



CPAG in Scotland

Response to Scottish Government Discussion Paper on
Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland

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Summary

- CPAG welcomes the Scottish Government's commitments to the **UK child poverty targets** and to doing "all within the powers available" to the Scottish Government to achieve these goals.
- We particularly welcome the new '**solidarity**' commitment to increasing "the proportion of income earned by the three lowest deciles as a group by 2017". We urge the Government to develop interim targets to measure progress against this goal, and to develop the target to ensure progress is judged on increasing the proportion of income held by *each* of the bottom three deciles
- We welcome the Government's recognition that **economic growth in itself does not necessarily reduce inequality or levels of poverty**. It is vital that potential conflicts between policies to promote growth and to tackle poverty are identified and settled in such a way that action on poverty and inequality is not subverted to the cause of economic growth.
- The emphasis in the Discussion Paper on tackling the **causes of poverty** is welcome. We strongly urge the Scottish Government to focus on tackling the structural barriers to an adequate household income.
- "Providing **work** for those who can work, alongside support for those who can't" as an approach must be based on a realistic understanding of the role work plays as a route out of poverty. Supporting people into employment needs to be based on voluntary engagement and the removal of barriers. The framework must build on the reference to a 'living wage' and set out how to increase rates of pay at the bottom end of the public sector pay spectrum. We recommend that Scottish Government Workforce Plus, enterprise and business support activity be directed to tackle the low pay, insecurity, discrimination and family unfriendly practice that too often makes work an ineffective route out of poverty. Devolved policies must also seek to minimise the negative impact of UK welfare reforms.
- We welcome the increased focus on a **framework of universal service provision**, and, specifically, the commitment to roll out free school meals to P1 to P3 pupils following evaluation of the current pilot programme. We urge Ministers and local authorities to work together to continue the pilots until the 2010 roll out to maintain the vision and momentum behind this much welcomed initiative. Government should also develop an approach to provision of universal childcare free at the point of delivery (see below). An increased focus on universal support cannot be achieved without additional resources. Such an approach must be part of moves towards building a society that is willing to invest a greater proportion of its wealth in services that protect children from poverty and promote opportunities for their development
- In **engaging the public** Ministers must continue to articulate an understanding of poverty that focuses on structural causes, and avoid the temptation to focus on individual failure or the symptoms of poverty. Government should seek to change the attitudes and behaviour of those who currently enjoy a disproportionate share of Scotland's wealth, and demonstrate the gains for society as a whole of reducing inequality and poverty and achieving greater solidarity and cohesion. Current Government focus on using control of devolved tax levers to reducing the tax contribution (by freezing council tax and cutting business rates) must not undermine

attempts to build support for the levels of progressive taxation and redistribution needed to eradicate poverty and achieve the solidarity target.

- To **reduce inequality and poverty at the same time as achieving economic growth** Scottish Government will need to focus on two key areas, tackling low pay and the quality of opportunity in the labour market, and ensuring any changes to devolved taxation levers have a progressive impact on the poorest households. At the same time those tax levers must play a full role in generating the resources required to deliver the services families need to protect them from poverty.
- A key barrier for parents in the labour market is lack of affordable, accessible childcare and CPAG urges the Government to **build on the current patchwork and targeted improvements in childcare toward a policy of universal childcare, free at the point of delivery**. The immediate priority is to establish an action plan with steps to achieve this, starting now.
- The new framework for tackling poverty must **set out how all children will have full access to the requirements of their education**; how government, local authorities and schools can reduce the costs that participation at school imposes, and build on the commitments to universal, free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils, the extension of free school meals entitlement to all children in families receiving maximum working tax credit and the current review of school uniform grants to identify and minimise the impact of charges for school related activities.
- The Governments recognition of the **vital role played by advice and information services** in ensuring families receive the financial support to which they are entitled, whether in or out of work, is very welcome. CPAG recommends that the new framework builds on this by mapping the extent to which advice and information service meet the needs of households across Scotland, and sets out a strategy for ensuring advice service are adequately funded and co-ordinated, as well as supported to maintain and improve quality standards
- The Scottish Government must do all in its power to **reduce the disproportionate level of taxation borne by poorer families**. Local taxation powers present a potential lever. It is vital that proposals for a local income tax are proofed for their impact on poverty and inequality. In addition to assessing the impact on income distribution, the impact in terms of revenue available to fund the services needed to tackle poverty need to be fully taken into account.
- In **communicating ambitions** on tackling poverty the Scottish Government need to show the structural causes of poverty and to explain the direct links between the hopelessly inadequate levels of income many families currently have to live on, whether adults are in or out of work, and the consequences for children. The Scottish Government can, and must, lead and shape this debate by being clear that poverty is predominantly caused by structural factors such as low pay, unemployment and inadequate support for those who cannot work. Government should also build the positive case – that policy works, that poverty and inequality can be reduced, and that all of us benefit from a more equal society.
- Central to **delivery** will be the relationship with local authorities. The framework must give full details of how local authorities will be supported, and held accountable, to ensure that spending and service provision reaches and benefits families living in poverty. Single Outcome Agreements must clearly define expectations and include mechanisms for measuring the impact of services and spending on child poverty.

1.0 Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland

CPAG promotes action for the prevention and relief of poverty among children and families with children. To achieve this, CPAG aims 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.

