POVERTY AND INEQUALITY COMMISSION

Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress 2025 - 2026

Scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission

Prepared for the Scottish Government, May 2026

Chair's Foreword

Scotland made a legal promise to its children: child poverty would be driven down to low levels by 2030. That pledge is now at serious risk.

Poverty steals childhood in quiet insidious ways: a cold home, limited meals, nowhere peaceful to study or just be alone, and the embarrassment of being unable to join in.

Poverty narrows horizons early and leaves lasting scars - on health, learning and prospects. If we are serious about making Scotland a better place for everyone, we must be serious about ending child poverty now.

This report is clear and direct: while policies introduced in Scotland are having an impact, and child poverty is lower in Scotland than the rest of the UK as a whole, on the current trajectory, the 2030 child poverty targets will not be met. The evidence all points the same way - child poverty remains too high, the distance to the targets remains large, and the pace of change is too slow. Put simply: the scale of action still does not match the scale of the problem.

It is also getting harder for the public and for decision makers to judge progress. The survey on which the official poverty measures are based has had falling sample sizes for Scotland since the pandemic, meaning that there is increased uncertainty about the true figures. Recent methodological changes will ultimately improve the accuracy of poverty measures, but meanwhile the figures for recent years have been revised and there is more uncertainty about progress.

In any case, changes to measurement must not be mistaken for changes in the experiences of deprived households. We need a simple, shared understanding of what these targets actually mean. Relative poverty means a child is growing up in a household with income far below what is usual and expected in Scotland today. Absolute poverty looks at whether family incomes are rising in real terms compared to a fixed baseline (adjusted for inflation). A child can be above the absolute poverty line and still be excluded from the everyday lives of their peers. Scotland committed to reducing both conditions, but both remain well above the 2030 targets.

This scrutiny report is a call to the new Scottish Parliament and incoming Government. They have inherited the final stretch before the 2030 deadline. The next five years are not another planning cycle - they are the decisive window in which targets will either be met or missed. Families cannot wait for gradual progress nor small scale changes.

There has been progress and measures which matter to families:

- The Scottish Child Payment (SCP) has made a substantial and significant difference to children's lives, with take up now estimated at 94% for eligible children under 16. The new Delivery Plan includes a commitment to increase SCP to £40 per week for children under one, supporting families during a period of particularly acute cost pressures and a higher risk of poverty.
- The Delivery Plan and recent announcements include several practical actions that will help families' day to day lives: universal breakfast clubs, a new transport to employment programme, and continued investment in debt and money advice, income maximisation and benefit take up services are all worthwhile actions.
- The 2025-26 Budget also contained positive moves, including increased funding for affordable housing - £768 million, rising in year to just under £808 million - alongside a sharper focus on housing delivery and addressing family homelessness through the Housing Emergency Action Plan.
- There are also welcome steps toward a more joined up approach to providing services, including plans for more coherent whole family support and third sector delivery, alongside improving evaluation and transparency with a cumulative impact assessment and measurement framework.

These are real positives. They will help families. They show that action by government and partners can change lives.

But honesty matters. Welcome as they are, these steps do not make the leap in progress required to meet the legal targets. The Scottish Government's own modelling, published alongside the Delivery Plan, estimates that poverty will remain well above the 2030 targets - around 18% for relative poverty and 15% for absolute poverty by 2030-31, against targets of 10% and 5% respectively.

So, this report starts with a clear message to the new government: be clear with the public about where Scotland is, and what it will take to get back on track. Then act at the necessary scale. The Commission has argued consistently that meeting the targets requires bold, transformative decisions, not just worthy initiatives.

Scotland still has a choice. Meeting the statutory targets will be difficult but doing so remains possible with urgent action. Not meeting them would also be a choice - one whose costs will be paid by children, every day, in the basics they go without and the opportunities they never have.

Professor Stephen Sinclair
Chair, Poverty and Inequality Commission

Contents

Executive Summary		**1**
1.	**Introduction**	**7**
1.1	The purpose of this report	7
1.2	The Commission's approach to scrutiny for 2025-2026	7
2.	**What do the child poverty statistics tell us about progress towards meeting the child poverty targets?**	**9**
2.1	Child Poverty Statistics 2024/25	9
2.2	Priority Family Statistics	14
3.	**What progress has been made in 2025-2026 towards meeting the child poverty targets?**	**17**
3.1	Social Security	18
3.2	Employability	19
3.3	Early Learning and Childcare	20
3.4	School Age Childcare	22
3.5	Whole Family Support	24
3.6	Affordable Housing Supply Programme	26
3.7	Child poverty priority families, intersectional approaches, and needs and barriers in rural areas	27
4.	***Bringing Hope, Building Futures* – the Scottish Government's third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan**	**30**
4.1	Reflecting on *Best Start, Bright Futures*	30
4.2	The context for *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*	31
4.3	Actions set out in *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*	33
5.	**Does it appear to the Commission that such progress is sufficient to meet the child poverty targets?**	**36**
6.	**What further progress does the Commission consider is required to meet the child poverty targets?**	**38**
6.1	Recommendations	40

Executive Summary

1. A message to Scotland: the commitment is at risk

Scotland made a legal commitment to its children: that child poverty would be driven down to low levels by 2030. That pledge is now at serious risk.

This scrutiny report makes it clear that action taken in Scotland is effective; policies - most notably the Scottish Child Payment - are making a meaningful difference, and child poverty is lower than in the UK overall. But the evidence is equally clear: on the current trajectory the 2030 child poverty targets will not be met. The distance to the targets remains large and the pace of change remains too slow. The scale of action still does not match the scale of the problem.

It is also becoming harder to judge progress due to uncertainty in the official statistics. Recent methodological changes should result in better data, but in the short term, revisions to the data make it harder to be sure whether changes in the measurement of poverty rates reflect real changes in families' lives. A revised estimate does not heat a home, fill a fridge nor relieve the stress that comes from not knowing how to manage the month ahead.

This report issues a call to the new Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. The next five years are not another planning cycle. They are the decisive delivery period during which the targets will either be met or missed. Families cannot be made to wait for gradual progress nor hope for small-scale change.

2. What the child poverty statistics tell us about progress

Scotland's child poverty targets are set in law. By 2030, fewer than 10% of children should be in relative poverty and fewer than 5% in absolute poverty, combined low income and material deprivation and persistent poverty.

Targets and definitions of poverty may appear abstract and technical, but families experience these as daily deprivation. Poverty means a child is growing up in a household with income below what is usual and expected in Scotland today. This means being shut out from ordinary activities, denied opportunities and being made to feel different. Poverty is about denying people dignity and decency.

This year, interpreting the level of poverty is complicated by changes to methodology in the official data. This uncertainty means that year-to-year changes can be difficult to interpret with confidence, which is deeply unsatisfactory. Even so, the overall picture remains clear: the gaps to the 2030 targets are substantial. The latest single-year estimates (2024/25) are:

- Relative child poverty (after housing costs): 21% (target: <10%)
- Absolute child poverty (after housing costs): 16% (target: <5%)
- Combined low income and material deprivation: 14% (target: <5%)
- Persistent poverty: 17% (target: <5%)

Poverty is concentrated and often deeper in the 'priority families'

The statistics show that child poverty is concentrated among six 'priority family types' which collectively account for around 90% of children in poverty. Data is not available for all the priority types, but the most recent multi-year averages highlight very high risks for:

- Households where the youngest child is under 1 (relative poverty: 39%)
- Minority ethnic households (relative poverty: 40%)
- Single-parent households (relative poverty: 30%)
- Households with three or more children (relative poverty: 38%)

The depth of poverty matters as well as its prevalence. Many children in relative poverty also experience severe poverty, meaning that their family income is very far below the poverty threshold. Severe poverty means that families are living on incomes below half UK median income. For these families this can mean very significant hardship.

3. What progress has been made in 2025-26 towards meeting the child poverty targets?

Progress made in 2025-26 includes positive policies and practical measures that should be applauded and built upon. Yet progress against several commitments made in the *Best Start, Bright Futures* child poverty delivery plan has been limited, and the overall scale of action remains insufficient to meet the 2030 targets.

Social Security

Social security is the most effective tool available to reduce child poverty as it puts money directly into households. The Scottish Child Payment (SCP), alongside the 'Five Family Payments' is repeatedly evidenced — by modelling, statistical analysis and testimony from families — as vital support that helps families buy essentials and reduces the pressure of a chronic cost of living crisis.

A key positive feature of the SCP is high take-up - now estimated at 94%. This matters: when a payment is reliably accessed, families can plan around it, and support that is not received cannot change lives. The commitment in the new Delivery Plan to increase the SCP to £40 per week for infants aged under one recognises that the first year of a child's life often involves reduced earnings alongside higher costs. Support for families at that point can be the difference between managing and struggling.

Employability

Employment can reduce poverty when it is sustained, paid fairly and compatible with family life. However, many parents in poverty already have jobs or cycle in and out of insecure work that does not lift their income enough to escape hardship.

Improved funding stability for No One Left Behind in 2025-26 was a welcome change after earlier disruption. Stability matters to families and the agencies that support them; stop-start provision and uncertain funding can disrupt support and erode trust.

However, as we enter the decisive delivery period for meeting the child poverty targets, it has become clear that the commitment to move 12,000 parents into employment by the end of the last parliamentary term will be missed. Figures to the end of September 2025 show that 8,428 parents moved into work, and fewer than half appear to sustain employment for at least 52 weeks.

