



The Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

Official Response

SUBJECT: Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland
REQUESTED BY: Scottish Government
REFERENCE: OR-2016/06
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Introduction

The motto of the Poverty Truth Commission is: 'Nothing About us Without Us is For Us.' This is a guiding principle for the work of the Poverty Truth Commission and the Church of Scotland as we seek to identify ways of effectively eradicating the scourge of poverty in Scotland today. We do not believe that poverty will ever be really effectively tackled, despite the good intentions of many, until those who experience poverty are at the heart of bringing about change.

The Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland has a long history both of campaigning against poverty and injustice and tackling that injustice at local and practical levels. We have committed time and resources to the very poorest communities in Scotland, recently through the work of its Priority Areas Committee and Crossreach. Through our full-time staff and volunteers, as well as through the Go For It Fund, we support pioneering work with children, families and young people and young people. All of this work convinces us of the critical importance of tackling child poverty.

In 2015 - 2016 the Church and Society Council undertook "Speak Out: 10,000 voices for change", a process which listened to nearly 11,000 individuals from Churches and communities across Scotland and heard their hopes and concerns for Scotland and the world. This exercise has been designed to set the strategic direction for our work over the next 15 years. From our analysis it was clear that the need to tackle poverty and systematic injustice was a prominent concern. One of the specific themes we will focus on is "Investing in our young people", 10% of responses to Speak Out related to this theme. The conclusions we reached will form a core element in our work in the coming years and as there are clear parallels to the Fairer Scotland Action Plan and we will engage further with the Scottish Government on wider responses to poverty.

Scotland's Poverty Truth Commission

The Poverty Truth Commission have been engaging with children, young people and families around the issues of child poverty over the last seven years. Amongst other issues, we shone a light on kinship care and the vital importance to kinship carers that it is the children themselves who must be remembered during policy discussions. Jessie says: "I just need to look at my grandson and the

emotions run high. Anything I do campaigning wise is for these kids." More recently we have highlighted the cost of school uniforms and the inadequate levels of the school clothing grant - highlighting the importance of ensuring that whilst tackling the attainment gap, the Scottish Government must tackle the sometimes hidden costs of schooling. Paul says: "You get in trouble if you don't wear the uniform. I used to be sent home every day for wearing shoes with some blue - instead of completely black - until my mum could afford a new pair."

The work of the Commission involves putting people with direct experience of poverty at the centre of discussions to overcome it. We strive to hear and amplify stories that people want to share. Two young Commissioners share some of their thoughts in the film *Kost of Kicks*: <https://vimeo.com/114057613>. We believe that listening, learning from and directly involving people brings about real change.

A Shared Response

The Church and Society Council and Poverty Truth Commission welcome the Consultation on a Child Poverty Bill for Scotland. We support the Scottish Government's intention to act on the recommendations of the UNCRC and to re-establish targets with measurable indicators to monitor and report on reductions in child poverty. We also emphasise the need to back up this process with a clear and robust Action Plan designed not just to measure Child Poverty but to eradicate it.

We are convinced that families who experience poverty must be involved in creating meaningful definitions of poverty, setting income measures and targets and agreeing steps to bring about sustainable change. However, this short consultation period, occurring concurrently with the Consultation on Social Security in Scotland, has hindered our ability to do this as effectively as we would have wished.

We have welcomed the openness of civil servants, government advisers and ministers to engage directly with families struggling against poverty. We would offer the opportunity to continue this vital dialogue both through ongoing dialogue with the Poverty Truth Commission and a range of the locally-based work which the Church of Scotland undertakes in Scotland's economically poorest communities.

If you would wish to take up this offer, please contact Chloe Clemmons, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Officer on 0131 240 2276 or chloe@actsparl.org