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

1.1. Yes.

2. The appropriateness and scope of the 4 proposed targets

2.1. The four proposed indicators for which targets are set are appropriate and have a good scope for covering the experience of child poverty. There are additional measures the government could consider using but they could also be used as indicators for ‘Pockets’ rather than as targets per se. See question 8 for more details.
2.2. The proposed targets are highly ambitious (unachievable?) on an after housing costs basis, particularly in light of the caveat that the Scottish Government does not hold all the levers to enable them to achieve these targets. This is further complicated by the most recent poverty statistics, see question 8.
2.3. To achieve these targets would require radical changes to legislation, policy in many areas, structural changes (eg labour market), a longer timescale and some interim targets to monitor progress and identify the most useful changes.

3. Whether interim targets are needed

3.1. I would strongly advocate the use of interim targets, especially in light of the ambitiousness of the targets.
3.2. Interim measures will allow the government to monitor success towards achieving the targets and to identify the most useful policy initiatives.

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

4.1. The proposed reporting arrangements, periodic delivery plans and annual progress reports, are welcome.
4.2. The delivery plans would be strengthened if they were made more strategic, e.g. set out exactly what the government will do and the policy areas that will be covered, eg education, health, social security, childcare and employment (among others).
4.3. The Scottish Government should be held to account by a commission whose role and independence is set in statute (see 7).

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

5.1. While a statutory duty on local councils and health boards is welcome, the proposed legislation does not go far enough. The wording of ‘describe measures being taken... that contribute to meeting the child poverty targets’ does not state that local councils and health boards need to actually do anything to achieve the targets and reduce child poverty, they just need to report on what is already being done. This is too weak.
5.2. This is also a retrospective reporting requirement rather than a reporting of a strategic plan going forward. As such it is not proactive and does not require action to actually reduce or prevent child poverty.

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

6.1. I think there are some good indicators in the framework and some very poor indicators. My research focus at the University of Edinburgh is child poverty and
indicators of child poverty. I find those in the CPMF insufficient. Here is what I would suggest:

6.1.1. Under ‘Pockets’:
- The existing indicators under Pockets are good but could be strengthened by the inclusion of some others (see question 8).
- We need to consider monies that directly affect children and have an impact on children’s lives, e.g. Free School Meal entitlement/take up, School Clothing Grant entitlement/take up and Educational Maintenance Allowance entitlement/take up.
- We need indicators of benefits take up directed at families with children, e.g. Universal Credit take up, Working Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits take up.

6.1.2. Under ‘Prospects’:
- I am deeply concerned by some of these indicators.
- Many of them rely on data from either the Health Behaviours in School-aged children study (HBSC) or the Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS). This is deeply problematic.
- HBSC is only collected every four years, the data take a further year or two to become available and then they are not publicly available (being held by academics). This could lead to a data gap of 5-6 years which is unacceptable.
- HBSC does not contain an income measure (to ascertain poverty) nor a reliable social class variable. It contains an outmoded ‘Family Affluence’ variable based on computer and car ownership.
- SALSUS is collected every two years but the data take several years to become available. The 2015 reports were published in October 2016. This means that the next reports will be published around October 2018. Three years is an unacceptable gap.
- Furthermore, the indicators chosen to be part of the CPMF are arguably caused by poverty and are not measures of it. The smoking one is particularly useless given that in the SALSUS data the use of e-cigarettes is far higher than the incidence of smoking. For a discussion on the difference between causes and consequences of poverty, please see my 2012 consultation response to the UK government in association with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh: Consultation response to the Conservative-led coalition government’s 2012 consultation on a new measure of child poverty.
- Furthermore, if the Scottish Government wishes to use these poor quality indicators then the raw percentages are meaningless without a counterfactual or comparison group. For example, the % of poor children who eat fruit or veg has no comparison group. Is this very high or very low? It would be better to use ratios, or gaps, as you do in Places, rather than raw percentages.
- I would be happy to discuss individual indicators with the Scottish Government as it sees fit.

6.1.3. Under ‘Places’:
- These are better indicators.

7. 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?

7.1. This should be included in the Bill and set in statute. It is important that there is independent expert scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s progress.
7.2. It is important the commission’s role and independence is set in legislation so that it is free to be critical of government policy and action where needed.
7.3. The commission should produce an annual report on the Scottish Government’s actions and progress to date (as in the old UK Child Poverty Act 2010).
7.4. The commission should include academic expertise. There are people in Scotland whose entire research and teaching focuses on child poverty.

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

8.1. The new child poverty statistics have been released since this call for review of the Child Poverty Bill. The new figures AHC are 26% (increase of 4 percentage points) for relative poverty, 24% (increase of 3 percentage points) for absolute poverty and 12% (unchanged) for income poverty and material deprivation combined. While the Scottish Government briefing cautions analysis of a one year change, it is very much in line with the predictions by Browne, Hood and Joyce (2014), which the SPICe briefing urges us to treat with ‘a great deal of caution’. I think the government needs to be more responsive and responsible here. The change is in line with some unwelcome predictions and is going strongly against the desired direction of change. This will make the Scottish Government’s job all the harder and so strong legislation with a sound strategy will be required.

8.2. Furthermore, the reason that combined material deprivation and income poverty is unchanged is likely due to the lagged effect of income poverty on material deprivation (Treanor, 2014)\(^1\). You can likely expect this to go in the wrong direction of travel, i.e. increase, in future without some strong intervention.

8.3. Other measures of poverty should be included as indicators to give a comprehensive picture of child poverty in Scotland, e.g. severe poverty, recurrent poverty, the poverty gap, debt and insecurity of income. Financial insecurity is shown to be linked to poor child wellbeing (Treanor, 2016a\(^2\), 2016b\(^3\)).

8.4. The Scottish Government has an annual birth cohort study called ‘Growing Up in Scotland’, which is longitudinal, and which should be used to develop stronger indicators, such as recurrent poverty.

8.5. As such, the government should put aside money for data and analysis costs.

This review came to me through various routes, including ‘Ask Academia’. I would be happy to be called forward to give oral evidence.

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\(^1\) Treanor, Morag C. (2014) ‘Deprived or not deprived? Comparing the measured extent of material deprivation using the UK government’s and the Poverty and Social Exclusion surveys’ method of calculating material deprivation’ *Quality & Quantity*, vol. 48 (3):1337-1346.


\(^3\) Treanor, Morag C. (2016), *Financial vulnerability, mothers’ emotional distress and child wellbeing*, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) Research briefing 81