Early Learning and Childcare

Childcare can reduce poverty by lowering costs and enabling parents to work or increase their earning hours. Scotland's funded early learning and childcare provision is a major investment and remains a core part of an effective approach to reduce poverty.

Evidence from evaluation of the expansion of childcare to 1,140 hours suggests this increased maternal employment, including for those in lower-income groups. That is significant and indicates that childcare policy can boost family incomes and help build financial resilience.

However, evidence also points to persistent and significant gaps: take-up for eligible two-year-olds remains notably lower than that for three- and four-year-olds, parents still identify flexibility of provision as an issue, and recruitment and retention of staff is a challenge.

School Age Childcare

School age childcare can remove barriers faced by many parents: the gap between their working hours and school hours and the cost of holiday care.

Programmes such as Early Adopter Communities, the Access to Childcare Fund and the Extra Time Programme provide real relief and benefit thousands of children. However, provision remains variable by geography and relatively small-scale compared with the number of families who might benefit.

Whole Family Support

Families living on low incomes often deal with multiple systems at once. When these systems do not join up, families struggle to access their rights and the support they need, they describe having to repeat their story to many different agencies, chasing information and managing complex and varied processes at times when they are already under strain.

The Commission recognises the intent behind Whole Family Support, and notes progress through Fairer Futures Partnerships and Whole Family Wellbeing Funding. However, at a time when urgent action is required, it is challenging to draw a clear line from Whole Family Support activity to reductions in child poverty at the scale and pace required.

Affordable Housing Supply Programme

Housing costs shape family budgets and stability. Increased funding and renewed focus on housing delivery are therefore welcome developments, particularly the emphasis on reducing homelessness and supporting families in temporary accommodation.

However, better data would strengthen accountability and improve policy design. The Commission notes ongoing gaps in understanding who benefits from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and how it could do more to reduce child poverty.

Child poverty priority families, intersectional approaches and needs and barriers in rural areas

Barriers are rarely experienced one at a time. The report highlights variation in how policy areas consider priority families, rural needs and intersectional circumstances. A more focused and consistent approach is required in policy design, data collection and evaluation to ensure that the families most affected by problems are those most effectively supported.

4. Does it appear that progress is sufficient to meet the targets?

It is important to recognise the improvements made over the four years of the *Best Start, Bright Futures* delivery plan. The Scottish Child Payment was expanded and increased, and families consistently describe it as making a meaningful difference. There were also several practical measures that benefited families by reducing the costs or removing barriers to participation they face. The automation of some benefits, expansion of eligibility for Best Start Foods, expansion of free school meals, and investment in employability and childcare are notable examples of these achievements.

Bringing Hope, Building Futures **– the Scottish Government's third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan**

The Scottish Government published the *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, its third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, in March 2026. This plan must deliver the poverty reductions required to meet the 2030 targets. The plan provides a framework but, because of the timing of the Scottish Parliament election, it focuses mainly on actions for 2026-27. A priority for the new Scottish Government must be to outline further measures to meet the targets by the end of the new Parliament.

The new Delivery Plan faces a challenging fiscal and economic context. But the difficult environment reduces neither the legal duty nor moral imperative to meet the child poverty targets. Rather, it increases the need for clarity on priorities, choices and the scale of action required.

Actions set out in *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*

The Delivery Plan sets out themes spanning increasing income from earnings, reducing living costs, enhancing social security and providing wider support. Many actions will bring real benefits - including breakfast clubs, transport support, debt and money advice, housing investment, and the SCP increase for children under the age of one. The publication of evaluation and cumulative impact materials alongside the plan provides welcome transparency.

However, the Commission's judgement remains clear - the plan contains many positive actions but does not set out bold, transformative measures at the scale required to meet the statutory targets. The proposed actions will help but they do not take the step-change needed.

Are these actions enough to meet the targets?

The evidence points to a clear conclusion: action is benefiting families, but without further investment and hard choices Scotland will miss the statutory child poverty targets by a large margin.

Modelling published alongside the Delivery Plan estimates that by 2030-31 relative poverty may be around 18% and absolute poverty around 15%, compared to respective targets of 10% and 5%. These estimates cannot be precise due to data limitations and assumptions, but they provide an indication of the scale of the gap that needs to be bridged.

5. What must happen next - the decisive window to 2030

The next five years are decisive. *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* provides a foundation but is not sufficient on its own. The incoming Government should be clear with the public about where Scotland is, what the targets mean in real life, and what needs be done to close the gap.

This will require building on what works, particularly increasing direct income support and strengthening the conditions that enable families to increase income through fair, sustainable work. It will require taking decisions that match the size of the challenge: not simply improving processes but aligning budgets with targets, prioritising investment towards need and where it makes the greatest impact to significantly reduce poverty.

The Commission recommends that the incoming Scottish Government should set out in its child poverty progress report for 2025-26 the additional action that it will take and how this will enable it to reach the 2030 targets. In doing so it should revisit the fourteen recommendations the Commission made in its advice to Scottish Government on what should be included in the 2026-2031 delivery plan (see pages 40 - 45 for the full recommendations).

Meeting Scotland's child poverty targets will be difficult, but it remains possible if the necessary urgent action is taken. Not meeting the targets is not fate but a choice - one whose costs are paid by children every day, in the essentials they go without and the opportunities they are denied.

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report

Each year the Scottish Government must publish a progress report setting out the progress it has made towards meeting the child poverty targets and in implementing its Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. There is a statutory requirement, under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, for the Scottish Government to consult the Poverty and Inequality Commission when preparing its annual child poverty progress report.

Scottish Ministers must consult the Commission on:

- The progress made during the reporting year towards meeting the child poverty targets
- Whether it appears to the Commission that such progress is sufficient to meet the child poverty targets
- What further progress the Commission considers is required to meet the child poverty targets

The Scottish Government's progress report must include any comments or recommendations made by the Commission on the points above. The Scottish Government's next progress report will cover the period April 2025 - March 2026. The Commission has been asked to provide its views on the progress made during this period.

1.2 The Commission's approach to scrutiny for 2025-2026

The Commission published its advice to Scottish Government for its next Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2026-2031) in November 2025, having spent most of the year working closely with its Experts by Experience Panel[1] to scrutinise progress in delivering existing actions, to review evidence, and to talk to organisations working on poverty or with the priority families at highest risk of poverty. This scrutiny report draws on the knowledge that the Commission gained from that work and on the recommendations that the Commission made to Scottish Government for the 2026-2031 Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

In order to consider progress during 2025-2026, the Commission asked the Scottish Government for written progress updates on some key actions / areas of work.

[1] In March 2024, the Commission established its second Experts by Experience Panel. It is made up of 10 people from across Scotland with lived experience of poverty, and was developed to embed participation in the work of the Commission and to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty are engaged in all aspects of the Commission's work

These were areas with commitments that might be expected to have a bigger impact on the child poverty targets, or ones that can have a strong impact on people living with poverty, or that appear to occupy a central role in the Scottish Government's approach to tackling child poverty. These were:

- Parental Employability
- Early Learning and Childcare
- School Age Childcare
- Affordable Housing
- Whole Family Support

The Commission also used existing evidence to look at progress with social security.

To get a fuller picture of progress as a whole, alongside the written updates the Commission reviewed other published data and reports, papers for the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Programme Board, and the latest child poverty statistics which were published in March 2026.

In considering whether the progress being made is likely to be sufficient to meet the 2030 targets, the Commission has also reviewed *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, the 2026-2031 Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, which was published in March 2026. This is the final Delivery Plan before the 2030 target deadline, but its development has been complicated by the fact that it had to be published less than two months before a Scottish Parliament election. The Scottish Government has said that the published plan is designed to give the next administration a strong foundation to build on, while allowing them to set their own policy priorities and decide how best to speed up progress. It therefore sets a framework but focuses on actions that will be taken in 2026-27, with further action to be outlined within annual progress reports on child poverty by an incoming Scottish Government.

2. What do the child poverty statistics tell us about progress towards meeting the child poverty targets?

Summary

Improvements to the income data that underpin the child poverty measures took effect in March 2026, which entailed revisions to child poverty figures starting from 2021/22. The new data and revised figures for previous years suggest that the relative and absolute child poverty targets may have been met in 2023/24, although as this was a single year figure any conclusions need to be treated with caution. The three year average, a better indicator of longer term trends, indicate a positive trajectory although still above the interim targets.

The combined low income and material deprivation measure was close to the interim target but a methodological change in how child material deprivation is measured in the most recent data means it is not possible to compare progress to previous years, so it is unclear how much is genuine improvement. The final measure (persistent poverty), which is taken from a different survey, was revised downwards for 2023/24 and shows a much more consistent trend. However, it is still more than double the interim target. Across the relative, absolute and combined poverty measures, there is still uncertainty about the extent of any apparent changes as they are within the range of measurement error in the survey.

2.1 Child Poverty Statistics 2024/25

The official measures of progress towards the four statutory child poverty targets are published annually by the Scottish Government. They are released around one year after the data are collected, so the most recent release relates to data collected during the 2024/25 financial year.

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament voted to set legal targets to reduce child poverty in Scotland. The targets are that by 2030 less than:

- 10% of children are in relative poverty
- 5% of children are in absolute poverty
- 5% of children are in combined low income and material deprivation
- 5% of children are in persistent poverty

Statistics for the first three indicators are drawn from the Family Resources Survey. In 2026 a methodological change has been made which links the survey data for these indicators to administrative records on social security benefits provided by DWP and HMRC. As a result, these indicators have been revised back to 2021/22 using the new methodology. In summer 2026, a follow up publication will include revisions for further years back to 2018/19.