Examples of our work in Scotland include raising awareness through the publication, with partners, of *Poverty in Scotland*; influencing policy on free school meals and fuel poverty, amongst other issues; contributing a Scottish voice to UK wide campaigns on education (2 Skint 4 School), child benefit (Make Child Benefit Count) and welfare reform; and maximising incomes through specialist training, advice and information on benefits, tax credits and their interaction with devolved sources of financial support.

Whilst recognising that child poverty cannot be divorced from poverty more generally, that ending child poverty will require policies that tackle the poverty facing individuals who may become parents in the future, and that today's child poverty is the parent and pensioner poverty of the future, the focus of this response, reflecting CPAG's objective, is on child poverty.

Following introductory comments the structure of this Response reflects and responds (with the relevant paragraphs identified) to the format of the Discussion Paper.

2.0 Introductory Comments

After dramatic increases in child poverty between 1979 and the mid 1990's, unprecedented government commitments to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and policy action from both Westminster and Holyrood, have had a real impact in reducing the numbers of children and pensioners in relative income poverty¹.

Yet, despite this real improvement, progress has stalled – at a UK level child poverty worsened between 2004/05 and 2006/07, and in Scotland there was no improvement. What's more no progress at all has been made in reducing the number of working age adults without children who are living in poverty.² Poverty levels in Scotland, as in the rest of the UK, remained extremely high. In recent historical terms, in relation to other European countries, and compared to adults, children in Scotland continued to face an unusually high risk of poverty. One in four are officially recognised as poor, compared to 20% of the population as a whole and almost double the 1979 rate³. Moreover Scotland's children are more than twice as likely to be poor than their peers in Scandinavian countries⁴.

Whilst recognizing the impact existing policies have had it is clear that renewed political vigour, increased resources and new policies are needed for future progress.

It is in this context that CPAG in Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's discussion paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation. We particularly welcome the clear commitments to the UK child poverty targets to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to doing "all within the powers available" to the Scottish Government to achieve these goals. The recognition that child poverty is "morally unacceptable", as well as a damaging economic cost, is important in

recognizing the inherent rights of children to enjoy lives free from the restrictions and damage poverty creates.

The placing of the Discussion Paper within the Government's Economic Strategy creates real potential, but also carries risks. As the Paper makes clear (para.36) economic growth in itself does not necessarily reduce inequality or levels of poverty, and societies can achieve high levels of economic growth alongside widening inequalities and deepening poverty. Neither however does economic growth come with inevitably growing inequality – rather it is vital to develop social and economic policies to create a fairer, more equal and less poverty blighted Scotland. Potential conflicts between growth and tackling poverty must be identified and settled in such a way that action on poverty and inequality are not subverted to the cause of economic growth. The locking of anti-poverty and 'solidarity' objectives into delivery of the Government's Overarching Purpose has real potential to ensure that anti-poverty and solidarity objectives are lifted to the top of the political agenda. It must be clearly understood, however, that economic growth is unlikely, in itself, to deliver 'solidarity' and poverty reduction.

The new commitment within the Solidarity purpose target to reducing income inequality is particularly welcomed. CPAG has long argued⁵ that there is a real need for government to seriously consider the role that underlying income inequalities play in undermining further progress toward eradicating poverty. As paragraph 16 of the Discussion Paper makes clear it is important that the proportion of income earned by "each of the lowest three deciles" is increased, not just the overall proportion of the bottom three deciles. CPAG would welcome a development of the Solidarity Golden Rule to ensure progress is judged on increasing the proportion of income held by *each* of the bottom three deciles.

CPAG argues that interim targets against which to assess the extent to which policy and spending are having an impact on income inequality will be essential to ensuring the Government's bold pledge to reduce income inequality is translated into reality on the ground, and hopes to see such interim targets developed in the proposed framework.

3.0 Key principles (para. 33)

3.1 Tackling root causes

CPAG welcomes the emphasis on tackling the causes as well the symptoms of poverty. The fundamental cause of poverty in a marketised economy is lack of an adequate income, and it is the tackling of inadequate incomes that needs to be at the heart of the new anti-poverty framework. Whilst the consequences of poverty play out on the damaged life chances, restricted opportunities and additional social problems that too many individuals and families experience, it is a combination of social, political and economic factors that drive the nature and extent of poverty. These include inequality, low pay, inadequate benefits, poor quality work opportunities and lack of support for those with caring responsibilities, ill health or affected by disability. The barriers and discrimination that particular groups (especially women, those affected by disability, some minority ethnic groups, and some immigrants) face in accessing adequate incomes all need to be tackled if poverty and inequality are to be addressed.

CPAG believes that tackling, and ending, income poverty, and the stunted opportunities such poverty creates, is fundamental to addressing inequalities relating to health,

education and housing, and to addressing wider social problems facing Scotland. Understanding that these social ills are as much a consequence of poverty as a cause is vital. Those wider social problems, including problematic drug and alcohol use and offending, affect a small proportion of families both in and out of poverty, but wreak their worst damage on those lacking the incomes to protect themselves or the resources to open up opportunities for their families.

We therefore strongly urge the Scottish Government to focus the new framework for tackling poverty on tackling the structural barriers to an adequate household income. However we must also recognize that those structural barriers are, for too many, accentuated by additional problems symptomatic of poverty. For example, action to increase access to decently paid, sustainable employment must focus primarily on tackling the low pay, inflexible employment practice, lack of childcare and discrimination that excludes too many from the labour market, and undermines the efforts of too many within it. At the same time, however, the additional problems some individuals face in relation to poor health, problems with drug and alcohol use, and lack of basic skills need to be considered in tackling those more fundamental structural barriers.

