

SCOTTISH ANTI POVERTY REVIEW



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THE CAMPAIGN ISSUE



EDITORIAL TEAM

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The Poverty Alliance

DISCLAIMER

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

ABOUT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance exists to combat poverty in Scotland by working with people and communities to affect change. We act as the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, engaging with voluntary organisations, policy makers and politicians. Our vision is of a sustainable Scotland free of poverty, with dignity and social and economic justice for all.

We will tackle poverty by working with individuals, organisations and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this, we will:

- support the development of policies and practices which promote social justice and combat poverty
- work with people and communities experiencing poverty to help them challenge poverty
- build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- raise awareness and change attitudes about poverty

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WELCOME

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EDITORIAL

Finding Our Voice

Peter Kelly, Director, Poverty Alliance.

It looks like it is time to start dusting off the old military metaphors: we are heading for a general election. Soon we'll be considering where 'the battle lines are being drawn' between parties, 'short campaigns' will be launched, key 'battleground' constituencies will be identified, and 'offences' will be mounted. Some of the parties may even wish to declare a war on poverty. These are the hackneyed phrases that will unfortunately be used too often to describe, and obscure, what will be a vitally important general election for those of us concerned about increasing poverty.

Of course, every general election is important, but the next one is especially so. Last time out in 2019, Brexit dominated the discussion, we were told that levelling up was on its way and that austerity was at an end. It seems like a lifetime ago. Five years on, with the experience of the covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, war in Europe and Palestine, and political turmoil in the ruling party, the context feels very different. There is a desire for real change after five years of missed opportunities.

We are yet to see any of the detailed policies that parties will put to the electorate but we can only hope that they will be begin to map out a new direction, away from many from those that have resulted in entrenched poverty and growing disenchantment with politics itself. As the Poverty Alliance begins prioritising our key asks, there are several areas where we will need to see change.

Social security will be at the top of our list. For more than a decade the emphasis in our system has been on restricting access to the support that people need. The cumulative impact of the two-child limit, the benefit cap, the arbitrary freezes and cuts imposed on most working age benefits, has been increased levels of deep poverty. A new government must set out a different direction for social security. It should start by scrapping the two-child limit and introducing the Essentials Guarantee as proposed by the Trussell Trust and JRF. That would be an important stepping stone on the way to a comprehensive Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). Moves towards a MIG would require change beyond our social security system. Paid employment and public services would need to change. Too many people scrape by in low paid jobs, with insufficient hours and little security. Services that we all need to live a good life – decent public transport, affordable childcare, community resources – all need greater investment.

As part of the general election debate, we will need to have a serious conversation about how we pay for the changes



we need. We are undoubtedly a wealthy country, but at the moment that wealth is not being harnessed for the good of the majority. Politicians have a responsibility to lead that discussion, although few seem to have the courage to say what is needed to deliver the kind of society most people want.

It is this reticence to say what is required to bring about real change that undermines trust in politics. The false promises of Brexit or the tax slashing failure of the Truss government have played their part in stoking distrust, but the lack of clarity in saying what is needed to bring about transformational change doesn't help either. In civil society we need to be concerned about increasing distrust in politics, especially as it impacts on those who are most likely to feel excluded by our political system: those on low incomes, young people, Black and minority ethnic people. Third sector organisations, civil society in general, has a long and proud tradition of standing with those who lose out in our political and economic system. We provide the support, the care, the hope for change for many people. Many of organisations will rightly raise their voices to demand better at the next general election. However, to make a real impact at this election, more organisations will need to be involved, and we will need to be clearer and more consistent in what we are calling for.

Our sector in Scotland involves more than 45,000 organisations, employing 135,000 people, with more than 1.1 million volunteers involved. We need to turn those numbers into real political pressure, by getting organised and demanding the system change we talk so often about. The Poverty Alliance will be making the case for the fundamental changes we need at the general election – we hope you'll join us.



FAIR FUNDING FOR THE SECTOR

Jason Henderson is Policy & Public Affairs Officer for the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

Every one of us wants to alleviate poverty in Scotland. We may have different ideas or views on how exactly we do that, but it would surely take the brassiest of brass necks to try and argue that poverty can be alleviated without the efforts of our voluntary sector. Simply, the voluntary sector is crucial in this fight. Across the country, voluntary organisations are working tirelessly, day after day, with a mission to eradicate poverty, while countless others dedicate their efforts to offering support, services, and projects that help to prevent poverty, support people in deprived areas, and alleviate the impacts of poverty.

But, as those organisations do battle with the root causes and debilitating impacts of poverty, our sector is in a fight of its own – a fight to reshape the currently unfair and unsustainable approaches that plague voluntary sector funding. Organisations carrying out such vital work, often small and volunteer led, see the capacity of incredibly talented and passionate people wasted because of those processes – capacity that should be directed towards undertaking the work they do so well.