Table 1 provides the official estimates for the four child poverty target measures since 2017/18 (the year prior to the Scottish Government's first tackling child poverty Delivery Plan). Due to the changes, the statistics are reported with a line break before 2021/22 for relative and absolute poverty, with the publication cautioning against comparisons before this year. The combined poverty figure is presented with a dotted line from 2023/24 due to methodological changes which mean that figures are not directly comparable to previous years. No data is available for 2020/21 for three of the measures as a result of COVID-19 pandemic disruption to the underlying data sources.

Table 1: Single-year estimates for statutory child poverty targets

	Statistics for each year(s)								Target levels (to be less than)	
	17/18	**18/19**	**19/20**	**20/21**	**21/22**	**22/23**	**23/24**	**24/25**	**2023** (Interim)	**2030** (Final)
Relative poverty (% of children, after housing costs)	24%	23%	26%	-	22%	27%	16%	21%	**18%**	**10%**
Absolute poverty (% of children, after housing costs)	22%	20%	23%	-	15%	22%	10%	16%	**14%**	**5%**
Combined low-income & material deprivation (% of children, after housing costs)	14%	12%	12%	-	8%	12%	9%	14%	**8%**	**5%**
	13-17	**14-18**	**15-19**	**16-20**	**17-21**	**18-22**	**19-23**	**20-24**		
Persistent poverty (% children, after housing costs)	14%	16%	19%	13%	14%	17%	16%	17%	**8%**	**5%**

Based on the figures published in March 2025 for 2023/24, it was held that the four interim targets for 2023/24 set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 were missed.

However, due to the revisions following the change in methodology, **the 2023/24 one-year estimates for relative and absolute child poverty are now both lower than the interim year targets.** As this was based on a single-year figure rather than a three year average, the conclusion that the interim figure was met should be treated with caution at this stage. The most recent estimates for 2024/25, for both measures, rose to levels above the interim targets. Figures for combined and persistent poverty remained above the interim targets.

In relation to each individual child poverty measure:

- The Scottish Government publish both single year estimates and multi-year rolling averages for relative and absolute poverty. The single year figures are used for the statutory measurement of the targets.

- **Relative poverty** affected 21% of children in 2024/25, above the interim target of 18%. However, revised figures for 2023/24 indicate that the interim target may have been met that year. There is relatively large variation between years compared to previous years of reporting, making it difficult to clearly identify longer-term trends at this stage: relative poverty decreased from 27% to 16%between 2022/23 and 23/24, but increased to 21% in 2024/25.

- **Absolute poverty** affected 16% of children in 2024/25, above the 2023/24 interim target. As with relative poverty, the revised figures for 2023/24 indicate that the interim target may have been met that year. Again, there is relatively large variation between years compared to previous years of reporting, making it difficult to clearly identify longer-term trends at this stage: absolute poverty decreased from 22% to 10% between 22/23 and 23/24, but increased to 16% in 2024/25.

- The multi-year average figures are helpful to consider alongside the single year figures, as they smooth out some of the statistical noise present in any single year and allow for a better determination of trends. The table overleaf indicates three-year average figures, showing that relative poverty has decreased since 2020-23, although the most recent figures for 2022-25 are above the 2023 interim targets.

Table 2: Multi-year averages for relative child poverty

	2017-20	2018-21	2019-22	2020-23	2021-24	2022-25	2023 (Interim)	2030 (Final)
Relative poverty (% of children, after housing costs)	24%	25%	*	25%	22%	21%	**18%**	**10%**

*Not available due to the COVID-19 pandemic disruption to the underlying data sources for 2020/21

- **Combined low income and material deprivation** missed the 2023/24 interim target, albeit by a small margin of around one percentage point, and has increased in 2024/25. This measure underwent significant methodological change between 22/23 and 23/24 (detailed further here). The purpose of the methodological change was so the material deprivation component of this measure better reflects today's society and expectations for living standards.

- **Persistent poverty** affected 17% of children in 2020-23, more than double the interim target of 6% by 2023. However, the figure for 2019-23 from the Understanding Society survey was revised downwards from 23% to 16%.[2]

- Although not included in the statutory child poverty targets, the data include a measure of **severe poverty**, which measures the proportion of children living in households below 50% of UK median income after housing costs. For 2022-25, an estimated 13% of children were in severe poverty, which was the same as in 2021-24, but below 2020-23 (16%).

Child Poverty statistics also include the new deep material poverty measure for children. This measure was developed by DWP to capture children experiencing a deeper level of poverty with first results published in December 2025. It is one of the headline metrics for the UK Child Poverty Strategy but is not a statutory target measure for the Scottish Government.

This measure is drawn from a subset of the 22 child material deprivation questions; of these 13 are seen as "essential items". A child is classified as being in deep material poverty if they lack at least 4 out of 13 essential items. A lack is defined as being due to financial constraints rather than personal choice

[2] Persistent poverty statistics are routinely revised when households that opted out of earlier waves of the Understanding Society survey respond to later waves.

It is estimated that 11% of children in Scotland were in deep material poverty (compared to 14% of all children in the UK). This initial estimate for Scotland is a two-year average over 2023/24 and 2024/25, the period for which the updated material deprivation questions are available.

Reading the single year figures alongside the multi-year averages published by the Scottish Government, the Commission observes from the official statistics that:

- The revised figures for 2023/24 may indicate that the interim targets were met for that year. However, the significant variation between years; the large confidence intervals for the figures; and the fact that they suggest relative and absolute child poverty rose again by five to six percentage points the following year, mean that this finding must be treated with caution at this stage.

- The trends for relative and absolute poverty may show a positive trajectory. The three-year averages - which help to 'smooth out' year-on-year variations - show small but more consistent reductions in both relative and absolute poverty, although both indicators where above the 2023 interim targets for the period 2022-25.

While the ongoing changes to the Family Resources Survey have improved the accuracy of poverty statistics, they have also introduced some more complexity in assessing progress towards targets. Figures for recent years have been revised, mainly downwards, particularly for 2023/24 when the interim targets were due to be met. The 'dotted line' before 2021/22 makes comparisons difficult before this point, although this should be addressed with revised figures back to 2017/18 in a future publication in summer 2026.

Overall, while there are some indications of positive movement in some of the indicators, interpretation is hampered by the uncertainty in these measures. In the annex of our 2023-24 scrutiny report and repeated in the 2024/25 report, the Commission noted that this uncertainty means we cannot be particularly confident around the single-year poverty figures, despite their status as statutory target measures. The size of year-to-year changes in child poverty rates are always likely to be smaller than their associated measurement error, making any assessment of improvement or worsening problematic.

The high uncertainty for any given single year of data also makes it difficult to answer the question of whether or not the interim targets have been achieved. The Commission understands there are a range of challenges being experienced across the UK (and in other countries) in gathering data of the kind used for the child poverty target measures.

This appears to be particularly the case for Scotland in the Family Resources Survey, with JRF Scotland finding that there had been a 37% reduction in sample size for Scotland in the survey in 2021-24 compared to the three years before COVID, which results in larger confidence intervals in the data. Given the statutory nature of the targets and the policy priority that reducing child poverty has in Scotland, the Commission considers the present situation to be highly unsatisfactory.

While the statutory targets are for Scotland alone and progress against them is not judged against other parts of the UK, there is continuing evidence of divergence of the relative poverty measure between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Scotland's relative child poverty rate over the period 2022-23 to 2024-25 was 21%, compared with 28% in the UK as a whole and 38% in Greater London. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) commented that this partly reflects lower housing costs – due both to lower rents and house prices and to a larger social rented sector than in the rest of the UK – but also that Scotland's devolved tax and benefit policy has played an increasingly important role in recent years.

2.2 Priority family statistics

The Scottish Government has defined six priority family types that are at higher risk of poverty and collectively account for around 90% of the children in relative poverty in Scotland.

Table 3 (overleaf) provides the most recent estimate of child poverty for the target measures, for each of the priority family types where available. These are multi-year averages for 2022-25 (2020-24 for persistent poverty) in order to give the sample size needed for reporting. The table also includes figures for severe poverty (less than 50% of median income) for comparison, although this is not a statutory target. As has been the case in previous years, the priority family types remain at higher risk of poverty than average.

Table 3: Priority Group Statistics

	2022-25				2020-24
	Relative poverty	Severe poverty	Absolute poverty	Combined low-income & material deprivation	Persistent poverty
Interim target (2023/24)	**18%**	**N/A**	**14%**	**8%**	**8%**
Final target (2030/31)	**10%**	**N/A**	**5%**	**5%**	**5%**
All children	**21%**	**13%**	**23%**	**11%**	**17%**
Youngest child in the household under 1	39%	28%	32%	16%	-
Mother under 25 in household	-	-	-	-	-
Disabled household member(s)	23%	14%	16%	16%	-
Minority ethnic household	40%	26%	32%	18%	-
Lone parent in household	30%	21%	25%	23%	-
3+ children in household	38%	25%	28%	21%	-

There is some indication of relative poverty rates reducing in recent years for some groups. For example, the relative poverty rate for children in single parent households reduced from 35% in 2020-23 to 30% in 2022-25 and reduced from 29% to 23% in the same period for children in households with a disabled person.

It is also important to note that some groups face additional costs that are not all accounted for in the headline poverty statistics. For example, households where there is a disabled adult or child can face additional costs associated with illness or disability. The Scottish Government publishes poverty statistics with disability benefits removed which is one way of attempting to understand and quantify this difference. These data show that the relative poverty rate for children with a disabled household member would be 25% with disability benefits removed from income, two percentage points higher than with payments included.

