

SCOTTISH ANTI POVERTY REVIEW



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SOCIAL POWER FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE



EDITORIAL TEAM

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The Poverty Alliance

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The views expressed in the Scottish Anti-Poverty Review do not necessarily reflect those of The Poverty Alliance.

ABOUT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance is a network of community, voluntary, statutory and other organisations whose vision is of a sustainable Scotland based on social and economic justice, with dignity for all, where poverty and inequalities are not tolerated and are challenged.

Our aim is to combat poverty by working with others to empower individuals and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this we:

- Work with people and communities experiencing poverty to empower them to address poverty
- Work with organisations to build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- Support the development of policies which promote social justice and combat poverty
- Raise awareness about poverty and encourage debate

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WELCOME

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EDITORIAL

Maintaining Momentum

It may sound like exaggeration, but the last year has seen some potentially ground breaking developments in the approach we are taking to address poverty and inequality in Scotland. The passing of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act at the end of 2017, which put in place targets to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030 and established an independent statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission to oversee progress, was heralded by campaigners across Scotland. Just before the Parliament went into the summer recess the latest piece of legislation was the Social Security Act, paving the way for a human rights focus to the delivery of social security benefits in Scotland.

With such important legislation making it onto the statute books, it's perhaps forgivable that some people seemed to have missed the publication of another important policy document earlier in the year. In March the new Child Poverty Delivery Plan, Every Child Every Chance, was launched by the Scottish Government. As Neil Cowan has highlighted in his article, the new plan is a substantial piece of work, one that has a broad sweep, but also has some clear priorities. It is a plan that requires, as Neil says, 'ambition, radicalism and participation' if it is to deliver.

The new Programme for Government suggests that we need to step up on all three of these areas if we are to maintain the momentum needed to deliver on child poverty reductions. There were some positive announcements, in particular bringing forward plans for the implementation of the Best Start Grant, providing an additional £2million to help address food insecurity during school holidays, and the commitment to ensure that companies receiving Regional Selective Assistance pay the real Living Wage by April 2019. However, given the scale of the challenge we face in reducing poverty, we will need to see more significant commitments in the years ahead.

How do we ensure that the Scottish Government begins to deliver on the commitments that it makes? Anyone working for social change knows that there has been for too long an 'implementation gap' between what politicians and policy makers commit to and what is actually delivered on the ground.

This is not to deny that many positive policies have had a real impact on many people and communities, but too often the expectations we have for change do not turn into reality.

Civil society organisations have a crucial role to play if we are to turn the commitments made in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan into meaningful change on the ground. Chloe Hardy from the Shelia McKechnie Foundation, writing in this edition, highlights the example of the campaign for a real Living Wage as one where civil society organisations, large and small, working together have brought about changes in both government policy but also in the practice of employers right across the UK. Ensuring the voice of civil society is heard and acted upon will be crucial in ensuring the commitments to reduce child poverty are delivered.

That is why we are so excited about the development of the Poverty Alliance's new Get Heard Scotland initiative. It is aimed at supporting organisations across the community and voluntary sectors to feed into the continued development of the local and national plans to address child poverty.

Over the long term it aims to build a body of knowledge, based on the lived experience of poverty, that can be drawn on when making decisions about how best to address poverty. Get Heard Scotland is not only about gathering yet more evidence on what needs to be done to address poverty, it should also be about empowering people who are living on low incomes, and the groups people are involved in to take action themselves to address poverty. Whether that is campaigning to address the lack of affordable transport, the need for more mental health services or to address low pay, Get Heard Scotland will help groups and activists to identify the changes needed to happen. Over the coming months and years we hope that it will be the voices raised through Get Heard Scotland that will increase the ambition and impact of our plans to reduce poverty.

Peter Kelly
Director



RESEARCH COMMENT

The Sustainable Development Goals: A global get-out-of-jail free card for not tackling poverty?

In his regular column Professor John McKendrick at Glasgow Caledonian University reflects on the launch of the new Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit at the University.



Photo by MVO Nederland SDG

One of the many good reasons to have children is that you get the chance to read Julia Donaldson on a daily basis. In *A Squash and a Squeeze*, a little old lady consults a wise old man about how to make room in her house. His advice is, in turn, to bring inside her hen, goat, pig and cow, before finally advising her to take them all out again. Back where she started, but relieved at the space that is created when the animals are removed from the house, the story ends with the little old lady thanking the wise old man for helping her create a gigantic house.

Is there a risk that, like Donaldson's little old lady, we will start to perceive that poverty in Scotland is not-so-bad, if the frame of reference shifts to the global with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The seventeen SDGs were set by the United Nations in 2015 with the goal of transforming the world by 2030. Scotland wasted no time in embracing the challenge with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announcing in July 2015 Scotland's intention to sign up to the goals, the first of which is No Poverty: end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Underpinning this particular goal are five specific targets:

- By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day (1.1)
- By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions (1.2)
- Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable (1.3)
- By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance (1.4)



RESEARCH COMMENT Cont'd

- By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters (1.5)

Earlier this year, the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) invited me to contribute to *Measuring Up: How the UK is Performing on the Sustainable Development Goals*. Across the seventeen goals, the UK was judged to be performing well on 24% of targets; having gaps in policy coverage or inadequate performance for 57% of targets; and having little or no policy in place to address the target or poor performance for 15% of targets. What then about poverty?

