North Ayrshire Council Response to the Call for Evidence on the Proposed Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill

1 Should Statutory Child Poverty Targets be Re-introduced for Scotland

Yes. Ending Child Poverty should be at the heart of the Scottish Government’s programme. Child Poverty levels are increasing across Scotland. However, this is not just about statistics, it is about the life chances of our children and young people. Too many young lives are being blighted by the effects of poverty in childhood. As a progressive, caring, developed society, we have a duty to act. Setting ambitious targets will provide a focus for action, and allow progress to be tracked.

2 The appropriateness and scope of the four targets proposed in the draft Bill

North Ayrshire Council supports the use and the scope of the four targets proposed in the draft bill. These indicators are now well-established and they complement one another to provide an overall measure of poverty. As they are already established and used, they also provide us a sound baseline to measure progress against.

3 Whether interim targets are needed

With 2030 the proposed date for achieving the targets set out in the Bill, interim targets will be required to track progress. However, it must also be recognised that addressing child poverty will require time, and there will be significant time lags between reform and outcomes. This will require a long-term view. It will also require patience, and the development of robust output measures to track progress towards the desired outcomes.

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

The proposals in the draft bill are a reasonable method for reporting progress towards meeting the targets. Obviously, the people of Scotland will hold the government to account, especially during elections to Holyrood. The Government will also need to present the annual progress reports to the Scottish Parliament. There may also be a role for a National Poverty and Inequality Commission to scrutinise delivery plans and Progress reports.

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

As key partners in delivering child poverty targets, annual progress reports from local councils and health boards will assist these local organisations to track their progress. There may be a need to identify individual targets for individual local authorities. This is in recognition that we are not starting from an even playing filed. Existing levels of child poverty vary across Scotland. In some areas such as North Ayrshire, levels are
exceptionally high and deeply entrenched. This may mean that exceptional focus locally and nationally will be required.

6 The existing Child Poverty Measurement Framework and its 37 indicators

The current framework with its themes of ‘Pockets, Prospects and Places’ is supported. Indeed, the approach has been used within North Ayrshire as a framework to review progress at a local level.

Given that education provides a route out of poverty, it may be useful to develop a measure that allows us to compare children’s educational performance against previous parental performance. Such a measure may be too complex to establish but would be a useful indicator of progress.

Our Fair for All Strategy (North Ayrshire’s strategy for tackling the root causes of child poverty) is also proposing to measure the following to track our progress:

- female participation in the labour market
- employment rates for disabled people
- employment rates for care leavers
- support to young carers
- the number of women smoking or drinking alcohol during pregnancy
- the number of women breastfeeding

These measures have been chosen as improvements in these areas will have a significant impact on the life-outcomes of our children and young people.

7 What should the status and powers be of a national poverty and inequality commission in relation to this Bill

As stated above the Commission should have the power to scrutinise progress and hold the Scottish Government to account on progress towards the targets. As key delivery partners, the Commission should include Local Government representation.

8 Any other issues you think are relevant to this Bill

There are three key issues that need to be covered:

a. Existing child poverty levels vary considerably across Scotland. It is therefore conceivable that the overall targets may be met, whilst levels in individual local authority areas rise. This is unacceptable. Reducing levels of child poverty must be achieved nationally across Scotland. This may require interim targets to vary in different geographical regions

b. The challenge of achieving the ambitious targets set out in the draft Bill cannot be underestimated. It must also be recognised that the scale of the challenge will vary across Scotland. Meeting these targets will place pressure on already stretched local authority budgets. Perversely, those local authorities who need
to make the biggest improvements, will be those facing the most pressure on budgets from increasing demand for services. There needs to be a recognition in the Bill of how **resources** will be made available to **delivery partners** to meet these ambitious targets.

c. The Bill also needs to recognise that in addition to local councils and health boards, other **community planning partners** also have a key role. Any proposed child poverty duty should also be applied to all Community Planning Partners.