



COSLA

From Targets to Action

*Empowering Local
Government to
Tackle Child Poverty*



Foreword



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COSLA Children
& Young People
Spokesperson

Child poverty remains a key priority for local government. You will find that, despite these challenging times, local authorities remain strongly committed to our shared priority under the Verity House Agreement to tackle poverty particularly child poverty and deliver a range of services and support children and their families in need.

While there is no way to capture all the great work underway across local authorities, we highlight some of the initiatives underway to tackle child poverty in Scotland. In my role as COSLA's Children and Young People Spokesperson I am privileged to hear about a great deal more work that is underway at a local level across the country. I want to extend my gratitude to those who are providing support to our young people and their families in these difficult situations and delivering vital services to their local communities.

However, we are all too aware that more can and needs to be done to end child poverty. The Scottish Government is unlikely to hit the statutory targets for child poverty reduction set by the Scottish Parliament. While local authorities remain committed this priority, we face significant financial challenges to supporting the Government to getting there.

We call for the Scottish Government to take action to ensure that future national policy allows for partnership approaches, to provide local authorities with holistic and sustainable funding to tackle child poverty, and for national policy to be developed holistically.

We recognise that there is still much progress to be made towards our shared ambition to see an end to child poverty, and while we hope to highlight some of the fantastic work local authorities are delivering to reach this, we implore the Scottish government to take serious sustainable action in order to reach these targets.

Overview



Scotland's 32 councils are fully committed to tackling child poverty. Local authorities have a vital role in tackling child poverty, delivering key services to families, providing advice and working with key partners locally to create tailored solutions to fit Scotland's diverse communities – noting that tackling child poverty in Lerwick will look different to approach that will need to be deployed in Livingston.

Poverty is a significant social determinate for adverse outcomes in life. For children living in poverty this can negatively impact their mental health, physical health, educational outcomes, and there are clear links between poverty and interactions with the justice system. Local Government has a long history of being the forefront of Scotland's effort to tackle poverty.

Under the [Verity House Agreement](#), jointly signed by both COSLA and the Scottish Government, we have committed to work together to *"Tackle poverty, particularly child poverty, in recognition of the joint national mission to tackle child poverty"*.

Additionally, under the [COSLA Plan](#) one of our 6 key priorities is to 'Support those most vulnerable in our communities'. We note that *"Everyone should have access to sufficient food, clothing, and housing, and warmth, and we should strive for continuous improvement in living conditions for those who are most marginalised. In order for those most vulnerable in society to be part of healthy and happy communities, we must nurture and protect our local resources, environments and all who live in them. Local Government plays a central role in this regard and by working in partnership with colleagues across the public and third sector, we can support and empower those who are at most risk of exclusion and poverty."*

Under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, the Scottish Parliament set legal targets Scottish Ministers must meet to reduce child poverty in Scotland by 2030 and interim targets by 2023.

Local Government supports the Act and we have been supportive of the settings of these targets to focus the actions of all spheres of government to reach the child poverty reduction targets. This requirement, alongside others, set out under the Act are essential for holding Scottish Government to account in their commitment.

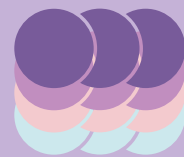
However, at the moment we are at risk of not making enough progress towards these targets and without appropriate policy development and resource allocation for service delivery at a national level to support local authorities, Scotland will fall further behind.

As noted in the latest Poverty and Inequality Commission's Delivery Plan Progress 2023-2024 Report, the Scottish Government is unlikely to meet both the interim statutory child poverty reduction targets and the statutory targets set under the Act. While COLSA welcomes the raising of income from social security with increased uptake of the Scottish Child Payments, we hold strong concerns at the lack of progress the Scottish Government made towards a number of promises under the Best Start Bright Futures delivery plan.

We urge for strong partnership working between Local and National government to ensure that policy development and service delivery reflects the needs of local contexts and for stronger and more sustainable policy to meet these targets.

For Challenge Poverty Week we are keen to highlight and raise awareness of all the good work that councils are undertaking and to provide key information about this important issue.

Local Government and Child Poverty



Despite financial pressures, Local Government continues its strong commitment to tackling child poverty locally through a range of services including transport, education, early learning and childcare, housing, access to advice and support.

Local authorities, in partnership with NHS Boards, have a statutory responsibility to develop a Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR) to report on the activity they are currently taking, and will take in future to reduce child poverty. These plans set out the key activities, policies and programmes that are tackling poverty in local areas. COSLA is strongly supportive of LCPARs as they bring clarity and highlight the role of Local Government in tackling child poverty.

Both the Improvement Service and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit's Tackling Poverty Locally Directory provide detailed information on the wide range of activities across the country.