There is some good news, which should come as no surprise. After all, the UK has a fairly wide-ranging system of social security (Target 1.3) and Scotland is taking steps to strengthen this system of support for its most vulnerable through the work of the new Scottish Social Security Agency. Similarly, as the World Bank itself acknowledges, the global poverty line is used primarily to track global extreme poverty and may have less relevance in middle-income countries, let alone high-income countries, such as the UK (Target 1.1). Beyond the targets, we must also value the goodwill and good intentions to tackle poverty in Scotland that are shared by many citizens and abound in organisations spanning government, private enterprise and the Third Sector.

On the other hand, concerns must be raised about the UK Government's 'direction of travel'. Social security has been weakened in recent years, with significant reductions in the level of resource that is at the disposal of some of the UK's most financially challenged citizens. The manner in which new provisions have been introduced (e.g. back-payment cycles for Universal Credit creating short-term vulnerabilities) has shown a disregard for the realities of life for those with least resource (Target 1.3). Foodbanks are becoming a necessary part of the landscape of social support.

Demand on crisis funds and welfare advice are increasing. Extreme poverty is among us (Target 1.1).

Perhaps more problematically, there has been significant weakening of explicit commitment by the UK government to tackle poverty in recent years (Target 1.2). For example, the Child Poverty Act 2010 was repealed in 2016 with the introduction of a Welfare Reform and Work Act, which meant there was no longer a legal obligation on the UK Government to eradicate child poverty by 2030.

We can be proud that here in Scotland we have committed to eradicate child poverty by 2030 (through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017) and articulated how this will be achieved through the first Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022. However, there is no room for complacency. Much more needs to be done if Scotland is truly to 'lead the way' in achieving the SDG1 goal of ending poverty.

At the very least, Scotland now needs a comprehensive and differentiated anti-poverty strategy, which acknowledges and specifies what is required to reduce poverty not only for children, but also for adults of working age and pensioner poverty.

One thing is certain – the SDGs do not provide grist to the mill for the minority who would rather that we did not rise to the challenge of eradicating poverty in Scotland. On the contrary, it provides another tool to be used to hold those in power to account for their decision-making.

The review of SDG1 – No poverty: end poverty in all of its forms can be accessed here: <https://www.ukssd.co.uk/measuringup>



TRADE UNION COMMENT

Making Social Security Work in Scotland



Photo by Loz Pycock

Social Security Scotland was formally launched in September 2018. The staff working in the new agency will play a crucial role in changing the perceptions of social security in Scotland. In this article Cat Boyd of the PCS trade union highlights what they want to see in the new social security system.

The most popular joke at this year's Edinburgh Festival poked fun at working in a Jobcentre. If you got sacked, the joke goes, you'd still have to turn up in the same place the next day. It's funny, because it appeals to the absurd. We're all guilty of forgetting that the people behind the desks in the Jobcentre are just at their work. It's the same way we often forget that staff in HMRC call centres are fighting a frontline battle against tax evasion or that its low paid civil servants making preparations for the politicians' vision of Brexit.

If DWP employees aren't faceless, then they're often demonised as they deliver Tory policies. But it's not that simple. Staff in the Department for Work and Pensions have suffered pay restraint, pensions cuts and attacks

on terms and conditions that are rarely seen in the public sector. At the same time, the employer works overtime to ensure that a hostile culture prevails and that the system becomes intimidating for those on both sides of the process.

So, when PCS union members heard that large parts of social security would be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, many recognised the huge opportunities for change emerging. First and foremost, our union wanted the Scottish Government to look at what the UK Government was doing- and do the opposite. When the Scottish Government said they wanted the Scottish Social Security System to be based on dignity, respect and fairness- our union wholeheartedly agreed.



TRADE UNION COMMENT Cont'd

But we went one step further too, we've been working to make these principles a reality.

Disability allowance, Carers allowance, Job Grants, Winter Fuel Allowance and Cold Weather Payment will eventually all be delivered by a new Scottish Social Security Agency by 2021. The Agency will be staffed by up to 3000 public sector workers, with hundreds delivering face to face services across the country.

A Scottish Social Security Working Party was established 2016, chaired by PCS national president Janice Godrich, which has worked with the Scottish Government to the Social Security (Scotland) Bill. Working in conjunction with the Scottish Government, our union members' experiences have helped ensure that the Bill now states that social security must 'contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland'. As well as enshrining a right to advocacy for those with mental health needs and inflation-proof benefit uprating, we've ensured that private sector involvement in social security is limited. In the past, when governments have who outsourced care or service to multinational firms, motivated by profit, both workers and individuals have suffered.

PCS undertook our own research with DWP staff asking what a decent social security system would look like, and unsurprisingly, the majority of those participating in the research called for an overhaul or end to the sanctions system, universal credit, and work capability assessments. Our research also highlighted systemic problems with organisational structure, management and job design. These factors are not internal staff gripes, but rather integral issues which impact on the experience for the public who need social security assistance.

The key recommendations to the Scottish Government from the report were:

- Provide dignity through a decent standard of living

- Ensure services are publicly delivered through the social security agency
- Design a transparent, easy to understand system
- Provide staff with comprehensive training
- IT systems need to be fully operational and effective from the outset
- Avoid replicating DWP management style in future social security delivery

These are areas where the Scottish Government can take steps to ensure that their social security department does not follow the route of DWP. In Scotland, the Government are faced with similar choices about how they design their agency, as well as issues such as the benefit rules and rates. We believe that this comes down to investing the time and money into getting these decisions right.

