



## Briefing for Members' Business Debate: Challenge Poverty Week 2024

10th October 2024

### About the Poverty Alliance

The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

### Introduction

In our wealthy nation, it is unjust that so many people do not have adequate incomes to live a decent and dignified life. One in five people in Scotland - rising to one in four children - are having their life chances restricted by the preventable injustice of poverty.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing cost of living crisis is compounding existing inequalities, contributing to a rising tide of poverty as people struggle to stay afloat. This crisis, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, have further illuminated the inadequacies of our social security system and structural issues in our labour market. As the climate emergency continues to have a disproportionate impact on people living on low incomes, this will likely compound pre-existing issues of income adequacy. It has, therefore, never been more important to raise our collective voices against poverty.

[Challenge Poverty Week \(CPW\)](#) represents a point in the year for civil society to come together to call for a just and equal Scotland – showcasing work that has been done throughout the year to tackle poverty, both locally and nationally, and calling for system change to address the root causes of poverty. Every year, over 400 organisations take part in the campaign. Coordinated by the Poverty Alliance since 2013, CPW provides clear evidence that people want to solve poverty, understand it and take action.

This year, Challenge Poverty Week is taking place between the **7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of October**. Events are happening across Scotland, both in-person and online, to shine a light on particular aspects of poverty, including:

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2024) *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23*. Data available at: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/download.html>

- The North East Health Improvements Team partnering with both Home Energy Scotland and Social Security Scotland to provide information on making homes more energy efficient and Scottish benefits;
- Aberlour highlighting the need for a new approach to public debt recover to end child poverty;
- End Poverty Edinburgh's 2024 Conference centering on the theme of Community Exclusion, highlighting the need for those with lived or living experience of poverty to be included in decision-making;
- The Poverty Alliance holding daily breakfast briefings to discuss the week's policy asks;
- Schools across Scotland integrating issues of poverty into lesson plans;
- The charitable arms of our football clubs holding activities and events for people in their communities and their elected representative; and
- Faith groups coming together with a joint statement on poverty.

There has been a key role for our political leaders too. The First Minister met with people living on low incomes to build better solutions to poverty and several of the Poverty Alliance's grass-roots, community-based organisational members met with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to explore how the Government can work with the sector on anti-poverty action. Further to this, MSPs from all parties have taken to social media to highlight the injustice of poverty and local solutions, making clear the role of all elected representatives in progressing the anti-poverty action that we know is needed.

At the Poverty Alliance, we know that Challenge Poverty Week is the accumulation and representation of the work that happens every single day in our communities. We must collectively take forward this resolve and energy into our wider work to end the injustice of poverty for good.

## Poverty in Scotland

Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (JRF) latest 'Poverty in Scotland' report continues the trend of showing little change in the Scottish poverty levels.<sup>2</sup> The reality is, poverty is deepening; nearly four million people experienced destitution in the UK in 2022, a 148% increase over five years.<sup>3</sup>

The risk of poverty continues to be disproportionately high for particular groups including disabled people, women, Black and minority ethnic people and single parents, over 90% of whom are women. However, despite this evidence, the needs and experiences of these groups do not receive sufficient attention by policy makers. For example, evidence from the JRF highlights that being in receipt of non-means tested disability benefits – which are provided to disabled people to cover the

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *Poverty in Scotland 2024*. Unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *Poverty in the UK 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

additional costs of being disabled - increasingly bears the risk of being in poverty. They show that the poverty rate more than doubles amongst families in receipt of disability payments when those payments are excluded from total household income. The impact of this is most starkly seen in the statistics that show that children and working age adults in a family where someone is disabled are three times as likely to experience combined low-income and material deprivation.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear then that poverty and inequality have far-reaching negative consequences for individuals, causing severe harm to people's daily lives, damaging their health and employment prospects, risking financial and personal wellbeing, and infringing on fundamental human rights such as access to food and housing.

A recent report by the Cross-Party Group on Poverty further highlights the extensive and deep-rooted nature of poverty-related stigma in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> This stigma continues to manifest in several reinforcing ways:

- Impacting people's mental health and wellbeing;
- Creating and reinforcing barriers to accessing support;
- Restricting educational attainment; and
- Influencing the design and resourcing of policies that can tackle poverty.

