

ANNUAL
REPORT
2023/24

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Despite dropping from the headlines, the impact of the cost-of-living remained a key focus for the members of the Poverty Alliance's network during 2023-24. Whenever we brought our members together it was clear that, although the headline rate of inflation had dropped back, the people and communities they were working with were still struggling to cope with the increased cost of living.

In this context it was right that we continued to focus on some key programmes to better understand and address the cost of living. Our new Taking Action on Rural Poverty (TARP) was set up explicitly to focus on the issues surrounding the additional costs for many basic services that people living in rural Scotland typically experience. Like other programmes and initiatives at the Poverty Alliance, we have sought to put the direct experience of poverty at the heart of this work. Panels of people with direct experience have been established in the two areas where we are working, Argyll and Bute and Aberdeenshire. We are also working with local third sector organisations and local decision makers.

TARP illustrates the ambition we have to address the fundamental drivers of poverty in Scotland, no matter where that poverty is. Our ambition is also reflected in our work on the Minimum Income Guarantee. Our annual conference in November 2023 highlighted the enthusiasm that members and supporters have for the idea of a MIG. Since then, we have been working hard to flesh out what that idea will look like in practice. There is no doubt that there is still a long way to go to see the ambition of the MIG realised, but we are confident that this long-term vision continues the radical changes that we need to make a real impact on poverty in Scotland.

In a period where progress in addressing poverty appears to have stalled, it is all the more important that the Poverty Alliance and our members continue to focus on the long-term change that we need. As our annual report shows, we have been active across a wide range of areas, calling out those policy changes that are impacting on people in poverty now, but always framed in the context of the longer-term changes we need.



Vital to all our work over the last year has been the engagement of our members. Whether at conferences, members meetings or in projects like Rights in Action, we continue to see sustained and growing involvement of our members in our work. This engagement is core to our purpose and to achieving the change that we all wish to see. Thank you for your continued support of the work of the Poverty Alliance and we look forward to continuing to work with you in the years to come.

Marie Ward
Convenor of the Board

CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT

At the Poverty Alliance we have a vision for Scotland. It is of a Scotland free from poverty where everyone can flourish and is treated with dignity. It's a compelling vision and one we believe most people would support. But how do we achieve it? How do we go about creating the conditions where Scotland can genuinely be a country free of poverty, and what is the Poverty Alliance's role?

These are questions we wrestle with as a network week in, week out. In the last financial year, answering those questions became especially tough. The cost-of-living crisis, the cuts to many vital public services and the strain that many third sector organisations were under, made the prospect of achieving a Scotland free from poverty a distant one.

But no matter the difficult context for campaigning for real change, the experiences of people who live on low incomes require us to find ways to overcome any challenges we face. The evidence we hear through projects like Get Heard Scotland, Rights in Action and Serving the Future, or through our members meetings, means we need to find ways to turn people's experiences of poverty into meaningful demands for change.

We can be proud of the work we have carried out over the last year. As a result of programmes like Living Wage Scotland we have helped deliver pay increases for thousands of low paid workers. Over the last 10 years, our work on the real Living Wage has secured more £485m for low paid workers. That's a good example of meaningful change, and of giving some prospect for hope.

Our Challenge Poverty Week campaign, running now for more than 10 years, has become important opportunity to maintain the profile of poverty in public debates, to raise clear demands on what needs to change, as well as highlighting the difference that civil society organisations make to people's lives every day. This year's CPW involved hundreds of groups and organisations from across Scotland, and engaged with senior politicians across the political spectrum, including the First Minister.



Projects and programmes like these deliver both real change and highlight where more change is still needed. They are perhaps even more important in a period such as the one we are in at the moment. Despite significant investment from Scottish Government, and genuine commitment on their part, progress in tackling poverty in Scotland has stalled. With statutory child poverty targets at risk of being missed, it is critical that we maintain the pressure, and provide the ideas, on how we can make progress.

We are grateful to all our members who have supported and contributed to the work of our network over the last year. I would also like to thank the funders and donors who have helped make this work possible. We face some significant challenges in the years ahead, but our experiences tells us that where we act together, we can make real change happen.