After years of underfunding and upheaval, combined with the more recent impacts of the pandemic and the cost-of-living and running cost crises, the voluntary sector is struggling. These crises have, for so many organisations, seen demand for the invaluable services and support they provide soar while, at the same time, increasing the likelihood of having to navigate rising costs and stagnant funding. Concurrently, the recruitment and retention of staff, as well as complete burnout of sector staff and volunteers alike, have become huge issues.

Thanks to the Scottish Third Sector Tracker, we know that 76% of organisations find organisational finances as one of their biggest challenges, with around half of organisations telling us that increasing costs are negatively impacting their ability to deliver core services. 1 in 10 voluntary organisations went into this winter uncertain whether they will even still be operating in 12 months. The current situation is simply unsustainable and this is a situation that is not only not helped by the Scottish Government's approach to sector funding, but it's a situation that is perpetuated by that approach.

The problems that the voluntary sector faces are obvious and undeniable. But what of the solutions? If the current situation is unsustainable, how do we make it sustainable? If voluntary sector funding is inflexible and inaccessible, how do we make it flexible and accessible? And if voluntary organisations believe the funding approaches taken by the

Scottish Government result in a funding landscape that is ultimately unfair, how do we make it fair?

Fairness is a positive, aspirational concept. A quick Google of the word fair throws up a definition of “impartial and just, without favouritism or discrimination”, alongside a myriad of suggested synonyms, including “equitable”, “trustworthy” and “honest”. Google also provides a second definition of “the quality of having light-coloured hair or a pale complexion” but that's of significantly less relevance to this particular topic.

When it comes to an aspect as pivotal as funding for a sector as crucial ours, SCVO doesn't think it is a radical position to believe that funding should be equitable, trustworthy and honest, impartial and just, and without favouritism and discrimination. In fact, we believe it should be the default position that Scotland's voluntary sector is entitled to funding that is fair both in name and definition: Fair Funding, some might even call it.

Fair Funding is our series of policy asks that would ensure funding for the voluntary sector is fair, flexible, sustainable, and accessible. Those asks, carefully developed over the last two years, are based entirely on what we've heard from voluntary organisations across the country who rely on successfully accessing funding to provide the services and support that our communities rely on, and are crucial in the fight against poverty.

Fair Funding is long-term funding of three years or more; it's flexible, unrestricted core funding; it's sustainable funding that includes inflation-based uplifts and full costs; it's funding that accommodates paying staff the Real Living Wage; it's funding that is accessed via streamlined, proportionate, and consistent approaches to applications and reporting; it's funding that involves timely processes, decision-making, and payments.

We've spent a great deal of time now calling on the Scottish Government for Fair Funding. We've won support from MSPs, highlighted the urgent need for Fair Funding at every opportunity, and sought to work with the Scottish Government collaboratively on ensuring those principles are adopted in the future. We've had our Fair Funding calls echoed by organisations across the sector, including by the Poverty Alliance, the ALLIANCE, the Scottish Sports Association, and Volunteer Scotland, and have developed a comprehensive resource this year to provide the tools and information needed so that even more organisations can support those calls. And we've continued to speak to the voluntary sector throughout, hearing the continuing experiences of organisations as they struggle from day to day.



Several voluntary organisations told us that 2023/24 had been the “worst ever” in terms of accessing Scottish Government funding and so, perhaps now more than ever, Scotland’s voluntary sector needs Fair Funding. We recognise that the Scottish Government, as a result of our influencing work, has responded to those calls for Fair Funding with a commitment to, albeit confusingly titled, Fairer Funding by 2026. Although we await the finer details and definitions of what that specifically entails, we will naturally support any move to improve funding for the voluntary sector, continuing to work with the government to ensure such a commitment is realised and that it comprises as many of our Fair Funding asks as possible.

It is imperative then that we – SCVO, the voluntary sector, the Scottish Government and beyond – work together to ensure that we do indeed make voluntary sector funding fairer, but not simply in a bid to make tomorrow’s funding slightly less unfair than it was yesterday. Instead, it is vital that the collective aim is Fair Funding - because the voluntary sector in Scotland not only deserves it, it desperately needs it.

Fair Funding is not a wish-list of wants and desires, it’s collection of what is required – not just to secure the future and stability of voluntary organisations across Scotland, but to ensure they have the capacity and ability to continue challenging poverty.

Our calls, the majority of which focus on the actual processes and problems involved in the current system rather than any clambering for extra finances, will continue to be at the heart of what SCVO asks, and expects, from the Scottish Government. Even with the brassiest of brass necks, we cannot have a discussion about challenging poverty in Scotland without recognising the undeniable need for a stable and secure voluntary sector, and we cannot have a discussion about a stable and secure voluntary sector without recognising the urgent need for Fair Funding.

