

Barnardo's Scotland response to the consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland

September 2016

Barnardo's is the UK's largest children's charity and Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 26,500 children and young people in over 122 specialised services. Our services work with families and children who are living in poverty and facing multiple adversities. This response draws on the experience of children and families supported by our services. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation

1. Do you agree with the Scottish Government including in statute an ambition to eradicate child poverty?

Yes. Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has outlined their intention to introduce a Child Poverty Bill in the first year of this parliament with the aim of eradicating child poverty. The misery of living in poverty is the day to day reality for far too many children in Scotland today. Currently 1 in 5 children live in poverty. In our work with children and families we see what is behind that statistic. Our services report that there is an increasing reliance on extended family, charitable donations and foodbanks to supplement income.

Our joint report with NSPCC *Challenges from the Frontline*¹ found that staff in many of our services were referring families to recently set up food banks in their local areas, and stepping in with practical support such as money for pre-payment meters, furniture donations and clothing. One Service Manager said that visits to families' homes often revealed a lack of basic necessities such as warm clothing, bedding, toothbrushes and toilet rolls. As a result, services are increasingly using money which was previously used to fund

¹ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/challenges-frontline-scotland-multiple-adversities-report.pdf>

extracurricular or more developmental activities to provide basic necessities.

Legislation is only one part of the action that needs to be taken to eradicate child poverty. Nevertheless, the introduction of a Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill constitutes a clear and highly public expression of the Scottish Government's intention to tackle child poverty. By enshrining the commitment in legislation, the Scottish Government will help to ensure that the targets - and the political impetus behind them - endure, regardless of variations in popular opinion. Vitaly, legislation will also provide a means of ensuring future governments are bound by the duty to eradicate child poverty.

Legislation will also help to set a clear direction of travel for all government departments, staff, the public sector and other key partners who will be in no doubt of the need to take action to ensure the Scottish Government's targets are met. In this sense the legislation will provide a clear framework for the development of policy across departments and at all levels of government.

The legislation will also provide a means of holding the Scottish Government and other public bodies to account. This will be achieved by making sure that the Bill contains provisions to scrutinise the performance of the Scottish Government and other public bodies in meeting targets to eradicate child poverty. We have seen with other legislative targets that media and stakeholder scrutiny also has an impact on increasing accountability and transparency and provides impetus to meet the target. This level of scrutiny will help to ensure that the scandal of child poverty remains high on the public and political agenda.

2. What are your views on making income targets statutory?

The experience of the families and children who use our services demonstrates that low income is at the heart of the many difficulties they face on a daily basis. In addition to the short term impact of being unable to afford basic necessities there is a longer term impact on the future educational and employment prospects for children living in poverty. This is why we believe that it is essential that there are clear targets to reduce the number of children living in households with a low income. For a statutory ambition or duty to eradicate child poverty to be meaningful there must be a clear method for measuring progress.

3. How do you think the role of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Child Poverty can be developed to ensure that they play a key role in developing the legislation?

Barnardo's Scotland has been a member of the Ministerial Advisory Group since its inception. The group has provided continuity in relation to the oversight of child poverty in Scotland when there have been many changes in the external environment including the abandonment of UK targets contained in the Child Poverty Act 2010.

We believe the Scottish Government should continue to draw on the expertise of the Ministerial Advisory Group. Given the importance of the task of developing child poverty legislation, the Scottish Government should ensure that the group is well informed and given requisite time and information to meaningfully inform the development of legislation as well as subsequent regulation and guidance.

In particular the Ministerial Advisory Group should have a key role in overseeing the development of the delivery plan. The group should continue to be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary and should meet no less than quarterly, with scope for additional meetings to be scheduled as and when is necessary.

A key task of the Ministerial Advisory Group should also be to consider how action to eradicate child poverty can be communicated across government and link with other policy initiatives, particularly around closing the educational attainment gap and the expansion of early learning and childcare.

The group should also consider the need for a wider independent Commission once the legislation is being implemented, and how best to ensure that children, young people and their families can participate in and contribute to the development of the legislation and child poverty measurement framework at all levels, including the work of the Ministerial Advisory Group itself.

4. How can links between the national strategy and local implementation be improved? What could local partners do to contribute to meeting these national goals? This might include reporting and sharing best practice or developing new strategic approaches.

We believe there is a need for stronger links between national and local implementation than currently exist under the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland.