That's why our union has a crucial role to play in delivering Scotland's new social security system. The way an Agency operates has an impact on the service it provides. We want the new agency to deliver justice for staff and those who need social solidarity.

Given the vastness and complexity of the social security system, it is little wonder that there are no easy fixes to improve the lives of those in need of support, but through our positive working relationship and the voice and experience of union members, we're trying to make a difference.

Jobcentre workers are real people- as real as the people they serve. Our families, friends and colleagues- and yes, even former DWP staff- do go through the system in times of need. Its part of the reason why we're giving all we have to make this system work better.

But most of all, our union believes that the way we deliver social security becomes a metaphor for our society, and if we want a society based on justice, solidarity and respect, then we must build it in Scotland's new agency.



THIRD SECTOR COMMENT

Influencing the Future of Social Security



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The third sector in Scotland have been working hard for years to ensure that we have the best social security system possible. Here Sheghley Ogilvie of SCVO outlines what has been achieved and what comes next.

On the 1st of June the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 received Royal Assent, establishing the first devolved social security system. The Act represents the greatest single increase in the responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament since devolution. By 2021, Scottish Ministers will be responsible for more than 15% of social security spending, totalling an estimated £2.8bn, and affecting around 1.4 million people. A big change, a big challenge, a big opportunity.

The devolution of eleven social security entitlements to Scotland has been enthusiastically supported by voluntary organisations. In Scotland, there has long been an appetite for a new approach to social security and the Scottish Government's aspirations to create a rights-based system built upon the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect, has been a welcome contrast to the negative UK level rhetoric and its consequences.

However, the transfer of social security powers to the Scottish Parliament is a complex task and what a rights-based approach means in practice has been hotly debated. Voluntary organisations have been ambitious, striving to ensure that the legislative framework for this new public service is as robust as possible. This ambition has resulted in a vastly improved piece of legislation.

Improvements include:

- Restriction of private-sector involvement in medical assessments
- Introduction of independent scrutiny through the Scottish Social Security Commission
- Restrictions on the recovery of overpayments
- A duty to consider the effects of inflation on the value of devolved assistance



THIRD SECTOR COMMENT Cont'd

- A duty to uprate disability, employment- injury assistance, and funeral expense assistance in line with inflation
- A duty to communicate in an inclusive way
- Recognition of the role of independent advice
- A right to independent advocacy for people with disabilities
- Payments of entitlements in cash, unless an individual chooses an alternative
- Changes to the reconsideration and appeals process to make it easier to challenge decisions.
- A fairer system of support for the terminally ill with no reference to life expectancy.
- A reduction in the number of face-to-face assessments
- Automatic spilt payments of Universal Credit between two members of a single household.

These improvements were the result of months of hard work by colleagues in a sector where resources are often stretched. Engagement directly with the Scottish Government was, for some, the route to success. Where amendments were, in the eyes of the Scottish Government, controversial, voluntary organisations sought alternative avenues to achieve change while continuing the conversation with the Scottish Government. Here the make-up of the Scottish Parliament offered voluntary organisations a distinct advantage. Colleagues seized the opportunity presented by minority government, utilising relationships across all political parties to create support for amendments among parties in opposition. Partnership working between voluntary organisations, and in some cases wider civil society organisations, was central to establishing cross party support. Similarly, the tactful use of e-campaigns and social media was, in several cases, an essential element of success.

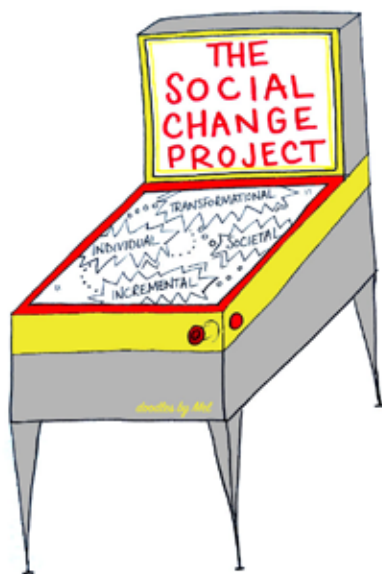
As we progress through the regulation phase we must continue to challenge the Scottish Government to deliver what they have promised, a rights-based social security system that treats people with dignity, fairness, and respect. Already it is emerging that voluntary organisations share concerns around the Scottish Government's approach to fraud and offences, the struggle between right-based and economic arguments, and achieving a rights-based culture within the social security agency. Similarly, the sector can and should come together to ensure commitments made to voluntary organisations, particularly around disability assistance are realised.

The Scottish Government have recognised that through a rights-based approach to social security we can achieve a more just Scotland and fulfil the rights of the people and communities who live here. Our role now is to ensure the detail matches this rhetoric.



Unleash your Social Power: How Real Change Happens

Anti-poverty campaigners should always be asking: how can we make a bigger impact? The Sheila McKechnie Foundation have been asking too. In this article Chloe Hardy, Director of Policy & Communications at SMK, reports on the findings of a project to look at how change happens.



In 2017, the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK) set itself its greatest challenge to date – to learn how social change happens from the people who do it, and ask how we can all increase our social power. ‘Social power’ is civil society’s ability to deliver transformational change for individuals, communities and society as a whole. Over a year, and hundreds of conversations later, we launched the Social Power report.

