

CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN 2022-26: VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITIES





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The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

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About Get Heard Scotland:

Get Heard Scotland (GHS) is a programme coordinated by the Poverty Alliance and funded by the Scottish Government as part of Every Child Every Chance, the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2018-22).

GHS is designed to help people on low incomes get their voices heard on the policies and decisions that most impact their lives and their communities. Very simply, it aims to find out – by holding discussions with people affected by poverty across Scotland and with the organisations that support people affected by poverty – what is working in their community, what is not working, and what needs to change to better support people living on low incomes and loosen the grip of poverty on their lives.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Scotland has set challenging targets to address child poverty: as directed by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act of 2017, by 2030/31 no more than 10 percent of children should be living in relative poverty. After a decade of austerity and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the scale of this challenge should not be underestimated. To meet the target will require significant interventions from the Scottish Government and from all other levels of government, but it is clear that to make real progress we need to galvanise activity across Scottish society. We need to turn the laudable rhetoric of a national mission to eradicate child poverty into practical steps that help us to fulfil that mission. The development and implementation of new policies such as the Scottish Child Payment are important steps along the way, but it is clear that we need to go further and faster, and that we need action from a whole range of different sectors, organisations and bodies.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on all of our lives over the last two years. However, the impact on people living on low incomes – particularly on disabled people, women, young people, and Black and minority ethnic people – has been especially acute, whether measured through the impact in terms of lives lost, jobs lost, services reduced, or on mental health and wellbeing.^{1 2} The response to the pandemic, particularly in its earliest

stages, highlighted the kind of resources that can be mobilised when we face a societal crisis. Universal Credit was topped up to cushion the impact of lost incomes, jobs were protected through the furlough scheme, and emergency sources of financial support such as the Scottish Welfare Fund were significantly boosted. Communities and civil society, as well as local and national government, were also mobilised to protect those in need. The lessons learned during the most acute phases of the pandemic, lessons about how we can care for each other, about what solidarity looks like in practice and about how the state and civil society can work together, should never be forgotten. Collectively, we showed that big changes can happen at pace.

The social and economic recovery from the pandemic will take time and its full impact on the scale, incidence and trends in child poverty is yet to be fully understood. Even as we wait to fully untangle the pandemic's impact, we can still clearly see some of its effects on our collective efforts to address child poverty. The rollout of key policies such as Scottish Child Payment and the extension of free childcare were both delayed by the pandemic. Educational inequalities are expected to have widened, with the longer-term implications for addressing poverty associated with educational inequality as yet unknown.³ Given this context it is right that

¹ R. Patrick et al (2022) Covid Realities: document living on a low income during the pandemic, <https://covidrealities.org/learnings/write-ups/covid-realities>

² F. McHardy et al (2021) Living through a pandemic: experiences of low-income families in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, Glasgow: Poverty Alliance https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/TPA_GHS_Project_Research_Report_FINAL_proof_02-1.pdf

³ Scottish Government (n.d.) Scotland's Wellbeing <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/scotlands-wellbeing-impact-covid-19-chapter-5-children-education>

we have seen the need to put child poverty at the heart of the plans for recovery from Covid-19. The Scottish Government's Covid Recovery Strategy has financial security for low-income households and the wellbeing of children and young people as fundamental to the approach to recovery from the pandemic.⁴

In this context, the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan (CPDP) becomes all the more critical. Even before Covid-19, reaching the interim child poverty targets was going to be challenging, but the new CPDP will be an opportunity to raise the level of debate and discussion about what needs to be done to address child poverty and to ensure we have the best chance of meeting those targets. It will also provide an opportunity to engage individuals and organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors in a discussion about what we can all do next to end child poverty in Scotland. The views contained in this report are part of that wider discussion.

The *Get Heard Scotland* project was launched as part of the first CPDP in 2018. The aim of the programme, which is funded by the Scottish Government, has been to develop a body of community-generated evidence that can contribute to Scotland's efforts to end child poverty. Over that time, we have talked to hundreds of people from across the country with direct experience of poverty, as well as with community organisations working on the frontline to address poverty.

As part of the programme in the second half of 2021, the Poverty Alliance carried out a range of engagement activity to identify key issues, concerns and ideas that could contribute to the development of the next CPDP. As these activities were undertaken, the results of the discussions were fed back to Scottish Government officials, allowing them to be considered in the development of the next CPDP. This report is a summary of the various discussions that took place. They contain a range of actions and priorities that need to be addressed if we are to make progress in addressing child poverty.

What we did

The *Get Heard Scotland* programme aims to generate community evidence on what needs to be done to address child poverty. The programme has used a variety of approaches to develop this body of evidence over the years. To generate discussions about priorities for the next Child Poverty Delivery Plan we have used a variety of approaches. This included in-depth interviews with community organisations, group discussions with people experiencing poverty, focus groups with community and voluntary organisations, and several webinar and conference discussions. This engagement took place from July until November. Details of the 25 organisations that were involved in one-to-one interviews is contained in appendix 1. A total of 68 people with direct and recent experience of living on a low income took part in the community discussions.

⁴ Scottish Government (2021) Covid Recovery Strategy, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-recovery-strategy-fairer-future/pages/1/>

2. CURRENT APPROACH – WHAT IS WORKING

It is important when assessing our collective response to child poverty in Scotland that we start from an attempt to gain a better understanding of what is working and why. Understanding ‘what works’ is the starting point for the *Get Heard Scotland* initiative. This helps us focus on the strengths of current policy responses and the strengths of those communities affected by poverty, as well as allowing us to highlight not only that change is possible but also where change is happening now.

The discussions that took place, whether with people directly experiencing poverty or with community and voluntary organisations, started sharing the key elements of the current approach to addressing child poverty in Scotland. We discussed, for example, the approach that Scottish Government has taken to implementing its new powers in relation to social security, the expansion of free childcare, the building of more affordable housing, and support for fair work. This discussion was framed in the context of the three key drivers of child poverty identified in the CPDP: incomes from employment, the costs of living and incomes from social security.