Peter Kelly
Chief Executive



In 2023-24 our work was focused around five key outcomes. These are the new outcomes agreed with the Board of the Poverty Alliance and that will give focus to our work until 2028-29. The five outcomes we are working to are that:

1. Social security that provides a more reliable source of adequate income
2. More jobs that help reduce in-work poverty;
3. Services more effectively help to reduce and prevent poverty;
4. More organisations & individuals collaborate to address poverty;
5. We are a healthy organisation equipped to bring about change

Under each of these outcomes we pursue a range of strategies to help bring about change. These activities bring focus and immediacy to what are high-level, long-term outcomes. A wide range of activities are carried out by the staff team with our members and many others in across all of our outcomes. In 2023-24 much of the focus of the work of the Poverty Alliance was around the continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Our work, whether in relation to policy development, network development and support, working alongside people with experience of poverty or delivering new research, sought to focus on how we can address the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis both now and long term. This report will highlight some of our key activities and achievements in each of the outcome areas.

OUTCOMES

Outcome 1: Social security that provides a more reliable source of adequate income

Our activities in relation to social security cuts across several areas of activity, including project activities, campaigns, lobbying and research. A concern with the adequacy of social security runs through all our work, and below we highlight some of the key areas where we worked in 2023-24. We have been active in the continued development of the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) in Scotland, contributing to the work of the Scottish Government's Expert Group and raising awareness of the policy among our membership. Our Annual Conference in November 2023 focused on MIG with a day of lively discussion with more than 150 delegates to expand learning on the policy and explore how we make it a reality in Scotland.

Building on this momentum, we have been successful in increasing awareness of, and support for, the MIG among our members through our Drawing a Line project funded by the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust. Phase one of this project started in February 2024 and now we have published an interim report that gives us a strong understanding of the priorities of our members. The Poverty Alliance continue to view the MIG as a policy with transformational potential and it has become a key lens through which we are frame our advocacy work.

Our campaigning and policy influencing work means supporting a variety of other coalitions and platforms during the year. Two important coalitions for us continue to be the End Child Poverty Scotland campaign, the Scottish Campaign on the Right to Social Security.

A key part of our approach to improving social security is changing the way we talk about it. We continue to speak regularly in the media about what needs to change in our social security system. In addition to speaking out in the media directly, we also encourage and support others to do the same. In the last year we delivered updated media training for people with direct experience of poverty. This combined existing training on how to framing poverty, with advice and experience on carrying out media interviews, and writing blogs. Our reputation as leaders in the framing of communications around moral values continued to grow. We provided bespoke training to Poverty Alliance members and supporters, including The Alliance, The Robertson Trust, Falkirk Council, East Dunbartonshire Council, and grant holders of The Corra Foundation.

Our research activity has continued to contribute to our understanding of the role of our social security system in addressing poverty. In partnership with the Fraser of Allander Institute, we were commissioned to conduct research on the additional costs of disability.



This was a small-scale research project where disabled people participating in the research completed costs of living diaries. The project team presented findings from this research to the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee in March 2024.

We also continued our research and advocacy work on child maintenance alongside Fife Gingerbread and others, conducting research with families on their experiences of child maintenance during the cost-of-living crisis. This research has fed into a number of consultation responses and findings were presented at an All-Party-Parliamentary Group on Child Maintenance Services in June 2023.

In 2023/2024, we also became a key partner in a five-year European Research Council project led by King's College London, Welfare Experiences, exploring recipients' experiences of out-of-work benefits across five countries: UK, Spain, Hungary, Estonia and Norway. This will be an important comparative project that will allow us to feed into the debates regarding the future direction of social security policy at both the Scottish and UK levels.





Outcome 2: More jobs that help reduce in-work poverty

Our advocacy and support for the real Living Wage remains at the heart of our approach to addressing in-work poverty. The accreditation initiative we started in 2014, now called Living Wage Scotland, has continued to grow in strength over the last year.

