



SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE BRIEFING: TACKLING CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN 2022-26 – SHELTER SCOTLAND EVIDENCE, THURSDAY 21 APRIL 2022

Introduction

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to give evidence to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, as part of its work scrutinising the new Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2022-2026. This plan marks a crucial stage in Scotland's efforts to reduce child poverty and meet statutory child poverty targets, coming as households face severe financial pressures due to high energy bills, rising inflation, and the recent cut to Universal Credit. Our response will largely focus on our key strategic priorities: social housing supply and strengthening and upholding housing rights, both of which we believe are vital to help tackle child poverty and the housing emergency.

Delivering a new generation of high-quality, energy-efficient social homes will make a major impact on tackling child poverty in Scotland, by reducing housing costs and ensuring every child has a safe, secure and warm place to grow up.

Strengthening the protection of human rights in Scots law will help ensure all children have access to suitable housing which their families can afford. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill should be reviewed and passed within legislative competence as soon as possible, and the Scottish Parliament must take forward commitments to a new Human Rights Bill in Scotland by 2025, fully incorporating the right to adequate housing into Scots law with robust access to justice.

Key Messages:

Social homes must be delivered at pace

- The housing emergency is contributing to high levels of child poverty, with children and families often stuck in unsuitable, unaffordable homes, or in temporary accommodation for unacceptable lengths of time.
- Increasing the supply of social housing decreases levels of poverty, by reducing housing costs in the long term and ensuring every child has a secure, warm and safe place to develop and grow.
- New social homes need to be delivered at pace and in the right places to ensure that the interim and long-term statutory child poverty targets for the

2022-26 Delivery Plan can be achieved, and to ensure an end to the thousands of children trapped in temporary accommodation for months or even years on end.

- Delivering the social homes required will give these thousands of children the best possible start in life, by improving a range of outcomes including mental and physical health, education and wellbeing.

Rights must be strengthened and upheld

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill and the upcoming Human Rights Bill are required to strengthen the UN right to adequate housing in Scots law, helping ensure every child has access to suitable housing which their families can afford.

The Case for Social Housing

Scotland's broken and biased housing system is exacerbating child poverty across the country, and we need to see leadership from those in power at both the national and local level to help end it by urgently building more social housing.

Housing costs are a key driver of child poverty as well as poverty more broadly. Previous research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has linked a higher provision of social housing in Scotland with lower rates of child poverty when compared to elsewhere in the UK,¹ but there is still much more to be done to tackle poverty in Scotland.

The scale of the housing emergency:

- Right now, 13,192 households, including 7,510 children across Scotland, are trapped in temporary accommodation, often in cramped, unsuitable conditions. Many of them have been living like this for months, or even years
- In 2020/21, there were 33,792 homeless applications made, with 27,570 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. These households included 11,804 children. This is equivalent to 32 children becoming homeless every day – more than the average primary school class.²
- In 2020/21, a couple with children spent on average 341 days in temporary accommodation, compared to an average of 190 days for a couple without children. This means if a couple with children entered temporary accommodation on the 21 April 2022 they'd be there until 28 March 2023, on average
- Figures from 2017/18 to 2019/20 showed that approximately 170,000 children in the rented sector were living in poverty after housing costs³. This figure

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021), [Poverty in Scotland 2021](#)

² These figures are likely an underestimate; an unknown number of people, including children, experience hidden homelessness, meaning they do not appear in official figures. Some people aren't aware they can make a homeless application. Others, especially families, exhaust all other options – including staying with friends and family, and even separating their children – before going to the council for help. Finally, due to their immigration status, some families are not eligible to make a homeless application.

³ Scottish Government (2021) [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20](#)

clearly shows the need to provide more social homes for those families struggling with the cost of rent, and to ensure that families are adequately supported by the social security system for example, to sustain a decent standard of living.

- Approximately 60,000 children are stuck on social housing waiting lists⁴

Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26

The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 makes the case for social and affordable housing, and the importance of this in the fight against child poverty in Scotland. The commitment of the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) to deliver 110,000 new affordable homes by 2032, with at least 70% of these for social rent, will be vital in starting to reduce housing need and tackling homelessness if the quality social homes can be delivered at pace and where they are needed most.

The Delivery Plan also makes a welcome reference to placing the prioritisation of tackling child poverty at the heart of the AHSP – looking at issues such as housing needs by size and location in the process, and gearing the planning system towards this goal.⁵ We have argued consistently for the AHSP to place social justice outcomes at its heart – and making tackling child poverty a priority of the programme is an important step to ensuring those outcomes.

We look forward to taking part in the discussions on how best to achieve and measure social justice outcomes. We need to see local authorities supported to prioritise and deliver the social homes required, at pace, to ensure the ambition can be met.

The Impact of the Housing Emergency

The on-going housing emergency is contributing to high levels of child poverty, with children and families often stuck in unsuitable, unaffordable homes or temporary accommodation, some for unacceptably long periods of time.