3.2 'Work for those who can work, support for those who can't'

"Providing work for those who can work, alongside support for those who can't" (para 33) as an approach needs to be based on a realistic understanding on the role work plays as a route out of poverty. We are concerned that current policy, particularly at UK level, tends to elevate work as the primary solution to poverty, without fully acknowledging the limitations of this approach – not everyone can do paid work and expecting parents to work longer hours undermines work-life balance and time to parent. There is also a real risk of undermining the value and contribution those who are not in paid work make to society. Too much of the focus of welfare to work policy at UK level has been on reducing rights to benefit support, ratcheting up conditions attached to benefits and increasing the associated threat of benefit sanctions. CPAG strongly believes such an approach risks exacerbating poverty, rather than reducing it, and urges Scottish Government approaches to supporting people into employment to continue to be based on voluntary engagement and the removal of barriers, an approach exemplified by, for example, the New Future Fund and Working for Families programmes.

It is absolutely vital that the low pay, insecurity and discrimination which undermine work as a route out of poverty are tackled, but also that Scottish Government policies recognise and reward the vital contribution that those who prioritise caring, including childcare, make. The new framework for tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation must seek to protect those unable to undertake paid work as a result of long term illness or disability, at the same time maximizing opportunities for people to contribute, whether paid or not, in a way that supports rather than undermines personal wellbeing.

Low pay, combined with job insecurity, lack of flexibility for working parents and sparse in-work support for those with disability or long term illness, continues to undermine paid work as a route out of poverty. Nearly a quarter of children living in poverty are in households where an adult is already working full time.⁶ Furthermore 30% of low pay in Scotland is within the public sector⁷ over which the Scottish Government has substantial direct responsibility.

We urge that the new framework, builds on the reference to developing a 'living wage' at paragraph 43 and sets out how the Scottish Government will increase rates of pay at the

bottom of the public sector pay spectrum, in order to set an example in tackling in-work poverty.

In addition the new framework will need to set out how a clearer focus on tackling the low pay, insecurity, discrimination and family unfriendly practice that too often makes work an ineffective route out of poverty will be built into the Scottish Government's Workforce Plus, enterprise and business support activity.

CPAG has serious concerns about the impact of UK government welfare reform policy on families in, and at risk of, poverty. We would urge that the Scottish Government framework for tackling poverty sets out how devolved policies will be developed in order to minimize those risks. We are concerned that many of those who rely on benefit support, such as the long term sick, the disabled and lone parents are facing increased conditionality attached to their benefits without the necessary support being in place to allow them to meet the new responsibilities being attached to benefit entitlement. This risks leading to increased poverty as claimants face financial sanctions as a result of circumstances outwith their control. Our key concerns, shared with other members of the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform, are as follows:

Gaps in provision in Scotland – Major policy areas encompassed by the UK Welfare Reform agenda, such as childcare, health and skills development, are devolved to the Scottish Government. For example it is vital that Scottish and UK government works together to ensure necessary levels of childcare and skills development support are in place as UK policy removes Income Support entitlement from lone parents with younger children. Planning across Scottish and UK government will be vital to reduce the risk of families losing benefit entitlement, or parents being forced into inappropriate jobs that risk undermining family wellbeing, because of lack of adequate support to engage with employment related opportunities.

Availability of good jobs – Good jobs, which provide flexibility and support to develop, are key to the realisation of the UK Government's welfare reform agenda. The UK Government states this explicitly in the 'In work, better off' Green Paper⁸. However, jobs at the bottom of the careers ladder often do not provide the support necessary to allow people to develop their potential. Unsustainable employment leads to a cycle of low pay and no pay, which creates in-work poverty. It is notable that the UK governments 'Jobs Pledge' focuses on the retail sector and includes companies which do not have a reputation for supporting parent employees. There is a real role for Scottish Government to ensure that its Economic Strategy focuses on supporting the development of quality jobs.

3.3 Targeted support within a framework of universal service provision

Getting the right balance between targeted and universal support is crucial to further progress in tackling poverty. Policy to date, at both Westminster and Holyrood, has largely focused on targeting resources, but future progress will demand a better balance between the need to target and the need to ensure support reaches all families that need it. In Scotland that means working toward a universal approach to providing childcare free at the point of delivery, and building on improvements in the nutritional quality of school meals with a shift toward universal free at the point of delivery provision. At UK level it means, for example, balancing investment in tax credits with investment in child benefit. Too often current targeting means many of those most in need of reserved and devolved sources of support fail to get it, a problem not unique to Scotland or the UK. The 2005 UNICEF report on Child Poverty in Rich Countries highlighted that highly targeted social expenditure creates problems across the

developed world and concluded that “benefits universally provided, though *apparently* more expensive, can avoid this poverty trap”⁹

The need to rebalance universal and targeted provision has been a key reason CPAG welcomes the Scottish Government’s moves toward a more universal approach to free school meal delivery. Current means testing results in less than half of children living in poverty currently receiving a free school meal. A quarter of Scotland’s children are officially recognised as living in poverty yet only 17% of children are entitled to a free school meal and only 11% actually get one¹⁰. Furthermore cost is a key factor in choosing not to eat a school meal for 21% of primary and 31% of secondary school pupils¹¹.