In the last financial year, we recorded 5968 wage uplifts to the real Living Wage, above our target of 5000. In total 640 organisations became accredited Living Wage employers. In total, we now estimate that more than 67,000 workers in Scotland receive a pay increase as a result of the real Living Wage, and that the overall financial gain has been in the region of £485m for low paid workers since the initiative began in 2014.

Over the last year we have continued to build on the success of the Living Wage accreditation process. In partnership with the Living Wage Foundation we have begun to offer Living Hours accreditation, where employers commit to providing minimum contractual hours, better notice of shift patterns and contracts that reflect actual hours. There are now 53 Living Hours accredited employers in Scotland, with 34 of those accrediting in the last financial year. This took us well beyond our target of reaching 40 by the end of March 2024. Living Hours employers in Scotland account for more than 30% of the UK total.

This important new development for Living Wage Scotland demonstrates that we understand that the challenges of in-work go beyond simply what a worker earns. We have continued to develop our work on Living Pensions, recognizing the vital role that an adequate workplace pension will play in addressing poverty in later life. We also started the second year of our Robertson Trust's Partnership in Change project, Serving the Future, which aims to identify actions to prevent and tackle in-work poverty in the hospitality sector in Scotland. In partnership with the Fraser of Allander Institute, we conducted longitudinal research with low-paid workers to explore their experiences of low-paid work over time. We also continued to deliver an action learning set process with employers from the sector.



During Challenge Poverty Week 2023, we published two reports from our action research with employers and workers and hosted a webinar to share interim findings from the project. We also continued to build relationships with key bodies in the sector and raise awareness of the project, for example, presenting findings from the research to the Fair Work Convention's Hospitality Inquiry and sharing project outputs at the Scottish Tourism Alliance and Hospitality Industry Trust conferences.



OUTCOMES

Outcome 3: Services more effectively help to reduce and prevent poverty

The first two outcomes in our strategy rightly focus on key sources of income – from paid employment and social security. However, we know that people living on low incomes are more likely to rely on a range of public services, and that they also often pay more for services delivered through the market. Addressing these aspects of the experience of poverty is vitally important.

Our most notable new project in relation to services has been the launch of our new Taking Action on Rural Poverty project. This was launched in November 2023, with the explicit aim of addressing the additional costs associated with many services in rural communities. It is expected that we will focus on key areas such as energy, food, transport and housing. With staff working in Argyll and Bute and Aberdeenshire, this will be an ambitious project that is intended to practically demonstrate how we can reduce the cost of essential services for more people in rural Scotland.

As part of our Get Heard Scotland programme, we were commissioned by Scottish Government engage with people with direct experience of poverty to better understand how the lifetime skills offer available from the Government could be improved. A second stage of this work was delivered in September 2023 when we took the same issues to equalities groups to understand their views on how these critical policies could better engage with the people these groups represented.

We have also continued to support the work of End Poverty Edinburgh, a group of citizens with direct experience of poverty who are seeking to influence the development of policies and practice in the city that can address poverty. Amongst a wide range of engagements that the group had in 2023-24, there was a particular focus on issues of housing and homelessness, with a number of meetings with the convenor of the Housing and Homelessness Committee of Edinburgh City Council. EPE is becoming an increasingly important voice in addressing poverty in the city.

As part of our Rights in Action project, we supported two groups of community researchers with experience of the asylum system to conduct participatory action research on the right to health and the right to education for asylum seekers in Scotland. In partnership with Maryhill Intergration Network, community researchers launched their photovoice project on the right to health at a meeting of the cross-party group on migration in May 2023. Exhibitions of the photos were held as part of the Scottish Parliament's Festival of Politics and the Mental Health Arts Festival.



In May 2023, another group of community researchers held an event with education stakeholders and civil servants on barriers to accessing further and higher education for asylum seekers in Scotland. In January 2024, we also began working in partnership with Romano Lav to support the delivery of a third participatory action research project with the Roma community in Govanhill. Evidence from our Rights in Action research fed into Poverty Alliance's response to the Human Rights Bill consultation.

