



# PRIORITIES FOR THE 2023-24 PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

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The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland works for the one in four children in Scotland growing up in poverty. We collect evidence from families living in poverty and campaign for solutions to bring about a society where children have a fair chance in life free from hardship. We provide training, advice and information on social security to frontline workers to make sure families get the financial support they need. In this briefing we look at how the *Programme for Government 2023 to 2024* and the *2024/25 Scottish budget* can ensure the Scottish government makes further substantive progress toward meeting Scotland's statutory child poverty targets.

## Summary

### The Scottish government's Programme for Government 2023-24 must:

- Increase the Scottish child payment *at the very least* to £30 per week from April 2024, as committed by the First Minister in his leadership campaign. To be sure of bringing child poverty below 18% **analysis suggests a £40 Scottish child payment is needed.**
- Ensure sufficient resources are harnessed and allocated to fund the wider measures set out in the statutory child poverty delivery plan - *Best Start, Bright Futures*.
- Provide **additional cash payments to families impacted by the two-child limit and the under 25 penalty** in universal credit.
- Continue to provide **sufficient investment in Best Start payments** to, at the very least, ensure they retain their real terms value.
- **Expand income maximisation and advice services**, including the training of new advisers.
- **Invest in childcare** so not only can the actions in *Best Start, Bright Futures* be delivered, but every parent can access the childcare they need, when they need it.
- Keep the commitment to **increase the minimum school clothing grant in line with inflation.**
- Ensure that **schools have sufficient resources to remove cost barriers**, including to provide every child with a device and connectivity; remove costs for curriculum related trips and activities and ensure all pupils are able to attend 'rite of passage' trips.



- **Roll out free school meals to all primary school pupils** and create a timetable for the introduction of universal free school meals in secondary schools.
- Make **further investment in the Scottish welfare fund**, including the administration and promotion of the fund to ensure it can meet demand.
- Ensure local authorities receive sufficient funds and clear guidance to enable them to use local powers to **provide payments to migrant families whose status limits their rights to social security benefits**.
- **Be bold in using tax powers in a progressive way** to ensure sufficient resources are available to fully deliver on the actions that are needed to tackle child poverty.

## Introduction

Tackling child poverty in Scotland is a priority for the Scottish government, and **the government's policies are working to reduce child poverty**. Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis concludes that, as a result of recent Scottish tax and benefit policies, "amongst the poorest 30% of households, those with children will see their incomes boosted by around a sizeable £2,000 a year" compared to those in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> Our Cost of a Child in Scotland report<sup>2</sup> shows the investment in the Scottish child payment and other low-income benefits, free school meals, free bus travel, funded childcare and reducing the costs of the school day are all having a welcome impact. Analyses shows that child poverty in Scotland will start to fall significantly.<sup>3</sup> However, more needs to be done to ensure Scotland meets its legally binding child poverty targets.<sup>4</sup>

The commitment from the First Minister to use '*all the powers we have to reach our targets of substantially reducing child poverty*'<sup>5</sup> is therefore very welcome. In his first budget these words must be matched by actions. The 2024/25 budget must at the very least harness and allocate sufficient resources to fund the measures set out in the statutory child poverty delivery plan - Best Start, Bright Futures. These measures are vital to both lift families out of poverty and prevent families falling into poverty. However, the Scottish government's own analysis<sup>6</sup> shows that the interim child poverty target may be missed, and that its current policy package is not sufficient to meet the 2030 target of less than 10% of children living in poverty by 2030. **Below we set out what the spending priorities should be to ensure child poverty targets are met.**

## Spending priorities

### The Scottish child payment

A key cause of child poverty is inadequate social security<sup>7</sup>. The Scottish child payment, an additional social security payment to many low-income families, is proving a vital investment. It is forecast to reduce child poverty in Scotland by around five percentage points – lifting up to 50 000 children out of poverty.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is essential that the Scottish child payment retains its real terms value. **By April 2024 it will not have been increased for 16 months**. Families have been facing inflation rates that haven't been seen for decades - with costs still rising, and low-income households worst affected.<sup>9</sup> **The First Minister committed to increase the Scottish child payment to £30 a week in "his first budget if elected first minister"**.<sup>10</sup> This is the *minimum* extra investment that is needed to support families. Analysis<sup>11</sup> suggests a payment of £40 per week will be needed to ensure child poverty levels fall below the 2023/24 interim target by 2024/25. **The Scottish government must increase the Scottish child payment to at the least £30 per week from April 2024, as committed by the First Minister. However, to be sure of bringing child poverty below the interim target level a £40 Scottish child payment is needed.**