We urge the Government to build on the pilot programmes to extend free school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils. We are concerned that, with the pilots only funded until June 2008, there is a danger of losing the vision and momentum behind the free school meal approach and a potentially negative impact on children and families who have begun to benefit from the pilots. CPAG urges local authorities and Ministers to work together to continue the provision of free school meals to P1 to P3 pupils in local authority pilot areas until the agreed 2010 roll out. We believe that such an extension of the pilot would play a vital role in maintaining the momentum behind this much welcomed Government initiative, and protect children and families from any negative consequences of losing what is already proving to be a vital benefit

It should be noted, however, that an increased focus on universal support, whether in regards to school meals or childcare, cannot be achieved without additional resources. Such an approach must be part of moves towards building a society that is willing to invest a greater proportion of its wealth in services that protect children from poverty and promote opportunities for their development.

3.4 Public engagement

CPAG also welcomes the ‘key principle’ within the Paper of developing more active public engagement around poverty (para. 33). Key to such engagement will be the need for Government Ministers to continue to articulate an understanding of poverty that focuses on structural causes, and avoids the temptation to focus on individual failure, or on the symptoms of poverty.

As a priority Government should take a lead in highlighting the discrimination and inflexibility within our current labour market that excludes so many parents, and condemns many more to in-work poverty. The new framework must challenge as well as support Scotland’s employers to ensure that work provides real routes out of poverty.

At the same time Government should be articulating a vision of a society, and setting out the steps needed to achieve that vision, that provides a real safety net for those unable to work whether as a result of ill health, disability, caring responsibility or lack of jobs; challenging inaccurate stereotypes that poverty is somehow a result of unwillingness to work, lack of motivation or a failure of individual aspiration.

Furthermore Scottish Government must take the lead in articulating the problem of inequality and poverty as being as much a problem of wealth and unfair distribution of resources. Real solutions to poverty will only emerge and gain public support if we recognize the extraordinary wealth Scotland has and challenge the still widespread idea that the ‘poor are always with us’. Seeking to change the attitudes and behaviour of those who currently enjoy a disproportionate share of Scotland’s wealth, and demonstrating the gains for society as a whole of achieving greater solidarity and

cohesion, will be crucial to further progress, and need to be central to public engagement around poverty.

There is a challenge for Government to provide the political leadership that will create the shifts in the social and political environment that are needed to enable Scotland to move toward the levels of public investment associated with those societies with the lowest levels of poverty and inequality. Whilst the current constitutional settlement limits the Scottish Government's powers over taxation and public spending levels, the current focus on council tax freeze and business rates cuts risks limiting the potential resources available to deliver the public services that the Discussion Paper recognises are needed to prevent and alleviate poverty. Care is needed to ensure that the current Government focus on using control of devolved tax levers to reduce tax contributions (by freezing council tax and cutting business rates) does not undermine attempts to build long term support for the levels of progressive taxation and redistribution needed to eradicate poverty and achieve the solidarity target.

4.0 Achieving Economic Growth and Reducing Inequality and Poverty (para. 35-39)

Achieving economic growth and reducing inequality and poverty is clearly the nub of the challenge facing the Scottish Government, and, as discussed under General Principles above, it is crucial that both are seen as equally important given the likely tensions in policy that will arise. CPAG welcomes the commitment to further international comparative work exploring the way other countries balance growth and greater equality (para.38). We would suggest that there is likely to be a connection between such a balance and more equal pay distribution, higher levels of income transfers and commitment to higher levels of taxation and investment in social welfare.

CPAG argues that to achieve the balance of economic growth at the same time as reducing inequality and poverty Scottish Government policy will need to focus on two key areas, outlined below; tackling low pay and the quality of opportunity within the labour market; and ensuring changes to devolved taxation levers have a more progressive impact on the poorest households whilst playing their full role in generating the resources needed to deliver the services families need to lift them out of, and protect them from, poverty.

5.0 Key areas for action (para. 43-53)

CPAG generally supports the analysis that there are three broad ways in which Scottish Government can tackle poverty under the current devolution settlement as outlined at para. 43 of the discussion paper; that is prevention, helping to lift people out of poverty, and alleviating the impact of poverty on people's lives. However we would highlight the need to recognize the 'chicken and egg' nature of the problem and be cautious as to pigeon-holing areas of action as solely 'preventative' or 'alleviatory'.

For example the Paper highlights 'addressing educational disadvantage' and 'tackling poor health' as key ways of preventing poverty. Whilst agreeing that improved educational outcomes and better health are vital to preventing future poverty, CPAG would argue that educational and health inequalities are as much consequences of poverty as they are causes to be addressed, and indeed these inequalities are caused by economic inequality. Reduced educational and health inequalities should be seen as the prize to be won for eradicating poverty, as much as the mechanism to reduce that poverty. We would argue that the primary focus should be on preventative action focusing on tackling the massive disparities in pay attached to different kinds of work. Working toward more reasonable rewards for the different ways in which people contribute to society, and finding ways to boost the incomes of families in, and at risk of, poverty should be the key focus of preventative action. In this analysis developing the concept of a 'living wage' for Scotland, and development of a fairer taxation system would be seen as fundamental to preventing poverty, rather than merely alleviating that poverty as suggested by the Paper.

Similarly whilst substance misuse and offending behaviour may impact disproportionately on those living in poverty they are not primary causes of poverty. Action to tackle these issues should be part of wider social policy, drawn into the anti-poverty framework, where appropriate, to ensure policies to support people out of poverty reach all those who need them, but should not be confused with policies tackling the fundamental structural causes of poverty.

