

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee
Wednesday 28 October 2026
6th Meeting, 2025 (Session 7)

Note by the Clerk

Child Poverty Themed Stakeholder Evidence Session

1. At its meeting on [24 June 2026](#), the Committee agreed to hold a series of themed stakeholder roundtable evidence sessions to assist Members in developing their understanding of key issues across the Committee's remit. These roundtable sessions follow a series of evidence sessions with Scottish Government Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers, during which the Committee explored the Scottish Government's priorities and planned activity across the Committee's remit. The roundtable evidence sessions are intended to complement that evidence by providing Members with an opportunity to hear directly from a range of stakeholders and organisations working across those policy areas.
2. At its meeting on [09 September 2026](#), the Committee agreed to invite a selection of stakeholders to participate in a roundtable discussion on child poverty.
3. At its meeting on 28 October 2026, the Committee will take evidence in a roundtable format from representatives of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, One Parent Families Scotland, Save the Children, Aberlour Children's Charity and The Poverty Alliance.
4. SPICe has prepared a briefing for the Committee on child poverty and its policy context. This briefing is included as **Annexe A** to this paper.
5. This evidence session will provide an opportunity for the Committee to explore key issues relating to its child poverty remit, including current actions to meet the 2030 child poverty targets, the balance between social security, employment and wider cost-of-living interventions, and the role of childcare, whole family support and public service reform in delivering sustainable reductions in child poverty.
6. Witnesses were invited to submit a one-page briefing in advance of the session, outlining their organisation's priorities for Scottish Government action on child poverty over the current parliamentary session, including key issues, opportunities, challenges, and areas of concern that they consider relevant to the Committee's scrutiny work. Submissions made can be found at **Annexe B**.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2026

Annexe A: SPICe Briefing on Child Poverty



This briefing provides background for the roundtable discussion on child poverty. It summarises:

- Previous committee discussion with the Cabinet Secretary
- Requirements of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017
- Progress report 25-26, Delivery Plan 26-30 and Programme for Government.
- Commentary on the scale of action needed, looking at policy on social security, childcare and whole family support
- Scottish Government budget context.

The purpose of the session is to consider stakeholders' views on the Scottish Government's mission to eradicate child poverty, including meeting the 2030 targets, the review of the targets and action beyond 2030. This will help inform the focus of the Committee's scrutiny of child poverty during Session 7.

Submissions from witnesses

The Committee has received submissions from each of the witnesses, and these are included at **Annexe B**. Common themes in most submissions were:

- The importance of income-based targets.
- The need for greater scale and pace of action including further investment in social security.
- The importance of increasing income through work – through fair work and removing barriers to employment, such as further expansion of funded childcare.
- Ensuring public service reform improves services and outcomes.

Other issues discussed included: public debt (OPFS, Aberlour), Whole Family Support (Aberlour, Poverty Alliance) and Minimum Income Guarantee (Poverty Alliance, OPFS), and keeping a focus on the priority groups (PiC, Poverty Alliance).

Previous committee consideration

The Committee discussed child poverty with the [Cabinet Secretary on 16 September](#) and with [social security stakeholders on 30 September](#).

The [Cabinet Secretary discussed](#) how the Government's approach was "guided by two clear objectives: helping people with the cost of living today, and taking the longer-term action needed to tackle the root causes." She highlighted the following policies:

- Whole family support
- Warm and affordable homes
- Employment and skills investment
- Childcare
- £2 bus fare
- Legal price ceiling on essential food items.

She stated that: "social security, is and will remain, integral to our approach," noting the planned increase to £40 of SCP for babies under one. However, she was clear that the Scottish Government did not intend to increase SCP to £55 for all children, observing that:

"Those organisations will continue to say that we are not going far enough on that, and I will continue to say that the Government does not intend to do that and that we need to focus on the wider policies." (Committee Official Report, 16 September 2026, col 13).

This wider consideration informs the review of the child poverty targets. The Cabinet Secretary emphasised the need to consider household costs as well as income, saying:

"Delivery of some of the measures that impact household cost of living pressures is not currently part of an income-based target and, to me, that does not sit comfortably."

The Cabinet Secretary explained that she wanted 'genuine consultation' on the review of the targets, and was

"... open to stakeholders assisting us in analysing the best types of targets for tackling poverty."

She was clear that:

"While we work on the review of the targets, we will not pause or lose momentum on any of the other work that is being undertaken across the Government."

Stakeholders on 30 September emphasised the importance of social security as a means to meet the targets. Points made included:

- There are many ways to tackle child poverty, (e.g. childcare, employment). These should be pursued, but they take time. Therefore, further investment in social security is needed in order to meet the 2030 targets.

- Specifically on the Scottish Child Payment, “unless we increase the payment to £55 a week, the targets will not be met” (Kirsty McKechnie, CPAG, col 10).
- Further investment in social security will improve peoples’ ability to respond to other policy such as childcare, employment and housing.
- Child poverty is linked to disabled peoples’ poverty and carers’ poverty.

Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

The 2017 Act set targets for four measures of child poverty. Interim targets were to be met in 2023-24 and final targets in 2030-31. Changes to the way statistics are calculated mean it’s difficult to tell whether the interim targets were met.

The targets and latest single year data are set out in the table below.

Table 1: Child poverty targets and latest data.

Measure	Interim target 2023-24	Final target 2030-31	Latest data <u>2024-25</u>
Relative Poverty	18%	10%	21%
Absolute Poverty	14%	5%	16%
Combined low income and material deprivation	8%	5%	14%
Persistent Poverty	8%	5%	17%

Source: Scottish Government [Child Poverty summary](#).

Definitions

Relative poverty: below 60% median equivalised net household income.

Absolute poverty: below 60% median equivalised net household income in 2010-11, uprated for inflation.

Combined low income and material deprivation: below 70% median equivalised income and also experiences material deprivation – i.e. the self-reported ability of individuals or households to afford goods and activities that are typical in society at a given point in time.

Persistent Poverty. In relative poverty in 3 of the last 4 years.

Equivalised income: adjusting reported household income to take account of larger families requiring a higher income to achieve the same standard of living.