This can be achieved in part by more clarity within the proposed legislation and subsequent delivery plans as to the role of local authorities and their community planning partners (and other key partners such as the DWP and the private sector) in reducing child poverty. While much is already being done locally to address child poverty, there is evidence of wide variation in terms of political commitment and the quality of existing strategic approaches to poverty reduction².

In order to ensure greater consistency and accountability across all local authority areas, we believe that the legislation should place a duty on local authorities and/or their community planning partners to take a strategic approach to reducing child poverty in their area.

Local authorities and their community planning partners have control over aspects of policy that can have a significant impact on levels of poverty including employability, education, childcare and the delivery of certain social security benefits. A requirement to demonstrate that a strategic approach to reducing child poverty through existing planning and reporting mechanisms such as Children's Services Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plans and Locality Plans – would help ensure child poverty was considered at the highest level within relevant organisations. We believe that there is already the basis for ensuring there is a strategic approach to tackling child poverty in the draft guidance for Part 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Section 74 of the draft guidance states that:

A local authority and relevant health board should also ensure that relevant national outcomes and objectives are reflected in the Children's Services Plan. This includes the national commitment to reducing child poverty. The Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland provides a detailed outcomes framework by which the underlying causes of poverty will be tackled, and a set of specific indicators with which to measure progress.¹⁷ It is recommended that both outcomes and indicators are reflected in the Children's Services Plan.

Enshrining this type of approach in legislation should ensure more consistency and help to ensure those working on poverty reduction do not do so in a silo as child poverty will be mainstreamed and relevant across the public sector. Such a duty could also include a requirement to consult with third sector partners on their role in a strategic approach.

² <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Local-action-tackle-poverty-Scotland.pdf>

5. What are your views on the income based measures of poverty proposed for Scottish child poverty targets? For example are there any additional income based measures you think we should use (and if so, why)? Are there any alternative approaches to measuring income – for example as used in other countries – that you think could apply in Scotland?

We strongly support the use of the four targets described in the consultation and the fact that they are all income based measures.

While we welcome priority the Scottish Government has attached to policy areas that will improve outcomes for children experiencing poverty – such as reducing the attainment gap and reducing health inequalities - we believe that retaining a focus on income based targets in this legislation is the correct approach. Only by reducing income inequality and maximising the financial resources available to families in Scotland can real and lasting progress be made.

6. What are your views on the Scottish Government’s proposals for the levels of child poverty that the targets will be set at?

We agree that the level at which the 2030 targets are set seems reasonable. International comparisons suggest that the headline 10% target level is both realistic and achievable.

7. What are your views on the Scottish Government’s proposal to set targets on an after housing costs basis. For example, are there any disadvantages to this approach that we have not already considered?

As highlighted in the End Child Poverty coalition response we welcome the Scottish Government’s proposal that the relative income target should be calculated **after housing costs** rather than before housing costs. Housing costs are an unavoidable expense and taking them into account allows for a more realistic understanding of the resources available to families. This is particularly important in relation to families with children who tend to spend a higher proportion of their income on housing than other population groups.

Gathering information on rates of poverty both before and after housing costs also allows for the impact of housing policy on poverty rates to be better understood.

8. What are your views on the Scottish Government's proposal to set targets that are expected to be achieved by 2030?

In addition to the 2030 targets we believe there is a need for the legislation to include interim targets to ensure the Scottish Government and other public bodies are on track towards achieving the 2030 target.

While detailed projections and calculation would be required to work out what realistic income targets might be, an example might be reducing relative child poverty to 15% by 2020, 10% by 2025 etc. Again, interim targets would allow public and political scrutiny and provide a useful way of measuring progress towards the 2030 goals. Supplementary interim targets could also be developed in relation to the key indicators in the measurement framework to help ensure progress is being achieved in relation to the key outcomes set out in the proposed delivery plan.

There are two examples of target setting in legislation that would support the setting of interim targets. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 set a target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016. The target was missed for a number of reasons but there was no interim reporting set out in statute over the 15 years of action to tackle the issue. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 does have interim targets set out in statute. The reporting on these attracts a good deal of attention from stakeholders, the media and wider public. This creates more transparency and debate on progress and the need for more concerted action or a change of direction.

9. What are your views on the proposal that Scottish Ministers will be required to produce a Child Poverty Delivery Plan every five years, and to report on this plan annually?

