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Thank you for your e-mails of 15 January to Michael Matheson and I about children's rights and welfare.

I was very sorry to hear that Jimmy Deuchars passed away. He played a key role in the Scottish Government group which helped to draft the Charter for Grandchildren and the Parenting Agreement for Scotland.

As you will know, care planning for children who are looked after is a matter for each local authority. If someone is unhappy about a local authority's care planning, they should contact the local authority direct. The Government is responsible for ensuring that the legislative framework meets the needs of children and families across Scotland.

We recognise the important role that grandparents can and do play in the lives of their grandchildren. This is highlighted in our National Parenting Strategy which you can find on our website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/10/4789>.

Section 3 of the Strategy, which is titled 'Parenting Today', stresses that the term 'parenting' now applies to a much broader range of primary caregivers and that grandparents, in particular, play a crucial role: "Grandparents, step-parents, kinship carers, foster and adoptive parents, 'corporate parents' of children looked after by the state, extended families, networks and communities – each has an important role to play in the care and upbringing of children and young people. The contribution of wider family and of grandparents in particular to the day-to-day care of children and in providing practical, emotional and often financial support to their own children is hugely significant, as highlighted in the *Growing Up in Scotland* study."

We are grateful for the contribution which grandparents made in informing the National Parenting Strategy. By working with an extensive range of partner organisations, the Scottish Government was able to engage with about 1,500 people with a parenting role, including mums-to-be, mums, dads, grandparents, kinship carers, adoptive parents and step-parents. A full list of the organisations which helped the Scottish Government engage with those with a parenting role can be found on our website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/parenting-early-learning/families/national-parenting-strategy/organisations>.

One of the commitments in the Parenting Strategy is to update the Parenting Agreement for Scotland. An expert group is currently working on the new version of the Agreement. I can assure you that the needs of grandparents will be properly reflected in the updated version.

We will test the draft with a range of stakeholders and would be grateful to hear the views of Grandparents Apart UK. To discuss how to provide feedback in relation to the updated version, please contact Craig Morris, who is chairing the expert group, at craig.morris@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

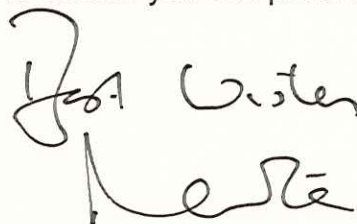
You may be interested in some of the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The 2014 Act will further the Government's ambition for Scotland to be the best place to grow up in. The Act puts children and young people at the heart of planning and services and ensures their rights will be respected across the public sector.

We value the important role played by kinship carers, many of whom are grandparents, in providing secure, stable and nurturing homes for children and young people who are no longer able to live with their birth parents. We believe that kinship carers who take on this responsibility are providing a valuable service and should be supported in carrying out this role.

Part 13 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will provide support for eligible kinship carers of non-looked after children who have obtained an order under section 11(1) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (for parental responsibilities and rights, residence or guardianship). Any kinship carer who has such a Section 11 order will now be deemed to have a "Kinship Care Order".

The intention of the Kinship Care Order is to provide additional support to kinship families who do not require regular supervision from the Children's Hearings System or Social Work. Secondary legislation which will set out what this support will entail is currently being considered.

Thank you again for taking the time to relay your views and I would encourage you to contact Craig Morris, as noted above, to ensure you can provide feedback to the updated Parenting Agreement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Sturgeon', written in a cursive style.

NICOLA STURGEON