

Local Election Manifestos: Children in Scotland Comment and Analysis

Overview

The 2017 local council elections will be held on 4 May. Each of Scotland's main parties¹ has produced a national manifesto for the election, in some cases alongside specific manifestos for each local authority. Last month we published [nine calls for candidates in the local election](#). This briefing provides an overview of how our calls are addressed in each party's national manifesto.

We were pleased to see that all of our calls, apart from better support for children and young people with experiences of trauma, were reflected in at least one manifesto. We will work to ensure the issue of services and knowledge to deal with trauma is brought onto local authorities' agendas following the election. Pledges that relate to children, young people and families and the services that affect them are prominent in all the manifestos. There is a focus across the political spectrum on early years and childcare, education, health and social care along with housing and local devolution.

For specific policy pledges in relation to your own local authority you will need to access the local party manifestos. However, we hope this briefing will support you in navigating the policy field and understanding how national parties have expressed their priorities for supporting children and families. This briefing covers six policy areas: Childcare and Early Years, Social Security, Additional Support for Learning, Children and Young People's Involvement in Local Decision-Making, the School Estate, and Mental Health Services. It includes reminders of our election calls and comments on the manifestos.

1. Childcare and Early Years

Children in Scotland calls:

- *Prioritise early learning and childcare. Childcare provision must have a primary focus on quality to ensure that it meets all children's development, care and learning needs.*
- *Support the early years. We know the value of the early years in social and emotional development.*

Scottish Conservatives

- Priority spending on early years support for disadvantaged one- and two-year-olds
- Investment in Continuing Professional Development for teachers and nursery staff.

Scottish Greens

- Work towards creating the best early years workforce through better training, qualifications, staff pay / conditions
- Greater flexibility of free childcare hours.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Deliver flexible, accessible and affordable full-time early education and childcare so parents can access their free childcare allocation local
- Support effective early intervention to promote wellbeing
- Introduction of a play and communications strategy.

Scottish Labour

- Investing in high quality, all-age, all-year round, flexible and affordable child care to cut the attainment gap before pupils enter school.

¹ Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Greens, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Labour and the SNP

SNP

- By 2020, more than double early learning and childcare provision to 1140 hours, or 30 hours a week. Provision will extend to all three- and four-year-olds and then to eligible two-year-olds
- Provide flexibility to maximise choice
- Ensure high quality provision
- All children in early learning to receive two hours of physical activity every week
- Roll out the [Daily Mile](#) to improve health and wellbeing.

Children in Scotland comment:

Early support is vital to ensure positive outcomes for our children and young people and we welcome the cross-party commitment to provision of high quality early years services. However, the pledges outlined are extremely general. Parties must work to ensure quality is paramount. One way quality can be ensured is through a focus on workforce development. We welcome this as a feature of several of the manifestos. This is vital in ensuring that services and staff are equipped to promote early child development. There also has to be far greater clarity over what is meant by flexibility of provision. We support the principle of parents having flexibility of providers and hours but this has to be firmly rooted in what is in the best interests of the child and in the context of their wellbeing.

2. Social Security

Children in Scotland call:

- Ensure all families receive benefits and support they are entitled to. Uptake of benefits is a huge factor in preventing child poverty.

Scottish Greens

- Support income maximisation, increase access to full entitlements of social security benefits.

Scottish Labour

- Child Benefit to be increased by £240 by 2020
- New taxation system to replace the council tax where 80% would pay less.

SNP

- Full mitigation of the UK Government's benefit cap.

Children in Scotland comment:

Child poverty is a huge factor in preventing children and young people achieving positive outcomes. As such the commitment to actions that will mitigate poverty, such as income maximisation and increasing child benefit from the Greens and Labour respectively are key policy proposals that we support. It is vital families have access to all the financial resource they are entitled to. Local councils can play an important role in ensuring this happens through funding services that support income maximisation. We have previously [advocated for the child benefit increase](#) and hope all parties utilise the tax powers at their disposal to support the financial wellbeing of families. This includes the pledge by Labour to focus on new forms of local taxation, moving from the Council Tax towards more redistributive methods.

