

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

Poverty and the Impact on Children and Young People's Health

Wednesday 21st February 2024 13:00 – 14:30
Minutes

Chair: Karen Adam MSP

Present

MSPs

Karen Adam MSP

Fulton MacGregor MSP

Invited guests

Andy Duncan, NHS Scotland

Fiona Steel, Action for Children

Jennifer Forsyth, Obesity Action Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

Parisa Shirazi, Children in Scotland

Hannah Priest, Children in Scotland

Kevin Kane, YouthLink Scotland

Sarah Robinson Galloway, Youthlink Scotland

David Yule, Children in Scotland

Fatou Drammeh, UNICEF

Ryan McQuigg, Action for Children

Brian Magee, COSCA

Joan Mowat, University of Strathclyde

Jackie Tolland, Parent Network Scotland

Roslyn Neely, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity

David Ashford

Robyn Pattison, Forces Children Scotland

Mark Hutchison, Fife Voluntary Action

Lara Balkwill, Rock Trust

Parsifal Hurst, Fathers' Way

Matt McDonald, SYP

Rhona Malcolm, SYP

Carol Robinson, Strathclyde Institute of Education

Jan Benvie, Peace & Justice (Scotland)
Kate Thompson, CYPSCS
Rebecca Mason, The Young Women's Movement
Lizzie Coutts, Aberlour
Emma Young, The Promise Scotland
Julia Swann, CYCJ
Erin Hastings, CYCJ
Gwen Galbraith, With Kids
Sarah Rogers, Families Outside
Angus Maclean, Befriending Networks
Arran Goodfellow, PAS
Lisa Weylandt, Includem
David Sweetman, Children's Parliament
Beth Davidson, Feeling Strong
Helen Forrest, Children's Health Scotland
Konstantina Scott-Barrett, RCPCH Scotland
Marianne Tyler, Alliance Scotland
Virginina Radcliffe, Licketyspit Theatre and Play Company
Finlay Allmond, Magic Breakfast
Todd Henshaw, FCSS
Kathryn Miller, Fife Gingerbread
Vikki Carpenter, CLD Standards Council
Leah Duncan-Karrim, Barnardos Scotland
Gemma Richardson, RCPCH Scotland
Fiona O'Sullivan, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity

Welcome from chair

Karen Adam MSP welcomed members of the CPG to the third meeting of the new parliamentary term. Karen informed the group that the meeting would focus on poverty and the impact that it has on the health of children and young people.

Karen introduced the topic by the levels of child poverty that currently exist in Scotland and highlighted the impact poverty can have on a child's health and wellbeing and the need for change. Karen also noted that the topic of poverty and the impact it has on the health of children and young people was requested by CPG members though the Membership survey circulated in the summer.

As part of the meeting, Karen informed members that the information shared would be used to create a summary paper that would be used for future policy outputs.

Karen ran through a range of housekeeping measures before passing over to Parisa Shirazi, Children in Scotland to go over some CPG business.

CPG Business

a. Previous Minutes

Parisa stated the secretariat had shared the previous minutes from the December meeting with members of the group. No issues were raised in relation to the minutes, and members were asked to confirm if they were happy to take the previous minutes as read.

This was approved by membership and the minutes were ratified.

b. Previous actions

Parisa advised that a summary paper from the last meeting was produced and shared with the Education, Children and Young People Committee. This was also shared with CPG members.

c. New members of the group

The following organisations asked to join the CPG:

- YMCA Scotland

All members agreed for the above-mentioned organisations to join the group.

Proposer: Arran Goodfellow

Seconder: Kevin Kane

Parisa then passed back to Karen who briefly introduced and handed over to the speakers to share their experiences of how poverty impacts the health of children and young people.

Fiona Steel, Action for Children

Fiona is the National Director for Scotland at Action for Children. Action for Children has been delivering a wide and varied service provision across Scotland since 1955.

Action for Children protects and supports children and young people, providing practical and emotional care, ensuring their voices are heard and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives. Fiona highlighted that their contribution to this discussion is based on discussions, experience, and expertise that Action for Children have gained for close to over 70 years of supporting and caring for young people and families across Scotland. Their vision is that every child has a safe and happy childhood and the foundations they need to thrive.

Fiona gave a presentation on how poverty is a clear and present danger to realising that vision where children are safe, happy and can thrive. Families have highlighted that poverty limits opportunities, choices, and freedom, with recent official figures estimating 24% of children are living in poverty, despite Scotland having ambitious child poverty targets. Through the presentation Fiona highlights how poverty has an

impact on children's health and wellbeing across a range of different factors, these include:

- Children in poverty are more likely to have poorer physical and mental health.
- Less likely to achieve potential at school and employment.
- More likely to be behind their peers in education.
- Inadequate housing or experience potential homelessness.
- Less access to healthy food options.
- Poverty impacts children's emotional wellbeing as they can be aware of and carry the worry of poverty.
- Exclusion from afterschool activities and clubs.

