



**Best Start, Bright Futures:
tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-26**

OPFS Initial Response

**Submission to Social Justice and Social Security
Committee**

April 2022

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS)

One Parent Families Scotland¹ is the leading organisation working with single parent families in Scotland. Building on seventy-five years of advocacy and service delivery expertise, OPFS provides single parent tailored information, advice and support, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare. OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that cause child poverty. Our vision is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Single parents are involved at various levels in OPFS. In this submission we have used the experiences and input of single parents, experts by experience, to inform our evidence .

Background Information

Single Parent Families make up a quarter of all families in Scotland, and 92% are headed by women. Around 80% of single parents are aged between 25 and 50 years old and less than 1% are teenagers.²

Children in single parent families in Scotland are more likely to live in poverty, and for longer, than couple families. The proportion of children in single parent families living in poverty has been increasing in recent years. Most children in poverty in single parent families live with a parent who is not in work, in a family where there are young children, or where adults are also disadvantaged by health problems, lack of private transport or low qualifications. Where children in poverty in single parent families also live in a household where someone is disabled, or where there are three or more children, they are likely to be even more disadvantaged: this is important as many do so. A recent briefing from Public Health Scotland shows ³

- Most (65%) single parents with dependent children in Scotland are in paid employment
- Four in ten (90,000) children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family and 39% of children in single parent families live in poverty.
- Two thirds of children in poverty in single parent families (66%) live in families where no one was in paid employment. A quarter (23%) live in families where the parent works part-time.
- Families often belong to more than one priority group. For example, among children in poverty: 40% of children in single parent families also have a disabled person at home; over half (54%) of children in a family with a younger mother are also in a single parent household.
- Single parent families are more likely to live in 'deprived areas'. In the 'most deprived' decile, more than five in 10 (53%) of families claiming Child Benefit are single parent families, while in the 'least deprived' decile, this is one in 10.
- Single parents not in paid work often face additional barriers to work, over and above their caring responsibilities. Compared to single parents in paid employment, single parents not in work were:
 - more likely to have low or no qualifications (65% vs 31%)

¹ <https://opfs.org.uk/>

² <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures/>

³ [Child Poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](https://publichealthscotland.scot/policy-areas/child-poverty/child-poverty-in-scotland-priority-groups-lone-parent-families)

- less likely to hold a current driving licence (31% vs 68%)
- less likely to report their health as good or very good (58% vs 80%)
- more likely to live in a household with three or more children (14% vs 6%)

This is important because single parent families with these characteristics are less likely to have a parent in work than single parent families with better qualifications, good or very good health, a current driving licence or a smaller family.

A recent survey of 1083 single parents across the UK found that 80% of single parents experienced discrimination and 96% wanted single parents added as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act ⁴

Why single parent families are more likely to be in poverty

Single parent families are predominately single mothers with dependent children, which means: there is just one potential earner in the family; their hourly earnings are likely to be lower because of the gender pay gap and the parent is limited in the hours they can work by caring responsibilities. Single Parents face a number of, often interacting, issues which trap them in poverty:

- **Personal Circumstances** - including caring responsibilities linked to the age of their youngest child, poor health, low level of qualifications and lack of access to private transport and digital exclusion.
- **UK Social Security System** - the design and delivery of a benefits system which creates barriers to single parents accessing further and higher education (and boosting their earnings). Welfare reform which means benefit rates which are below minimum income standards and policies such as the benefit cap, 2 child policy which punish single parent families.⁵
- **Employability** – Research funded Oxfam⁶ shows current ‘support into employment’ provision in Scotland is not fit for purpose. There is a lack of sufficient and effective employability support for people juggling unpaid caring responsibilities with the need to secure paid work.
- **Labour Market**- Scotland’s labour market is not working for single parents according to research commissioned by JRF.⁷ We are missing out on single parents’ economic contributions and skills, and single parents are missing out on opportunities they deserve to build a better life for their families. There is limited availability of job opportunities that would allow single parents to meet their caring responsibilities and exit poverty, especially in regions where single parents are more likely to live.
- **Childcare** - limited availability of flexible, affordable childcare, both early years & school age, that would allow single parents to manage caring responsibilities with earning and learning, again in those places where single parents are most likely to live.

⁴ [Single Parent Discrimination Research & Lobbying — Single Parent Rights](#)

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/welfare-reform-report-impact-welfare-reforms-households-children/>

⁶ [One Parent Families Scotland \(opfs.org.uk\)](http://One Parent Families Scotland (opfs.org.uk))

⁷ [Freeing low-income single parents from in-work poverty's grip | JRF](#)

If we want to take a preventative approach to child poverty by looking at causes and impacts, the drivers (and targets) as set out in the Scottish Government delivery plan are income related and we agree that is at the heart of the matter. However child poverty impacts also need to be mitigated and long term prevention needs a focus on both investment in services that will support families as well as a decent 'minimum income guarantee' and reducing living costs through 'universal basic services'.