All the above measures are after housing costs have been deducted. The threshold for relative poverty in 2024-25 for different family types is set out below.

Table 2: Relative poverty before and after housing costs 2024-25.

	Households without children		With two children, 5 and 14	
Weekly income:	Single	Couple	Single	Couple
Before housing costs	£289	£432	£518	£660
After housing costs	£217	£374	£449	£606

Source: [Scottish Government income inequality statistics](#)

For further information on these definitions see [Scottish Government Child Poverty](#).

Accountability requirements

The 2017 Act includes a reporting cycle and established the Poverty and Inequality Commission to advise and scrutinise the Scottish Government.

Over the period 2018 to 2030 there must be:

- **Three delivery plans**, covering 2018-22, 2022-26 and 2026-31, which must be laid in Parliament and accompanied by a Ministerial Statement.
- **Annual progress reports**, that must be published by the end of June each year, laid in Parliament and accompanied by a Ministerial Statement. The [progress report for 2025-26 was published on 18 June 2026](#).
- **Statements to Parliament** on whether the interim and final targets are met and if they are not met, an explanation of why not. Because the data for the 2030 targets will not be available until March 2032, the reporting date set out in the Act needs to be changed. This will require a Bill later in the session.
- **Annual local child poverty action reports** prepared by health boards and local authorities.

The [Act created the Poverty and Inequality Commission](#) as a statutory body to:

- Advise Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality.
- Monitor progress in reducing poverty and inequality.

- Promote the reduction of poverty and inequality.

Ministers must consult the Commission on the Scottish Government's delivery plans and annual progress reports and must have regard to its recommendations.

Review of targets

The review of the child poverty statutory targets is due to conclude in the spring. As noted above, the Cabinet Secretary has said that the review is needed because the current, income-based targets, do not take account of work to tackle the cost of living.

There are also technical issues with the choice of statistics used in the Act. These include:

- Single year statistics at Scotland level can be unreliable, mainly due to sample sizes in the survey from which the statistics are derived. Statisticians recommend using a three-year average to avoid this.
- There is a one-year time lag in publication. The statistics for the target year, 2030-31, won't be published until March 2032.
- The UK Government's work to improve the accuracy of the statistics has led to breaks in the series, making comparison across years difficult. For example, the DWP has linked the underlying survey data to administrative data on benefits. Although an improvement, in the short term it makes it more difficult to see the trend. The [March 2027 release, \(covering poverty in 2025-26\) will include revised statistics going back to 2018-19.](#)
- The reference year for absolute poverty has been changed to 2024-25, but the Scottish statutory definition remains at 2010-11. (Regulations could be used to change this).
- There are other measures available such as 'deep poverty' (This measure is drawn from a subset of the 22 child material deprivation questions; of these 13 are seen as "essential items". A child is classified as being in deep material poverty if they lack at least 4 out of 13 essential items. A lack is defined as being due to financial constraints rather than personal choice. In 2024-25, 14% of children were estimated to be in deep poverty).
- The list of items used in the 'material deprivation' definition has changed.

An illustration of some of these issues is the uncertainty about whether the interim targets were met. Initial DWP statistics suggested the target was missed, while subsequent revised data (incorporating improved benefits linkage) indicated that relative child poverty in 2023–24 dropped to 16%, meeting the interim threshold.

All the witnesses today have emphasised the importance of income-based targets. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said:

“The outcome of the review should be for the targets to retain an income-based focus and to be as ambitious as the original targets, both in poverty reduction and timescales.” [JRF blog, 31 August 2026](#)

The organisation argued that income-based targets are a valid way of also achieving broader outcomes:

“by directly measuring poverty through income-based measures we can reasonably assume a change in child poverty rates will directly affect a range of other outcomes for young people in Scotland.”

Progress Report 2025-26

The 2025-26 progress report was the final report on the 2022-26 delivery plan, [Best Start, Bright Futures](#). It “details nearly 100 actions which have been completed or are delivering at scale since 2022.”

In their [scrutiny report](#) on the 2025-26 progress report, the Poverty and Inequality Commission find some positives – such as work to mitigate the two child limit. However, the overall judgement was that:

- On current trajectory the targets will be missed, and
- the scale of the action still does not match the scale of the problem.

The report looked at progress in a range of policy areas.

On **social security**: the Commission welcomed the statement that funding that would have been used to mitigate the two-child limit would be reallocated to other action to tackle child poverty.

On **employability**: while noting that funding had stabilised, “it is now unarguable that the 12,000 target will not be reached.” This was the ‘stretch target’ set out in the [second delivery plan](#) to move 12,000 parents into sustained employment over the course of the plan.

On **early learning and childcare**, the Commission recommended greater focus on improving take-up for eligible two-year-olds, and no meaningful progress on developing funded early learning and childcare offers for one and two year olds.

On **school age childcare**: the Commission described progress as supporting only relatively small numbers of children.

On **Whole Family Support**, the Commission noted that a commitment to deliver funding of ‘at least £500 million over five years’ had delivered £154.5 million between

2022 and March 2026, and that the focus of evaluation so far had been on delivery of services and systems change rather than outcomes for families.

Key milestones in 2025-26

The Scottish Government's progress report set out 'key milestones' in each year since 2022-23. The 25 milestones for 2025-26 are listed below. Most of them have a broader focus than child poverty, albeit they could all have an impact on child poverty.

Advice

1. Council tax debt advice project expanded nationally
2. Advice in accessible setting fund expanded.

Transport

3. Free foot passenger travel on inter-island ferries for under 22 year olds islanders
4. National concessionary ferry scheme extended
5. Peak rail fares abolished on ScotRail services
6. £2 bus fare cap pilot in Highland.

Work

7. New fair work resource for employers launched
8. Specialist employability support launched
9. Over 4,000 employers in Scotland real living wage accredited
10. Scottish Government and Business in the Community publish shared statement on in-work child poverty.

Housing

11. Housing (Scotland) Act passed
12. Housing emergency action plan published
13. Warmer homes Scotland supported its 50,000th customer.

Social Security

14. Minimum income guarantee expert group report published
15. Young carer grant extended to young carers aged 19
16. Scottish carer benefits improved.

