

## Child Poverty Strategy Consultation January 2011

### Introduction

The Scottish Out of School Care Network, [www.soscn.org](http://www.soscn.org), is the national organisation representing over a thousand school age childcare (play and learning) services across Scotland. Our work is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, and, as such, take a children's rights approach to child poverty and the provision of care, play and learning services for children. We believe that children have the right to play, care and learning, delivered by high quality professional staff, in the hours before and after school and during school holidays and in-service days.

While most out of school care places are taken up in order to help parents work or train, historically, services have also provided places for children in need of access to play and care opportunities, due to difficult circumstances in their lives. (Scottish Government, 2003). We therefore believe that out of school care is a crucial element of support to children in poverty; both as an enabler to help parents return to the job market and bring in higher family income, and as a resource for children experiencing poverty to gain access to activities which help prevent social exclusion.

Throughout our response we are concentrating on the issue of childcare but at the same time understanding that many other factors need to be addressed to prevent child poverty and to change the situation for families in poverty now. While it may be difficult to formulate a national policy approach, given the huge local variability in terms of the accessibility, affordability and flexibility of childcare; the challenges in terms of disadvantaged children and childcare are very similar across the UK.

This is backed up by recently published reports which show that while in 2008/09 child poverty reduced slightly for workless households, but those in *working families* increased to 2.1 million, which is a record high. Furthermore, 5.8 million people are in what is termed "deep poverty" (At least a third below the poverty line), (Parekh, MacInnes and Kenway, 2010).

These figures are based only on the start of the recession, before the change of UK government priorities and policies, and the fall in out of work child poverty could be due to the increases in child benefit and tax credits in April 2008 (around £5 per child per week) (Parekh, MacInnes and Kenway, 2010).

Two facts stand out here for consideration;

- The increase of child poverty in **working families**
- The difference an increase of **£5 per week** had made to child poverty in workless households.

According to the "*Working Better*" report (EHRC, 2010):

“Four out of 10 children living in poverty have a mother who is a lone parent. A further three out of 10 children in poverty are in families where the father works and the mother has no or low income.... A Joseph Rowntree report concluded that appropriate childcare provision could move between a sixth and a half of children out of poverty today” (EHRC, 2010,p 9). (The Joseph Rowntree Report cited is by Waldfogel and Garnham, 2008).

The report also points out that it is the *lowest income families* who are least likely to use formal childcare and who have access to the least information and advice about childcare. In addition, families with children who have disabilities have problems accessing the care they need and ethnic minority families are amongst the lowest users of formal childcare.

The report also stresses the need for a more concentrated development of **school age childcare and flexible hours childcare** (to meet the needs of shift workers). It is worth pointing out that these findings are based on English data where there is a *legal duty* on local authorities to both assess the local need for childcare and to provide a sufficiency of childcare to meet that need (which we do not have in Scotland).

From Frank Field’s UK government report (Field, 2010) to the Glasgow PPP initiative, the need for helping parents with parenting skills has also been a recent focus of attention...stressing that there are many kinds of poverty for children not just that of low family income. While no doubt there are many families who need this type of support it should not, however, replace giving a family enough income for shelter, food, heat, light, clothing and the basics of life, but be additional to this. Also, the levels of information on families required in the recommendations contained in the Field report (often based on subjective health visitor observation), may be seen to be highly intrusive and could encourage further mistrust and distancing from services, from, perhaps, the very families who need extra support.

Scotland did better than the UK as a whole in reducing child poverty in the period since 1998/99 to 2005, but in 2006/07 there were still 210,000 children living in relative low-income poverty before housing costs in Scotland, (Sinclair and McKendrick, 2010) and this figure is unchanged overall for 2008/2009, despite the increases in benefits outlined above, (Scottish Government, 2010a), although this could explain the slight decline in absolute poverty.