More information on Fair Funding, the Scottish Third Sector Tracker, and SCVO’s work more generally can be found at scvo.scot.



IT'S TIME TO GUARANTEE OUR ESSENTIALS!

Cara Hilton is Senior Policy & Public Affairs Manager (Scotland) with The Trussell Trust

We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world yet millions of people across the UK are struggling on incomes so low, they can't afford the essentials. Our recent Hunger in Scotland research, revealed that 1 in 6 people in Scotland had experienced hunger in the past year, that's almost 1.2 million people. This isn't right and we are determined to change this.

No one in Scotland, no one in the UK, should be forced to turn to charity to feed themselves or their family. Food banks do all they can to support people in their communities, but it should be our social security system that supports anyone who has fallen on hard times and needs help. People are going hungry because they simply don't have enough income to cover the essentials.

Could you cover your essential costs with £85 a week?

Everyone's circumstances can change. Losing your job, breaking up with your partner, needing to juggle caring responsibilities and work – these are things that can happen to any of us.

That's why Universal Credit should offer support to anyone in need of help, but right now it's not providing enough income to cover the cost of life's essentials, such as food, household bills and travel costs. The basic rate is only £85 a week for a single adult – an amount which doesn't reflect what we need to afford the essentials. In fact it's £35 short of the £120 a week our research shows is needed to meet essential living costs. The shortfall this creates is forcing people to skip meals, switch off essential appliances and turn off their heating just to get by.

More and more people are going without the essentials

We expect Universal Credit to support us when we fall on hard times, but there is now a significant gap between people's income and their living costs, with around five in six low-income households receiving Universal Credit going without at least one essential right now. People often receive even less due to deductions, with money taken off automatically at unaffordable rates, often to pay off debts to government. Living in a country without a decent safety net is scary. It means we are not properly supported if we face challenging times and it's pushing more and more people to food banks. Without that safety net, a sudden change of circumstances can be hard to overcome, and people needing support for longer such as part-time workers with caring responsibilities or disabled people are falling through the cracks.

What's our solution?

We can't always deal with what life throws at us on our own, so we need to have a system that supports us all to afford the essentials if we face setbacks.

Last year, the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation launched our joint campaign, "Guarantee our Essentials". Our campaign objectives are two-fold. Firstly, we want to build a consensus within society that change is needed to social security so that it protects people from going without the essentials. Secondly, we want the UK Government to enshrine in law a basic rate of Universal Credit that is calculated at a level that is at least what people need to afford the essentials and can never be brought below this – an 'Essentials Guarantee'.

An Essentials Guarantee would:

- **Establish an independent process to regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level, linked to costs;**
- **Guarantee that the Universal Credit standard allowance rate must always meet this level;**
- **Ensure that various deductions can never drag support below this minimum level.**

When rising numbers of people are being left with no option but to use a food bank, it's time to reassess the systems we expect to support us all. It's time for politicians to act.

When people are going without, it's time to guarantee our essentials. That's why this General Election year, we're calling on political leaders from all parties to commit to the implementation of an 'Essentials Guarantee' into Universal Credit in their upcoming manifestos. This is vital to ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

We will be taking our campaign out to communities across the country

Our mobilisation campaign kicked off last autumn with food bank Days of Action in September, focused on key cities across the UK including Glasgow. Over 100 Trussell Trust food banks held street stalls or community events to talk to local people about our campaign, gathering signatures for our petition to all UK party leaders, calling on them to back an Essentials Guarantee.

We launched a high profile social media campaign, highlighting our message that Universal Credit is falling short and organised high profile activity at party conferences, including billboard stunts.



Here in Scotland, we were delighted that First Minister Humza Yousaf MSP pledged his support for an Essentials Guarantee in September's Programme for Government and more recently, former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has added his support to our campaign. Last month, dozens of celebrities, including Ed Sheeran, Liam Gallagher, Dame Emma Thompson, Carol Vorderman, Charlotte Ritchie and Delia Smith, backed an open letter to politicians calling for an Essentials Guarantee, co-written by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

As the momentum builds for change, we will be stepping up our campaigning to build a political consensus, that no one should need to turn to a food bank, showing the level of public concern about rising hardship and demonstrating the groundswell of support for an Essentials Guarantee.

We will shortly be handing in our petition to UK party leaders, demonstrating the strength of support for change. Across Scotland and the UK, we will be mobilising local communities, particularly in strategically important constituencies, to show their support for the campaign alongside our food bank network, who we are supporting to continue to engage locally.

We will be engaging with MSPs, MPs and parliamentary candidates across the country to show support for an Essentials Guarantee and the need for change.