Education and childcare

17. Bright Start Breakfasts launched.

Public and third sector delivery

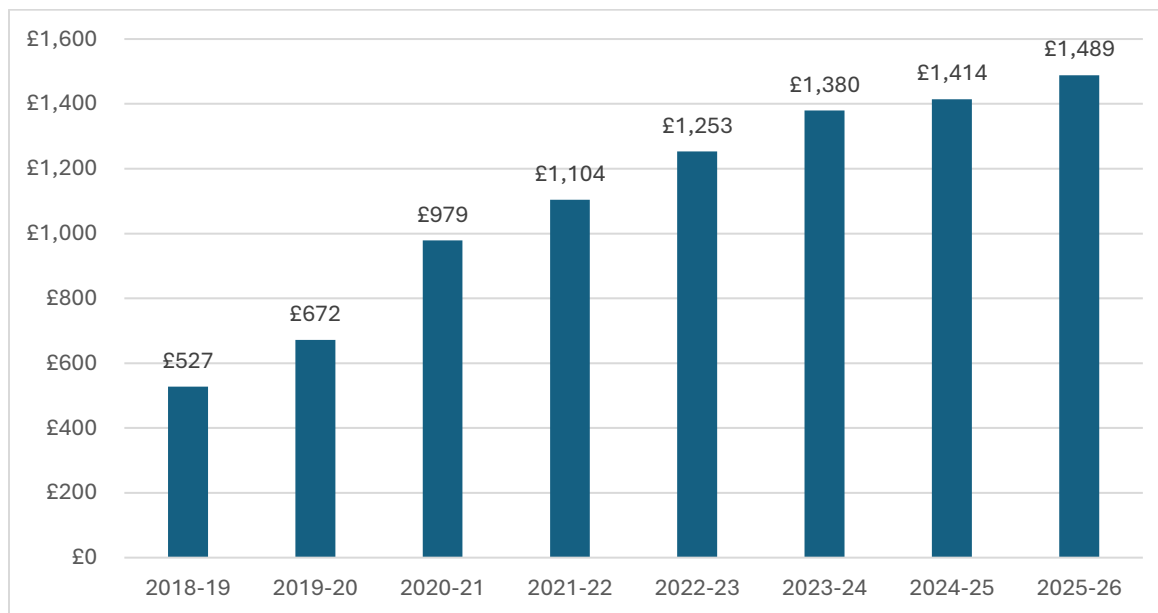
18. Third sector fairer funding expanded for 51 organisations
19. Whole Family Support 'getting it right through collaborative leadership' event held
20. Whole family support working together to get it right event held
21. Public sector reform strategy published
22. Fairer futures partnerships expanded to a total of 16 local authorities
23. Child poverty practice accelerator fund round 3 launched
24. Community wealth building bill passed

25. Publication of the national islands plan.

Spending on low-income families with children

Each progress report includes an estimate of how much the Scottish Government is spending on tackling child poverty. Reported spending on children in low-income families increased from £527 million in 2018-19 to £1,489 million in 2025-26.

Chart 1: Reported spending on children in low-income families since 2018. £m.

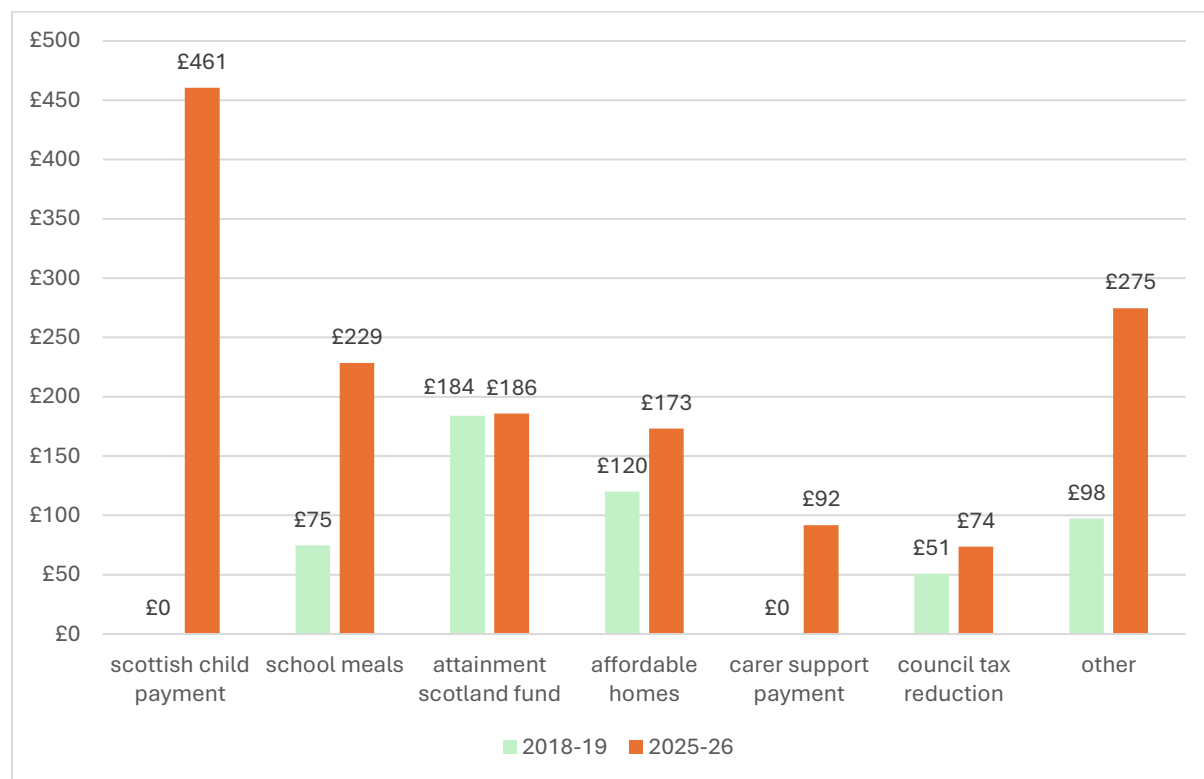


Source: Tackling Child Poverty [progress report 2021-22](#), Progress report 2025-26.

