



One Parent Families Scotland response to the consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland

September 2016

The consultation on the Scottish Government's proposals for a Child Poverty Bill ¹includes:

- Enshrining in legislation our ambition to eradicate child poverty
 - Reinstating statutory income-based targets to reduce the number of children living in poverty
 - Placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to develop a Child Poverty Delivery Plan, and to report on annually on their progress towards delivering that plan.
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One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland is Scotland's national single parent organisation. OPFS provides expert information, advice & family support, along with training activities, work preparation programmes & flexible childcare, tailored to the needs of single parents.

OPFS model of transformational change has co-production at the centre by involving single parents as volunteers, peer mentors and as members of the board. Involving Single Parents in ways that recognise their different needs, experiences, concerns, knowledge, interests and abilities is central to our work. OPFS encourages and enables single parents to believe in themselves, enter employment, training or education and take up new opportunities. OPFS also delivers vital childcare services – giving children high quality care and learning experiences as well as allowing parents to work, learn, and take part in training.

OPFS works with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised parents. Our transformational approach enables single parents to increase their self-esteem, confidence and skills, increasing access to employment, training and education. OPFS programmes raise participants' aspirations and expectations – giving them the desire, confidence and skills to change their lives and support to challenge the structural barriers that prevent them from achieving their potential.

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¹ https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/social-justice/consultation-on-a-child-poverty-bill-for-scotland/consult_view



Single Parents Profile

There are 170,000 single parents aged 16yrs to 74yrs in Scotland with over 281,000 dependent children, 92 per cent (156,000) are female.² By 2037 Households containing just one adult with children are projected to increase by 27 per cent, to 196,300 households.³ 41 per cent of children in single parent families live in relative poverty, around twice the risk of relative poverty faced by children in couple families (24 per cent).⁴ The success of the ambition to eradicate child poverty is therefore of vital importance to the many children in one parent families who live in poverty.

Most single parents are more likely to be in low-skilled or routine work. The Scottish single parent employment rate is 58.1%, according to data from the 2011 Census. This hides wide local variations. In Glasgow for example a different picture emerges with only 49.5% (13,108) of lone parents in paid work, of which 63.2% (8,285) are in part-time work.

Single Parent Families and Poverty

Lone parent families are more likely to experience child poverty than are couple families, regardless of whether they are in or out of work.

- 41 per cent of children in single parent families live in relative poverty, around twice the risk of relative poverty faced by children in couple families (24 per cent).⁵
- 22% of all children in lone parent families live in poverty before housing costs, almost doubling to 44% after housing costs. In contrast, 16% of children in couple families live in poverty, rising to 24% after housing costs.⁶
- 23 per cent of single parent households were in persistent poverty in 2008-2013, compared with 5 per cent of couple households.⁷

Poverty among children with both parents working full time is 5% after housing costs, rising to 10% where one parent works full-time and the other works part-time. Among children with a lone parent working full-time, almost one in five (17%) are in poverty, rising to 31% among those with a lone parent working part-time. Furthermore, lone parents' average earnings are the equivalent of one-third of couples' earnings.

Research also shows that single parents disproportionately enter lower skilled occupations, which are typically low paid, less secure and often involve short-term contracts. Twenty-seven percent of single parents enter elementary jobs which require little or no formal training, such as cleaning or kitchen and catering work; a further fifth enter sales and customer service posts. Twenty-two percent take roles in personal service occupations, such as care assistants or childminders. In total more than two-thirds (68%) of single parents enter these types of roles – which, inevitably, have much more limited opportunities for development and progression.

² www.scotlandcensus.gov.uk/2011/householdsandfamilies

³ <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/household-projections/2012-based/2012-house-proj-publication.pdf>

⁴ DWP (2015) [Households below average income, 1994/95-2013/14](#). Table 4.14ts

⁵ DWP (2015) [Households below average income, 1994/95-2013/14](#). Table 4.14ts

⁶ DWP (2016) [Households below average income, 1994/95-2014/15](#). Table 4.14ts

⁷ ONS (2015) [Persistent poverty in the UK and EU, 2008-2013](#). Household type breakdown on persistent poverty unpublished.