Civil society’s role in social change

During our research, we saw and heard examples of civil society driving extraordinarily powerful social change – from society-wide changes in attitudes and cultural norms (equal marriage), to important shifts in legislation (National Living Wage), to genuine transformations in local communities and individual lives.

We witnessed civil society working at its best: unlocking resources, realising assets, building relationships, getting upstream of problems, transforming lives, and sharing power. We found it helping people and communities come together, negotiating change and building consensus. We saw it working in ways and in places the state finds difficult.

We found that civil society is often at the heart of the most significant social change, brought to fruition by working symbiotically with government and, increasingly, with the private sector, the media and the arts.

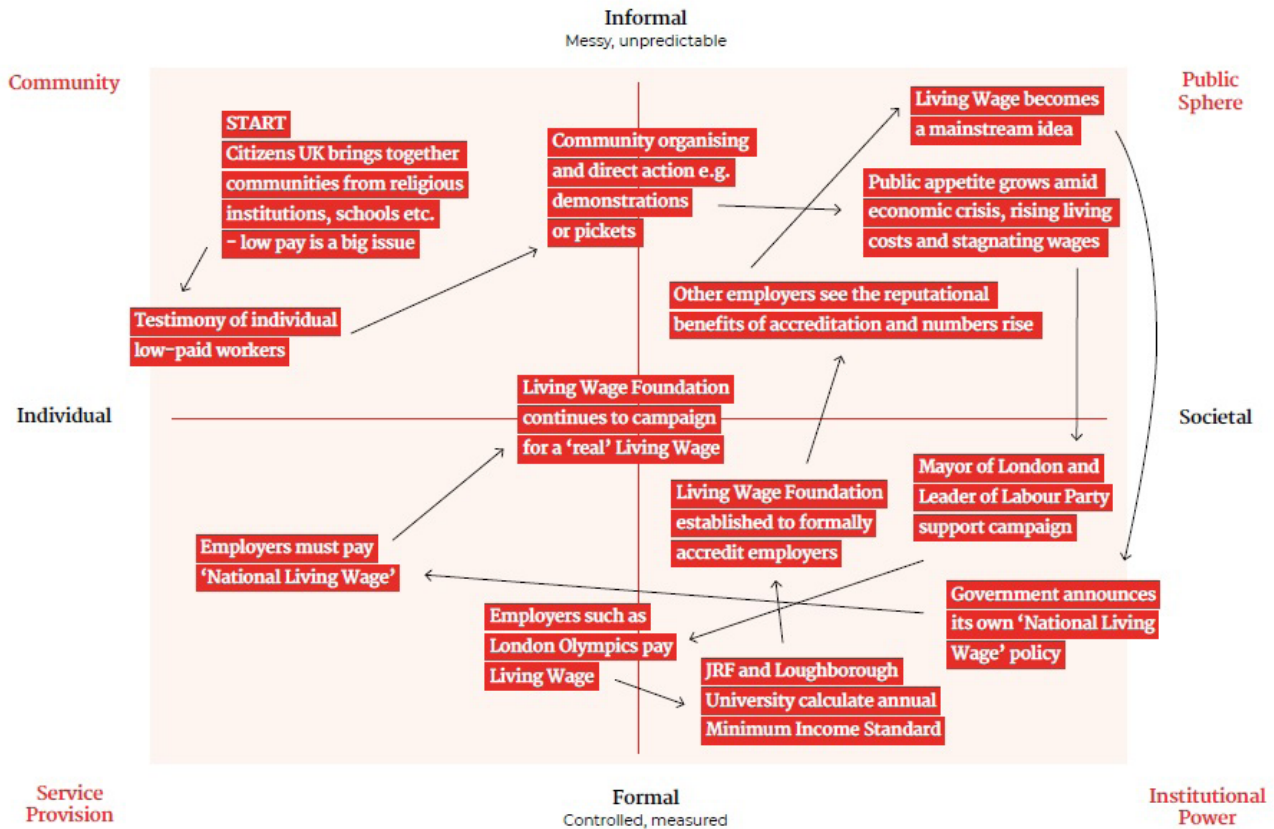
Where change happens

One of our key findings was that lasting change happens across different arenas. We mapped all kinds of activity associated with social change, and discovered it working across four arenas: service provision, community, the public sphere and formal power.

When we looked at examples of successful change, we found that the most effective activity was able to ‘pinball’ around all four. For example, the Living Wage campaign had its start in communities of people organising for fairer wages but, in order to reach today’s level of widespread acceptance (even if full legal definition has not yet been achieved), it had to act to shift public opinion, secure business buy-in, persuade government to commission services on different contract terms, co-ordinate further community organising, seek out political allies, lobby government and more.



Unleash your Social Power: How Real Change Happens



What successful change looks like

One of our most striking findings was how much effective change-makers had in common. Individuals and organisations, local and national, big and small, we saw similar characteristics appear again and again. They became the ‘Twelve Habits of Successful Change-Makers’, covering everything from how you focus on your purpose, to how you interact with others, to how you learn.

Of the twelve, we can all find a handful that come naturally – either because of who we are or the nature of our organisation. For example, we’re small national charity, so SMK simply has to be great at number three – ‘being adaptive and responsive’. Some of the local community activists we spoke to were living examples of number four – ‘persistence, perseverance and resilience’. Local organisations were often better at answering number five – ‘in whose name?’ – loud and clear.

