

Poverty Alliance Strategic Plan 2016-21



WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

1. Introduction

1.1 Despite many economic challenges over the last five years, Scotland remains part of one of the wealthiest countries in the world, but despite our great wealth, almost one fifth of our population lives in poverty. This is neither an inevitable or necessary situation. The Poverty Alliance exists to combat poverty in Scotland by working with people and communities to affect change. This Strategic Plan sets out how we intend to do this over the next five years.

Who we are

1.2 We are a national voluntary organisation with charitable status and a company limited by guarantee. Formally established in 1992 the Alliance is a membership organisation which has extensive experience in addressing issues related to poverty and social exclusion, and in working alongside grassroots community groups, individuals facing poverty, voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith based organisations and researchers, as well as statutory organisations, policy makers and politicians. Growing from a regionally based anti-poverty grouping we now act as the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, engaging with voluntary organisations, policy makers and politicians at the Scottish, UK and European levels.

1.3 In this section of the plan we give an overview to the changed context that the Alliance is operating in, drawing on the various sources of intelligence identified above.

The Context

1.5 When our last Strategic Plan was reviewed 2011/12, we were still dealing with the aftermath of the deepest recession since the 1930s, and the first impacts of austerity were beginning to be felt. Since then we have seen important political and policy changes take place in Scotland and in the UK. These changes have already had an impact on the way that the Poverty Alliance has operated, and will continue to impact over the next five years.

Below we briefly outline some of the most significant trends and changes, drawing out some of the implications for our work.

We have identified six broad areas that will affect the work of the Poverty Alliance.

- Changing patterns in poverty and inequality – it is expected that poverty will remain high over the coming years and that younger people and those renting accommodation will be increasingly affected. We expect that there will be increasing attention focused on issues associated with in-work poverty and with fair work.
- Continued change in the social security system – significant changes will be implemented at the UK level that will affect people in Scotland. There will also be important new powers coming to Scotland to address poverty through the social security system;
- Structural political change at local Scottish, UK and European levels. There has been significant political change in Scotland over the last 5 years, with a shift in political preferences that has shifted the way many policies are debated. We can expect some of these trends to continue, and for our relationship with Europe to continue to change
- Beliefs about poverty: these have been changing slowly over a long period of time. We have witnessed amongst some politicians and policy makers a greater awareness of the impact of negative attitudes on people living in poverty. However, there is little evidence of changes in the general public's understanding of the realities of poverty.

There are undoubtedly many other changes in the context that the Poverty Alliance operates in. However these are some of the most important ones, that will shape the kinds of activities and approaches that we pursue over the coming years.

2. Where We Stand: Vision and Values

Vision

Our vision is of a sustainable Scotland free of poverty, with dignity and social and economic justice for all.

Aim

We will tackle poverty by working with individuals, organisations and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources

Our Values

2.1 **Human Rights:** We believe that the existence of poverty represents a breach of fundamental human rights. We place our concerns within the wider framework of human rights, equality of opportunity and of social, economic and environmental justice.

2.2 **Income adequacy:** Central to our rights based understanding of poverty, is the recognition that every person has the right to an adequate income. This right must be at the heart of long term strategies to address poverty, whether these incomes are delivered through the labour market, the state or a combination.

2.3 **Dignity and Respect:** Central to everything that we do is the principle that all people, regardless of their circumstances, must be treated with dignity and respect. We put this principle into practice in our own work as well as encouraging others to build this into their work and lives

2.4 **Equality:** We recognise that some groups, for example disabled people, women, people from black and ethnic minority communities, are more at risk of poverty. We will ensure that the work we do reflects the differing experiences that people have of poverty.

2.5 **Empowerment:** We are committed to the empowerment of people living in poverty and seek to promote this in our own practice as well as encouraging others to build this into their work. Empowerment is a process whereby people can gain more control and influence over the decisions that affect their lives.

2.6 **Participation:** We believe that people who experience poverty should be able to contribute to finding the solutions to the problems that affect their lives. We aim to put this principle of participation into practice in our own work by ensuring that time and resources are available to allow meaningful engagement in our activities.

2.7 **Partnership:** We are committed to the principle that poverty is not simply a problem for those who experience it but is the responsibility of our whole society. We are part of Scottish civil society and will work with a broad range of organisations including community and voluntary organisations, trade unions, faith-based organisations, political parties, public sector bodies, as well as the private sector.

2.8 **Organisational Independence:** Regardless of funding, we retain our right to act as an independent organisation. We are non-party political, and will work with all organisations that support our aims and our values.