We very much welcome the proposal that plans should be produced every five years and that progress should be reported annually. We believe that given the importance of the issue and the ambition of the target the reporting should include a statement to parliament. This would allow for a debate on the progress towards the target.

The Child Poverty Strategies produced to date by the Scottish Government under the Child Poverty Act 2010 have helped to sharpen the Scottish Government's focus and ensure that the issue of child poverty remains a priority. The strategies have also provided an important means of improving transparency, highlighting progress and identifying gaps in existing policy. As such

we welcome the proposal of including a duty to produce delivery plans in the legislation.

Extending the period covered by the proposed 'delivery plans' will also provide a more realistic timeframe in which new policies can be developed, implemented and their impact assessed. It might also be helpful that the 5 year period is in-keeping with parliamentary term. However, we would want to see the publication of the first delivery plan as soon as practicable within the current parliament, rather than being delayed until the next parliamentary term.

The delivery plan would also need to be adequately resourced and the resources required for its realisation would need to be set aside at each Spending Review between now and 2030.

We would urge the Scottish Government to give consideration to how the delivery plans – and the reporting of them – are informed by Children's Services Plans which will be required to be produced every 3 years from April 2017. We have noted above where there is a proposal in draft guidance for Part 3 of the Children and Young People Act 2014 that national outcomes and objectives are reflected in Children's Services Plans. Many of the services delivered locally will have a significant impact on child poverty and an important role to play in working towards the 2030 target. As such there will need to be close links between the delivery plan and Children's Services Plan's and planning processes. The delivery plan needs to be considered in this context.

As suggested above there should be a role for the Ministerial Advisory Group in overseeing the development of the delivery plan and potentially a role for a wider Commission at the implementation stage.

10. Do you have any suggestions for how the measurement framework could usefully be improved? For example, are there any influencing factors that are not covered by the measurement framework? Or are there any additional indicators that could be added?

We support the view of the End Child Poverty coalition that there should be a role for the Ministerial Advisory Group in ensuring the measurement framework is appropriate and produces evidence of progress against the delivery plan.

We believe that the contents of any renewed measurement framework should be linked more closely with the four income

based targets. While many of the indicators contained in the current framework are valid and extremely useful, others do not relate directly to eradicating child poverty and amongst other things would prove extremely difficult if not impossible to measure for example:

- Increase in % of poorest children finding it easy to talk to their mother.
- Increase % of neighbours stopping to talk in the poorest areas.

Instead new measures must primarily relate clearly and directly to the proposed income targets, focussing on maximising household income, reducing rates of material deprivation and reducing housing costs. Further measures should relate to the direct impact of poverty on children's lives, including their health, educational attainment and future prospects. Evidence gathering as part of the measurement framework should also be qualitative in nature and draw on the experience of those living in poverty.

Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) has developed measures around trends in health and inequality in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire³ which could be used in the development of the measurement framework.

Consideration also needs to be given to how the measurement framework links with the requirement on Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) to report annually on progress towards achieving positive outcomes for children and young people through the SHANARRI framework. Poverty and child well-being are inextricably linked and, as such, the measurement of progress towards eradicating child poverty needs to link to reporting on well-being. The Scottish Government has produced a useful advice paper that should prove useful in relation to the development of the framework⁴.

The measurement framework should also consider the specific needs of children in care and care experienced young people and those with disabilities.

Finally we believe that the voices of children and families with lived experiences of poverty, must also inform changes to the child poverty measurement framework. Across a range of measurements

³ [Trends in Health and Inequality in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire](#)

⁴ Scottish Government Analytics (November 2014) Evidencing and Reporting on Children and Young People's Wellbeing Outcomes

in the existing framework, for example satisfaction with local schools, the stigma of poverty or lack of social and cultural capital may prevent families living in poverty from asserting their rights. Genuine participation of families experiencing or who have experienced poverty will help ensure that measurements reflect and track real change in the experience and impact of child poverty in Scotland over time.

Do you have any additional views on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland?

The Scottish Government are currently consulting on how newly devolved social security powers will be used. This includes the ability to use top up powers and introduce new benefits. We believe that consideration needs to be given to what can be done with these powers to ensure that the 2030 target is met.

It is very important that the legislation acts as a driver for joining up the different policy initiatives that have an impact on reducing the number of children living in poverty.

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