And we will be seeking to capture the public's attention and get people talking about Universal Credit and how this vital system isn't protecting us from going without the essentials.

The upcoming General Election is an opportunity for us to end the scandal of millions going without the essentials

It's an opportunity to say enough is enough. It's time for the UK Government to put ending poverty at the heart of policy making. Poverty is a political choice and in a rich country like the UK, everyone should be able to afford the essentials. It's time for all political parties to listen to the public and act to end hunger in Scotland and across the UK. We urge political leaders to do the right thing and including an Essentials Guarantee in their manifestos.

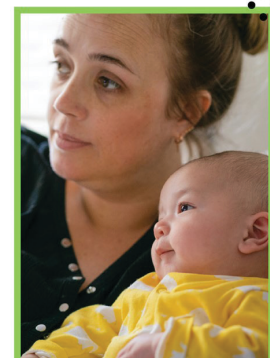
If you'd like to know more about how you can get involved in supporting our campaign, please contact **Cara Hilton at cara.hilton@trusselltrust.org**

AN ESSENTIALS GUARANTEE

Reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation:
Lucy Barnicoat, Peter Masego, Ian Porter,
Daisy Sands, Kasia Schmuecker, Andrew Warham.

The Trussell Trust:
Rachel Bull, Iwan Ferrer, Anna Hughes.



1. *Hunger in Scotland, June 2023, The Trussell Trust*
2. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/>



END YOUNG PARENT POVERTY!

One Parent Families Scotland Policy, Research and Influencing Lead Caitlin Logan talks about their campaigns to stop the injustice that sees younger lone parents given less social security support than others.

How it started

In March 2021, One Parent Families Scotland launched our campaign to restore the adult rate of benefits to parents under 25. This quickly gained support around the UK, and a letter was sent to the then Work and Pensions Secretary signed by over 90 organisations and 60 cross-party MPs.

Redressing the inequality and stark levels of poverty faced by young parent families was a cause that had been far too low on the agenda. Our friends at Child Poverty Action Group had filed a judicial review claim in 2019 challenging the lower standard allowance in Universal Credit for lone parents under 25, but unfortunately this was refused.

Young mums were coming to our parent groups in crisis because of the combined stresses of struggling to cover basic costs, being a new parent, and facing social judgement because of their age.

More young parents were being moved over to Universal Credit from “legacy benefits”, most often when their child turned five and their entitlement changed. Adding to their list of worries, our advisors had to explain that their basic rate would now be lower because, under the new system, they were no longer classed as adults. Meanwhile, others were claiming benefits for the first time, unable to make ends meet but unaware that they were receiving less than older parents.

Every parent we spoke to was shocked to learn that the DWP had decided to pay them even less, simply because of their age. Faced with this injustice, we had no choice but to launch our campaign to end the “young parent penalty”.

How it evolved

A lot has happened in the three years since we launched the campaign. A Scottish Parliament election. Two new Prime Ministers. Two new First Ministers. The ongoing fall out from Covid-19 and a cost-of-living crisis.

The responses we received from the UK Government diminished the experiences of young parents by saying that under 25s are more likely to live with their parents, and that the lower rate of benefits is meant to encourage them into work. Acknowledging this gulf of understanding, we took a step back and considered our strategy.

In April 2023, we launched a new phase of our campaign to ‘End Young Parent Poverty’, focused on the UK and Scottish Governments. An integral – and challenging – part of running any campaign is to be realistic, while never diluting your purpose. Balancing these considerations, and working closely with partners, we concluded that it was essential to urge the Scottish Government to act where the UK Government would not. By mitigating the young parent penalty with a Scottish Child Payment top-up, Scottish ministers could support children with young mums – a group they have identified as a priority for action on child poverty.

Alongside this, we became more ambitious in our call to the UK Government. Through discussions with partners and parliamentarians, we understood that a campaign for all under 25s to receive the adult rate of social security had the potential to gain widespread support. The case was made that poverty is cumulative, and trapping any young person in poverty is both inherently wrong and means that new young parents and their children will start from a worse position.

This campaign has been an excellent lesson in the strengths of partnership working. We can learn so much from each other, and only by doing so can we act as a unified voice for change.

So, what has changed?

One of the toughest aspects of any policy campaign is the knowledge that the end result will rarely be achieved as quickly as we need it to be. This is especially hard when we know people are suffering. However, it’s important to recognise our successes in order to build on them.

Over 80 organisations signed up to the campaign. It’s been covered on TV, radio, and multiple newspapers – shining a light on this injustice for new audiences. It’s among the key calls of the Scottish Campaign on Rights to Social Security and End Child Poverty in Scotland. MPs and MSPs have asked about it in the House of Commons and the Holyrood chamber.

We, and young parents we support, have met Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP on the issue. The minister has since Tweeted more than once about “age discrimination against the young in Universal Credit”.



