

Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

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Ending Child Poverty: Making it Happen Consultation Response (March 2009)

1a – Does the 2020 vision, as set out in Chapter 2, capture the key areas where action is required to ensure the greatest impact on reducing child poverty?

We believe that the key areas are, in general, clearly articulated. There are, however, a few key points we wish to emphasise:

First, it is essential to recognise that parental employment is not a guarantee of avoiding poverty. As is acknowledged in the consultation document, many children in poverty are not living in workless households. Other factors – crucially including easy access to good quality, affordable child care – can determine whether some families are able to use employment to escape poverty or will remain mired in poverty despite being employed.

Second, some desired outcomes for children are not directly correlated with (let alone caused by) the level of household income. Many other factors impact on the likelihood of good health, successful education, and positive transition to adult life. It is essential that these are accurately identified and effectively addressed if children are to be both lifted out of poverty in their childhood and helped to avoid continuing the cycle of poverty into another generation.

We are particularly interested in governmental actions that not only result in adequate additional household income, but also eliminate the worst consequences of poverty upon children. That is why we have supported efforts to eliminate fuel poverty for low-income families with children. Until the happy day arrives when poverty itself is eliminated, governments could and should ensure that children at least can have a warm, dry and

reasonably healthy home in which to grow up, rather than one that is cold, damp and illness-inducing.

Third, there is conclusive evidence that ‘the earlier the better’ should be a key principle in interventions intended to reduce the incidence of child poverty and associated negative experiences. Preventing poverty and preventing the negative consequences of poverty upon children must be accorded top priority. Finally, while action at community level is welcome, many poor families do not live in deprived communities. The needs of these families must also be addressed in the Government’s vision.

1b – Are the building blocks the right ones to make progress towards 2020, including for those groups at particular risk of poverty?

We agree that the measures proposed will support progress towards the Government’s objectives. Some greater specificity would be helpful in moving towards implementation – ‘parent support’, for example, can take many forms. It is important that there is a good understanding of the target populations and of interventions proven to be effective with them.

2a – Should the measure of success be expanded beyond relative income, combined low income and material deprivation, and persistent low income to also include absolute low income?

As we stated above, income is far from the sole determinant of poor outcomes for children. Measures of success must include both child well-being outcomes and household income.

2b – Will proposals to publish a strategy, informed by an expert child poverty commission, and proposals to monitor and report on progress, drive the action needed?

Strategies and commissions do not per se drive action forward. Clear implementation plans with designated responsibilities, effective delivery methods are needed to address the whole range of variables that result in child poverty. There also must be robust monitoring and accountability systems (which focus on outcomes). A strategy and commission accountable for tracking and reporting progress on these matters may be helpful. Consideration also must be given to sanctions for public bodies that fail to meet their commitments to eradicate child poverty. Poor children should not be the only ones who bear the negative consequences of failure and the persistence of poverty.

3 – What option (or combination of options) identified in Chapter 4 would best support local authorities and delivery partners and drive local action to eradicate child poverty?

In Scotland, this would need to be achieved through the Single Outcome Agreements at the level of local authorities. This, in turn, requires the participation of, and effective collaboration among, Community Planning Partnerships, CoSLA and the Scottish Government. Implementation of some important and desirable anti-poverty actions also depend upon the involvement of, and support for, voluntary sector organizations. They, too, should be considered and treated as key partners in eradicating child poverty.

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve:ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.