Carers Trust Scotland

Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill

Evidence submission for Social Security Committee

1. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Social Security Committee on the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. Young carers and their families are more likely to live in deprived circumstances than the average young population\(^1\), and young carers in the most deprived areas of Scotland are more likely to have substantial caring roles compared with carers in the least deprived areas\(^2\). The costs of providing care are high and can push families into poverty, so it will remain important that young carers and their families are supported by this legislation and the policy and practice that will accompany its implementation.

2. The links between young people’s caring responsibilities and living in poverty can be complex, but are primarily connected to the household’s limited capacity for paid work alongside caring roles and the extra costs associated with living in a household where someone has an illness or disability. It has been acknowledged in the policy memorandum accompanying the Bill that poverty rates are higher for households with a disabled child\(^3\) and we are pleased that due consideration will be given to the additional barriers faced by specific groups. It is important to note further that children in households with a disabled adult are also likely to experience poverty. The existing financial support for people with little or no capacity to work alongside caring is inadequate and, as a result, carers are too often ending up in financial hardship\(^4\).

3. Adults in a household where there are young carers may be carers themselves or be recipients of care, both of which can limit their ability to undertake paid employment to support the family. Families where someone is ill or disabled will often be in receipt of benefits, which can also contribute to living in poverty – Carers Allowance is one of the lowest income-replacement benefits, at £62.10 per week\(^5\). Very few young carers themselves have access to Carers Allowance due to the eligibility criteria for this benefit, which prevents those in full-time study from receiving it even if they are providing substantial amounts of care. Caring responsibilities can also limit a young carer’s opportunities to undertake paid employment themselves. However, it is positive that of those young people under the age of 24 who are entitled to Carers Allowance, over 90% receive the benefit\(^6\).

\(^1\) “Coping is difficult, but I feel proud”: perspectives on mental health and wellbeing of young carers (2017)
Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland/Carers Trust Scotland

\(^2\) Scotland’s Carers (2015) Scottish Government

\(^3\) Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill Policy Memorandum (2017) S30, Scottish Parliament

\(^4\) Informal Carers, Poverty and Work (2016) New Policy Institute

\(^5\) 2016/17 rate. We recognise the commitment of the Scottish Government to increasing the rate of Carers Allowance in Scotland as soon as they are practically able to do so.

\(^6\) Scotland’s Carers (2015) Scottish Government
Do you agree that statutory child poverty targets should be re-introduced for Scotland?

4. We support the re-introduction of statutory child poverty targets as this sends a strong message on how the Scottish Government intends to monitor the progress of eradicating child poverty. We agree with the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland that establishing these targets is consistent with the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child concluding observations and in line with their duty in part 1 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Do you agree with the appropriateness and scope of the 4 proposed targets?

5. The income-based targets are appropriate. The persistent poverty and low income/material deprivation targets are useful targets to measure, as young carers are more likely to experience relative and absolute low income after housing costs than young people who are not carers. However, there may also be a need to measure health and social care related costs and disability related expenditure when looking at income and poverty for this group of young people.

6. We agree with the Scottish Youth Parliament’s assertion that debt should be acknowledged when assessing poverty, as many families with caring roles can be in debt as a direct result of caring responsibilities and this can be a factor that keeps children and young people in persistent poverty.

Whether interim targets are needed?

7. Although long-term targets are useful for ensuring that there is a durable policy driver towards eradicating poverty, they can be more difficult to achieve, particularly if there is no interim opportunity for checking progress and modifying actions towards meeting the target if necessary. There is an opportunity for shorter term targets to be included in legislation, particularly as frequent progress reports are to be produced. We agree with Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland that smaller interim targets could be put in place to improve public and political scrutiny of progress towards longer term goals.

Do you agree with the proposed arrangements for reporting progress towards meeting the targets and how best to hold the Scottish Government to account?

Do you agree with the responsibility placed on local councils and health boards to make local progress reports?

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8 Income Poverty and Material Deprivation Risks Amongst Young Carers in Britain (2016), Presentation to APPAM conference, P Vizard
9 State of Caring 2016 (2016), Carers UK
10 Response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland (2016) CPAG in Scotland
8. Yes. Requiring both local and national progress reporting is useful to measure progress towards targets with a focus on the practical delivery of anti-poverty measures. We agree with the Scottish Youth Parliament that both national and local reports must be made widely available and well publicised, as well as being appropriate and accessible for children and young people.

Do you agree with the existing Child Poverty Measurement Framework and its 37 indicators?

9. The Child Poverty Measurement Framework is useful but it is important that the additional barriers faced by households with caring responsibilities are borne in mind. For example, underemployment is more likely in households with carers or young carers, as well-paid flexible work is not always compatible with unpaid caring. We agree with Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland that indicators should link more closely to the targets.

About Carers Trust Scotland

Carers Trust Scotland is the largest provider of comprehensive carers support services in Scotland.

We reach around 30,000 adult carers and 2,400 young carers from all groups and communities, through a unique network of independent carers’ centres and young carers services throughout Scotland. We work with these centres to improve support, services and recognition for carers in communities across Scotland.

There are at least 759,000 carers aged 16 and over in Scotland and 29,000 young carers. The value of care provided by carers in Scotland is £10.8bn a year.

About the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance

Facilitated by Carers Trust Scotland, the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance provides all young carer services in Scotland with information and support so that they can provide the best possible support to young carers.

Alliance members are experts in all of the issues that can affect young carers – from missing out on educational and vocational opportunities, to bullying, mental health problems and struggling to juggle caring with friendships.

Thanks to this level of expertise, the Alliance can advise those responsible for national policy, guidance and legislation to make sure that the needs of young carers are acknowledged and met.

Carers Trust Scotland

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