



A MANIFESTO FOR ENDING CHILD POVERTY:

Our Priorities for the 2022 Scottish Council Elections

- 1 in 4 children in Scotland are growing up in the grip of poverty. Child poverty was rising in every Scottish local authority area, even before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.¹
- 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.
- Local authorities have a key role to play in ending child poverty in Scotland. They also have a legal duty to produce Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) jointly with their local health board, describing ongoing and planned action to tackle child poverty in their area.
- Local authorities must prioritise action to end child poverty and use all policy levers to their fullest to ensure families have the financial resources they need to give their children a decent start in life. Economic development, employment, education, transport, housing and childcare policies must be developed with the goal of preventing and ending child poverty at their heart.
- This manifesto outlines the key policies and investments that must be made. None of these policies alone will end child poverty in Scotland, but together they would help loosen the grip of poverty on the lives of tens of thousands of children and make a huge difference to children currently denied the opportunities that growing up in Scotland should offer everyone.

End Child Poverty members in Scotland are urging Councillors elected this May to ensure that tackling child poverty is at the heart of all of their policy and spending decisions. Scotland has set legally binding child poverty targets for 2023/24 and 2030. To meet these targets and ensure that children in Scotland are able to grow up free from poverty, local government must play a key role.

¹ <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ECP-Scotland-release-FINAL.docx>

Local authorities face real budgetary challenges, so it's more important than ever that following May's elections every local authority commits to considering the impact of budget decisions on child poverty. A child poverty lens must be placed on all decisions to ensure they contribute to reducing child poverty and don't increase it.²

We are calling on all Councillors elected this May to:

- Ensure robust, time-bound plans to tackle child poverty are in place.
- Ensure access to an adequate supply of affordable, secure, good quality family housing.
- Support 'fair work' employment opportunities for all parents, with a particular focus on groups who face barriers to good quality employment including women, single parents, disabled people and Black and minority ethnic people.
- Ensure economic development investment decisions help tackle the drivers of child poverty.
- Use local powers to deliver more cash support to families.
- Improve access to high quality, free childcare.
- Remove all financial barriers to education for children.
- Invest in holistic family support.
- Improve data sharing to help make sure families get the support they are entitled to.

Plan to tackle child poverty

Tackling child poverty at the local level requires a strategic and multi-disciplinary approach. Local authorities must ensure that all of their powers are used to their fullest to tackle child poverty.

We urge all council candidates to commit to ensuring their local authority:

- Establishes clear outcomes and indicators to measure progress for tackling child poverty at the local level.
- Commits to placing reducing child poverty at the heart of their investments in COVID-19 recovery and tackling the cost of living.
- Ensures responsibility for tackling child poverty is held at a senior management strategic level to ensure that all policy decisions are taken with a child poverty lens.
- Allocates sufficient resources to planning to tackle child poverty. This must ensure that there is an evidence base, that people with experience of poverty play a key role in the development of policy, and that monitoring and evaluation of the actions taken can be carried out.
- Commits to sharing best practice with other local authorities across Scotland in relation to both planning and reporting on action to tackle child poverty.

² Local authorities should consider how measures such as Equality Impact Assessments and the Fairer Scotland Duty could be used to this end. Local authorities have a legal duty to prepare Child Rights Impact Assessments on their plans and these should consider the impact of poverty and be linked to their Local Child Poverty Action Reports. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Scotland) Bill is planned to come into force later this year and will place a legal duty on local authorities to comply with the UNCRC. This includes the right to social security and the right to an adequate standard of living, including a requirement for States Parties to "provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing".

Housing

Housing costs have an important impact on levels of child poverty. In the period 2017- 2020, before housing costs are taken into consideration 21% of children were living in poverty. After housing costs that figure rises to 24%.³ Good quality, affordable housing is still too often difficult to access.⁴ UK social security housing payments leave many families with a shortfall which they must cover from other means, including benefits which are not meant to pay for housing. This can leave families with little or nothing to live on, pushing them into deeper poverty.

Local authorities have a key role to play by ensuring provision of genuinely affordable, accessible family housing. Ahead of the election we urge candidates to commit to:

- Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable, secure, good quality family housing.
- Exploring and implementing initiatives to bring down rents to a genuinely affordable level in both the social and private rented sectors.
- Expanding and improving early person-centred advice and advocacy services to prevent homelessness, including providing income maximisation work.