Chart 2 below compares spending in 2018-19 and 2025-26 showing a breakdown of the largest elements of spending. This shows that the largest areas of increased reported spend were in:

- Scottish Child Payment
- School meals
- Increased spending spread across a large number of smaller policies (spending of £98 million spread across 28 policies in 2018 and spending of £275 million spread across 30 policies in 2025-26).

Chart 2: Reported spending on children in low-income families in 2018-19 and 2025-26, by individual policy, £m.



Source: Scottish Government Tackling child poverty [progress report 2018-19](#), [Progress report 2025-26](#). **n.b** on school meals, 2018-19 reported Free school meals P4+ (£74.69m), whereas 2025-26 reported 3 separate policies: alternate holiday provision (£21.75m, school meals incl. free school meals £169.80, and Scottish Child Payment expansion £37.00m). In 2018-19, Carer Support Payment was delivered by DWP as Carer's Allowance.

Delivery Plan 2026 to 2030

The new delivery plan focuses mainly on 2026-27, highlighting 15 actions under four broad themes, as listed below:

Increasing earned income

1. £11m to support parents to access skills and education
2. Breakfast clubs in primary schools by August 2027. £100 million over three years.
3. £19 million for a transport to employment offer for low-income parents.
4. £10 million Flexible Workforce Development Fund, to incentivise employers to support employment and progression opportunities.

Reducing the costs of living

5. Investment in affordable homes, providing up to 24,000 children 'with a place to call home' Up to £4.1 billion over the next four years.
6. £9 million to mitigate the impact of the Local Housing Allowance, helping up to 18,000 families.
7. £1 million in the Islands Costs Crisis Emergency Fund
8. £2 million for a Council Tax Debt project to support up to 15,000 people in council tax debt.

Maximising incomes from social security and benefits in kind

9. Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week for babies under one from 2027-28.
10. Parental Employability and Financial Support campaign to help families access available support.
11. Over £27 million over two years for welfare, income maximisation and debt advice services.

Supporting children and families to thrive

12. Expand Family Nurse Partnership to another 500 first time mothers.
13. £1 million to expand MCR Pathways school-based mentoring programme for care experienced and disadvantaged young people.
14. £20 million Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund
15. £2 million to develop a 'Once for Scotland' data exchange 'to help unlock the use of data to ensure services and support reach the families that need it most.

In their commentary on the plan the Poverty and Inequality Commission welcomed the commitments set out but stated that:

“...even by the Scottish Government’s own assessment, the contribution of many of the actions in the plan towards meeting the child poverty targets continues to be relatively small scale and difficult to assess. The plan contains many positive actions but it does not set out the bold and transformative action that the Commission was looking for.” ([Poverty and Inequality Commission, Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2025-26](#))

Similarly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was unimpressed, considering that the plan failed to meet the statutory requirement to set out a detailed plan up to 2030-31. In a blog in June, JRF stated that:

“We take the view that the Act obliges the Scottish Government to set out a plan that contains a range of measures that will meet the 2030/31 targets, and that this should include a quantitative assessment of how they will do so. We also take the view that the delivery plan fails to meet this standard. “(JRF, [June 2026, 'Time to go further'](#))

Programme for Government

The delivery plan focused on 2026-27. Additional commitments on child poverty in the [2026-27 Programme for Government](#) included:

- Expansion of free childcare by the end of the Parliament to 52 weeks a year for children aged 9 months to end of primary school. Blueprint for consultation due in 2026-27.
- £2 bus fare cap across Scotland by the end of the Parliament
- Consultation on price caps for essential food items
- Write off school meals debt and further expand free school meals in primary school.
- £22 million to help parents access the skills and training they need through the new Colleges RISE Training Access Fund and Flexible Workforce Development Fund.

Scale of action needed

[JRF state that:](#)

“there is an increasing disconnect between the Scottish Government’s rhetoric and the reality of life for families in poverty across Scotland.”

And that:

“the Scottish Government’s current plans will not deliver the scale of change needed to shift the dial.”

The Poverty and Inequality Commission state that:

“although challenging, it is still possible for Scotland to meet the 2030-31 child poverty targets.”

However,

“there is no route to the targets that does not require significant additional investment over the next five years. The financial context is difficult and this will require redirecting spending from other policy areas and/or changing tax arrangements.”

The following sections look at proposed action in:

- **Social security:** the Scottish Government's focus is on maximising take-up, whereas stakeholders have asked for substantial increases to the Scottish Child Payment.
- **Childcare:** the Scottish Government is due to consult on a large-scale expansion of childcare, but it is difficult to model the impact this might have on child poverty.
- **Whole Family Support** is a focus of the delivery plan. However, the Poverty and Inequality Commission has said that it is unclear what the causal relationship is with reducing child poverty.

Further investment in social security

Stakeholders' main proposal for social security investment is to increase the SCP to £55 per week by the end of the Parliament. As noted above, this has been rejected by the Cabinet Secretary.

The SCP is currently £28.20 per week and is paid to around 330,000 children.

The [Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts](#) that SCP will be £30.65 per week in 2030-31, cost £522 million and be paid to 322,000 children.

[Modelling by the Scottish Government](#) suggests that having the SCP in place results in child poverty being 5 percentage points lower than if it didn't exist.

[Modelling by the Fraser of Allander Institute in 2025](#) estimated that increasing the payment to £55 would cost around £444 million per year and reduce child poverty by a further 2.7 percentage points.

One area of debate has been whether higher levels of SCP would affect labour market decisions. Scottish Government research published on 13 October concluded that:

“While SCP may affect labour market decisions for some individuals, there remains no evidence that it has led to detectable reductions in employment or labour supply at a population level. However, this analysis is not sufficient to conclude that further increases in the value of SCP will not have an effect on the labour market.” ([Scottish Government, Scottish Child Payment labour market update](#))

A report on the SCP is due to be published by Audit Scotland in November 2026.

Maximising take-up

The Scottish Government published its [benefit take-up strategy on 21 October](#). Maximising take-up has potential to reduce child poverty, with Scottish Government modelling estimating that:

“were both UK and SG benefits to see maximum take-up of eligible social security benefits (where modellable),^[8] modelling suggests this would reduce projected child poverty by 3 percentage points – equivalent to keeping a further 30,000 children out of poverty.” ([Scottish Government Bringing Hope, Building Futures, Annex 5 cumulative assessment](#))

It’s worth noting that take-up of SCP is already [estimated to be 94%](#).

