

Child Poverty Bill enacted as strategic direction is set out by Whitehall

The Child Poverty Act received Royal Assent days before the Prime Minister called the general election. It seals a historic consensus across the political parties that the eradication of child poverty by 2020 should be a firm target and a major policy priority for government.

CPAG worked closely with partners in the Campaign to End Child Poverty to secure improvements to the Bill. Our successes included an amendment to require that government strategy considers which groups of children in the UK are disproportionately affected by socio-economic disadvantage, and assesses the likely impact of each measure on children within each of those groups. We also won a concession to allow the independent Child Poverty Commission greater power to pursue its own research.

The enactment was somewhat tempered by a very disappointing Budget for child poverty campaigners, which included next to no new investment targeted at the poorest families with the small exception of an increase in child tax credit for families with one and two year olds. But this investment does not start until 2012 and was offset by an even larger cut to housing benefit.

CPAG's Head of Policy, Rights and Advocacy, Imran Hussein, warned:

'Every other Budget this decade will need to provide far more for families if the 2020 target to eradicate child poverty is to be met and the promise to Britain's children kept.'

Budget day also saw the publication of a route mapping document by the Child Poverty Unit – a cross departmental body tasked with child poverty strategy. The paper sets out the Government's key areas of focus as it begins work to develop the first compre-

hensive strategy required by the new Act. Work as a route out of poverty remains the central focus. For the transformation of children's life chances, early childhood development, the educational attainment gap and transition from adolescence to adulthood are seen as key areas for activity. Local government strategies are cited as key to tailoring approaches to local need and addressing the 'importance of place' to address neighbourhood environments.



Karen Buck is the second CPAG MP of the Year thanks to her magnificent efforts on the Welfare Reform Bill and the Child Poverty Bill. Read more inside...

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In The House

Jamie Reed MP is this issue's nominee for **CPAG MP of the Year**. The Labour member for Cope-land has pledged to give his MP's pay rise towards the establishment of a project to tackle child poverty in his constituency. This follows his instrumental role in establishing a **local forum on child poverty** bringing together the key local stakeholders in Cumbria. We hope many other MPs will be inspired to follow his example.



Jamie Reed MP

With the approaching election, there was a hurry to complete as much business as possible. Members of the House of Lords saw through the final stages of the Child Poverty Bill. Those bills failing to make it over the line included the Equality Bill, which CPAG had hoped to see achieve Royal Assent because of its inclusion of a new public sector duty to address socio-economic disadvantage.

The **Fuel Poverty Charter** was launched in the House of Commons at an event chaired by financial journalist Paul Lewis. Government Minister Joan Ruddock attended to welcome the charter and called on all the organisations behind it to continue their campaigning.

In the final days before the election, a statement to the House by the **Work and Pensions Secretary, Yvette Cooper** announced another **new welfare reform paper** (*Building bridges to work: new approaches to tackling long-term worklessness*). It confirms transition of all **incapacity benefit** claimants to **employment support allowance** (ESA) by 2014; and that most claimants will only receive ESA for up to two years, after which it is expected they will either have found work, or their capability will have improved sufficiently to receive **jobseeker's allowance**. CPAG is working closely with disability organisations through the **Disability Benefits Consortium** to lobby government on our major concerns in regard to its ongoing welfare reform programme.

Karen Buck is CPAG's MP of the Year

Child poverty is a major problem in Karen's inner London constituency of Regents Park and Kensington North. Her background provides valuable knowledge and experience in economics, disability and public health, which has helped her bring an expert understanding to some of the most important policy issues.

Karen told CPAG: "I was honoured to receive this award, especially from an organisation that is so dedicated to keeping the cause of inequality and child poverty in the public eye. There is a real danger in the current climate that we go back to the days of blaming people for their own poverty. Of course poverty has many causes, but we must stay focused on the need for good jobs, decent pay, fair benefits for those who cannot work, quality childcare and family support, and I am proud to champion these issues."

Her commitment to campaigning on poverty within Parliament has been evident since her maiden speech, when, speaking about her racially diverse constituency, she warned: 'In the shadow of some of Britain's wealthiest streets are pockets of chronic unemployment and poverty. Inequality turns diversity into a ladder of deprivation and, therefore, it is an inequality which our new Government must tackle.'

It is her actions during the passages of the Welfare Reform and Child Poverty Bills, as well as her campaigning for investment in poor children in the 2009 Budget, which have impressed CPAG in the past year. Speaking in support of amendments to protect welfare rights, Karen warned that the Welfare Reform Bill would push work-related requirements onto lone parents before the necessary support and childcare was in place. During the committee stage of the Child Poverty Bill, she won a commitment from the Government to strengthen the childcare requirements within the child poverty strategies that future governments must produce and implement.

CPAG's Chief Executive, Shan Nicholas, said: 'Karen has the combination of expertise and tenacity that makes Ministers listen and think again. We are delighted to express our gratitude for being such an effective voice for low-income families in Parliament by making her our second MP of the year. We will need many more child poverty champions like her after the election if Britain's great goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020 is to succeed.'

Political support grows for free school meals

CPAG's call for universal free school meals (FSM) as part of our '2skint4school' campaign is gaining momentum. In the run up to the election, we have been seeking commitments from all parties to extend FSM eligibility in their manifestos and election pledges. The Labour manifesto commits to looking at universal FSM in primary schools when current pilots finish next year.