1. Do you agree with the Scottish Government including in statute an ambition to eradicate child poverty?

OPFS believes that ending child poverty and socio-economic disadvantage should be at the heart of the Scottish Government's programme for 2017.⁸ The UK Government's Child Poverty Act 2010 was an important step aimed at driving and monitoring progress. We are extremely disappointed that the UK targets contained in the Child Poverty Act 2010 have been abandoned by the Westminster government. We therefore agree with this ambition to eradicate child poverty being added to statute in Scotland. This would also be in keeping with the recommendation from the UN Committee which examined the UK on its performance under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that the UK 'set up clear accountability mechanisms for the eradication of child poverty, including by re-establishing concrete targets with a set timeframe and measurable indicators, and continue regular monitoring and reporting on child poverty reduction.'

We welcome the vision, aims and general approach in the strategy. Its success will depend on a cross cutting approach that reflects the nature of child poverty and the policy areas where action is needed. We support the Scottish Government's commitment to implementing the strategy and OPFS is committed to working together with partners to make this vision a reality. However, we believe there is a need to further strengthen the current arrangements for scrutinising the Scottish Government - and local authorities - approach to tackling child poverty.

2. What are your views on making income targets statutory?

Yes, we agree income targets should be statutory. For a statutory desire or duty to eradicate child poverty to be meaningful there must be a clear process for measuring progress. If designed with strong, evidence-based policies, a statutory target that transcends political parties can contribute to Scotland's economic strength and improve the lives of children from the early years onward.

3. How do you think the role of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Child Poverty can be developed to ensure that they play a key role in developing the legislation?

We support the continuing involvement of cross sector representatives on the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). In particular the MAG should have a key role in overseeing the development of the delivery plan. It would be important to develop a method of involving those with experience of poverty- to learn from good practice to create the mechanisms to facilitative effective participation

⁸ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/plan-scotland-scottish-governments-programme-scotland-2016-17/>



The MAG role in the development of an effective child poverty target and in developing the legislation could include:

1. How to build a sense of shared responsibility that facilitates cooperation on the policies required to attain the goal - challenging the individualisation of poverty with the facts.
2. Support strong accountability systems and effective monitoring - independent oversight that protects the child poverty strategy from changes in political leadership, and accountability measures to ensure continued progress;
3. A focus on how to develop a strategy that is cross-cutting – ensuring a coordinated effort (For e.g. how will the childcare strategy impact on the child poverty strategy?)
4. **How can links between the national strategy and local implementation be improved? What could local partners do to contribute to meeting these national goals? This might include reporting and sharing best practice or developing new strategic approaches.**

We support the ECP call for stronger links between national and local implementation than currently exist under the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland.

In order to ensure greater consistency and accountability across all local authority areas ECP members in Scotland believe that the legislation should place a duty on local authorities and/or their community planning partners to take a strategic approach to reducing child poverty in their area. A requirement to demonstrate that a strategic approach to reducing child poverty through existing planning and reporting mechanisms such as Children's Services Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plans and Locality Plans – would help ensure child poverty was considered at the highest level within relevant organisations. Progress at a local level should be driven by a statutory specific local level child poverty target. We believe that it is particularly important that JCP are involved and contribute to local strategies as they roll out.

For example OPFS has been involved in a number of independent Commissions set up by local authorities, such as Dundee⁹ and Fife¹⁰ and in Glasgow¹¹ the Poverty Leadership Panel, to consider evidence and develop recommendations for addressing poverty and inequality in the area. These structures have resulted in local authorities adopting strategic plans for addressing child poverty / poverty.

