for voluntary groups. If youth work requires specific guidance, Richard asked that this be brought to his attention after the meeting. Youth work will be in later phases.

Iain Gray noted comments from Cross-Party Group members on how the guidance is interpreted very rigorously by local authorities. Although, in theory, guidance might allow community bookings of council facilities, local groups are being told no. How do we deal with this?

Richard responded that they quite often find local authorities will take a default position of safety and then seek further guidance from central government. They do not want youth work to be at any disadvantage, and since outdoor activities will be starting up again, they will now be putting more thought into indoor activities and producing more guidance around that.

10. Josh Kennedy MSYP, Scottish Youth Parliament

In our recent survey of young people's concerns around lockdown, called Lockdown Lowdown, 2/3rds of our 2,400+ respondents said they were moderately to extremely concerned about the impact of coronavirus and lockdown on their future. We know that young people will be disproportionately affected by any negative impact on the job market and will be hit the hardest by any economic downturn caused by lockdown. What has been done to ensure that young people are actively and meaningfully engaged in decision-making during lockdown, and will you commit to continuing or stepping up this engagement as we begin to recover?

[Click here to read](#) the full Lockdown Lowdown report.

Alison Evison noted that it is important to have the voice of children and young people at a local level. They want to engage with children and young people and will keep up engagement through organisations like SYP and Young Scot.

Maree Todd responded that this is the way they want to operate. They want children and young people to have a strong voice in government. The critical nature of the crisis and the speed needed for the reaction, has meant a different response. However, they want to include children and young people going forward. They understand that those with digital access will be the ones participating at the moment, but if there are any ideas on how Scottish Government can connect with those hardest to hear right now, please let them know.

Christina McKelvie mentioned the Developing Young Workforce team and asked that Josh and any others please contact them. She also mentioned the campaign 'No One Left Behind', which SCVO is running and urged people to get involved.

11. Tamsin Knight, Faculty of Public Health in Scotland

Children and young people are bearing a lot of negative impacts from the coronavirus pandemic. These include: more children in poverty as family incomes suffer; loss of education with increased educational inequalities and loss of the social benefits of school; those young people entering the jobs market now are likely to have long-term poorer employment - and so poorer health - outcomes; and there are increased risks of abuse and exploitation for some children and young people.

How will the Scottish Government's plans for recovery from the pandemic support - and reduce inequalities - for children, young people and families in the short-term and build a better future for them in the long term?

Christina McKelvie spoke about cross-government working on these issues. She noted that this is about taking forward what they have learned in this pandemic. They are working to identify and understand the issues and put plans in place. Abuse and exploitation are key concerns and are being tackled by the Clear Your Head campaign and the work they are doing on the social isolation and loneliness strategy, but also the work they are doing with families who could be subject to abuse. They are looking at a holistic package for tackling inequalities, looking at income, health, opportunity, and educational outcome.

12. Beccie White, aged 15 – digital exclusion and the attainment gap

Issues resulting from coronavirus like digital exclusion, basing exam grades off of previous years and increased poverty might have a negative effect on the attainment gap. How are you going to tackle this issue now and in the future?

Maree Todd responded that they were very keen to tackle the attainment gap even before the crisis. She mentioned the Early Learning and Childcare investment, which would have a long-term impact on children and young people's lives, but that they have unfortunately had to pause due to the crisis. There have been a number of

difficulties for children and young people, but Scottish Government have been able to respond in a cohesive way. An example of this is tackling digital exclusion through the [Connecting Scotland project](#). They have also asked local authority partners to be flexible about how they spend their attainment funding to reach the children and young people who have been most disadvantaged by the circumstances.

Maree Todd left the meeting.

Alison Evison responded that the work on tackling child poverty is a core aspect of local authority work. She reiterated the importance of partnership working and noted that this is an example of where they need to work together to help those most in need in the community.

13. Sarah Anderson, LGBT Youth Scotland

The support offered by Gender Identity Clinics (GICs) is essential and often life saving for young trans people. However, due to COVID-19 GICs in Scotland are operating on reduced capacity. This means that all appointments are cancelled (to be rescheduled when possible) and, for those young people over 18, trans-related surgeries have been postponed. Prior to COVID-19 trans young people would expect a wait as long as two years for their first appointment with a GIC.

