

A black and white photograph of five children sitting on a wooden bench, looking out over a park-like area with trees and a building in the distance. The children are seen from behind, and their shadows are cast on the bench.

A BUDGET FOR ENDING CHILD POVERTY:

Our Priorities for the 2023 Scottish Budget

- 1 in 4 children in Scotland are growing up in the grip of poverty. It doesn't have to be this way.
- Every child has a right to a decent standard of living that meets their physical and social needs and supports their development. We believe all children should be safe, warm, fed, and able to play and learn. Yet not all families have an adequate income to meet these needs. Poverty is fundamentally about a lack of money. It excludes children from the everyday activities and opportunities that their better-off peers enjoy and too often leaves them cold, hungry and without proper fitting shoes. However, child poverty can be solved.
- Budget decisions should be viewed through a child poverty lens – what impact will decisions taken in this budget have on levels of child poverty now and in the future? Decisions now will impact on our ability to meet 2030 targets.
- The Scottish government's *Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan* sets out actions on social security, childcare, employment and housing that are critical to ending child poverty. It has been welcomed by the End Child Poverty coalition. It is now more important than ever to ensure there are sufficient resources available to make these plans a reality.
- Specifically, this budget must:
 - Build on the investment in the Scottish child payment
 - Bolster current income supports provided to children in low-income households
 - Ensure crisis support is adequate and accessible
 - Provide holistic whole family support
 - Support migrant children and caregivers
 - Embed child poverty focused labour market policies

Why action is needed

Sustained action is needed to address the systemic causes of low income for families, including low wages, welfare cuts and rising costs, as part of a step-change in how we value all those with caring responsibilities, including those looking after children.

We must ensure children's right to an adequate standard of living is met now, and for good. Every tool at Scotland's disposal must be used to that end. Families should have financial security. That means having an adequate income that meets material needs and enables participation in society, an income that is secure and reliable, ensures costs for essentials are manageable and enables families to manage shocks to their income and have autonomy to make their own financial decisions.

Experiencing poverty means living on a low income, so we must see a cash first response for families now and in the long-term. This must include targeted support for children and those who care for them. Families need predictable, consistent, and sustainable incomes. Where any level of government can do more to loosen the grip of poverty then it must. We can end child poverty – for good.

Build on the investment in the Scottish child payment

We welcome the significant investment that has been made in the Scottish child payment – this will have a very real impact on families across Scotland. However, this investment in the Scottish child payment must be sustained, and gaps in entitlement filled. This budget must :

- Ensure the Scottish child payment *at the very least* retains its real terms value, through an above inflation increase in April 2023;
- Provide sufficient additional resources to mitigate the impact of the two-child limit and younger parent penalty in order to maximise the impact of the SCP; and
- Ensure local authorities have sufficient resources to deliver the welcome commitment to mitigate the UK benefit cap 'as fully as possible' in Scotland.

Bolster current income supports provided to children in low-income households

Best Start grants, Best Start foods, school clothing grants and free school meals all provide much-needed support to low-income families. We believe that all this support must be protected and increased. We welcome the cash-first approach to provision of free school meal replacement support over the school holidays by local authorities, it is important that this continues to be resourced. Systems need to be established to enable a cash first approach to free school meals for those that are not in school over mealtime, such as those students who are on part-time timetables, face formal and informal exclusions, are on study leave, have medical reasons or are home schooling. We know that the stigma attached to being entitled to free school meals significantly hampers take-up. This could be tackled by making all children and young people eligible for free school meals. This budget must :

- Increase the level of best start grants from April 2023, by *at the very least* the rate of inflation to ensure they retain their real terms value;
- Provide resource to immediately extend eligibility to free school meals to all children in primary school and at the very least to all secondary school pupils where a parent or guardian is in receipt of universal credit or equivalent benefit;
- Increase the eligibility criteria and value of school clothing grant to maximise the number of families that are supported with costs; and
- Ensure local authorities have the resources to enable a cash first approach to free school meals for those that are not in school over mealtime.

Ensure crisis support is adequate and accessible

For many people, the Scottish Welfare Fund represents a much-needed lifeline when facing the income shocks created by the inadequacies of the social security system. Yet our organisations have mounting evidence that the Fund is often neither adequate nor accessible, with best practice models of delivery not always implemented.

In many cases Scottish Welfare Fund does not appear to be acting as the safety net it is intended to be for families in urgent financial need. The experience of organisations working directly with those families and providing help and support, such as Aberlour, OPFS and Save the Children through their hardship funds or the Trussell Trust through their food banks, is that families are turning to charities and other support organisations and not realising their potential eligibility to support from Scottish Welfare Fund. This budget must :

- Ensure the Scottish Welfare Fund provides consistent and adequate support in a crisis including when families face exceptional pressures. In order to achieve this:
 - There must be significant enhanced investment in the Scottish Welfare fund.