Social security

There was strong support for the key initiatives that have been designed by the Scottish Government to increase incomes from social security. In particular, participants welcomed the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment, Best Start Grants, and other

social security payments. The focus on improving the financial resources that people had available to them was widely endorsed.

As one participant stated:

“the key is putting money in people’s pockets. People will make the best choices for their families.”

At the time these discussions were taking place there was intensive debate and campaigning around the £20 Universal Credit cut that was being proposed, and then implemented, by the UK Government. This cut was causing grave concern amongst the organisations we spoke to and served to highlight the importance of the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment. The impact of the cut also meant that there was a greater awareness of the role of Scottish social security in addressing poverty. For many of the people that we spoke to there was often little separation in the discussions about social security, between those elements that are devolved and those that are reserved. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the centrality and importance for income maintenance of those social security benefits that are reserved, but also because for people who are in receipt of support, the ultimate origins of particular benefits is of relatively little importance. What matters is whether the benefits are sufficient to meet needs. **This lack of separation has important implications for issues around awareness of entitlements as we discuss below.**

Several participants also highlighted other areas where incomes had been directly increased, either through Scottish Government or Local Authority policies and action. This included key policies such as the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods, which were widely welcomed. One participant in the community discussions was very positive about the Best Start Foods, stating:

“I think [Best Start Foods] could be extended for lower income families to help cover the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables after age 4 – it’s cheaper to buy unhealthy options than fresh healthy options and that’s adding to health issues for kids and adults in poverty.”

The impact of Covid-19 on the discussions that took place was very evident. Efforts to ensure that entitlement to Free School Meals was maintained beyond the pandemic was seen as critically important. The fact that this support was delivered, in many cases, as a cash entitlement was strongly welcomed. One participant noted that Fife Council ‘provided £23 a week per child for food during the summer holidays.’

‘Cash first’ approaches were strongly favoured across the board, with several participants highlighting and welcoming the increased levels of School Clothing Grant. The fact that this support was delivered as a cash payment was not only important in providing additional income but also allowed some element of choice to be made by individuals. A similar point was made with regard to the cash support delivered during school holidays – this was welcomed on the basis of the additional income as well as the choice and autonomy that it allowed individuals.

Cost of Living

Concern about the rising cost of living was increasingly evident in the second half of 2021, when the engagement for *Get Heard Scotland* was taking place. Efforts to reduce the cost of living, to help ensure that people on low incomes do not face the full impact of rising costs, was seen as a real strength of the current Scottish Government approach to addressing child poverty. The views expressed here were gathered before the current rapid increases in energy prices or the predictions of inflation reaching 7% in the Spring of 2022.⁵ We expected that support for more Scottish Government action on the cost of living would only have increased since the fieldwork was carried out.

There was strong support for actions to address the cost of living. Whilst much of the discussion was around areas such as energy costs and housing, there was a recognition of the importance of issues including access to the internet, food and transport. In this context the extension of free bus travel for young people, the increases in School Clothing Grants, the extension of free childcare, and free prescriptions were all noted as being important and welcomed.

It was noted that support provided by local third sector organisations provided, such as through emergency food aid, pantries, providing digital access, was important in reducing the cost of living for the people they worked with. The role of civil society organisations in helping to reduce the cost of living should be acknowledged and given greater prominence in local and national anti-poverty strategies.

⁵ Brigid Francis-Devine, D. Harari, M. Keep, P. Bolton, *Rising Cost of Living*, House of Commons Library, 8 February 2022 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/>



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Overall participants felt that the broad thrust of the Scottish Government's approach – focusing on increasing incomes employment, social security and reducing household costs – was correct. What they wanted to see was greater activity, action and impact in some key aspects of these three drivers.

One participant felt that too often there can be confusion in the way we talk about the root causes of poverty and the consequences of poverty. Whilst the CPDP was very focused on some of the structural causes of poverty (the role of employment, social security, etc), it was not always apparent that the actions in the plan were focused on these. It would be important in the next iteration of the plan to be clear on those policies or actions that are designed to address the longer-term drivers of poverty and those that are more focused on more immediate mitigation.

Income from employment

The crucial role of paid employment in providing an effective route out of poverty was widely acknowledged. It was understood that the social security system and support in the community were only partial responses to poverty and that the role of decent employment was central.

In this context the focus on the payment of the real Living Wage was seen by many as an important step towards the provision of fair work. Whilst this focus was welcomed, it was also acknowledged that there was further to go and that some of the sectors where young people are disproportionately employed, such as hospitality, may need additional support. Pay is just one aspect of the experience of in-work poverty and some participants welcomed the efforts to address other dimensions of the experience, in particular emerging efforts to address the need for security of contracts and hours for low paid workers.



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3. PRIORITY CHILD POVERTY THEMES

Across all the discussions that took place as part of Get Heard Scotland common themes emerged that allow us to identify some of the key priorities that should be reflected in the next CPDP. Below we highlight these key themes before considering key messages to emerge from this work.

Covid-19 and Tackling Child Poverty

It was impossible to avoid discussions on the impact of the pandemic on efforts to address poverty in Scotland. As we highlighted in our previous *Get Heard Scotland* report, *Weathering the Storm*,⁶ the pandemic did not affect everyone equally, with those already experiencing poverty more exposed to health and financial consequences. The effects of the pandemic were still evident in the discussions that took place for this phase of *Get Heard*. Not only has the pandemic had an impact on the material wellbeing of people living on already low incomes, but it has also highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in our approaches to addressing poverty.

There was a clear consensus across the discussions around the challenges that the pandemic had brought to both families and the services supporting them. There was felt to have been an intensification of poverty, with an increase in demand for support – both crisis responses and more sustained support.

People we spoke to highlighted the need to consider how best to support people who were previously experiencing poverty prior to the pandemic, alongside those households who entered poverty as result of the pandemic. Some organisations delivering services were conscious that the type and scale of services needed as we move out of the pandemic may be different, including the need to plan for the levels of support required in advice services.

“Our demographics changed: we saw more young people and those who were homeowners coming forward as a result of being furloughed.... the clients we would traditionally see – their needs were met on short term basis – i.e. Universal Credit uplift, the stopping of evictions and the measures of financial companies actually stopped some very vulnerable people falling into crisis.”

