

Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022 – 2026: Consultation and Call for evidence

Submission from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health

Overview of response

As previously documented^{1,2}, the Scottish Government (SG) should be commended for introducing (in the 2017 Child Poverty Act³) ambitious targets for the reduction of child poverty at a time when the Westminster Government abandoned any such targets for England & Wales⁴. That the targets were supported by a delivery plan detailing 15 specific policy measures aimed at meeting those targets was also commendable.

However, that context of different parliamentary powers and objectives is of obvious fundamental importance to this discussion. The 2017 Act was introduced amid a series of UK Government 'austerity' policies which have notably increased levels of poverty⁵ – including child poverty^{5,6} – across the whole of the UK, as well as having numerous other adverse societal impacts⁷⁻¹². The likely £20 per week reduction in levels of Universal Credit which is planned for October this year will have a further detrimental effect. While new policy developments in Scotland such as the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) will mitigate the effects of UK Government policies to a degree, recent analyses by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) have shown that in the context of such UK austerity measures, they will not be sufficient to meet either the SG's final (2030) or interim (2023/24) child poverty targets^{13,14}. In order to achieve these targets, therefore, much more is required in terms of directly increasing household income for poorer families in Scotland. Our principal response, therefore, is to support the JRF's call for the SCP to be increased. Their analyses suggest that the interim target could be met by increasing the SCP to either £30 (if the UK-wide £20 reduction in Universal Credit does not take place) or £40 (if that reduction does take place); however, the final (2030) target will require, in addition to those increases, policy interventions across a range of the key drivers of child poverty, including affordable housing and good work.

Additional measures are suggested in the more detailed response to the consultation questions below.

Question 1: what's currently working well, and what should the Scottish Government and partners continue to do or do more of?

- As stated, the very introduction of targets, and a corresponding strategy, should not be downplayed.
- The introduction of the Scottish Child Payment is particularly welcome, as are additional payments such as the Best Start Grant (although as one-off payments, the impact of the latter on poverty levels is obviously much more limited).
- The additional £500,000 pounds for the Healthier, Wealthier Children initiative is also commendable, especially as its success and impact has been demonstrated in an independent evaluation¹⁵, and it has influenced the adoption of similar models of early-years money advice referral pathways in different parts of the world including London, Sweden and three sites in Australia¹⁶.
- Such evaluations are obviously enormously important in ensuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of policy. However, in some cases the lack of any such evidence of successful evaluation, or sufficient details of what the policy measures included in the delivery plan actually entail, make it difficult for us to comment. For example, it is unclear what the £7.5m 'innovation fund' to 'support new thinking and new approaches' is likely to achieve, given the scarcity of specific details. The same can be said of the £1.35m given to 'develop

initiatives' with further education colleges, and there are other examples where no evidence of successful evaluation of initiatives is presented. The likely success or otherwise of such policy measures contained in the delivery plan is therefore unknown.

Question 2: are there policies, actions or approaches that the Scottish Government and partners should stop doing or need to do differently?

- As stated in the overview to this response, to achieve the SG's child poverty reduction targets, the SCP needs to be increased. We therefore support the JRF's call (based on their own analyses) of increasing the SCP to either £30 or £40 per week depending on whether the UK-wide £20 reduction in Universal Credit goes ahead¹³. According to their analyses, the SG's child poverty reduction targets will not be met without doing this.
- The final bullet point in response to Question 1 is entirely relevant to this question. A review of the evidence (including the results of – or absence of – any evaluations) for the different policy measures included in the delivery plan should be undertaken to assess their likely impact.

Question 3: what new policies, actions or approaches should the Scottish Government consider implementing?

- As stated above, increase the SCP and review the evidence behind the other policy measures included in the delivery plan.
- In addition, the automation of the school clothing grant (as has been done within the Glasgow City Council area) should be extended to all of Scotland. Such automation removes barriers in terms of awareness of, and claiming of, the grant. In Glasgow, automation has resulted in approximately 97% of eligible families receiving the school clothing grant.
- Another successful Glasgow-based money advice related policy – the integrated money advice service model within General Practices – could be rolled out to the rest of Scotland. The evaluation of this pilot project showed that it achieved good uptake and highly positive outcomes (albeit that some challenges were also identified in terms of funding and scaling up of the model)¹⁷.
- Note that money advice initiatives such as the above need to be continuously re-invigorated, promoted and supported to ensure they remain embedded in statutory provision. More work could also be done to embed money advice in other settings such as education.
- A rolling out and extension of the Cost of the School Day (CoSD) project: this project examined the cost-related barriers to children's participation in the school experience. A national evaluation revealed the benefits to children and young people in terms of removing barriers to full participation in the school experience, as well as highlighting policy and practice changes at local authority and school level respectively, and bringing about changes in attitudes towards, and awareness and understanding of, poverty^{18,19}.
- Considering the origins of child poverty, Scottish Government should consider the cost of the pregnancy pathway. The relationship between lack of material resources and poor health, including during pregnancy, is well established, and the birth of a new baby can result in those close to the poverty line falling below it. Evidence shows that there can be cost-related barriers to accessing universally provided, and free at the point of access, services including the cost of public transport and of childcare²⁰.
- Address housing, transport and childcare costs – some of the other drivers of child poverty levels – recognising that each of these are 'super policy' areas²¹ with likely positive overspill across other policy areas e.g. investment in public transport may improve access to work,

and create jobs in the transport sector, as well as having environmental/sustainability benefits.

Question 4: what lessons from the COVID response could be applied to tackling child poverty in the future?

- It has already been demonstrated that the necessary emergency response to dealing with the pandemic contrasts with the necessary, but sadly entirely insufficient, response to dealing with health inequalities across Scotland and the rest of the UK – an issue that accounts for the loss of many more lives than have been lost in the pandemic²². Similarly, current and projected^{23,24} child poverty levels represent a major societal crisis that requires a similar emergency response, especially as we know that the adverse consequences of growing up in poverty are long-lasting. The pandemic has shown that governments are capable of extraordinary responses in the face of emergencies: this is required now in Scotland.
- Lessons can also be learned from the agility of the Third Sector in stepping in to provide help and support to communities during the pandemic. This has demonstrated the benefits of multi-agency co-production in ensuring local responses. It would be a lost opportunity if this multi-agency work was not supported and funded on an ongoing basis to ensure that Third Sector partners can continue to work alongside health and local authority colleagues and sustain their contributions to anti-poverty work.

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