## The two-child limit

Families already at increased risk of poverty are being badly affected by UK wide social security policies - the two-child limit,<sup>12</sup> the benefit cap<sup>13</sup>, the bedroom tax and the young parent penalty.<sup>14</sup> The responsibility for these policies lies with Westminster and the UK government must abolish them at source. The Scottish government mitigation of the bedroom tax and benefit cap are extremely welcome.<sup>15</sup> With CPAG analysis now showing the two-child limit affects over 80 000 children in Scotland and pushes up to 15 000 of them into poverty it is necessary for the Scottish government to now address its impact. The young parent penalty also reduces the income of families at particular risk of poverty.<sup>16</sup> The most effective way to mitigate these policies in Scotland is through additional payments of the Scottish child payment to the families that are affected.<sup>17</sup> **The Scottish government must address the impact of the two-child limit and the under 25 penalty in universal credit through additional payments of the Scottish child payment.**

## Other cash payments

Other Social Security Scotland cash payments to low-income families - Best Start grants paid at key points in a child's life, and Best Start food payments - provide vital additional financial support. However, at present not all families in poverty are entitled to all these payments. We therefore welcome the commitment to extend Best Start foods to all families entitled to universal credit in February 2024.<sup>18</sup> **The Scottish budget must provide sufficient investment in these payments, to, at the very least, ensure they retain their real terms value.** Legislation<sup>19</sup> should be amended to ensure they continue to retain their value in the future.

The ever-increasing complexity of social security, along with rising costs and insufficient wages, mean more people than ever are seeking advice from welfare rights services. Evidence from our advice line consistently highlights that many people cannot access their maximum social security entitlement without expert help and advice. We welcome the colocation of advice services, and effective referral pathways, that we are seeing in local authorities and health settings across Scotland.<sup>20</sup> However, we understand that there is a lack of capacity within advice services,<sup>21</sup> as well as difficulty recruiting new advisers. **The Scottish budget must provide sufficient investment to fund the expansion of income maximisation and advice services, including the training of new advisers.**

## Employment and childcare

The level of paid work in a family is a key factor in providing protection from poverty. In a family where one adult works full time and one part time, the risk of child poverty is 7%, compared to 40% where there is only part time employment.<sup>22</sup> Yet more than two thirds of children in poverty live in working households.<sup>23</sup> There is evidence that child poverty, gender and disability are linked. Analysis suggests that removing barriers to work for mothers and for parents affected by disability, and tackling the labour market inequality they face, is necessary to address child poverty.<sup>24</sup> The Scottish government's child poverty delivery plans committed to reducing the gender, ethnicity and disability pay and employment gaps. **The Scottish government must do more to tackle the structural employment barriers and inequalities that these groups face.**

Lack of appropriate childcare, and the childcare costs families face, continue to lock children in poverty, despite significant improvements in funded childcare in Scotland in recent years. We welcome the commitments the Scottish government has already made,<sup>25</sup> and the recognition in the *Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022 to 2026*,<sup>26</sup> that tackling child poverty will require further investment in childcare. Government must now prioritise investment to ensure that the commitment (set out in the delivery plan) of a funded offer of early learning and childcare for children aged one and two and a system of school age childcare are

implemented. However, it needs to go further and ensure every parent can access the childcare they need, when they need it. A strategy with adequate funding must be put in place toward delivering on the vision for childcare in Scotland developed by CPAG, Close the Gap, One Parent Families Scotland, Parenting across Scotland, Save the Children and others.<sup>27</sup> In short, **the Scottish government must fund and deliver the commitments in *Best Start, Bright Futures*, and go further to ensure every parent can access up to 50 hours childcare per week, when they need it.**

## Housing

Housing costs have an important impact on child poverty. In the period 2019 - 2022, before housing costs are taken into consideration 22% of children were living in poverty, after housing costs that figure rises to 24%.<sup>28</sup> This reflects the inadequacy of the incomes families have at their disposal once housing costs, over which they often have limited control, are taken into account. Good quality, affordable family housing is still too often difficult to access. Reduced support for housing costs within the UK social security system leaves many families with a shortfall which they must cover from other means, including benefits not meant for housing costs. This can leave families with little or nothing to live on, pushing them into deeper poverty. **The Scottish government must ensure an adequate supply of affordable, secure, good quality family housing.**

## Free school meals

The cost of school meals continues to be a significant pressure on increasingly hard-pressed household budgets, particularly for those just above the means-tested threshold for free meals. Research continues to show that universal provision is progressive and helps tackle inequality.<sup>29</sup> It is disappointing that the Scottish government's commitment to introduce free school meals to all primary school children by August 2022<sup>30</sup> has not been met. We are concerned that there is still no agreed timetable for the full roll out of this policy.

