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The Scottish Government
Social Inclusion Division
Area 2-F (South), Victoria Quay
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14th July 2008

Dear Mike

Taking forward the government economic strategy: a discussion paper on tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation in Scotland

NCH Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's Discussion Paper on tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation in Scotland. NCH Scotland's response draws upon our experience of working with some of the most vulnerable and difficult to reach children, families and young people in Scotland. Our response addresses certain general issues around tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation, as well as some of the specific questions raised in the Discussion Document. For ease of reference we have used the same headings as the Discussion Document.

In summary the key issues NCH Scotland wishes to raise are:

- **NCH Scotland welcomes the commitment shown by the Scottish Government and by the UK Government to reduce child poverty;**
- **Urgent action is required, however, by the Scottish Government, the UK Government, local authorities and by other agencies on an integrated basis to ensure further progress is made in eradicating child poverty in Scotland;**
- **The UK Government has a vital role to play in this process, particularly in relation to its administration of the tax and benefits system and in tackling disability discrimination. We believe future welfare reform should increase support for those most in need, including lone parents; and**
- **NCH Scotland considers more should be done to ensure that increased opportunities are available in education, employment and training for vulnerable and difficult to reach young people, including young people with a disability, looked after young people and those at risk of offending**

General

NCH Scotland believes it is completely unacceptable that many children, families and young people in Scotland continue to live in poverty. It is estimated, for example, that 210,000 children in Scotland (one in four of Scotland's children) are currently still living in poverty. There is also a strong relationship between poverty and ill health.

The Scottish Government's *Results from the 2005 – 2006 Scottish Household Survey* (August, 2007) confirm that households with low net annual incomes are "most likely to contain someone with a long-standing limiting illness, health problem or disability: 41% of households with a net annual income of £6,000 or less, and 51% of households with a net annual income of £6,001 to £10,000. In comparison, 12% of households with a net annual income of over £40,000 contain someone with a long-standing limiting illness, health problem or disability".

In view of these factors it is, therefore, not surprising that young people participating in the recent *Hear our voice!* Young People's Survey voted for tackling poverty as the key policy priority for the Scottish Parliament. NCH Scotland and Young Scot ran this survey in partnership with Dundee City Council, East Ayrshire Council, Highland Council and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. The survey focused on what young people believed should be the key policy priorities for the Scottish Parliament, and over 500 of the most difficult to reach young people voted in the survey.

Key principles

NCH Scotland notes the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation through its national outcomes framework. We further note that in developing this framework, the Scottish Government will seek to ensure that certain key principles such as, for example, the need for a focus on tackling the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, and on early intervention and prevention, will be at the heart of its plans for the future.

Against this background, NCH Scotland welcomes the commitment shown by the Scottish Government and by the UK Government to reduce child poverty. We believe, however, that urgent action must be taken on an integrated basis by the Scottish Government, the UK Government, local authorities and by other agencies to ensure further progress is made in eradicating child poverty in Scotland. NCH Scotland, therefore, welcomes the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendation in its recent *Child Poverty in Scotland* report (2008) that the Scottish Government, the UK Government and local authorities should build upon their existing joined-up approach to maximise the impact of their efforts to end child poverty. NCH Scotland takes the view that the need for a joined-up, integrated approach should be clearly stated in the key principles which the Scottish Government has confirmed will be at the heart of its plan for the future.

Key Areas for Action by the Scottish Government

NCH Scotland notes the Scottish Government's commitment to tackle poverty, inequality and deprivation in three broad ways, and welcomes many of the specific actions being proposed through its overall approach. In this respect, NCH Scotland considers it vital that the key areas for action should include the Single Outcome Agreements, and the Community Planning process.