To summarise, SCP at its current rate is estimated to reduce child poverty by 5 percentage points. Increasing to £55 could further reduce child poverty by 2.7 percentage points. Maximising benefit-take up could reduce child poverty by 3 percentage points.

Minimum Income Guarantee

In their submissions, OPFS and the Poverty Alliance refer to the minimum income guarantee as set out in the [expert group’s roadmap published in 2025](#). MIG is:

“a combination of fair and accessible paid work, reform on costs, high-quality services and stronger social security.”

The report sets out action up to 2031 – including increasing the Scottish Child Payment and other welfare reforms. Further action up to 2036 includes introducing a time limited payment of £11,500 for a single adult, £20,000 for a couple and £28,000 for a couple with one child or single parents with two children.

“This would require additional investment of £5.9 billion per year in Scotland if introduced tomorrow. However, with improvements to the quality of work, and further investment in services, reductions in costs, and improvements in social security across the UK between now and 2036, this cost could be reduced significantly ahead of introduction.”

The [Scottish Government’s response](#) in November 2025 set out relevant work across a wide range of policy areas and stated that:

“the next government should consider exploring what a Minimum Income Guarantee pilot could look like under current powers in Scotland and impact what a pilot might mean for different groups.”

Childcare expansion

The [evaluation of providing 1140 hours funded childcare](#) found that it increased parents’ employment. For mothers in the lowest income group:

- the proportion in employment increased from 41% pre-expansion to 53% post-expansion
- the proportion in full-time work increased from 11% to 14%

- the proportion in part-time work increased from 30% to 39%.

In 2022, the delivery plan '[Bright Start, Bright Futures](#)' included a commitment to publish a strategic plan for childcare which would:

“set out our approach to further develop our funded offers of early learning and childcare for children aged one and two, starting with low-income households within this Parliament, and to build a system of school age childcare, offering care before and after school, and during the holidays by the end of this Parliament.”

That strategic plan was published, but as noted above, the Poverty and Inequality Commission found ‘no meaningful progress’ on one- and two-year-olds and after school care only supporting small numbers of children.

The 2026-27 [Programme for Government](#) includes a commitment to further expand childcare.

“By the end of this Parliament, we will transform the childcare offer for families, providing support 52 weeks a year for children from 9 months old to the end of primary school.”

It stated that the Scottish Government would publish and consult on a ‘blueprint for a new childcare offer’.

Whole Family Support

The Scottish Government is increasingly emphasising Whole Family Support as a means to address child poverty. The child poverty delivery plan states that:

“Enabling Whole Family Support is at the heart of our approach. This means creating the conditions for partners to deliver person-centred services that interact seamlessly so that families across Scotland can get the right support, at the right time, in the right place, for as long as they need it. In collaboration with local partners, we are reshaping our system to make this our default way of working.”

Key aspects of this approach have included;

- Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme “to transform the local delivery of holistic whole family support.” [Latest evaluation report published in 2026.](#)
- [Third Sector Whole Family Wellbeing Support Fund](#),
- 16 Fairer Future Partnerships in 16 local authority areas “to bring together education, health and social care, housing employment and beyond to provide whole family support.” [Fairer future partnerships evaluation strategy published in 2025.](#)

The Scottish Government is now planning to bring these different aspects together, with plans for:

“Developing an integrated Whole Family Support programme which brings together our work across Fairer Future Partnerships, Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and Whole Family Support Early Adopter Areas from April 2027. This will streamline and strengthen approaches to local systems change – providing a clear offer to local areas that supports the implementation of Whole Family Support approaches that best meet the needs of local communities.”

The [Programme for Government](#) stated that the Scottish Government would:

“Work with partners to build on existing best practice to progress an integrated Whole Family Support programme. From April 2027, this will provide multi-year change funding to better enable partners to meet the needs of communities and tailor support to individual families.”

In their scrutiny of the 2025-26 progress report, the Poverty and Inequality Commission emphasised the uncertain impact of Whole Family Support, saying:

“While a focus on whole family support and systems change may have benefits for families, it is not clear that it will have a significant impact on the child poverty targets and should not be overemphasised as a lever for meeting the 2030 targets.” [Poverty and Inequality Commission, Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2025-26](#)

The Commission’s report refers to a Scottish Government update which acknowledged that it is:

“challenging to draw a line between specific activities and funding under Fairer Future Partnerships programme, Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, and reductions in child poverty.”

JRF, in their [Poverty in Scotland](#) report (October 2026) recommended that the Scottish Government:

“develop a clear vision for whole-family support, identify the population that it will support and how it will respond to the often-intersecting challenges families face, and then provide funding for delivery in collaboration with the third sector.”

Scottish Government budget context

The Scottish Fiscal Commission’s [August update](#) highlighted the tight financial context for the Scottish Government going into budget 2027-28.

- Pressures on households: Recent data suggests low-income households have seen real disposable incomes fall since 2021-22, as prices of essentials have risen significantly since then.
- Pressures on funding: UK Government funding to the Scottish Government is expected to fall by 1.2 per cent in real terms in 2027-28 and the 2027-28 Scottish Budget will be reduced by £720 million for a negative Income Tax reconciliation.
- Pressures on spending: there are pressures resulting from pay deal settlements, and “there is little sign of progress” towards the target to decrease the public sector workforce by 0.5 per cent per year.

The UK Government budget on 28 October also faces challenging financial backdrop. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) has said:

- Conflict in the Middle East and the subsequent energy price shock will squeeze households and make the economic backdrop to the Budget more difficult.
- Higher inflation, higher government borrowing costs and pressures on public services will be the key challenges faced by the Chancellor at the Budget.

The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has estimated that:

“incomes after housing costs in 2029-30 are now expected to be between £440 and £770 a year lower than they were in 2024-25. Either scenario would represent the worst parliament for living standards since modern records began in 1961.”

