

COMMUNITIES FOR ALL: POVERTY ALLIANCE 2022 LOCAL ELECTION MANIFESTO



INTRODUCTION

Over one million people in Scotland were living in the grip of poverty even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, the pandemic's impact has combined with the ongoing rising cost of living to pull ever-greater numbers of people into financial hardship.

In communities the length and breadth of Scotland – from Glasgow to Gretna and from Dornoch to Dumfries – people are finding it increasingly difficult to stay afloat. Unless every level of government meets its moral duty to protect people from poverty, the rising tide of poverty risks becoming a flood.

The factors driving poverty in Scotland are not principally under the control of local authorities. However, local councils can and should play a critical role in protecting

people from poverty, and in delivering services that can loosen the grip of poverty on people's lives. It is therefore essential that they are fully supported by the Scottish Government in doing just that. That means Scottish ministers must ensure that councils have both the powers and the resources to play their part in our national mission to end poverty.

At a time when so many people are being pushed into poverty, May's local authority elections come at a critical moment. People living on low incomes in Scotland need councillors and councils that will prioritise the actions that will stem the rising tide of poverty, and that will use local powers to strengthen and empower communities to take action themselves.

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PRIORITISING POVERTY

“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.”

Participant, Get Heard Scotland

Local authorities have a critical role to play in ending poverty in Scotland: providing employability programmes to help people into paid work, delivering critical emergency financial support to people in need, leading the physical regeneration of communities or supporting the third sector. To genuinely fulfil this role we need councillors across Scotland to put tackling poverty at the heart of all that they do, particularly amid a cost of living crisis where more and more people are being swept into financial hardship.

They can do this by:

- **Ensuring that all major economic development activity is assessed for its impact on levels of poverty.** Economic development spend should be focused on creating high quality, secure jobs that pay at least the real Living Wage, as well as improving the services – like childcare and transport – that low income households disproportionately rely upon.
- **Developing Local Child Poverty Action Reports that contains meaningful and measurable commitments.** Local authorities across Scotland have, under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act of 2017,

a duty to work with their local health board to produce annual reports on the action they are taking to tackle child poverty. It is essential that local authorities place high importance on the reports, and that the reports contain meaningful commitments that can be measured for impact.

- **Becoming Living Wage and Living Hours employers.** Local authorities are significant employers and can set the direction of local economies, moving them towards a focus on wellbeing. All local authorities should be accredited Living Wage employers and should seek Living Hours status, pledging to provide security of hours and contracts alongside payment of the real Living Wage. They should also establish new Living Wage Places in their areas to further promote the adoption of the real Living Wage. These steps will be key in the further development of Community Wealth Building in Scotland.

BOOSTING INCOMES

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

Participant in Get Heard Scotland initiative

A lack of adequate and secure income – combined with the rising cost of living – is locking people across our communities into poverty. At a local authority level, though, there is a range of action that councils can take to boost incomes and loosen the grip of poverty on people’s lives.

Action must include:

- **Applying strict Fair Work conditionality throughout the local authority supply chain.** Councils’ grant-giving, procurement, planning and licensing powers mean that they possess the capacity to help shape and drive a more just local labour market, where workers receive a level and security of pay that will protect them from poverty.
- **Ensuring that the Scottish Welfare Fund is accessible, adequate and timely.** The Scottish Welfare Fund provides a critical lifeline to people experiencing income crisis in Scotland. Yet too often people’s experiences of applying for the Fund leave room for improvement. While the Scottish Government has committed to undertaking a review of the Fund, there are steps that local authorities can take now. There is a need, for example, not only to ensure that the Fund is being promoted as widely as possible – including the provision of up-to-date and accessible information that is available in different formats and languages – but also to ensure that the awards provided to people are adequate and able to genuinely protect people from crisis. In addition, all local authorities should guarantee a same-day decision and payment of Crisis Grants, to ensure people are not forced into using food banks.
- **Exploring options for delivering payments to migrant families who are prevented from accessing social security.** Many people across Scotland who experience the most acute levels of poverty and destitution are people with No Recourse to Public Funds, who can find themselves trapped within a system where they are prevented from meeting even their most basic needs. While somewhat constrained by UK Government legislation, all councils should explore every option to provide additional cash support to people and families who find themselves prevented from accessing mainstream social security support.
- **Developing a more compassionate approach to debt recovery and exploring debt write-off schemes.** Council tax debt represents a major burden for many people across Scotland, which – when combined with the surging cost of living and real-terms benefit cuts – serves to lock people even tighter into poverty. For people in this situation, debt recovery processes involving the use of Sheriff Officers can be an intimidating and anxiety-inducing experience that pushes them further from accessing the support they need; councils must design more compassionate approaches to the recovery of debt. At the same time, councils should engage with the Scottish Government on the need to develop debt write-off schemes for people struggling with ongoing and unsustainable council tax debt.