Of course, neither government nor party policy is made on social media, but this surely tells us that our message is getting through.

We've involved young parents in the campaign, and, in the process, more have become awake to the unfairness they're facing. This is not a small thing – both because this will be needed to build momentum for change, and because perhaps the cruellest outcome of this policy and others like it is that, too often, people are left to feel as though their problems are individual ones.

Speaking to the BBC, young mum Olivia, who had to go to foodbanks just to keep her daughter fed, said: "There is that guilt there that you just want them to have everything, because that's what you do want for you kids. So, there's that in the back of your mind, am I doing enough? There is a bit of mum guilt."

This is why we campaign. Not because there are guarantees that political change will happen overnight, but because people deserve to know the way the system is treating them isn't right and that there are people who care enough to stand with them and fight for progress.

What lies ahead?

It is with this mixture of realism and hope that we look ahead to the General Election. With polls indicating a change in government, this is an opportunity to focus on convincing the Labour leadership of the merits of ending age discrimination in Universal Credit.

It's also a chance to urge other political parties to prioritise the issue in their own election campaigns, in turn raising awareness and applying pressure to the next government. The matter of priorities will be the greatest challenge in a year where numerous campaigns are sure to ramp up their efforts.



Young parents are an easily forgotten and often stigmatised group, so our aim will be to put their voices front and centre and work to shift the narrative about their lives, the reasons why they and their children need support, and the costs of doing nothing.

From April 2024, the National Living Wage age threshold will reduce from 23 to 21. SNP MP Martyn Day recently asked the UK Government whether it had investigated the merits of aligning the Universal Credit 'adult' age with the Living Wage; the response was that "no such assessment has been made". This arbitrary distinction might provide a good starting point for a probable future Labour

government to examine the logic of the policy. The next minister for work and pensions should have an answer for why this discrimination stands, especially when parents under 25 were classified as adults under the previous Labour administration.

One thing is certain: change won't be achieved by any one organisation, so we will have to work together across the UK to ensure this inequality is no longer one that politicians can ignore.



**I support an end
to discrimination
against under
25s in Universal
Credit.**

EndYoung
ParentPoverty



TAXING TIMES FOR TACKLING POVERTY

WHY TAX IS KEY TO SOLVING SCOTLAND'S POVERTY PROBLEM

Lewis Ryder-Jones is Oxfam Scotland's Advocacy Adviser



The Scottish Government can't afford to end Scotland's persistent poverty problem. The money just isn't there, or so we're often told.

Last December's Scottish Budget seemed to prove it. While it was a relief for many to see social security payments uprated and promised pay rises for social and childcare staff delivered, other key budget areas vital to ending poverty, like housing and employability support, were slashed. Stretched public finances meant difficult choices, Ministers said.

The truth is that Scotland remains a wealthy country, both in its own right, and as part of the UK. Ministers know what needs to be done to end poverty and build a fairer, more equal Scotland: holistic, joined up approaches to social security, public services, housing and the labour market. The solutions exist. It's the political will to invest in them that's missing, time and time again.

But let's be frank, even if Humza empties every piggy bank in Holyrood and then rummages down the back of his Bute House couch, he still won't have scraped together the cash needed for this transformational investment.

That's why it's time for the First Minister to fulfil his predecessor's promise to "be even bolder on taxation, and the redistribution of wealth". That means not only re-thinking the devolved tax system from the ground up to raise more money in the fairest possible way, but also making the case for big changes at UK level – particularly regarding how we tax wealth. This will help create the opportunity for transformational investment by both governments.

But fair tax reform needs to be about more than just fairly raising more revenue.



The tax system taken as a whole – encompassing taxes on income, wealth, consumption, and property, but also reliefs – is deeply unfair. Those on low and middle incomes generally pay a higher proportion of their incomes on taxes than the rich. Fair tax reform must also address this longstanding issue and support broader action that narrows yawning economic inequalities.

At Oxfam, we have long documented the link between poverty and inequality, particularly extreme wealth inequality.

Globally, there has been a wealth inequality explosion: last year the wealth of the world's five richest men ballooned by 114 per cent. Meanwhile, the wealth of the poorest 4.77 billion people (60 per cent) fell.

In stark contrast, extreme poverty is still higher than pre-pandemic levels and people worldwide are working harder and longer hours, often for poverty wages in precarious and unsafe jobs.

Across 52 countries, average real wages of nearly 800 million workers have fallen, with these workers losing a combined \$1.5 trillion (£1.2 trillion) over the last two years, equivalent to nearly a month of

lost wages each. The most recent Gini index – which measures inequality – found that global income inequality is now comparable with that of South Africa, the country with the highest inequality in the world.