The same approach should be taken towards school meals in high schools. We understand that there are capacity and logistical barriers to extending provision in high schools, but a commitment to a universal approach would give local authorities the confidence to invest in creating sufficient catering facilities in all high schools. An immediate first step could be the extension of free school meals to all families in receipt of universal credit, or an equivalent means-tested benefit<sup>31</sup> as part of a roadmap towards universal provision. **The Scottish government must roll out free school meals to all primary school pupils and create a timetable for the introduction of universal free school meals in secondary schools.**

## School clothing grants

Uniform is frequently cited by parents and carers as one of their most significant school costs. Uniform policies vary from school to school, and this has implications for affordability. The new statutory guidance on school uniform must be brought in as soon as possible. The national minimum<sup>32</sup> school clothing grant is also welcome. The SNP manifesto committed to increase the minimum grant in line with inflation each year,<sup>33</sup> but this has not happened. In real terms the value of clothing grants has fallen over the past two years.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore many struggling families' have incomes that are above the income thresholds used to define eligibility for the grants. These thresholds have also not increased in line with inflation.

**The Scottish Government must:**

- **Keep the commitment to increase the minimum clothing grant in line with inflation, lifting them to at least £150 for primary school and £185 for high school pupils by the summer 2024;<sup>35</sup> and**
- **Work with local authorities to ensure that income thresholds used for school clothing grants increase**

*at a minimum* in line with inflation, as a step towards extending eligibility to all families in receipt of universal credit (or an equivalent benefits).

## Other costs of the school day

The Scottish government has committed to ‘ensure access to a device for every school aged child’;<sup>36</sup> to ‘support schools to provide inclusive trips and activities for all and ensure consistent practice across Scotland’, and to ‘ensure that schools and teachers are resourced to deliver [the Curriculum for Excellence]’.<sup>37</sup> With families continuing to face rising costs it is now more important than ever that costs of the school day are minimised. **The Scottish government must ensure that local authorities and schools have sufficient resources to:**

- provide every child with a device and connectivity;
- ensure families do not face costs for curriculum related trips and activities;
- ensure all pupils are able to attend ‘rite of passage’ trips, such as P7 residential; and
- introduce minimum entitlement for all secondary pupils to attend at least one ‘optional’ trip during their time at school.

## Cash first support in a crisis – the Scottish welfare fund

Despite the Scottish government’s welcome commitments to a cash first approach to supporting households in immediate crisis<sup>38</sup> too many families in Scotland continue to rely on emergency food aid or charity handouts.<sup>39</sup>

For those in immediate crisis the Scottish welfare fund should be the key source of cash first support. The government’s Scottish Welfare Fund Action Plan,<sup>40</sup> should, if fully implemented, address many of the concerns that have previously been identified in the administration and promotion of the fund. **The Scottish government must now provide sufficient investment in the administration and promotion of the Scottish welfare fund to ensure those who need it can get the support they need, and it can play the fullest possible role in ending the need for foodbanks.**

The government’s review of the Fund also notes evidence that demand for crisis support is now outstripping the funding local authorities are provided with, putting increasing pressure on wider Scottish welfare fund budgets.<sup>41</sup> The role of the Scottish welfare fund is not only to provide financial support in a crisis, but also to provide vital support through community care grants. **The Scottish government must ensure investment in the Scottish welfare fund can meet demand for crisis support as well as the wider role of providing community care grants.**

Not everyone is able to access cash support via the Scottish welfare fund. The Scottish welfare fund is only able to help when someone has a crisis or has a need for ‘occasional support’,<sup>42</sup> whereas many people are in need of ongoing access to emergency food. Some families are also excluded from accessing the fund, such as those who have ‘no recourse to public funds.’ **The Scottish government must ensure local authorities receive sufficient funds and clear guidance to enable them to use local powers to provide payments to, for example, migrant families whose status limits their rights to social security benefits and who are at risk of destitution.**<sup>43</sup>

## Using tax powers to tackle child poverty.

Taxation policy needs to ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver on the Scottish government’s priorities, legal child poverty commitments and human rights obligations. It should not be assumed current taxation policy will be sufficient. Scotland has wide ranging powers over taxation, the full scope of which are

still to be explored. The Scottish government needs to review all devolved tax powers and identify how to make progressive use of those powers to fund the social infrastructure needed, not just to prevent more children being pushed into poverty, but to help end that poverty for good. **The Scottish government must commit to undertaking and publishing a review of Scotland's tax powers. The scope of the review should be bold and include, for example, opportunities to overhaul council tax and introduce Scotland specific taxes on wealth and inheritance.**