Specific areas of action which CPAG believes Scottish Government can, and must, act to prevent, lift people out of, and alleviate poverty are:

- to promote economic development that creates better jobs, not just more jobs;
- to work towards good quality, free at the point of delivery universal childcare;
- to ensure all children have full access to the requirements of their education;
- to ensure people receive the advice, information and support they need to access their full entitlement to benefits and tax credits whether in work, moving into work or out of work; and,
- to reduce the disproportionate taxation borne by poorer families.

5.1 Better jobs, not just more jobs

CPAG is supportive of the moves at UK and Scotland level to help more people into work - if this is what people want and if this results in improvements in their and their families' quality of life. However, policy which over-focuses on paid work may conflict with enabling parents to have sufficient time to parent and, as Lisa Harker puts it in her commissioned report for the DWP, 'The 2010 and 2020 targets cannot be met by increases in employment alone.'¹²

Underlying an aspiration to increase the employment rate is that decent jobs are available. The existence of jobs in the economy does not prove that jobs are open equally to all. Barriers to work, including costs associated with work, the quality of jobs, spatial concentrations of employment and non-employment, skill demands and discrimination mean that not all have equal access to jobs, and certainly not all have equal access to good-quality jobs.

The evidence also clearly shows that employers have a greater role to play in opening up opportunities to decent, flexible work and overcoming the discrimination that currently reduces access to employment for many groups. An increased employment rate brought about with increased cycling in and out of work amongst lower income families will not reduce overall poverty and may increase hardship.

In particular, more needs to be done to ensure that employment pays more for low-paid workers. Scotland, alongside the rest of the UK, already has a high employment rate, hand-in-hand with a high child poverty rate - half of poverty currently occurs in households with some work.¹³ A higher employment rate does not necessarily mean a low poverty rate.

CPAG argues that the focus on employment in the new framework should concentrate on improving access to decent employment, ensuring jobs are more sustainable (reducing churn), ensuring pay progression and the use of carrots, not sticks, to work with parents' own aspirations. Clearer mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that spending on employment support reaches parents facing poverty and focuses on activity that removes barriers to employment such as lack of childcare, inflexible employment practices and in-work support for those with disability or long term illness.

5.2 Good quality, free at the point of delivery universal childcare

CPAG urges the Scottish Government to build on current patchwork and targeted improvements in childcare toward a policy of universal childcare, free at the point of delivery. Affordable and accessible childcare provision needs to focus as much on supporting child development as enabling parents into work, training or further education. Whilst there have been real improvement through increased access to nursery places, development of sure start programmes, of local childcare strategies and of the Working for Families programme, problems of expense and inadequate supply, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas, continue to undermine parents attempts to take up work and other opportunities. Difficulties facing organisations providing childcare in the most disadvantaged areas have created a child care system that is *"often, patchy, inflexible and expensive"*¹⁴. As frontline providers described in *Poverty in Scotland 2007* *"..the childcare infrastructure remains the biggest obstacle to the progress of individual parents"*, with pressures on childcare providers to increase sustainability and reduce grant dependency by increasing parental fees leading to *"Some nurseries which have been driven down this route have only been able to do so by relinquishing anti-poverty objectives"*¹⁵

CPAG recognises that providing a sustainable universal childcare service is a complex undertaking. In addition to issues of principle, there are workplace issues around the number of child carers, and the training and remuneration they receive. These workplace issues, in part being addressed as part of ongoing policy reform, are critical to creating a service that is not only of good quality - sufficient to maximise child development - but is also sustainable.

In the short term, sustainable ways must be sought to make more childcare available in deprived areas, as well as ensuring a greater variety of provision to match need. Further commitment, and funding, from the Scottish Government is needed to ensure affordable childcare provision is accessible, in the right places and at the right times, to all parents seeking to move into education, training or employment related activity. The long-term ambition should be universal childcare, free at the point of delivery, and the immediate priority is to establish an action plan with steps to get there, starting now.

5.3 Ensure all children have full access to the requirements of their education

There is no question that children growing up in poverty are significantly less likely to do well at school or to go on to further and higher education. There is a clear attainment gap between children experiencing poverty and their peers. Amongst the lowest attaining 20% of Scottish pupils there are over twice the proportion of pupils registered to take free school meals than in the population as a whole. At the same time the highest proportion of the lowest attaining pupils live in the most deprived areas of Scotland¹⁶. Worse still the attainment of the lowest performing 20% of pupils has not improved since 1999 – and the gap between the lowest attaining pupils and all other pupils is actually widening.

Furthermore there is clear evidence, set out in a recent CPAG report *Chicken and Egg: child poverty and education inequalities*,¹⁷ that at each stage of development the poverty attainment gap widens. By age three, children in poverty are nine months behind other children in their 'school readiness'. During their years at school, children in poverty appear to do progressively worse, and are less likely to go on to further and higher education.¹⁸ In Scotland 5% of those pupils who left state schools in 2002/03 did so with no qualifications. For pupils in the 15% most deprived areas the figure was double that at 11%. 35,000 young people aged between 16 and 19 in Scotland are not in education, employment or training.¹⁹ But these links are about more than poverty statistics and attainment levels. They are about how children growing up in poverty are too often made to feel that school is not for them, too feel shut out, different, disrespected, picked on and without the options open to other children.

