

Patricia Ferguson MP
Member of Parliament for Glasgow West

Submission to the Child Poverty Taskforce

On the 18th February 2025 representatives from eleven third sector organisations from across the Glasgow West constituency were brought together by Patricia Ferguson MP, to discuss the issue of child poverty and the key questions being considered by the UK Child Poverty Taskforce.

The participants in this event represented a range of front-line organisations working with children and families in communities across Glasgow West.

With relative child poverty in the Glasgow West constituency at 28.4% in 2022/23, which is 8.4% above the UK level; and the absolute child poverty rate at 22.8%, compared to 15.9% for the whole of the UK, Patricia Ferguson MP felt it was important to capture the everyday experiences and wealth of knowledge from these key workers and to share with the Taskforce as they develop a strategy to reduce and alleviate child poverty.

The following information provides an overview of the participants' thinking in relation to:

- **The key factors contributing to child poverty in the communities of Glasgow West**
- **The most effective actions that could be taken – at a local, regional, and national level – to alleviate these problems**
- **The main asks of national government that would make the biggest difference to children in poverty locally**

Key factors and main challenges

“People already feel defeated”

The overwhelming consensus among participants was that the current situation means that incomes and financial support are so low that they do not allow families to have a lifestyle that affords them a level of dignity most people take for granted. Families are unable to fund basic necessities, meaning children often go to school with holes in their shoes, and they lack enough financial leeway that a child playing and ripping their trousers can be enough to tip a family over the edge. This feeling of fragility is reinforced by the fact that families' financial struggles prevent them from planning for even the most predictable of circumstances. Participants noted that putting money aside for school holidays is often impossible, meaning extended periods of time off for children, where an extra meal a day to be produced, or heating on a little longer, can again push families deeper into poverty. Increases in the cost of living have not been matched by an increase in wages or benefits, and families are struggling more than ever to make the

little money they have stretch further. Children are also all too aware of the financial pressures their parents are facing, detracting from their ability to enjoy being children. One participant, a volunteer running a local youth centre, highlighted this, reflecting on her experience of taking a group of children on a day out and giving them each £5 to buy lunch. One of the children asked if he could forgo lunch so that he could take the money home to his mum so she could buy bread and milk.

The following is a summary of the key challenges contributing to child poverty in Glasgow West identified during the discussion:

Social Security and entitlements

- The difficulty of navigating two different benefits systems (DWP & Social Security Scotland) and local authority provided support, including the lack of communication between agencies
- The impact of numerous changes within the welfare system
- The welfare system does not provide for a dignified lifestyle – this is compounded by sanctions and debt
- Universal Credit – the lack of managed migration through the very lengthy claim processing time during which legacy benefits are ended, meaning claimants can often start off in debt
- Digital exclusion – the journal process is frustrating, difficult and unresponsive
- The welfare system moves people towards ‘incapacity’ by being seen to provide greater support for incapacity, rather than promoting and rewarding capacity
- Lack of knowledge of entitlements which can often lead to debt accruing due to paying for something for which there is an entitlement (i.e. free school meals)
- Complex processes, such as applying for a Young Scot entitlement card which gives access to free bus travel. A British birth certificate is required to qualify
- Newly arrived families have no access to public funds – it takes too long to move them through the immigration system, all the while they are missing out on critical support such as access to free school meals

Work, training and other opportunities

- Availability of employment and the challenge of getting young people into employment
- Breaking the cycle of worklessness (intergenerational worklessness)
- Providing meaningful opportunities and a more positive outlook
- Cost of working – such as commuting costs and work clothes
- Brexit removed opportunities for people to seek well paid work in Europe
- Adults lack financial skills meaning that they struggle to know how to handle the money they may receive as benefits

Key services

- Housing availability and affordability
- Temporary housing provides no access to warm homes discount
- Pre-payment energy costs

- Lack of access to services – withdrawal of face-to-face services and support, compounded by digital exclusion
- Lack of services due to cutbacks
- Lack of available/accessible/affordable transport which presents a barrier to accessing services and opportunities
- Cuts to mental health services has had a massive impact, compounded by pressures on GP services
- Lack of support once a positive asylum decision is made when people move from Home Office accommodation
- Services do not reflect the experience on the ground and many organisations find their work starts once the typical working day is over when it is difficult to access support and when children have left the safety of school and are going home, often difficult circumstances

Other challenges

- Language barriers and additional communication needs/challenges
- Lack of ESOL availability in Glasgow & the cost of interpretation services
- Managing lifestyle burdens – parenting, caring, working responsibilities
- “Digital by Default” approach of so many key service providers present barriers and challenges to the digitally excluded
- ‘Adultisation’ of children. Some children are being taken out of school to attend appointments with their parents in order that they can translate for parents who have little or no English and are being asked to read correspondence for their parents. Often, they are exposed to information/situations that children shouldn’t be exposed to; children are effectively acting as carers to their parents
- Diversity being lost from communities – wealth and variety in life experience play an important part in encouraging aspiration but often this is being lost in the communities that need it most as children lack role models as those who go to university or otherwise are seen to have achieved move away from the community
- Financial issues disincentivising aspiration – for example, parents stop receiving child benefits but need to financially support children going to college or university, this generates an incentive for the child to enter the workforce so they can contribute to supporting the family
- Emotional based school avoidance – children from households where parents do not work, and do not therefore get up in the morning or sometimes don’t leave the home during the day, often copy this pattern of behaviour and avoid school.