The Twelve Habits are also a challenge, one that we all face. Virtually no one has nailed all twelve and, if they have, it takes hard work to stay that good!

At SMK, I would venture like most other organisations, time pressure can tempt us to skip number eleven – ‘evaluating what matters and learning from it’. And who hasn’t occasionally wished that change was straightforward, as we battle to understand a complicated world in our pursuit of number two – ‘looking at the bigger picture’?

Exactly what these habits look like in your organisation, in your area and for you personally will be unique. But how they hone and shape your work is shared by everyone, from community groups to mega-charities.



Photo by clem-onojehuo-381204-unsplash

For civil society to absorb and implement these habits will require leadership from the very top – from chief executives, directors and board members. Our recommendations for leaders are a challenge to examine their priorities, decision-making and culture. In essence – be good, be mission-led, be bold.

Civil society’s role in our democracy

For decades, with strong public support, charities and pressure groups have taken part in political debate. Civil society is a vital part of a healthy democracy. The Lords Select Committee on Charities said:

‘Charities are the eyes, ears and conscience of society. They mobilise, they provide, they inspire, they advocate and they unite.’

Without civil society, there is a real danger that our public debate will only be informed by the experiences of businesses, politicians and officials. The UN Special Rapporteur has already expressed concern about closing civic spaces in the UK. Organisations are silenced by the uncertainty of the Lobbying Act and so-called ‘gagging clauses’ on public funding.

Trust in all kinds of institutions is fraying and charities are no longer automatically the ‘good guys’.

Campaigning organisations need to be an accepted (if not always a

welcome) player in every arena. Laws alone (formal power) won’t tackle everyday discrimination, any more than changing public attitudes (public sphere) will define new criminal offences to tackle emerging problems like cyber-stalking. We need to value civil society for all it does, not just the easy and popular – when it speaks up for the human rights of asylum seekers, not just when it raises money for sick children.

A rewrite of the relationship between civil society, government and the public feels urgent. Providing services and relief to people in need is important, but we need challenge as well as partnership in a functioning democracy. Only then does truly transformational social change happen, as assumptions are tested, social norms shift and a new state of affairs is forged for everyone.



Unleash your Social Power: How Real Change Happens

Changing the conversation

Change is complex, long-term and dependent on the environment you're working in. There is a great deal campaigners and change-makers can do to be better, but it is not down to us alone. Civil society also has a collective responsibility to recognise and value social change as one of its core purposes.

Amongst other things, we call on civil society leaders to be guided by their mission and to be an ally to the whole sector. Essentially, we are asking them not to be complicit in silencing themselves and others through well-intentioned compromise.

We want civil society to be proud of its role in our democracy, and to protect it fiercely. We want it to pull together to press for policy and funding changes that are a framework for all it does, not just the popular stuff.

The Social Power report makes recommendations for the Government, regulators and funders too. We ask them to do their part to uphold civil society's right to be an active part of our democracy. That means publicly recognising its unique contribution to our political debate, and creating a legal and policy framework that supports, instead of silences, the voices and experiences it brings to that debate.

What next?

In the coming year, the Sheila McKechnie Foundation will spread these findings widely – to both wider civil society and decision-makers. In particular, we want to stimulate further discussion, reflection and exchange of ideas amongst campaigners and change-makers. To get the latest about forthcoming materials, research, events and discussions based on the Social Power findings, subscribe to our newsletter.

Find the Social Power report at www.smk.org.uk/social-power-report/



How Poverty is Portrayed in the Media



Stigmatising portrayals of people on low incomes has been commonplace in large parts of the media for many years. As welfare changes have come under increasing strain in recent years, have these portrayals undergone any change. In this article Dr James Morrison, Reader in Journalism at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, looks at the evidence.

After years of sustained government attacks on the social security system – legitimised by myths about unemployed and disabled people every bit as unforgiving as historical depictions of the ‘undeserving poor’ – there is growing optimism that the tide might, finally, be turning. Though some of the Cameron era’s severest benefit cuts are only now taking effect, the all-consuming political headache of Brexit has at least distracted Theresa May’s government from seeking further ‘savings’ from the low-hanging branches of the working-age welfare bill.

The media’s attention, too, has turned away from its once obsessive focus on stories about work-shy ‘shirkers’ and ‘scroungers’ – even if its insatiable appetite to find scapegoats for the country’s ills has been diverted, to resurrect equally hostile caricatures of immigrants.

But how confident should we be that the relentless claimant-bashing of the Coalition years has finally abated – and lost its popular appeal?

For all the tacit mea culpas of the likes of council house-raised Stephen Crabb, who succeeded Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith with a speech conceding that behind every DWP ‘statistic’ lay ‘a human being’, have recent shifts in emphasis been genuine or merely symbolic? And to what extent are they reflected in a meaningful change in attitudes and perceptions among the public at large?

Challenging Stigma

Counter-discourses against what might loosely be termed ‘shirkerphobia’ are hardly new. The Poverty Alliance’s trailblazing 2015 ‘Stick your Labels’ initiative is proof of this, as is the dogged campaigning against the brutality of Work Capability Assessments by the similarly Scottish-based Black Triangle Campaign.