5. **What are your views on the income-based measures of poverty proposed for Scottish child poverty targets? For example, are there any additional income-based measures you think we should also use (and if so, why)? Are there any alternative approaches to measuring income - for example, as used in other countries - that you think could apply in Scotland?**

⁹ http://www.dundeepartnership.co.uk/sites/default/files/fairnessreport-screen_0.pdf

¹⁰ Fairness Matters – Fairer Fife Commission, November 2015 <http://www.fifedirect.org.uk>

¹¹ Poverty Leadership Panel. <http://www.povertyleadershippanel.org.uk/>



OPFS strongly supports the use of the four key targets as laid out in the consultation and that they are all income based measures, keeping income poverty and material deprivation at the core of poverty measurement.

- **Relative poverty:** less than 10 per cent of children living in relative low-income poverty.
- **Material deprivation:** less than 5 per cent of children living in combined material deprivation and low income.
- **Absolute low income:** reduce the proportion of children who live in absolute low income to less than 5 per cent.
- **Persistent poverty:** percentage of children living in relative poverty for three out of four years.

We believe that retaining an emphasis on income based targets is the right approach. Only by reducing income poverty and inequality and maximising the financial resources as well as reducing living costs available to families in Scotland can real and lasting progress be made.

6. What are your views on the Scottish Government's proposals for the levels of child poverty that the targets will be set at?

The level at which the 2030 targets are ambitious and will give a strong indication that across civic society the eradication of child poverty is our common goal. International comparisons suggest that the headline 10% target level is both realistic and achievable. While we recognise the need to set an attainable target to reduce poverty, it should become unacceptable for any child's health, wellbeing and future life changes to be blighted by poverty.

We think that the vision should encompass the eradication of the damaging impact that poverty has on children's experiences of childhood, about improving their lives today. At present, too many children miss out on experiences that others take for granted. When we have asked single parents how they were coping financially – many tell us they have had to go without something for their children, and described the impact of this:

'I have had to go without meals some days so my kids can eat properly. My wee girl has had to stop after-school activities.'

'I have not put any heating on this year. I don't eat during the day so my kids can get new school clothes'

'My lad says he understands that I have no money so he doesn't want any Christmas presents.'

'I stopped my daughter's drama lessons, which is so sad because she loved them.'

'I feel guilty that I cannot give my kids what most other kids are getting, and I am afraid of being seen as a bad mother.'

The vision of eradicating child poverty must include improving children's lives now, as well as in the future.



7. What are your views on the Scottish Government's proposal to set targets on an after housing costs basis? For example, are there any disadvantages to this approach that we have not already considered?

We also welcome the Scottish Government's proposal that the relative income target should be calculated after housing costs rather than before housing costs. Housing costs are an unavoidable expense and taking them into account allows for a more realistic understanding of the resources available to families. This is particularly true for single parent families as the data shows that the percentage of children in lone parent families living in poverty after housing is 43% almost double the "before housing costs figure".

8. What are your views on the Scottish Government's proposal to set targets that are expected to be achieved by 2030?

We are disappointed that the UK level 2020 targets contained in the Child Poverty Act 2010 are no longer realistic for the Scottish Government to meet the income targets described by 2020.

We believe there is a need for the legislation to include interim targets to ensure the Scottish Government and other public bodies are on track towards achieving the 2030 target. Interim targets would allow scrutiny and provide a useful way of measuring progress towards the 2030 goals.

9. What are your views on the proposal that Scottish Ministers will be required by the Bill to produce a Child Poverty Delivery Plan every five years, and to report on this Plan annually?

We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government will be required to report on its progress in relation to the Delivery plan on an annual basis. In order to ensure the contents of the delivery plan remain relevant we believe there should also be an annual opportunity for the document to be reviewed and refreshed. This will help to ensure the plan remains relevant and as a 'living' document. As suggested above there could be a role for the Ministerial Advisory Group in overseeing the development of the delivery plan and potentially a role for a wider Commission at the implementation stage.

The child poverty strategy should be published every three years and should include a duty on government departments and relevant agencies to set out their contribution to tackling child poverty.

We think that the legislation should specify what must be set out in the strategy, and that this should include:

- How the Government will work with local authorities
- The contribution of departments across Government to eradicating child poverty. The legislation should include within it a duty on Government departments to set out their own strategy for contributing to the eradication of child poverty, including that of relevant public bodies. Individual department's contribution to progress against the target itself should be set out (in the first strategy, and also assessed in subsequent strategies), including any actions which may have contribute to greater rather than fewer children living in poverty.
- Details of Government funding for the strategy.



