



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Natalie Don  
Convener  
Social Justice and Social Security  
Committee

By email only

**Public Audit Committee**  
Room T3.60  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

Email:

[publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot)

10 March 2023

Dear Natalie,

### **Tackling child poverty**

Following an evidence session with the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) on the joint Audit Scotland and Accounts Commission [briefing on Tackling Child Poverty](#) (the joint briefing) at its [meeting on 6 October 2022](#), the Public Audit Committee held a roundtable evidence session with stakeholders on [10 November 2022](#). The Committee subsequently sought [further written evidence from the Scottish Government](#), which it considered at its meeting on 9 February 2023, and agreed to write to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee to highlight some of the key issues raised during its evidence taking. At this meeting, we also noted the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government's [response to the joint briefing](#).

The Committee found its roundtable evidence session to be very powerful and informative. The Committee agreed with the witnesses that addressing child poverty is a serious and urgent issue. In particular, we agreed with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland who stated that "the failure to properly address child poverty is having a catastrophic effect on children across Scotland, and we are not doing enough to address that". Due to the adverse impact poverty can have on children, and the risk that it can negatively change the course of a young person's

life, the Committee believes that tackling child poverty must remain a key priority for the Scottish Government.

#### Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2022-26

The first key message in the joint briefing states that the Scottish Government has not yet demonstrated a clear shift to preventing child poverty. The joint briefing goes on to state that it is not possible to assess the success of the Scottish Government's first four-year plan to reduce child poverty, as the Scottish Government had not set out what impact the plan was expected to have on the levels of child poverty. The briefing also highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the ability to collect data on child poverty.

It is understood from the joint briefing that while the second delivery plan, Best Starts, Bright Futures, has renewed efforts to reduce child poverty for the period 2022-2026, and the anticipated impact is set out more clearly, it still lacks detail. This was raised during the roundtable evidence session where we heard concerns that the second delivery plan lacks detail on how and when some of the actions will be delivered. We agree with the statement in the joint briefing which stipulates that this lack of detail must be addressed urgently. We believe that this is crucial to the successful delivery of the plan.

#### Views of children and families living in poverty

One of the key messages from the joint briefing is that—

“The views of children and families living in poverty are not always meaningfully considered as policies and actions are developed, implemented and evaluated”.

The joint briefing recommends that the Scottish Government should consider how best to involve children and families with lived experience of poverty in providing strategic oversight of how it is tackling child poverty. The Scottish Government confirmed that it is looking at every policy area contained in its Best Start, Bright Futures delivery plan for 2022 to 2026, to see how it can “ensure that the voices, experiences and views of children, young people and parents inform how we go about delivery”. The Committee believes that it is vital that progress is made on this work as a matter of urgency, to ensure the best possible outcomes are delivered for children living in poverty.

#### Tracking spending and data

Capturing the views of children and families with lived experience of poverty are also vital to ensure that spending is having the desired impact.

We heard from Bill Scott, Chair of the Poverty Commission that—

“We need to know what is working and what is not working—in other words, the impact of the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been invested. If that money is being spent on something that is not doing what it set out to achieve, we need to stop that and channel that money towards what we have identified does work.”

During the roundtable evidence session, the AGS told us that it is fundamentally important that there is good quality data to enable the assessment of the impact of spending on outcomes. The AGS also agreed that “if spending is not having the desired impact, we can then stop doing it and move on to something that will have more influence.”

We were concerned to hear of an 18-month lag in obtaining data on relative poverty. Given the significant impact poverty is having on children’s day-to-day lives, this led us to question the Scottish Government on how quickly changes can be made when it is identified that a specific approach is not working.

In its written response, the Scottish Government agreed that in the context of stretching child poverty targets and a limited budget, it is even more vital that it understands the impact of its policy choices and is able to make decisions based on a robust understanding of what works and what does not. The Scottish Government acknowledged the time lag in obtaining official statistics to measure progress and explained the other indicators it uses to help understand the progress it is making towards tackling child poverty.

The written response also sets out the further steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support the delivery of its approach to policy specific evaluations. This includes the establishment of an internal evaluation network and plans to publish a framework to support policy leads across the Scottish Government to embed child poverty within their own evaluations. In addition, the Scottish Government states that it has put in place internal governance structures underpinning ‘Best Start, Bright Futures’ which include quarterly performance reporting on impact, performance against outcomes and progress on evaluation. The Committee agrees that it is vital that these additional steps are implemented and delivered upon at pace.

### Working with partners

The evidence we heard was clear that the issue of child poverty will not be solved by any one organisation. It is therefore vital that the Scottish Government works closely with local government, the third sector, children and families with lived experience of poverty and others, including the UK Government to address this serious issue as a matter of urgency.

The Committee asks that your committee gives consideration to monitoring the progress made by the Scottish Government in tackling child poverty and implementing the recommendations in the joint report as part of your future work programme.

Yours sincerely,

**Richard Leonard MSP,  
Convener**