

Child Poverty Bill Stage 1 Debate Briefing

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

Too many children across Scotland are living in poverty. In 2015/16, 190,000 children in Scotland lived in relative poverty before housing costs, 20,000 more than during the previous year. An additional 70,000 children were living in poverty after housing costs – meaning that one in four children in Scotland lived in relative poverty in 2015/16.

- Shelter Scotland is appalled at the level of child poverty across Scotland and alarmed by the recent increase. More must be done by all partners to urgently address the causes, consequences and responses to poverty.
- We strongly support the aim and intention of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill and the introduction of statutory targets for reducing child poverty and interim targets which will help with monitoring and accountability.
- We believe however, that the targets introduced by the Bill do not adequately represent housing costs and welcome the recommendation that the Committee should look again at how household income is calculated.
- It is vital that the measurement mechanisms and Measurement Framework and indicators are right before the statutory targets are introduced to ensure successful and meaningful delivery.

We strongly support the inclusion of clear statutory targets to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill signals the Scottish Parliament's commitment to tackling child poverty and focuses the priorities and resources of policymakers at a national and local level.

However, we believe that, given the devastating impact that prolonged experience of poverty has on the long-term prospects of children,¹ **the persistent poverty target should be based on a two-year period rather than a three-year period.** The Social Security Committee agreed that the Bill should include a more challenging target on persistent poverty.

Despite the targets taking housing costs into consideration, **Shelter Scotland is concerned that housing costs are not adequately represented.** Housing costs, for instance, currently only include the interest element of a mortgage and not the capital element. We therefore welcome the recommendation of the Committee to give further consideration to other deductions when the net household income is calculated.

Shelter Scotland strongly supports the inclusion of interim targets. This would allow for greater public scrutiny and better enable the Scottish Government, Parliament, local bodies and the public to measure progress towards the 2030 targets.

¹ Dickerson, A. and Popli, G. (2012) [Persistent poverty and children's cognitive development: Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort Study](#), CLS Cohort Studies Working Paper 2012/2.

Shelter Scotland would also like to stress the importance of other measurement mechanisms. The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) was developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2008 and provides a benchmark of minimum needs based on goods and services that the public think are necessary for an adequate standard of living in the UK.² This is updated annually and includes food, clothes, housing, and social and cultural participation. JRF uses 75 per cent of the MIS as a poverty indicator. The importance of the MIS has been recognised by Naomi Eisenstadt, who has warned about looking at income by itself and argues that the MIS should especially be considered when examining rural poverty. Other important measures examine changes to income inequality over time, such as the 20:20 ratio or the Gini coefficient.

In order to ensure the success of the Child Poverty Bill, the Scottish Government will need to address a wide range of factors, which influence child poverty. The large number of factors means that it is difficult to measure child poverty and that a comprehensive approach is needed. Social networks, which often help to, for example, address childcare needs, and community amenities make a real difference to how well children cope with living in poverty. Yet, the lack of affordable housing means that more and more families have to move away from such networks. Through our advice services and especially our Foundations First project based in Paisley, we know that the lack of affordable childcare has often directly contributed to the families' impoverishment and prevents them from escaping poverty.

The delivery plans will play a key part in securing the success of this Bill in addressing these important issues, including the provision of affordable and accessible housing across Scotland. **Shelter Scotland therefore supports the Committee's call for the inclusion of the content and shape of the delivery plans in the Bill.** We further support the proposed focus of the delivery plans on the full use of Scottish social security powers, the importance of providing information, assistance and advice on welfare rights and income maximisation, the provision of affordable and suitable housing, the availability of affordable childcare, and assisting parents and carers to secure and maintain employment.

While Shelter Scotland supports the Child Poverty Measurement Framework and believes that it is an important addition to the proposed income-based targets, we suggest that additional indicators should be added. **We therefore strongly support the Government's commitment to reviewing the Measurement Framework and to create a wider range of indicators, especially in regard to families affected by bad housing, homelessness and the ongoing benefit reforms.**

Whether the targets are reached will depend on the collaboration between different local and national actors. **Shelter Scotland welcomes the creation of a reference group, which is aimed at providing guidance to health boards and local authorities.** From Shelter Scotland's experience, there is a need to establish a more effective working relationship between the local authority housing departments, children's services and health boards building on the integration of health and social care. The accomplishments of this reference group will, in turn, largely depend on its membership and remit. The importance of housing needs to be

² Davis, et al., (2016), [A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2016](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

adequately represented within this group and we strongly suggest that children themselves are given a voice.

To ensure that the Scottish Minister's progress is efficiently monitored and scrutinised, a national Poverty and Inequality Commission, as detailed in the Fairer Scotland Action Plan, should be established. The establishment of such a commission, on a statutory footing, will ensure that when indicators are not being met, an independent review can take place which provides clear recommendations for targeted action from national and local governments.

Shelter Scotland supports the framework that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill is aiming to establish. It signals a clear commitment to reducing child poverty in Scotland. However, to ensure its success, a comprehensive approach, which takes into consideration and tackles the wide range of factors leading to child poverty, is needed. The interconnected issues of poverty, homelessness, high housing costs and welfare changes must be addressed together if we are to meaningfully tackle them.

Contact:

Nora Uhrig, Policy Officer nora_uhrig@shelter.org.uk 0344 515 1847

Fiona King, Campaigns & Public Affairs Manager Fiona_king@shelter.org.uk 0344 515 2456