

10th April 2010

**Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee call for written evidence
on the Welfare Reform (further Provision) (Scotland) Bill**

Response from Barnardo's Scotland

1. Context

1.1 Barnardo's Scotland is a national voluntary organisation providing over 100 services throughout Scotland to nearly 10,000 children and families. Every Barnardo's project is different but each believes in the potential in every child and young person, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through.

1.2 Many of the children and families we work with are reliant on some form of benefits or welfare payments, including both out-of-work payments such as income support and in-work payments such as tax credits. Barnardo's Scotland has worked with other children's charities to highlight the particular and serious issues faced by vulnerable children and their families arising from the bill, both in terms of the impacts of specific changes and the impact in the round of the expected reductions in welfare spending.

1.3 Barnardo's Scotland believes that there is a real danger that the UK welfare changes could impose an unmanageable burden on the poorest and most vulnerable children and their families. Whilst we are supportive of many of the principles that sit behind the UK Government's welfare reform agenda - in particular proposals to improve work incentives through the introduction of Universal Credit - we believe that some of the planned changes could have huge unintended consequences that will mount even greater pressure on vulnerable families who are already struggling to make ends meet

2. Views on the Bill as a whole and the general principles underlying the bill

2.1 This bill is urgently required to ensure that proper provisions in relation to the Westminster Welfare Reform Act are put in place in areas relating to devolved Scottish competences. Enabling legislation along these lines can help ensure there is a smooth transition to the new benefit system which will be adopted after April 2013. We look forward to the opportunity to scrutinise the regulations arising from this legislation in the future.

2.2 Our main wish is that this legislation is passed as swiftly as possible, and that regulations are published and agreed with a sufficient timescale to allow them to be disseminated and widely understood by all those who will be affected by them.

3. Proposed powers in relation to Universal Credit (UC) and Personal Independence Payments, and other comments on the introduction of UC

3.1 Barnardo's Scotland broadly supports the proposed powers in relation to UC and PIP. However, any new regulations introduced in Scotland must integrate well with existing systems in Scotland and the new UK-wide benefits system.

3.2 More broadly, we hope that any such powers for regulation will allow any Scotland-specific anomalies in the new system to be identified and action taken to rectify them.

4. Views on the proposed subordinate legislation powers in the Bill?

4.1 Barnardo's Scotland agrees with the powers and believes them to be appropriate.

5. Other comments on regulations that would follow this Bill on "passporting" benefits and eligibility for them?

5.1 Many of the vulnerable children and families we work with greatly benefit from access to reduced or low cost services by virtue of their benefit status. We recognise that the replacement of benefits such as job seekers allowance by the broader UC presents a technical problem for defining access to these services, and we also recognise, as highlighted in the Explanatory Notes to the bill (para 32) that the Scottish Government cannot formulate its policy on passported benefits until it has more detail from the UK Government and it does not expect to have this detail until June.

5.2 Barnardo's Scotland supports the position of the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform that "The most important issues in designing the new system are preserving – if not enhancing – current levels of entitlement and maximising take up of passported benefits. The best way to achieve this is a combination of a simple structure without complicated rules, and timely accessible information to claimants of universal credit about other entitlements". However, we fully understand the financial pressure that Scottish Local Authorities are under and therefore do not believe that it would be appropriate for any UC entitlement to give access to all currently passported benefits.

5.3 Barnardo's Scotland would therefore ask the committee to consider maintaining eligibility by using receipt of other benefits such as the revised Council Tax Benefit, or who are on government schemes such as the Work Programme, as a passport to accessing services. Further to this we would ask the committee to explore extending age itself as a passport to access currently passported services, perhaps up to the age of 21. This would ensure that the large number of young people who are not council tax payers were also eligible.

The committee could also explore how the Scottish National Entitlement Card could also potentially be used as part of any future passporting scheme.

5.4 The Committee should also seek to engage as widely as possible on any future regulations. It is important to ensure that the voices of those who currently access passported benefit are heard and their concerns taken on board in the design of any new system.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Barnardo's Scotland welcomes this new legislation. We believe it's swift passage, and that of the regulations that will follow, will help bring much-needed clarity to all those who rely on welfare and benefits in Scotland. However, there is still a lack information about the implications for Scotland of the proposed changes, and we would urge the committee to consider, as part of their scrutiny of this bill and subsequent regulations, ensuring that material a long similar lines to that produced by the Welsh Assembly Government (Analysing the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms in Wales - Stage 1 Analysis, <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/analysingreforms/?lang=en> is produced in Scotland. This would also help local authorities, voluntary organisations and other bodies working with those on benefits to better understand, and comment on the material in this bill and subsequent regulations.

6.2 We would be happy to provide oral evidence to the Committee on any of the above points.

7. Contact

7.1 For more information please contact

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