Another highlighted the insecurity that many people experienced prior to the pandemic, insecurity that has now turning into a longer-term crisis for some:

“a lot of people, two working parents, two kids, both furloughed now – before covid, they were literally just affording to live, keep the car on the road, pay the mortgage...now looking at selling the house, downgrading, moving back to renting.”

⁶ Neil Cowan (2021) *Weathering the Storm*, Glasgow: Poverty Alliance https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GHS_Weathering_the_Storm_Summary_Report.pdf

It was felt by some that the pandemic had ushered in a more 'collective consciousness' across society. There was a greater awareness of the needs of people who might be struggling on a low or insecure income and a sense that there was more flexibility and consideration given by statutory bodies and organisations in meeting the needs of people on low incomes. This greater flexibility had been useful in terms of obtaining better outcomes for some people. This flexible approach was, though, perceived to be waning, with a return to 'traditional' ways of operating.

As we emerge from the depths of pandemic it will be important that the lessons from it are understood and considered as the next CPDP is developed. This includes not only the changed demographics of who is in need and how services are delivered, but also questions of public attitudes towards people living on low incomes. Our next CPDP should seek to build on the solidarity that was shown during the pandemic to help deliver lasting change in our communities.

Social security

There was unanimity in support for the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment. There was also strong support for the doubling of SCP and for that to happen as soon as possible – a commitment that will now be delivered from April 2022.⁷

Whilst the SCP and the doubling of the level was welcomed, there was also support for looking at how wider Scottish social security powers could be used to make a bigger impact on poverty.

Several participants discussed the challenge of those who were just above the threshold for entitlement to passported benefits. One person noted:

“a lot of the families we deal with are just over the limit for passported benefits, so they don't qualify for School Clothing Grant, etc...that leads them to be in a worse position than people who are on these benefits.”

These participants wanted the Scottish Government to look at whether there were options to deliver additional support to people who were experiencing in-work poverty, to allow them to keep more of their benefits⁸. They also proposed exploring options for other targeted social security payments for people who are in low paid employment.

Even with improved take up of benefits (as discussed below) there remained concerns about the adequacy of incomes for many people. Inadequate incomes were seen as eroding the impact of other interventions aimed at supporting family wellbeing. **Cash first approaches and rights-based approaches were seen as central to ensuing that people had access to decent incomes.** Debt cancellation was discussed as a key area that could make a significant difference for households in terms of managing their income. More generally work to reduce household costs was required.

⁷ See <https://www.gov.scot/news/doubling-the-scottish-child-payment/#:~:text=The%20Scottish%20Child%20Payment%20will,with%20children%20aged%20under%206.>

⁸ This discussion took place prior to the change in the UC taper rate.

“Rise in cost of living I think has represented a real time cut in benefits. At the same time as the cost of living is going up exponentially and will continue to in the next six months. I think it’s going to be a very difficult time for our most vulnerable families”.

“for first time tenants, there’s an awful lot that could be done there around educating people on the cost of a tenancy, and on budgeting. But the stark reality that we face are that, you know, people aren’t getting enough income to begin with to be able to budget effectively”

The role of Carers Allowance Supplement was raised by several participants. Carers Allowance (the benefit administered by the DWP) is of particular importance to families where a member of the household is disabled. People repeatedly spoke about Carers Allowance as a vital way to recognise the contribution of carers – who are disproportionately women – and the impact of caring responsibilities on their likelihood of living in poverty. It further recognises the limits that caring responsibilities place on their ability to exit poverty through work.

Across our conversations it was reported that eligibility criteria for Carers Allowance and its supplementary payments is too restrictive and often illogical. Carers Allowance does not recognise carers under 16, and often ends when employment or full-time education begins; despite the requirement for care remaining during these points.

The impact of these restrictions is to trap carers in poverty; limiting their options and opportunities and preventing them from exiting poverty through work that requires higher or further education. One participant said:

“Access to Carers Allowance would help immensely, it would mean me not having to go to a foodbank and put my heating on.”

Many organisations referred to the urgent need for Scottish Government to find ways to extend support to people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). They spoke of the threat of destitution that comes with NRPF. It was felt that the Scottish Welfare Fund should be available for people in this situation, rather than simply having to rely on charitable support. (see below)

It was accepted that there were limitations on the scope for action by Scottish Government, but it was felt that this people in this group should receive more attention in the next CPDP. It was understood that there are various strategies in development that are designed to prevent destitution, in relation to food and housing.

However, given the significant risk of poverty that people affected by NRPF face it was felt that a clear route to protecting people in this situation against poverty, even within the relative limitations of devolved powers, should be included in the CPDP. As well as being unjust, we heard of the long-term impacts this has on people affected, including barriers to integration on an equal basis. It was welcomed that children in this situation receive free school meals and School Clothing Grants, demonstrating that support can be given to people without leave to remain. It was suggested that the Best Start Grant be extended to people with NRPF.

The need for specialist services to support some groups who were at high risk of poverty was highlighted. One group working with the Roma community noted the need for support for language and literacy skills, stating that without this support individuals would remain locked in poverty.

Employment, training and employability

Issues of in-work poverty were raised consistently throughout all discussions. As discussed above, there was a sense from many organisations that more needed to be done for people whose income put them just about the threshold for benefits, meaning that they missed out on a variety of support (school meals, clothing grants etc). One participant put the issue starkly:

“over the summer holidays this year...we have been serving about 150 people a week...and the people, the children who we’re serving, all come from working households.”

Traditionally there had been a significant number of people using their services due to benefit delays, and other benefit-related issues. Now though, more clients were using their services due to issues of ‘low income’, reflecting the ongoing prevalence of in-work poverty. One organisation noted that a school clothing bank that they run had seen a drop off in attendance, which they suspected was due to the increased level of the School Clothing Grant. However, they were seeing more people who were in employment and not eligible for clothing grants.

Some people who were living on low incomes suggested that they felt they had been ‘penalised’ for working as they lose out on support while still experiencing poverty. It was suggested that Scottish Government should

lower the income thresholds for interventions they control to enable working families on low income to benefit. As one mum with two children working full-time noted:

“£630 per month is not a lot of money if you have kids.”