The Scottish government consultation paper on child poverty makes it clear that there are a number of valuable interlinked policies (based on numerous research) which shows that early intervention can have a positive effect in terms of longer term outcomes for children. However, it should be pointed out that what is also important is improving the quality of children’s lives in the here and now; this is linked also to the strengthening of the children’s rights agenda and the recognition of childhood as a valuable time of life, in its own right.

SOSCN supports all of these Scottish Government policies and the reasoning behind them, and in our own overview of out of school care

(SOSCN, 2010) we show how out of school care fits in with many of these aspirational proposals. In particular we support using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and *Getting it Right for every Child* as the framework for children's services.

We would suggest the UNCRC is a useful starting point for a national policy in relation to child poverty as well as childcare.

"Article 18, 3: States parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible" (UNCRC,1989).

There should be a national policy developed specifically on childcare as, despite the inclusion in *Achieving Our Potential* (Scottish Government, 2007) and the *Early Years Framework* (Scottish Government, 2009), while the *Early Years Framework* does mention childcare, especially in the papers from the working groups, within the framework itself it is submerged within a much broader argument on refocusing resources and support to the early years, and in integrating early education and childcare for that age range.

In particular we would like to see:

A specific policy document and statement reiterating the need to support the provision of childcare; especially for disadvantaged families, and to measure current and future demand, including home based care such as child minding and sitter services, wraparound care around the early education free hours, and care before and after school and during school holidays. Also looking at how to address the gaps in services for disabled children, older children, ethnic minorities and families in need of care support and children's need (at all ages) for access to play and leisure opportunities even if their parents are not in work.

A refreshing of guidance such as "Schools Out" in terms of both measuring the demand and provision of school age childcare, would be useful and SOSCN could help with that.

An information strategy on changes to tax credits and availability of different types of childcare locally.

A potential fund to help parents with the costs of advance payments/deposits for childcare provision when moving from benefits to work.

We believe that organisations like SOSCN have a key role to play in both helping to sustain existing levels of support for families and to explore new ways in which school age childcare and similar related services can work together to help alleviate the experience of poverty for children.

**Irene Audain, Chief Executive**  
**Scottish Out of School Care Network, January 2011**

Attached:

List of references

Respondent Information Form

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### Question 1

**What are your views on the Scottish Government's current approach to tackling child poverty, outlined in this paper? Does it capture the key areas where action is required to ensure the greatest impact on reducing child poverty? Are there any important steps to be taken by the Scottish Government that are not covered in this paper?**

While the priorities in the strategy and related frameworks/ policies are well expressed, at a time of stringent cuts in public spending it is essential that there is very clear direction and monitoring, in terms of what is expected of local authorities in relation to these priorities. Many of the charitable and third sector organisations which can and do support children in poverty are vulnerable to cuts in public investment just as the need for their support is increased.

#### **1.1. UK benefit and tax changes – effects on child poverty**

The Scottish Government has to also respond to the impact on families on UK government benefit and child tax credit cuts, especially childcare tax credits and the requirement for any parents on benefits to go on to jobseekers allowance and be available for work. Once their child is five years old. (UK Treasury, 2010)

The cuts in the subsidies for childcare to parents will impact on the supply of childcare places just when they are needed the most. It has been estimated that more than 40,000 families in Scotland will lose on average £432 a year in subsidies (The Resolution Foundation, 2010).

#### **1.2 Supporting school age childcare**

There should also be very clear messages to local government that school age childcare services need to be supported and protected at times of cuts as these services are absolutely essential for working parents and in helping families out of poverty. They are also sources of jobs in the community.

While we at the Scottish Out of School Care understand that out of school care is included in the Early Years Framework, and it suggests that support for vulnerable children beyond age 8 is also essential, we do not find that this message is well understood on a local level. In fact one local authority justified their withdrawal of subsidy funding of all local out of school care services by stating that "it is not a statutory requirement to provide out of school care" in response to SOSCN's correspondence on the issue.