In Fife, our work on developing a stigma toolkit with the Making it Work for Families project was launched with a range of practitioners in April 2023. This toolkit was developed as an aid to support thinking and challenging stigma at a local level to help improve outcomes for families. Outside of Fife, the stigma toolkit has been shared with other local authorities and is feeding into the development of a stigma charter in Edinburgh. We also continued to support research on the development of a poverty-based stigma measurement tool with the University of the West of Scotland, University of Strathclyde and the Mental Health Foundation.





Outcome 4: A healthy organisation equipped to bring about change

Creating opportunities for our members to work together and collaborate is central to why the Poverty Alliance exists. We know that when we raise our voices together we are more likely to make real change. We continued to see the growth in our network in 2023-24, and saw greater levels of engagement across a broad range of activities. Our members meetings are now a vital part of our programme of work, allowing members to connect, share and work together.

Our policy and campaigns team worked closely with member organisations to identify and lobby on a range of policy issues relevant to poverty in Scotland. We contributed a number of parliamentary briefings and consultation responses on a diverse range of topics, including parental employment, the Scottish Budget, the Fair Fares Review, child poverty, human rights and Community Wealth Building. We also continued to build relationships with elected members and political parties. As part of this work, we held at least one fringe event at the party conference of every political party who won seats in the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. We worked in partnership with members to host fringe events on topics such as social security, fair work, and poverty at end of life.

In addition to the consultations and evidence sessions in the Scottish Parliament, we have continued to support the work of Cross-Party Group on Poverty in the Scottish Parliament through our role as secretariat. We undertook an in-depth inquiry focusing on rural poverty with the final report containing many important insights. We will be using the report as the basis for advocacy over the coming years. We would like to thank those organisations who inputted into this work. Through our Taking Action on Rural Poverty project, we have also embedded rural poverty more consistently throughout our policy and campaigns work. The CPG on Poverty has become an important way for a wide range of civil society organisations to come together to engage with politicians.

Challenge Poverty Week (CPW) not only ties together much of our policy and campaigns work, but has become a central part of our work to build a strong and coherent anti-poverty movement across Scotland. We work closely with organisations from early in the year to: develop our policy asks; deliver media training; and deliver support via our Get Inspired meetings. Over 200 individuals participated in our media training, framing training and Get Inspired meetings – helping us to build a shared language around challenging poverty.



Our analysis from CPW 2023 highlighted organisations continued to invest time, effort and resource to contribute to the events, activities and sharing the key messages. Over 500 organisations took part in the campaign, a 30% increase on the previous year.

For CPW 2023, we developed a framework to reach out to new audiences, with a focused effort to engage differently with faith groups, businesses and sport clubs. Key moments from this saw faith leaders coming together to support a statement during CPW, the SPFL Trust launching anti-poverty initiatives and a video highlighting CPW; and work with the Institute of Directors. This is work we will continue to build on during future CPW campaigns. We also made changes to our policy process to streamline our asks and, for the first time, develop these in collaboration with our members through a short-life working group. This has increased ownership of our asks and improved the visibility of policy within the campaign.

Our Rights in Action project once again proved to be an effective way of bringing a wide range of poverty alliance members together in a practical way to help build their capacity, enabling them to take a human rights based approach to addressing poverty. More than 75 members took part in the project last year, more than our target, engage in a wide range of activities including training, webinars, action learning sets and more.

This thematic approach to member engagement has proved successful in other areas. We worked with the Mental Health Foundation to engage with our members to better understand their needs in relation to supporting them to work on issues around mental ill health. The needs assessment is now being taken forward, with support from funding from the Scottish Government, to enable us to develop materials that will address the needs identified.

OUTCOMES

Outcome 5: A healthy organisation equipped to bring about change

We prioritised three areas in continuing to develop our organisation to ensure it was well placed to bring about the changes that were needed: enhancing our governance processes, supporting our growing staff team, and modernizing our systems.

We successfully recruited new board members at the AGM in November 2023, bringing the total number of elected members to 15. This is the maximum allowed by our articles of association. It was also the first time in many years where we held a competitive election for board positions. This highlights the growing engagement of members in the life of the organisation. We instituted a short life governance review, led by board members to ensure that our governance processes were robust. One of their recommendations was the establishment of a Governance Sub Committee which will propose further changes to our governance processes at the next AGM.