Careers guidance was seen as a critical area in helping ensure that young people were able to take advantage of the labour market opportunities that were available to them. This was particularly the case for young people who may be at particular risk of a poor experience in the labour market, such as people leaving care, those who had suffered trauma, young women or ethnic minority children who may experience discrimination. The emphasis should be on ensuring that young people have access to a career rather than just moving them towards any job.

The quality of employment on offer was seen as critical. If jobs are low paid and flexible, then they will not provide an effective route out of poverty. They will also not be attractive to people to move off benefits where there is at least some security of income, even if that income is low. The risk of moving into the labour market for a short-term job, and then have long gaps in income as a person waits to have their claim processed, is not one that some people are willing to take:

“the thought of moving from a secure low income to an erratic maybe higher, but sometimes not even higher, is understandably a nightmare scenario for most young people we support.”

It was considered to be important, therefore, that employers are encouraged by the Scottish Government and other agencies to look at the quality of work that they were delivering. It was recognised that the idea of



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Living Hours was now being promoted but it was questioned whether enough people know about this scheme.

On the real Living Wage, some participants felt that this was still not sufficient. But it was also acknowledged that some sectors will need more encouragement to pay the real Living Wage, such as hospitality, retail and care. Scottish Government and local authorities have a key role to play here in encouraging more employers to pay the real Living Wage.

Much of the employability support that is available is targeted at young people. Whilst this was seen as important, it was felt by some organisations that more attention needs to be given to those who are older and may be trapped in low paying occupations. Employability (or lifelong learning) support should be available to those who wish to change jobs and improve their prospects. As one participant noted:

“there’s not enough support for the over 50s. I mean, it’s as if you hit fifty and you’re in the bin. So we need more support for the over 50s and in general for adults over age 25.”

Employability schemes should pay the real Living Wage according to several community organisations.

It was perceived that the labour market had gone through significant change in the last two years, and the effects of these changes would continue. Employability services need to ensure that they respond to these changes and provided support to people who lack the skills to access roles in the changing labour market. It was perceived that employability services were offered on a ‘narrow’ basis, excluding some who may need the support the most.

Alongside changes to employability services there was the need to build more flexible and inclusive workplaces. Employment contracts should support family structures – particularly for families most at risk of experiencing poverty like lone parent families rather than families having to fit around the structures of jobs. One participant highlighted that more should be done to move towards a four day week as this will bring benefits for work life balance and should be another tool for addressing child poverty.

Building Community Cohesion and Support

Many organisations highlighted the way that community and voluntary organisations had worked together, alongside local authorities, during the pandemic. There was a strong desire to see that these lessons were learned and taken forward. This was highlighted in relation to a variety of issues – in addressing the mental health impacts of covid, which were seen as being long term, or in relation to accessing advice and information about entitlements.

This included calls for longer term support for grassroots third sector organisations. Levels of funding were not sufficient to allow groups and organisations to do what they had been set up for, but also the short-term nature of much of this funding was problematic. Some organisations talked of the time that was spent chasing funding instead of delivering their services.

Local organisations were seen as trusted sources of support and information, and therefore had an important role to play in addressing poverty. They should be seen as a vital part of any local or national anti-poverty strategy. This trusted support means that they could play a central role in ensuring that individuals access their entitlements.

These issues of trust were all the more important when considering communities that were already marginalised or excluded – some ethnic minority communities for example. It was felt important that organisations that support and engage with those communities receive consistent and adequate funding to enable them to carry out their work.

One organisation highlighted the time that was required to build relationships with people who would be seen as ‘hard to reach’. Longer term funding allowed stability of employment for staff in third sector organisations, which in turn enabled relationships to be developed. Whilst there has been repeated calls for long term funding relationships, these were seldom in place in reality.

In relation to the cost of living some felt that there was a bigger role for community organisations and social enterprises to play. They referred to the benefits of initiatives such as community growing both in helping individuals reduce their food bills but also give new skills and to help foster greater community involvement and participation. Developments such as the growth of community larders could see the emergence of a different, low-cost form of provision. This could extend to other services such as laundry and help cut costs through collective provision. Fundamentally it was felt that a bigger role for social enterprises in anti-poverty strategy would help the emergence of these alternative forms of service delivery. The next CPDP should therefore set out more clearly the role of social enterprises in addressing poverty:

“If Scottish Government are serious about poverty reduction, then they should be putting a lot of support, financial and otherwise, into social enterprises, because we have got

the values to support people in the labour market, people with complex needs. We're committed to a better, fairer economy. You know, we're on the same page from the start."

Alongside investment in community development and organisations that would support this approach, there were also several calls for investment in those services that would reduce the cost of living whilst also helping to build community infrastructure and resilience. This could mean investment not only in leisure facilities but also in greenspaces and other public spaces. It was noted by several groups that some aspects of the physical infrastructure of communities had improved, particularly the quality of some social housing, but that other aspects of the physical appearance of some disadvantaged communities needed investment.

Housing and local infrastructure in communities is an important factor in addressing child poverty, and housing affordability and supply should be seen as a critical cross-cutting issue affecting all areas of child poverty policy. Having quality stock of both social and private rented housing stock was considered to be vital. Practitioners called for the need to improve existing housing stock and increase the retrofitting of properties across Scotland amongst other measures.

Affordability and access were pressing issues across Scotland, but acute needs were identified in areas like Edinburgh, and in other local authorities where prices were rising and rapidly limiting families' access to properties. Access to social housing has also, it was said, become more difficult for families.

A need for more innovation in the housing field was cited. There was a need to consider how there could be further access

of availability of housing and in particular the need to work more coherently with the private rented sector. Examples were given of private rented stock being brought under the control of registered social landlords.

Childcare and Child Poverty

This was seen by many as a top priority issue and one that needs to be urgently addressed if progress is to be made in addressing child poverty, particularly amongst lone parents, the overwhelming majority of whom are women. Whilst the expansion of free childcare provision was important, it was felt that this did not go far enough. This did not in itself address the question of provision – there simply is not enough childcare places available at the times or in the places where it is needed. So there needs to be an increase in the number of places available.