NCH Scotland is aware that, under the Concordat and new funding arrangements between the Scottish Government and COSLA, each local authority must put in place a Single Outcome Agreement, based on an agreed set of national outcomes underpinned by agreed national indicators. We note that the national outcomes include the commitments that "our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed", and "we have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk". NCH Scotland believes, however, that, if these national outcomes

are to be achieved, the Scottish Government and COSLA must continue to work together to ensure each local authority's Single Outcome Agreement contains a strong commitment to tackle child poverty, and to ensure that sufficient funding is put in place to provide services to the most vulnerable and difficult to reach children, families and young people. NCH Scotland takes the view that this is necessary to ensure that the quality of services, and the level of support, available within each local authority area to tackle child poverty is consistent across Scotland, and does not become a 'post-code' lottery.

NCH Scotland is also aware that local authorities, health boards and other agencies have a statutory duty under Section 15 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 to consult and co-operate with community bodies and other persons, including young people and organisations working on their behalf, about the design and delivery of services provided through the Community Planning process. We believe that more should be done by the Scottish Government, local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships to engage young people, and organisations working on their behalf, in this process. This will help to ensure that local authorities and other agencies adopt policies designed to tackle child poverty, and that key services continue to be delivered to disadvantaged children, families and young people.

Prevention of poverty and tackling the root causes

The recent Scottish Government report, *Estimating the cost of Child Poverty – Approaches and Evidence*, suggests “a figure of £0.5-£0.75 billion for the direct cost of child poverty due to extra spending on services”. The report also estimates “that the annual knock-on cost to the public purse of young people not in employment, education or training could be as high as another £1 billion”. NCH Scotland shares the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee's concern that, failure to improve the financial status of young adults, could jeopardise the long term sustainability of recent reductions in child poverty, given the generational nature of poverty.

Significantly, Scotland has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Europe among young people. NCH Scotland is working in partnership with a number of local agencies through NCH Scotland's Youthbuild model to positively address the problem of youth unemployment. NCH Scotland's Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild Project was launched by Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Early Years, and NCH Scotland's Inverclyde Youthbuild (PICT) Project was launched by Maureen Watt MSP, Minister for Schools and Skills. NCH Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's support for our Youthbuild model, which offers training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for disadvantaged young people.

NCH Scotland currently runs 3 Youthbuild services: the Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild, the Inverclyde Youthbuild, and Govanhill Youthbuild, with other Youthbuild projects currently under development. These projects work on local regeneration developments and, along with local housing associations such as the Oak Tree, Cloch, Milnbank, Shettleston and Govanhill housing associations, aim to give the young people work experience on local sites where they are building homes. Other partners include the Scottish Government's Youth Crime Prevention Fund, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Community and Safety Services, the European Social Fund, Inverclyde Council, Scottish Enterprise and Communities Scotland. NCH Scotland is also actively working with 20 large construction companies.

NCH Scotland believes our Youthbuild model offers a better future for these young people, while helping to address labour shortages in the construction industry. NCH Scotland's Youthbuild has been of considerable benefit to the young people concerned and their families, to local communities, and to the wider economy. Reflecting this, an independent evaluation of the first group of 16-25 years olds to use NCH Youthbuild projects in Glasgow and Inverclyde has found that more than two thirds have either secured an apprenticeship or full time employment. Most had no previous experience of paid work. Indeed, the young people involved in Youthbuild generally come from the most deprived and difficult backgrounds, and face multiple challenges in finding work. This can include poor family support, issues around leaving care, homelessness, specific learning difficulties, alcohol/substance misuse, offending and poor social/personal skills. NCH Scotland believes that getting these young people into work is vitally important in helping them to move forward, and to give them the financial status to ensure their children have the best possible starts in life.

The young people we work with require extra support to take the crucial first steps on the employment ladder. A key aspect of the Youthbuild model is the one-to-one support provided by NCH Scotland staff to the Youthbuild trainees to help them make the move into work. Key elements of the project focus on induction and preparation, work experience, relevant training, personal support, and core skills and development. NCH Scotland's Youthbuild projects are proving successful in securing training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for young people. This shows what can be achieved when different agencies work together to help young people take advantage of the opportunities that are out there.

