

## Invest in Britain's families, campaigners tell Chancellor

**A**s the Child Poverty Bill goes through Parliament, campaigners are asking MPs to give the Bill credibility by investing in Britain's families in the Pre-Budget Report this autumn with a 'Recession Survival Package for Families'.

The package has targeted measures that will not only help families survive the recession but will help reduce child poverty. It also reiterates the importance of significant investment in benefits and tax credits so the target to halve child poverty is met as soon as possible. This will both help many families stay afloat and ensure enough progress is made for the Child Poverty Bill targets to be reached.

The package includes:

- more targeted help through benefits and tax credits;
- free school meals for families on working tax credit (WTC);
- an immediate rollout of benefit disregards for 'mini jobs';
- raising tax credit childcare support from 80 per cent to 100 per cent of the cost;
- extending social fund loans to families on WTC.

Kate Green, CPAG's Chief Executive and Co-Chair of the Campaign to End Child Poverty, said: 'For many families hit by the recession, life is all about how soon in the week the purse is empty and the

battle to stay out of debt. Government's first priority was to stop the economy collapsing, but families need to weather the storm too. We know if their needs are ignored, the social and economic costs will harm us all in years to come.'

The package has been costed and evidence suggests it could have net fiscal and economic benefits over the medium and longer term. This means it could benefit all tax payers at a time when Britain knows it may need to tighten its belt in coming years and must spend wisely.

Kate Green added: 'Investing in Britain's families is the priority now for a secure future for our children and our economy. The Recession Survival Package will help many families stay afloat, which in turn will help our economy move out of its current crisis sooner and

onto a stronger footing.'

Suggestions that the Child Poverty Bill may distract from the immediate needs of families as MPs focus on the long-term target of eradicating child poverty by 2020, were dismissed by CPAG's Head of Policy, Paul Dornan.

He said: 'The Bill does the opposite of buying breathing space for the Government. It means it has to step up its action immediately to keep the 2020 target within reach. The Bill really raises expectations for investment in Britain's families in the Pre-Budget Report and millions of them need this extra support urgently before they spiral into debt. What should be cast into doubt is not the progress that can be made, but ill-considered welfare reforms that would upset this progress.'

### Inside this issue (page 3)

What drives the public's views on poverty and inequality? New research provides important lessons and key messages for campaigners.



Channel 4's 'How the Other Half Live', challenging perceptions of poverty for mainstream audiences.

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Printed by  
Wernham Printers Ltd  
020 8805 8026

Next edition  
November 2009



## In The House

Steve Webb MP joins our shortlist for CPAG's MP of the Year. Leading for the Liberal Democrats in the **Child Poverty Bill's** Second Reading, he showed a depth of understanding that was lauded by MPs from all political parties as he questioned how the targets would pick up all disadvantaged children. He also suggested that we should consider how we can do better than reducing the proportion of children in poverty to 10 per cent, which would still leave a million children in poverty, saying: 'The goal of being about as good as the best European countries is a start, but it should not be the end of our ambitions.'



Steve Webb MP

While many predicted the Conservatives would never support the Bill, **Theresa May MP** spoke in its favour, arguing that ending child poverty will have a fiscal benefit – a point we hope she is strongly pressing on the Shadow Chancellor. As Shadow Secretary for Work and Pensions, her support and the votes of her Conservative colleagues will help ensure the Bill's safe passage through Parliament.

Other notable contributions in the debate came from **Karen Buck MP**, who brought the focus onto practical measures to achieve the targets, and **Sally Keeble MP**, who called for a stronger focus on the important issue of good quality and affordable **housing**. The most moving contribution came from **Jamie Reed MP**, who is campaigning on child poverty in his own constituency over the summer. The Bill will go into committee in October.

Conservative **David Gauke MP**, who will be active for the party on the Child Poverty Bill committee, has also been questioning new Work and Pensions Minister, **Helen Goodman MP**, on government progress towards the child poverty targets. The new minister held firm when asked to agree that the target cannot be met and said the Government is continuing to make progress.

Meanwhile the Lords have finished their committee debate on the **Welfare Reform Bill**. There was an excellent standard of debate, particularly on parental choice over **childcare**, barriers for parents with **disabled children** and the need to ensure **child wellbeing** is paramount for parents subject to new conditionality rules. The Minister, **Lord McKenzie**, has promised to look afresh at several areas of concern. New **Work and Pensions Secretary, Yvette Cooper**, has since issued a parliamentary statement saying that changes will be made to better protect child wellbeing and parental choice of child-care. The Government will bring forward eagerly anticipated amendments at **Report Stage** in October. This progress reflects the work that CPAG and other campaigners have put into improving this legislation, but there is still much that concerns us and we are planning further amendments to lobby on at Report Stage.