How Poverty is Portrayed in the Media Cont'd

Yet, for five years under the Coalition, and during the early stages of the succeeding Tory government, such powerful protestations had little discernible impact on the tone and substance of mainstream media-political discourse.

More recently, there have been grounds for justified positivity. The critical and popular acclaim heaped on Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* seemed to act, for a time, as an engine for amplifying previously ignored counter-discursive voices, from issue-specific groups representing disabled service-users to broader anti-poverty charities. Under Jeremy Corbyn, a previously dissembling Labour Party belatedly rediscovered a desire to defend the dispossessed that had long deserted it.

Even some of those directly culpable for promoting narratives pitting 'shirkers' against 'strivers' seemed to have second thoughts. Though motivated more by his Brexit manoeuvrings than any Damascene awakening to the plight of his victims, the March 2016 letter in which Mr Duncan Smith resigned his Work and Pensions brief threw the media spotlight onto the heartless ways in which welfare spending was 'repeatedly salami-sliced' by George Osborne's Treasury. Likewise, ex-Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, liberated from his Coalition straitjacket, used a near-contemporaneous Guardian interview to condemn Osborne's 'ruthless' mining of a 'bottomless pit' of welfare cuts.

Stubborn Myths

Yet systematic analysis of the substance of media-political discourse around contemporary British poverty suggests that myths about society's 'have-nots' remain stubbornly entrenched. Moreover, while there has been some evidence of audible counter-narratives emerging, most have been far less coherent and full-throated than optimists might argue – and sufficiently qualified (even conflicted) to be easily undermined by the more focused and unflinching claims of forces determined to perpetuate scrounger stereotypes.

In my latest book, I unpack the relative balance that had been achieved between scrounger-bashing and

counter-discursive narratives in print and online newspaper coverage of the welfare debate by 2016: the year of *I, Daniel Blake*, Mr Duncan Smith's resignation and repeated promises by Mr Crabb, then his successor, Damian Green, that, after a six-year cascade of benefit cuts, there would be no more. While my analysis found heartening signs of discrete injustices finally getting a hearing – from the cruelty of fitness-for-work tests to the exponential growth of foodbank use – much of the coverage still defaulted to stigmatising misrepresentations.

What the papers (actually) say

In total, I analysed all 3,534 UK newspaper articles published in 2016 that used one or more of eight neutral poverty-related keywords. Of these terms (which included 'welfare' and 'claimant'), two – 'benefits' and 'dole' – generally appeared in articles that were critical of welfare recipients. While nearly a quarter of all 412 'dole' pieces were framed negatively, this was true of more than half of those using the term 'benefits'.

Moreover, the specific imagery used to represent claimants closely echoed the slew of shirker-baiting stories published during the most recent full-blown moral panic about scroungers: 2013. This, lest we forget, was the year when (in the words of the Daily Express) 'Britain's most evil scrounger', Mick Philpott, was jailed for killing six of his children in a fire at his home; TV channels were flooded with a wave of 'poverty porn'; and ministers were mobilising a poisonous rhetorical war against the unemployed to justify an unprecedented tidal-wave of punitive 'welfare reforms' – from a working-age benefit freeze and household cap to the mass rollout of unpaid Workfare schemes.

Wind forward three years and, while the number of articles explicitly using terms like 'scrounger' and 'shirker' had dropped back from 2013 highs of 2,103 and 593 respectively to 605 and 264, the headlines and imagery used to present such stories remained depressingly familiar.



A glut of stories spread across tabloids and broadsheets about an unemployed couple who renewed their Housing Benefit claim after spending the last of a £50,000 Christmas lottery win repeatedly branded them ‘scroungers’ (and worse). The ever-sober Express headlined its report ‘Jobless couple who blew £50k lottery win to beg for benefits claim “we’re not scroungers”’, over photos of sullen Abbie Hort, replete with neck tattoo and lip stud, and the couple perched on their sofa, with The Jeremy Kyle Show playing behind them on a TV set reportedly bought with their winnings. Even the Daily Telegraph joined in the bear-baiting – dismissing the pair as ‘a couple on benefits’ who had demanded more ‘state handouts’.

Below The Line

Moreover, the continuing dominance of scrounger discourse was not confined to news coverage itself. It was also reflected in the nature and tone of contributions made to press narratives by their audiences. Of 2,000-plus reader comments posted below online articles about 2016’s most widely covered ‘anti-scrounger’ press stories, 45 per cent displayed negative attitudes towards claimants.

Some language used was so aggressively discriminatory that, if directed towards other groups, such as racial minorities, it would have constituted incitement.

Comments about the lottery-winning couple described them as ‘scrounging wasters’, ‘lowlife scrounging bums’, ‘pond life’, ‘parasites’, ‘mindless mouth-breathers’ and ‘dirty little scummers’. A story about the sentencing for firearms offences of ‘Black Dee’, a former participant in Channel 4 reality show Benefits Street, prompted one Birmingham Mail reader to rant against the ‘roundabout’ of prison and welfare and advocate ‘a bullet in the temple’ as the only ‘sure fire way’ of thwarting repeat offenders.

Deliberation on the supposedly more liberal social media platform of Twitter was equally sinister.