In recognising the importance of whole family support we believe that embedding the ten principles of family support, outlined in 'The Promise' should be recognised in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Services should be holistic and relational, therapeutic, non-stigmatising, patient and persistent, underpinned by children's rights, community based, flexible, responsive and timely. We should work with family assets, supporting agency and empowerment.⁸ As one single parent Carol, from Glasgow described it

"Not one thing will eradicate poverty ... services need to come together and provide families with the support they need, and government should enable access to a decent standard of living. Some parents want to focus on full- time parenting when their kids are young, others want to get into education and employment. Wages need to be higher and benefit rates better to allow families to live a decent quality of life, but further education should be an option too. As part of this policy makers should recognise the unique challenge single parents face of sole responsibility for the care of their children as well the economic survival of their family."

Inequalities are also intersecting. The majority of single parents are women. However, viewing single parents through an intersectional lens highlights multiple factors of disadvantage facing women who are single parents. Not all single mothers share the same level of disadvantage purely because they are women: single mothers from the black, asian, minority ethnic community for example experience the discriminations that confront them as women, but in addition they have to deal with those that come with being women of colour. They are faced with two overlapping or intersecting areas of injustice and discrimination resulting in multiple disadvantages.

⁸ [Plan 21-24 - The Promise](#) p 26

Best Start, Bright Futures

The Scottish Government have published their second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, due under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, outlining action for the period 2022-2026

This briefing is our response to the new plans.

OPFS fully support the national mission to eradicate child poverty in Scotland, as four in ten children in poverty in Scotland live with one parent. Rocketing energy bills, the increase in National Insurance, rising inflation and cuts to benefits by the UK government have created a “perfect storm” for poverty, debt and despair for many low income families. The Scottish Governments’ second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 is therefore of vital importance to those families.⁹

We welcome the commitment “to ensure that systems work for the people who need them most, trialling and evaluating new approaches, adapting our ways of working, and investing in rigorous monitoring to understand how changes are impacting on priority families.”

The Deputy First Minister highlights in his foreword that the government’s work to tackle child poverty must be strongly aligned with their commitment to the outcomes of the Independent Care Review.¹⁰ We very much support the approach that to Keep The Promise¹¹ and to ensure Scotland is to be the best place in the world to grow up, we need our public services to work for, and with families.

OPFS is working, with support from The Promise Scotland, alongside families in Dundee who have children in care, on the edges of care or with experience of care to identify how can ensure an anti-poverty focus to the work. Our aim is to work with key partners to develop a whole family ‘Financial Inclusion Pathway’ which enables support at transitions, explores and addresses the financial implications of young people being taken into care/returning from care and age/stage related financial transitions. We want to see how we can support families to avoid detrimental financial consequences and pitfalls (such as reductions in benefit entitlements, increased conditionality, changes to housing entitlements) and identify measures to mitigate reductions in income where they cannot be avoided.

Poverty was a consistent theme in the work of the Independent Care Review, and through the evidence framework we know where the financial cliff edges and pitfalls are.¹² We are taking a whole family approach and by involving Experts by Experience with the emphasis on how a lack of joined up approach is experienced by the family and each of its members and work with them to identify what would make the difference and how and then test further with a larger group of families.

We are very supportive of the measures detailed in the child poverty delivery plan, although we know more actions will be needed over the coming years. This is

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/>

¹⁰ <https://www.carereview.scot/conclusions/independent-care-review-reports/>

¹¹ <https://thepromise.scot/>

¹² [Evidence Framework – Independent Care Review](#)

acknowledged in the plan which states the government will “continue to consider further actions required over the lifetime of this plan to achieve these targets, to support families, and break the cycle of child poverty. “

Our initial response is to highlight

Providing the opportunities and integrated support parents need to enter, sustain and progress in work.

- The actions include a new Parental Transition Fund to tackle the financial barriers parents face in entering the labour market, particularly over the initial period of employment, investing up to £15 million in this support each year. Plans to test new ways to support priority parents into paid work and a new fund to tackle financial barriers parents face entering paid work are extremely promising.

Findings of our research with JRF & Oxfam Scotland show that along with the need for high quality, affordable, accessible, flexible early years & school-age childcare these area are vital.¹³ Many single parents we work with face barriers when moving into work, this includes paying upfront childcare costs, the cost of travel to work and wider costs of living. We look forward to contributing towards these developments so that financial barriers are removed for parents as quickly as possible.

