

PE1606/A

Petitioner Submission of 7 September 2016

SNP Manifesto 2016

The SNP manifesto for this year's Scottish Parliamentary elections was released in April at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8Tu6kHw0HUMdXZyb0RHNHdRSzQ/view>. In it, the SNP made a commitment to "create new educational regions to decentralise management and support."

The Next Steps (page 8)

We will implement our new National Improvement Framework for schools to drive up standards for all and close the attainment gap between young people from the most and those from the least affluent backgrounds.

We will give more power and resources direct to schools, to put teachers, parents and communities in the driving seat of school improvement.

We will increase investment in the Scottish Attainment Fund by £750 million over the course of the next parliament, with more money allocated direct to headteachers.

Reforming to Raise Standards for All Children (page 9)

We will encourage school clusters and create new educational regions to decentralise management and support.

This suggests the Government may be minded to support this petition, since it will release the finance they could use to reduce class sizes and build more schools in disadvantaged areas, key steps in "closing the attainment gap".

However, there will always be opposition from local authorities: The Herald Newspaper published the article "Councils lobby for caution on SNP proposals for regional schools' boards" on 13 June 2016.

... council leaders have urged the government to proceed with caution as they prepare for a Scotland-wide education summit with Cabinet Secretary John Swinney on Wednesday. (ie 15th June)

The SNP councillor from East Ayrshire who speaks for the national councils' body Cosla, said:

"Councils are uniquely placed to support every need of the child due, in no small part, to the expertise and professionalism of all their employees who make a difference to families every single day."

"Ultimately this debate should focus on the needs of families and the local government family, kept together, can deliver for all those needs."

I would argue that Councils add very little to education. Schools deliver that. The joined-up GIRFEC approach with the participation

The delivery of other educational services, which employ nurseries and early years' staff, community centre staff, educational psychologists and therapists, disability workers, Active Schools Co-ordinators, Youth Music Initiative Co-ordinators and instructors,

-should also be managed by regional boards

What the petition proposes is not new

Roads and schools were delivered in Scotland on a regional basis until 1996, when the 7 Regional Councils and 2 Island Authorities were abolished by the UK Tory Government: they were seen as bastions of socialism. The new 32 Unitary Authorities were based on the pre-existing District Councils and took over the delivery of education and transport.

Just 3 years later, the new Labour Government established a Scottish Parliament.

The new Unitary Authorities went on a spending spree and duplicated the Departmental structures of the region at local level, thus multiplying back office costs instantly. In Lothian, four unitary authorities were created and so Education and Transport admin costs increased fourfold.

The Working of Joint Arrangements 1995

This document published by the UK Government in 1995 can be found at www.kidsnotsuits.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/The-Working-of-Joint-Arrangements.pdf

It observes that reforms of local government in England have led to the creation of many joint arrangements, where district or borough councils work together to provide specific services. However, some types of joint arrangement work more effectively than others. This study, by Tony Travers, Stephen Biggs and George Jones of the London School of Economics, looked at local government in the six metropolitan areas and London to test how existing joint provision works.

Political Support for this Petition

The first time politicians commented publicly on this petition was at the East Edinburgh hustings in Northfield on the 7th April.

Whilst there seems to be some support for the regional provision of transport, there is resistance to the same for schools. Kids not Suits suspects that for many politicians, their gut reaction will be to say no to this part of the petition. But there are big reasons why they should say yes.

Reasons to Regionalise Schools Delivery - Financial Savings

The petition argues that by forcing Lothian's four Councils to fund and run Lothian's schools through a region-wide joint board, vast sums of cash would be saved. Edinburgh alone spends 39% of its £1Bn budget on education.

The Dept that was Children & Families employs 45% of all Council staff: it has more non-teaching staff employed than teachers; there are 3,436 teachers employed and 3,380 others (see staffing summary in [CEC Key Facts 2015-16](#)). These others are classroom assistants, nursery and early years staff, community centre staff, educational psychologists and therapists, disability workers, Active Schools Co-ordinators, Youth Music Initiative Co-ordinators and instructors, Children & Family Centre staff; Early Years Centres staff; Residential Care Officers; domestic staff and social workers. Also included in these "others" are 524 staff involved in back-room services and management. Some of these "others" will have teaching qualifications, but will not be employed as teachers.

As of 2012, of these 524 staff, 190 were managers. Just looking at Edinburgh alone, the scheme would see these 524 staff redeployed back into teaching. If they didn't want to return to the classroom (in either an admin, classroom assistant or teaching capacity) then they may succeed in finding a place at the new region-wide education authority.

The petitioner's aim is to see much smaller class sizes and lots of new schools being built- and smaller ones, too. He proposes a means of giving teachers the resources to enjoy teaching in small classes in well-resourced schools, with far fewer directives from bureaucrats at HQ – when most of the time they can organise their own training. Under Lothian Region, schools were run more effectively than they are under the Unitary Authorities- schools were comparatively better resourced in those days and teachers had arguably greater job satisfaction. The Lothian-wide teacher training and support run from the Dean Centre by the professional education advisors based there worked very effectively. Admin on catchment areas and placements was run from the Region's Education HQ at Torphichen St.