Again, stories framed by newspapers in individualised ways – emphasising the fecklessness or degeneracy of named (and pictured) individuals or families – generated the most vicious comments. This applied to nine out of 10 tweets about the lottery winners but also eight out of 10 commenting on a story about a formerly unemployed couple who might have been held up as a shining example of the ‘hardworking families’ ministers endlessly champion. Despite using a £26,000 windfall from producers of Channel 5’s The Great British Benefits Handout to launch a successful party business, the Gavins from Liverpool endured vitriolic abuse: according to ‘Scouse’, they would ‘fail, spunk the money up the wall and go back on the dole’, while another tweeter labelled Mr Gavin ‘an electrician with 4 kids claiming = Scrounger!’ More contextualised stories about poverty, however, generated more sympathetic responses, while the news that Mr Duncan Smith had cried as he described meeting an impoverished single mother in a TV interview with satirist Ian Hislop saw a 25-1 split in favour of tweets castigating him for his past mistreatment of claimants.

Perhaps most dispiriting was the insipid nature of much of what might broadly be termed ‘the counter-discourse’. Fewer than a third of articles adopted even vaguely counter-discursive positions: i.e. ones focusing on the suffering of claimants, rather than their abuse of the system. Of the 1,000-odd that did take angles contesting the anti-welfare consensus, moreover, nine out of 10 mounted ‘soft’ counter-discursive cases.

In other words, they emphasised specific aspects of welfare reform or the plight of particular groups, while conspicuously failing to stand up for others – let alone claimants generally.

Typically, a story (and sources it quoted) might highlight the suffering of media-friendly archetypes only the most hard-hearted would consider any less than ‘deserving’ – e.g. the severely disabled or women fleeing domestic abuse – while omitting the (undeserving) unemployed.



How Poverty is Portrayed in the Media Cont'd

And, while in-work poverty did, at last, feature in some articles – propelled by mounting debates about foodbanks and zero-hours contracts – it remained grossly under-represented compared to other categories, such as ‘pensioner poverty’ and ‘child poverty’.

Amid all this doom and gloom, though, there are rays of hope – happily, many emanating from Scotland. Just as the Poverty Alliance led the charge in demanding an end to the stigmatisation of claimants north of the border, anti-welfare discourse seems mercifully less widespread or aggressive in Scottish newspapers than the UK press overall, with the exception of Scotland’s versions of right-wing titles like the Mail and Express. Indeed, one of the most explicitly counter-discursive articles appeared in the Glasgow Herald on 28 May, under the headline ‘[Angela] Constance hits out at depiction of poverty’ and with an intro quoting her condemnation of discourses that ‘portray poverty as a “lifestyle choice”’. Set alongside the encouraging (if still concerning) findings of recent Scottish Social Attitudes surveys, and UK-wide figures showing sharp declines in newspapers’ use of pejorative terms like ‘scrounger’ (if not ‘shirker’) since their most recent peak, in 2013, we can see genuine signs of progress. As long as it remains socially acceptable for people to keep using terms like these in conversation or on social media, though, there will always be much more to do.

Dr James Morrison is a Reader in Journalism at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and a former national newspaper journalist. Scrounger: Moral Panics and Media-political Myths is published by Zed Books in February 2019, priced £18.99.



Child Poverty Delivery Plan: What is it and what happens now?

Scotland now has its own child poverty legislation, with stretching targets for poverty reduction. But how will they be achieved? In this article Neil Cowan, Policy and Parliamentary Officer at the Poverty Alliance, looks at the approach that the Scottish Government has set out in its recent Child Poverty Delivery Plan.



The 8th November 2017 saw the unanimous passing of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act by the Scottish Parliament. The passing of the Act, which set poverty reduction targets for the Scottish Government to work towards, represented an important moment for everyone concerned with tackling poverty in Scotland. It provides a vision; a Scotland all but free from the grip of poverty by 2030.

Not only that, it makes clear that eradicating poverty is a priority for policy-makers from across the political spectrum. This is a reflection not only of the success of anti-poverty campaigners in securing political support, but also of the sheer scale of the poverty that holds 1 million people in Scotland in its grip.

However, legislation on its own, while very important, is not the end of the story.

What matters most, and what leads to real-world change, is the action that legislation requires or inspires.

So it was a significant day on March 29th when the Scottish Government published Every Child, Every Chance:

The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022. The plan, which the Scottish Government was mandated to develop and publish as a requirement of the Child Poverty Act, sets out the policies, proposals and actions that the Scottish Government will pursue in order to meet the ambitious poverty reduction targets set by the Act.

A Plan for Action

At 156 pages, the plan is a substantial piece of work that recognises the gender, ethnicity, age and disability dimensions of poverty. It does this through focusing its actions on families who are most at risk of experiencing poverty. These priority families are:

- Lone parent families
- Families which include a disabled adult or children
- Larger families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year old
- Families where the mother is under 25 years old

So what's in the plan? What is the Scottish Government actually proposing to do? And what does it tell us about what we in the anti-poverty sector need to do in the coming years?



Child Poverty Delivery Plan: What is it and what happens now?

The plan's actions are broadly centred around three main themes; work and earnings, costs of living, and social security, and it pays to have a closer look at what actions are being implemented for each.

Work and earnings

In-work poverty levels may be increasing, but we know that employment – when it is secure, based on at least the real Living Wage, and in accordance with principles of fair work – is still one of the most effective ways of boosting people's incomes and, in turn, preventing and tackling poverty.

