

Barnardo's Scotland: Priorities for Programme for Government 23-24

Barnardo's Scotland works with thousands of children, young people, and families every year across a wide range of services. We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to seek positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities.

This briefing summarises some of Barnardo's recent research, the key priorities for our services and the families we support, and some actions we hope to see included in the Programme for Government 2023/24. For further information please contact Barnardo's Scotland Senior Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Kirsty-Louise Hunt at kirstylouise.hunt@barnardos.org.uk

Tackling Child Poverty

The cost-of-living crisis and its impact on families mean more and more children are at risk of poverty¹. As supporters of the End Child Poverty Scotland coalition, Barnardo's Scotland supports calls to further **invest in the Scottish Child Payment**. Analysis² suggests that a further increase in the Scottish Child Payment to £40 would help meet the interim child poverty targets.

We want to see **an end to the young parent penalty**. The Scottish Government should uprate the Scottish Child Payment or provide additional cash to families impacted by the two-child limit and the under-25 young parent penalty for those receiving universal credit.

The Scottish Government should **increase the school clothing grant in line with inflation** and take further action to help schools **reduce the cost of the school day** so that children and young people can fully participate in digital learning and school trips.

The Scottish Government must deliver on the commitment to **roll out universal free school meals** for all primary children as soon as possible.

Keeping The Promise

The Scottish Government must renew its commitment to keeping The Promise.

Scotland must go further and faster on **expanding access to holistic family support** services, particularly if the original commitment by Scottish Government to the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to invest £500 million by 2026 is to be kept on track.

¹ [Barnardo's research: A Crisis on our Doorstep – the deepening impact of the cost-of-living crisis on children and young people in the UK \(March 2023\)](#)

² [Fraser of Allander Institute: Meeting the Scottish Child Poverty Targets, is it a case of too little, too late? 4 July 2023](#)

The Children's Care and Justice Bill and Redesign of the Children's Hearing System must be **properly resourced**. It is vital that **children's rights to access independent advocacy is promoted and protected** through any proposed changes to the system. There is already a lack of capacity in advocacy provision and any presumption that changes to the system should lead to a reduction in advocacy need could pose a threat to children's rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC to have their views heard in decisions affecting them.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The mental wellbeing of children and young people must be at centre of an action plan to support Scotland's new mental health and wellbeing strategy.

Access to specialist CAMHS must be improved for those children and young people who really need it – but for this to be achieved, **pressure on the service must be relieved further upstream**. Investment should be made to support children and their families who are waiting³ too long for CAMHS support.

Support should not be confined to a medical model or diagnosis and should closely involve universal services like education, adopting **a whole school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing**. Barnardo's Scotland has a long history of working in partnership with families, schools and communities and the Scottish Attainment Challenge has enabled us to extend our work to reach over 400 schools across Scotland.

Tackling Child Exploitation

Barnardo's recently published research into the [impact of the cost of living on child sexual and criminal exploitation](#) and [a blueprint for supporting displaced children seeking protection in the UK](#). We want the Scottish Government to take urgent action to help protect Scotland's children from harm and the Programme for Government should commit to implementing our recommendations:

- The Scottish Government should set up a National Working Group and **publish an updated National Action Plan** to tackle the exploitation of children and young people in Scotland, including child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation.
- The Scottish Government should **invest in Scotland-specific research on the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation**.
- The Scottish Government should **provide enhanced training and support, pre- and post-qualification, for all professionals working with children**, so that they have the knowledge and confidence that they need to better protect children by identifying signs of and responding to child sexual abuse, exploitation, and child criminal exploitation.

³ [CAMHS waiting times for quarter ending March 2023, Public Health Scotland](#)