IMPROVING SERVICES

“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.”

Participant, Get Heard Scotland

Local authorities deliver a range of services – like childcare, education and childcare – that play a critical role in the lives of people on low incomes, and which can provide a route to unlocking households from poverty. Too often though, these services are not working for people living in poverty. Councillors elected across Scotland must commit to playing their part in designing local services that meet the needs of people on low incomes, and which can help to actively prevent and reduce poverty.

Action should include:

- **Ensuring that the local delivery of the 1140 hours of funded childcare is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of every family.** The expansion of funded childcare to 1140 was a welcome step, but for many families – particularly lone parent families and families with a disabled child – current childcare provision does not meet their needs. Local authorities must do more to ensure that child care does not act as a barrier for parents, especially women, who are seeking to engage in and sustain employment.
- **Expanding the provision of free school meals.** The Scottish Government’s commitment to free school meals for all primary school pupils is, though delayed, a welcome step. But it still leaves many children and young people of secondary school age who may go without the food they need – either because their family does not currently qualify despite being in hardship or because of the shame or stigma associated with free school meals. Every local authority should engage with the Scottish Government on the need to expand free school meal provision, while working towards universal free school meals for all children and young people in state education.
- **Working towards affordable, accessible, and publicly-owned bus networks.** Bus services across Scotland are not working for many people living on low incomes. They are unaffordable and inaccessible; limiting the opportunities and prospects of many, while profit-driven bus operators have no incentive to redesign their services to address this. Councils across Scotland should engage with the Scottish Government on expanding the public ownership of buses, and demand the support they need to organise local transport networks. Alongside this, they should commit their support for the expansion of free bus travel, to include people on low incomes and under-26s.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

“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 can’t give your kids what they want.”

Participant in Get Heard Scotland initiative

Too often, people on low incomes in Scotland are absent from decision-making processes that most impact their lives and are unable to exercise any influence over the distribution of resources or design of services in their community. This is the result of a combination of factors including the prevalence of stigma and a lack of local participatory processes. This is wrong and must change, along with a greater recognition of the work of community organisations in fostering solidarity and strength among communities. Councillors elected in May must recognise these factors and commit to change.

Action should include:

- **Developing approaches to tackling poverty-related stigma.** The stigma that is associated with poverty can not only prevent people from seeking the support they need, but can also affect the policies and decisions that are made by those with power about how to best address poverty. It therefore incumbent upon local authorities to do all they can to end stigma, both by actively challenging stigmatising attitudes or practice that may exist locally, but also by ensuring – through the involvement of people with experience of poverty – that council-run or council-supported services are delivered in a non-stigmatising way. Plans for addressing stigma should be a key element in each local authority’s Local Child Poverty Action Report.
- **Ensure that people with experience of poverty are supported to play an active role in the development of Local Child Poverty Action Reports.** The development and implementation of Local Child Poverty Action Reports should represent a central part of a council’s anti-poverty activities. Given that, it is essential that people with experience of poverty are able to participate in the formulation of the reports and that they are able to influence their content. Councils should – in partnership with local third sector and community organisations – develop meaningful participatory processes to ensure the widest possible involvement in their development.
- **Provide long-term investment in third sector organisations.** The work of the third sector in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of community groups and organisations in supporting people on low incomes. These organisations were often able to deliver preventative action, due to being



based in communities and having a deep understanding of the issues that needed to be addressed, both at an individual and community level. Where local authorities are providing financial support to the third sector, it is vital that this support is long-term, which will in turn allow organisations to plan with security; allowing for a greater embedding of services and more positive impact.

- **Commit to at least doubling the proportion of council budgets spent using participatory budgeting.**

Participatory budgeting is an important tool in ensuring that people have a meaningful say about the distribution of resources in their community, and can allow them a greater say over how poverty and inequality are tackled in their area. Yet only a tiny proportion of public spending in Scotland is apportioned via participatory budgeting. A commitment to doubling the proportion of council budgets spent via participatory budgeting over the course of the next council term would be a strong step toward meaningfully empowering communities.

For more information please contact:

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