There is some variation between the measures in terms of groups most affected by poverty. For example, an estimated 40% of children in minority ethnic families were in relative poverty, while 18% were assessed as being in combined low income and material poverty.

By contrast, a lower proportion of children in single parent households were in relative poverty (30%), but a higher proportion (23%) were in combined low income and material poverty.

Around 6 out of 10 children living in relative poverty (less than 60% of median income) are also in severe poverty (less than 50% of median income). This rises to seven out of ten children living in a lone parent household or in a household where the youngest child is under the age of 1, indicating that the depth of poverty may be greater for children in these households.

3. What progress has been made in 2025-2026 towards meeting the child poverty targets?

Summary

There has been positive progress during 2025-26 in a number of areas. Take-up of the Scottish Child Payment has increased, and the Scottish Government showed important leadership in taking forward work to mitigate the two-child limit. Employability funding appears to have stabilised, providing greater certainty for services and service users, while the evaluation of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has found that it has had a positive impact on maternal employment. After previous funding cuts to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, and a slowing of approvals and starts for new homes, 2025-26 has seen an increased focus on affordable housing, with higher levels of funding and an improved trajectory in the second half of 2025. Many individual children and families are likely to have benefited from smaller-scale funded projects and programmes.

All these things are welcome, but progress is still limited when considered against the commitments that were made in the 2022-26 tackling child poverty delivery plan, *Best Start, Bright Futures*. While data is not yet available to the end of March, the aim of moving 2,000 parents into employment by the end of the parliamentary term has clearly been missed.

There has not been meaningful progress in delivering on the commitment to develop funded early learning and childcare offers for one- and two-year-olds, and while steps are being taken to improve the availability of school age childcare, this varies by geography and offer, and is still supporting relatively small numbers of children and families. The Scottish Government has continued to emphasise whole family support but has acknowledged that it is challenging to draw a direct line between the relevant activities and reductions in child poverty, and that such outcomes may only be achieved over a longer timeframe.

This section summarises the progress that has been made in 2025-26 in delivering the actions set out in *Best Start, Bright Futures* and the Commission's views on this progress. It draws on written updates from the Scottish Government, updates to the Tackling Child Poverty Programme Board and published reports and statistics.

3.1 Social Security

Social security plays a key role in the Scottish Government's action to reduce child poverty, primarily through the Scottish Child Payment, along with the three Best Start Grant payments, and Best Start Foods (known collectively as the Five Family Payments), but also through wider devolved social security benefits, and the mitigation of the impact of restrictions on reserved benefits.In our last scrutiny report we noted that modelling suggested that the Scottish Child Payment was delivering around a four percentage point reduction in relative child poverty, compared to what would be the case in its absence.

An evaluation of the Five Family Payments, published in September 2025, found that parents reported a range of positive impacts of the payments.[3] These included increased child-related spend, including participation in social and education activities, along with being able to buy healthy foods, reduced financial insecurity, and improvements to mental health.

While there have not been any significant changes to social security in Scotland during 2025-26, benefits have been uprated by inflation and there continues to be progress on take-up of benefits. Take-up of the Five Family Payments is generally higher than for other Scottish benefits, and automation of the Best Start Early Learning and School Age payments has helped raise take-up. It is estimated that for 2024-25 (the latest estimates available) the take-up rate for the Scottish Child Payment for all eligible children aged under 16 reached 94%, an increase of five percentage points from 2023-24.[4]

The Scottish Government also invests in mitigating the impact of some UK Government social security policy decisions. The Scottish Government has estimated that it has spent in the region of £1.3 billion[5] since 2010, and will spend a planned £159 million[6] in 2026-27, mitigating the impacts of UK Government welfare reforms. If this had not been required, this money could have been spent on other activity to reduce child poverty in Scotland.

Looking at mitigation of the benefit cap in particular, which is the limit imposed by the UK Government on the total amount of benefit that a household can get, the Scottish Government committed funding of £9.4 million in 2025-26 for mitigation. This is delivered by local authorities via discretionary housing payments. In 2024-25 (the latest year for which information is available) there was some progress on take-up, with local authorities spending 64% of their allocated funding on benefit cap mitigation, an increase from 57% in 2023-24.[7]

[3] Five Family Payments: evaluation - gov.scot
[4] Take-up rates of Scottish benefits - 2025
[5] Meeting of the Parliament: 04/02/2026 Scottish Parliament Website
[6] Meeting of the Parliament: 12/03/2026 Scottish Parliament Website
[7] Official statistics: Expenditure profile 2024-25 - Discretionary Housing Payments in Scotland: 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 - gov.scot

There is still work to do to raise awareness of the availability of this funding and identify households that would benefit. Data can be key in supporting this. Fife Council, for example, has been able to use its administrative datasets to identify households that were subject to the benefit cap and proactively reach out to invite them to apply for discretionary housing payments.[8]

As part of its 2025-26 Budget, the Scottish Government announced that it planned to mitigate the impact of the two-child limit. The two-child limit restricted the Universal Credit child element to only the first two children in a family, with some limited exceptions. The Scottish Government set out its intention to introduce a Two Child Limit Payment from March 2026. The UK Government subsequently announced in November 2025 that it would remove the two-child limit from Universal Credit, so the Two Child Limit Payment has not gone ahead, but the Scottish Government showed important leadership in this area. The Commission has welcomed the Scottish Government's statement that the funding that would have been used for the payment would be reallocated for other action to tackle child poverty.

3.2 Employability

Increasing income from employment needs to play an important role in eradicating child poverty and in *Best Start, Bright Futures*, the Scottish Government said it would increase investment in employability support to help up to 12,000 parents into work, and support up to 3,000 already in-work parents to increase their earnings. The Scottish Government estimated that this could achieve up to a two percentage point reduction in child poverty. Employability support is primarily delivered through the No One Left Behind approach via Local Employability Partnerships.

In previous scrutiny reports the Commission has highlighted issues with funding, including in-year cuts, budget reductions, and delays in confirming funding, and said that it was very unlikely that the aim of supporting 12,000 parents into work by the end of March 2026 would be met. It has also noted that while outcomes for parents were not broken down by priority family types, the data for all participants supported through No One Left Behind showed that participants from minority ethnic groups were less likely to enter employment than white participants, and that disabled participants were less likely to enter employment than people without a disability. This continues to be the case.

More positively, funding now seems to have stabilised, with £90 million allocated to No One Left Behind in 2025-26 and funding letters issued on schedule, providing greater certainty for services and service users.

[8] Fife Council allocated over £160,000 to benefit capped households in just eight months - Policy in Practice

A range of resources have been produced over the last year to support the delivery of No One Left Behind, and there are some examples of specialist or targeted employment support being provided which aims to support parents from the priority families and parents in rural areas.

Nevertheless, while at the time of writing data was not available up to the end of March 2026, it is now unarguable that the 12,000 target will not be reached. The latest available figures show that 30,202 parents received employability support between April 2020 and September 2025, with 8,428 (28%) moving into work so far.[9] At present less than half (40%) of parents who move into work appear to be sustaining employment for at least 52 weeks.[10] It remains unclear from the available data whether it is changes to policy design, delivery or funding that are required to improve outcomes. The available evidence also does not tell us whether employment support is reaching parents already in work and helping them to increase their earnings. If employability support is to make a serious contribution to meeting the child poverty targets a step-change will be needed in the numbers entering and sustaining work over the next five years.

3.3 Early Learning and Childcare

The Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare commitment is intended to achieve several distinct but interrelated objectives: reducing household costs, supporting parental access to work, and improving developmental outcomes for young children. It is an important element of the approach to reducing child poverty by increasing income from work. The policy provides 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare for all three- and four year olds, as well as eligible two year olds. The Scottish Government provides around £1 billion funding every year to support the policy and estimates that it would cost families more than £6,000 per eligible child per year if they paid for their full entitlement themselves.

In terms of delivery and take-up of the existing policy, the proportion of three- and four-year-olds estimated to be registered for funded early learning and childcare increased from 98% in 2024 to 100% in 2025.[11] Take-up of funded early learning and childcare for eligible two-year-olds is much lower and estimated take-up fell from 57% in 2024 to 55% in 2025. In its previous scrutiny report the Commission recommended that there needed to be a greater focus on improving take-up for eligible two-year-olds.

[9] Scotland's Devolved Employment Services: No One Left Behind Statistical Summary February 2026 - gov.scot

[10] This is calculated based on those who entered employment at least 52 weeks before.

[11] Supporting documents - Funded Early Learning and Childcare Statistics 2025 - gov.scot These are estimates and not every child in Scotland will be accessing their funded place.

The figures show that it continues to be the case that more is needed. The Improvement Service has been undertaking a National Improvement Project working with five local authorities to improve uptake. The report of the Discovery Phase of the project has highlighted the need for localised strategies to address distinct challenges in different local authorities, better data and better use of data to support targeted outreach, strengthened pathways for families eligible through immigration status or parental care experience, and improved communication with families.[12] This learning should inform the work of all local authorities on take-up.

An evaluation of the early learning and childcare expansion was published in March 2026.[13] This focuses on the difference that the increase in the number of funded hours from 600 to 1,140 has made. It found that the number of childcare places increased substantially over the period of the expansion, but that recruiting and retaining staff was a key challenge and the capacity of childminding services decreased substantially. Based on various measures, most parents were satisfied with the funded early learning and childcare provision they received, although flexibility was an issue for a minority of parents. Affordability had become less of an issue for families, with fewer having to use additional paid for childcare, but a substantial minority (42%) of those paying for childcare still reported affordability difficulties.