## Income tax

The next year will be financially challenging for government,<sup>44</sup> but with prices and costs continuing to rise it will be even more challenging for low-income families. The Scottish government must ensure it has the additional revenues needed to invest in preventing child poverty. The changes made to income tax in Scotland to date have been progressive and provided welcome additional resources to help meet government priorities, including the reduction of child poverty. However, there is more that the Scottish government could do. Changes to income tax are the quickest way for the Scottish government to raise more revenue in a fair and progressive way. Given the pressure on existing government resources this budget must make **further progressive changes to income tax to generate the additional revenue needed to fully deliver action needed to meet child poverty commitments.**

In the longer term increasing the tax base in Scotland is important to allow sufficient revenue to be generated. Closing the gender pay gap would bring more women into the tax system, and create more higher rate taxpayers, as well as reducing child poverty. Investment in childcare helps increase employment and increases the tax base, whilst also reducing costs for families. Removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities, BME communities, low-income households, and women, would increase the income from work for many families at greater risk of poverty, whilst also increasing the number of taxpayers.

Despite aspects of employment legislation being reserved to the UK government there is much that could be done in Scotland. The Scottish government must leverage the influence public procurement plays to promote more family friendly employment opportunities. There is also a key role for employers in Scotland to play in bringing about these changes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2023) *Scottish Budget changes to tax and benefit system widen gap with rest of the UK, with higher taxes and more redistribution to poorer families*. Available at <https://ifs.org.uk/news/scottish-budget-changes-tax-and-benefit-system-widen-gap-rest-uk-higher-taxes-and-more>

<sup>2</sup> See our Cost of Child in Scotland report commissioned by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland from the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University. <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-child-scotland-2022-update>

<sup>3</sup> For example, Fraser of Allander (2023) *Meeting the Scottish child poverty targets – is it a case of too little, too late?*. Available at <https://fraserofallander.org/meeting-the-scottish-child-poverty-targets-is-it-a-case-of-too-little-too-late/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/2022/cpupdate.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-opportunity-community-new-leadership-fresh-start/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/annex-b-cumulative-impact-assessment-update/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/pages/4/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-child-payment-increased/> and <https://www.gov.scot/publications/annex-b-cumulative-impact-assessment-update/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/cost-living-crisis>

<sup>10</sup> “Yousaf has previously announced he would look to increase the payment, but says he would push it to £30 per week from £25 in his first budget if elected first minister.” <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2023/mar/07/snp-leadership-debate-live-hamza-yousaf-kate-forbes-and-ash-regan-to-set-out-visions-for-scotland> and <https://twitter.com/CPAGScotland/status/1633482352193052673>

<sup>11</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research (2023). Poverty doesn’t have to be inevitable – it needs political will and investment to eradicate. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/blog/poverty-doesn-t-have-to-be-inevitable-it-needs-political-will-and-investment-to-eradicate>

<sup>12</sup> The two-child limit is a UK government policy that prevents families in receipt of universal credit (UC) or child tax credits (CTC) from getting a child element for a third or subsequent child born after 6th April 2017, unless one of a small number of exceptions applies. Over 80 000 children in Scotland are adversely impacted by this policy. See <https://cpag.org.uk/topic/two-child-limit> for more details.

<sup>13</sup> The cap limits the amount of social security support that households with no work or low earnings can receive and overrides the amount that the DWP assesses a family to need. The cap is the same for a family of two as a family of five, meaning that households with children who rent their homes and therefore have higher costs are affected most deeply by the flat-rate of the cap. See <https://cpag.org.uk/topic/benefit-cap> for more detail.

<sup>14</sup> All people aged under 25 receive substantially less on UC than those over 25. Unlike in the legacy benefit system, UC extends this penalty to younger parents. This makes single younger parents £70 a month worse off and couple parents £110 a month worse off than on legacy benefits.

<sup>15</sup> The Scottish government provides funding through discretionary housing payments to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax and the benefit cap. See <https://cpag.org.uk/scotland/welfare-rights/scottish-benefits/discretionary-housing-payments-scotland> for more details.

<sup>16</sup> <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/campaigns/end-young-parent-poverty/>

<sup>17</sup> CPAG and OPFS held round tables with stakeholders, Scottish government officials and experts to discuss the most effective way of mitigating the two-child limit and young parent penalty that concluded the Scottish child payment was the most effective method.