If current trends continue, the world will have its first trillionaire within a decade, but poverty won't be eradicated for another 229 years. That would be bad news for all of us. Extreme inequality undermines our collective ability to tackle poverty, stop climate breakdown, and build more prosperous societies.

That's why Oxfam continues to call on governments everywhere to rapidly and radically reduce the gap between the super-rich and the rest. If the UK Government implemented a new wealth tax on British millionaires and billionaires at a rate of between one to two per cent on net wealth above £10 million, it could generate up to £22 billion each year. Just imagine the difference that money could make. Here in Scotland, we may not have many billionaires, but the wealthiest among us are earning more than ever, and the gap between them and the poorest is getting wider. New official statistics show that income inequality in Scotland has surged in recent years while Scotland's poverty rate remains stubbornly high.

**WE CAN'T PRESS SNOOZE ON
COMMON SENSE TAX REFORMS
TO HELP DELIVER A FAIRER
AND GREENER SCOTLAND**





Increasing income inequality, from already high levels, is intrinsically linked to Scotland's widening and grotesque wealth gap, with levels of wealth inequality even deeper than those related to incomes. It's obscene that Scotland's richest households have 217 times more wealth than the poorest.

Inequality fuels poverty and harms Scotland's economic prosperity. But it doesn't have to be this way.

While there is no doubt that the UK Government has a crucial role to play to ensure the economy better shares income and wealth through employment law, monetary policy and a range of common-sense tax reforms ensuring the richest pay their fair share, the Scottish Government – which has a national commitment to share wealth more equally – must, and can, act too.

That's why momentum for tax reform has been growing. Over the past 18 months, Oxfam Scotland has been working with many others, including the Poverty Alliance, to make the case for fundamental reform of the Scottish tax system.

Ahead of last year's Scottish Budget, we collectively laid out a series of progressive options to reform the Scottish tax system using devolved powers to make the system fairer while raising hundreds of millions of pounds annually in extra revenue.

Over 60 organisations jointly wrote to Scotland's party leaders asking them to work together to drive forward progress. We argued that a new and additional Income Tax band between the current Higher and Top rates, could raise significant additional revenues, but also made it clear that pursuing new levers and kickstarting long overdue reform – not least on local tax – is vital too.

The Scottish Government heeded the call on Income Tax and brought forward a new 'Advanced Rate' and other tweaks that make Scotland's Income Tax system significantly fairer than the rest of the UK. In the round, these changes and others made since 2017 will raise an additional £1.5 billion in 2024-25.

And while that's positive, we can't afford for it to be the end of the story.

Even the Scottish Government's own advisory body, Scotland's Poverty and Inequality Commission, has published analysis which says "substantial reform of tax policy is required". And bolder action on tax isn't just common sense, a consistent and significant majority of people in Scotland say they want increased fair taxation to boost spending on health, education and social security.

With much of Scotland's wealth locked up in property, reforming property taxation is an obvious place to start. The Council Tax is badly outdated, deeply regressive, and hits the poorest the hardest.

This makes it all the more puzzling that the Scottish Government effectively cancelled out any poverty-busting gains made through fair Income Tax increases in the last Budget through a simultaneous backhander to the better off through the Council Tax freeze. Analysis has shown that this disproportionately benefits wealthier households and does little to help those on low incomes.

The Scottish Government must end this inconsistent approach and stop stumbling from one short-term Budget to the next. There is no doubt that reform will take time, so clear, unwavering commitment to change is vital.

So that's why the Scottish Government must press the UK Government to act while ensuring its own upcoming tax strategy charts a new course, ensuring that every part of the devolved tax system helps to reduce poverty and inequality. Such action isn't just a moral imperative; it's an economic necessity. No longer can our economy be built on the survival of the richest.



BETTER BUSES FOR SCOTLAND



Ellie Harrison is an artist and activist based in Glasgow. She is chair of Get Glasgow Moving and a founder of Better Buses for Strathclyde.

The campaign for better buses in Scotland has been behind efforts in England – but we’re catching up fast.

In February, the Better Buses for Strathclyde campaign handed in a petition with nearly 10,000 names to the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT).

It was the latest in a series of actions that we’ve been taking over the last six months to get SPT to take Strathclyde’s bus network back into public control. Our campaign was inspired by the success of others in the North of England, where a quiet revolution in public transport is now well underway.

Regional bus networks, which have been deregulated and privatised since the 1980s, are slowly but surely being brought back into public control. Greater Manchester is leading the charge.

The first phase of their new ‘Bee Network’ integrated public transport system was launched in September 2023. By January 2025 every bus across the ten local authorities in the region will be publicly-controlled by their transport authority, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), and painted yellow in matching Bee Network livery.