In terms of outcomes, the evaluation found limited evidence for progress on children's development and no evidence for closing the poverty-related outcomes gap. However, the timing of the expansion means that the children who received the additional hours were also impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which negatively impacted on young children's development. It is therefore impossible to distinguish between these different impacts.

The evaluation does however find evidence of an impact on maternal employment. There was an increase in the proportion of mothers of children receiving funded early learning and childcare who were in employment, training or full-time education following the expansion of funded hours. For mothers of early learning and childcare 'leavers' (the four- and five-year-old group) this increased from 76% pre-expansion to 84% post-expansion. The proportion in employment increased from 69% to 78%, with an increase from 29% to 37% in full-time employment.

Employment rose for mothers across all income groups and for the lowest income group it increased from 41% pre-expansion to 53% post-expansion, primarily due to an increase in part-time work.

[12] Targeted Uptake and Access Support Improvement Service

[13] Funded early learning and childcare - expansion to 1140 hours 2018-2025: National Outcomes evaluation - gov.scot

The income-related gap in maternal employment closed slightly as the increase in employment was greater for low-income mothers. For mothers of children eligible for early learning and childcare at age two ('eligible twos'), there was no significant change in work, study or full-time education after a year. However, there was a significant change in full-time working. The proportion of mothers of eligible twos who were working full-time when their child was age three, increased from 5% pre-expansion to 16% post-expansion.

This increase in maternal employment, and in full-time working, amongst the lowest income group should raise household incomes and have an impact on child poverty. Increased maternal income across the board can also potentially be a factor in preventing future poverty, for example, in the case of future relationship breakdowns.

Looking beyond delivery of current funded hours, in *Best Start, Bright Futures* the Scottish Government committed to developing funded early learning and childcare offers for one- and two year olds, initially for low income households. The Commission has previously noted a lack of the investment needed to take this forward. The Commission's 2024-25 scrutiny report concluded that it was 'clear that this commitment will not be delivered by May 2026'. It remains the case in 2025-26 that there has not been meaningful progress on this commitment. While there continues to be positive activity, such as funding for a programme to better recruit and retain the childminding workforce, and investment in Early Adopter Communities[14] across six local authority areas to expand access to childcare and provide other support to families, there is no plan in place to deliver expansion at scale.

3.4 School Age Childcare

In *Best Start, Bright Futures*, the Scottish Government committed to building a system of school age childcare, offering care before and after school, and during the holidays, by the end of this Parliament. In the Commission's last scrutiny report we noted that the Scottish Government had acknowledged that it had not allocated the funding needed to deliver the original commitment, although it said it remained committed to building a system of school age childcare, targeted to children and families who need it most. The Scottish Government had rescoped the commitment to focus on learning through smaller scale projects and funding, rather than on delivering at scale.

The School Age Childcare Programme budget was £16.2 million for 2025-26, an increase on the £13 million that was allocated in 2024-25, but modest compared to the likely cost of building a system of school age childcare.

[14] This activity is taken forward jointly with School Age Childcare policy.

This was supplemented by £1.7 million from the Early Learning and Childcare budget and £1.5 million from the Social Justice budget to contribute to the Early Adopter Communities and Extra Time Programme. Due to underspends, predominantly across the Early Adopter Community projects, the actual spend on the School Age Childcare Programme in 2025-26 was £16.5 million. In addition, the Scottish Government also provided £21.75 million to local authorities to support the provision during holidays of free school meal alternatives for eligible families, and £1 million to support holiday playschemes for disabled children.

In 2025-26 the Scottish Government has continued to invest in the Early Adopter Communities, Access to Childcare Fund, and Extra Time Programme. The Early Adopter Communities use a people-centred and place-based approach to develop childcare, activities and wider support services, particularly focused on the priority families. The Access to Childcare Fund funds projects that test different models of childcare for low income families, including those supporting disabled children and children with additional support needs. The Extra Time Programme, delivered in partnership with the Scottish Football Association, provides free breakfast, after school and holiday club places for children from families most at risk of living in poverty. Between them these projects support an estimated 5,400 children (and their families in case of the Early Adopter Communities).

In addition to continuing and expanding existing commitments, the 2025-26 Programme for Government included a commitment to invest £3 million to expand the delivery of free breakfast clubs. Bright Start Breakfasts funding has been awarded to 490 breakfast clubs, creating almost 9000 breakfast club places, supporting up to 20,000 primary and special school children across Scotland. An evaluation report will be published in summer 2026.

Alongside these funded programmes, the Scottish Government has been taking forward other work to support school age childcare. This includes consulting on a new legal definition of school age childcare. Defining school age childcare separately from early learning and childcare could open up opportunities to address some of the existing difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff, and the possibility of parents being able to use tax free childcare and Universal Credit to pay for childcare that comes in the form of children's activity services (which are currently unregulated).

Overall, there appear to be steps being taken to improve the availability of school age childcare, but this varies by geography and by offer, and is still supporting relatively small numbers of children and families. While this will make a difference to individual families and can offer wider benefits to children, the extent to which it is likely to add up in the future to a co-ordinated system that parents can rely on for childcare and that supports employment remains unclear.

3.5 Whole Family Support

The Scottish Government has increasingly focused on the role that holistic, tailored, Whole Family Support can play in reducing child poverty. In *Best Start, Bright Futures*, the Scottish Government committed to identifying a small number of 'Pathfinder' areas between 2022-26 to work on a new phased approach to delivering local, holistic, person-centred support. This evolved into the Fairer Futures Partnerships, starting in Glasgow, Dundee and Clackmannanshire, and now expanded into 16 local authority areas. The Scottish Government also committed to invest at least £500 million over five years in a Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme to help transform services that support families.

Almost £6 million was allocated to the **Fairer Futures Partnership Programme** in 2025-26, with some additional funding provided to the 16 local authorities who are not part of the programme. Alongside the local area work, some additional activities have been undertaken, including work on increasing funding flexibility, a project to improve the integration of the third sector with Fairer Futures Partnerships, publication of evaluations of the original pathfinders, and a programme of engagement activities to share learning. Over the past year the First Minister has led two stakeholder events to discuss learning, barriers and practice in relation to the delivery of Whole Family Support and the necessary systems change to enable it.

Evaluations of the three original pathfinders were published in June 2025.[15] These reports identified some good practice in engaging with and supporting families at risk of poverty, and some improvements in partnership working. They also identified a range of systems barriers that needed to be addressed such as data sharing, the need for long term flexible funding, and changes to benefit rules. At this stage there is limited evidence about the longer term impacts of the pathfinders for families, including their impact on child poverty. Further evaluation work is taking place, which will include a focus on employment and income impacts of the Dundee Pathfinder.

The aim of the **Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme** is to transform the way family support is delivered, so that families can access the help they need, where and when they need it. The original funding commitment for Whole Family Wellbeing Funding was £500 million over five years from 2022-23. Between 2022 and March 2026 the Scottish Government has spent a total of over £154.5 million and has taken the decision to extend the timeframe of the programme beyond 2025-26.

[15] Summary Report - Family Wellbeing Partnership in Clackmannanshire: evaluation - summary report - gov.scot and Introduction - Child poverty pathfinders in Dundee and Glasgow: phase two evaluation - summary report - gov.scot

The budget for 2025-26 was £50 million, with just over £38 million allocated directly to Children's Service Planning Partnerships to support system change and improved delivery of holistic whole family support. Evaluation of the programme so far has focused on the delivery of services and systems change, rather than outcomes for families, although further evaluation is planned. The most recent evaluation report found some improvements in the availability of and access to support, while the impact in terms of systems change was inconclusive.[16]

The Commission has previously recommended that the Scottish Government should clearly set out:

1. what its Whole Family Support approach consists of
2. a theory of change about how it is expected to reduce child poverty
3. what evidence there is to support this causal relationship in practice

In its update to the Commission the Scottish Government has set out that Whole Family Support means making sure families get the right support when they need it, where they need it, and for as long as they need it. It is described as a key component of the approach to Tackling Child Poverty and enabling public service reform. The Scottish Government says that this will require major changes to how services and systems work, by removing barriers and simplifying and aligning policy, funding and delivery. There is an emphasis on place-based approaches that prioritise preventative support and drive long-term system change.

In terms of outcomes and impact on reducing child poverty, the Scottish Government's update acknowledges that it is 'challenging to draw a line between specific activities and funding under the FFP programme, WFWF, and reductions in child poverty'. The Theory of Change for the Fairer Futures Partnerships programme sets longer term outcomes including reductions in child poverty, but the Scottish Government says that these will only be achieved at scale over a longer-term timeframe as a result of wider systems change. This reinforces the points that the Commission has made previously, that while a focus on whole family support and systems change may have benefits for families, it is not clear that it will have a significant impact on the child poverty targets and should not be overemphasised as a lever for meeting the 2030 targets.

[16] Whole Family Wellbeing Funding (WFWF) Programme - year 2: process and impact evaluation - full report - gov.scot

3.6 Affordable Housing Supply Programme

The availability of more affordable housing, particularly social housing, has been identified as one of the reasons why child poverty is lower in Scotland than in the UK as a whole. The Scottish Government has committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with at least 70 per cent for social rent and at least 10 per cent located in rural and island communities. In its last scrutiny report, the Commission noted that funding had been cut, and approvals and starts for new homes had slowed, putting delivery of the commitment at risk. In the 2025-26 Budget, the Scottish Government increased the affordable homes funding to £768 million, taking it broadly back to 2023-24 levels of spending in real terms, and it was further increased in year to just under £808 million.

