

End Child Poverty Briefing for Stage 1 Debate: Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill



1st June 2017

About End Child Poverty

This briefing is produced by members of End Child Poverty (ECP) in Scotland including the Child Poverty Action Group, The Poverty Alliance, Barnardo's Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Children 1st and Children in Scotland.

Key Points

- We fully support the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill. We also welcome the Social Security Committee Stage 1 report which makes a number of welcome recommendations.
- Progress towards the 2030 target will be more challenging unless there is a requirement that local authorities and health boards set out their strategic approach to tackling child poverty in their areas. The Bill should contain a duty which addresses this issue.
- We agree with the Committee that this is a framework Bill and that setting targets will not, of itself, reduce child poverty. Nevertheless, scrutiny of what measures are in place is essential. As such we welcome the committee's recommendation that a commission should be established on a statutory footing. The Scottish Government's proposed Poverty and Inequality Commission represents the opportunity to do this.
- We are particularly pleased that the Committee have recognised the need for interim targets towards 2030 target and that the delivery plans should have a set of key areas that Minister's should have to include which were outlined by End Child Poverty.

The Stage 1 report from the Social Security committee represents another step towards ensuring that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill provides the most effective framework to contribute to tackling the poverty that affects increasing numbers of children and families. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimate that relative child poverty will rise from 29 per cent in 2014–15 to 36% in 2021–22¹. Our members delivering children's services report that increasing numbers of families and children are seeking help with many in reporting in crisis as a direct consequence of living on a low income. **That is why we believe that every aspect of efforts to tackle child poverty should be subject to scrutiny to ensure that what we are doing locally and nationally is effective. This briefing sets out areas where End Child Poverty thinks the Bill could be strengthened at Stage 2.**

The need for a strategic, forward-looking duty on local authorities and health boards

As it is currently drafted, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill 2017 places a duty on local authorities and health boards to produce "local child poverty action reports". These reports would describe action taken in each local authority area in the last year for the purpose of contributing to the achievement of the child poverty targets. While incorporation of local authorities and health boards in the legislative framework is hugely welcome, we are concerned that section 10 is insufficient in that it is retrospective, requiring local authorities to describe what they have done rather than plan for future actions. ECP believe the key to meeting the 2030 target will be how local activity to tackle child

¹ Institute for Fiscal Studies. (2017). Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2016–17 to 2021–22.

poverty is linked to the actions that Scottish Ministers will take. A concerted national and local approach is vital. As such the legislation should ensure there is a clear duty on local authorities and health boards to take a strategic approach to reducing child poverty in their area – as well as reporting annually on the steps they have taken to achieve this.

We believe that the Bill should be amended to ensure reducing and preventing child poverty is embedded in the processes local authorities and their community planning partners use to set outcomes and allocate resources – i.e. Local Outcome Improvement Plans.

Another option is that Section 10 of the Bill could be amended to ensure local child poverty action reports describe strategic measures to be taken in the following year.

The need for independent scrutiny

End Child Poverty welcome the committee's recommendation that a commission should be established in statute. We believe that there is an opportunity to do this with the proposed Poverty and Inequality Commission. We note the evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities that timing of establishing a statutory commission could be an issue. We believe that establishing a commission as the Committee suggests would ensure the level of independence and resource required for the commission to be effective. As such it should be possible to set up shadow arrangements whilst the statutory requirements of appointments and other aspects are progressed. For example, the Scottish Welfare Fund was established in the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015 but was operational before the legislation was enacted.

The independence of a commission is vital. Oxfam Scotland in a recent report on what the Poverty and Inequality Commission should look like said *"It should be fully independent of the Scottish Government, both in practice and perception. Consideration should be given to placing the commission on a statutory footing, with it reporting directly to the Scottish Parliament"*² As well as wider functions in relation to poverty and inequality the commission should advise Ministers' on the level of interim targets, the development of delivery plan's and report to parliament on the commission view of progress made towards meeting any interim target and the 2030 target.

Delivery Plans

End Child Poverty has made the case that the contents of the delivery plans are linked directly to achievement of the proposed child poverty targets. We believe that delivery plans should describe how the Scottish Government will use all of the major financial and policy tools at its disposal to progress towards these targets. We are therefore very pleased that the committee has recommended that the Scottish Government brings forward an amendment at Stage 2 to include the five areas suggested by End Child Poverty as being a requirement for inclusion in delivery plans.

These five areas are:

- *the full use of Scottish social security powers*
- *the provision of information, advice and assistance to parents and carer in relation to welfare rights and income maximisation*
- *the provision of suitable and affordable housing*
- *the availability of childcare*
- *the facilitation of employment for parents and carers*

² Oxfam Scotland: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/building-a-more-equal-scotland-designing-scotlands-poverty-and-inequality-commi-620264>

The Scottish Government would then be obliged to set out in its delivery plan how action in each of the areas will contribute to the eradication of child poverty.

Measurement Framework

We welcome the both the Scottish Government commitment to reviewing the measurement framework and the fact that the committee have highlighted the Cabinet Secretary's commitment to review the measurement framework and to include an updated version delivery plan to be published next year. We would be keen to work with the Scottish Government on "a wider dashboard of indicators" and support the committee's recommendation that delivery plans make specific reference to the measurement framework.

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