The ever-increasing complexity of social security, along with rising costs and insufficient wages, means more people than ever are seeking advice from welfare rights services. Evidence from CPAG's advice line consistently highlights that many people cannot access their maximum social security entitlement without expert help and advice. This budget must :

- provide sufficient investment to fund the expansion of income maximisation and advice services, including the training of new advisers.

Recent research by Aberlour has highlighted the impact public sector debt has on low-income families. To provide immediate support to these families, The Scottish government must:

- Put a pause on collecting debt and arrears owed to public bodies to provide breathing space for families.

Guarantee holistic whole family support – including practical, emotional and financial support – is available to all families needing help

Emotional and recovery support for children and families that need it cannot be separated from practical and financial support. We need a clear commitment to sustainable investment in holistic whole family support, if we are to ensure early and preventative help is available to all families who need it in line with the recommendations of the Independent Care Review (The Promise) and children's rights as set out in the UNCRC. We believe that this will limit the possibility of families' problems developing into crises, due to a lack of adequate help and support from systems that don't work.

A holistic approach to working with families builds on their existing strengths and enables the development of strong, trusting relationships with and within families. We recognise the variety of structures in which families exist, and holistic support that aims to ensure all families get the help they need must also recognise and respond to how families recognise and define themselves. Working in partnership alongside families to identify solutions to the challenges they experience is key to helping develop and maintain safe, nurturing and loving environments where children can thrive, and making sure families can stay together. This budget must provide:

- Sufficient resources to implement a national approach to holistic whole family support that guarantees practical, emotional and financial help and assistance to all families across Scotland who need it. Anti-poverty and income maximisation work should be embedded into all whole family support.
 - Specifically, the Scottish government's Whole Family Wellbeing Fund needs to be prioritised and ring fenced to provide the much-needed support now.
 - All beneficiaries of the fund should be required to demonstrate the anti-poverty practice and policy that has been embedded in the service provided.
 - Sufficient resource needs to be made available to meet high levels of need for mental health services for adults and children affected by poverty.

Support migrant children and caregivers

Many migrant families and children are excluded from, or face a range of barriers to accessing mainstream social security benefits, regardless of how acute their need is. ECP members experience is that knowledge of migrants' rights is very limited within public services and too often based on an assumption that migrant families and children cannot be provided with financial support. Local authorities have limited powers and some statutory duties to provide support through social services, however, this is very limited and often inadequate to lift families out of extreme poverty and meet children's essential needs. No child should be pulled into destitution. This budget must:

- Ensure local authorities receive the funds that would allow them to use local powers to provide payments to migrant families whose status limits their rights to social security benefits and who are at risk of destitution. These could be used to provide equivalent financial support to the Scottish child payment and at the very least should provide sufficient financial support to meet essential needs.

Embed child poverty focused labour market policies

Women account for most low-paid workers in Scotland, and two-thirds of workers being paid less than the living wage are women. Tackling women's low pay and addressing child poverty should therefore be viewed as intertwined ambitions.

The government must boost the provision of accessible, affordable and flexible childcare through the delivery of the increased funded childcare entitlement for young children at the earliest opportunity. Childcare is the most immediate barrier to women being able to work, study and train. Childcare can also play an important role in local economic regeneration strategies through offering employment, providing opportunities for mothers to access the wider labour market, and improving the quality of provision for children in areas of deprivation.

We need to see family incomes protected and stabilised through employment support for parents, building on the existing Parental Employment Support Fund. Employability support must not push people, particularly those with caring responsibilities, towards paid work without taking account of the structural barriers, such as affordable and accessible childcare, which trap parents, especially mothers, in poverty. Employability must offer holistic support to help parents towards the labour market and to realise a sustainable livelihood, with the support provided shaped by those accessing it.

This budget must:

- Invest in further expansion of high-quality, accessible, and flexible early learning and childcare;
- Drive improvements in the quality of work, particularly in female-dominated sectors such as social care and childcare – including addressing low-pay and ensuring secure work conditions;
- Reduce barriers to entering and remaining in well paid employment for those groups identified as being in higher risk of poverty - people impacted by disability, lone parents, BME communities and larger families;
- Ensure there are sufficient resources invested in employability service to ensure the targets in the child poverty delivery plan are met; and
- Allocate sufficient funding for the implementation of the employability commitments in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, including the Parental Transition Fund, to ensure that employability support meets the needs of priority families.

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