The news that [Edinburgh Council paid £100M too much](#) for badly designed PFI schools only makes the case for properly resourced and managed regional boards even stronger. For a joint Board, in that it would be controlled by 4 different Councils, would impose greater (not less) political scrutiny of contracts such as PFI. For every single Cllr serving on a joint board would know they are accountable to the whole authority that appointed them and that their every decision would be heavily scrutinised by their Council colleagues.

Published in Edinburgh Evening News 8th Dec 2015

Pete Gregson : Edinburgh Council needs fresh ideas not cuts

Youth and community groups across Edinburgh have just got letters from the council saying their funding is being cut. Many have been catering for deprived communities for more than 50 years, The Venchie in Craigmillar, for example will close.

Edinburgh also faces 2000 redundancies, 12 per cent of the workforce, with big cuts in many areas. For instance, the playpark budget has gone. The council has asked the public for suggestions on its website, but rather than argue about which local services should disappear, we ought to set our sights higher.

This council and others can profit from economies of scale and save millions of pounds if they work with neighbours and merge some departments such as roads and education. My idea is spelt out in detail on the council site as "Merge big Depts with East, West and Midlothian Councils". Evening News readers can show support by adding comments – and voting – on this and other proposals.

The area that needs to be cut is the back office: Edinburgh's bureaucracy is duplicated in every council in Scotland. I'm not suggesting the Scottish Government takes over emptying our bins or agreeing our house extensions. There needs to be local accountability for services, but road maintenance and education are two obvious candidates for regional management, as they were under Lothian Regional Council until John Major abolished it in 1996.

Back then we had had just one director of education, rather than the four we have now. Just one of these, Edinburgh's Gillian Tee, is paid £170,000 a year, significantly more than the Prime Minister. By reducing four bosses to one, at every level, and cutting duplication in admin staff, overhead costs could be cut by 75 per cent – education is almost half the council's annual budget of a billion pounds a year – without affecting schools.

Many front-line staff are now seeking early retirement. But if they're in what are deemed to be essential services (like homelessness), they're not getting it. With this idea those front-line staff could leave, with the back office workers filling their posts. In 2010, the former chairman of the Accounts Commission, Alastair McNish, saw austerity coming and put out a call to merge Scottish education authorities.

The Christie Commission in 2011 said public services must become more efficient by reducing duplication and sharing services. That led to Police Scotland. In four years little has changed, although last year East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire councils launched the Ayrshire Roads Alliance to deliver a range of roads services, expected to deliver more than £8 million in savings over the next ten years.

I know that Stirling & Clackmannanshire Councils have tried it too. The idea is not just best for Edinburgh, but for the whole of Scotland, which has more public sector staff per head than anyone else in Europe.

Will senior council officers propose merging services to councillors in the forthcoming budget meetings? Would they suggest cutting their own jobs? Unlikely. Do turkeys vote for Christmas?

No. But we can. Let's use the council's public website to tell our politicians to think big – not small. Readers can submit their views on this proposal via the Edinburgh City Council website, which is currently exploring options from citizens as part of its "Budget Challenge" consultation.

- Pete Gregson is founder of the Kids not Suits (www.kidsnotsuits.com) campaign group and a former council worker

Published in Scotsman 16th Dec 2015

Pete Gregson: Shared services way forward for councils

WORKING together could help local authorities ride out austerity storm, writes Pete Gregson

As winter draws nigh and austerity bites, councils everywhere are struggling to balance the books. Cuts are on the minds of local politicians and senior officers as they try to identify which services and projects will survive – and which cuts will keep voters happy.

Two weeks ago COSLA warned that councils across Scotland face a half billion pound squeeze next year, leading to “severe” reductions in services. Edinburgh council has major worries with 2000 staff facing the chop and community groups, play facilities, museums, libraries and even lollipop ladies being cut. It may be possible, however, to avoid some or all of these cutbacks by sharing services with other councils – roads and education for example.

If every council worked with its neighbours, huge sums could be saved through economies of scale. Previously the (mostly Labour-run) regional councils, which were abolished in 1996 by a Tory government, managed areas such as education and transport. When the new unitary local authorities replaced them, instead of one director of education, we had four, and so on. Costs soon mushroomed.

Most councils in England adopted the shared services approach years ago. Scotland did not, and now has the highest number of public sector staff per head of population of any country in Europe.

Some progress has admittedly been made: the 2011 Christie Commission pushed for public bodies to share services and the results so far have been Police Scotland and Creative Scotland among others. Last year saw East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire councils launch the Ayrshire Roads Alliance.

But local authorities have mostly ducked the issue. If Scottish councils won't act, it may be that the Scottish Government needs to step in. Could this be an election issue for May 2016?