



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Paul Johnston  
Director-General Communities  
Scottish Government

By email only

**Public Audit Committee**  
Room T3.60  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

Email:

[publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot)

1 December 2022

Dear Paul,

### **Tackling child poverty**

Thank you for taking part in the Committee's [recent roundtable evidence session](#) on tackling child poverty. The Committee found the session to be very powerful and informative and it hopes the discussion will help contribute to addressing this very serious and urgent issue, which impacts on the lives of children in Scotland.

During the discussion, we heard from Bill Scott, Chair of the Poverty Commission that—

“We need to know what is working and what is not working—in other words, the impact of the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been invested. If that money is being spent on something that is not doing what it set out to achieve, we need to stop that and channel that money towards what we have identified does work.”

The Auditor General for Scotland told us that when we track spending, it is fundamentally important that there is good quality data to enable the assessment of the impact of spending on outcomes. The Auditor General agreed that “if spending is not having the desired impact, we can then stop doing it and move on to something that will have more influence.”

We were concerned to hear the evidence from Hanna McCulloch, from the Improvement Service, of an 18-month lag in obtaining data on relative poverty. Given the significant impact poverty is having on children's day-to-day lives, this led us to question how quickly changes can be made when it is identified that a specific approach is not working.

**We would be grateful if you could provide us with information on the steps that are taken when it becomes clear that an approach is not working.**

**Can you also confirm—**

- **what process are in place to ensure feedback at a local level is acted upon swiftly, so that approaches that are not working are rectified as soon as possible.**
- **How quickly these changes can be made.**

The Committee also agrees with the view of the Auditor General for Scotland and other stakeholders that the issue of child poverty will not be solved by any one organisation. During the evidence session you spoke of how the Scottish Government's delivery plan for tackling child poverty sets out the need for the Scottish Government to work closely with all partners, including the UK Government.

**The Committee is interested in the work that the Scottish Government is undertaking with its partners and asks that you provide further detail of the partnership working that is taking place to tackle child poverty.**

**I would be grateful if you could provide a response by 12 January 2023.**

Yours sincerely,

**Richard Leonard MSP,  
Convener**