

**Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026 – 2031**

**Response from Parenting across Scotland**

**April 2025**

**Contact:**

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## About Parenting across Scotland

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) is a membership organisation. We work together with our members, partners and stakeholders to help realise our vision - a Scotland where all parents and families are valued and supported to give children the best possible start in life.

We spend time listening to parents and carers and those working with them to understand their priorities. We use the evidence we gather to influence decision makers where we can. Our policy priorities include; family support, children's rights, child poverty, leisure and play and parenting across the lifespan.

We warmly welcome the opportunity to respond to the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026 – 2031.

For this consultation response we draw evidence from multiple publications, but in particular:

- Our [Parenting Evidence Review Scotland](#), published in June 2024, this report brings together research from over 4000 parents and carers across 26 local authority areas.
- Our [Open Kindergarten project](#). Now in its third phase, this innovative early years initiative provides valuable evidence about what works for parents, carers and babies in the early years, building on a Nordic model of whole family support
- Our work on increasing children and young people's access to hobbies, building on our Chief Executive's [Churchill Fellowship research study](#) in Finland and Iceland

PAS is also a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition (ECP) and is fully supportive of the calls that are included within the ECP response to this consultation.

## Introduction

The ECP response clearly outlines the need for concerted action to address child poverty in Scotland;

*'in the period 2021 to 2024, 23% children in Scotland were growing up in poverty'<sup>1</sup>. If Scotland is to meet its statutory targets, including the target of under 10% children in relative poverty by 2030/31, much more needs to be done. Modelling from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has shown that despite existing progress, without further action the relative child poverty rate in Scotland will still be 22% by 2030<sup>2</sup>. If the*

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<sup>1</sup> Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2021-2024 statistics, Scottish government, 2025, available here: <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/>.

<sup>2</sup> Achieving the 2030 Child Poverty Target, The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), 2025, available here: [https://ippr.org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Achieving\\_2030\\_child\\_poverty\\_target\\_March25.pdf?dm=1742569422](https://ippr.org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Achieving_2030_child_poverty_target_March25.pdf?dm=1742569422).

*next tackling child poverty delivery plan does not commit to significant further action and investment, the targets will be missed. In the meantime, poverty will continue to strip away the opportunities for children and young people to learn, grow and develop fully, and have happy and thriving childhoods.'*

While positive changes have taken place in Scotland to address child poverty, most notably the Scottish Child Payment, the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan will be crucial to achieving our national targets. It therefore requires actions that are both evidence based and impactful at scale.

### **1. Do you think these are the right themes to focus on?**

We agree that the four themes outlined in the consultation document are all important and relevant to addressing child poverty in Scotland.

We also support the proposed ongoing focus on the six priority groups outlined in previous Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans. However, we recommend that emphasis is given to the intersectionality inequalities that many families in these priority groups experience. We also welcome the consultation document's recognition that other types of families can experience poverty and that addressing their needs is also within scope of the next Delivery Plan.

We recommend that the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan is contextualised in relation to incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law. Children having the right to live free from poverty should be a core message of the next delivery plan.

### **2. Are there other key strategic themes we should consider?**

No.

### **3. What is working well and what actions should Scottish Government and partners either continue to do or to do more of?**

**Reducing the costs of living and maximising incomes from social security to allow families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs**

Parenting across Scotland, along with other End Child Poverty Coalition members, welcomes the significant investment made through the Scottish Child Payment (SCP). All available evidence suggests that further investment in the SCP would be the most

effective mechanism for reducing child poverty in Scotland<sup>3 4</sup>. It is hard to see Scotland achieving its child poverty targets without the SCP increasing substantially.

The Scottish Government has an important leadership role to play using its social security powers to mitigate negative and unjust decisions at a UK level. We therefore support the Scottish Government's decision to mitigate the two-child limit in Scotland. We recommend further mitigation action to address the inequity in levels of Universal Credit experienced by parents aged under 25, in line with One Parent Families Scotland's campaign<sup>5</sup>.

Debt, including public debt, is a factor that pulls and traps families into poverty and deep poverty<sup>6</sup>. PAS, in with the End Child Poverty Coalition response, recommends that the 2026-2031 delivery plan should include the implementation of a debt amnesty programme that prioritises low-income families trapped in poverty due to unmanageable public sector debts, such as council tax arrears, housing arrears and school meal debt. While ECP members have welcomed previous commitments from the Scottish Government to write-off historic school meal debt, there also needs to be a longer-term commitment to end this debt for good.

