Mental Health & Wellbeing: 
A Briefing for the 2017 Local Government Elections

This is one of a series of briefings prepared by the children’s committee of the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland (CCPS). The briefings are part of our #plan4children campaign, and set out the shared position of third sector organisations providing children’s services. Ahead of the local government elections CCPS is promoting the principles of good children’s services planning, their relevance to a number of key issues, and their impact on children and families.

1. Good Children’s Services Planning

The Christie Commission principles of participation and prevention are at the heart of good children’s services planning. Involving individuals, including children, young people and parents in the planning, design and delivery of services and closer partnership working between public service providers and the third sector are key elements of good planning and effective services. There is a tremendous opportunity with the introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Part 3), which places new duties on local government and health boards, in line with the Christie principles, to refresh and improve the planning of services; to make collaboration, early intervention and prevention the new norm; and to effect positive change in the lives of children, young people and families in our communities.
The principles of good planning

1. Collaboration with children and young people, their families, communities and service providers in planning, prioritisation, and service design

2. Providing services that promote prevention and early intervention

3. Understanding the needs of children and young people, and the scope of

4. Identifying the totality of resources available across all statutory and

5. Connecting the outcomes and ambitions of strategic plans to decisions

6. Taking an accountable and transparent approach

2. The issue - Mental Health & Wellbeing

Children and young people who experience disadvantage and inequality are increasingly likely to experience poor mental health and wellbeing\(^1\). In Scotland, one in 10 children starting school have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, and it is now shown that half of adult mental health problems begin by the age of 14 and 75 percent start before the age of 24\(^2\). We know that poor mental health can have an adverse impact on physical health and wellbeing, social relationships and educational outcomes\(^3\). Early intervention and prevention services have been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of children and young people developing acute mental health problems throughout adolescence and into adulthood\(^4\). Therefore, to address the issue of poor mental health and wellbeing for children and young people from our most disadvantaged communities, we believe a long-term approach to children’s service planning which aims to provide sustainable early intervention and prevention services and support within communities across Scotland is essential\(^5\).

Relevance to local authorities
Local authorities, working in partnership with NHS health boards and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), have responsibility for the planning, development and commissioning of services and support in their areas that are intended to realise those outcomes identified within the Scottish Government’s newly published Mental Health Strategy, *Mental Health in Scotland: 2017-2027*, as well as those ambitions for our children, young people and families – and their communities – embedded within the Scottish Government’s *National Outcomes*. Connecting national ambitions to local outcomes through strategic service planning and commissioning is an important role for local authorities. In partnership with NHS health boards and CAMHS, they provide services for children and young people who are already experiencing mental health problems. However, local authorities also play a key role in preventing mental ill-health. Well-resourced, robust early intervention and prevention services can ensure that children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing is supported and concerns addressed at the earliest stage. Local authorities can ensure such services and support are available by working more closely with the third sector, who have the skills and experience of delivering such services and support, as part of their children’s services planning process.

Current challenges in relation to planning
Local authority spending cuts and reduced budgets over the last decade have ensured priorities have been focused on treatment rather than early intervention and prevention, in relation to children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Services and practitioners supporting children and young people are commonly under resourced and inadequately trained to provide the necessary support for those who experience (often undiagnosed) mental health concerns. Most often, when children and young people present mental health concerns they are simply referred to CAMHS as there is a lack of resources, capacity or expertise available otherwise to address any identified issues. However, 1 in 5 referrals are rejected highlighting the need for alternative support for those unable to access CAMHS. Many services provided by the third sector, which aim to address children and young people’s mental health issues at an early stage, are limited in capacity and provision is inconsistent throughout the country due to reduced financial resources, as well as varying approaches to service planning and commissioning. A better approach to children’s services planning can help to ensure the necessary consistency of such services across all local authorities.

Role of the third sector
Third sector organisations have a valuable role in providing services which both identify and address early signs of mental health and wellbeing concerns. Most often the third sector provides such support in non-clinical settings in communities through family support, early years or young people’s services, or through working in partnership with schools. Third sector organisations can also act as a link to statutory services and primary care services, and can also ensure that mental

6.  [https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/hub/publication/23227](https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/hub/publication/23227)
ill-health is recognised as not simply a medical issue. As such it is vital that these organisations are fully involved in the development of Children’s Services Plans given the breadth of support they provide and their experience and expertise in this area. The ultimate shared aim of the third sector and partners across local government and other sectors is to empower and enable children, young people, families and their communities to become resilient and supportive and to realise their potential. However, this cannot be achieved through short-term service planning and commissioning – as enduring change is measured over decades, not months and years.

**Key Message**

The mental health and wellbeing of Scotland’s children is everyone’s concern, and should not be seen as simply a medical issue. By supporting children and young people with their mental health and wellbeing in their communities and in schools, and addressing concerns at the earliest stage, this can reduce both barriers and waiting times to access essential CAMHS treatment and support for those who need it most. By providing support to children and young people at the earliest stage it can have a significant positive impact on physical health and wellbeing, social relationships and educational attainment.

**About CCPS:**

We represent more than 25 leading national charities providing children’s services. Our members support more than 150,000 children, young people and families, employ just under 6000 staff and provide public services worth around £150 million. Our experience is that services which achieve the best outcomes are those designed collaboratively and which prioritise early intervention. That’s why we’re urging every council candidate to join our campaign and publicly pledge to #plan4children.