

Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland

Report by Mary Smith, Director Education, Communities and Economy

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the Scottish Government's Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland, and seek approval for the Council's response as set out in Appendix 1.

2 Background

- 2.1 In July 2015, the UK Government announced their intention to repeal significant proportions of the Child Poverty Act 2010 via the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. They proposed to replace the four income-based targets with measures on worklessness and educational attainment and to rename the legislation the Life Chances Act.
- 2.2 Scottish Ministers disagreed with this approach; in particular, the removal of targets, and the use of alternative measures that do not take income into account. In the Scottish Government's view, this represents a shift towards characterising poverty as a lifestyle choice rather than addressing the social and economic drivers that cause people to fall into or remain in poverty.
- 2.3 In May 2016 the UK was examined on its performance under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UN Committee noted "serious concern" regarding the UK Government's repeal of the child poverty targets.
- 2.4 The Scottish Government requested an opt-out from the UK Government's approach and worked to bring forward amendments to the Bill repealing all parts of the 2010 Act that imposed any duty on Scottish Ministers, and sought legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament. The UK Government's Welfare Reform and Work Bill was passed with the requested amendments in March 2016, meaning that the Scottish Government is now in a position to bring forward proposals for a Scottish approach to tackling and measuring child poverty.
- 2.5 The consultation seeks feedback on the Scottish Government's proposals for a Child Poverty Bill. The proposals include:
- Enshrining in legislation an ambition to eradicate child poverty
 - Reinstating statutory income-based targets to reduce the number of children living in poverty
 - Placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to develop a Child Poverty Delivery Plan, and to report annually on their progress towards delivering that plan.

The full consultation can be viewed at:
www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/08/7185. The deadline for comment is the 30 September 2016.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

The consultation on a proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill has no direct resource implications for Midlothian Council at this point in time. If a draft Bill is developed the Council will have an opportunity to carefully scrutinise the resource implications.

3.2 Risk

Responding to a Scottish Government proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill carries minimal risk.

3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan (SMP)

The proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill endorses the SMP priority of Getting it Right for Every Midlothian Child (GIRFEMC).

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

There is a body of evidence that shows that reducing child poverty improves their life chances, for example the Joseph Rowntree Foundation literature review “Costs of Child Poverty for Individuals and Society”. The proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill will embed a preventative social policy approach.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The GIRFEMC Board and Improving Opportunities Midlothian Group have been invited to comment on this consultation response.

The Government’s proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill is supported by a national communications and engagement strategy. Organisations across Scotland are also being encouraged to respond to this consultation.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

The Government's consultation on the proposal to prepare a Child Poverty Bill will need to go through rigorous legislative processes including a full equality impact assessment. Reducing child poverty will have a positive impact on reducing inequalities.

3.8 Sustainability

None

3.9 IT Issues

None

4 Summary

The Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland reflects the ambition of the Scottish Government to eradicate child poverty. The proposals are at the beginning of the legislative cycle and a transformational economic policy will be needed to meet this ambitious policy ambition. A robust measurement framework will also be needed to ensure ongoing national and local political accountability. The Council should wholeheartedly support the development of a Bill that aims to eradicate child poverty. Once a draft Bill is developed the Council will have an opportunity to further scrutinise the implications for Midlothian. An effective Child Poverty Bill will help ensure that the best interests of the child are maintained by reducing the number of families living in poverty.

7 Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- i) Notes the Scottish Government's proposals to develop a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland; and
- ii) Approves the Council's response to the Child Poverty Bill for Scotland, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

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Appendix 1 – Child Poverty Consultation Draft Response