## CPAG at the conferences

CPAG is teaming up with three think tanks – The Fabians, Centre Forum and The Centre for Social Justice – to run a series of conference fringes on the subject *After the Crunch – how do we beat poverty?*

### TUC

*Ending Child Poverty*

12.15pm, 15 September – Liverpool.

Speakers: Kate Green, Paul Dornan, Jim Murphy MP (TBC), Mary Turner (GMB President).

### Liberal Democrats in Bournemouth

*After the Crunch: how do we beat poverty?*

8pm, 19 September – Dorchester Room 1, Highcliff Marriott.

Speakers: Kate Green, Charlotte Pickles (CSJ), Steve Webb MP (TBC), Andy Burnham MP (TBC).

*Fuel Poverty – can we get it off the back burner?*

1pm, 20 September, Old Harry's Bar, Highcliff Marriott.

Speakers: Kate Green, Simon Hughes (TBC), Ed Matthew (Friends of the Earth), Patrick South (Age Concern). Chaired by Ed Mayo/Larry Whitty.

*Getting Families Fit for Work*

1pm, 21 September, Premier Inn Bournemouth Central.

Speakers: Kate Green, Danny Alexander MP, Debbie Scott (Tomorrow's People), Baroness Liz Barker. Chaired by Geoff Morgan.

### Labour in Brighton

*After the Crunch: how do we beat poverty?*

12.30pm, 29 September – Brighton.

Speakers: Kate Green, Yvette Cooper MP, Iain Duncan Smith MP (CSJ), Steve Webb MP.

*Fuel Poverty – Can we get it off the back burner?*

7pm, 29 September – Tudor Suite, The Old Ship.

Speakers: Kate Green, Ed Miliband, Ed Matthew (Friends of the Earth), Patrick South (Age Concern). Chaired by Ed Mayo/Larry Whitty.

### Conservatives in Manchester

*After the Crunch: how do we fight poverty?*

6pm, 5 October, Manchester Town Hall.

Speakers: Kate Green, Iain Duncan Smith MP (CSJ), Justine Greening MP, Theodore Dalrymple, Tim Montgomerie.

*Fuel Poverty – Can we get it off the back burner?*

1pm, 7 October – Green Room, Bridgwater Hall.

Speakers: Kate Green, Charles Hendry MP (TBC). Chaired by Ed Mayo.

*Child Poverty Strategies (Centre for Excellence in Outcomes)*

7.30pm, 7 October

Speaker: Kate Green and others TBC.

# Changing minds on poverty

The majority of British people (69 per cent) believe that there is enough opportunity to avoid poverty and it comes down to individuals and how much they are motivated. Only a minority (30 per cent) believe some people are severely disadvantaged and face insurmountable barriers.

The figures come from polling by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) as part of its major Public Interest in Poverty Issues project, which has published a clutch of important reports for campaigners in recent weeks. Its research looks at public attitudes to economic inequality, how support can be built for eradicating UK poverty and how those directly affected by poverty can get their voices heard in the media.

Research participants were resistant to the word 'poverty' being used about the UK – the sense of equivalence with developing world poverty is distasteful to them. Low-income families don't like being told they're in poverty either. But there is nonetheless significant concern about inequality.

Although antagonism is growing to bankers after the credit crunch, participants still believe 'deserved' inequalities are fair. They made assumptions about the virtues of the richest and lack of virtues of the poorest. This may help explain why abstract arguments about greater equality are not persuasive. Such arguments could seem arbitrary and indifferent to the high value placed on virtue by participants. When argument for greater equality was framed in terms of fairer rewards for effort and contribution, the participants were much more supportive.

However another report highlighted a lack of

visibility for those affected by poverty, meaning the virtuous ways in which many struggle, but still get no reward, are not seen or understood. This feeds antagonism by leaving space to be occupied by assumptions that a lack of virtue is at play. For this reason, a further paper looked at ways in which campaigners can help get the voices of the most disadvantaged families into the media and the public spotlight.

But campaigners are still cautious about some of the most successful approaches with gaining audiences. A Channel 4 series shown in July/August called *How the Other Half Live* paired low income families with wealthy 'sponsor' families, drawing comparisons with sponsorship of families in the developing world. This premise, and use of a 'reality TV' format for such an important issue, was strongly criticised by some commentators before the programme aired. However, at a preview screening with poverty campaigners there was a generally positive response.