COSLA works closely with the Scottish Government towards our shared ambition to end child poverty. Children experience the impacts of poverty because they live in families and communities which experience poverty, therefore a whole system, cross-policy approach is required.

Local authorities, with partners, have conducted great work with support and investment in local innovation through pathfinder work currently underway in Dundee, Glasgow, and Clackmannanshire. These pathfinders, designed at a local level aim to provide person-centred support to families most at risk of poverty, making it easier for families to access services as part of an attempt to improve the system as a whole, moving towards joined up service provision. We have welcomed the Scottish Government's recent commitments to expand current place-based initiatives, including the fairer futures partnerships. This allows local authorities to provide person-centred approaches to tackling child poverty and address specific challenges faced by those families within their community contexts. It also enables councils to pilot work to pool budgets and reduce duplicated reporting.

We would like to focus on the key work local authorities are progressing in line with the themes of Challenge Poverty Week. By highlighting this work and outlining the keys to ensuring successful action in future, we hope to further the shared ambition of Local and National Government to see an end to child poverty in Scotland. We are clear that this is not a comprehensive list, and that excellent work is underway in all 32 local authorities, as detailed in their local child poverty action reports.



Housing

Every child in Scotland should have safe, secure and consistent housing. The situation is becoming increasingly challenging, with the Scottish Government making a cut last December to Scotland's Affordable Housing Supply budget and Scotland in a housing emergency, with a record number of children in homeless accommodation. There needs to be a focus on flexibility in supporting local responses, rather than centrally driven solutions, and increased flexibility and responsiveness is needed in delivery of the Affordable housing supply programme. Despite the challenging circumstances local authorities have been supporting residents in low-income households and addressing systemic issues in housing.

Private Rented Sector Housing and Welfare Hub

The Private Rented Sector Housing and Welfare Hub within **Glasgow City Council** Housing Services (Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability (NRS) provides a wide range of services to support vulnerable families living in the city's private rented sector. These services include: preventing homelessness and the sustainment of tenancies of families living in the private rented sector; improving the condition of housing and addressing critical safety problems; providing welfare advice and support to families to ensure that they receive the benefits that they are entitled to, as well as other services.

The Hub takes a holistic approach when assessing the needs of families including housing options, property conditions, socio-economic and health issues, and welfare rights. 70% of those receiving support are families with children.

Utilisation of Data to Identify Vulnerable Families

Fife Council has worked to utilise data to support vulnerable families. The Scottish Government provided additional funding to councils from January 2023 for Discretionary Housing Payment to mitigate the benefit cap. Fife council has identified 96 households that were being affected by the cap. Fife Council's Benefit Assessment Team invited these households to make an application for their housing costs to be met. 83 of them have since had their housing costs met. 97% are households with children and 69% are lone parent families.



Transport

The access and cost of transport can be a significant barrier to accessing education and work for young people and their families. Work is ongoing in some local authorities to reduce and understand the impact of the cost of public transport on poverty.

Removing Barriers to Accessing National Entitlement Cards

Approximately 79% of eligible young people in Renfrewshire have a Junior or a Young Scot National Entitlement Card and receive free bus travel as part of the Young Persons Free Bus Travel Scheme, saving families money on transport costs.

Barriers to accessing the card have been removed by setting up easy application processes with trusted verifier organisations who support young people experiencing poverty. These trusted organisations include social work, Home Link, young homeless charities, supported residential units, employability programmes, and organisations supporting young migrants and refugees.

Renfrewshire Council has removed the need for them to collect documentation and pay for a passport photo to apply for their card. Instead of families having to pay for required proofs to apply, (e.g. full birth certificates), the council will use their school record to verify their details, simplifying and poverty-proofing the process.

Work to Better Understand Public Transport Needs

East Lothian Council is working with the Workforce Mobility Project of the Edinburgh and South-East City Region Deal to better understand how public transport meets the demands of the local workforce and employers.



Adequate Incomes

Ensuring that families have access to an adequate income through supplements such as the Scottish Child Payment helps mitigate cost of living pressures on families across Scotland. Local authorities have sought to increase income maximisation through access to advice and support through the embedding of referral pathways and advice in a wide range of settings.

Embedding Advice in Educational Settings

In May 2023 Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland hosted an online event chaired by the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland. One area highlighted by speakers was how access to advice in education settings works to maximise incomes, and the impressive scale of financial gain to parents and carers as a result of this approach.

Via the **Glasgow** FISO project (Financial Support Officers in Schools) alone, 3,200 clients have gained £5.3 million in three years.

In **Edinburgh**, a partnership between schools, CHAI (Community Help and Advice Initiative) and Children First has achieved £24 financial gain for families for every £1 invested.