Parents that we spoke to repeatedly reported a policy implementation gap where free childcare is not being made available in all council areas. Some free care is provided for a few hours per day, making it incompatible with work. In some places there are no-choice, mandatory holidays in free childcare provision. In addition, staff shortages were reported as a barrier to accessing childcare.

The impact of this implementation gap between policy intention and provision within and between local authorities, the sporadic nature of provision, the provision of funded care at times parents are unlikely to be able to find work and the implementation of no-choice holidays from free childcare all make accessing and maintaining employment difficult. This reduced the impact of this intervention and restricts the outcomes experienced by parents in priority groups.



Image Tanaphong Toochinda © Unsplash

“This increase is very welcome but out of all my friends in Fife only two have received the increased hours in full.”

“I would take my older kids to school, come back to take the nursery child in for two and a half hours and by the time I have done that it’s time to pick the primary school kids up and then go pick up the youngest from nursery. It was back and forth Monday to Friday. When would I ever have time to go to work? I had to wait till all my kids started school. Nothing has changed.”

Free childcare should also be available at an earlier age, not simply from age three (or two in some circumstances). Entitlement to free childcare should be more closely aligned with entitlement to maternity leave. This would ensure that mums who wished to return to the labour market but could not otherwise afford the childcare were able to do so.

“you need childcare roughly from then your child is one year old, so that you can get back into the field of work...if a young mum delays going back to work until the baby is three years old then they are at such a disadvantage in the labour market.”

Childcare was also a significant issue for students, where young women were being effectively excluded from continuing their education due to lack of affordable and accessible childcare.

One organisation noted that the current provision of childcare was often very inflexible and was difficult to organise around flexible forms of employment. One person they were working with had to pay £900 a month for childcare which meant that they were no better off working. This would have deterred most people from taking a job.

Another participant summarised the importance place on childcare expressed by various groups: she called for free universal childcare as

‘it would change the entire economy – if people could put their kids into childcare, go to do a meaningful job that pays a fair amount and their childcare needs are met – everybody wins out of that.’

Another organisation highlighted the need to provide additional support in the period after a child is born. It was noted that there was a significant drop in income associated with having a baby and more could be done to support some families at this time. The Best Start Grant was seen as an important source of financial support to pregnant women and new parents, however it is clear that some families require more support than is currently available.

Stigma and Poverty

“when you are talking around practical things, it’s easy to forget the stigma around poverty and the pain and anguish that parents feel when you’re living in poverty and they can’t give their kids what they want.”

Issues of stigma featured in most of the discussions with community organisations, with it being an area where they felt not enough was being done. Some talked of the complexity of addressing issues of stigma as service delivery organisations:

“we don’t want to be seen as a service for the poor, that becomes stigmatising.”

This community development trust attempted to ensure that its services were welcoming and open to all, in the belief that this will help ensure access for those who really need their support.

Some organisations felt that stigma was the biggest barrier in further addressing child poverty. This was due to the fact

that stigma and shame prevented people from seeking the support they need, but also that stigma can affect the policies and decisions that are made about how best to address child poverty. **There were two consequences from this observation: there needs to be more done in respect to public awareness to address the stigma of poverty.** This could be part of the way that the next CPDP is publicised and discussed in the media. The second aspect is that there needs to be more done to address the awareness of decision makers about the realities of poverty.

Stigma also interacts with issues of race, ethnicity, place, and culture. In some communities, such as the Sikh community, there can be increased stigma and shame associated with asking for support:

“the community that we work in [the Sikh community] itself there’s still a massive stigma around asking for help and support. It’s massively challenging for people to overcome.”

In rural communities, issues of shame are heightened due to the sense that poverty is not really an issue, or that people will just 'get by'. Another BME led organisation noted that there should be specific campaign around stigma at the national level that would 'amplify the message that it is ok to ask for help.'

One way for stigma to be addressed is for more effective approaches to local participation to be developed.

Participatory budgeting was mentioned as one useful approach that needs to be further developed. It was also felt that children's voices must be more central to the development of local and national anti-poverty policies. By bringing people who are directly affected by the policies contained in the CPDP there will be opportunities to break down barriers and improve understanding of the reality of poverty.

The Cost of Living

Our discussions in *Get Heard Scotland* preceded the current focus on the cost-of-living crisis, but there was nevertheless a range of areas where participants thought more could be done.

There was widespread recognition of the success in many places of getting digital devices to those who needed them during the pandemic. There was a sense that whilst a great deal of effort had been made, some of the coverage across different local authority areas was patchy. It was noted that whilst more families now had access to devices thanks to funding during the pandemic, many did not have the data that would allow them to use these them to the full extent. It was felt then that proposals around free universal broadband should be considered, or at least targeted in particular communities.

The problem of fuel poverty had received a good delata of media attention in the autumn of 2021, but many organisations noted that it has been an issue for many years. In rural communities there was long standing issues of people being off the gas grid and using solid fuel. There was a perception that wood burning energy systems were a luxury, however for some families these were essential. In relation to reducing costs, there needed to be a clearer approach to addressing fuel poverty in rural communities. There was reference to a scheme in the Highlands in the winter of 2021 which gave payments of up to £60 for people in need. This was seen as essential and should be maintained.

The impact of the rising cost of living was present throughout conversations, particularly in terms of the impact on food and heating costs. People asked for caps on the costs of essentials such as food or fuel and for support to be increased through regular, dependable, income boosts rather than one-off payments.

Public transport costs, especially bus costs, were consistently identified as being too high. High public transport costs prevent people on low incomes in many of our communities from being able to access employment and services. As one organisation working with women from black and ethnic minority communities stated:

'Free bus travel for parents would make such a difference.'

Preventing Crisis

The overarching theme around prevention related to building relationships and holistic support from as early age as possible. Targeting at risk groups was considered vital in prevention of poverty on a longer-term basis, with an increased focus needed on young people and working relationally to support them through key transitions.

