

Treasury Minister commits to updating child poverty strategy

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Timms, has told MPs that the Government will publish an update of its child poverty strategy this summer alongside the Comprehensive Spending Review.

In an evidence session on 30 January 2007 held by the influential Treasury Select Committee on emerging issues for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave insights into forthcoming announcements on the Government's child poverty strategy.

A copy of CPAG's recent report, *Comprehensive Spending Review 2007: what it needs to deliver on child poverty*, was circulated to all Committee members as an official submission to the Committee's enquiry.

The evidence session followed concerns raised by the Committee in their report on the 2006 Pre-Budget Report published late January 2007 and just days before the Minister's appearance. The Treasury Select Committee quoted CPAG when it recommended that the Government publish an updated strategy for meeting targets to halve child poverty figures by 2010.

Citing CPAG's comment that 'the Chancellor of the Exchequer must do much more in next year's Budget and Comprehensive Spending Review, or the Government will fail to meet this important target,' the Committee stated: 'We recommend that, either in the 2007 Budget or in reporting the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government outline its strategic position with respect to the 2010-11 target...and specify how it intends to achieve the target, including the extent to which it expects various measures to contribute towards achieving the target.'

The Chancellor was also criticised for

appearing to claim in his evidence to the Committee last December that the target to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent by 2005 had been met, despite previous Government admissions that they had fallen short. The Committee has requested the Chancellor provide them with an explanation.

While there is increasing clarity about when details on progress and future

policy for meeting child poverty targets will appear, responsibility for meeting the 2010 and 2020 targets remains cloudy. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury could not confirm which department will be responsible for ensuring the CSR's 2010 child poverty reduction targets are met. Confirmation is expected when the CSR is reported to Parliament in the summer.

BBC Radio 4 New Year's Eve Appeal



A huge thank you to Linda Robson (pictured), BBC Radio 4 and to everyone who responded to our appeal.

Three broadcasts over the New Year period (one immediately following *The Archers* on New Year's Eve) ensured a large audience became more aware of the extent and nature of child poverty in the UK. This is borne out by letters we received from some listeners who seemed to find our poverty statistics unbelievable in such a prosperous country! They may seem unbelievable but unfortunately they are, of course, true.

You can still hear the appeal online at www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/appeal in the listen again section.

The appeal raised a wonderful £6,476 which will go straight towards our work this year. Thank you.

In the House

December's Pre-Budget Report (PBR) brought the welcome announcement of child benefit payments from week 29 of pregnancy. However, the PBR did not deliver extra investment on nearly the scale required to get back on track for halving child poverty figures by 2010.

Budget cuts to the Department for Constitutional Affairs announced in the PBR pose a threat to essential advocacy services used by the poorest families. Advocacy services will be even more important in the light of reforms to the child maintenance system announced in a Government White Paper. The Child Support Agency will be replaced by a new Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission that is predicted to have a reduced caseload as more separated parents agree their own maintenance arrangements. The need for independent legal advice to draw up these arrangements makes plans to cut access to civil legal aid and advice disconcerting.

Legal aid reform also remains a contentious issue. MPs from all parties recently used an Adjournment Debate to express their concerns at the loss of access to legal advice if the Carter Report's recommendations are implemented.

The Welfare Reform Bill has now arrived in the House of Lords. The Bill will be steered through by the newly appointed Lord McKenzie, who replaces Lord Hunt as the Work and Pensions Minister. Many Peers expressed great concerns over the proposed use of sanctions that the Bill will include.

Back in the Commons, the recent CPAG policy publication *Out of Reach: Benefits for disabled children* was cited repeatedly during an opposition debate on services for disabled children. MPs expressed strong concerns at the low take-up of disability living allowance and the deficient benefits advice for families with disabled children.

And finally, to the Lords again where CPAG has successfully campaigned for an amendment to the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Bill that ensures that individuals who have lost a Social Security Tribunal appeal cannot have costs awarded against them.

Lib Dems sign up to 2020 target and signal support for Make Child Benefit Count

At the end of last year the Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Menzies Campbell, signed his party up to the commitment to end child poverty by 2020. The party set two additional goals for 2020: to improve numeracy and literacy skills to the highest in Europe and to halve the number of people claiming benefits on the grounds of incapacity.



Kate Green, Chief Executive of CPAG, said: 'This is excellent news and cause for celebration by all members of the Campaign to End Child Poverty. There is now an unprecedented consensus amongst the main parties to end child poverty by 2020.'

There was further good news when Sir Menzies announced that his party is considering the *Make Child Benefit Count* campaign call to increase the rate of child benefit for all children to the level of the eldest child. This would lift 300,000 more children out of poverty and we hope that all parties will give serious consideration to this proposal.

However, there were some causes for concern including the suggestion that the party look at lowering the age of the youngest child in a lone parent family after which the parent is required to seek work. In a speech titled *Making Work Pay*, the Liberal Democrat leader also failed to address low pay. Half of children in poverty live in working families so, ahead of the final report from the party's working group later this year, CPAG continues to lobby the party as to how it would tackle Britain's dependency on a significant low-pay sector of the economy.

Conservatives to tackle relative poverty

Following the Conservatives' backing last spring of the 2020 target to end child poverty, there are further signs by the Party of a new acceptance of the importance of tackling relative poverty.

In his Scarman Lecture late last year, David Cameron, Leader of the Conservative Party, stated: 'In the past, we used to think of poverty only in absolute terms – meaning straightforward material deprivation. That's not enough. We need to think of poverty in relative terms – the fact that some people lack those things which others in society take for granted.'

Kate Green, CPAG's Chief Executive, responded: 'David Cameron is absolutely right that it is essential to tackle relative poverty, not just absolute poverty. His whole party must embrace the importance of relative poverty or remain unacceptable to voters who saw the relentless growth in inequality when they were last in office.'