The plan recognises this, with a number of actions aimed at promoting and supporting fairer and more sustainable employment. These include:

- Building a Living Wage Nation, with a stated aim of increasing by 25,000 – via the Living Wage Scotland accreditation programme – the numbers of workers receiving at least the real Living Wage.
- Developing a new employment support service – Fair Start Scotland – which will provide particular support to lone parents, disabled people, minority ethnic groups, refugees and people from low income backgrounds.
- Developing intensive employment support programmes for low income parents to help them get into work and progress in work.

Costs of living

At a time of stagnating wages and frozen benefits, the increasing rise of living costs have contributed towards a tightening of poverty's grip on people's lives across Scotland in recent years. Whether its food, transport or energy, prices are rising across the board with the strongest impact being felt by people on low incomes. When combined with other factors such as the 'poverty premium', the cost pressures on low income families can be unmanageable.

The plan commits to action to reduce living costs in a number of ways:

- Introducing a new minimum level for School Clothing Grants.
- Providing additional funding to address food insecurity experienced by children during the school holiday.
- Providing a new Financial Health Check Service aimed at helping low income families with the poverty premium and benefit uptake.

Social security

With the passing of the Social Security Act and the ongoing creation of a new Scottish social security system, we now have the opportunity to create a true safety net for people on low incomes. The plan describes social security as an important part of the solution to poverty, and commits to a number of actions:

- Introducing a new income supplement for low income families.
- Introducing a new Best Start Grant for low income families to provide additional financial support during the early years of a child's life.
- Providing a range of additional support for carers, including a Carer's Allowance Supplement and a new Young Carer Grant.

Taken as a whole, the commitments within the plan are positive steps forward which can help us all work towards the ambitions targets set by the Child Poverty Act. What is important now is that these very encouraging and positive promises and commitments made on paper are used to transform people's lives in reality. The key question is how do we make that happen? In this regard, three things will be vital; ambition, radicalism and participation.



Photo by charlein-gracia-682270-unsplash

Ambition, Radicalism and Participation

Ambition: The Child Poverty Act sets the target of reducing child poverty from 24% to below 10% by 2030. Such ambitious targets require us all to respond with ambitious action, and we must all continue to show this in the years ahead. Tackling poverty must infuse all policy development and decision-making processes, and we must constantly guard against complacency or against the limiting of ambitions. This means reaching for solutions with the biggest impact and the furthest reach.

Tackling poverty is a priority for all across the political spectrum, and as such it needs the resources required for bold action.

Radicalism: Everyone in Scotland wants to see a more just and compassionate society, but the way our economy has been designed too often prevents those values from being enacted. If we are serious about realising those values, then we are required to engage in a conversation about how to redesign the economy so that it works for everyone.

This means continuing to engage in big conversations, for example around how to best utilise taxation powers to support poverty reduction, and to pursue bold ideas. The scale of the challenge of tackling poverty demands new, radical thinking and we – as campaigners – have a duty to provide it.

Participation: Central to the success of the delivery plan will be the participation of people with experience of poverty. This is recognised in the plan, with the Scottish Government supporting the Poverty Alliance to develop a new initiative called Get Heard

Scotland, aimed at ensuring that people on low incomes can have their voices heard in the policy-making processes that most impact their lives. It is only by securing space for those voices to be heard that we can truly reflect the realities of poverty in anti-poverty policy.



Child Poverty Delivery Plan: What is it and what happens now?

The delivery plan, then, provides a positive framework from which we can all work in support of tackling poverty, and the action shown by the Scottish Government – both in terms of taking forward the Child Poverty Act and through publishing a plan with some significant commitments, such as the new income supplement – should be welcomed. But the hard work, in both implementing the plan and building on it, lies ahead. As campaigners we have a critical role to play in the years to come, in encouraging decision-makers to pursue the ambitious and radical solutions required, and in encouraging all in society to get behind the changes that can solve poverty.

To download a copy of the Child Poverty Delivery Plan go to <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/> The Poverty Alliance is encouraging individuals, groups and organisations to feedback their views on what needs to be done to address poverty. To find out more about the Get Heard Scotland initiative visit www.povertyalliance.org/get_heard_scotland



MEMBERSHIP: JOIN US!

The Poverty Alliance is a national anti-poverty development agency for Scotland, which seeks to combat poverty through collaborative action, bringing together workers and activists drawn from the public sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and other agencies.

The Alliance's wide range of activities provide many opportunities for members to exchange information and expertise, which benefits the anti-poverty movement.

The benefits of membership include regular mailings, Scottish Anti-Poverty Review, opportunities to become involved in working groups and access to a wide range of organisations and activists who have the potential to influence the direction of anti-poverty policy in the future.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name and designation of contact person: _____

Name and address of organisation: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

FULL MEMBERSHIP: OPEN TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: INCOME LESS THAN £50K: FREE | £50,000-£75,000: £50 | £75,000-£175,000: £75 | £175,000-£500,000: £100 | MORE THAN £500,000: £200

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP: OPEN TO INDIVIDUALS, VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY BODIES, AND PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATIONS*: UNWAGED INDIVIDUALS: FREE | INDIVIDUALS: £25 | VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: £25 | STATUTORY BODIES: £300

*PLEASE CONTACT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE FOR DETAILS

I/We wish to apply for *Ordinary/Associate Membership for the year: _____

* Please delete as appropriate. NB Membership of The Poverty Alliance runs from 1st April to 31st March. Applications for new membership received after April 1st are charged on a pro rata basis.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please send the completed application form to the address below - thank you.