



Glasgow
Council
for the
Voluntary
Sector

Everyone's
Children 

**Response to Social Security
Committee's call for written
evidence:**

Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill

22 March 2017

Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) has nearly 650 members, and is recognised by the Scottish Government as the core partner in the Glasgow Third Sector Interface, with responsibility for providing a wide range of development support and technical services to voluntary and community organisations across the city.

The GCVS 'Everyone's Children' project gives support to Third Sector organisations in Glasgow that provide services to children, young people and families. The project is funded by the Scottish Government and works in partnership with statutory partners and the Third Sector.

GCVS and Everyone's Children is delighted to respond to the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee call for written evidence on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill.

1. Whether you agree that statutory child poverty targets should be re-introduced for Scotland?

There has never been a more critical time for child poverty targets to be made statutory in Scotland. Figures published on March 16 show that 1 in 4 children in the country are now living in poverty - an increase from 220,000 in 2016 to 260,000 in 2017¹. Statutory child poverty targets will ensure that significant efforts are made toward eradicating child poverty and lowering these shocking statistics.

The re-introduction of child poverty targets for Scotland will also set us aside from the UK government who abandoned large parts of the previous Child Poverty Act, showing that Scotland have a commitment to the eradication of child poverty. Statutory targets with an established framework by which the Government can be held to account will help demonstrate and deliver this.

2. The appropriateness and scope of the 4 proposed targets.

Although the 4 proposed targets are realistic, Government should state that the long term goal is that no child in Scotland is living in poverty. It is also important to recognise that most families experience a fluctuation between sitting below the poverty line and above it, rather than explicitly being in poverty or not. Individuals on zero-hour/temporary contracts often experience an inconsistent and unreliable income; meaning they are sometimes by definition in poverty, but sometimes not. It would be useful for targets within legislation to reflect the erratic nature of poverty in this manner.

3. Whether interim targets are needed.

Interim targets are vital to ensure that the Scottish Government are on track to achieving the four statutory targets for 2030 set out in the Bill. Child poverty in Glasgow is a current and serious issue that needs urgent action. Almost 30% of children in Glasgow are currently living in poverty. We cannot wait thirteen years until

2030 to measure what progress has been made against the four proposed targets. Having interim targets will ensure that progress is made now and in the coming years, and that the Government and ministers are held to account for their efforts in doing so.

4. The proposed arrangements for reporting progress towards meeting the targets and how best to hold the Scottish Government to account.

GCVS welcome the requirements put on Scottish Ministers to produce annual progress reports, as this will ensure momentum is sustained in working towards alleviating child poverty, and will provide a mechanism for holding the Scottish Government to account on their promises. We hope that the progress reports will clearly describe the effect of the measures being taken towards meeting the proposed targets, as is described in the Bill.

5. The responsibility placed on local councils and health boards to make local progress reports.

At GCVS we welcome the fact that for the first time local authorities and health boards have a legal duty to report on the action they are taking to reduce child poverty in their area. This requirement will only be meaningful if local authorities and health boards engage and partner effectively with the wider community, and third sector organisations, to really understand what the needs of families living in poverty are, and how best they can work to contribute to meeting the proposed child poverty targets.

6. The existing Child Poverty Measurement Framework and its 37 indicators.

Recent indicators produced by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) for children's health profilesⁱⁱ provide good examples of poverty indicators that could yield more useful data on child poverty than some of the 37 indicators in the Bill. Indicators used by GCPH that seem extremely relevant to use in the Child Poverty Measurement Framework are:

- Overcrowded households with children
- Under 25s living in households with no central heating
- Under 25s living in privately rented or rent-free households
- Babies with birth weight below 2500g
- Infant mortality
- Under 16s living within 400m of green space

There are also indicators specific to adults in the Bill (presumably in order to understand particular areas and thus children in those areas), yet if data is available on children it seems a missed opportunity to not include them as indicators. For instance, 'Percentage of adults in the most deprived areas who are within a five-minute walk of green space', appears in the Bill indicators, despite the fact an almost identical indicator (but for children), as shown above, could be used.

7. The Living Wage.

Making the Living Wage a requirement for all employers would help decrease the rates of child poverty in Scotland immensely. Almost two-thirds of children in poverty in Scotland are in working familiesⁱⁱⁱ. At GCVS, we know from organisations that we support that income maximisation is what lifts families out of poverty. The current National Minimum Wage of £6.70 an hour is nowhere near enough for individuals and families in Scotland to live their lives with essentials, never mind being able to save for emergencies and for their children's future. As above-mentioned, many parents in Scotland are employed on zero-hours/temporary contracts, meaning their

income is unreliable and inconsistent. A Living Wage requirement for all employers in Scotland would significantly lower the numbers of people who experience in-work poverty and financial insecurity.

8. Although not in this Bill, the Scottish Government has committed to establishing a national poverty and inequality commission. What should this commission's status and powers be in relation to this Bill?

A national Poverty and Inequality Commission must be established so that it has the power to recommend and make specific changes in policy. The commission should also commit to a role in producing annual reports, detailed evaluations of projects, and delivering and producing good practice advice to alleviate child poverty.

9. Any other issues you think are relevant to this Bill.

Legislation alone won't eradicate child poverty. It must be considered to what extent a Bill will make actual, practical and meaningful differences to the lives of children in Scotland who are living in poverty. Poverty can only be eradicated through community action, and this is required and more urgent now than ever before.

Therefore, the Bill must be used as a means to developing practical steps to make the proposed targets a reality. At GCVS we know that benefit cuts and welfare reform are inextricably linked to the current high child poverty rates in Scotland. Actions by the Scottish Government could help improve the lives of those affected by austerity measures from the UK government. For example, the Scottish Government could use new powers to top-up child benefit by £5 a week, which could reduce child poverty in Scotland by up to 14%, taking around 30,000 children out of poverty^{iv}. The Government will also have devolved powers over the bedroom tax ('spare room subsidy'), which it must use to alleviate child poverty.

Finally, it is relevant to bring forward the fact that the UK government recently imposed controversial new restrictions on tax credit entitlement which will have damaging effects on families in Scotland. The two-child limit on means-tested benefit, with the inclusion of a 'rape clause', has become law without any debate or vote in parliament. With social security a reserved power, the Scottish Government will have no control over this law which will not only limit tax credits to two children per family, but will see new mothers who have been raped asked for verification of it if they wish to claim tax credits for a third child. We would want to see the Scottish Government using its voice to campaign against this inhumane and undemocratic piece of legislation which will re-victimise and re-traumatise women, exacerbate women and children's poverty^v, and diminish any efforts that are made to alleviating child poverty in Scotland.

ⁱ <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/immediate-action-needed-official-figures-show-increase-child-poverty-scotland>

ⁱⁱ http://www.understandingglasgow.com/assets/0003/5007/Notes_and_definitions_for_children_and_young_people_profiles.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

^{iv} <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/use-new-powers-invest-%C2%A35-week-every-child-say-child-poverty-campaigners>

^v [https://www.engender.org.uk/files/letter-to-the-secondary-legislation-scrutiny-committee-march-2017-\(2\).pdf](https://www.engender.org.uk/files/letter-to-the-secondary-legislation-scrutiny-committee-march-2017-(2).pdf)