#### **1.3 Scottish policy on out of school care**

As, out of school care is not viewed as a statutory service, unlike early education places, it is therefore more vulnerable to cuts from local

government. These cuts are short-sighted as childcare support for families is essential for any economic regeneration strategy. We know that “ Schools Out, a framework for the development of out of school care, 2003, is still a relevant policy document for school aged childcare, and it mentions the economic benefits of out of school care, so we would like to see a renewal of emphasis on this framework as part of an anti poverty strategy.

#### **1.4 Children in poverty – need for access to play, care and learning out of school**

Our response focuses on the needs of children in poverty to be able to access high quality childcare, mainly to enable parents to work but we also suggest it is time to provide children from families in deep poverty and not in work, to be able to access some hours of quality childcare during term time and holidays in order to give them much needed opportunities for play and companionship of other children. This could include, for example, access to day trips out in summer.

Children in poverty are cut off from many experiences others take for granted and the current quality childcare services are well placed to (if subsidised directly) give these children opportunities to be included in society, including their right to play, and to experience leisure activities their parents may not be able to provide.

In terms of the health and well being of poorer children; school age childcare services would easily be able to expand their activities, if supported to do, so by subsidies and access to premises and kitchens in order to provide, for example, breakfast clubs to ensure children get a nutritious breakfast, or, with access to gyms and playing fields, opportunities for games and exercise after school and in the holidays. Such resources would help deliver Equally Well (Scottish Government, 2008).

Children and families coping with disability are also disproportionately represented in poorer families, therefore expanding and supporting childcare services which offer disabled children much needed play opportunities and parents respite support are also essential.

There is marked poverty in terms of remote rural areas and it is very difficult in such areas to maintain self financing small childcare businesses, either community run or otherwise, yet children there also need access to play and relaxation, and parents need all the support they can to take up any work or training opportunities.

## **2. What do you think should be the priority areas for action in the child poverty strategy? What will make the biggest difference to reducing levels of child poverty?**

### **2.1 Children’s rights**

SOSCN takes a children’s rights approach to children in poverty; despite the current financial climate, the UK is still a relatively wealthy nation in the

world, so it is scandalous that we still have so many children living in poverty.

If we are truly committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, then the state is supposed to make sure that parents have the support they need in providing care for their children and this includes an adequate income, childcare, education and health care. This means we believe that families on welfare benefits should receive enough to ensure that their children are kept out of poverty and, given that many families in work are also still in poverty, that the minimum pay levels should be raised for all. We also believe that there should be strong and stable infrastructures of support for families including childcare, and a wide range of support services to help families dealing with difficult circumstances.

## **2.2 Action points – SOSCN Recommendations**

Given the current financial climate there should be a “triple pronged” approach; first protect existing services for children and families, including non statutory services, such as out of school care, second invest in a range of practical measures to deal with the impact of further reductions in family income and job losses. Third, ensure that Scottish policies to reduce child poverty are delivered locally and stringently monitored, while also monitoring the impact of the UK government’s policies in terms of changes to tax and benefit systems and public sector investment.

Undoubtedly the creating of proper jobs with decent pay, backed by a strong infrastructure of childcare, back to work support and training, would make a big difference in tackling child poverty. The big question is where these jobs are going to come from in this current economic climate?

High numbers of young people are experiencing unemployment and the loss of such programmes as future builders means they are not getting valuable work experiences, this could then create another generation kept out of the job market, as the longer a person experiences unemployment the harder it is for them to convince others, or indeed themselves, that they have skills to offer an employer, therefore we must look at providing work experience opportunities for young people.

## **2.3 Information strategy on changes to tax credits and childcare**

Workers in out of school care are usually women, many in part time low waged work and many themselves claim tax credits. We need to ensure an information strategy for employers and employees on tax credit changes such as changes to the minimum number of hours a person must work in order to claim, or a large group of families will fall under the new limits. Many parents do not know about locally available childcare, therefore we suggest a mass marketing campaign, similar to the successful, “play, talk, read” campaign and to ensure they do know about what tax credits are still available to them.

