

Social Justice and Social Security Committee Call for Views: Post-Legislative Scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 aims to measure, tackle and report on child poverty in Scotland.

About includem

includem are a Scottish charity that work with children, young people and families to help them transform their lives. We support children, young people and families to make positive life choices and progress towards the type of future they want to live.

To do this, we work with social services, schools and a variety of partners including statutory services to identify which children, young people and families would benefit from our support. We then engage the child or young person and their family or carer to develop a package of support, tailored to their specific needs. Our support is unique to each individual. We don't use a 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to supporting children, young people and families to achieve positive outcomes.

We work with children and young people aged 0 – 26 across Scotland, many of whom have lived experience of poverty, as have their families and the communities they live in.

In 2022 we spoke to 83 children, young people and families we work with about their experiences of poverty. The findings from our research, show that for the families we work with, there is a lack of access to basic human rights due to inadequate incomes, underfunded social security, and weak wellbeing infrastructure. This locks families into poverty and increases their likelihood of significant intervention by statutory services.

There was a concerning trend on costs directly linked to childhood – with 66% of families reported struggling with child costs and/ or school costs. For those whose main source of income is social security, this rose to a shocking 88%. A majority of respondents felt judged by their situations and, crucially, felt that decision-makers ignore, or simply do not understand, their lived reality.

Families want decision makers to know that poverty is not a choice.

The call for views on the efficacy of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 must consider the experiences of those living in poverty and we invite the Committee to [consider the report](#) alongside our response.

1. The Act introduced a statutory framework for reducing child poverty. What difference has that framework made to the way the Scottish Government has approached reducing child poverty?

We would suggest that the statutory framework for reducing child poverty, as introduced by the Act, has not made a significant difference to the way the Scottish Government has approached reducing child poverty.

Child poverty targets, delivery plans and reporting requirements are underpinned by the legislative framework in the Act. The framework has been helpful in setting targets, increasing accountability and ensuring the tackling poverty remains a focus for the Scottish Government. Despite this, progress towards meeting statutory poverty targets, as outlined in the Act, has largely been slow as reported by the Poverty and Inequality Commission.

The framework has encouraged cross-sector collaboration and framed poverty as a multi-dimensional issue that requires a holistic approach but due to a lack of consistent investment in anti-poverty measures, the framework has had limited impact.

A nationally agreed approach to measuring, reporting and tackling child poverty should be transformational, but it requires continued cross-party support and investment, support for the public and third sector who are responsible for driving innovation and change, and renewed efforts to tackle the stigma associated with poverty.

2. What difference has the statutory framework made to the way local authorities and health boards have approached reducing child poverty?

As per our previous answer, we would suggest that the statutory framework has made little difference to how local authorities and health boards approach reducing child poverty.

The statutory framework has, in theory, enhanced the local approach to reducing child poverty through planning and reporting. As a third sector organisation working across Scotland, we are aware of the need for local strategies and plans to be informed by – and aligned with – the needs of the population. The framework creates a more consistent approach to targets and reporting but also creates further administrative burdens that ultimately restrict resources in other areas where they could have a greater impact on the lives of children and young people. Local

Authorities and Health Boards are also limited in how much they can achieve locally depending on their level of funding and the populations that they serve.

The statutory framework introduced by the *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017* has required local authorities and health boards to take a more structured and accountable approach to reducing child poverty. They must now produce annual reports detailing their efforts and progress, which has led to increased focus on child poverty reduction in local planning. This has fostered more collaboration across sectors, such as health, education, and housing, ensuring a holistic approach to tackling poverty. Local strategies are now aligned with national targets, promoting more coordinated and sustained interventions.

3. What difference has having the targets, delivery plans and reporting requirements built into the Act made at a national level?

Scotland is currently not on track to meet the child poverty targets, casting serious doubt on the efficacy of statutory targets, delivery plans and reporting requirements.

Delivery plans and reporting requirements are useful in as far as they contribute to ongoing scrutiny, learning and improvement. Information about targets and delivery plans being published in a timely and accessible way has been an important tool in analysing progress, sharing information with people with lived experience, and campaigning for change.

The Act, on account of its requirement for continuously updated delivery plans, has stimulated some policy innovation at a national level.

In a sense, targets have been useful in creating measurements for potentially holding the Scottish Government to account, but a lack of progress according to targets is in no way comforting, reassuring or encouraging for children, young people and families living in poverty. For them, the people who really matter, having targets built into the Act has made no difference to their day-to-day lives.

4. The Act set up several scrutiny measures. How effective have these been?

In our view, the scrutiny measures set up as part of the Act have emphasised the importance of data and evidence in understanding and addressing child poverty but have not been effective in bringing about meaningful change for children, young people and families experiencing poverty.

Scrutiny measures are most effective when remedies for lack of progress exist. It is our view that scrutiny processes need to include stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure that government commitments are met within the set timelines.

We value the independent scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission but feel that this work has had little impact in driving change and reducing poverty, as the Act intended.

5. If you were involved in scrutiny of the Bill in 2016/17, has it had the impact you expected?

6. What does the implementation of the Act tell us about the effectiveness or otherwise of statutory targets as a way of driving policy?

As outlined in previous answers, the effectiveness of statutory targets has had little impact on driving or evaluating policy innovation.

Statutory targets, as outlined in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 are useful for maintaining public and political scrutiny and articulating a clear goal for change but their effectiveness is limited as evidenced by the lack of progress towards meeting these targets thus far.

7. Do you have any other comments?

We would argue that, to date, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 has not had sufficient impact on reducing child poverty.

If there are no sanctions for missed targets, targets are nothing more than ambitions. This has been evident through a lack of accountability for the lack of progress thus far. Despite requiring cross-party support and investment, the lack of progress on reducing child poverty is now a political talking point, with responsibility and blame shifted between nations and parties. Accountability for reaching targets, as those set out in the Poverty Act, must be clearly set out with sanctions or remedial action in the event of failure to meet targets.

Further, the lack of progress has been significantly hindered by a lack of investment in policy solutions. Along with better accountability and consequences for missed targets, statutory framework like the one introduced by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 must include a commitment to investment to bring about the intended outcomes.