Whilst the primary driver of these inequalities in educational experience is inadequate incomes at home (measures which to address are discussed above), at least part of the explanation lies in the way the costs of school impact on children's ability to benefit from opportunities. Research shows that poor children are often excluded from educational opportunities because of prohibitive costs²⁰, whilst exploratory work for CPAG in Scotland has found a lack of consistency or guidance on charging for school activities.²¹ At the same time the importance of healthy eating to children's education has been recognised by action to improve school meals²², yet less than half of children in poverty currently receive a free healthy school meal.²³ Similarly the cost of school uniforms can be substantial, but grants to help low income families with uniform costs vary across Scotland in value and eligibility²⁴.

Yet whilst education policy can, and must, play a role in reducing the inequalities in the life chances of our children, focussing only on what happens in schools will have limited impact – education is affected by life beyond the school gates. Research suggests "only around 14% of variation in achievement is attributable to identifiable features of school quality"²⁵. It is therefore vital that policies seeking to increase the attainment of children in poverty look at the range of factors that impact on those children.

CPAG believes, along with other members of the End Child Poverty Coalition in Scotland, that improving educational outcomes for children living in poverty must be made a national priority, with a clear cross-cutting strategy developed on how improvement can be made. Such a strategy should include action in three specific areas. First, and most importantly, we need to see action to address the inadequate family incomes that too often prevent children maximising on the opportunities of the education system. Without more flexible and better paid job opportunities for parents and more effective financial support for families in and out of work, action to achieve more equal educational outcomes is unlikely to succeed. Second, government, local authorities and individual schools need to look at ways of reducing the costs that participation at school

imposes on families. Commitments from the Scottish Government to roll out the free school meals pilot for P1 to 3 pupils and extend free school entitlement to children in families where parents are working but on low wages are an important step in the right direction and need to be supported. Likewise the welcome review of school uniform grants currently underway must lead to policy action that will ensure costs to parents are minimised. Meanwhile local authorities and schools need to do more to identify and promote good practice in minimising the impact of charges for school related activities. Finally, there is a need for action to improve the involvement of disadvantaged children in their education and to develop their control over their own learning, alongside support to enable the parents of children living in poverty to engage in their children's learning.

5.4 Access to the advice and information needed to get full entitlement to benefits and tax credits

Benefits and tax credits play a vital role in boosting the incomes of families facing poverty, both in and out of work, and are an important tool in the strategy to end child poverty. Whilst benefit and tax credit policy are reserved matters, many families miss out on the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled either because they do not claim or are unable to challenge poor decision making and administration relating to their claims. Official estimates suggest one in five families fail to claim tax credits worth around £70m in Scotland alone²⁶, and there is evidence that families facing the most severe and persistent poverty are not receiving the benefit support they should be. Save the Children research showed that 14% of children living in severe and persistent poverty had not received benefits in the previous 5 years, rising to 68% of children who had experienced severe poverty over a short term.²⁷ Despite being at particular risk of poverty less than half of disabled children receive Disability Living Allowance.²⁸

There are important measures that the Scottish Government can take to ensure families in Scotland receive the benefits and tax credits they are entitled to. Research shows welfare rights services "improve take up and deliver significant financial gains for clients"; that the "extra resources acquired by clients tends to be directed toward extra spending on fuel, food, education, recreation and transport"; and that the "local economy gains". Furthermore "positive, if broadly anecdotal" evidence suggest welfare rights advice is cost effective. RNIB estimate that for every £1 of funding £44 worth of unclaimed benefit is raised, whilst CAB estimate every £1 spent on take up campaigns nets up to £85 for local areas.²⁹

CPAG very much welcomes existing Scottish Government investment in advice and information service, including the funding provided to CPAG to support the capacity of frontline advisers to deliver effective high quality advice and information. However we suggest that the new framework maps the extent to which welfare rights advice services, second tier welfare rights advice and other benefits and tax credits information sources meet the needs of households across Scotland and identify gaps in service provision and quality. The framework should also set out a longer term strategy to ensure that advice services are accessible, adequately funded and co-ordinated, as well as supported to maintain and improve quality standards. Identifying new ways of delivering benefits and tax credits information and advice in those places most used by families (e.g. childcare, Sure Start, health and education settings) should also be part of such a strategic approach.

5.5 Reduce the disproportionate level of taxation borne by poorer families.

The very poorest households pay a higher proportion of their income in taxes than the richest households. This is because indirect taxes on goods - unlike income tax and national insurance - tend not to be based on ability to pay. About one-third of the poorest

tenth of households with children are taxed this way by the state, more than cancelling out the progressive nature of income tax. It is not just indirect tax that is regressive: council tax costs proportionately more to the poor than to the rich. Even after council tax benefit - which rebates the cost of those eligible and who claim it - the poorest tenth pay an average of 3.8 per cent of their gross incomes on council tax; the richest tenth pay 1.4 per cent.³⁰

Whilst the bulk of taxation policy is out with the control of the Scottish Government, local taxation presents a potential lever to reduce the burden of taxation on the poorest households. It is therefore vital that the current freeze on council tax and proposed reforms to local income tax are proofed for their impact on poverty and inequality. Council tax is regressive and income tax is progressive but we need to see the precise distributional impacts of the Scottish Government's proposed local income tax before being sure of its impacts – shifting between the two forms of taxation will not necessarily generate a more progressive outcome.

It is also important to note that higher take up of benefits and tax credits, and investment in quality advice and information to ensure such take up, (see 5.4 above) plays an important role in improving the impact of tax and benefit policy on families in poverty.