## **2.4 Disability**

Not every family has an adult able to work, however, due to disability or other circumstances, yet current UK government policies are taking more people off the slightly more generous disability or illness related benefits, as well as taking parents of five year olds off income support, therefore putting more families into meeting the Jobseekers Allowance conditions. These conditions include sanctions like cuts in benefits, if the adult(s) in the household do not take up work opportunities (even although this could be through lack of childcare or inability for adaptations to be put in place for their disability).

## **2.5 Asylum Seekers**

Another segment of society experiencing the worse poverty are asylum seeking families, who are currently dependent on the work of Scottish charities to help provide the basics of life. The Scottish Government and local authorities should continue to support such work.

While the tax and benefit system is not devolved to the Scottish Government, they could monitor and report back on the impact of these policies, while investing in alleviative measures to deal with the impact on families.

It is right that the Scottish Government sees the long term positive benefits of early intervention, and that early intervention is not just in the early years, although that has tangible long term benefits.

## **2.6 Avoiding the blame culture**

The majority of people in Scotland want what is best for their families and want decent jobs, or to access further education or training to get such jobs, but in some communities there are very few such opportunities, so it is important in rhetoric about child poverty that there is not a blame” the parents’ culture.

Many leading and respected research agencies on poverty (such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) do emphasis the need to get away from an individualistic analysis, where poverty is “caused” only by the choices an individual might make. Poverty is a result of both macroeconomic and microeconomic forces which affect the demand for labour and skills internationally and nationally, in terms of work opportunities in communities, and of political decisions which determine the levels of wages, benefits, taxation or investments in public services and welfare. Countries such as Sweden, for example, have much lower child poverty, higher investment in support to families, including childcare and school age childcare, and a smaller gap between the rich and poor in their society.

## **2.7.Supporting parents into work**

The complexity of the welfare system and the uncertainty about, for example, having to pay in advance for childcare, transport, appropriate

clothing for work, with gaps in subsidies creating a fear of getting behind with bills, are all highly rational reasons for not risking a move into work for some parents. Organisations which support parents and subsidies to help with transitions to work can help make such processes easier; therefore we suggest continued investment in such programmes and organisations.

There are also areas with third and second generations, who have never managed to escape a life on benefits, what is essential in such areas is to both avoid the “blame culture” and to create genuine supported work or training opportunities.

**b) What kinds of measures will make the biggest difference to reducing the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on children?**

There are both *physical and psychological effects* of poverty on children, therefore there should be measures which help ensure their physical and emotional well being.

### **2.8 Breakfast clubs**

SOSCN agrees with the provision of free nutritious school meals for children in poverty but this must be delivered in a non stigmatising way.

As we have already suggested, if resourced properly, and that includes access to school premises and kitchens, subsidies for staff wages and running costs, the network of out of school services in Scotland would be well placed to set up breakfast clubs for children in need. Breakfast clubs are rarely able to be run on a self financing basis. If the Scottish Government chooses that this is directly provided by schools, then we must stress that this should be done in partnership with any out of school care already providing this service, or the knock on effect could be to displace and close down an essential service.

### **2.9 Subsidised places in school age childcare**

Another way to help children from poorer families not in work, is to subsidise current out of school childcare services to provide extra places for children in need, so that these children can access play and learning after school and during holidays. However, this has to be done carefully so that services can continue to operate as business like as possible for long term sustainability, but for the moment any extra income would help services stay in existence, while at the same time providing wider opportunities for the children in their communities. Parents moving into the job market could have either a subsidised place or loan to pay advance childcare costs now required by many services.

These measures would help in terms of children’s physical health, but also in terms of emotional well being and inclusion in the local community that play care and learning services out of school provide. In addition this helps parents get to know the local childcare provider in advance of looking for work and can be a point of social contact for them in the community.

For children and families experiencing multiple disadvantages, such access to services, for example, children with disabilities, or asylum seeking children, would have further additional benefits for them, in participating in their community.