3. Strategic Objectives & Outcomes

What We Want to Change

3.1 In order to focus our activities the Poverty Alliance has identified key areas that must be addressed in order to make progress in the fight against poverty. These are:

- Low Incomes
- Services
- Participation
- Attitudes

3.2 **Incomes:** to increase the incomes of those currently living in poverty. Low income is at the heart of our analysis of poverty, and access to an adequate income is essential to addressing poverty. Much of our work over the next five years will be focused on supporting policies and actions that increase the incomes of those currently living in poverty. We will pursue two approaches: ensuring that new powers in Scotland are used to address low incomes through the social security system where possible; and engaging with employers to encourage them to pay the Living Wage.

3.3 **Services:** to increase understanding amongst service providers of the needs of people experiencing poverty. People living on low incomes are more likely to rely on public services. A key **policy focus** over the next five years will be to advocate for changes that help ensure people living on low incomes have access to high quality public services. Over the coming five years we will work to ensure that services used by and targeted on people experiencing poverty are better informed, defended and improved.

3.4 **Participation:** to ensure that more participatory forms of policy and practice development are created. We believe that the participation of people experiencing poverty is central to developing better policy solutions to poverty,

and to ensuring that people are treated with dignity. We will therefore work to ensure that more participatory forms of policy development are created over the coming years. Our primary focus will be on the *national* level (in Scotland), but will also seek policy change that ensures that people are able to have their voices heard at the local level.

3.5 Attitudes: to challenge negative and stereotypical attitudes and views of people experiencing poverty. Public attitudes set the context in which anti-poverty policy are developed. Increasingly, it has become clear that efforts to introduce more effective anti-poverty policies can be hindered by negative or discriminatory attitudes to people experiencing poverty. We will therefore be involved in a range of activities to highlight where progress is being made to address poverty and to challenge negative and stereotypical views of people experiencing poverty.

What we do

To make change in the four priority areas we will organise our work across five strategic objectives. Our primary objective is:

1. Influencing policy and practice: we will support the development of policies and practices which promote social justice and combat poverty

There are a wide range of policies and practices that effect poverty. Over the next five years we will remain active in a number of areas including (but not limited to): social security, in-work poverty, educational inequality, health inequalities, housing. We will continue raise key concerns through a variety of forums and in a number of ways. This has included working with other voluntary sector organisations through advisory forums, networks and board membership, through participation in a range of campaigning activities, consultation responses, and direct engagement in policy making.

Key Outcome:

- *There will be clear evidence of Poverty Alliance change priorities in key policy statements*
- *There will be clear evidence of change in key practice development areas that the Poverty Alliance has targeted*

To achieve our primary objective we will:

2. Support Communities: we will work with people and communities experiencing poverty to help them to challenge poverty

We do not believe that simply being involved in consultation processes leads to empowerment. In order to participate in policy developments that effect their lives people must have the knowledge and skills to be able to engage. Capacity building for individuals and communities is therefore essential. People and communities need to be able to work through existing structures, but should also have the support to act together independently of any structures to influence policy and make change on their own behalf. We will provide training and other support to community organisations and individuals facing poverty to help them engage in policy.

Key Outcomes

- *People and communities will report being better able to participate in policy and practice processes at local and national level*
- *Policies and practices will have been informed with evidence co-produced by people with experience of poverty*

3. Build our network: We will build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland

We believe that all members of society have a role in combating poverty. It is only by working together, with individuals experiencing poverty, in civil society organisations, in the private sector that we will be able to develop the solutions needed to address poverty. In order to have a bigger impact on poverty is essential that the Poverty Alliance is able to draw more of individuals and organisations into our membership. Over the next five years we will seek to strengthen and diversify our network:

Key Outcome

- ***Membership of the Poverty Alliance will have doubled by March 2021***
- ***Members will report being more engaged in the work of The Poverty Alliance***

4. Raise awareness and change attitudes: We will raise awareness and change attitudes about poverty

In recent years there has been increased debate about poverty and inequality in Scotland. However, public understanding about poverty, its nature, scale and the realities of living in poverty, remains low. The Poverty Alliance will continue to intervene in public debates about the nature of poverty. We will do this through campaigns, media activity, publications and direct engagement.

Key Outcomes

Members and stakeholders will report being better able to raise awareness of poverty

change attitudes

Improved recognition of the Poverty Alliance in local and national media, evidenced by accuracy and frequency of media coverage

5. Evidence: We provide high quality research and knowledge about poverty in Scotland

In comparison to 20 years ago, we have a much better understanding of the nature and extent of poverty in Scotland. Despite this improvement, there remains a need for high-quality, co-produced evidence on the lived experience of poverty. Whether in relation to food, stigma, employment, there is much to do to hear the voices of those experiencing poverty. We will develop our programme of research and evidence to ensure that debates and policies about poverty are well informed.

Key Outcome:

Policies will have been informed with evidence co-produced by people with experience of poverty

Feedback

If you have comments or views on the work of the Poverty Alliance or on the approach we have outlined in this strategic plan then please get in touch.

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