Fair Employment

While employment should be a route out of poverty, this is not always the case. 68% of children living in poverty in Scotland live in a household where someone is in paid employment.⁵ Women⁶; Black and minority ethnic people; disabled people; and single parents - 90% of whom are women - are less likely to be in good quality employment, and they face a particularly high risk of poverty. We remain some distance from delivering fair work in Scotland. Action on work and earnings remains critical to addressing child poverty.⁷

As women's experiences of poverty are directly tied to their experiences of employment, tackling women's inequality in the labour market is critical if we are to address child poverty. However, women continue to account for the majority of low-paid workers in Scotland and face gendered barriers to progression into higher paid and more senior roles. 60% of workers earning less than the real Living Wage in Scotland are women, and there is low coverage of the real Living Wage in female dominated sectors such as care, cleaning and retail. Concerted action is needed to better value and reward work which is disproportionately undertaken by women, including to reflect that women provide most unpaid care, creating additional barriers to paid employment.⁸

As major employers in local communities, local authorities have an important role to play in addressing women's labour market inequality. While women make up 74% of local government employees women remain under-represented in senior grades across the sector and are concentrated in low-paid jobs. Local authorities can implement policies to advance gender equality and address women's poverty by prioritising action to tackle women's low pay; reducing occupational segregation, ensuring effective support for those juggling work with unpaid caring responsibilities, and supporting victim-survivors of violence against women.

3 'Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20' Scottish Government, 2021. **Before** housing costs local statistics on child poverty on child poverty are published by the DWP at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics#contents>. End Child Poverty also publishes estimates of local child poverty levels **after** housing costs see <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/local-child-poverty-data-2014-15-2019-20/>

4 Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post 2021 Shelter, 2020

5 Poverty and Inequality Commission (2022) *Advice on the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan*

6 Close the Gap (2022) *Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the Child Poverty Delivery Plan*

7 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2018>

8 <https://oxfamapps.org/scotland/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Making-Care-Count-in-Scotland-Oxfam-Scotland-July-2020-1.pdf>

Council candidates must commit to embedding fair employment practices within their own organisation and in the wider community by:

- Driving improvements in the quality of work for local authority employees, including addressing low pay, particularly in female dominated sectors such as social care and child care.
- Introducing greater conditionality for companies from whom they procure services with requirements for them to increase the quality of work they offer, including improving the support they provide to those with caring responsibilities, enabling flexible working and addressing low pay
- Better integrating gender equality and women's experiences of employment into labour market and economic development policymaking, with action to address occupational segregation and the undervaluation of "women's work".
- Ensuring that all economic development investment is assessed for its potential impact on child poverty. The jobs that are created should be high quality and paid at least the real Living Wage. Infrastructure spend should focus on removing the childcare, transport, education and employment barrier families on low incomes face.
- Engaging with Close the Gap's employer accreditation programme, Equally Safe at Work.⁹
- Working with Local Employability Partnerships to implement an improved employability offer to parents identified as a priority in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan - providing tailored provision through a dedicated keyworker and support to access childcare and transport as well as to training, education and sustainable well paid jobs.

Cash support for families

Due to the insecurity of many jobs and the current holes in our social security system, families in Scotland continue to face income crises. Local authorities have a significant role to play in ensuring families get the support they need when they need it.

Food bank use has continued to rise.¹⁰ There is no shortage of food in Scotland and reliance on charity food aid reflects the extent to which tens of thousands of families experience income crises. Whilst individuals and communities have stepped up and tried to plug the obvious gaps in our social security system with food banks and others forms of charity food provision, these are no alternative to the dignity and choice of having enough money to buy food for yourself and your family.¹¹

End Child Poverty members have welcomed action to mitigate the benefit cap through discretionary housing payments (DHPs), and the recent Scottish government commitment to work with local authorities to mitigate the benefit cap as fully as possible¹². The use of DHPs to mitigate the benefit cap is currently inconsistent.