There is little doubt that our staff team is vital to our success and progress. Over the last year we have continued to invest in their wellbeing, providing greater levels of staff training on a wide range of issues, rolling out a new appraisal process across the organisation, investing in coaching, maintaining our free and confidential counselling service for staff, and fully updating and modernising our staffing policies. As we continue to grow we will keep all of these approaches under review and ensure that we have the policies and practices in place to attract and retain staff.

As would be expected, we have seen changes in our staffing complement over the last year. Mostly this has occurred through the growth of the organisation. However, some long serving member of the team have also moved on. Our Research Manager, Fiona McHardy, left the organisation in September 2024. Fiona played a critical role in building the Poverty Alliance's research capacity and profile over the last 15 years. She will be missed, but she has left a strong team and legacy and we know we will do great work in her new role at the University of Strathclyde.

During 2023-24 we undertook the implementation of a new Salesforce system to allow us to more effectively engage with members, provided targeted support to them and to help grow our membership. This new initiative is still in an early phase of implementation, but it signals the next stage in the development and modernisation of our infrastructure.





Treasurers Update

A key achievement in this area has been the continued growth in the income of the Poverty Alliance (see finances in section below). In the course of the last year we further strengthened our relationship with key funders such as the Robertson Trust and abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, receiving important new funding to take forward innovative projects. We have also continued to increase our earned income through our work on the accreditation of Living Wage employers. This income in particular has given us an ability to develop and support programmes of work that would otherwise prove difficult to fund. This is an area that will be an increasing focus in the years to come.

We have continued to operate a reserves policy that aims for between 3 to 6 months operating costs. There are no doubts about The Poverty Alliance being a going concern. The Poverty Alliance currently has general unrestricted funds of £451,946 (2023: £443,470) and restricted funds of £178,025 (2023: £66,322). Furthermore, the charitable company had additional unrestricted designated funds of £195,271 (2023: £195,271). See table below for a Summary of 2023/24 financial statements.

As always, we thank all our funders for their support, particularly the Scottish Government for its long-term funding, and for all the new funders that have supported our work in the last year. We would also like to thank those members who support us through the vital membership fees.



INCOME AND EXPENDITURE, 2023-24

Income	2023-2024	2022-2023
Donations	1713	15,699
Charitable activities	1,504,084	1,235,913
Other trading activities	5,880	769
Other income	5,478	903
Total	1,522,155	1,253,284
Expenditure		
Charitable activities	1,401,976	1,120,606
Total	1,401,976	1,120,606
Net movements in funds	120,179	132,678
Balance brought forward	705,063	572,385
Balance carried forward	825,242	705,063

STAFF AND TEAM

APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024

Peter Kelly, Chief Executive

Communities and Networks Team

David Reilly, Communities & Networks Manager
Twimukye Mushaka, Senior Communities & Networks Officer (until July 23)
Isla McIntosh, Senior Communities and Networks Officer (from October 23)
Steven Drew, Community Participation Officer
Lydia Murphy, Development Officer
Annie McCormack, Development Officer (TARP project) (from September 23)
Becky Hothersall, Development Officer (TARP project) (from October 23)

Policy and Campaigns Team

Ruth Boyle, Policy and Campaigns Manager
Alyson Laird, Campaigns Officer
Ashley McLean, Policy & Parliamentary Officer (until January 24)
Chloe Campbell, Policy and Parliamentary Officer (from March 24)
David Eyre, Communications Officer
Ralph Hartley, Policy Officer (TARP Project) (from September 23)

Research and Information Team

Fiona McHardy, Research and Information Manager
Dr. Laura Robertson, Senior Research Officer
Dr. Paul Pearson, Research Officer
Nicola Bowman, Research Officer (TARP Project) (from September 23)