“Most of the young people we support don’t expect life to be any different”

Partnership working and early intervention were vital in the role of prevention. There was a need for the recognition of the work conducted by the third sector during the pandemic and the resilience it showed in its adaption of its services and support. The pandemic had brought new approaches to collaboration between agencies and institutions and there was need for good practice across this area to continue. Examining the new relationships and pathways created was essential to ensure the continued funding as well as ensuring the sustainability of interventions.

Also discussed on the theme of prevention was the need for high quality and well-funded money advice services. There was a need for local support services that understood the wider contexts of where household were placed and the local challenges they faced.

It was noted that crisis services were often being misused by referring partners who, with heavy and challenging caseloads, were limited and unclear on intervention pathways. Stretched capacity and caseloads across many frontline services both statutory and voluntary had resulted in emergency food provision being used in ways were not appropriate. Emergency food aid providers were anticipating significant pressures on

families given the rising fuel prices and other costs, and that this would lead to an upsurge in demand for their provision.

The role of the Scottish Welfare Fund was seen as critical in providing emergency support. There was a need to speed up the current turnaround times for crisis grants, with examples given of families waiting for 40 days or more. This was also linked to other areas in terms of prevention and the need to consider the role of the Scottish Welfare Fund in the adjustment of households to new tenancies and to maintain tenancies.

Rural issues

We spoke to a number of organisations in rural and semi-rural areas of Scotland. Many of the issues they raised were similar to those in urban areas – access to childcare, adequacy of social security, availability of employment. However, many of these issues were exacerbated or were more acute due to rurality.

Costs in rural areas of Scotland were an issue that some organisations felt was not sufficiently reflected in the current approach to child poverty. Transport and childcare were mentioned as both being more expensive in rural locations. In addition, the question of accessibility of these services was critical, not only in allowing individuals to access other services (benefits, GPs etc), but also to allow them to access employment. Rural transport had a particular wide-reaching impact and should be seen as much more of a priority in future plans.

It was felt that the particular experiences of rural poverty need to be given greater prominence in the next CPDP. Rural poverty is a hidden issue – it doesn’t show in statistics in the same way as in urban areas, but the dispersed nature of rural poverty makes it no less severe.

“If you live in Muir of Ord or the Black Isle, where there are some people who are living in serious deprivation, they don’t ‘show up’. It’s hidden...they don’t show up because they live side by side with people that aren’t living in poverty... one of the biggest barriers is understanding that poverty exists in our pretty, rural villages.”

Addiction

A number of organisations highlighted the vital importance of linking drug misuse and poverty. One stated that this was ‘single biggest issue in our community’, and that there was a need for more community-based services and for community based addiction workers.

From the discussions it was clear that organisations wish to see a better articulation between approaches designed to address child poverty and those focused on drug misuse. It was noted that issues of trauma and broader community wellbeing, both intimately linked to child poverty, are closely linked to drug and alcohol issues. For some people, and in some communities, it is not possible to separate issues of problematic drug or alcohol use. In order to address child poverty we therefore need more effective approaches to addressing drug misuse – and vice versa. It was felt that the next CPDP should contain a more ‘trauma informed’ approach to addressing child poverty.

Individual Skills and Confidence

The skills and ability capacity to get by on a low income was raised by some organisations, sometimes in contradictory ways. For example, one organisation felt that ‘getting to the third week [of the month] and running out of money isn’t a crisis, it’s a lack of management’. However, they immediately added an equal part of this problem is not having enough money.

There was a common theme that poverty was not only about income (although income was always an essential part of the issue). Various organisations noted that there was still a role for activities that helped individuals to budget, to understand issues around credit and debt. These issues were often linked to questions about individual confidence. Indeed, such issues were raised in relation to overall wellbeing of individuals and communities and were linked to questions of community resilience in the face of adversity.

Income Maximisation and Access to Advice

There were numerous references to the awareness of particular benefits and entitlements. One participant felt that there was too little information about the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) available and that more should be done to ensure that information is available through health visitors, schools as well as 3rd sector organisations. This will become particularly important when the full roll out of SCP takes place.



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Young people involved with Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH) talked about the need for information to be available in a variety of locations from GPs surgeries to libraries. There is also a need for support for informal forms of advice based within community organisations to enable people to get advice as part of other day to day engagement with community groups. It was noted that by basing advice workers within community organisations individuals would be able to access advice more readily, when they need it. One organisation described the importance of having a welfare rights advisor embedded with them, and how they had helped overcome barriers to asking for advice:

“now she’s with us the whole day, she’s in the garden, chit chatting to people who are volunteering and giving them ‘sideways’ advice. And then if they want more formal advice, she can speak to them in the office.”

The role of the third sector in ensuring that people were accessing all the support they needed was emphasised by many organisations. This went beyond formal welfare rights advice services but was primarily about the relationships that members of staff in organisations had with those who potentially needed support. Support to non-specialist organisations to ensure that they are providing the most up to date information was seen as a key part of any benefit take up strategy.

The public awareness campaigns on new Scottish benefits were noted and welcomed. However, it was felt that there is a need for a targeted public awareness campaign as SCP was progressively rolled out. Participants were conscious that such plans would no doubt be in motion, but they felt that they need to be more targeted as too many people still do not know about them.

Maximizing household incomes through social security was seen as a critical priority in terms of mitigating the pressures on families. The increased devolution of benefits was viewed as an opportunity for change and culture shift in terms of families experience of social security and boosting household incomes. To ensure that the full impact of new and existing benefits are felt there should be an emphasis on raising awareness of entitlements through mass media campaigns, on a scale similar to that witnessed during the pandemic in relation to vaccinations, as well as more focused efforts to remove stigma from public service provision.

Education

The Cost of the School Day (CoSD) programme was mentioned by several participants. This was seen as a very valuable approach to addressing the hidden costs of attending school. It was also seen as an approach that could help begin to address stigma in a very practical way. The next CPDP should contain plans for how this programme can be expanded to reach more schools.

The priority given to addressing the poverty related attainment gap was welcomed. However, questions were raised about how effectively some of these resources were being deployed and whether they were being used to address child poverty. It was not clear that teachers had the capacity or training to be able to identify the actions that could be taken to address child poverty. The next CPDP should set out how PEF connects with the broader child poverty agenda.