9 Equally Safe at Work, an innovative employer accreditation programme delivered by Close the Gap. The programme was developed to advance women's labour market equality in Scotland through working directly with local authorities in their capacity as employers. Equally Safe at Work supports councils to develop improved gender-sensitive employment practice, and better support victim-survivors in the workplace. Crucially, it enables councils to understand their role as an employer in preventing violence against women.

10 <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

11 The work of the Menu for Change (<https://cpag.org.uk/scotland/menu-for-change#:~:text=A%20Menu%20for%20Change%3A%20Cash,in%20Scotland%20and%20Nourish%20Scotland>) project has laid bare the triggers of food insecurity - inadequate and insecure incomes from work and social security. It has also highlighted the role of the statutory Scottish Welfare Fund as a source of crisis support, and the need to strengthen it to ensure it plays a fuller role as a cash and rights based alternative to charity food aid.

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

We urge council candidates to commit to building on existing action to ensure a dignified cash-first approach to income crises replaces the distribution of emergency food as the prime response to income crisis. This should include:

- Ensuring a same day decision and payment of Crisis Grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund, to ensure that people in crisis are not forced to use a food bank.
- Ensuring information on the Scottish Welfare Fund on the local authority's website is up-to-date, easy to find and understand and available in formats and languages that reflect the communities the local authority serves. Information on local authority websites is too often out of date, difficult to understand or incorrect.
- Ensuring that all agencies that refer to food banks are supported to explore all other options, including the Scottish Welfare Fund, before resorting to a food bank referral. The expectation should be for agencies to make active referrals to advice and support services, rather than simply signpost people in crisis.
- Considering ways of providing payments to migrant families whose status limits their rights to social security benefits and who are at risk of destitution, and ensure policies are in place to do so.¹³
- Prioritising embedding welfare rights and income maximisation work across public facing services. Local authorities have a key role to play in funding, delivering and partnering to provide welfare rights income maximisation services to ensure all families are getting the cash support they are entitled to.
- Use discretionary housing payments (DHPs) to mitigate the benefit cap.

Childcare

The End Child Poverty Coalition have welcomed the expansion of funded childcare in Scotland. It is vital that the expansion delivers high quality services that improve child development and outcomes, as well as enabling parents to work the hours they need and want. Childcare can play an important role in local economic regeneration strategies in terms of dealing with area-based poverty 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.

Childcare remains the most immediate barrier to women being able to work, study and train. The provision of high quality, flexible childcare is inconsistent in Scotland and the prohibitively high cost means that many women reduce their hours after having children, or leave their job altogether to do full-time childcare. One-quarter of parents living in absolute poverty have had to give up work and one-third turned down a job because of high cost of childcare.¹⁴ Parents and carers of disabled children pay higher than average costs, and three-quarters have reduced their hours or left their job because of difficulties accessing appropriate childcare.¹⁵ Challenges in accessing affordable and flexible childcare are particularly acute for single parents, 90% of whom are women, thus contributing to higher rates of single parent poverty.

The need to balance earning with caring means women are more likely to work part-time. This exacerbates women's concentration in low paid and insecure work, as most part-time work is found in the lowest paid jobs and sectors, making it difficult for women to combine their caring responsibility with a job that is commensurate with their skill level. While some progress to improve employment support in Scotland have been taken, there is more to do to establish a distinct Scottish approach to employability which provides tailored support to those with caring responsibilities.¹⁶

13 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. For an example see: <http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/migrants-rights-entitlements/introduction/1-1-how-use-guidance>

14 Family and Childcare Trust (2017) *Childcare Survey 2017*

15 UK Parliament (2014) *Report of the parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children*

16 <https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ExploringEmployabilitySupportforSingleParentsandCarers.pdf>

Part-time work is negatively correlated with progression out of low-paid work¹⁷ and part-time jobs are more than three times more likely to pay below the Living Wage than full-time roles.¹⁸ The Covid-19 crisis underscored the importance of childcare infrastructure to women's ability to sustain employment, and to the wider economy. Investing in high-quality affordable childcare should therefore be a key priority for local authorities as part of recovery from the pandemic.