Action for Children have their own crisis fund, this fund was designed to provide immediate support to families with an unexpected expense, such as a broken fridge or washing machine. However, Fiona explains they are now seeing families accessing the fund for every day essentials such as buying food and energy bills.

Fiona then provided and talked through current statistics and findings alongside testimonials from families that Action for Children support. These testimonials can be read in the presentation slides.

[Click here to view the slides.](#)

Dr Andy Duncan, NHS Borders

Dr Andy Duncan is a consultant paediatrician at the NHS Borders and has practiced there for 25 years. Andy explains in his role he looks after children from birth to childhood to adolescence and in some cases transition of young people with health issues to adulthood. Andy also works as the locality paediatrician for one of the most deprived areas of the Borders through an outreach basis providing clinics and therefore has first-hand experience working with a multidisciplinary team.

Although Andy was able to attend the meeting, due to connection issues, Andy sent a prerecorded video for the members to listen to in which he informs the group that he is speaking as a paediatrician and a representative of the Royal College of Paediatric Child Health (RCPCH) in Scotland.

Andy highlights health inequalities are avoidable, unfair, and systematic differences in health outcomes between different groups of babies, children, and young people. This occurs through complex interactions between social, economic, and environmental factors. The presentation for this meeting focused on the economic factors.

Children and young people living in poverty are more likely to have poorer health outcomes including:

- More likely to have been born prematurely.
- More likely to have suffered low birth weight.

- Less likely to have been breast fed.
- Poor physical health, including obesity and other related issues particularly diet and nutritional.
- Seeing increasing mental health problems in children and young people than seen previously.

Andy explained the following examples of how poverty impacts children's health outcomes. Families decisions are constrained by systems, personal capacities and culture, and choices made are often the best available in these circumstances. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience adversity which can have a cumulative negative effect on later physical and mental health, and children in poorer families have less access to healthcare due to additional barriers such as no means of transport and digital poverty.

The RCPCH has been running a health inequalities campaign to develop resources that encourage change, this is ongoing. In 2022 RCPCH worked with children and young people to develop a toolkit for paediatricians.

[Click here to access those resources.](#)

Jennifer Forsyth, Obesity Action Scotland

Jennifer Forsyth is the Policy and Evidence Manager at Obesity Action Scotland. Obesity Action Scotland was established in 2015 to provide clinical leadership and independent advocacy on preventing and reducing overweight and obesity in Scotland.

Jennifer provided the policy context highlighting the Scottish Governments ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030. The presentation shows that Scotland is currently not on track to meet this target with childhood obesity on the rise. Children in the most deprived SIMD quintile are more than twice as likely as those in the least deprived SIMD quintile to be at risk of overweight and obesity. Jennifer provides examples of three of the reasons why this is occurring:

- Price: Cost-of-living crisis having a significant impact on the cost of essentials, in particular food prices. Healthy food is 2x more expensive per calorie than unhealthy food.
- Availability: The clustering of unhealthy food provision in deprived areas and promotions skewed towards unhealthy products.
- Advertising: Children from more deprived areas are up to 50% more likely to be exposed to unhealthy food advertising. Advertising spend focused on unhealthy products contributing to social norms surrounding what products are seen as attractive.

Jennifer also highlighted the findings from the Growing up in Scotland (GUS) survey and the Scottish Obesity Alliance Youth Advocacy Report.

[Click here to read the report](#)

Obesity Action Scotland's The Pledge campaign is calling on all groups, organisations and individuals who are invested in children's health. They are asking for you to sign up to the Pledge 'Child healthy weight matters to me' and help encourage leaders to follow through on measures that will support healthy weight in children.

[Click here for more information](#)

[Click here to view the slides from this presentation.](#)

Group Discussion Summary

Following the discussion, members were placed into breakout groups, facilitated by the secretariat. Questions discussed were as follows:

- 1) From what you have heard in the presentations, are there any other areas you would like to highlight or draw attention to in how poverty can affect the health of children and young people?
- 2) What policy changes are needed to improve the lives of children and young people?
- 3) Where would you like us to share the evidence gathered today?

The main points raised were as follows:

1. From what you have heard in the presentations, are there any other areas you would like to highlight or draw attention to in how poverty can affect the health of children and young people?
 - Climate change, for example air pollution affecting children's health in poorer areas with increases in asthma diagnoses.
 - Environmental inequality, children living in poverty have disproportionately less access to green spaces. This hinders children from having the space to learn transferable skills and play.
 - Lack of access to outdoor activities, hobbies and sports impact health and wellbeing.
 - Housing inequality, the impact of mould and heating on children's health.
 - Mental health and wellbeing and links to poverty.
 - The stigma surrounding the topic needs to be addressed with a whole population approach needed.
 - Young women's access to physical activity, identifying barriers such as their safety, body image issues and feeling uncomfortable to exercise in public spaces.
 - The Psychology of food choices – the impact of trauma on the nervous system and how this impacts food choice and hunger.
 - Children and families affected by imprisonment face compounding impacts for their health and wellbeing of imprisonment and poverty and the dual stigma of both.