- Many single parents tell us they want to take up skills training or access further and higher education. This offers them a route into better paid work which will take their children out of poverty. The commitment in the plan to make child poverty a central pillar of the governments’ Lifetime Skills Offer, with enhanced support for the priority groups is welcome . We hope the new Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland to be published in Spring 2022 will include the recognition of the barriers to learning single parents in particular face – esp. childcare and financial barriers.
- The plan announces that in summer 2022 Scottish Government will develop and publish a strategic plan for all of their childcare commitments for the remainder of this Parliament. This will set out their approach to further develop funded offers of early learning and childcare for children aged one and two 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.

OPFS believes the provision of funded, high quality and flexible childcare requires even further investment including for under-fives, comprehensive school-age and holiday childcare and help with the upfront costs. Our vision is that every child up to the age of 12 should receive the funded childcare entitlement extended up to 50 hours of high quality childcare and education per week throughout the year.

¹³ <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policy-research/employment-employability-and-education/>

Maximising the support available for families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs.

- The commitment of a further £5 increase to the Scottish Child Payment by end of 2022 to bring it to £100 a month will be greatly welcomed by the many parents struggling to put food on the table. However we know further increases will be necessary to help meet the statutory child poverty targets in 2024 and 2030.
We support work to develop a minimum income guarantee in Scotland over the long term and IPPR's recommendation that as a first step to raise the Scottish child payment to £40 by the end of the parliament and to consult on introducing a disability premium and a lone parent premium to the Scottish child payment in order to help those families in deepest poverty.¹⁴
- We are particularly pleased about the recognition by the Cabinet Secretary of the devastating impact of the UK Benefit Cap and her commitment to work with local authorities to mitigate it. This is an inexplicable policy which mainly affects single parent families with very young children. It makes poor families who have no choice poorer. It has pushed families into ever deeper poverty, to foodbanks and often homelessness, with devastating impacts on family well-being and health. This new commitment will hopefully change this.

Conclusion

Every aspect of families lives and the communities they live in has been affected by Covid-19, which has heightened stark disparities between disadvantaged children and young people, and their peers. There are vast social and economic benefits of investing in early intervention. Child poverty is now costing the UK an estimated £38 billion a year.¹⁵

The latest progress Scottish Government report highlighted that significant progress needs to be achieved in the years ahead to deliver the 2030 targets.¹⁶ We know poverty is not inevitable. Policy interventions have successfully reduced poverty, particularly amongst children and pensioners. Between the mid-1990s and early 2010s child poverty in Scotland fell from 33% of all children to 19%.¹⁷

OPFS supports investment in more holistic family support services, bringing together financial, practical and emotional support in one place, which ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

We also need to capture the diversity of single parents and ensure what we develop will be inclusive of experiences of single parents facing multiple inequalities and

¹⁴ <https://www.standardlifefoundation.org.uk/docs?editionId=7f2108e4-220e-4841-a957-a56613939d5f>

¹⁵ [The Cost of Child Poverty in 2021 CRSP Paper.pdf \(lboro.ac.uk\)](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/centres-and-institutes/child-research-programme/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Cost-of-Child-Poverty-in-2021-CRSP-Paper.pdf)

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-third-year-progress-report-2020-2021/pages/1/>

¹⁷ https://cpag.org.uk/ScottishAffairsCommitteeEvidence_Dec2020

poverty; and that the outcomes will be on a personal, community and structural level - to support individuals with training/qualifications ; support single parents as a community through specialist, tailored service provision being mainstreamed and to tackle issues and barriers at org/structural level through equality, diversity and inclusion. We need a focus on making available more single parent friendly quality employment opportunities and to ensure we can have training, progression and work that pays enough to be out of poverty and a greater focus on how public spending can help drive the changes needed in our labour market.

We need to ensure early intervention is at the forefront of policy and spending at Scottish Government and local authority levels. As society moves out of the trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic there will be ongoing debate on the development on a Scottish Green New Deal, a wellbeing economy, affordable housing, integrated transport, and an early years and school age childcare framework that meets needs of all parents and children. These and other key areas are of great importance to single parents including the development of new scottish social security benefits, the replacement for Fair Start Scotland with an employability system which is flexible, joined-up and responsive and implementation of the Promise.¹⁸

We will respond in more detail to these elements in the tackling child poverty delivery plan in the coming months. OPFS will work with single parents to ensure they are able to participate, and their voices are heard in these discussions.

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¹⁸ <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>