Can the Scottish Government therefore confirm what action will be taken to mitigate the impact COVID-19 will have on GIC waiting times and that medical procedures for trans people will not be deprioritised after the NHS returns to a 'normal' service delivery?

Christina McKelvie responded by noting the importance of the work LGBT Youth Scotland is doing at the moment. Updated guidance was recently issued on prescriptions. The health service stood down with the advent of the crisis and there has been a large influx of people in hospital care. The health team are now working closely across the board to look at opening services. Christina was not sure exactly where the GICs sit within the reopening of services, but she will find out.

Although the legislation is paused, the commitment to the Gender Recognition Act is still there. There are some remote consultations taking place and Christina noted that this may be a better option for those young people who live in rural areas.

14. Coll McColl, Changing our World – attitudinal change through Covid-19

How do we ensure that the mass attitudinal change that has occurred since the breakout of the pandemic regarding how we treat the hero's we clap for on a Thursday night (unskilled workers prior to the pandemic) remains in place post COVID-19?

Alison Evison noted that many of those key workers are directly or indirectly employed by local authorities and that is important to acknowledge them. Society would not have managed to survive without them. They have spent a long time trying to develop the concepts of wellbeing and kindness, and now this is now being

seen in practice. There is now a need to promote and continue to talk about it. She mentioned the COSLA hashtag: #CouncilsCare, which is about the work that council workers are doing. It is important to celebrate the work that individuals are doing. Everyone has a part to play in spreading the message, not just government.

Questions from the Floor

1. Brian Whittle MSP

My concern is that the third sector is under increasing pressure to such an extent that much of it may not be there when we need it most. Scouts, Guides, as well as access to playing sport and other activities will be crucial for the physical, mental, and emotional health of our young people. What consideration is Scottish Government giving to ensuring we protect the third sector, so it is there as we come out of lockdown?

Christina McKelvie responded that they have been able to continue stakeholder engagement events and roundtables over the last few weeks, because the third sector are key partners along with local government. They are trusted and valued, which is why the third sector resilience fund was created.

Christina allowed all organisations she works with to reprofile the money they were receiving, so they could react to the situation flexibly. The thinking now is about the long-term, and they are working closely with third sector partners on this. More people are now understanding the value of the third sector. She will get back to Brian with more details on plans and steps.

2. Khaleda Noon, Intercultural Youth Scotland

There is evidence that BAME young people will face challenges receiving estimated grades from teachers. Schools in less affluent areas will not have the previous performance privileges, as a result there is a greater risk of disadvantaged pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from ethnic minority backgrounds. What is the strategy to build resilience and culturally appropriate youth work?

Young people of colour have seen more videos of black people being killed. Some have had significant issues with housing. Anxieties are high for families in low paid jobs and due to struggling with their education at home. What is the strategy on preparing to deliver specialist and culturally appropriate support for specific trauma experienced by young people of colour due to COVID-19 without being in danger of 'one size fits all'?

Christina McKelvie responded that the educational outcomes and health related issues she would need to defer to colleagues but will find out the answers.

However, from an inequalities point of view, there is a clear indication from evidence in England and around the world of the detrimental impact on young people from BAME backgrounds. Christina commissioned a piece of work to find out exactly what is happening, especially since ethnicity is not recorded on death

certificates. They published some data last week, but it is incomplete, so they are doing another piece of work. The results were inconclusive as it did not show any difference in Scotland, but they are not accepting that.

There is a Minority Ethnic Expert Panel being set up, which includes third sector organisations and academics. They are going to analyse the impact of COVID-19, inequality and across different communities.

AGM

Iain Gray MSP conducted the AGM for the group. He noted that Brian Whittle MSP, Fulton MacGregor MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP were all in attendance at the meeting.

The Membership agreed to re-elect Alison Johnstone MSP, Fulton MacGregor MSP, Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP and Brian Whittle MSP as co-convenors of the group.

Fulton MacGregor nominated Children in Scotland as Secretariat for the group. Jeremy Balfour seconded the nomination.

Chris Ross nominated YouthLink Scotland as Treasurer for the group. Brian Whittle seconded the nomination.

Agree Actions

- The Secretariat will follow up on points made in the chat box on behalf of the CPG.