In addition to assessing the impact in terms of disposable income, the impact in terms of revenue available to provide the services needed to help, reduce, alleviate and prevent poverty needs to be fully proofed for the impact on poorer households, and balanced against any gains in the disposable income of those households.

Consideration also needs to be given to the potential role variation in the basic rate of income tax might play in increasing the resources available to the Scottish government to deliver the action on employment, education and childcare described above, modelled against impact on poverty and inequality.

5.6 Reduction of essential living costs

CPAG agrees that there is a real role for Scottish Government to play in reducing the essential living costs households in poverty face (para 47). We argue that such approaches relate not just to pensioners but to other low income households. Examples include programmes to tackle fuel poverty, currently being examined by the Scottish Government's Fuel Poverty Forum, and the removal of school meal charges, and other school related charges, as discussed above. Other approaches might include action to remove or reduce public transport costs to enable more equal participation in employment and other opportunities, and a thorough proofing of housing policy to ensure social housing is affordable to those on the lowest incomes, and, crucially, affordable for those moving into work.

6.0 Target groups? (para. 54-55)

CPAG analysis demonstrates that particular groups of children are at heightened risk of poverty. Our publication, [At Greatest Risk](#), identified those various groups of children who were at greatest risk of child poverty and looked at how to tackle the particular issues that most affect them. The challenge for the Scottish Government's anti-poverty framework is to drive overall policy to deliver most for the most vulnerable children and families including those living in large families; those children with disabilities; children with disabled parents; black and minority ethnic children; traveller and gypsy children; children leaving care and asylum seekers.

6.1 Large Families

Studies have consistently found that children in large families are at far greater risk of poverty than children from small families. Across the UK 50 per cent of children in families with four or more children in 2004/05 were poor³¹, compared with 23 per cent in one-child families. There is an overlap between large families and other groups at risk of poverty (such as younger children, minority ethnic groups, those living on benefit and social tenants)³². Nevertheless, being in a large family is still associated with a specifically higher risk of living in poverty. The increased risk of poverty for large families is not inevitable. For example, in Norway there is no linear connection between the number of children in a family and living on a low income, with a link only for families with five children or more.

6.2 Children with disabilities

While not all disabled children will experience poverty, they are more likely than their non-disabled peers to live in poverty as a result of lower incomes (because parents need to look after disabled children and so cannot work) and the impact of disability-related additional costs.³³, with those living in lone-parent families and black and minority ethnic families at particular risk³⁴.

CPAG's report, [Out of Reach](#),³⁵ explores ways of improving the effectiveness of current policy and its administration - by, for instance, maximising the take-up of disability living allowance - to improve the circumstances of disabled children. CPAG therefore welcomed Scottish Government investment in our activity focusing on working with non-specialist frontline workers to provide basic level training, information and advice on benefit and tax credits for disabled children and their families, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further action that could be taken to ensure families affected by disability receive the financial support they are entitled to.

6.3 Children with disabled parents

Children with disabled parents face a significantly higher risk of living in poverty than those of non-disabled parents. The main reason for this is the key role that work can play in keeping families out of poverty. Disabled parents are much less likely to be in paid work, and also suffer the impact of additional disability-related costs which sap family budgets. Although the benefit system provides higher support for disabled parents than for non-disabled parents, spells of poverty are likely to be much longer for children of disabled parents. And, when disabled parents move into work, the risk of in-work poverty is higher than for non-disabled parents. One reason for this is that disabled parents are more likely to have to take relatively low-paid, part-time and insecure work compared with non-disabled parents.

CPAG supports policy to increase the opportunity and support for those workless disabled adults who are able and willing to work. However, we have considerable concerns about the approach being taken to reform incapacity benefit and, in particular, the use of sanctions around employment programmes and non-state contracted providers making and enforcing decisions. The key to increasing the employment rate of disabled adults is to offer effective support and engage with employers to ensure adequate jobs are available – an area in which Scottish Government must play an important role. However, attempting to force disabled adults into work risks undermining

good will, leaving people in unsustainable employment and increasing stress, while doing nothing to reduce poverty.

6.4 Black and minority ethnic children

In Scotland in 2002/03 to 2004/05, after housing costs, an estimated 42% of children living with a minority ethnic head of household were living in poverty (compared with 24% of children with a non-minority ethnic head of household).³⁶

CPAG's report [*At Greatest Risk*](#)³⁷ points out that the greater likelihood of poverty among minority ethnic groups is the consequence of a number of factors, including: higher than average unemployment levels; minority ethnic communities largely concentrated in inner cities where recession and industrial restructuring have weakened or destroyed older industrial sectors; racism in the selection of people for jobs or redundancy; the greater likelihood of being in low-paid work; inadequate health and housing provision; and, more recently, restrictions on financial help for refugees and asylum seekers.

6.5 Traveller and gypsy children

There is a severe lack of robust quantitative data on gypsy and traveller families, including that on poverty, reflecting their general exclusion and 'invisibility'. For example, the DWP has no separate data on gypsy and traveller work patterns or unemployment rates.