Poverty is also bad for our economy, stifling our collective wellbeing and resulting in resources being used to fix problems rather than prevent them. Research from IPPR Scotland found that around £2.3 billion of health boards' budgets in Scotland is directed at responding to the impacts of poverty, with hundreds of millions more diverted through primary care and addressing health inequalities driven by financial inequality.<sup>6</sup> As well as being the socially just thing to do, it also makes good economic sense to prioritise action to tackle poverty.

## **Our policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week 2024**

This year, our policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week were the basis of our asks for the Programme for Government, and will remain our focus for the Scottish Budget. These policies were formed in collaboration with a short-life working group with representation from public bodies, the private sector, and a variety of third sector organisations giving them a solid foundation of expertise across sectors.<sup>7</sup> They are designed to turn our shared values of justice and compassion into action, and to

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *Poverty in Scotland 2024*. Unpublished.

<sup>5</sup> Cross Party Group on Poverty (2023) *An inquiry into poverty-related stigma in Scotland: Key findings and recommendations*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Summary-briefing-of-the-inquiry-into-stigma-CPG-on-Poverty.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> IPPR Scotland (2023) *Tipping the Scales: The Economic and Social Harm of Poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/tipping-the-scales>

<sup>7</sup> The membership of the working group included: Abundant Borders, ALLIANCE, Carers Scotland, CHAP, Citizens Advice Scotland, Eildon Housing Association, Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Community Development Trust, Fullarton Connexions, Grassmarket Community Project, Magic Breakfast, Marie Curie, NHS Tayside Charitable Foundation, Survivors of Human Trafficking Scotland and Women's Support Project. Please note the policy asks and content of the accompanying briefings may not reflect the organisational views of each member of the working group.

highlight to our elected representatives what action is required to build a Scotland free from poverty.

The anti-poverty movement are collectively calling for substantive action to ensure a Scotland where we:

- Have safe, secure and sustainable homes;
- Can get to where we need to go by public transport;
- Have access to an adequate income for a decent and dignified life;
- Live without hunger; and
- Value our communities and volunteers through fair funding for the third sector.

In placing emphasis on food, housing and transport, these policy asks are focused on meeting people's basic needs, and realising the human rights of people in Scotland. Poverty is a breach of our human rights. The Poverty Alliance and our membership are therefore extremely concerned about the delay to the Human Rights Bill which will have negative implications for the Scottish Government's ability to deliver on the core mission of eradicating child poverty. Progress towards the realisation of our human rights cannot wait.

We made this clear in August, through a joint letter from more than 100 of Poverty Alliance's members – representing charities, trade unions, campaign groups and community organisations – which called on the First Minister to ensure that action to tackle poverty at the heart of the Programme for Government.<sup>8</sup> These diverse organisations showed their support for the critical actions outlined in this briefing, in recognition that people living in the grip of poverty cannot afford to wait. **It is time to build a fairer Scotland where everyone has access to an adequate income that allows for a dignified and decent life.**

## Eradicating child poverty in Scotland

The First Minister has made clear that the eradication of child poverty is the single most important policy objective for his government. This is very welcome, and we believe this to be the right priority. However, this ambitious commitment must be matched with bold, immediate action.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission's latest scrutiny report on progress of the Child Poverty Delivery Plan makes clear that child poverty levels have stayed broadly the same as they were five years previously, when the plan was published. It states that "*meeting the [Scottish Government's] 2030 targets [on child poverty] will require transformational change in relation to all the drivers of poverty.*"<sup>9</sup> They state that, in view of recent statistics, they believe it is unlikely that the Government's

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<sup>8</sup> See letter at <https://www.povertyalliance.org/programme-for-government-2024/>

<sup>9</sup> Poverty and Inequality Commission (2024) *Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress 2023-24*. Available at: [https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Child\\_Poverty\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_progress\\_2023-2024\\_Scrutiny\\_by\\_the\\_Poverty\\_and\\_Inequality\\_Commission.pdf](https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Child_Poverty_Delivery_Plan_progress_2023-2024_Scrutiny_by_the_Poverty_and_Inequality_Commission.pdf)

interim child poverty targets will be met and, further to that, “*without immediate and significant action, the Scottish Government will not meet the 2030 targets.*”<sup>10</sup>

