COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence in relation to the Child Poverty Bill for Scotland. As such, we have set out our views in relation to the questions posed by the Committee. We trust our response will be useful to inform the Committee’s considerations.

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

The Scottish Government’s proposals for child poverty targets are acceptable to local government as they are in line with what was set under the Child Poverty (2010) UK Act that COSLA previously supported.

Making income targets statutory would also provide a driver for change and improvement. This is arguably because embedding the targets in statute ensures that the issue remains at the forefront of the national conscious and can be used to monitor progress.

Further, setting income targets is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) view on accountability. However, income targets relate to a much wider agenda and are influenced by a range of factors out with the control of the Scottish Government or Scottish local government.

- **The appropriateness and scope of the 4 proposed targets?**

The four income-based indicators suggested are well-established and complement one another to provide a better overall measure of poverty. Moreover, given they are recognised and generally understood and accepted, it would seem sensible to continue to use these measures. In addition, the value of retaining these measures is that they provide consistency and allow trend information to be available.

- **Whether interim targets are needed?**

2030 would seem a reasonable timeframe to set targets that are expected to be achieved for child poverty. Nevertheless, the risk of such an expansive timeframe could be that the momentum to achieve the targets could be more difficult to sustain due to changes in government along with professionals and experts involved in setting the targets by 2030. As such, it would be worth considering interim targets that help ensure more immediacy of effort. These interim targets should be within 3 years to provide an indication of progress.

- **The proposed arrangements for reporting progress towards meeting the targets and how best to hold the Scottish Government to account?**

A Child Poverty Delivery Plan could ensure an ambition for child poverty can be realised. It would also require to recognise the major contribution of local authorities and Community
Planning Partnerships. As such, it would be important that a Child Poverty Delivery Plan is adequately resourced to allow the ambition to be driven and delivered locally by local authorities and their community planning partners to make a tangible difference.

Further, the life span of plans such as local children’s service plans tend to be produced on a 3 yearly cycle. As such, consideration would require to be given to how the links to child poverty planning and reporting arrangements could be made annually as well as to education policy areas such as the Attainment Challenge and the Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce Programme which are closely linked to addressing child poverty.

- **The responsibility placed on local councils and health boards to make local progress reports?**

The eradication of child poverty will require a delivery plan that recognises the major contribution of local authorities and health boards to the child poverty agenda and is supported by sufficient resources. It will also require guidance that reflects the wider contribution that other community planning partners can make to this agenda rather than just local authorities and health boards. In addition, it will be crucially important that local authorities are adequately resourced to credibly take forward a new Scottish approach to child poverty to build capacity and share good practice across multi agency partnerships.

- **The existing Child Poverty Measurement Framework and its 37 indicators?**

As child poverty is a multi-dimensional issue a number of indicators could be collated for the measurement framework to enhance it such as health inequality measures. In addition, indicators that would help to measure the number of “working poor” households such as the proportion of children living in households with income below the Living Wage or the number of households where one or more parents works irregular hours and has a zero hour contract.

Overall, the focus of the measurement framework should essentially be on the quality, validity and frequency of the data collection. In addition, the data should ideally be able to be disaggregated to a local level particularly where it can inform Local Outcome Improvement Plans and the targeting of resources.

- **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 would require to be relevant and contain the necessary expertise to advise on what is a complex issue e.g. representation from local government and other key partners as well as those with an understanding of poverty in for instance rural areas would be useful. It would also seem appropriate that the Commission is given a role from the outset in overseeing the implementation of the legislation in an advisory capacity to Ministers.

The Commission could be used to maximise engagement with other stakeholders and have responsibilities beyond the introduction of any Act to hear evidence relating to best practice ensuring that such examples are grounded in research and can evidence impact. In addition, the Commission could have a role in developing ways of ensuring that best practice is shared and replicated more widely across Scotland as appropriate.
• Any other issues you think are relevant to this Bill.

Given the focus in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 on empowering communities and developing locality plans to tackle inequalities as outcomes in disadvantaged communities, it would be very useful if data on child poverty could be disaggregated to a neighbourhood level where possible, to inform decision making and the targeting of resources.

There is a need to recognise that the current climate of budget cuts puts councils in a difficult position in terms of their capacity. As such, support to local government to address child poverty will be imperative along with adequate resources to build capacity, promote good practice and co-ordinate efforts across not only a wide range of local authority services, but also community planning partners. This could be achieved through for example designated co-ordinators to drive the agenda locally.

There is also a need for the private sector to be engaged in this crucial agenda and to determine how companies as employers can help to tangibly support local initiatives to alleviate child poverty across the country.

Finally, the provisions of the Children and Young People Act (2014) and related policy developments such as the expansion of the Early Years provision, Corporate Parenting and the Fairer Scotland Action Plan should help to support new legislation on child poverty.

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COSLA