However it is clear that many gypsy and traveller children are 'poor' in multiple and different ways. Many are financially poor and there are many dimensions to the 'poverty' faced by such groups. Despite the paucity of robust data on the income of gypsy and traveller families, both anecdotal information and other studies show that some families have few financial resources. However, research has shown levels of discrimination and disadvantage in accessing the benefit system for those who are frequently nomadic.³⁸

6.6 Children leaving care

Young people leaving care are one of the most disadvantaged groups of young people in society. Many have experienced abuse, neglect or difficulties at home, and being in care has often failed to undo this damage, so by the time they leave - often at a far younger age than other young people leave home - their life chances are very poor. Research has shown that many are likely to face multiple disadvantages, including poverty.³⁹ This is a consequence of their pre-care, in-care, leaving care and after-care 'life course' experiences including: their poor family backgrounds and damaging intra-family experiences, including abuse and neglect; the failure of care to provide stability and compensate young people in care; low levels of educational attainment and post-16 participation; leaving care at a younger age than other young people leave home; being a young householder; moving often and experiencing homelessness; and being a young parent.

6.7 Asylum seekers

CPAG believes that the UK Government's asylum policy directly conflicts with policies on child welfare, social inclusion and anti-discrimination principles. The difference in treatment of asylum-seeker families is highlighted in a recent report from researchers at the London School of Economics.⁴⁰ It found that while poverty had been alleviated for some vulnerable groups over the last seven years, asylum policies have led to a reduction in rights for this group in employment, health services, income and housing. According to the report, policies introduced by the UK Government have helped to make

asylum seekers the most socially excluded group in Britain. CPAG strongly urges the Scottish Government to do what it can within its powers to ensure all children benefit from devolved child welfare and anti-poverty policies. Children should be seen and dealt with as children first – irrespective of where they were born.

7.0 Perceptions of poverty – communicating Scottish Government ambitions (para. 56-60)

Key to communicating the problems poverty and inequality causes across Scotland, is the need to show the structural causes of poverty and to explain the direct links between the hopelessly inadequate levels of income many families currently have to live on, whether parents are in or out of work, and the consequences for children.

Poverty is too often portrayed as an individual failing rather than the structural problem which research shows that it is. It is all too easy for us all to reject our individual responsibility in favour of blaming the victims. The Scottish Government can, and must, lead and shape this debate by being clear that poverty is predominantly caused by structural factors such as low pay, unemployment and inadequate support for those who cannot work. As well as demonstrating the injustice of poverty, Government should build the positive case – that policy works, that poverty and inequality can be reduced, and that all of us benefit from a more equal society.

It is important to continue to measure progress toward child poverty targets using the relative low income measure used by UK and Scottish Government. At the same time, however, Government has a role to play in articulating the devastating impact such low income has in terms of missed opportunities, educational underachievement, poor health and stunted life chances. The impossible choices families in poverty face (such as whether to buy healthy food, pay fuel bills, participate in school activities, visit friends and families or get into debt), needs to be communicated, as does the extent parents go without essentials themselves to protect their children from the worst effects of poverty. Whilst not all families officially recognised as living in poverty would choose to describe themselves as ‘poor’, this should not distract from the need to recognise the inadequacy of their incomes for the task of bringing up children fully able to participate and fulfil their potential in 21st century Scotland.

Furthermore, as discussed at 3.4 above, the Government’s emerging anti-poverty framework must focus not just on poverty, but on Scotland’s wealth, and how that wealth can be better harnessed and distributed to ensure no child is left in poverty.

8.0 Delivering (para. 61-64)

As the Discussion Paper recognizes central to delivery will be the Single Outcome Agreements and the relationship with local authorities (para.61). The anti-poverty framework must give full details on how local authorities will be supported, and held accountable, to ensure that spending reaches and benefits children and families living in poverty. Given the significant additional discretion on spending local authorities now

have it is vital that future Single Outcome Agreements clearly define expectations in relation to reducing child poverty and include mechanisms for measuring the impact of spending on child poverty levels.

CPAG has developed a Local Child Poverty toolkit for use in England that could, with appropriate funding and commitment from local government and the Scottish Government, be adapted for use by local authorities in Scotland, as a way of assisting in the development of local strategic approaches and of measuring the impact of local service delivery on child poverty levels. The toolkit, which can be accessed at <http://www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk> has been designed to support local authorities in their contribution to the national child poverty target, and to help local partners to frame an informed debate on child poverty in relation to employment, income, education, health and social services.

9.0 Concluding Comments

CPAG in Scotland welcomes the general approach suggested by the Discussion Paper. The commitment to the UK child poverty targets, the new Solidarity target, the recognition of the need for a framework of universal service provision, the recognition of the role of quality advice and information in tackling poverty, the emphasis on engaging the public and communicating anti-poverty ambitions will all be important elements of the new framework for tackling poverty and inequality. Delivering the goals outlined in the paper will require a real focus on the underlying structural causes of poverty and a clear commitment to ensuring that where tensions arise anti-poverty objectives are not subverted to the drive for economic growth.

Crucial to realising the Government's stated ambitions will be commitment to building support for fairer pay distribution, more progressive taxation and investment in the services that protect families from poverty and open up opportunities for children. It is vital that the current focus on using control of devolved tax levers to reduce the tax contribution, and therefore the potential resources available to prevent poverty, (by freezing council tax and cutting business rates), does not undermine attempts to build long term support for that fairer, more progressive social and economic model needed to emulate more equal, less poverty blighted European countries.

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- ² *Poverty in Scotland 2007* Chapter 13 p132 CPAG 2007
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- ⁵ See for e.g. CPAG Submission to Scottish Affairs Committee Poverty in Scotland inquiry http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/SAC_Poverty_submission_1006.doc
- ⁶ http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2005/pdf_files/chapters/chapter_4_hbai06.pdf Table 4.4
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- ⁸ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/in-work-better-off/>
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