



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Edward Mountain MSP  
Convener  
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

**2 December 2024**

Dear Edward,

### Addressing child poverty through parental employment report – Follow up

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee is seeking your assistance to ensure that progress is made in addressing child poverty, one of the Scottish Government's key priorities and a shared priority across political parties with the passing of the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) (the 2017 Act).

The 2017 Act sets interim targets to be met by 2023/24 and final targets to be met by 2030. The next update on progress will be available in March 2025 with the Scottish Government required to make a statement about them next summer.

The latest Scottish Government [modelling](#) however estimates that "policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty and 70,000 children out of absolute poverty in 2024-25, with the respective child poverty rates 10 percentage points and 7 percentage points lower than they would have been without these policies."

In the current delivery plan which runs to 2026, [Best Start, Bright Futures](#), the Scottish Government clearly states that parental employment is a key driver to meet the statutory targets to address child poverty. It has set out key approaches to support "up to 12,000 parents to access and sustain employment and up to 3,000 in-work parents to increase their earnings. These cover a broad range of policy areas and include:

- A strengthened employment offer with increased investment in employability support and the testing of new approaches
- Connectivity and childcare to enable access to employment with a greater availability of affordable public transport and more childcare offers
- Transforming the economy by working with all sectors to promote fair work and investing in local and regional economies.

This cornerstone of the delivery plan has been the subject of the Committee's [inquiry](#) to ensure the Scottish Government delivers on its plan.

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Contact: Social Justice and Social Security Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email [SJSS.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:SJSS.committee@parliament.scot). We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

## **Inquiry report**

The Committee published its inquiry [report](#) in November 2023. It contains 34 recommendations and requests for action across a range of themes. The Committee received a [response against each recommendation from the Scottish Government](#) on 22 January 2024 and a [debate](#) was held on 14 March 2024. Several Members from a range of committees with relevant remits, such as Net Zero, Energy and Transport and Education, Children and Young people, contributed demonstrating an interest in making progress through the various policies.

## **The need for a commitment to deliver across policy areas**

Throughout our inquiry and other related work, the Committee has heard that a greater scale and pace of action would be needed to meet the interim child poverty targets.

Our work also clearly highlights the cross-cutting nature of the issues and barriers faced by parents when it comes to employment and employability and the decisive action needed across different policy areas if the Scottish Government is to achieve Best Start Bright Futures' commitments and targets.

## **Progress a year on from publication of the report**

A lot has changed since the publication of the report at both UK and Scottish Government levels. However, in spring 2024, the First Minister reaffirmed his commitment to tackle child poverty, saying “Eradicating child poverty will be the single most important objective of my government – and work in other priority areas will support and drive that mission.”

For the inquiry and our recommendations to have a meaningful impact, the Committee will continue to hold the Scottish Government to account on its progress on the relevant policy areas to the end of the session. We [wrote](#) to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on 7 November to get an update on progress nearly a year in from the publication of the report. The Cabinet Secretary [replied to the Committee](#) on 29 November.

## **Policy areas relevant to the remit of your Committee**

We believe the remit of your committee is incredibly important to tackle this issue and we would greatly value an update on pieces of work and lines of inquiry in your current or future work programme. This would help us hold the Government to account, broadening the impact of our report and highlighting the cross-cutting nature of the actions and policies needed to win its fight against child poverty.

The Scottish Government recognises that adequate and affordable transport provision is vital to address inequalities and contribute to reducing child poverty.

The inquiry highlighted that in order to lift parents out of poverty through access to fair and flexible employment, a network of essential infrastructure needs to be in place,

including an improved and affordable transport network across the country to make it easier for those on low incomes to access employment or training opportunities.

These recommendations very much fit with Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation and its vision of a fairer and more equal society which you Committee scrutinised earlier in this session.

## **Maximising the impact of our recommendations**

Ending child poverty can only be achieved if the Scottish Government supercharges its efforts to deliver across different policy area commitments.

We would therefore be grateful if you could let us know if you have done or are planning any scrutiny work around the above topics and policy areas and/or the recommendations listed in the Annexe which are relevant to the remit of your Committee. We would be particularly like to know:

- What progress you have made on relevant pieces of work you are currently undertaking and/or outcomes of relevant work you have completed
- If you are planning to do some work on any of these issues by the end of the current parliamentary session
- If you are aware of relevant and/or upcoming updates and developments relating to these issues.

We would appreciate a response by 31 January in order to inform the follow-up work of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Collette Stevenson MSP**  
**Convener**  
**Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

## Annexe

### Recommendations relevant to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b> <b>Adequate and affordable services for low-income parents</b>
<b>Public transport provision</b> 96 - The Committee encourages the Scottish Government to consider how public transport services can be designed and better supported to provide affordable, frequent and direct services that support the type of trips more regularly made by parents, and young people, e.g. orbital trips between suburbs without the need to travel via a city centre, or trip changing – i.e. trips that call at multiple stops such as childcare, work and shops. The Committee also draws the attention of the Scottish Government to paragraph 139 of this report which highlights transport challenges specifically faced by parents in island and rural communities.
<b>Affordability of transport</b> 108- The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government undertakes a data-based analysis of the groups who need travel concessions the most. Analysis could link eligibility criteria for other things relevant to low-income families such as funded childcare, so as to best target concessionary travel offers to the groups most in need of extra support.
<b>Affordability of transport</b> 109- The Committee understands that universal free travel may not be possible for all groups. We therefore recommend that the Scottish Government uses modelling to develop a holistic and integrated system of discounted travel offers for low-income working-age people, providing a boost for some families and enabling them to access a wider range of employment opportunities by being able to travel further more cost effectively.
<b>Affordability of transport</b> 110- Finally, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government enters into constructive discussions with operators and local authorities nationwide to explore how concession schemes and discounted travel offers could be expanded to best serve the needs of low-income parents and what revenue can be made available to achieve this.
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b> <b>Need for diverse service provision to meet specific needs</b>
<b>Public transport outside urban centres, travel corridors and in remote areas</b> 140 - The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government reviews its strategy for transport in rural areas and considers the need of working parents and low-income families to have access to a combination of modes of transport to access work, education and childcare. This should be informed by the review of how existing and planned Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) can be used to support low-income families as part of Best Start Bright Future, as detailed in the 2023 progress report.
<b>FUNDING TO DELIVER PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT - Prioritisation</b>

**Transport for low-income families**

276 - The Committee welcomes the willingness of the Scottish Government to work with the Committee and others. Transport issues relevant to low income parents have been set out in this report and the Committee asks the Scottish Government to take account of these issues and their relevance to tackling child poverty through parental employment when allocating funding for delivering transport policies.