

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

Minutes - Tuesday, 19 September, 1pm-2.30pm

Committee Room 2

Chair: Alison Johnstone MSP

Child Poverty and the use of new Social Security Powers

Attendees:

Alison Johnstone MSP	Fulton MacGregor MSP	Rachael Hamilton MSP
Gill Westwood	Lesley Kinloch	Linz Connell
Claire Hunter	Marion Davis	Seonaid Heeps
Muriel Mowat	Paul Traynor	Heather McVeigh
Ann Clarke	Joanna Shepherd	Catherine Henderson
Lesley Kelly	Pauline Cavanagh	Laura Van Der Hoeven
Michael Shanks	Amy Woodhouse	Sarah Paterson
John Dickie	Rob Gowans	Jenny Duncan

Summary of meeting

This meeting discussed Child Poverty and the use of new Social Security powers. The CPG heard presentations on the progress of the Child Poverty Bill and about the early stages of the Social Security Bill. The meeting provided a great opportunity to learn more about these important pieces of legislation and also to discuss with our elected members how they plan to ensure they best meet the needs of children and young people in Scotland.

Agenda

1. Welcome from chair Alison Johnstone MSP
2. Presentation on Child Poverty Bill from John Dickie, Child Poverty Action Group
3. Presentation on Social Security Bill from Rob Gowans
4. #Giveme5 campaign
5. Floor discussion and questions
6. Closing remarks and any actions

John Dickie, Child Poverty Action Group

- 1 in 4 children in Scotland living in poverty (260 000)
- poverty line less than 70% of the minimum income standard for families
- over two thirds of those in poverty (70%) in working households
- affects families in every part of Scotland(www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2016/)
- rising levels acute income crisis.
- Poverty impacts on health, education wellbeing
- Nothing inevitable about these levels of poverty
- Real progress: by 2011/12 170 000 fewer children in poverty than in 1996/7
- Policy worked – at UK and Scottish level
- NMW, childcare, child benefit and tax credits, employment support and rights
- Child wellbeing improved (e.g. see Bradshaw 2012)
- By 2020/21 post-2015 'welfare reforms' will take another £1bn out of household incomes in Scotland alone, on top of £1.1 billion already lost since 2010 (Sheffield Hallam, Nov 2016)
- Households with children worst affected. Key cuts include benefits freeze, benefit cap, cuts to work allowance in UC, two child policy.
- IFS and Resolution Foundation modelling forecasts increases in child poverty across UK of 50% by 2020
- UK gov. abandoned child poverty targets and duties
- 2016 UK Welfare Reform and Work Act largely repealed 2010 Child Poverty Act including 2020 targets
- CPAG, with support of End Child Poverty (ECP) members, led call for a Scottish child poverty bill
- Consultation on a Scottish bill in 2016
- Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill introduced February 2017, completed Stage 2 June 2017

Creates **four statutory targets** to be met by 2030/31:

- Less than 10% of children in relative poverty.
- Less than 5% of children in absolute poverty.

- Less than 5% in combined low income/material deprivation
- Less than 5% in households in persistent poverty.

Duty to produce three **delivery plans** – setting out measures and how they will contribute to meeting the targets, and prepare **annual reports**.

Duty on LAs and health boards to produce **local action reports**.

- Interim **targets** for 2023/24
- **delivery plans** – matters to be considered must include: the provision of financial support for children and parents; provision of information advice and assistance; housing; health; childcare; education; employment; use of new social security powers, incl. power to 'top up.'
- **Local child poverty action reports** to be forward looking
- Statutory poverty and inequality commission
- Interim **targets** for 2023/24
- **delivery plans** – matters to be considered must include: the provision of financial support for children and parents; provision of information advice and assistance; housing; health; childcare; education; employment; use of new social security powers, incl. power to 'top up.'
- **Local child poverty action reports** to be forward looking
- Statutory poverty and inequality commission
- Protect key amendments in Stage 3 tidy up: including provision of financial support and consideration of use of devolved social security powers, incl. to 'top up,' within delivery plans.
- Revisit potential for amendment to ensure link between Scottish budget and meeting child poverty targets?
- Inform guidance on local child poverty action reports – ensure tackling child poverty at heart of local strategic planning processes.

Rob Gowans, Citizens Advice Scotland

- The devolution of social security powers to Scotland, and the Social Security (Scotland) Bill is very significant. Last year, CABs in Scotland advised clients on over 94,000 issues related to the benefits that are due to be devolved.
- The Bill is just one part of the devolution process – the design of the new benefits, and the development of a new Social Security Agency are taking place in parallel. Each of these present opportunities to build a better system.

- A brief summary of the Bill – an enabling framework rather than lots of detail. There are a number of areas where the Bill could be improved.
- In terms of future opportunities to tackle poverty, the powers do not cover all of the benefits that cause people problems at the moment, or that could be used to tackle poverty. There are powers to top-up benefits that could be used to top up Child Benefit, or reduce the waiting period for Universal Credit
- However, there are opportunities within the powers to make improvements – such as making changes to disability benefits, the appeals system, and by opening up eligibility to carer’s benefits (including to young people)
- Additionally, I can provide some wider context around the problems that seem to contribute to the increase in poverty, such as the roll out of Universal Credit, causes of gaps in income leading to food bank referrals, and other cuts to social security support. I can also talk about the role of independent advice in maximising people’s incomes. These would probably work better as part of the general discussion, though can work them into my presentation if that would be more suitable.

#Giveme5 campaign

Give Me Five - The child benefit top up campaign.

They are calling on MSPs to ensure the 2018/19 budget and Scottish Government spending plans include a top-up of child benefit by £5 per week. The Give Me Five campaign is a coalition of third sector, civic society and faith groups.

Poverty currently affects one in four children in Scotland, but it doesn’t have to be that way. We believe that poverty can be solved. Tackling poverty is good for us all, and we believe that social security should help enable children to access all the opportunities available to them.

Increasing child benefit by just £5 a week for every child could lift 30,000 children out of poverty. Poverty is fundamentally about a lack of income, and this move would improve families’ incomes.

An additional £5 per week could cover seven nutritious breakfasts of cereal, milk, fruit juice and a banana; or over two months, a good quality winter coat or enable children to take part in a school trip or activity each week.

Scotland has new social security powers. We believe the Scottish Government should take every opportunity to help children and families out of poverty, including “topping up” child benefit

We have sent several briefing notes to MSPs highlighting the campaign to top-up child benefit. Here are a selection:

- [Briefing on the Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Bill - Stage One](#)
- [2017/18 Budget Briefing Note](#)
- [Using the Scottish Government's new social security powers](#)

Floor Questions

1. What is impact of increasing income on reducing ACEs?
2. Is the social security bill missing a principle about adequacy?
3. Will Universal Provision be enough? Do we need support for speech and language therapists?
4. What will be the implications of Brexit on inflation?

Closing Remarks and Actions

- Convenors to confirm next meeting date