



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Colin Smyth MSP  
Convener  
Economy and Fair Work Committee

**2 December 2024**

Dear Colin,

### Addressing child poverty through parental employment report – Follow up

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee is seeking your assistance to ensure that progress is made in addressing child poverty, one of the Scottish Government's key priorities and a shared priority across political parties with the passing of the [Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017](#) (the 2017 Act).

The 2017 Act sets interim targets to be met by 2023/24 and final targets to be met by 2030. The next update on progress will be available in March 2025 with the Scottish Government required to make a statement about them next summer.

The latest Scottish Government [modelling](#) however estimates that "policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty and 70,000 children out of absolute poverty in 2024-25, with the respective child poverty rates 10 percentage points and 7 percentage points lower than they would have been without these policies."

In the current delivery plan which runs to 2026, [Best Start, Bright Futures](#), the Scottish Government clearly states that parental employment is a key driver to meet the statutory targets to address child poverty. It has set out key approaches to support "up to 12,000 parents to access and sustain employment and up to 3,000 in-work parents to increase their earnings. These cover a broad range of policy areas and include:

- A strengthened employment offer with increased investment in employability support and the testing of new approaches
- Connectivity and childcare to enable access to employment with a greater availability of affordable public transport and more childcare offers
- Transforming the economy by working with all sectors to promote fair work and investing in local and regional economies.

This cornerstone of the delivery plan has been the subject of the Committee's [inquiry](#) to ensure the Scottish Government delivers on its plan.

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Contact: Social Justice and Social Security Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email [SJSS.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:SJSS.committee@parliament.scot). We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

## **Inquiry report**

The Committee published its inquiry [report](#) in November 2023. It contains 34 recommendations and requests for action across a range of themes. The Committee received a [response against each recommendation from the Scottish Government](#) on 22 January 2024 and a [debate](#) was held on 14 March 2024. Several Members from a range of committees with relevant remits, such as Net Zero, Energy and Transport and Education, Children and Young people, contributed demonstrating an interest in making progress through the various policies.

## **The need for a commitment to deliver across policy areas**

Throughout our inquiry and other related work, the Committee has heard that a greater scale and pace of action would be needed to meet the interim child poverty targets.

Our work also clearly highlights the cross-cutting nature of the issues and barriers faced by parents when it comes to employment and employability and the decisive action needed across different policy areas if the Scottish Government is to achieve Best Start Bright Futures' commitments and targets.

## **Progress a year on from publication of the report**

A lot has changed since the publication of the report at both UK and Scottish Government levels. However, in spring 2024, the First Minister reaffirmed his commitment to tackle child poverty, saying “Eradicating child poverty will be the single most important objective of my government – and work in other priority areas will support and drive that mission.”

For the inquiry and our recommendations to have a meaningful impact, the Committee will continue to hold the Scottish Government to account on its progress on the relevant policy areas to the end of the session. We [wrote](#) to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on 7 November to get an update on progress nearly a year in from the publication of the report. The Cabinet Secretary [replied to the Committee](#) on 29 November.

## **Policy areas relevant to the remit of your Committee**

We believe the remit of your committee is incredibly important to tackle this issue and we would greatly value an update on pieces of work and lines of inquiry in your current or future work programme. This would help us hold the Government to account, broadening the impact of our report and highlighting the cross-cutting nature of the actions and policies needed to win its fight against child poverty.

The Scottish Government's vision is for Scotland to be a leading Fair Work Nation by 2025. In its 2023 Tackling Child Poverty progress report, the Scottish Government stated that “many families living in poverty are already working. Instead, what is needed, is well-paid, stable and secure contracts that allow families to not live in poverty.”

Increased and improved parental support for in-work parents, especially single parents, so they are given the best chance to stay in work and improve their prospects, is key to reducing child poverty. Employability programmes are essential but services rely on employers offering quality job opportunities to the people they support.

The Committee also heard that jobs that pay a fair wage and are family friendly with a flexible working approach to meet parents' needs and allow them to balance their responsibilities are key. The Committee has called on the Scottish Government to lead by example and make flexible working an option for all jobs whether desk based or frontline. The Committee also believes that women returning to work should be considered as an asset to the economy and given the right support to further meaningful careers.

All these recommendations very much fit with Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation and its vision of a fairer and more equal society which you Committee scrutinised earlier in this session.

## **Maximising the impact of our recommendations**

Ending child poverty can only be achieved if the Scottish Government supercharges its efforts to deliver across different policy area commitments.

We would therefore be grateful if you could let us know if you have done or are planning any work around the above topics and policy areas and also consider the recommendations listed in the Annexe which are relevant to the remit of your committee. In order to increase the reach of our report, we would be particularly like to know:

- What progress you have made on relevant pieces of work you are currently undertaking and/or outcomes of relevant work you have completed
- If you are planning to do some work on any of these issues by the end of the current parliamentary session
- If you are aware of relevant and/or upcoming updates and developments relating to these issues.

We would appreciate a response by 31 January in order to inform the follow-up work of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Collette Stevenson MSP**  
**Convener**  
**Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

## Annexe

### Recommendations relevant to the Economy and Fair Work Committee

NATIONAL POLICY PRIORITIES
<b>Fair pay for childcare workers</b> 202 - The Committee asks the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the sector on what this increase in minimum pay means for providers' overall wage bills, for recruitment into the sector, for paying managers higher salaries than the minimum pay to retain them in the sector and for organisations that rely on grant funding to pay staff wages.
INTER-SECTOR COLLABORATION TO PROGRESS NATIONAL PRIORITIES
<b>Involving employers in employability programmes</b> 228 - The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's New Deal for Business and asks the Scottish Government to set out how that work reflects the Scottish Government's priority of tackling child poverty.
FAIR WORK AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR
<b>Family friendly and flexible working</b> 251- The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, in considering its workforce planning for the devolved public sector, takes into account the desirability of flexible working and predictable shift patterns for making roles more accessible, particularly to those with caring responsibilities.
<b>Using procurement rules to influence employment practices</b> 265 - The Committee asks the Scottish Government whether it will look into the feasibility of using its procurement and tendering processes to strengthen Fair Work First criteria around family-friendly and flexible working to ensure low-income parents get a fair deal.