<sup>18</sup> At present, parents over 18 can only get Best Start foods if they get a qualifying benefit *and* their income is below a certain level. See <https://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods/best-start-apply> for full details. The Scottish government has committed to removing income thresholds.

<sup>19</sup> Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 could be amended to include Best Start grants under Sec 86B, this would require Scottish Ministers to uprate Best Start grants in line with inflation. If the legislative footing of Best Start Foods is changed they too can be include in Sec 86B.

- <sup>20</sup> For example, see reports from the Improvement service *Embedding Access to Money and Welfare Rights Advice in Education Settings*, available from: <https://sway.office.com/TJRjaKUWAHmT0aBP?ref=email&loc=play> and *Child Poverty and the Cost of Living*, available from [https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/40523/child-poverty-cost-of-living-briefing.pdf](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/40523/child-poverty-cost-of-living-briefing.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup> See, for example, NHS GG&C *Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan - Universal Pathway Money Advice Directive*
- <sup>22</sup> Scottish Government, [Additional child poverty analysis 2020](#) Table 6a (2020)
- <sup>23</sup> Scottish Government, *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2019-22*, (2023). Available at <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/index.html#children>
- <sup>24</sup> JRF, (2018), *Poverty in Scotland 2018* available from <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2018>
- <sup>25</sup> Further investment in childcare through, for example, the funding 1140 hours of childcare for all pre-school children from the age of three and additional investment in funding childcare provision for some families for two year olds.
- <sup>26</sup> *Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026*, Scottish government, 2022, available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/vision-childcare-helps-end-child-poverty-scotland>
- <sup>28</sup> Scottish Government *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2019-22* (2023). Available at <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#Children>
- <sup>29</sup> For example C.J. Morelli and P.T. Seaman (2022), *Understanding Society: Poverty, Wealth and Inequality in the UK*, London: Routledge also see C.J. Morelli and P. Seaman, 2010, *Devolution as a policy crucible: the case of universal free school meals*, *Poverty & Public Policy*, Vol. 2: Iss. 1, pp.139-61, DOI: 10.2202/1944-2858.1032 <http://www.psocommons.org/ppp/vol2/iss1/art7/> also see C. J. Morelli, G. Mooney and P. Seaman 2012, 'Moving 'Upstream'? The Case for Universalism and Redistribution in Tackling Poverty and Inequality in the Devolved Scotland', in M. Leith, I. McPhee and T. Laxton, (ed.s), *Scottish Devolution and Social Policy - Evidence from the First Decade*, (Cambridge). ISBN 978-1-4438-3790-3
- <sup>30</sup> Scottish government news release *Budget deal secured, new initiatives on free school meals, pay and the environment* (2021). Available at <https://www.gov.scot/news/budget-deal-secured/>
- <sup>31</sup> The benefits of extending entitlement beyond the current entitlement are explored in our free school meals policy paper available from <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/briefing/free-school-meals-policy-paper>
- <sup>32</sup> Currently £120 for primary school children and £150 for secondary school children
- <sup>33</sup> Scottish National Party (2021) *Scotland's Future*. SNP Manifesto 2021. "If re-elected we will review the real cost of school uniforms for less well-off families, increasing the grant to at least £120 in primary school and £150 in secondary school and ensure it increases each year with inflation." p61 [https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04\\_15\\_snp\\_manifesto\\_2021\\_a4\\_document?mode=window](https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021_a4_document?mode=window)
- <sup>34</sup> CPAG analysis shows that if school clothing grants had kept pace with inflation, they would be worth around £141 for primary school children and £177 for high school pupils in August 2024.
- <sup>35</sup> Using average inflation forecasts this is the level needed to maintain the grants real terms value in 2024/25.
- <sup>36</sup> *Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026*, Scottish government, 2022, Pg 14 available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-and-scottish-green-party-shared-policy-programme/>
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/pages/1/>
- <sup>3939</sup> <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/2023-Hunger-in-Scotland-report-AW-web.pdf>
- <sup>4040</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-action-plan/pages/1/>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-scottish-welfare-fund-final-report/pages/2/>
- <sup>4242</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-action-plan/pages/1/>
- <sup>43</sup> e.g. people whose immigration status mean that they have no recourse to public funds or EU nationals who have no 'right to reside' or settled status and therefore cannot access social security.
- <sup>44</sup> <https://www.fiscalcommission.scot/publications/scotlands-economic-and-fiscal-forecasts-may-2023/>