Up to the end December 2025, 32,479 affordable homes have been completed towards the 110,000 target. Of these 77% are for social rent. The latest figures available, which go up to the end of December 2025, show a continued decline in approvals, starts and completions in 2025.[17] Comparing 2025 to 2024, there was a 24% decrease in the number of homes completed for social rent. Affordable housing supply approvals were 53% lower than the peak in approvals in 2018. Although approvals and starts were also lower in 2025, they did show an increase in the last two quarters of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, which may suggest an improved trajectory.

The focus on housing intensified during 2025-26, and the Scottish Government created a new Cabinet Secretary for Housing role and published a Housing Emergency Action Plan. In the introduction to the plan, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing said that her 'top priority is to use this action plan to drive forward our mission to eradicate child poverty', and the plan has a particular focus on children living in temporary accommodation.[18] It sets out a range of actions, including plans to increase investment in acquisitions, and in particular family homes, where existing properties are bought from the private sector to provide social housing. This aims to increase the supply of permanent housing and reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation, particularly families with children. In January 2026, the Scottish Government also announced that it intended to establish a new national housing agency, 'More Homes Scotland', from 2027-28 to enable the delivery of housing of all types to meet housing need across Scotland.

[17] Due to availability of data the figures used here refer to calendar years rather than financial years.

[18] Tackling Scotland's Housing Emergency - gov.scot

The increased funding and focus on affordable housing, along with the improved trajectory in the second half of 2025, are welcome and give some cause for cautious optimism. However, the Commission has consistently called for the Scottish Government to do more to understand the role that housing costs play in child poverty and how it can maximise the impact of existing policy on reducing child poverty, given the significant amounts of funding involved. While the Scottish Government identifies increasing affordable housing as an important element of its work to eradicate child poverty and estimates that keeping social rents lower than market rents benefits approximately 140,000 children in poverty each year, there continues to be a lack of information collected about who benefits from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and whether or not it could do more to address child poverty. Estimates of families and children benefiting from newly delivered Affordable Housing Supply Programme homes continue to be based on characteristics of households across the whole social rented sector from the Scottish Household Survey, rather than on data collected by the programme.

3.7 Child poverty priority families, intersectional approaches, and needs and barriers in rural areas

When the Commission asked for updates from the Scottish Government on progress on policies and actions, it also asked for information on how those policies and actions took account of the child poverty priority family types, the particular needs and barriers in rural areas, and the extent to which it had been possible to take an intersectional approach in developing and delivering them.

The ways in which thinking about the child poverty priority family types has shaped policies and delivery varies between policy areas. Broadly speaking these fall into three categories: targeting of an intervention towards the priority family types; specific action for particular priority family types within a wider policy; and an expectation that the priority family types will benefit due to prevalence in a particular geographical area or amongst a group of service users. Alongside this some areas also collect participation or outcome data by priority family type.

The work of the Early Adopter Communities and the ‘Extra Time’ programme are examples of policy targeting, in that they are described as particularly targeted at children and families from the six priority family types.

In contrast, the update on employability highlights specialist employment support projects that fit in the specific action category. These include projects designed to provide support for single parents, disabled parents, young mothers, and refugees, migrants and people experiencing racism.

Another example is the Access to Childcare Fund which includes projects aimed at supporting children with complex additional support needs, sensory and physical disabilities, in recognition of the extra barriers families with disabled children face when trying to access childcare.

For other actions, such as the Fairer Futures Partnerships, Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, the relationships with the priority family types tends to be framed as an assumption that the priority family types are benefiting, due to their prevalence either in particular geographical areas, or amongst the relevant population (e.g. those being allocated social housing). This may well be the case, but does not demonstrate whether or not these actions are being designed in a way to meet the needs of these groups, or whether they may continue to face barriers in accessing them.

Some areas, such as employability support, are collecting data about outcomes for the priority family types. Others have identified this as an area for further development and future evaluations will attempt to consider this.

In addition to the information provided by Scottish Government, we would note that for many of these actions local authorities and partners have responsibility for identifying and meeting needs locally. This means there may be other ways in which the priority family types are being used locally to design and develop services and support, which are not captured here.

Most of the policy areas identified activity in relation to rural issues. This divided primarily into activity to address specific issues and barriers in rural areas, and work to ensure that rural areas were represented in relation to particular actions.

Specific activity includes:

- Funding for work to address childcare challenges in areas affected by acute population decline.
- Funding through the Access to Childcare Fund for rural childcare services.
- Using a rurality weighting as part of the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme to account for higher costs and delivery challenges in rural and island areas.
- Putting in place a Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan and two rural housing funds – the Rural and Islands Housing Fund and the Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund.
- Employability support designed to meet particular needs in rural areas. For example, Orkney Council is supporting parents with travel costs to access training and learning for work and trying to align support with public transport links.

Actions focusing on representation of rural areas include:

- Ensuring all clubs applying for Best Start Breakfasts funding in remote rural areas and remote rural towns were awarded funding – in recognition of the challenges related to rural living.
- Making sure rural and island areas are included in the Fairer Futures Partnerships.

The Scottish Government identified that for some actions there continued to be challenges in rural areas. For example, it was noted that delivery of the Extra Time Programme had been challenging in four remote rural local authority areas, primarily due to a lack of Scottish Football Association clubs, and that the Scottish Football Association was working with the local authorities and local recreational trusts to design and deliver projects in these areas.

Most of the policies and actions that the Commission looked at do not explicitly take an intersectional approach in their design or delivery. Some, such as No One Left Behind and Whole Family Support, note that they recognise that parents and families may face multiple barriers and that by taking a person-centred approach they aim to respond to the full range of challenges that parents and families face. The Scottish Government notes that the evaluation that is taking place of the Early Adopter Communities will include intersectional analysis where possible.

4. *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* – the Scottish Government's third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan

Summary

The Scottish Government's new delivery plan, *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, has been published at a time of considerable uncertainty. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has said the fiscal outlook for the next Scottish Government is likely to be challenging because of substantial funding and spending pressures, and, with the war in Iran, the wider global economic context has worsened and uncertainty increased.

The publication of *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* shortly before a Scottish Parliament election means that it understandably focuses on action for 2026-27, so as to allow an incoming government the opportunity to set out its own priorities. While the lack of detail about future plans is understandable in this context, it makes it more difficult to draw any conclusions about the extent to which *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* will put the next Scottish Government on track to reach the child poverty targets. The Commission welcomes the actions set out in the plan and there is no doubt that they are likely to bring benefits to children and families. But even by the Scottish Government's own assessment, the contribution of many of the actions in the plan towards meeting the child poverty targets continues to be relatively small-scale or difficult to assess. The plan contains many positive actions but it does not set out the bold and transformative actions that the Commission was looking for.

4.1 Reflecting on *Best Start, Bright Futures*

The Scottish Government published *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*, its third Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan in March 2026. The Commission's role is to focus on the child poverty targets and highlight what more is needed to meet the targets, but, as we move into the final Delivery Plan before the 2030 targets are due to be met, it is important to also reflect on the substantial progress that has been made over the last four years under *Best Start, Bright Futures*.

Since the publication of *Best Start, Bright Futures*, the Scottish Government has more than doubled the value of the Scottish Child Payment and overseen its extension to all eligible children aged under sixteen. We know from families how important this is to them and the difference it makes to children's lives.

Alongside this, the automation of the Best Start Grant, Early Learning and School Age payments, expansion of eligibility for Best Start Foods and extension of free school meals for children in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment in P6 and P7 have helped ensure that more children receive the support they need. In committing to mitigate the impact of the benefit cap and two-child limit, the Scottish Government has shown leadership on child poverty across the UK. In addition to action on social security, this period has seen considerable additional investment in employment support to help parents into work and the testing of approaches intended to enhance childcare, and transform the systems that support families. There have also been many smaller-scale actions that may not have had an impact on the child poverty targets, but have benefited individual children and families, such as writing off school meal debt.

Over the last four years we have seen that action by Scottish Government, local authorities and other partners can make a difference, both in the lives of families and in making progress towards meeting the child poverty targets. In the next five years it is vital that progress is accelerated.

4.2 The context for *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*

The context for meeting the 2030 targets is undoubtedly challenging. In February 2026, the Scottish Fiscal Commission published a report on fiscal sustainability and the next Scottish Parliament term.[19] It highlighted substantial funding and spending pressures confronting any incoming government, including large real-terms increases in social security. It noted that the Scottish Government had projected that spending trends would result in a £2.6 billion gap in spending on day-to-day services by 2029-30. In the 2026 Scottish Spending Review the Scottish Government committed to implement £1.5 billion of savings to balance the budget for the next three years. The Fiscal Commission's view is that delivering these savings could be challenging.

The Scottish Spending Review 2026 set out multi-year spending plans to 2028-29 for resource spending, and up to 2029-30 for capital spending. It sets out a planned large increase in spending on the Social Justice portfolio, but the majority of this relates to the social security budget, driven by uprating of social security payments and rising caseloads, along with an increase in funding for Discretionary Housing Payments to account for higher spending on Benefit Cap mitigation. Outside the Social Justice portfolio, housing sees a substantial increase in planned spending, while local government funding reduces over the spending review period.