UK Government child poverty plan

The UK Government published a [child poverty plan in December 2025](#). The headline measure was abolishing the ‘two child limit’ from April 2026 (the limit on the number of children who could be included in a claim for Universal Credit). This is forecast to reduce child poverty by [3.2 percentage points across the UK by 2030](#).

Camilla Kidner, Senior Researcher, SPICe

Date: 20/10/2026

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Annexe B: Stakeholder Written Evidence

Aberlour Children's Charity – October 2026

The First Minister's continued commitment to "eradicating child poverty" is clear in its ambition and we welcome it. More than 1 in 5 children in Scotland continue to live in poverty. This Scottish Parliament must be the Parliament where we prioritise ending child poverty above all else.

Public Service Reform

Delivering good public services is essential to creating a fairer and more equal society. Effective public service delivery must be rooted in a rights-based approach, providing early help and support as an entitlement as and when people need it, helping to prevent challenges in their lives escalating into crises. The third sector currently plays a critical role in the delivery of public services working alongside the public sector. Based on decades of service delivery and support in communities across Scotland, we can strongly evidence *what we know works* to prevent poverty and to respond to its impact on the lives of children and families. However, if Scotland's ambition is to ensure our public services meet the needs of all of our citizens and communities, this requires the necessary investment.

Child Poverty Targets

Income-based targets remain the most effective measure of child poverty, which is fundamentally an absence of adequate income. Additional and complementary measures for child poverty targets could be helpful in telling the story of child poverty in Scotland. This includes how whole family support (i.e. practical, emotional and financial support to respond to the range of needs of an individual family) can contribute to preventing, alleviating and addressing the impact of poverty on children and families.

Whole Family Support

The Scottish Government's focus on whole family support as a key element of its child poverty strategy is welcome. However, it is not currently possible to effectively identify, and consistently measure, how whole family support is helping to alleviate child poverty across Scotland, due the lack of investment and delivery at scale. There are examples of excellent and effective whole family support being delivered in communities right across the country, mostly by the third sector, to help and support families living in poverty. This knowledge, expertise and insight must be harnessed to help Scotland most effectively meet the needs of children and families today and into the future.

Public Debt

Public debt is a key feature of child poverty in Scotland. Ending child poverty as a priority must mean we are equally focused on tackling public debt. This means

addressing the systems put in place to recover public debt, which often have the effect of trapping children and families in poverty. Policies to address public debt must be included in, and informed by, policy development in other areas, such as housing, disability, domestic abuse and public service reform.

The Poverty Alliance – October 2026

Tackling child poverty in Scotland: A Minimum Income Guarantee for every family

What is working?

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 established ambitious statutory targets for 2030, providing an important framework for action. Scotland has made meaningful progress through policies including the Scottish Child Payment, expanded childcare provision and free bus travel for young people.

The Scottish Child Payment demonstrates that direct investment in family incomes can make a tangible difference. It has helped reduce child poverty, while Scotland's statutory targets and dedicated delivery plans have maintained a cross-portfolio focus on poverty.

However, progress remains insufficient. Scotland is not on track to meet its 2030 child poverty targets, and existing action must be strengthened to deliver the change required.

What are the challenges?

Child poverty is driven by inadequate household incomes, high living costs and insufficient social security. These pressures are compounded by insecure and poorly paid work, unaffordable housing and barriers to accessing employment, childcare and essential services.

Poverty disproportionately affects particular groups, including lone-parent families, disabled people, minority ethnic families, and families with young children. Policies must recognise these inequalities and intersections and respond to the different circumstances and needs of families.

While the Scottish Government's *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* Delivery Plan provides a framework for action, its commitments do not yet demonstrate the scale, pace or investment needed to meet the 2030 targets. The priority must be to accelerate action, not lower ambition or delay progress by reviewing the targets.

What policy action should be prioritised?

The Poverty Alliance believes that a **Minimum Income Guarantee** provides the long-term vision needed to eradicate child poverty. By bringing together fair work, strong public services and better social security, the Guarantee would ensure everyone has the income they need.

We call on the Scottish Government to:

- **Increase family incomes through social security:** Prioritise increasing the Scottish Child Payment to at least £55 per week as soon as possible during this parliamentary session, and by the end of 2030 at the latest, as well as maximising take-up through investment in advice and support services.
- **Increase access to secure, well-paid, flexible employment for parents:** Use Fair Work conditionality in public funding and procurement to work towards all workers receiving at least the real Living Wage by 2030. Ensure sectoral bargaining in low-paid sectors like social care. Strengthen investment in, and the accessibility of, employability services.
- **Reduce the cost of living:** Invest in social and affordable housing, reduce fuel poverty and ensure families can access affordable food, transport, childcare and other necessities.
- **Invest in public services and whole-family support:** Provide sustained funding for accessible, high-quality services that prevent poverty, reduce household costs and respond to families' needs.
- **Commit to a Minimum Income Guarantee:** Adopt the independent Expert Group's roadmap as the framework for implementation, embed poverty reduction across government portfolios and introduce ambitious multi-year pilots, including for unpaid carers and rural and island communities.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation – October 2026

As the Committee will know, we published Poverty in Scotland 2026 earlier this month which [contains the headline poverty trends](#). Worth noting are the stubborn overall rates, the deepening nature of poverty, the higher risk for particular groups and the increased prevalence of in-work poverty. Fundamentally, a family's chance of being in poverty is shaped by what they earn from work, what they receive from social security, and what they pay for housing. Two of these are directly within this Committee's remit, and councils have a pivotal role in the third via employability and economic development. That gives the Committee real leverage over whether the child poverty targets are met. We suggest the following priorities for the Committee:

The review of the statutory targets – the current target regime has led to action on the SG's part and focussed minds. The review is an opportunity for the Parliament to ensure ambition is maintained and delivered on. Income levels should remain a core part of the measures and the Parliament should take the chance to strengthen the accountability mechanisms in the 2017 Act. It is also important to note that the current targets need changed not because of a weakness in them but because of a lack of action to meet them.

The role of local labour markets in reducing child poverty – far too often we treat problems with employment through the prism of the individual rather than our economy. Our work with the [Fraser of Allander Institute highlighted](#) that Scotland has many different labour markets which require different solutions to increase parental employment. Employability can be part of the solution but it is only part and economic development in those areas lacking jobs is the crucial other side of the coin.