Whilst action to raise incomes through policy interventions like the Scottish Child Payment is making progress - showcasing what can be achieved with commitment to, and funding for, significant change - we agree that **the necessary pace and scale of action on child poverty has not been taken to shift the dial on child poverty.**

**Our child poverty targets can only be met through a range of actions that work together and are transformative in scale.** As such, there must be scaled-up and accelerated investment in all ‘Best Start, Bright Futures’ commitments to close the policy implementation gap that is currently rendering it extremely challenging to meet the 2030 child poverty targets. Scotland’s child poverty targets were passed by all parties in the Scottish Parliament in 2017. Therefore, every party, and all of our political leaders, have responsibility to do what they can to meet Scotland’s child poverty targets.

### **What are we asking for, and how do we get there?**

This briefing provides an overview of our key policy asks, and the action that is required to achieve that ambition. More detail on the individual asks can be found in the accompanying policy briefings on [housing](#), [transport](#), [adequate incomes](#), [food security](#) and [fair funding for third sector](#) on the Poverty Alliance [website](#).

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<sup>10</sup> Poverty and Inequality Commission (2024) *Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress 2023-24*. Available at: [https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Child\\_Poverty\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_progress\\_2023-2024\\_Scrutiny\\_by\\_the\\_Poverty\\_and\\_Inequality\\_Commission.pdf](https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Child_Poverty_Delivery_Plan_progress_2023-2024_Scrutiny_by_the_Poverty_and_Inequality_Commission.pdf)

## **A Scotland where we have safe, secure and sustainable homes**

### **What are we calling for?**

Ensure that everyone has a secure, sustainable and accessible home that meets their needs.

### **How do we get there?**

- Adequately fund the delivery of new social homes through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, and ensure existing social homes are well-maintained and suitably adapted to meet people's needs;
- Ensure all tenants are aware of, and can exercise, their rights by making advocacy services fully available and accessible; and
- Adequately fund - and advertise - advice and financial support to improve energy efficiency in the home, including grants for those on the lowest incomes, disabled people and those living with long-term or terminal conditions.

## **A Scotland where we can all get where we need to go**

### **What are we calling for?**

Improve the affordability, accessibility and reliability of public transport so all of us have the same freedoms to access essential services, employment and leisure.

### **How do we get there?**

- Expanding concessionary travel to under 25s, people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits and unpaid carers;
- Integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram; and
- Ensure public transport funding is directed towards networks which are affordable, reliable, safe and meet the needs of local people.

## **A Scotland where we all have enough to live a decent and dignified life**

### **What are we calling for?**

The Scottish Government can ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income by taking the steps needed to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee.

### **How do we get there?**

Initial steps to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee should include action to:

- Implement an Essentials Guarantee;
- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week;
- Increase the funded childcare entitlement and ensure greater flexibility in the delivery of pre-existing entitlements;
- Prioritise the pre-existing commitment to model a Minimum Income Guarantee for unpaid carers;
- Maximise incomes through full coverage access to advice services, and collective working between the Scottish Government, UK Government and local authorities to automate social security support to increase uptake and reduce stigma; and
- Ensure that any changes to our social security systems through the Work Capability Assessment continue to support disabled people on a day-to-day basis so that they can fully realise their rights to independent living and equal participation in society.

## **A Scotland where we live without hunger**

### **What are we calling for?**

Ensure people have dignified access to good quality, healthy and sustainable food.

### **How do we get there?**

- Improve dignified and 'cash first' food insecurity responses, including boosting the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund;
- Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items; and
- Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland.

## **A Scotland where we value our communities and volunteers**

### **What are we calling for?**

Introduce fair and sustainable funding of three years or more for the third sector.

### **How do we get there?**

To do this, the Scottish Government must provide funding for community and voluntary organisations that is:

- Fair and recognises the value of the third sector;
- Longer-term, guaranteeing income of three years or more;
- Sustainable, including awards that cover the payment of the real Living Wage, inflation-based uplifts and full costs, including core operating costs; and
- Accessible through providing proportionate, and consistent approaches to applications and reporting.

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