[19] Fiscal Sustainability Perspectives February 2026

The level of detail provided in the Spending Review makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions, but it does not appear that any significant extra investment is planned for tackling child poverty in 2027/28 and beyond, and certainly not the kind of spending that might be required to meet the 2030 targets. The reduction in local government spending is of concern given that local government delivers many of the underpinning services that are needed to support children and families and prevent child poverty. Specific funding and action to tackle child poverty will not be effective if accompanied by cuts to other services.

Since the publication of the Spending Review, the wider global economic context has worsened and uncertainty increased. The IMF has said that the energy shock from the Iran war will hit the UK the hardest of the world's advanced economies. It forecast that the UK will see a lower growth rate and higher inflation.[20] This is expected to translate into higher fuel and food prices and borrowing costs.

In addition to this wider economic context, there is also a Scottish Parliament election in May 2026. This report is being prepared before the election takes place, but by the time it is published there will be a new government in place which has committed to a set of policies in its manifesto. This means that the final tackling child poverty delivery plan before the 2030 targets has been prepared in a time of uncertainty and where there were limits to the longer term commitments that could be made. The Scottish Government has said that *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* is 'designed to give the next administration a strong foundation to build on, while allowing them to set their own policy priorities and decide how best to speed up progress'. It focuses on actions for 2026-27, and the intention is that the incoming Scottish Government will set out further action in the annual progress reports on child poverty.

This lack of detail about future plans, while understandable in this context, makes it more difficult to draw any conclusions about the extent to which *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* will put the next Scottish Government on track to reach the child poverty targets.

[20] How the War in the Middle East Is Affecting Energy, Trade, and Finance

4.3 Actions set out in *Bringing Hope, Building Futures*

Bringing Hope, Building Futures sets out four themes and 15 interconnected areas where further action is needed. The four themes are:

1. Increasing earned incomes
2. Reducing the cost of living
3. Maximising incomes from social security
4. Supporting children and families to thrive

The fifteen areas include skills and employment support, childcare, public transport, labour market, affordable homes, homelessness, heating, public debt, social security, maximising benefit take up, debt and money advice, whole family support, child development, ensuring children and young people can reach their full potential, and data. The Commission considers that these themes and areas are helpful and reflect many areas previously highlighted by the Commission.

As noted above, the specific actions set out in the plan are focused primarily on 2026-27, although some do go beyond that timescale. The Commission welcomes the actions set out in the plan, which will benefit children and families. Actions like investment in training and skills, the national breakfast club offer, and the new transport to employment programme should help parents access work, while work with employers through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund has the potential to influence employer action and enable parents to increase their income from work.

The increased funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme that was announced in the Budget should play a positive role in addressing some of the issues faced by the programme at present. Alongside this, the commitment to mitigate the impact of the freeze of Local Housing Allowance rates will help families in the private rented sector to manage housing costs and enable them to stay in their homes. Investment in action to address Council Tax and water charges debt can help relieve the pressure on families facing debt and potential deductions from earnings and benefits.

On social security, the commitment to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week for children under one will provide additional support to a group of families at high risk of poverty during the crucial first year of a child's life. The continued investment in welfare, income maximisation and debt advice, along with a campaign to raise awareness of devolved and reserved benefits, will help make sure that families get the money to which they are entitled.

Along with this action on the main drivers of poverty, families will also benefit from the plan's actions to provide further support to families. These include £20 million of funding for a new Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Plan. The Commission has previously said that there needed to be a more strategic approach taken to different activities and funding streams relating to whole family support, so it welcomes the Scottish Government's intention to develop an integrated Whole Family Support programme, bringing together existing work across Fairer Future Partnerships, Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and Whole Family Support Early Adopter Areas, which should reduce complexity and allow a clearer focus on local delivery.

Along with the delivery plan the Scottish Government has published a cumulative impact assessment and an assessment of the impact of the policies in the delivery plan on child poverty. It has also published an updated evaluation strategy and measurement framework. This continued commitment to, and transparency about, understanding the impact of policies and their likely contribution to meeting the child poverty targets is to be commended.

There is no doubt that the actions the Scottish Government has set out are likely to bring benefits to children and families. Some of the actions, such as raising the Scottish Child Payment for children under one, the new Flexible Workforce Development Fund, the universal provision of breakfast clubs, and increased investment in action to tackle council tax debt, at least partly reflect the Commission's advice. Many of the actions in this plan have benefits that go beyond a narrow focus on meeting the child poverty targets. But Scotland has made a commitment to meeting the 2030 targets and, even by the Scottish Government's own assessment, the contribution of many of the actions in the plan towards meeting the child poverty targets continues to be relatively small-scale or difficult to assess.

When the UK Government announced that it would remove the two-child limit, the Scottish Government committed to using all the money that it had expected to spend on its proposed mitigation payment on other action to tackle child poverty. While this was welcome, there was initially some lack of clarity about how the money was to be spent, and in fact some of the funding is being used to pay for the inflationary uprating of the Scottish Child Payment which would have had to be paid for anyway. No additional funding above the amount previously earmarked for the Two Child Limit Payment, has been allocated to specifically tackle child poverty in 2026-27. It is unclear what would have happened had the UK Government not chosen to remove the two-child limit. Perhaps the Scottish Government would have announced no additional action in 2026-27 to tackle child poverty, or perhaps it would have allocated more funding on top of the money earmarked for the two-child limit payment.

In its advice to the Scottish Government on what should be included in the delivery plan, the Commission said that meeting the targets is likely to require three or four bold policies/actions along with several more specific smaller-scale actions. It highlighted the kinds of actions that could make a difference: a minimum income guarantee, further increases to the Scottish Child Payment, a clear delivery plan to expand funded childcare for one- and two-year-olds, among others. The plan contains many positive actions but they are not bold or transformative. In the next section we discuss what this means for the likelihood of meeting the 2030 targets.

5. Does it appear to the Commission that such progress is sufficient to meet the child poverty targets?

Summary

The action the Scottish Government is taking is benefiting children and families, but all the evidence points to the conclusion that the Scottish Government continues to be on course to miss the child poverty targets by a large margin. The scale of the action to date does not meet the scale of the challenge and the Commission's view is that the new actions set out in *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* do not add up to an agenda that changes this. Judgements on progress towards the targets are complicated this year by the recent methodological changes to the child poverty statistics and the uncertainty in the data. Despite this, it is fair to conclude that the child poverty statistics suggest that the Scottish Government has a large gap to close if it is to meet the 2030 targets. The Scottish Government's cumulative impact assessment estimates that, based on existing and newly announced policies, relative and absolute child poverty will fall further, but by 2030-31 will remain substantially above the targets. The incoming government must take immediate and decisive action that goes beyond what is included in the delivery plan.

In considering whether the progress that has been made so far is likely to be sufficient to meet the 2030 targets, the Commission has considered the action that has been taken so far, the evidence about impact, the Budget and Spending Review, new commitments for 2026-27, the child poverty statistics, and the estimates from modelling of future impact. Judgements on progress towards the targets are complicated this year by the recent methodological changes to the child poverty statistics and the uncertainty in the data.

The child poverty statistics suggest that the Scottish Government has a large gap to close if it is to meet the 2030 targets. The gap between current estimates and targets ranges from 11 percentage points for relative poverty to six percentage points for combined low income and material deprivation. Both absolute poverty and persistent poverty are estimated to be nine percentage points above the targets.

The Scottish Government published a cumulative impact assessment alongside the delivery plan.[21]

[21] Summary - Bringing Hope, Building Futures: Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2026-2031 – annex 5: Cumulative Impact Assessment - gov.scot

The modelling was carried out before the 2024-25 child poverty data was available, using data from previous years using the previous methodology, so isn't directly comparable to the most recent statistics. Based on existing policies and new policies announced in the Delivery Plan (including the removal of the two-child limit by the UK Government), relative child poverty is projected to fall to 18% and absolute child poverty projected to fall to 15% by 2030-31. This remains substantially above the 10% relative child poverty and 5% absolute child poverty targets.

This modelling should be seen as a useful indication, but the specific figures should be treated with caution due to the uncertainty and assumptions in the model and the subsequent methodological changes to the child poverty data. It is important to note that the modelling only includes policies where there is quantitative data and evidence to support inclusion and therefore excludes some policies that may have an impact on child poverty (e.g. Whole Family Support and Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare), but where such data is not available.

The Commission reiterates its view that the action being taken by the Scottish Government is benefiting children and families in poverty. The Scottish Government's modelling estimates that Scottish Government policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty and 70,000 out of absolute poverty in 2026-27. However, the scale of the action to date does not meet the scale of the challenge. All the evidence points to the conclusion that the Scottish Government is on course to miss the child poverty targets by a large margin.

The Scottish Government is rapidly running out of time to meet the 2030 child poverty targets. The Commission's view is that cumulatively the actions set out in *Bringing Hope, Building Futures* do not add up to an agenda that will deliver the necessary progress. The incoming government must take immediate and decisive action that goes beyond what is included in the delivery plan.

6. What further progress does the Commission consider is required to meet the child poverty targets?

Summary

Scotland has committed to eradicating child poverty. This requires ambitious policies and actions, and the alignment of budgets and activity to deliver this. The Commission recommends that the incoming Scottish Government should quickly set out the additional action that it will take and how this will enable it to reach the 2030 targets. It should use the child poverty progress report for 2025-26, that it is required to publish by June 2026, to do this. In considering what additional action to take it should revisit the fourteen recommendations the Commission made in its advice to Scottish Government on what should be included in the 2026-2031 delivery plan.