**Delivering holistic and whole family support to improve outcomes and wellbeing and enable families to better engage with other services that directly increase their incomes.**

We agree that holistic whole family support has an important role to play within the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Whole family support can provide a range of positive outcomes for children, parents and wider family members, supporting their wellbeing and ensuring that they better connected with support services in their communities.

Whole family support services can also provide a good route to deliver income maximisation support, thereby ensuring that families are receiving all the financial aid to which they are entitled. As members of the Transforming Child Maintenance Strategic Advisory Group, we would recommend that child maintenance should always be within scope of income maximisation services.

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research, Achieving the 2030 Child Poverty Target, The Distance Left to Travel, 2025, available here: [https://ippr.org.files.svdcn.com/production/Downloads/Achieving\\_2030\\_child\\_poverty\\_target\\_March25.pdf?dm=1742569422](https://ippr.org.files.svdcn.com/production/Downloads/Achieving_2030_child_poverty_target_March25.pdf?dm=1742569422)

<sup>4</sup> Fraser of Allender Institute, Meeting Scotland's child poverty targets: Modelling and policy packages, 2025, available here: [2025-03-Child-poverty-modelling-report.pdf](https://fraserinstitute.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025-03-Child-poverty-modelling-report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> One Parent Families Scotland, 2025. <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/campaigns/end-young-parent-poverty-top-up-the-scottish-child-payment/>

<sup>6</sup> Aberlour and Govan Law Centre, Child poverty won't end without a new approach to Scottish public debt collection, 2024, available here: <https://govanlawcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Public-Debt-Briefing-for-MSPs-1.pdf>

The Holistic Whole Family Support routemap and national principles provides an excellent framework for family support in Scotland<sup>7</sup>. It emphasises the importance of universal preventative provision that is stigma free and has families at the centre.

Since 2018, Parenting across Scotland has been working in partnership with Children in Scotland, Midlothian Sure Start, University of Stirling and the Open University to bring Open Kindergartens to Scotland. Open Kindergartens are a long-standing concept in early years whole family support in the Nordic countries. Groups of parents, carers and their babies and young children meet regularly in family centres and are supported by highly-qualified early years staff who work alongside specialists to develop parents' skills, confidence and knowledge.

Our research and evaluation to date has concluded that Open Kindergartens:

- Meet parents' support and learning needs more effectively
- Provide parents with peer support
- Upskill the early years workforce, particularly on parental engagement
- Represent a sustainable and financially viable model, readily capable of being upscaled and, most importantly, contribute to achieving better and more equitable outcomes for children<sup>8</sup>.

Our current phase of work (2024-2026), – funded by the Scottish Government's Whole Family Wellbeing Fund – is testing and rolling out the model in more sites across Scotland and developing learning resources to help embed the Open Kindergarten approach in a variety of early learning and childcare settings.

With their free, open door, non-stigmatising approach, Open Kindergartens provide an accessible and supportive environment, particularly for parents who are not able to access support in other ways;

*“There is people worse off than me but I would put myself on the poverty line. Like, I have to use foodbanks and things like that because there's just not enough money. I get universal credits. I have to pay my rent off universal credits. I pay my council tax and there is weeks where I have to go to the food bank. And it's mortifying, 100% it's mortifying. But this is why it's good why this is free because if it wasnae free I wouldnae be here because I wouldn't be able to afford it.”*

*“I'm not one to shy away and not say that I've had postnatal depression. At the moment I still struggle with depression, but to have this is a lifeline. It gets me out of the house. These four walls keep closing me in.” (Parent, Open Kindergarten)*

We believe that the Scottish Government should financially support the roll out of Open Kindergartens out across Scotland and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this more.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/routemap-national-principles-holistic-whole-family-support/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Open-Kindergarten-University-of-Stirling-Final-Report-June-2020.pdf>

You can access the previous reports and feasibility study here: [Open Kindergarten project | Parenting across Scotland](#)

#### **4. Are there policies, actions or approaches that the Scottish Government and/or partners should either stop or do differently?**

**Increasing earned incomes by supporting and providing opportunities for parents and carers, to enter, sustain and progress in work.**

*“We cannot currently afford any extra childcare costs; I have had to decline extra working hours because childcare would not be covered by the extra pay.” (Parent, Parenting Evidence Review)*

In order to support parents and carers to enter, sustain and progress in work, it is vital that childcare services fit the needs of parents and carers. Through a mixed-method survey, the Scottish Women’s Budget Group (SWBG) identified that 30% of mothers do not find childcare manageable. Their survey highlights a disconnect between the offered 1140 funded hours and the reality of accessing and using that funded childcare<sup>9</sup>. Their evidence shows that not only does the current system not support parents but penalises women who are more likely than men to change or reduce their working patterns. This has a significant impact on continued earning discrepancies and pension inequalities and affects women’s mental wellbeing.