Helping to lift people out of poverty

NCH Scotland believes that the UK Government can make a major contribution to eradicating child poverty through its administration of the tax and benefits system. We also believe that any future welfare reform must secure real and significant improvements in the lives of those on low incomes. In addition, action should be taken to increase the availability of affordable, high quality child care support for families and single parents on low incomes. We, therefore, welcome the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendations in its *Child Poverty in Scotland* report that consideration should be given to introducing higher rates of benefit, and that more support should be made available for people who want to move into work or to return to work. NCH Scotland further welcomes the Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendation that more should be done to "increase the take-up of benefits and tax credits entitlements". We believe that action in these areas can help to raise the income of the poorest families and individuals, and to lift more children out of poverty.

Target Groups

Many of those living in poverty are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society, such as, for example, lone parents, young disabled people and care leavers.

Lone Parents

Although many children who are brought up in lone parent families go on to do well, many more will struggle from the difficult start they have in life. NCH Scotland's Factfile report for 2007 – 2008, which pulls together statistics on the state of Scotland's children and young people highlighted that:

- there are now 162,000 lone parent families in Scotland;
- two thirds of teenage mothers are lone parents;
- lone parents are more likely to report poor health – more than a quarter said emotional problems were making their life difficult; and
- lone parent families make up a quarter of all homeless people in Scotland.

The *Results from the 2005 – 2006 Scottish Household Survey (2007)* also confirms that 66% of lone parent households have an income of £15,000 or less; while only 20% of lone parent households have savings or investments compared to 51% of all households. NCH Scotland considers that more action should be taken to improve support for lone parents, including encouraging greater numbers of lone parents to take up their benefit and tax credits entitlement, and increasing their access to affordable, high quality childcare.

Young Disabled People

Many young disabled people face material poverty and poverty of opportunity in their daily lives. NCH Scotland believes that, to help young disabled people break the cycle of poverty, more should be done to support them through the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is a difficult transition for all children, and it presents particular problems and challenges for disabled children and young people. NCH Scotland is aware, for example, that, while a great deal of service provision focuses on the needs of children aged 5 to 18, the support in many areas for young disabled people during the transition from childhood to adulthood is minimal. Indeed, apart from the provision of some short term respite care at 18, it is fair to say that young disabled people receive little, if any, support between the ages of 18 and 25. This significantly reduces the number of life opportunities available for young disabled people, and perpetuates many of the barriers which blight their adult lives later, including poverty.

By way of illustration, it is worth considering the contrast between the experience of young disabled people who are encouraged to go straight from school, where they have considerable support and a social network, to colleges where they often have little support and feel isolated. NCH Scotland considers that this transition needs to be better managed by key agencies, if we are to ensure that the experience of all young disabled people at college and/or in employment is to be both positive and rewarding. In this respect, we believe that resources must be made available to give young disabled people the necessary support to assist them make the transition from the relatively well supported environment of school to college and/or work. This could be achieved through increasing resources recruiting more experienced social workers and improving training for both staff and social workers, particularly in relation to communication skills and the use of related technology. This would give young disabled people the skills and qualifications to improve their chances of not being condemned to a life of material poverty, and poverty of opportunity.

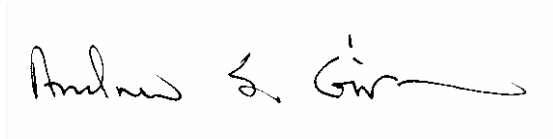
Increased support for looked after and accommodated children

NCH Scotland works with some of the most vulnerable and difficult to reach young people in Scotland, including young people who are looked after or have previously been in care, through projects such as Foster Care NCH – CAPS Glasgow. The outcomes for looked after children upon leaving care are very poor, and NCH Scotland believes that urgent action is required to increase the opportunities available in employment, education and in training for young people leaving care.

This is necessary to ensure that greater numbers of these disadvantaged young people fulfil their potential, and avoid the risks of falling into the poverty to which many prove vulnerable. NCH Scotland, therefore, welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward the key issues in *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*.

Please do not hesitate to contact either myself on 0141-550-9010, if you require more information, or would like to discuss any of the issues raised in our response further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrew S. Girvan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end of the name.

Andrew S. Girvan
Director of Children's Services