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Convener, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Issued by email to:
hscs.committee@parliament.scot

25 February 2025

DEVELOPING THE TACKLING CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN FOR 2026-31

Dear Clare,

As you know, eradicating child poverty is the top priority of the Scottish Government, as well as a shared ambition held by Members of the Scottish Parliament across all parties. Since the unanimous passing of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, that spirit of collaboration and commitment among Members continues to be of central importance in what is a national, collective endeavour.

Across all sectors, across all of Scotland, wide-ranging action is underway to bring down child poverty levels - and it is vital that the Scottish Government continues to support and lead these efforts. To this end, and in line with the provisions of the Act, the Scottish Government is undertaking engagement to inform development of the third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, which is required to be published by the end of March 2026.

As part of that engagement process, I am writing to you and all relevant Committees to seek views to inform the development of the plan.

As the final plan to be published ahead of the 2030 targets, it is of unique importance. It must enable progress to be delivered at sufficient pace and scale for the targets to be met. Not only this, but it will also be published in the months prior to the next Scottish Parliament election; offering the opportunity to build consensus across the Parliament, and with stakeholders, on key areas where action is needed.

To ensure that we build upon action taken to date and accelerate progress toward 2030, it is the Scottish Government's intent that the Plan will outline a robust framework for action – informed by engagement across Parliament and with stakeholders – as well as provide a route-map for delivery, irrespective of who should form the next Scottish Government.

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Meeting the 2030 targets will require further ambitious action, building on key measures including the Scottish Child Payment, parental employment support, and expansion of funded Early Learning and Childcare. The plan must focus on actions which are deliverable and are capable of achieving the change needed over the life of the next Parliament.

The views of Members are crucial in ensuring that the Plan can meet those aims.

In your role as Convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I would be grateful if you would give consideration to what our priorities for the next plan should be, alongside your colleagues. To assist I have enclosed, at **Annex A**, further information regarding our wider engagement process, including the areas of focus agreed with our External Reference Group and details of the Call for Views which will issue to stakeholders later today.

I would be grateful if you could provide any views in writing to me by **24 April 2025**, to allow your input to be fed into the process of developing the next plan. However, please advise if an extension is needed in order to facilitate the Committee hearing evidence, undertaking engagement or any other activity relating to this request. If there are any matters you would welcome a discussion on, please contact my office and I will accommodate a meeting if at all possible.

Yours sincerely,



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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Annex A – Overview of engagement and themes to consider

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 - unanimously agreed by the Scottish Parliament - set ambitious targets for child poverty reduction and placed a duty on Scottish Ministers to publish three delivery plans over the life of the legislation.

To date two delivery plans have been published, with *Every Child, Every Chance*, covering the period 2018-22 and *Best Start, Bright Futures*, covering the period 2022-26. The plans have focussed on tackling the three drivers of child poverty reduction; income from employment, costs of living and income from social security and benefits in kind, alongside the wider action needed to improve the lives and outcomes of families and children. The plans have also placed a strong focus on the family types who are at greatest risk of poverty, and placed an increasing emphasis on the need to consider intersectionality in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies – to ensure that they meet the needs of families.

Building on the robust evidence based established and action taken to date, the third and final delivery plan will cover the period 2026-31. This Plan must set out action at sufficient pace and scale to close the gap to the final child poverty targets.

Eradicating child poverty is a national mission and it will take action from a wide range of organisations, including national and local government, community and third sector organisations, and business, to deliver the change needed. With that in mind, the Scottish Government is seeking to engage and consult with a wide range of stakeholders and partners as we begin work to develop the next delivery plan.

To support our engagement, we have established an External Reference Group, who will work with us over the course of our engagement and consultation and support development of the next delivery plan. The purpose of the Group is to lend advice, expertise and challenge as we take forward the work.

A call for evidence has now opened so that stakeholders can submit their views. In addition to written feedback, we are planning a series of workshops and deep dives on specific issues and with particular groups. This includes working with children and families with lived experience of poverty.

Building on our learning and evidence to date and following engagement with our External Reference Group, we have identified four key strategic themes which we would like to test, which are noted below:

- **Increasing earned incomes by supporting and providing opportunities for parents and carers, to enter, sustain and progress in work.** This includes through the likes of employability support and the provision of essential infrastructure such as childcare and transport.
- **Reducing the costs of living and maximising incomes from social security to allow families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs.** This includes through the likes of social security, affordable homes, and advice services.

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- **Delivering holistic and whole family support to improve outcomes and wellbeing and enable families to better engage with other services that directly increase their incomes.** This includes through action focused on preventing families falling into poverty and wider community-based support.
- **Supporting children and young people to reach their full potential and to break the cycle of poverty in the longer term.** This includes through the likes of early years support, education, and post-school transitions.

Across all of these themes we have also identified the need to retain a sharp focus on addressing the needs of the families at greatest risk of poverty; including the six priority family groups identified: lone parent families; families with a disabled adult or child; larger families with three or more children; minority ethnic families; families with children under the age of one; and families with mothers under the age of 25. This also must give consideration to other inequalities including the deeply gendered nature of child poverty and the challenges associated with living in rural areas.

We would welcome the Committee's views on these themes - in particular:

- Do you think these are the right themes to focus on?
- Are there other key strategic themes we should consider?

As you think about each theme, noting the plan must set out measures for the purpose of meeting the 2030 child poverty targets, we would also be keen to hear your views on any or all of the following questions:

- What is working well and what actions should Scottish Government and partners either continue to do or to do more of?
- Are there policies, actions or approaches that the Scottish Government and/or partners should either stop or do differently?
- Are there new policies, actions or approaches that Scottish Government should consider implementing?
- How can Scottish Government and partners work differently to ensure seamless, integrated supported for families? What prevents this?
- What more can we do to understand the challenges being faced by the family at greatest risk of poverty, including the six priority families identified to ensure their specific and interconnected needs are met?
- What targeted action could be taken to tackle inequalities faced by marginalised groups, to help raise their incomes and improve their outcomes? This could include specialist support for one or more groups.

We will collate and analyse all of the feedback we receive via Committee submissions, the call for views and other planned engagement activities. This body of information will then be used alongside existing evidence and learning to inform the development of the next plan and assessed against various factors including legality, finance and deliverability.

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