There will be simple, affordable integrated ticketing across bus, tram, rail and bike hire. This is something which is, of course, the norm in most other European city regions (and in London), which have not been forced to endure the crazed free-market experiment of bus deregulation imposed by Thatcher’s government in 1986. The closest we have in Scotland is in Edinburgh, where Lothian Trams and Lothian Buses (which escaped the process of privatisation) are both still publicly-owned, and where day tickets allow seamless changes between the two different modes of travel.



The contrast between our capital and the expensive, and uncoordinated mess we have in Glasgow and Strathclyde could not be starker (a single on Lothian is £2, whilst on privatised First Bus it's at least £2.85).

Back in England it's the Liverpool City Region that will be next, with its Mayor Steve Rotherham announcing on 6 October 2023 that they would proceed with re-regulating buses across the six local authorities in the Merseytravel area. The first publicly-controlled buses should be rolling through the streets of St Helens in 2026. West Yorkshire Combined Authority is hot on their heels and South Yorkshire is then likely to follow. This means, within the next five years, the 8.5 million people living in this contiguous area across the North of England will have access to properly regulated buses run in the public interest (alongside the 8.8 million in London who always have). Huge patronage growth is expected, with sustainable and affordable public transport finally available to all.

Scotland cannot be left behind. And now – despite the Scottish Government's four-year delay in enacting the new powers in the Transport Act 2019, which finally came into effect on 4 December 2023 – SPT has the opportunity to do something even more radical.

As a result of Get Glasgow Moving's persistent campaign at the Scottish Parliament in 2018-2019, the Transport Act was amended to enable transport authorities in Scotland to set-up new publicly-owned bus operators for the first time since 1986. This is still illegal in England (although UK Labour has pledged to lift the ban if elected later this year). It means that SPT can not only re-regulate the region's bus network – it can also bring more-and-more of it into public ownership as well.

Establishing a new 'Strathclyde Buses' (co-owned by the twelve local authorities in the region through SPT) will, in the longer-term, offer a much simpler and more cost-effective way of delivering fully integrated public transport.

This is why the public ownership of transport operations is, again, the norm in most other parts of the world. It's worth remembering that more than 50% of the income for Scotland's private bus companies comes from the public purse.

We hope our campaign will set a precedent for other Scottish regions to follow. Everyone in Scotland deserves access to a publicly-owned, affordable, reliable and accountable bus service, like those provided by Edinburgh's Lothian Buses. And it's only by making this a reality that we stand any chance of meeting pressing climate targets, not least the Scottish Government's target of reducing car miles by 20% by 2030.

We need to see new Better Buses campaigns up and running in Tayside and Grampian and elsewhere to put pressure on their respective transport authorities to follow SPT's lead. And we need the Scottish Government to put its money where its mouth is: to look and learn from the quiet revolution unfolding down south, and to properly empower and fund our regional transport authorities public bodies so they can deliver the world-class, fully-integrated public transport networks that we urgently need.

Join the Better Buses for Strathclyde campaign at: betterbuses.uk/Strathclyde. You can find a list of other grassroots Better Buses campaigns at: betterbuses.uk



COMING TOGETHER TO CHALLENGE POVERTY



Alyson Laird is Campaigns Officer for The Poverty Alliance and plays a key role in the development and delivery of Challenge Poverty Week. She explores what campaigning in 2024 will look like.

Scotland is a wealthy country, but the injustice of poverty is felt widely across our communities.

Anti-poverty campaigners know the statistics, and we know the impact that the pandemic, and the current cost-of-living crisis have had on them. There has been very little positive change over the last decade with almost 1 in 5 adults still living in poverty after housing costs, and almost a quarter of children in Scotland living in poverty. As a reporter on STV said recently, these statistics are losing their shock factor we say them so often. Campaigning to end poverty can be tiring, and progress can be slow. Many working in the third sector are experiencing burnout, and many living in the grip of poverty see no way to free themselves.

How do we keep momentum with this as our starting point?

Challenge Poverty Week (CPW) is a good example of a campaign where solidarity and collective action are essential, based on our common values of compassion and justice. It is a campaign which provides hope that a different, more equal, Scotland is possible - CPW

continues to serve as a crucial platform to highlight the challenges faced by those living in poverty and to advocate for meaningful change.

CPW 2023, in some ways, felt like it had been recharged. There was a flurry of activity over the course of the week and organisations who may have not typically got involved found their own space and voice within the anti-poverty movement. Our voices were loud and we will continue to build on this work for 2024.

In 2023, more than 500 organisations joined us in calling for an end to poverty in Scotland – this was around 30% more than had taken part in 2022. There continues to be demand for and engagement with this campaign, it is supported by many organisations who align closely with Poverty Alliance values. We worked alongside our members to present solutions, and joined them in highlighting the lived-experience of poverty in Scotland. During Challenge Poverty Week there are local events, national events, activity across social media, lessons taking place in classrooms and colleges, webinars to inform and involve individuals, and a whole host of passion and enthusiasm felt across the week. Everyone is fighting for the same cause and with our priorities aligned.