### **2.10 Supporting parents in social inclusion**

Many community based school age childcare providers are potentially a useful gateway for groups of parents to come together on particular issues (such as disability) or socially, and with around half of the services in Scotland, still managed by voluntary parent committees, there are also opportunities for parents to develop skills as a volunteer, which helps increase confidence and reduces social isolation.

### **2.11 Practical help: resources for children**

We are sure many other commentators on the strategy will also have practical suggestions for resources required by children in poverty; those below are based on various research papers, which show that poorer children do not have access to a lot of the basic necessities of life in this country.

For example, people notice if children are poorly dressed, so there should be a way of providing clothing grants over and above school uniforms for the poorest families, and perhaps a way of subsidising things like a professional hair cut, if desired, for the children. These practical measures, if carried out sensitively, would help children feel more equal to their better off peers, and help stop them “standing out” as scruffy or inadequately clothed for the current weather. (Of course “scruffy” might be in fashion and some children refuse to wear the proper clothing for the weather conditions, but there is a difference between having a choice to do this or no access to an alternative).

In Finland, every new baby is welcomed by the state, by the provision of free layette of baby clothes and essentials; this could be copied here, but for families on the lowest incomes. We should also ensure that children access free dental and eye care and ensure more dental practices deliver NHS treatment and this should be monitored.

Children in poverty have less access to a computer or the internet than their peers and that is a huge disadvantage for them. We believe the Scottish Government would be well able to negotiate with some of the larger firms, who provide such equipment and services, to enable them work in partnership with national charitable organisations, or community planning partnerships, in order to deliver such assets locally to children in poverty.

### **2.12 Long term strategies to support children’s rights**

None of the measures suggested here are intended to be short term, despite the absolute need for them in the face of the current financial climate, we believe that as long as child poverty exists in this country we should endeavour to take practical steps to make a difference to children’s

day to day lives. We should ensure they are able to participate in their communities, through accessing play and extra curricular activities in “out of school care” and similar services for younger or older children and through being provided with nutritious food, exercise, clothing, equipment, health and personal care to ensure their dignity and overall well being. We believe children in Scotland have the right to this care and support.

### **2.13 Measuring poverty and life chances;**

Despite these suggestions undoubtedly what would make the biggest difference to children in poverty are better and more adequate levels of family income, which reduces stress on parents and children, and enables fuller participation in society.

While some recent reports, such as Frank Fields UK government report, and others suggest measures in terms of life chances, or that children in poverty report they are just as happy as children who are not, we should not forget that often parents do their best to “protect” their children from knowing their family is in poverty, and indeed children do their best to “protect” their parents from knowing about how poverty affects them.

Across the income strata, where parents do not listen to children or care enough, or spend positive time with them, or where parents have addiction issues, or are ill or isolated, then children suffer. These situations are exacerbated, if combined with the social exclusion of poverty and perhaps, more skilfully “hidden from view” in better off families.

We should not take an either/or approach, increasing the income of poorer families and reducing inequality leads to better well being of everyone in society while, in addition, tackling deficits in care and parenting, which mitigate against child well being should also be addressed.

### **3. What are the main constraints to tackling child poverty in Scotland: (a) At the (Scottish) national level?**

**3.1** At the Scottish level there is the lack of control over the levels of welfare benefits and low pay and related tax credits in terms of income subsidies for families in poverty. There are also the challenges of the recession and cuts in public spending, which is why we are suggesting small measures which add value to existing community services and investments in relatively small but important packages of care for children in poverty. There is also a strong reliance of local authorities fulfilling their commitment to the concordat with the Scottish Government in the face of cuts to their budgets.