To improve access to affordable, flexible and accessible childcare candidates should commit to:

- Ensuring that the local delivery of the 1140 hours of funded childcare is sufficiently flexible to meet parents' needs.
- Ensuring that parents of disabled children have access to affordable and appropriate childcare.
- Recognising childcare as vital infrastructure investment in local economic development strategies.
- Supporting the development of wraparound childcare and expansion of early learning and childcare to one-and-two-year-olds as early priorities.
- Ensuring that out of school and holiday care is affordable and available.

Remove Financial Barriers to Education

Charging for curriculum materials, lack of digital devices and connectivity, the cost of school trips, uniform policies, transport and school meal costs continue to exclude young people from learning opportunities and heap additional pressure on already inadequate family budgets.¹⁹

Schools across Scotland are working hard to support children on low incomes to ensure their inclusion and participation. But further action is needed from local authorities to ensure school education is genuinely free, and that children don't miss out as a result of their family's financial circumstances.

Candidates should commit to:

- Implementing automatic payment of school clothing grants and delivery of free school meal entitlement to remove barriers to application and boost uptake.
- Investing in advice workers in schools to ensure families are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to.²⁰
- Going further on roll out of free healthy school meals, beyond the statutory requirement and rolling out to P6s and P7s as soon as possible. Beyond this further action should be taken, in the first instance extending entitlement to all pupils in families in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent legacy benefits.
- Designating a senior leader within education services who will champion Cost of the School Day work and take strategic responsibility for it
- Ensuring a regular review of action to tackle the cost of the school day is built into planning cycles and review or audit processes.
- Ensuring local governance structures are in place to enable progress to be monitored and impact to be understood.

17 In-Work Progression Commission (2021) *Supporting Progression Out of Low-paid Work*

18 Jones, Gareth (2019) 'Women benefit from living wage expansion', *Third Force News*, available at <https://tfn.scot/news/women-benefit-from-living-wage-expansion>

19 https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policy/Cost_of_Learning_in_Lockdown_2021_Scotland_findings.pdf

20 Example of successful school based advice provision can be found in Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh see eg https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/Talking%20about%20Costs%20and%20Money%20at%20School_1.pdf

Invest in holistic family support

Families must be able to access early help and support which addresses the challenges they are experiencing, builds resilience to ensure families are better equipped to navigate difficult periods in their lives, and crucially, which prevents escalation to the point of crisis. We believe that, in the context of the ambitions set out by the Scottish government to incorporate the UNCRC and to fully implement the vision set out by The Promise, families have a right to this early and continuing help and support, along the same lines as other public services like schools, health visitors or GPs. Furthermore, we know what this support should look like because families have told us what works best for them – that relationship-based, non-judgmental, flexible and holistic support is available to every family in the way they want, where they want, and for as long as they need it. Families want to be treated with dignity and stigma is a significant barrier to asking for help.

Income adequacy is a fundamental element of holistic family support provision. Articles 26 and 27 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outline that it is a government's responsibility to ensure the financial support necessary is made available through social security measures for families who need financial assistance, in order to provide an adequate standard of living to meet children's needs. We believe that any commitment to providing holistic family support, to implementing The Promise and to incorporating the UNCRC cannot be realised without an explicit commitment to ensuring income adequacy and the necessary financial support for families at risk of being pushed or falling further into poverty. Making sure that families have the means to provide for themselves is essential if we are to begin to address the conditions that perpetuate poverty and help them to recover from trauma.

We want local election candidates to commit to:

- Ensuring access to family support services in every local community and ensuring that the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund is put to use for the benefit of families across Scotland.

Data Sharing

Local authorities should look at how they can address technical and legal barriers to their ability to share data in ways that could help to increase the take up of benefits and other entitlements, and reduce child poverty. Specifically, they should look at how Social Security Scotland, local authorities and other partners could share data in ways to maximise take up of entitlements. Sharing data more effectively could ensure poverty reduction measures reach families who most need the support, be used to identify barriers to accessing services that some groups may face and allow the automation of payments to families²¹.

Council candidates should:

- Commit to supporting their local authority to analyse the data they hold in order to target information on benefits and other entitlements to households that are likely to be eligible for support, or face specific barriers to accessing support.

21 For example, Glasgow has pioneered the use of housing benefit, council tax reduction and education data to automate payment of school clothing grants without need for applications: <https://youtu.be/OIWE79tGtmg>