It was also highlighted that some particular groups of children need specialist help to support them to engage with education. Roma children were highlighted in particular in this respect.

Concerns were raised around the disruption that children and young people had faced during the pandemic due to the loss of school and nursery provision. These problems had receded somewhat, but there was ongoing disruption in school and nursery provision. The implications of this disruption were thought to be significant for educational attainment. For groups of children and young people who were already impacted by the poverty related attainment gap the pandemic is thought to have increased that gap.

Co-Production and Co-Location of Services

A range of participants spoke about the need to consider service design, including the location of service, in a new way. Involving people who are excluded and from marginalised communities more effectively in the design of services that are in place to support them was seen as essential. Co-production and models of services that drew upon peer support were seen as more effective approaches service delivery. A greater emphasis on co-production would enable a better fit for individuals and communities and ensure that services were tailored to the complexities families experienced. In the field of employability, for example, greater co-production could lead to the creation of opportunities that were more flexible and more applicable to those who often were the furthest from the labour market.

Alongside this, practitioners highlighted that considering the co-location of services, for example, in schools are effective way to reach families. There was a general reflection around the importance of understanding service touchpoints requiring more mapping and analysis about where families are accessing information.

Advice providers discussed the shift to a digital and telephone-only services had resulted in both benefits and problems in helping families to access money advice, allowing easier access for some in remote areas, but potentially excluding some people. How these changing models of service provision would impact on the delivery of benefit take-up is still unknown but clearly will be important in contributing to the delivery of child poverty targets. The move to digital services during the pandemic was anticipated to remain in place, partly reflecting service users needs and funders priorities, however it was noted that many service users will continue to need and prefer face-to-face services.

Investment

There was clear consensus a on the need for significant investment to tackle social and economic injustice in Scotland. From the perspective of third sector organisations that we spoke to there was a need for continued and sustainable funding of investment in the services they provide to help tackle poverty. Many funding streams had altered and being realigned during the pandemic as part of crisis responses and reconfigurations of services. Practitioners spoke positively, in some cases, about the response to the pandemic providing renewed strategic focus, stimulating greater collaboration across organisations and localities. However, the increased demand and need meant services were under greater pressure.

Alongside investment there was a need for more strategic learning and mapping of local service provision, both in terms of the availability of services and the populations being served. Local level service provision had often adopted new modes of delivery during the pandemic that in some cases had been sustained. The longer-term impacts of these changes needs to be fully understood.

Priority groups and Child Poverty

Throughout our discussions we asked about the priority groups that had been identified in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan. There was general agreement that the priority groups were broadly the right ones to focus on. However, there were several suggestions in terms of focus:

- A more explicit focus on young people. Whilst some young people are covered by the current priority groups (young parents for example), it was felt that a greater focus on young people would strengthen both the approach to addressing child poverty now and would also contribute to a preventative agenda. Young lone parents were highlighted in particular – they faced barriers related to their lower rates of universal credit and in turn lower rates of income and the increased financial pressure they faced.
- Migrant families, including Roma families, and people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). Whilst the absolute numbers of individuals in these groups may be small, their risk of poverty was perceived as significant. These populations were at risk of missing out on support. There were also particular challenges faced when providing digital support services when using digital translators and supporting families effectively.
- Experience of care: Young people with experience of the care system were also cited as a key group in relation to barriers related to trauma. Since the publication of the first CPDP, the Promise Scotland has been launched, which should ensure a greater focus on the connection between poverty and care.
- Experience of the criminal justice system: people, particularly young people, who had experience of the criminal justice systems were perceived as facing barriers that required specific support, especially in relation to housing, but also debt and money advice.



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Final Comments

There were some useful observations that did not fit easily into the themes outlined above. One participant asked whether the next CPDP would include an accurate assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on the likelihood of reaching the interim or final child poverty targets. There needs to be a clear statement on what remedial action is required and there should also be honesty if it was very likely that the targets would not be met.

Data sharing between organisations and automation of entitlements should become the norm. People are deterred from seeking support when they know that they will have to repeatedly tell their stories and repeat

difficult experiences. This is an issue that is increasingly understood in the public sector as a key means to ensure that all those who are entitled to support, but are not claiming it, receive it. The next CPDP should contain national approach to the automation of entitlements.

Several organisations raised issues of wealth and income inequality in relation to child poverty. It was felt that Scotland needed to do more to address inequality as part of its efforts to tackle child poverty. Whilst it was understood that there are limits on the scope for action by the Scottish Government on directly addressing income and wealth inequality, it was felt that the levers that are held should be used to greater effect.

4. TACKLING CHILD POVERTY IN SCOTLAND: KEY MESSAGES

The next Child Poverty Delivery Plan will set out the next steps that will be required in Scotland to meet both the interim child poverty targets in 2023/2024 as well as those set for 2030. Meeting these targets has rightly been defined by the Scottish Government as a ‘national mission’. It is a mission that organisations and individuals who have been involved in *Get Heard Scotland* share, and it is a mission that they play an active role in contributing to every day.

To deliver on this mission will require significant change in the profile and priority given to addressing poverty in Scotland. It will require all of Scotland – government, civil society, business and more – to play a part. We will need to see child poverty as a top priority for public sector bodies across Scotland. It will require the private sector take more responsibility and ensure it plays a greater role in helping to drive down poverty. The community and voluntary sector, including social enterprises, will need more support to ensure they can contribute all their expertise and knowledge.

Above all, to achieve our national mission we need to ensure that the priorities, needs and voices of those people experiencing poverty are at the heart of our approach. Important steps have been made by local authorities, health boards and by the Scottish Government to ensure that people with experience of poverty are more actively involved in contributing to the development of anti-poverty policy. However, there is still much to do.

The discussions that have contributed to this report highlight just how much people with direct experience of poverty and those who work in communities affected by poverty have to contribute to our efforts end poverty. We hope that the Scottish Government and all those responsible for taking action on poverty not only listen to, but act on what has been reported here.