### **(b) At local (Community Planning Partnership) level?**

**3.2** At the local level there is the question of resources to help deliver strategic support, and of community planning partnerships understanding and delivering on national strategies and priorities. As we mentioned at the beginning, there is certainly not always an understanding locally of the importance of school age childcare to the economy, the Early Years

## Framework and anti – poverty strategies.

### **4. This discussion paper sets out the principles of an ‘assets based approach’ (section 3). What are your views on this approach? What would help to deliver and promote it?**

**4.1** We strongly agree with an assets based approach, the current wave of school age childcare services which started in the 1980s was based on just such an approach. People in disadvantaged communities banded together to create out of school care and holiday services, accessing grants from regeneration programmes, to develop both services and a local then national infrastructure. This also led to providing a model for parents in all communities, poor and better off, to follow, in setting up much needed services for their children.

### **4.2 Services for older children – opportunities to create new services**

Children are, of course, an important asset in every community. There is a lack of services for older children in terms of early secondary school age/ late primary school in accessing somewhere to go after school if their parents are at work or indeed to just go and meet with peers. Again, by building on existing out of school care and linking up with youth services, communities could be encouraged to set up services for children of this age group – perhaps with investment funding directed through guidance to the national lottery Scottish programmes or similar.

### **4.3 Supporting small business start up including school age childcare, and providing support to parents**

Community work and using local activists and local services to encourage innovation locally, investment in micro businesses, encouraging social inclusion by giving children opportunities to join in with others in out of school and holiday care, and to provide gateways for parents to contribute their ideas and skills. Support voluntary organisations who deliver practical support to returners to the job market.

We also believe that everyone has skills and many families in disadvantaged communities already help each other out, and this social capital is highly valuable and makes a difference to children’s lives. We need to support community hubs such as libraries and enable internet access in poorer communities in order to give people more opportunities to network.

We also believe that in financially difficult times we should use innovative ways of developing new support measure from existing services which help protect current levels of services and provide new opportunities for children in poverty.

Community assets such as school buildings, gym hall, playing fields and kitchens should be available at low or no cost to help facilitate services for children of the community.

**5. What can Scottish Government do to effectively support its partners to tackle child poverty? In particular:**

- **This discussion paper notes the particular challenges of focusing public spending on early intervention and prevention in a constrained economic climate. What could Scottish Government do to support local areas with these challenges?**
- **More generally, what can Scottish Government do to facilitate local strategic approaches to tackling child poverty, and to support effective local delivery?**

**5.1** The Scottish government could provide a protected national budget and use the expertise of national organisations for children to deliver packages of subsidised places and the practical support we have outlined.

What we fear is that with the pressure on local authority budgets we will lose many services for children at this time, and it will cost much more in the long term to re-establish such services, and indeed, in the case of school age childcare, prevent the full delivery of economic regeneration.

**6. What are your views on existing measures to monitor progress on tackling child poverty, set out in Section 5?**

**6.** We would like to see more stringent reporting requirements on, for example, The Early Years Framework, and regular data on the provision of services to children, including childcare and financial support for services.

**7(a) We are interested in examples of effective local practice in tackling child poverty. If there are any examples you think it would be useful for us to be aware of, please provide a brief summary below.**

**7.** We believe that the development of school age childcare services by local people in communities is an excellent example of self help and assets based approach. These services create direct employment and enable others in the community to get back to work.

The services in many communities emerged from first providing voluntary run play services for all of the children of these communities with play and leisure opportunities yet, ironically, now, they are mainly only able to offer places to working parents who can pay (albeit subsidised through tax credits), it is time now to build on these services to enable further access to families in poverty in order to improve the quality of children's lives in terms of a children's rights approach.

The expertise of services which combine support to parents entering the job market, with childcare and practical skills training should be harnessed; there is a wealth of experience available from particular voluntary sector organisations and they should be involved in strategy development. Rosemount Lifelong learning in Glasgow is a good example of such a service, while One Parent Families Scotland is highly expert in supporting lone parent return to work processes.

**7 (b) Would you be prepared to be contacted for further information on any examples you have provided above? If so, please provide contact details below.**

[irene@soscn.org](mailto:irene@soscn.org) – Yes.

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## RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

### 1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

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Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please tick as appropriate

Surname

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Forename

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### 3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/

Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate YES

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate YES

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

YES