Since the beginning of 2023 alone - after spending just £1,800 of their Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) on access to advice - the Braes High School in **Falkirk** has secured £35,718 additional income for families.



Food

The cost of food can be a large expense for families and lack of access to sufficient nutrition has a significant impact on children's health and education. Local authorities support children's access to food and reduce burdens on families through services such as the delivery of free school meals to primary children, with the recent expansion to Primary 6 and 7 children in receipt of Scottish Child Payment.

Child Poverty Index to Target Free Breakfast Club Provision

Scottish Borders Council has developed a Child Poverty Index which has been replicated in other areas of Scotland. The Index uses data from HMRC, SCG, FSM, and EMA data to provide granular information on rates of child poverty in school catchment areas.

This index has been used to inform where additional monies were targeted for breakfast club provision. The Council's year 5 LCPAR notes that "£60,000 has been allocated from councils Cost of Living Support Fund, to support the setting up and continuation or provision of a free breakfast club offer across Scottish Borders. Nineteen schools were successful in their application for funding in addition to one community-based group, with some areas targeted based on the Child Poverty Index".



Communities & Volunteers

The third sector plays a key role in delivering services and advice to vulnerable members of the community and reducing the impact of poverty. Councils work closely with partners in third sector organisations who hold knowledge and experience to support local communities tackle child poverty. Volunteers in communities are also highly valued and critical in terms of their expertise, skills and local knowledge.

Tackling Poverty Reference Group

Those with lived experience form part of the **Dumfries and Galloway** Poverty and Inequalities Partnership. Support has been provided to all volunteers with lived experience of poverty who are members of the Tackling Poverty Reference Group. £10,000 was committed to travelling expenses, visits to various third and public sector organisations, home wi-fi connections and digital devices.

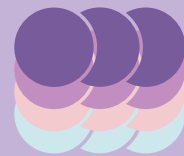
They have stated that *"All dedicated support enables our volunteers to complete all consultations and help with new Project Design and Guidance to eliminate barriers to anyone who is experiencing any form of poverty."*

The next steps include a further recruitment campaign to enhance the input from families, parents, children and young people with experience of poverty.

Promoting Volunteering Roles to Support those Returning to the Workplace

Scottish Borders Council has promoted volunteering roles within the Citizens Advice Bureau Service and an extensive training programme to develop skills and build confidence to return to the workplace, particularly after a period of being at home looking after children.

Keys to Success



As we have been clear, Local Government in Scotland is committed to tackling child poverty. Below are some of the key actions we believe will ensure we can make the right progress towards meeting the statutory child poverty targets.

Partnership and Joined-up Working

- **Cross-sectoral work** is key to ensuring a much-needed holistic approach is taken to policy development and service implementation. Councils are working with partners to take an approach which allows them to tackle poverty in a joined-up way.
- **National policy** – there is a need to ensure that future national policy is developed with the aim of acknowledging, promoting and facilitating partnership approaches, recognising the skill, experience, and knowledge of all those who have a role to play in tackling child poverty.
- **Support** – policy should focus on allowing people to access the right support at the right time.

Holistic/Sustainable Approach to Funding

- **Public sector budgets** – reductions in public sector budgets disproportionately affect people already facing poverty and disadvantage, who tend to rely on services more.
- **'Upstream' investment** – there needs to be 'upstream' investment in services that help to prevent problems rather than focusing spending on responding to them.
- **Focus on prevention** – pressure on core budgets often leads to cuts to those early intervention and prevention services needed. The need to continue focusing on crisis interventions within tight budgets also impacts on the ability to shift focus towards prevention.
- **Shared priorities** – a whole systems approach to funding public services needs to be taken to develop thinking, methods and practice to better understand public sector challenges (health, wellbeing, poverty, environment) and identify collective actions and alignment of commitments across the public sector toward shared priorities.

Holistic Approach to Policy Development

- **Holistic approach** – a holistic approach needs to be taken to policy development to ensure that all opportunities are taken at both a national and local level across all areas that influence and have an impact on child poverty.
- **Engagement** – it will be essential for the Scottish Government to have substantial engagement with Local Government to ensure policy can be developed and delivered in an effective, holistic manner.
- **Person-centred** – a holistic approach must be person-centred and utilise the lived experiences of local families, particularly those in priority groups, to address specific challenges faced by low income families within their community. This requires adequate funding for local authorities, who are best placed to provide local services for their local contexts.
- **Rural and island communities** – the unique challenges rural and island communities face must be addressed. It is essential that future policy development accounts for the contexts of these areas and allows Local Government the flexibility needed to support them.
- **Place-focused multi-agency collaboration** – if national and Local Government are to take this coordinated approach to tackling child poverty, there is a strong need to recognise the importance of place-focused multi-agency collaboration.



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