



**Environmental Common Frameworks
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Call For Views**

31 May 2022

About Children in Scotland

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Our response to this call for views

Children in Scotland is pleased to be able to respond to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's call for views on the Provision Environmental Common Frameworks.

As a rights-based organisation, our work is rooted in children's rights as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)¹ In addition, Climate Change is one of the 10 themes identified in our Manifesto 2021-26. We have previously responded to a number of consultations on the environment, including the Scottish Government's Directorate for Energy and Climate Change consultation on [Net Zero Nation Draft Public Engagement Strategy For Climate Change](#), and Transport Scotland's call for views on the [20% car kilometre reduction route map](#).

¹ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

While Children in Scotland does not have the expertise to comment on specifics of the Environmental Commons Framework, we do have a leadership role within the children's sector on the issue of the environment. Rather than responding to specific details in the framework, Children in Scotland recommend the Scottish Parliament take a child rights-based approach to negotiating the Environmental Commons Framework and actively consider how these frameworks may impact the rights of children and young people.

Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment

The Scottish Parliament has underlined its intention to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. This means that children's rights must underpin all policies. Article 4 of the UNCRC requires governments to “undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the UNCRC². The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends that all levels of government should complete a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) when developing policy.³ This process helps policymakers identify and anticipate the impact of any proposed measure on children's rights and wellbeing.

Crucially, CRWIA should be done at the earliest stage of legislation on all new policies and legislation that impact children, not just policies that impact children's services. Under Part 1 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Scottish Ministers have a duty to “Give better or further effect to the requirements of the UNCRC”⁴.

Children and young people are not referenced at all in the documentation on the Environmental Commons Framework and thus far no CRWIA has been undertaken. Children in Scotland strongly recommends that this assessment is undertaken at the soonest convenience.

Air Quality and Children's Health

The Environmental Common Framework sets a framework for Air Quality, covering policies and regulations that aim to reduce dangerous emissions and setting limits for the concentration of air pollutants that can damage both human health and the environment. While Air Quality policy is a devolved matter, the proposed framework aims to set common standards across the UK and to work together to improve air quality and develop our understanding of the sources and impacts in line with our current and future

² [Ibid](#)

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-wellbeing-impact-assessment-guidance/pages/4/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-rights-wellbeing-impact-assessment-guidance/pages/2/>

obligations. However, that framework makes no mention of children and young people or how air pollution, and therefore regulations on it, disproportionately impact children.

Article 24 of the UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to the best health possible. To uphold children's rights, states should take into consideration the dangers of environmental pollution and its impact on children's health.⁵

Children and young people, particularly from the most disadvantaged families, are among the most at risk for adverse effects from climate change and these groups are already disproportionately experiencing the negative impact of pollution. Research from UNICEF found that areas with a large population of children and young people tend to have disproportionately high levels of particulate matter – 75% of the local authorities with the youngest populations in the UK also have unsafe levels of particulate matter.⁶ These particles are very dangerous to health, able to penetrate a person's lungs, bloodstream, and brains. These effects are even more acute for young children.⁷ Poor air quality can have a significant impact on children's growth and health. Children who grow up in areas of higher pollution are significantly more likely to show reduced lung function compared to those who grow up in less polluted areas.^{8,9} This puts these children at a heightened risk for developing lung cancer and cardiovascular disease over the course of their life.^{10,11}

UNICEF research found that 1/3 babies in the UK are growing up in communities with unsafe levels of particulate matter, which are among the most dangerous pollutants for health.¹² Children in Scotland's Manifesto for 2021-2026¹³ calls on the Scottish Government to Improving air quality in locations where children live, learn and play. We also call on the Scottish Government to introduce school air quality monitoring and education

⁵ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf

⁶ https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-breath-of-toxic-air_UnicefUKResearchPaper_June2018.pdf

⁷ [Ibid](#)

⁸ Chen Z, Salam MT, Eckel SP, Breton CV, Gilliland FD (2015) Chronic effects of air pollution on respiratory health in Southern California children: findings from the Southern California Children's Health Study. *J Thorac Dis* 2015;7:46–58.

⁹ Wood, HE, Marlin, N, Mudway, IS, Bremner, SA, Cross, L, Dundas, I, Grieve, A, Grigg, J, Jamaludin, JB, Kelly, FJ, Lee, T, Sheikh, A, Walton, R & Griffiths, CJ 2015, 'Effects of air pollution and the introduction of the London Low Emission Zone on the prevalence of respiratory and allergic symptoms in schoolchildren in east London: A sequential cross.

¹⁰ IARC (2013) Air pollution and Cancer <https://www.iarc.fr/en/publications/books/sp161/AirPollutionandCancer161.pdf>

¹¹ World Health Organization (2012) Press Release No.213, IARC WHO

¹² [Ibid](#)

¹³ https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Manifesto_V2.1_March-21.pdf

scheme to measure air quality, educate children and families about this issue, and reduce children's exposure to harmful pollutants.

Children in Scotland recommends that the Air Quality Common Framework be altered to include specific consideration and regulations for areas where children live, learn and play to ensure children's health is protected. Conducting a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment on these policies may also highlight other ways children may be disproportionately impacted by this framework.

Engaging Children and Young People

Children in Scotland's Manifesto for 2021-2026¹⁴, which received support from a wide range of organisations across the children's sector, was developed in consultation with children and young people. The environment has become a key issue for children in Scotland and across the world and action is needed to ensure that they are engaged in environmental policies decision making.

While the complexity of this consultation would make it difficult to engage children in discussions, climate change is a social justice issue and children and young people and the most disadvantaged families in our society will be among those most adversely affected by climate change and environmental damage. Article 12 of the convention articulates that children and young people have a right to be heard in decisions that affect them. This includes decision-making processes and policy design.

We believe the UK and Scottish Governments should strive to engage children and young people on environmental issues throughout the whole policymaking process: from setting the agenda and developing the policy through to implementation and evaluation. We believe more must be done to support the participation of vulnerable groups, including those with additional support needs and younger children. Steps the UK and Scottish Governments could consider taking to better engage with children and young people include drafting accessible versions of consultations.

Children in Scotland also calls on the Scottish Government to embed education about climate change in the curriculum, in line with a wider review of Curriculum for Excellence. Children and young people from all backgrounds should be informed and be able to critically engage in discussions on climate change and wider environmental issues.

For more information, please contact:

Amy Woodhouse
Head of Policy, Projects, and Participation
Children in Scotland

¹⁴ https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Manifesto_V2.1_March-21.pdf

Email: awoodhouse@childreninscotland.org.uk