With school lunches costing up to £9 a week per child, subsidising them is a great way to free up money for families in working poverty.

Research and pilot schemes have also shown that universal free school meals have clear benefits for all children. They improve health, concentration in the classroom, behaviour and support social development through children sitting down to eat together.

Working with 38Degrees, CPAG has developed an online tool, to allow you to email your Parliamentary candidates and ask them to support the call for FSM for all children.

To add your support to the campaign please visit www.38degrees.org.uk/free-school-meals/.

Child poverty champions: 4in10 celebrates London's best projects



EC1 resident: "If I'm in trouble I would go to them again because I know they would get things done."

The End Child Poverty London project culminated in the publication of a good practice guide pulling together some of the best practice it has identified across the capital in the last 18 months.

The inspirational examples are providing a clear benefit to the lives of disadvantaged families and children in areas like housing, parental support, child development education and wellbeing. They have also been able to reach some of the most at risk groups, such as black and ethnic minority communities.

Speaking at the Parliamentary launch of the event were Treasury Minister, Stephen Timms, and Conservative spokesperson, Andrew Selous, who both congratulated the community workers whose projects and schemes are having such a positive impact at the grassroots level in London's neighbourhoods. However, the speaker whose contribution gained the strongest appreciation was Dianne Bell, a single parent of four children.

Dianne spoke of the challenges she and her family face making ends meet in crowded and poor quality housing: 'I think it's harder to live in Westminster than in any other part of the country because all the shops and supermarkets charge a

lot more as they have higher overheads. That's not our fault but we still have to pay so much more.' She also criticised the lack of affordable council housing, made a strong case for the need for a London Living Wage and highlighted the unfairness of not being able to pay for her children to take up hobbies.

Also present were many of those who have delivered or benefited from the projects and schemes included in the best practice guide, such as EC1 Connect, which is part of the New Deal Partnership for Communities. It covers 5,000 households in a part of Islington characterised by low household incomes, high levels of worklessness, poor health and low educational outcomes. EC1 Connect advisers use an outreach approach to contact residents directly on the doorstep. They identify all the support and opportunities relating to a household's circumstances provided by services like benefits, tax credits, employment advice, childcare, training, housing advice and volunteering opportunities.

To find out more about EC1 and other projects, you can get a copy of the Child Poverty Champions guide to good practice by emailing liz@ecpc.org.uk.

Help us make a difference

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of child poverty in the UK and for a better deal for low-income families and children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty; *and*
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque**, **postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By **credit card** online at www.cpag.org.uk.
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

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Scottish campaign on welfare reform launches a Manifesto for Change

CPAG, in coalition with other leading charities, anti-poverty campaigners, faith groups and trade unions in the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR), has put the need for radical improvements in the benefits system on the Westminster election campaign agenda in Scotland.

The launch in Edinburgh of the Campaign's *Manifesto for Change* attracted widespread media coverage with a call for all candidates to commit to welfare reforms that genuinely protect people from the poverty that ill health, disability, unemployment and caring responsibilities too often bring.

The SCoWR *Manifesto*, based on the experiences of the people CPAG and other Campaign members work with, calls for benefit rates to be increased so no one is left in poverty and all have a minimum socially acceptable quality of life. It describes reforms that would

ensure the welfare system treats people with respect, arguing for an immediate review of employment and support allowance and changes moving lone parents off income support, rolling back any measures that fail to treat people with dignity. It proposes simplifying the system by increasing benefit disregards to make moves into work easier, and reducing the complexity and stigma of means-testing by making more use of universal benefits like child benefit.

Manifesto for Change also argues for reforms that would ensure high quality childcare and employment support are



available to all and that they take into account the very different services in place in Scotland.

Making these reforms, investing in welfare and insuring against the risks of ill health, disability and unemployment would require up-front investment. But, the SCoWR *Manifesto* argues, that the investment would pay a massive return, slashing the costs poverty imposes on society, removing barriers to paid employment, enhancing the lives of some of our most vulnerable citizens and boosting the security of us all.

See the SCoWR *Manifesto for Change* at www.cpag.org.uk.

'Extreme disappointment' over free school lunches setback

CPAG in Scotland has expressed extreme disappointment that Scottish Government Ministers and local authorities have backtracked on their commitment to roll out free school lunches to all P1 to P3 pupils from August 2010.

Despite protests, led by CPAG in Scotland, from teachers' unions, churches, children's charities and anti-poverty campaigners, Michael Russell MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Educa-

tion, has agreed with council leaders that local authorities will have flexibility to prioritise free school lunches for children in the most deprived areas first, as part of the commitment to work towards free school lunches for all P1-P3 pupils.

Responding to the news John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland, said: 'The recession has put great pressures on family budgets. The extension of free school lunches is an important way

Scottish government can help relieve those pressures, while ensuring all young children get a healthy meal in the middle of the school day.'

CPAG continues to urge Scottish Ministers and local authorities to consider the important health, educational and anti-poverty benefits of a universal approach free school meals brings and not delay the promised timetable for all P1 to P3 pupils getting a free school lunch.