Our discussions with grassroots community organisations and people with direct experience of poverty highlighted a wide range of complex issues. To have a greater impact on child poverty we need to better understand and respond to that complexity. Across our discussion a number of key messages have emerged:

Social Security

The role of our social security system is fundamental to our ability to address child poverty in Scotland. The development and implementation of the Scottish Child Payment shows what can be done with the powers of the Scottish Parliament. Proposals around the development of a Minimum Income Guarantee are very positive, but there is a need to take further steps in the short term to ensure that we move towards the vision of adequate incomes for all, and in doing so drive down levels of child poverty. More should be done to ensure that Scottish social security payments help to **deliver adequate incomes** and reach all those who need support.

In developing a social security system that delivers adequate incomes, we must also develop **an inclusive social security system** that meets everyone's needs. Particular priority should be given to providing support for key groups such as unpaid carers and people with NRPF. As the Scottish social security system continues to develop, more attention should be focused on how raise awareness of the support that is available. **Delivering increases in take-up rates** of all entitlements, from Social Security Scotland and the DWP, is fundamental to making progress in boosting incomes. Data sharing between organisations and automation of entitlements should become the norm.

Jobs and Employability

Fair work – a job that pays at least the real Living Wage, that is secure and can give a reliable income – will be a vital part of the next Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors all have a role to play in ensuring that more workers **receive at least the real Living Wage**. Employers, particularly in the private sector, in sectors such as hospitality, retail and care, all need to ensure that they are paying the real Living Wage. It has been increasingly recognized that pay alone will not lift some families out of poverty. Secure contracts and an adequate number of hours are also needed to make paid employment an effective route out of poverty. Scottish Government, Local Government and Health Boards have a responsibility to use all the means at their disposal to ensure that employers are doing all they can to address in-work poverty. This means using **procurement** more effectively to encourage the adoption of fair work practices and placing more **conditions on employers** that receive support.

Alongside action to improve the experience in the labour market, there needs to be better support for those who are seeking to enter the world of work. **Employability schemes, particularly those for young people, need to pay at least the real Living Wage**. More support should be provided to organisations in the third sector and social economy organisations to deliver employability programmes.

Childcare was a particularly important theme in our discussions. It was most often raised in relation to employment, but it was recognized that high quality affordable childcare not only allowed parents to be in paid employment, but could have wider beneficial effects on the wellbeing and development of children. The expansion of **free childcare** was widely welcomed, but it was clear that to deliver on our child poverty targets more would need to be done. Closing the implementation gap between childcare policy and reality and better alignment between maternity leave provisions and childcare entitlement are also important areas of action.

Communities and Poverty

Organisations in the Poverty Alliance's network have delivered a range of support during the pandemic to help mitigate the impact of poverty. This experience has only reinforced the importance of community groups and organisations in take forward action to address child poverty. These organisations were often in a position to deliver **preventative action**, as these were based in communities and were well placed to identify the issues that needed to be addressed, both at individual and community level. **Greater investment in community organisations** to build sustainability in the longer term is required if organisations are to deliver further change that will help reduce child poverty.



Civil society organisations working in communities not only deliver vital support and services to people living on low incomes, but also provide much of the infrastructure and expertise that can bring about the **participation and co-production** that should be seen as a crucial element in efforts to address child poverty. The next CPDP should set out how the goal of participation and co-production are to be realized at both the local and national levels.

Addressing Stigma

A consistent message through our discussions was the importance of stigma and poverty. Too often people living on low incomes are made to feel ashamed for the position they find themselves in. People are stigmatized because of where they live, the schools their children attend, or because of their need for services and support. Despite

the welcome recognition of the impact of stigma by policy makers, there remains little tangible action to practically address the problem. Initiatives like the **Cost of the School Day** show that problems of stigma can be addressed in ways that make a real, material difference to the wellbeing of children and families. The wider lessons of this work should be taken on when producing the next CPDP, ensuring that we not only address the material harms that poverty can produce, but also the wider impact on mental wellbeing.

To this end, the next Child Poverty Delivery Plan should be accompanied by an **awareness raising programme** designed to give a higher profile to the actions that are being taken across Scotland. This will help undermine some of the stigmatizing beliefs that persist about poverty and highlight the benefits our whole society gains from effectively addressing child poverty.

APPENDIX 1: ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN GET HEARD SCOTLAND 2021-22

TABLE 1: Organisations participating in 1-2-1 interviews

Organisation	Area	Organisation	Area
Fife Gingerbread	Fife	Star Project	Renfrewshire
Louise Project	Glasgow/Govanhill	FARE Scotland	Glasgow, central Scotland
Darkwood Crew	Renfrewshire	EBI Unites	Renfrewshire
Bridging the Gap	Glasgow/Gorbals	Mayfield & Easterhouse Dev Trust	Midlothian
Cornerstone House	North Lanarkshire	Grassmarket Community Project	Edinburgh
Amina Muslim Women	Glasgow	Cranhill Development Trust	Glasgow
Saheliya	Glasgow/Edinburgh	Childrens University	Scotland
3D Drumchapel	Glasgow	Glasgow Association for Mental Health	Glasgow
Belville Community Gardens	Inverclyde	Pachedu	Renfrewshire
Sikh Sanjog	Edinburgh/Scotland	Broke not Broken	Perth and Kinross
Spirit Advocacy (HUG)	Highland	Your Voice Inverclyde Carers Forum	Inverclyde
Home Start Renfrewshire	Renfrewshire	Ayr Housing Aid Centre	North Ayrshire
Youth Community Support Agency	Glasgow		

Findings are provided from group discussions with 68 people from the following community organisations, representing people from key priority groups at risk of poverty including: lone parents, families where a member of the household is disabled, large families, minority ethnic families, families with children under 1 year old and mothers under 25.

TABLE 2: Organisations supporting community discussions

Organisation	Area
Fife Gingerbread	Fife
Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre	Glasgow / Dundee
Saheliya	Edinburgh / Glasgow
3D Drumchapel	Glasgow
Your Voice Inverclyde Carers Forum	Inverclyde
Sikh Sanjog	Edinburgh / all Scotland
Women in Action	Glasgow / all Scotland
Darkwood Crew	Renfrewshire
FARE Scotland	Glasgow
Cranhill Development Trust	Glasgow
Community Activist Advisory group	All Scotland



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