A crucial part of our campaign is engaging with policymakers, and in particular the Scottish Government. In 2023, anti-poverty campaigners who have lived-experience of poverty met with the First Minister to detail what their experience is and how things could change to ensure everyone in Scotland has the essentials they need – a safe secure home, reliable and affordable public transport, and dignified access to food.

CPW is a well-known campaign, which organisations participate in every year and 2024 will come with the same energy. We will continue to engage with organisations from all sectors and continue to come together during CPW to highlight the collective action of the anti-poverty movement. It's a campaign we are all working on all year round as we continue anti-poverty work across our various areas of work and expertise.

General Election Campaigning

Evidence from CPW (as well as from other campaigns) highlights that The Poverty Alliance and its members play a key role in achieving change, and we are characterised by the campaigns we run.

As we move closer to a General Election announcement, we will see a flurry of political campaigns pop-up all across the country. Candidates from all parties will tell us about their priorities. They'll tell us how they will make life better for Scottish people by using their voices in Westminster to stand-up for communities. Campaign teams will chap doors rain, hail, or shine to chat about how their candidate is worth your vote.

Leaflets will come through your letter box with photos of candidates standing with well-known local faces and emblazoned with party logos. The media will be dominated with hustings events, party political broadcasts and likely a few controversial stories. For a while, in that world, it will be the only thing that matters. The campaigns will be well-organised, energetic and - for a short time - they will dominate our lives.

Anti-poverty campaigners will have an important role to play in this. We can work to ensure that political parties and their candidates prioritise solutions to end poverty in Scotland. There is incredible power in a group of people coming together to call for change and The Poverty Alliance, with its membership, are in a useful position where we can campaign and advocate for change.

One of our priority campaigns for 2024 is the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) a simple yet transformational idea that no-one in Scotland will be allowed to fall below the income they need. If you attended our annual conference back in November 2023 you may have been inspired to campaign further to see its implementation. The Poverty Alliance have received funding from abrdn Financial Fairness to progress work on the MIG, and we hope you will join us in supporting this important policy. Building awareness and support around a MIG is the main aim of this campaign and making further progress towards an MIG in Scotland.





At one time or another we have all been part of a campaign whether you are involved in Challenge Poverty Week each year, or running your own anti-poverty campaign, perhaps you have added your name to a letter or petition to signal support for a cause or perhaps you are trying to stop the closure of a local library or ensuring a vital local bus service continues to run.

Our collective responsibility

In the words of environmental campaigner, Greta Thunberg: “no one is too small to make a difference” and in campaigning for causes we are passionate about we must remember this. It is our collective action that drives change and we all have a role to play.

Campaigning serves as a catalyst for change, yielding tangible results that benefit those affected by poverty and with a General Election on the horizon now is the time for us to ramp up those efforts. This a pivotal point where we must ensure that poverty is high up the list of priorities for the incoming Government. We are in a position where we are well informed of the solutions to end poverty, and therefore we each have a role and responsibility to engage with and challenge party candidates to support those calls. By engaging in dialogue and advocating for meaningful solutions, we can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive society.

What now?

The challenge of poverty is a continuous fight for Poverty Alliance members and the harsh and unfair reality for many people living on low incomes that we work alongside, but it doesn't have to be like this. It's imperative that we continue to amplify the voices of individuals and communities affected by poverty.

Meaningful campaign actions take many forms and if you're not sure where to start we would encourage you to:

- *Write about your own work in supporting anti-poverty policies – is there a platform for you to write a blog, or you can write something for national or local press perhaps about your experience or the work you do?*
 - *Get to know the policymakers – whether it is locally elected representatives, Members of the Scottish Parliament or Members of the UK Parliament, get to know who represents you and let them know what changes you want to see through meetings, letters and petitions.*
- With each of these actions, and more, The Poverty Alliance can offer support, so please don't hesitate to get in touch if there's a campaign action you want to take but you're not quite sure how to get there yet.
- *Reach beyond your network – it is likely that you are already supportive of the policy solutions to end poverty but who needs convincing? The bigger the movement the more powerful it will be, keep aiming to bring more supporters on board!*
 - *Use social media to share key messages – graphics and videos are an effective way to get your messages across on social media.*



MEMBERSHIP:

JOIN US!

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

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

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name and designation of contact person: _____

Name and address of organisation: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

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

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

*PLEASE CONTACT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE FOR DETAILS

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

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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

The Poverty Alliance, Standard Buildings, 94 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6PH
 T: 0141 353 0440 | E: admin@povertyalliance.org | www.povertyalliance.org