3. Additional Support for Learning

Children in Scotland call:

- Ensure that adequate resources are allocated for additional support for learning (ASL).

Scottish Greens

- Increased numbers of additional support for learning staff and better quality of support.

Scottish Labour

- Increase teaching numbers and classroom assistants.

Children in Scotland comment:

Adequate ASL provision is vital for improving the educational outcomes of children and young people with additional support needs. Evidence from [the Enquire service](#) and elsewhere indicates that many families struggle to access adequate support where an additional support need is present ². This can have a negative impact on children, young people, families and teachers. We welcome the commitments from the Greens and Labour to increase staffing in this area. However Labour should be clearer about whether its commitment is to dedicated and specialised additional support for learning staff. We are disappointed there are not more pledges about this in the Liberal Democrat and SNP manifestos. However, there may be further commitment evident in local manifestos.

4. Children and Young People's Involvement in Local Decision-Making

Children in Scotland calls:

- Work to ensure active involvement of children, young people and their families in all local authority decision-making processes and enable them to be co-producers of the services they need and use.
- Protect outdoor spaces, and give children and young people the opportunity to discuss plans for their built environment.

Scottish Greens

- Involve disabled people in integration plans going forward
- Pilot new methods of citizen participation and increase powers over existing methods
- Campaign for education committees to include Parents, carers, TUs and children and young people.

Scottish Labour

- Support community groups to buy local land for regeneration projects or food growing.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Increase power of community councils.

SNP

- Devolve 1% of budget directly to local communities to allow citizens to decide priorities
- Support local groups to take back neglected land and property
- Put local people at the centre of decisions about their local area.

Children in Scotland comment:

One of the main failings across all the manifestos is the lack of guarantees around children and young people's involvement in decision-making processes. Article 12 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) states that all children and young people have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect them but explicit commitment to this is sadly lacking. There have been certain policies put forward in relation to specific decision-making bodies, such as Education Committees, and this is very

² See Enable Scotland's report [Included in the Main?](#)

welcome. However there is a distinct lack of commitment to, and awareness of, fully embedding participation for young people in the decision-making process. We will be encouraging local councils to ensure all Scotland's children and young people have access to services that listen to and work for them and their families.

5. Use of the School Estate

Children in Scotland call:

Encourage better use of school estate facilities. To tackle issues such as holiday hunger and promote community engagement in schools, we need to encourage public and community use of our school estates and facilities outwith school hours.

Scottish Conservatives

- Extension of the use of school buildings into evenings and weekends.

Children in Scotland comment:

We support plans to open the school building up outside normal school hours and would like to see other parties commit to this. However we will be pushing for the increased use of school estates not only in evenings and weekends but also during the school holidays. We also feel that this must include kitchen access as this can allow schools to provide food over the holidays and address major issues such as [holiday hunger](#). Councils have a key role in facilitating this and we will continue to work with them to ensure contracts allow for further use of school facilities.

6. Mental Health Services

Children in Scotland call:

- Protect services that facilitate good mental health amongst our young people.

Scottish Conservatives

- Mental health support should be provided in each GP surgery and A&E departments 24/7.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Make mental health support quick, effective and locally available
- Support young people's mental health in local education services and ease transitions to adult services
- Local authorities to champion mental health.

SNP

- SNP Councils will work with the Scottish Government and the third sector to fully implement the Scottish Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027.

Children in Scotland comment:

We welcome the Liberal Democrats' commitment to mental health support for children and young people and are disappointed that it is not reflected in other party manifestos. However as we have [previously stated](#), the Mental Health Strategy raises some questions and we hope councils work to address these as they implement it. Local councils have a crucial role to play in tackling mental health problems in children and young people through the funding and provision of community-based mental health support, parent and family support, and school-based mental health support. We would like to see more evidence of action being taken to address the mental health of children and young people across local councils and will work to raise awareness of their important role in this agenda post-election.