The opportunity, and risk, that public service reform poses for reducing child poverty – our Poverty in Scotland report this year focussed on the role of councils in reducing poverty. Via a survey of over 3,000 people in Scotland, it showed high levels of disaffection with councils and highlighted that those in low-income households were most likely to be dissatisfied with services. This makes a strong case for reform of local services but there is a risk that council reorganisation becomes a distraction from the far more important work of improving people's lives. We think the Committee should hold the SG to account on how these proposed reforms will improve local services for people.

The reform of local government finance – our Poverty in Scotland report also showed that there is broad public misunderstanding of local government finance, as well as support for changes to how councils are funded. We would argue reform to this was needed anyway, but the proposed reorganisation of councils would demand it. Funding is insufficient to meet the needs of communities who need it the most and if we want to eradicate child poverty that needs to change.

The adequacy of social security – the social security system is a powerful investment in our society that can ensure that everyone can live the sort of lives that we all deserve. Whatever the new child poverty reduction are, if they are to be credible, they will be impossible to meet without further investment in social security.

Social housing – Scotland's housing crisis is anchored in there not being enough affordable (and particularly social) homes in the places where they are needed. How funding is distributed and how development of social housing is prioritised in the places of most need is crucial.

Poverty and Inequality Commission – October 2026

Introduction

The Poverty and Inequality Commission welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's roundtable discussion on child poverty.

The Commission's recent [scrutiny](#) of progress towards Scotland's statutory child poverty targets found that, while a number of policies are making a meaningful difference to the lives of low-income families, Scotland remains some distance from achieving the 2030 targets. Measures such as the Scottish Child Payment have helped reduce poverty and child poverty rates remain lower in Scotland than across the UK as a whole. However, the Commission's assessment is that the pace and scale of progress are currently insufficient to deliver the reductions required by 2030.

With fewer than four years remaining until the statutory deadline, this parliamentary session represents a critical period for accelerating progress.

1. Key issues

Accelerating progress towards the 2030 targets

The Commission's principal priority is for the Scottish Government to set out and deliver a clear pathway to meeting the child poverty targets. While the most recent Child Poverty Delivery Plan contains a range of positive actions, the Commission has consistently [recommended](#) the need for additional measures capable of closing the remaining gap to the targets. The scale of action must match the scale of the challenge.

Increasing family incomes

Evidence continues to show that increasing household income is the most direct means of reducing child poverty. The Commission therefore notes that, if the 2030 target is to be met, priority must be given to policies that immediately increase the incomes of low income families.

The Scottish Child Payment (SCP) has proven to be the most effective anti-poverty intervention, and clearly demonstrates the value of targeted income support for low-income families. Alongside the SCP, improving access to fair work, tackling barriers to employment, supporting progression in work, and investing in the infrastructure that enables people to work, such as affordable childcare and accessible transport, will be critical to reducing poverty and improving living standards, although impact may take longer to become evident.

Effective use of resources

In the current fiscal climate, there is a growing need to consider both how the revenue required to eradicate child poverty can be raised and how public spending can be used most effectively to achieve the greatest impact. In September 2026, the Commission published a review of evidence on universal and targeted approaches to tackling poverty. The review concluded that neither approach is inherently superior and that the strongest outcomes are achieved through a combination of both.

Scotland's approach has combined universal services - such as free prescriptions, funded childcare and free school meals - with targeted support including the Scottish Child Payment and other family payments. The Commission believes that it is important to use both universal and targeted provision in ways that are deliberate, evidence-based and focused on outcomes.

Outcomes for priority family groups

Child poverty remains concentrated amongst a number of priority family types, including lone-parent households, larger families and families that include a disabled adult or child. Many families experience multiple, overlapping forms of disadvantage, meaning that poverty can be particularly deep and persistent where these characteristics intersect. Understanding outcomes for priority families through an intersectional lens, and whether progress is being made for those facing the greatest barriers, should remain a key focus.

Investment in enabling services and infrastructure

While income-based support remains important, the Committee may wish to consider the role of enabling services and infrastructure in supporting families to enter, remain in and progress in employment. This includes investment in affordable and accessible childcare, transport, advice services and other practical supports that help families overcome barriers to employment and access the financial support and services to which they are entitled. Strengthening these enabling services can improve family incomes, reduce poverty and support longer-term economic participation.

Lived experience and measurement of progress

Understanding the impact of actions to reduce poverty requires a strong evidence base. The Committee may wish to consider how statistical data and lived experience evidence can be used together to assess progress, understand the real-world impact of policies, and identify where further action may be needed. Combining quantitative measures with the experiences of people living in poverty can provide a richer understanding of what is working and where barriers remain.

2. Conclusion

The Commission's overall assessment is that Scotland has demonstrated that child poverty can be reduced through deliberate policy intervention. However, current progress remains insufficient to meet the statutory targets by 2030.

Over the remainder of this parliamentary session, the Commission believes the focus should be on accelerating progress towards the targets, increasing family incomes, maintaining an effective combination of universal and targeted support, and ensuring that scrutiny remains firmly focused on outcomes for children and families experiencing poverty. The coming years will be decisive in determining whether Scotland fulfils its commitment to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) – October 2026

In a just and compassionate Scotland, we believe every child should grow up free from poverty. Yet, with around a third (30%) of children in single parent families growing up in poverty (compared to 21% of all children) this vision remains out of reach. The latest data shows that over 9 in 10 children in poverty are in one or more of these priority families¹. These numbers are a stark indicator of the structural barriers and policy choices that single parent families face. Single parent families make up around one in four families with children in Scotland: the statutory child poverty targets cannot be met without action that reaches them.

OPFS shares the position of the End Child Poverty coalition and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation: income-based targets must stay at the core of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, and the review must not reduce ambition or accountability. Every interim target was missed. Relative child poverty (21%) is 11 percentage points (around 110,000 children) from the 2030 target of 10%, persistent poverty has risen from 15% to 17% and a third of children in poverty are in very deep poverty. The gap is not because the targets measure the wrong thing, but because the scale of action and investment has not gone far enough. The public agrees: 83% of people in Scotland want clear targets, deadlines and regular reporting².