CPAG's Media Officer, Tim Nichols, said: 'There are some hard lessons for us campaigners. We get nowhere only attacking public attitudes we don't like, so we have to acknowledge underlying public values we can work with. Once you dig beneath the antagonism raised by the word 'poverty', or the failure to appreciate how some groups face disadvantage, you find something quite positive. The research reveals a widespread willingness to support greater equality when it's part of a vision for a society with a better quality of life all of us. That's definitely something we can certainly work with.'

## Key messages for campaigners from JRF

### Invest greater resources in case studies

Only 13 per cent of media coverage uses the voices of people with experience. Use real life stories in formats that can reach mainstream audiences to challenge assumptions and make visible the barriers people face.

### Use the word 'poverty' with greater caution

Popular conceptions of poverty equate it with the developing world or Victorian Britain. The public, including those below the poverty line, can react negatively to having this challenged. Highlight the existence of specific problems and unfair outcomes for a more effective route to public support for policy solutions.

### Explain why inequality is undeserved

Attacking people for holding the widespread

belief that 'deserved' inequality is fair can be perceived as an attack on their belief in virtue, and hence resisted. Explaining why inequality is undeserved and unfair in particular circumstances can win support for policies sooner and helps long-term to destabilise this negative framing.

### Present solutions and wider benefits

The public accept evidence of wider social conflict and costs from inequality and support a vision of more equitable a less materialistic society with a better quality of life for all. Present policy as both ending unfairness towards specific groups and increasing quality of life for all.

You can read the full JRF research and recommendations at [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.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](http://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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Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief – fill out a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit [www.cpag.org.uk/support](http://www.cpag.org.uk/support) email [staff@cpag.org.uk](mailto:staff@cpag.org.uk) or write to:  
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## Secretary of State prompts lively debate at CPAG in Scotland conference

**S**ecretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy MP prompted lively debate at CPAG in Scotland's annual welfare rights conference at the end of June.

Speaking to over 130 delegates on 'welfare rights in a time of recession,' Mr Murphy restated the UK Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty and highlighted investment in the Future Jobs Fund and the need to learn from previous recessions. But he also re-affirmed Government commitment to increasing the conditions attached to benefit entitlement, which CPAG in Scotland believes is not the most effective

way of getting more people into decent jobs and protecting the wellbeing of families and may damage children's welfare.

The minister's suggestion that there are people claiming benefits who could be working but are staying at home 'with the curtains drawn' while their neighbours go to work was challenged by several delegates drawing on their direct experience of vulnerable claimants whose benefits were sanctioned when they were unable to meet new conditions. They highlighted the often invisible barriers people face, including health conditions and caring responsibilities.

Following two sets of very popular workshops, delegates participated in an engaging panel debate chaired by journalist and broadcaster Keith Aitken. Labour's Deputy Leader in the Scottish Parliament, Johann Lamont MSP, joined John Mason MP (SNP Work and Pensions spokesperson), and frontline advice service managers Amanda Pringle and Anne Hanna. They debated delegates' questions on the need to fund and protect welfare rights services, the importance of a living wage to tackling poverty and the potential role of credit unions in provision of social fund loans.

## Free school meals for thousands more of Scotland's children

Many more children will soon be benefiting from free school meals as pupils return to school across Scotland. After years of campaign work by CPAG to highlight the number of children in low income families missing out on free school meals, the Scottish Parliament approved regulations extending entitlement to all children whose parents are getting working tax credit with an annual income (as assessed by the Revenue for tax credits purposes) below £6,420 from August 2009. The Scottish Government estimates an additional 44,000 pupils will become entitled to a free school meal.

Welcoming the move John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland, said: 'After many years of campaigning, it is fantastic to see so many more children

become entitled to a healthy free school meal, particularly with families struggling in the recession.'

Meanwhile, children in the first three years of primary school in West Dunbartonshire will receive free schools on a universal basis as the council introduces the joint Scottish Government/Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) commitment to provide all Primary 1 to 3 pupils with free school meals from August 2010 a year early.

CPAG's John Dickie added: 'West Dunbartonshire Council should be particularly congratulated for leading the way and getting rid of the means test on free school meals for children in the early years of primary a year ahead of the national commitment.'

### **Children's Handbook Scotland** *A benefits guide for children living away from their parents 2009/10* 2nd edition

This is a comprehensive guide to benefits and tax credits where children are living apart from their parents, including children in foster or kinship care situations, or being looked after by the local authority, or at residential school or in residential care. This is also available online at <http://scottishhandbooks.cpag.org.uk>.

'This is an area of social security law which can cause much confusion... the clarity of the information and clear structure of the chapters means this book will prove to be a valuable resource for advisers.' *The Adviser* (Citizens Advice)

Due to be published in October 2009.  
To order, call CPAG or visit [www.cpag.org.uk/publications](http://www.cpag.org.uk/publications).