- The stress and worry of poverty and the impact on mental health and development.
- Lesley Riddoch's Nordic Horizons Film, State of Happiness was recommended to watch. This will be brought to parliament and will be accessible online.
- Rutger Bregman TEDx talk was recommended on universal basic income.

2. What policy changes are needed to improve the lives of children and young people?

- Encouraging inclusion and participation of families and making families the centre of the discussion.
- Improve employment contracts, those who need to work flexible hours are often not paid the living wage.
- Creation of clear routes to access the relevant and appropriate benefits, along with creating capacity to support families in accessing the benefits they are entitled to.
- Support for care experienced young people and their health.
- The introduction of legislation that ensures public debt recovery practice is consistent, rights based and does not push families into poverty and destitution.
- Expansion of free school meal eligibility to all low-income families in receipt of benefits.
- Address school meal debt and missing of meals due to no money in account.
- Issue of temporary accommodation and housing.
- Public transport and access to services for young people.
- Increase of child payment.
- Making access to healthier food easier.
- The right to play in a way that is safe and accessible.
- Policy learning from other countries.
- Address wider environment around school meals and eating needs to be improved with school meals seen as an investment not a cost.

3. Where would you like us to share the evidence gathered today?

- Share evidence gathered today with the Scottish Government and potential letter to the Minister.
- Look into the extent we are working with children and young people about their experiences of health care.

Close

Karen thanked all attendees for attending and sharing their thoughts. She advised that the secretariat would be in touch shortly to inform members of the next meeting date for the CPG.

Following the meeting, it was agreed that the information shared at the meeting would be used to create a summary paper that would be used for future policy outputs.

Information from CPG members to be shared:


Resources from Inspiring Scotland:

Here's a link to an Outdoor Community Play ASN Film:

<https://vimeo.com/832304009/c508d7c2f7?share=copy>

We have a great resource about how to develop inclusive play spaces, again by our team Thrive Outdoors in partnership with sector leaders:

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/publication/free-play-guide-creating-accessible-inclusive-public-play-spaces/>

We are working with Glasgow University on researching Active Play within ASN settings in 4 ASN schools in Glasgow – here's a summary  [Active Play ASL Summary.docx](#)

There are some Active Play resources on the Activity hub where people are trained to use the STEPS model to ensure games are accessible for all ages and stages:

<https://actify.org.uk/activeplay>

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to scrutinise infant formula market through a market study

In our [autumn update on our review in the groceries sector](#) we committed to look in further detail at the infant formula market, in light of significant price rises and signs of weak competition between major manufacturers.

Today [we have announced](#) that we are taking this ongoing work forward as a formal market study into the supply of infant formula in the UK.

Although the scope of our ongoing work remains the same, by launching this market study, we are able to use our compulsory information gathering powers rather than rely on firms providing information voluntarily. Proceeding on this basis will help to ensure that our findings, and subsequent recommendations, are based on the best available evidence. It will also ensure that our work can proceed at pace.

It is our intention to conduct the market study as swiftly as possible with the view to publishing our final report in September 2024. As part of our study, we have published an [invitation to comment](#) and will shortly be issuing requests for information from suppliers and retailers to gather evidence.

The consumer experience – in particular the influences and information that lead consumers to choose particular formula brands – will be important to factor into our work. To better understand this, we expect to commission qualitative research involving consumers who have recently purchased infant formula. With this in mind, although the invitation to comment is open to all, we are not seeking direct consumer feedback at this stage.

More information can be found on our [Infant Formula Market Study case page](#).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me direct.

#RightsOnTrack – Together need your help!

To properly monitor what's happening to keep children's #RightsOntrack we need everyone on board – help us to spread this campaign across Scotland and tell children and young people and duty bearers that monitoring starts now!

We ask you to please:

- Spread the word: please share the #RightsOnTrack campaign and our sign-up link to anyone you think might be interested. Feel free to share on twitter and social media and don't forget to use #RightsOnTrack tag!
- Stay tuned for our next update as we continue our journey towards a Scotland where children's rights are fully protected, respected and fulfilled!

[Click here to access the sign-up link.](#)

Poverty, attainment and wellbeing: making a difference to lives of children and young people – Research Brief, Children's Services Focus May 2019

Scottish Universities Insight institute, Dr Joan Mowat & Dr Gale Macleod

This seminar series examined the relationship between poverty, attainment and children's mental health and wellbeing. The research brief linked is for children's services which was produced as a result of the seminars, with the other two briefs directed towards schools and policy makers. This was highlighted as possibly being of value to those attending the session as the findings and recommendations are still valid.

[Click here to access the report.](#)