This is relevant for parents with school aged children as well as those in the early years. We have heard cases of parents being unable to work because their school does not provide accessible afterschool care for their child, for example.

Increasing the availability and flexibility of childcare and reducing its cost are all absolutely vital if parental employment is to increase. Approaches such as those developed by [Flexible Childcare Services Scotland](#) show that it is possible to provide childcare without many of the conditions imposed by childcare providers, such as a minimum number of hours or sessions.

#### **5. Are there new policies, actions or approaches that Scottish Government should consider implementing?**

*Strategic theme: Reducing the costs of living and maximising incomes from social security to allow families to live dignified lives and meet their basic needs.*

*And*

*Strategic theme: Supporting children and young people to reach their full potential and to break the cycle of poverty in the longer term.*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.swbg.org.uk/content/publications/SWBG-Cost-of-Living-report-proof-06.pdf>

Taking part in leisure, hobbies and activities has huge benefits for children and young people<sup>1011</sup> in terms of physical health, mental health and wellbeing. There is a wide range of hobbies available in Scotland, but many come with a cost attached and with persisting poverty levels and the cost-of-living crisis, many families are unable to pay for their children to partake in hobbies and leisure activities. CAB Scotland reported that at the end of 2023, over 235,000 parents and carers had to cut back on spending for their children's hobbies due to the cost-of-living crisis<sup>12</sup>.

At present, there is no national policy in Scotland which gives children and young people access to free hobbies and leisure activities. This is not the case internationally and there are examples that we can learn from, in particular, from Nordic countries. Finland and Iceland both offer free access to hobbies for children and young people, following different models.

In 2023 our CEO, Amy Woodhouse, visited Iceland and Finland as part of her Churchill Fellowship, to investigate how these countries are working to increase children and young people's access to hobbies. Her report outlines key features of both countries approaches and makes a series of recommendations about how the Scottish Government could work towards developing a national hobby model for Scotland<sup>13</sup>. It recognises that we already have many of the building blocks in place including:

- Funding for children and young peoples' participation in sports and arts activities through bodies such as Sports Scotland and Creative Scotland
- National mechanisms for the distribution of entitlements to young people, such as the Young Scot card
- A wide variety of hobby providers across Scotland, delivering hobbies in schools, leisure centres, libraries, community halls and commercial facilities.
- A [Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce](#)

We firmly believe that developing a national hobby model could go a long way to ensuring that the mental health benefits of hobbies and leisure activities could be maximised, whilst removing the pressure on parents and carers to be able to financially provide hobbies. The experiences of both Finland and Iceland show that the mental health benefits are maximised when:

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<sup>10</sup> Fancourt D et al (2020) Evidence Summary for Policy: The role of arts in improving health and wellbeing: Report to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. UCL.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f9812268fa8f543f786b37f/DCMS\\_report\\_April\\_2020\\_finalx\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f9812268fa8f543f786b37f/DCMS_report_April_2020_finalx_1_.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Smith A et al (2024) Children and Young People's Mental Health and Physical Activity: An independent evidence review commissioned by Sports England.

<https://www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Smith%20et%20al%20Evidence%20Review%20Final%20Oct%2024-10.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/articles/cas-children-face-cutbacks-on-clothes-and-hobbies-due-to-soaring-bills>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1569/exploring-national-approaches-to-increasing-access-to-hobbies-for-children-and-young-people-churchill-fellowship.pdf>

- Children and young people have a choice and say in what hobbies they take part in and how those hobbies are delivered
- Hobby providers and hobby commissioners understand the public health impact of hobbies and their role in improving mental health outcomes. This would include the equivalents of national bodies such as Sports Scotland and Creative Scotland.
- Hobbies are provided in group settings over a prolonged period to encourage friendships and social connections to develop
- The barriers to hobby access are removed, including financial, physical and cultural barriers.

**6. How can Scottish Government and partners work differently to ensure seamless, integrated supported for families? What prevents this?**

Partnership working is vital to achieving our goals for reducing child poverty. However, financial uncertainty, lack of cost-of-living increases, and short-term rollovers of grants affect the ability of many third sector organisations to support families living in poverty.

There is an urgent need for multi-year, flexible funding with inflation-based uplifts so that third sector organisations can support families without worrying about staff retention, turning service users away, or spending large amounts of time on seeking other sources of income.