The effects of waiting for a place to call home are shattering. Learning is disrupted. Family life is strained. Health and job prospects can be ruined. And in the face of a growing cost-of-living crisis, the problem will only worsen. More and more people, especially families with children, are being pushed further into poverty, often having to choose whether to pay rent or keep themselves warm.

Children who have been homeless are three to four times more likely to experience mental health problems than children who have never been homeless, even a year after they've secured a permanent home, as well as increasing the risk of severe ill-health or disability.⁶ And according to teachers, children who are homeless or in bad

⁴ Scottish Government (2020) [Scottish household survey 2019: annual report](#)

⁵ [Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026](#) (2022), p.67

⁶ Shelter (2006) *The chance of a lifetime*

housing are often late, exhausted and struggle to maintain relationships with other children.⁷

The 2022-2026 Delivery Plan does refer to the Scottish Government's work on Ending Homelessness Together, and the total investment of £100m in this plan. Equally, delivering the social homes promised will also help ensure fewer people are trapped in unsuitable housing or temporary accommodation for prolonged periods. However, there are over 7,500 children trapped in temporary accommodation in Scotland right now, and the Delivery Plan fails to address how the Scottish Government plans to get these children into safe, secure homes as quickly as possible.

To tackle child poverty long-term, and improve health, mental health and educational outcomes we need to ensure there is an adequate supply of social homes for children to live and grow-up in.

Housing Rights

The housing emergency has a disproportionate impact on marginalised groups. People of colour, disabled people, people with health and dependency issues and the economically marginalised face greater barriers to housing equality than most others in society.⁸

Scotland is rightly proud of the strength of our housing rights framework. We are world leaders on homelessness rights and the Scottish Government's commitment to put the United Nations right to adequate housing into Scots Law will be another international landmark. Scotland recognises that we cannot have a fair society when so many citizens are denied the basic right of a safe, secure, warm and affordable place to call home.

We welcome the Scottish Government's focus on rights put forward in the Housing to 2040 strategy published last year. Rights should guide all areas of housing policy including renter's rights and the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

The Scottish Government should make the human right to an adequate home a reality for every child in Scotland by:

- Fully incorporating the right to adequate housing into Scots law in the forthcoming Human Rights Bill, with robust access to justice.
- Continuing to guarantee every person experiencing homelessness has access to a safe, affordable and secure home from which to rebuild their lives. Families with children spend longer in temporary homeless accommodation than those without. We must focus on supporting families with children who are homeless to quickly find a home that meets their needs, ensuring minimal disruption to their home and school lives.
- Delivering the social homes required in the right places to ensure people can access a home that meets their needs.

⁷ Digby A and Fu E for Shelter (2017) Impacts of homelessness on children – research with teachers. Kantar Public.

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/> Scottish Government (2021) Housing to 2040

The Delivery Plan refers to action being taken to reduce costs for families in the private rented sector, by pledging a new system of rent control and creating a new PRS regulator. The Scottish Government say that both of these initiatives will have the “specified aim of reducing child poverty”⁹, and we look forward to seeing more detail on this as these plans progress.

We have responded to the Scottish Government’s recent consultation on the Rented Sector Strategy, covering both social and private sectors, calling for tenants’ rights to be strengthened and upheld¹⁰. While many of the steps included in the Rented Sector Strategy may prove positive additions to the housing system, they cannot be viewed as alternatives to the structural importance of delivering the social homes Scotland desperately needs.

Tackling Child Poverty through child payments and benefit cap

The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan makes a number of additional pledges to help tackle child poverty that go beyond our strategic priorities and areas of expertise. However, we recognise the immediate benefits that certain measures will bring for families across Scotland and have supported campaigns on these issues in recent months.

We supported calls from across the third sector to double the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per child per week ahead of the Scottish Budget. It is welcome to see this being extended further to £25 per child per week. However, in the face of rampant inflation, rising energy bills and the cut to Universal Credit by the UK government, more will need to be done to ensure children do not fall into poverty. This includes extending the Scottish Child Payment further and raising it to £40 per child per week, as noted in the recent Save the Children, Trussell Trust and IPPR Scotland report on Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution.¹¹

The commitment to mitigate the benefit cap as far as possible is also welcome and helps to widen the social security safety net at a desperate time for household budgets. This is equally true of the measures to address fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency, which will clearly have an important impact on improving poor quality homes in Scotland.

However, it remains clear that structural changes are needed in order to reduce and eradicate child poverty in Scotland. This includes delivering the social homes Scotland needs to reduce housing costs and ensure every child has a safe, warm, secure and affordable place to grow up. The Scottish Government’s Delivery Plan suggests interim targets will be met. The Scottish Government can ensure they meet their longer-term targets by delivering at pace a new generation of social homes across the country.

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⁹ [Best Start, Bright Futures](#) (2022), p.68

¹⁰ [Shelter Scotland consultation response – A New Deal for Tenants \(2022\)](#)

¹¹ [Tackling Child Poverty and Destitution: Next Steps for the Scottish Child Payment and Scottish Welfare Fund](#) (2022)