Living Wage Scotland

Lynn Anderson, Living Wage Scotland Manager
Christine McCaig, Living Wage Projects Coordinator
Iain Russell, Living Wage Accreditation Officer (until June 23)
Rachel Morrison McCormick, Living Wage Accreditation Officer
Anna Hirvonen, Living Wage Accreditation Officer
Sheena McBeth, Living Wage Projects Officer (from October 23)
Patricia Di-Tommaso, Living Wage Scotland Project Assistant
Muireann O'Sullivan – Living Wage Scotland Project Assistant (until March 24)
Anna Hirvonen, Living Wage Accreditation Officer
Patricia Di-Tommaso, Living Wage Scotland Project Assistant (p-t)

Finance and Administration Team

Andrew Bogan, Finance & Business Manager
Sinead Howell, Administrator
Maelle Duchemin-Pelletier, Administrator (Maternity Leave cover)
Jade Blackthorn, Administrative Assistant
Anna Murphy, Administrative Assistant
Isla Gildea, Finance Officer

BOARD MEMBERS

APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024

Marie Ward, Cranhill Development Trust (Convenor)
Polly Jones – Trussell (Vice Convenor)
Jimmy Wilson, FARE Scotland (Treasurer)
Hugh Foy, Xaverian Missionaries UK Province (until November 23)
Susan Lyons, HUG - Action for Mental Health
Trishna Singh, Sikh Sanjog (until November 23)
Sharon Baldwin, Fuse Youth Café
Innocent Jakisa, Community Activist Advisory Group (co-opted)
Bridie Ashrowan, EVOG
Mhoraig Green, Citizens Advice Scotland
Shirley Grieve, Church of Scotland (until November 23)
Ailsa MacKenzie – The Pyramid at Anderston
Kirsty McKechnie – CPAG Scotland
Emma Jackson, Church of Scotland (from November 23)
Angela Moohan, The Larder (from November 2023)
Rob Gowans, The Health and Social Care Alliance (from November 2023)
Joy Gillespie, Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland (SOHTIS) (from November 2023)
Kim Dams, DG Voice (from November 23)
Mhairi Snowden, Human Rights Consortium Scotland (from November 2023)

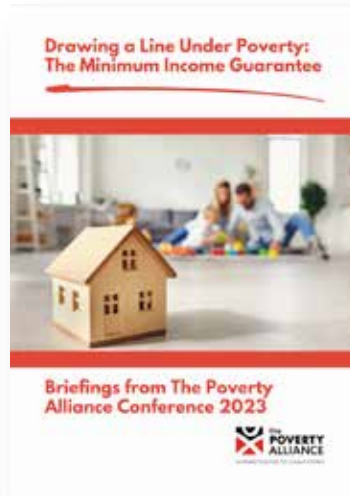
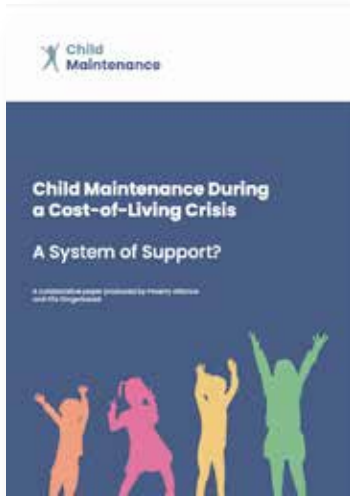


OUR FUNDERS

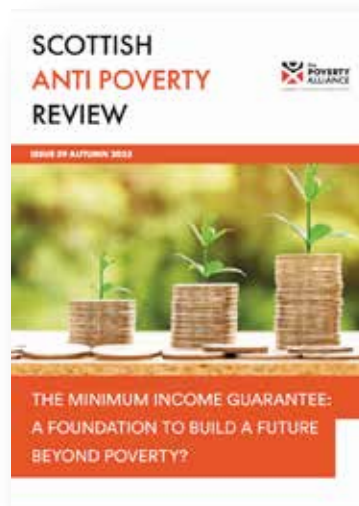
INSPIRING SCOTLAND



PUBLICATIONS



Some of our publications produced during 2023 and 2024.







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Registered in Scotland No. 136689 • Registered Office: Standard Building, 3rd Floor Front, 102 Hope,
Glasgow, G2 6PH The Poverty Alliance is recognised as a charity by the Inland Revenue
Reference No. ED872/91/SCO 19926 VAT Reg No. 307 2180 35