We ask the Committee to use pre-budget scrutiny to press the Scottish Government to:

- **Publish its post-election Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan alongside the Budget**, with modelling of how far the Budget moves each target, and measures Ministers are satisfied will meet the targets
- **Rule out a retreat**. Any new timeframe must come with new interim targets and stronger accountability, including making the Act's list of policy areas for action mandatory.
- **Act now, not after the review**. Nothing in the review stops the Government investing in what we already know works – starting with the choices below.

¹ [Poverty in Scotland, Poverty in Scotland 2026 | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

² [Poverty in Scotland, Poverty in Scotland 2026 | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

At One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), we see the impact of these choices on the families we support on a daily basis. Parents are going without food, energy arrears are on the rise, and we are deeply concerned by a new increase in parents contacting us for help with childcare debt. The Scottish Budget is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to make a difference for families and act on the issues that matter most to single parent families in Scotland by making the following choices:

- **Increasing the Scottish Child Payment to a minimum of £40 at the earliest opportunity**, with targeted further increases for priority families who are at greater risk of poverty. The planned £40 rate for babies under one from 2027 is welcome and shows the mechanism works – it should be funded in this Budget and extended to every eligible child.
- **Providing a universal funded entitlement of 50 hours of childcare per week** for children aged 6 months and above that is free at the point of use for all families. This must address systemic barriers that families face in utilising current provisions by being flexible, accessible and available - particularly for children with additional support needs. Any phased expansion should start with single parents and low-income families.
- **Ensuring that public service reform protects essential services** and is undertaken alongside robust equalities and human rights impact assessments. Priority should be given to investing in services that we know have the biggest impact on positive outcomes for families in poverty with a universal basic services offer as set out by the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group as a baseline.
- **Addressing the public debt crisis.** Female single parents are 68% more likely to have public debt than the wider population³. Current enforcement practices are expensive, inefficient and traumatising for families. Reforming how public debt is recovered should be a central part of public service reform. We also need to see action that reduces the debt recovery period for council tax arrears and reduce the single person council tax obligation from 75% to 50%.
- **Supporting single parents into high quality, sustainable employment**, building on the success of the OPFS and Public Health Scotland pilot, further developed through the Lone Parent Positive Work Pathways programme. With three quarters of children in poverty living in a working household, ensuring work is flexible, with progression opportunities and Living Wage as a minimum will be key to reducing poverty.⁴
- **Commitment to multi-year funding** for holistic support for families on low incomes, to ensure continuity of support available where and when needed. This should include funding for income maximisation services best able to reach priority

³ [The-Gendered-Impact-of-Public-Debt-November-2025.pdf](#)

⁴ [OPFS research on child maintenance, Better-for-everyone-final.pdf](#)

families, including single parents, and specialist advice and support on topics such as child maintenance. If every separated family had an effective arrangement, around £200 million would reach around 100,000 children, lifting about 20,000 out of poverty.

- **Extending free school meals to all primary school pupils** and introducing free school meals for all secondary school pupils, reducing costs and stigma for families.
- **Increasing the value of the School Clothing Grant** so it covers the real cost of school clothing and ensuring that this includes auto enrolment for families in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment, along with annual inflationary uplifts in line with other Scottish social security payments.

Save the Children – October 2026

Key messages

Poverty is not inevitable, it is the result of political choices. Save the Children welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicating child poverty as a priority.

Progress has been made but not fast enough to meet the 2030 targets and progress is not being experienced evenly: rates of poverty for some groups – such as families with a baby or families with mothers under the age of 25 – are far higher than the national average of 21%. Further targeted action for these groups is required.

- We know what works and we are heading in the right direction. The introduction of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) has seen child poverty levels fall and had a real impact for children across Scotland. This is preventative spending which supports families to move away from poverty and helps build a better, [more prosperous Scotland for all](#).

- As the Scottish Government sets about reviewing the 2030 child poverty targets, it is essential that we maintain robust income targets that continue to drive progress. We must not lower our ambitions for children: now is not the time to press pause on actions on child poverty. The decisions made in this Parliament will have a lasting impact on a generation of children and the future of Scotland. **Children only get one childhood. We must make this the Parliament that ends child poverty in Scotland.**

- **Changing the narrative about child poverty is key:** Save the Children and JRF have developed new evidence on how to talk about child poverty in a way that will connect with the public, one that confidently makes the case for investing in children to build a better Scotland for all of us. We are asking MSPs to use our evidence-based [guide](#) to inform their contributions to this debate, and their wider engagements.

Save the Children's policy priorities

1. Greater investment in prevention via social security: The Scottish Child Payment is one of the most effective tools available to reduce child poverty and support family incomes. Along with our [End Child Poverty partners](#) we continue to call for the Scottish

Child Payment to increase to £40 per week and up to £55 by the end of this parliamentary term.

2. Deliver fair work for mums: Supporting mothers into [fair, sustainable work](#) is one of the most powerful ways to increase family incomes and reduce child poverty over the long term. Too many parents, especially mothers, are locked out of good-quality employment because of inflexible jobs and low-paid, insecure work. The Scottish Government must do more to encourage employers to improve pay, flexibility and conditions.

3. Expand access to affordable and flexible early learning and childcare: Supporting parents into work must go alongside improvements to the childcare offer. Parents across Scotland tell us how, despite the availability of early learning childcare hours (and incoming expansion), childcare is simply too inflexible to work around parents' jobs and too expensive outside term-time. We must make sure childcare provision meets the needs of parents on the lowest incomes.

4. Go further to prevent poverty in the early years: We welcome the planned introduction of a babies supplement to the SCP. The earliest years are crucial to development and life-long outcomes, but with the rate of poverty among families with a baby much higher than the national average, there remains more to do. Our [evidence](#) shows that investing further in Best Start Grants/Best Start Foods, alongside greater investment in whole-family support, could prevent and significantly drive down poverty rates for these families.

6. We must work alongside those with lived experience of poverty to understand the barriers and the solutions. We will not meet the shared ambition of ending child poverty if we do not ground solutions in insights from families and communities.