The party now has the challenge of producing policy that

reflects these goals. The Social Justice Commission, led by former party leader Iain Duncan Smith, has analysed the factors related to poverty in Britain and will report later this year with a set of policy proposals for the party to consider. The Commission's analysis so far has had a strong focus on the benefits of raising children within stable relationships. Cameron has set out his own view that social responsibility, rather than state dependency, is the key to tackling poverty.

CPAG welcomes the party's new commitment to tackling relative poverty. We have been offered opportunities to feed into their policy development and are providing representations on the measures needed to end child poverty. If the party fails to take the necessary steps required to address income and wealth inequality, particularly for those unable to work, then they will have embraced only the rhetoric and not the solutions.

End Child Poverty campaign update

CPAG is a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition and a strong supporter of its vital role in highlighting the extent of child poverty and the importance of meeting targets to end child poverty by 2020.

The campaign had a strong presence at the National Poverty Hearing in Westminster in December 2006 where it put on a powerful presentation of voices from children living in poverty in the UK, performed by students from St Thomas More School, North London (pictured).

CPAG is among coalition members currently contributing to the planning of campaigns for the coming year. There will be a strong focus on the Comprehensive Spending Review and on actions that both engage the public and challenge the common perception that poverty is not widespread in the UK.



Freud review of welfare

On 18 December 2006 the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton MP, launched the Freud review of welfare. The intention of the review is to propose future options for social security benefits and welfare to work programmes. The details of the Freud review remain unclear but general terms of reference were given in a press release:

To review progress on Welfare to Work programmes since 1997, taking account of evidence from the UK and international experience, and make recommendations on how the Government can build on its success in using policies such as the New Deal to continue to reduce inactivity and in-work poverty, and to help meet the Government's 80 per cent employment aspiration.

What might, in practice, be under discussion was addressed at a seminar hosted by Jim Murphy MP, Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform on 23 January 2007. Speeches from

the event – including CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green – are available from the DWP welfare reform blog (www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/blog).

Several seminars are planned to inform the Freud review and CPAG will be attending these and seeking to engage with the review. We have concerns relating both to the process of the Freud review and over some of the issues in which it seems to be engaging. The speed of the review, which reports back in the spring, is astonishing given the complexity of the issues it is examining; such a rapid review seems unlikely to allow sufficient time for appropriate consultation.

We are also anxious about the implications of some issues apparently under consideration. These include the role of the voluntary sector in providing support, requirements to participate in work-focused interviews before claims for safety net benefits are processed and the assumption that work is the best route out of poverty regardless of the poor quality of many jobs. CPAG is also uneasy at how much of the language of the debate is focussing on language of conditionality and sanctions. Such an approach could seriously affect some of the most vulnerable families, and will alarm many claimants.

The Wrong Trainers

The Children's BBC *Newsround Special's* recent investigation into children who live in poverty, *The Wrong Trainers*, has become one of the series most successful programmes and has resulted in its most visited website.

The programme, for which CPAG provided research assistance, features children providing their voices for animations of their own stories. Each child then has the opportunity to confront someone in a position of authority to ask how they could help them improve their lives. Even Work and Pensions

Minister, Jim Murphy MP, received a knock on his door from two of the children!

All the films and animations can be watched online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/specials/2006/the_wrong_trainers



URGENT: Supporters called on to contact MSPs to support free school meals

CPAG in Scotland is asking members and supporters to email or write to their MSPs now to urge them to support universal free school meal amendments to the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill.

Your donations make a difference

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity promoting action for the relief directly or indirectly of poverty among children and families with 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;
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty: improving children's lives today and helping to abolish child poverty tomorrow.

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**.
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For more information visit our website www.cpag.org.uk, email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

As it stands the Bill imposes new duties on local authorities to ensure school meals are better promoted and meet defined nutritional standards. It also provides new powers to supply healthy snacks – either free or paid. However, if not amended, the Bill will do nothing to tackle the means testing that leaves tens of thousands of Scotland's poorest children without a healthy school meal.

CPAG is supporting amendments that will place a duty on local authorities to provide universal free school meals to all primary school children. At the very least they will give local authorities the flexibility to provide universal free school meals and commit the Scottish Executive to carry out a pilot universal approach.

This Scottish Executive Bill provides the last chance for MSPs in the current Parliament to vote for a universal free school meal approach before the May elections. Due to pressures on the Parliamentary timetable, Frances Curran MSP's free school meals Bill (along with several other Members' Bills) will not be considered, despite receiving massive support and having met all deadlines.

However, the case for universal free school meals has been given a massive boost by the latest findings from the evaluators of Hull City Council's universal free school meals pilot. The Hull University findings show take-up of school meals up from 36 per cent to 64 per cent and 'a significant impact in all areas of children's schooling... behaviour, social relationships, health and learning.' While Scottish Ministers continue to oppose giving even local councils the power to introduce universal free school meals, Westminster Education Secretary Alan Johnson MP described plans to scrap them in Hull as 'perverse'.

John Dickie, head of CPAG in Scotland and a leading voice in the Campaign for Free School Meals said:

The lesson from Hull is that improving the quality of school meals is, in itself, not enough. The Scottish Executive's Bill is therefore severely limited in what it can achieve. To really boost healthy eating in school the free provision of school lunches to all children is essential. We would urge CPAG supporters in Scotland to contact their local MSPs asking them to amend the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Bill to allow schools to follow the Hull example.

In addition to contacting their MSPs supporters can text a supporting message – 'FSM (your message)' – to 64446.

For more details and help in contacting your MSP visit www.cpag.org.uk/scotland.



Frances Curran MSP (left) and supporters campaign for free school meals