



# Ending child poverty: challenges and opportunities

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# Ending child poverty

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- Scale, extent and nature of child poverty in Scotland
- Impact of that poverty – why it matters
- What needs to be done?
  - at UK level
  - at Scotland and local level
- Challenges and Opportunities

# Scale and nature of child poverty

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- 250 000 (25%) children living in poverty  
(2009/10)
- some children at particular risk
  - families affected by disability
  - one parent families
  - families without paid work
- affects families across Scotland, but concentration and nature varies



# Impact of child poverty

- poverty damages health – poverty kills
  - health compromised from birth – average birth weight 200g lower
  - 2 ½ times more likely to have chronic illness as toddlers
  - 3 times more likely to suffer mental disorders
- poverty undermines learning
  - nine months behind by age three
  - gap widens as go through school
- poverty undermines life chances
  - More likely to be unemployed as adult
  - More likely to be the parents facing poverty in the future
- poverty damages childhoods
- poverty in Scotland may be “relative” but its impact on children is absolute
- Child poverty costs us all – est. £1.5billion a year



# Impact of child poverty: beyond the statistics

## **Ann, 48**

"I'll make sure that my son eats before I do. In the last fortnight before pay day I would say I skip meals maybe twice a week, just to make sure that he has enough"

Oxfam/IpsosMORI, Oct 2011

## **Mother, 30s**

'The kids have had to give up so much because there's not been the money there. Couldn't afford the brownies and Cubs and swimming because of the petrol money... I dinnae have the fuel, I dinnae have the money.'

Poverty Alliance, EPIC project, 2011

## **Courtney, 9**

"When I pick up my baby sister, she smells of mould."

"What I hate...is you feel that you want to be sick when you have visitors. I don't like having pals in my house, in case they bully me."

*Poor Kids*, [www.truevisiontv.com](http://www.truevisiontv.com), 2011



# What needs to be done?

## Context:

Nothing inevitable about this poverty

Not starting from scratch.....

- Real progress: since 1997 100 000 fewer children in poverty
- Policy worked: at UK and Scotland level
- Political consensus: UK Child Poverty Act 2010
- Scottish government: Solidarity target, poverty framework and new Child Poverty strategy



# What needs to be done? Context cont.

.....but huge **challenges**

- progress had stalled even before recession/cuts
- Over £18billion welfare cuts, hitting poorest hardest
- IFS predict massive rise in child poverty
- Scotland: little evidence that spending decisions being proofed for impact on child poverty despite national anti-poverty frameworks.
- Explicit commitments on free school meals, nursery education and school clothing grants already scaled back.

# What needs to be done?

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## What are the **opportunities**?

### At UK level:

- Hold to account on 2010 Child Poverty Act
- Challenge cuts to benefits and tax credits
- Work together to:
  - challenge the myths that drive welfare policy
  - seek practical amendments to UK Welfare Reform Bill
  - present an alternative positive vision for welfare



# Opportunities in Scotland?

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- Use of new welfare powers to protect poorest families?
  - social fund and council tax benefit replacements
  - revisit criteria for passported benefits
  - access to advice and information
- Build on existing commitments
  - Extend early years nursery provision
  - Universal free school meals commitments
  - School clothing grant recommendations
- Preventative spend and early intervention
  - Need to prioritise spending and delivery that prevent child poverty
- Build on commitments to Scottish Living Wage
- Proposed legislation on children's rights and services

# Conclusion

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- Faltering economy and cuts must not be excuse for inaction.
- Fundamental choices to be made about kind of society we want
- Whatever level of growth and public spending need a fairer distribution
- Scotland and UK extraordinarily wealthy
- Need to ensure that wealth is used to end child poverty



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