10. Do you have any suggestions for how the measurement framework could usefully be improved? For example, are there any influencing factors that are not covered by the measurement framework? Or are there any additional indicators that could be added?

We welcome the wide-ranging set of indicators detailed in the measurement framework. However we believe contents of any renewed measurement framework are linked more closely with the four income based targets.

Some indicators contained in the current framework do not relate directly to eradicating child poverty and some are not a useful measure. For example the table in the consultation document¹² the under the heading ‘Performance Improving – Pockets’ it says ‘Employment rate of parents – 80%’. However this can’t effectively be used as a measure of maximising household resources (pockets), particularly for single parents. Research¹³ shows although 66.5% of lone parents are now in work, a rise of 2% on a year ago - for single parent families in part time work the number of children in child poverty has not improved since 2006/7 - remaining at around 35%. For single parent’s families in full time work the situation has deteriorated even further with the number of children in poverty rising from 12% in 2003/4 to 19% in 2014/15.¹⁴

Children in families headed by a single parent have a greater chance of living in poverty. Single parent households most likely to report that they do not manage well financially with 23 per cent reporting they do not manage well financially - higher than the overall Scotland figure of 10 per cent. We would also suggest adding a measure for lone parents around managing financially/social support.¹⁵

There are a number of significant indicators of child poverty that are missing, for example relating to families’ income, such as the adequacy of benefits, compared to the level of income required to take families out of poverty. (We recognise the challenge around the fact that the proportion of the Scottish social security budget that will devolve to Scotland amounts 15% of the total £17.5 billion spent here every year. However it may be a useful marker of the fact that this impacts on the success of the Scottish Child Poverty Strategy¹⁶)

In terms of measuring the progress towards eradicating child poverty by 2030, OPFS does believe that there is scope for developing additional indicators that capture a broader range of issues of importance to children’s life chances. Relevant indicators for :

- The promotion and facilitation of sustainable employment of parents and the development of access to qualifications for parents
- The provision of financial support for families to eradicate the need for food banks
- The provision of information, advice and assistance to parents

¹² https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/social-justice/consultation-on-a-child-poverty-bill-for-scotland/consult_view p15

¹³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/workingandworklesshouseholdsintheukaprtojune2016>

¹⁴ DWP (2016) [Households below average income, 1994/95-2014/15](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/54444/Households_below_average_income_1994_95-2014_15.pdf). Table 4.14ts

¹⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/7673/7>

¹⁶ <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/social-security/social-security-in-scotland>



- Physical and mental health, education, childcare and social work
- Housing, the built or natural environment and the promotion of social inclusion.

There should be a focus on place-based as well as people-focused interventions/measurements to improve services. Strategies should recognise the importance of geography associated with poverty distribution in communities but also take account of the fact that poverty may be found everywhere. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) which ranks up to 7,000 small areas in Scotland listing the most deprived to the least can show where poverty is concentrated. Research shows that in the most deprived areas single parent families are over 50% of all families with children¹⁷, place based interventions are required which acknowledge this and which recognise that a tailored integrated policy response is required.

11. Do you have any additional views on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland?

New powers over social security are being devolved to Scotland which includes an ability to use top up powers and introduce new benefits. We agree with CPAG that consideration needs to be given to what can be done with these powers to ensure that the 2030 target is met.

We would like to see a greater recognition of the role of employers in making this shift happen. The strategy could place stronger emphasis on their responsibilities. We believe that eradicating child poverty will require dramatic shifts in employer practices, as much as improvements in individuals qualifications and skills.

“The Spirit Level “concludes inequality is at root of all society’s problems, from violent crime to teenage pregnancy. The Spirit Level points out that the affluent also miss out in unequal societies. Unequal societies record around **three times** more mental illness than equal ones.¹⁸

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¹⁷ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=3710&p=0>

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4bPIMRmLGo>