Effective actions

It was widely recognised by participants that families have become reliant on local organisations – often voluntary ones – to provide basic support and fill the gaps where government cuts have restricted or closed critical services. However, this increase in demand is not being reflected in the funding organisations receive. Participants expressed frustration that they were being expected to offer more for less. Moreover, the

irregularity of funding means organisation's attention is increasingly diverted to sourcing donations and filling out complicated application forms instead of focusing on providing their service. One participant reflected that it was 'the unpredictability that's killing people', noting that she would rather have less money on a more consistent basis. Many suggestions for improvements were put forward, and these have been listed below.

Social Security and entitlements

- Greater flexibility within the benefits system
- Better managed transition between benefits and off benefits
- End the 'cliff edge' – too many people lose additional support/entitlements because they are just a little over a threshold
- Review the lower Universal Credit payment for under 18s
- Tapering child benefits to provide support for young people whilst they attend college or university

Work, training and other opportunities

- Incentivise training and work
- Mitigate the impact that receiving the £110 per week training allowance has on Universal Credit eligibility
- More training opportunities and well-paid employment should be provided

Key services

- Reinstate phone lines and face to face opportunities to engage with key service providers rather than having service providers working from home
- Address digital exclusion
- Improve availability and affordability of public transport
- Improve processes for obtaining a Young Scot eligibility card, including addressing the need for a British birth certificate
- Explore ways of making public transport cheaper – fare caps and off-peak travel
- Improving communications between schools and other organisations to aid early intervention – fears about breaking GDPR is preventing effective sharing of information between those who work with children and those who offer support
- Provide financial support for schools to hire specialists to support children transitioning back to attending school
- Speed up response/processing times – resolving issues more quickly lessens the impact upon children and their families
- Clearing backlogs and shortening waiting lists to ensure those who require urgent support are able to access it at the point of need – a particular issue when accessing mental health services, where intervention often needs to occur with speed

Other challenges

- Increase access to ESOL classes (there is a current 4 year waiting list in areas of Glasgow)

- Core funding for third sector service providers – the lack of continuity of funding provides a challenge to key local service providers who are, in many cases, holding communities together
- Improve access to affordable & healthy food
- Providing mental health support for adults to prevent trauma being passed on to younger generations

“The lack of continuity in staffing for community groups impacts on trust in the community. You lose experience, you create instability, and local people find it soul destroying to have to re-tell their story to different staff”

Summary of key issues and main asks

When seeking to eradicate child poverty, the aim must be to strive for better family life. This should be the focus of future government work at all levels. The current system places a significant burden low-income families to work as much as possible in order to provide financial support for their family, but this can alienate them from their children, creating a negative knock-on impact on family relationships. One participant recalled a 13-year child describing how much he missed spending time with his mum who was working so hard that she had not found the time to sit down and cuddle him since he was 7. Participants highlighted the work of a local voluntary organisation which offers addiction support for adults and provides free lunch and toys so families can sit down and eat and play together, ensuring that receiving critical support is a positive experience for the whole family. We have concluded below with a summary of the main issues that were discussed and what was felt to be the most important steps to be taken going forward.

Social Security

- Navigating two different benefits systems (DWP & Social Security Scotland)
- Complexity of the systems
- Challenges faced by those for speakers of other languages; those with additional needs; and the digitally excluded

Access to public services

- The importance and contribution of the Community Sector is not recognised
- The inconsistency of funding is a barrier to the vital work carried out by local community groups and organisations
- The Third Sector is, in many instances, holding communities together and government does not seem to recognise this vital contribution

The impact of Covid

- The social damage caused by Covid has not been fully recognised
- The withdrawal of essential face to face services (such as via Council and Housing providers) which have never been reinstated present a challenge for people trying to engage with vital service providers
- School exclusion has never been tackled and reversed

Integrated Service Provision

- The need for a place-based approach – importance of different organisations being geographically close
- The importance of service providers working together – health, housing, transport, employment services etc.
- Community mapping of local support to prevent groups doubling up on work, making support more targeted and efficient

Family Life

- The impact of people taking on multiple jobs to make work pay

“The impact of poverty stays, and we all need to work together to tackle it. We need good creative solutions to make better use of existing resources”

Participants

Jane Cowie & Philip Brentwood - **The Annexe Healthy Living Centre (Partick)**

Danny Paton - **Drumchapel Advocacy Project**

Pauline Carruthers - **Drumchapel Children’s Rights Project**

Fiona Temple – **Drumchapel Citizens Advice Bureau**

Patricia Butler - **Drumchapel Credit Union**

Drumchapel High School (written submission)

Samantha McInnes - **Drumchapel Money Advice**

Gerard Espie – **Dumbarton Road Corridor Youth Project**

Joyce Bell - **G15 Youth Project**

Gary Gentles – **Knightswood Community Centre**

Lyndsay Murray – **Langfaulds Primary School**

Rachel Ferguson – **LINKES (Knightswood)**

Councillor Bill Butler - **Garscadden/Scotstounhill ward**

Councillor Eunis Jassemi - **Victoria Park ward**

Kirsty McNeill MP - **Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Scotland Office)**

Patricia Ferguson MP - **Member of Parliament for Glasgow West**

Owen Mooney - **Child Poverty Task Force representative**