While Scotland is still a long way from meeting its child poverty targets, the progress that has been made over the eight years since the first delivery plan demonstrates that action on child poverty can make a difference. The Scottish Parliament passed the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 with unanimous cross-party support. There is no lack of commitment in Scotland to the principle of eradicating child poverty, what we now need to see is a laser focus across government and partners that aligns budgets and activity in order to realise that commitment.

The only way to meet the targets will be with ambitious policies and actions that are developed in a way that builds in sustainability and resilience for the long-term. There is no route to the targets that does not require significant additional investment over the next five years. The financial context is difficult, and this will require redirecting spending from other policy areas and/or changing tax arrangements. This will be challenging but necessary. Child poverty already costs Scotland a significant amount in terms of pressures on services and lost opportunities. Investment in children should not be seen as a cost, but as an investment in the future of Scotland.

The incoming Scottish Government will have to publish a child poverty progress report for 2025-26 by June 2026. The Commission recommends that it uses this to immediately set out the additional action that it will take and how this will enable it to reach the 2030 targets.

The Commission made fourteen recommendations to the Scottish Government in the advice it provided on the 2026-2031 delivery plan.[22] Some aspects of the advice are reflected in the delivery plan but some recommendations are not, or are only partially reflected, without the necessary scale and ambition. There have been no substantive changes in policy nor conditions since these recommendations were made. Therefore, rather than provide new proposals, the Commission recommends that the incoming Scottish Government revisits and adopts those recommendations, which are reproduced in full overleaf.

[22] Advice on the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031 - Poverty Inequality Commission

6.1 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Minimum Income Guarantee

The Scottish Government should take action to progress towards a Minimum Income Guarantee as a matter of urgency. It should commit to implementing the steps on the Building the Guarantee: 2026-31 road map, working with the UK Government as necessary.

Recommendation 2: Scottish Child Payment

The Scottish Government should:

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment, as it has been proven to be an effective way to reduce child poverty.
- Expand eligibility for the Scottish Child Payment to include children aged 16-19 in full-time education.
- Develop an options appraisal for using the new childhood assistance power in the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act, to establish the Scottish Child Payment as a standalone benefit, looking at how tapering can address the cliff edge for those who lose Universal Credit entitlement.

Recommendation 3: Advice services and income maximisation

The Scottish Government should provide further funding for advice services to maximise take-up of both devolved and reserved social security entitlements. It should:

- Recognise the status of advice services as an essential service in securing people's rights, and ensure that they have sustained, secure and adequate funding
- Commit to long-term funding for evidence-based interventions, such as the Welfare Advice in Health Partnerships programme
- Investigate the barriers to accessing advice and support, particularly for priority families, and invest further in evidence-based strategies to maximise take-up
- Urge the UK Government to provide benefit take-up data for Universal Credit in order to strengthen the evidence base

Recommendation 4: Improving the quality of employment

- Where the Scottish Government is a significant procurer and/or funder of services, for example in social care, childcare, and the cultural sector, it should maximise the opportunities of this funding to drive fair work in these sectors, including improving pay, hours, flexibility and accessibility. This will require the Scottish Government to ensure that sufficient funding is available to permit organisations, particularly those in the third sector, to deliver fair work.
- Once its evaluation of Fair Work First is completed, the Scottish Government should consider where there are areas for improvement, and what scope there is to make further aspects of Fair Work – particularly flexibility – mandatory in its grants and procurement.
- Focusing particularly on sectors characterised by low pay and poor conditions, the Scottish Government should make use of Fair Work policy levers identified by the Fair Work Convention to enhance Fair Work. The Scottish Government should take a lead in recognising existing good practice in employment – such as pro-active recruitment and collaborative job redesign with disadvantaged groups - and build capacity amongst employers and trade unions to work toward Fair Work Agreements and sectoral bargaining, and promote care-informed working practices.
- Given the employment gap and pay gap for disabled people, the Scottish Government should review the action it is currently taking to address this and identify further action that can be taken to ensure that disabled people can access good quality, inclusive, accessible and flexible long-term opportunities.

Recommendation 5: Increasing the effectiveness of employability services

- Funding and strategic agreements with Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) to deliver the No One Left Behind (NOLB) employability programme, should set out requirements for local authorities, LEPs and providers to:
  - Actively work with employers to develop opportunities and deliver fair work outcomes for those engaging with support
  - Make better use of existing partnerships, especially where successful programmes exist, and work flexibly across boundaries, for example in managing Employer Recruitment Incentives across different local authorities
- No One Left Behind should deliver more specialist, targeted support, in order to deliver better outcomes, even if this means supporting fewer people. This should include a particular focus on those for whom outcomes are currently worst, such as minority ethnic and disabled participants. This support should build on existing effective practice, and on the knowledge of organisations working with groups who face specific barriers to employment (who should be properly funded to share this knowledge and support).

Recommendation 6: Increasing access to and affordability of childcare

- The Scottish Government should work with the Improvement Service, local authorities, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) to take further action to urgently maximise the uptake of early learning and childcare for eligible two-year-olds.
- The Scottish Government should apply learning from its pilots and tests of change, and set out a clear delivery plan and timetable for delivery of funded childcare for one- and two-year olds, starting with children from low-income families.
- The Scottish Government should take steps to increase the availability of school age childcare to support greater access to the labour market for families living in poverty.
- The Scottish Government should apply learning from its pilots and tests of change and set out how it intends to improve access to suitable childcare for disabled children and young people, and for children whose households include a disabled family member.

Recommendation 7: Maximise the impact of Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme and existing social housing in tackling child poverty

- The Scottish Government should use existing data, and gather appropriate additional data on social housing allocations, to demonstrate the extent to which the Affordable Housing Supply Programme currently contributes to reducing child poverty by providing affordable, suitable and accessible housing, and how it can do more. It should look particularly at the extent to which the housing needs of larger households are currently being met.
- While taking account of competing priorities in social housing allocations, the Scottish Government should consider giving greater weight to housing (un)affordability in its allocations guidance. It should also explore legislative amendments to introduce a new 'reasonable preference' group encompassing households currently living in unaffordable housing in the private rented sector, with families with children prioritised within relevant accompanying guidance.

Recommendation 8: Housing accessibility

The Scottish Government should set out a plan and timescales for updating the Housing for Varying Needs Standard and introducing a Scottish Accessible Housing Standard, to increase the availability of accessible and adaptable housing.

Recommendation 9: Ensuring pursuit of public debt does not deepen poverty

The Scottish Government, local authorities and the wider public sector must ensure their approach to the pursuit and recovery of public debt does not undermine child poverty reduction, by:

- Building on learning from Scotland and other parts of the UK to use instances of debt as an early warning sign of households in financial difficulty and develop and deploy supportive interventions (rather than punitive recovery approaches) as the first-line response.
- Collaborating and making better use of the data they hold on households in these circumstances to act preventatively to stop debt getting worse and households being pulled further into poverty.

Recommendation 10: Supporting families with fuel costs

- The Scottish Government should continue to press the UK Government to deliver on the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Social Tariff Working Group for a flexible discount mechanism that would automatically deliver a unit rate discount for energy costs for eligible households.
- The Scottish Government should re-establish its Fuel Insecurity Fund, to provide additional support for energy costs for those living in poverty who are rationing usage or at risk of self-disconnection, with a particular focus on those facing higher fuel costs, such as those in rural areas and those whose health conditions or impairments require high energy usage.

Recommendation 11: Whole Family Support Approach

The Scottish Government should clearly set out: 1) what its Whole Family Support approach consists of, 2) a theory of change about how it is expected to reduce child poverty, and 3) what evidence there is to support this causal relationship in practice.

Recommendation 12: Third Sector Funding

Given the crucial role of the Third Sector in working alongside and within communities, the Scottish Government and local authorities must work to deliver longer term funding for third sector partners, by:

- Moving away from short-term funding cycles and the high overheads they incur on both third sector partners and funding administrators, through developing and implementing standards on longer-term funding, and appropriate timeframes for funding decisions, across the sector.
- Working towards parity between the third sector and public sector in job security and terms and conditions when delivering similar services.

Recommendation 13: Making better use of public assets

As part of delivering on the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform Strategy, the Scottish Government, local authorities and wider public sector must work to make more efficient and effective use of public assets and the public estate to support action to tackle child poverty, by:

- Ensuring public assets (such as community buildings or school buildings) are available to use for the community, when not in use for their primary purpose, including for school age childcare.
- Consider how information on the location, ownership and availability of such public assets, can be made available to increase transparency and support more effective use of them.

Recommendation 14: No Recourse to Public Funds/Restricted Eligibility

- As part of the review of the Ending Destitution Together strategy, the Scottish Government should audit the most relevant existing services and benefits to assess whether eligibility rules or processes and practice can be adjusted to allow access for those with No Recourse to Public Funds or restricted eligibility, including families with children, as highlighted by the 'Ending Destitution in Scotland' report by Fair Way Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should directly commission or otherwise enable access to specialist legal advice for families with children facing extreme hardship as a result of having No Recourse to Public Funds or other restricted eligibility due to immigration status.
- The Scottish Government and COSLA should develop guidance to ensure greater consistently in the standard of local authority support for families with NRPF or other restricted eligibility due to immigration status.

Although challenging, it is still possible for Scotland to meet the 2030/31 child poverty targets. From our own history and international experience we know what works and what is required. We also know the consequences for children's wellbeing and national prosperity of not applying these lessons. Not taking the necessary actions is a political choice, and so we urge the new Scottish Government and Parliament to show bold leadership in embracing this challenge.

Visit our website
povertyinequality.scot

For general and press
enquiries:
info@povertyinequality.scot