

# **Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

## **Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017**

### **Written submission by Barnardo's Scotland, September 2024**

#### **About Barnardo's Scotland**

At Barnardo's, our purpose is clear – changing childhoods and changing lives, so that children, young people and families are safe, happy, healthy and hopeful.

Barnardo's Scotland runs more than 150 services, supporting around 11,500 children, young people, parents and carers. Last year, we provided essential support to 373,200 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 800 services and partnerships across the UK.

For over 150 years, we've been there for the children and young people who need us most – bringing love, care and hope into their lives and giving them a place where they feel they belong.

#### **1. The Act introduced a statutory framework for reducing child poverty. What difference has that framework made to the way the Scottish Government has approached reducing child poverty?**

The statutory framework has helped improved the emphasis on the importance of tackling child poverty within Scottish Government, highlighted through recent announcements by the First Minister underlining that child poverty is the highest priority of government.

Statutory targets to reduce poverty have also helped with initiatives such as the Scottish Child Payment by encouraging Scottish Government to use all levers at their disposal.

Despite these positive policy initiatives, Barnardo's Scotland continues to support significant numbers of children and families across Scotland experiencing poverty. Further action is needed to reach statutory child poverty targets by 2030 – with interim 2023-24 targets notably predicted to have been missed. Overall, clearer progress, driven by a strong anti-child poverty agenda, will be required to realise the ambitious changes required to realise the 2030 targets.

This also requires a joined-up approach across all of Scotland's public sector. There are still too many cases of a postcode lottery in support across local authorities – for example, a lack of standardised process in the value and application process for policies like the school uniform grant.

#### **3. What difference has having the targets, delivery plans and reporting requirements built into the Act made at a national level?**

The introduction of defined targets, delivery plans, and reporting requirements through the Act has been significant in ensuring that the Scottish Government must actively consider appropriate measures for tackling child poverty in Scotland.

However, in 2024, eight years on from the introduction of this legislation, the Scottish Government's own research indicated that it is likely to have missed interim targets in 2023-24, with 19% of children still living in poverty<sup>1</sup>.

For the true value of child poverty targets to be realised, all interim and final targets must be met. Failure to do so is a strong reminder that further and faster progress is needed in this area, through cross-departmental and cross-sector buy in to eradicate child poverty – something that will not happen without defined action. Specifically, more work is needed to break down siloed working within organisations to ensure a co-ordinated response can be implemented.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 established the ability for children to access redress through Scottish courts when their rights are breached by public bodies, with direct accountability placed on the specific public body involved. However, final accountability for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 does not have such provision built in. We would welcome further clarity on what direct legal consequences for public bodies, and which bodies, would therefore look like should the 2030 targets fail to be met.

Commitments by the Scottish Government to tackle child poverty have nonetheless seen some measured success. The introduction, and increase of, the Scottish Child Payment has lifted thousands of families out of poverty and helped to ease the impact of cost-of-living crisis. However, while the payment represents a positive development in relation to alleviation of child poverty in Scotland, analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research suggests that current provisions alone will not be sufficient to meet 2030 targets<sup>2</sup>. Instead, this research recommends an increase in the payment to a minimum of £30 at the earliest opportunity, with an ideal target of £40.

Finally, as we look towards 2030, there must be a clearer understanding of the potential consequences of failing to meet legally enshrined targets. The Scottish Government is not on track to meet these targets for the children and families to whom these commitments were made, and there must be greater understanding of what accountability will look like if these are ultimately missed. Notwithstanding this, Barnardo's Scotland does recognise that any and all progress made towards reducing the numbers of children living in poverty in Scotland is a step in the right direction.

## **6. What does the implementation of the Act tell us about the effectiveness or otherwise of statutory targets as a way of driving policy?**

Since 2016-17 Barnardo's Scotland has welcomed policy commitments from the Scottish Government in relation to tackling child poverty, such as the commitment to the expansion of universal free school meal provisions for all primary aged children, and the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment. However, projected failure to meet 2023-24 interim targets is concerning.

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<sup>1</sup> ['Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan – Annual Progress Report: Annex B'](#), Scottish Government, 13 June 2023.

<sup>2</sup> [Poverty Doesn't Have To Be Inevitable – It Needs Political Will and Investment To Eradicate](#), 5 April 2023, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR): <https://www.ippr.org/articles/poverty-doesn-t-have-to-be-inevitable-it-needs-political-will-and-investment-to-eradicate>

The commitment to expand universal free school meal provision within successive Programme for Government documents has been welcome, however without implementation it does not represent progress for children and families.

## **7. Do you have any other comments?**

Barnardo's Scotland supports significant numbers of children and families across the country who are experiencing high levels of poverty. Evidence from Barnardo's UK- wide Practitioner Survey highlighted the severity of this, with 35% of those surveyed in our most recent edition identifying the main issues facing service users as being financial issues, poverty, and the cost-of-living crisis. This has remained a constant since January 2023.

The vast majority of practitioners said they are worried that rising costs are impacting the ability of the families they support to afford food (93%); energy such as heating, fuel, or electricity payments (90%); and rent or mortgage payments (80%).

Around two thirds of practitioners (65%) said they are currently supporting a child, young person or family experiencing poverty (compared to 58% of practitioners in July 2022).

Therefore, while Barnardo's Scotland celebrates progress made to tackle child poverty since the introduction of the Act, the importance of succeeding in this endeavour within a timely manner is paramount for the children and families that we support.

Finally, the passing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act ensures that all children in Scotland have a legally enforceable right to social security. Barnardo's Scotland encourages the Scottish Government to ensure that all children are able to realise this right – both through full utilisation of its devolved powers, and through continued efforts to influence the UK Government to put an end to the two-child limit. Full utilisation of devolved powers in Scotland should include maximisation of auto-enrolment of families for all benefits to which they are entitled.