

CELCIS response to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Poverty's inquiry into poverty and stigma: call for written evidence

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CELCIS, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, is based at the University of Strathclyde. CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care. We welcome the opportunity to provide our views and evidence to inform the Cross-Party Group's inquiry into poverty and stigma. Our submission focuses on the experience and impact of poverty and stigma for children, young people and families in need of care and protection, and is based on research evidence, practice and policy experience and expertise offered through our long-standing, cross-organisational networks, including with people who have lived experience of poverty, stigma and discrimination.

Child poverty in Scotland

The number of children living in poverty in Scotland is high and increasing. 260,000 children (26%) were living in relative poverty in 2019-20, an increase from 210,000 (18%) in 2014-15.¹ Children's economic rights are a fundamental part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)². The UNCRC enshrines children's rights not simply to survive, but to develop to their full potential; requiring an adequate standard of living that ensures they can develop physically, mentally and socially, meeting their best interests and best health. When children live in poverty, all of these rights are eroded.

As the CPG's inquiry is aware, in addition to the difficulties of fundamentally getting by, people living in poverty also face the impact of poverty-related stigma, resulting in unwarranted social exclusion and shame.³ As the cost of living crisis escalates in Scotland now, so too will the scale and experience of poverty. This is in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pressures of which have been compounded for some families by the stigma they experience around poverty.⁴

¹ Scottish Government (2021) [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland](https://data.gov.scot/poverty/xls/All%20single%20year.xlsx). Table 3 at Tab '1 Rel AHC' <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/xls/All%20single%20year.xlsx>

² General Assembly of the United Nations (1989) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Geneva: General Assembly of the United Nations

³ Lister, R. (2015). 'To count for nothing': poverty beyond the statistics. *Journal of British Academy*, 3, 139-165

⁴ McHardy, F., Robertson, L., Cloughton, B. & White, G. (2021) [Living through a pandemic: Experiences of low-income families in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde](#). Poverty Alliance & Get Heard.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, sets out targets for addressing child poverty and requirements for Scottish Government and local authorities to report on their plans to do so, as well as establishing a statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission to report on any progress made. Whilst CELCIS welcomes recent commitments from Scottish Government to double the Scottish Child Payment, the most recent report from this commission is clear that without further significant action, the targets set out in legislation will be missed, demonstrating the need for further action as a matter of urgency.⁵

Poverty and children in need of care and protection

Over 14,000 children are 'looked after' by Scottish local authorities, and over 7,000 young people are eligible for 'aftercare'.⁶ This includes young people who are care leavers, and children who are currently being cared for in foster care, residential care, kinship care, or living at home with one or both birth parents whilst receiving support from social work; all of these young people are care experienced. There are also 2,645 children 'at risk of significant harm' and thus on a Child Protection Register in Scotland. Furthermore, there are children who are in need of care and protection who may not be identified or recorded within formal child protection systems.⁷

All of these children are in need of care and protection but their individual circumstances and needs will vary. All children and young people in need of care and protection have encountered difficulties in their lives, often experiencing trauma, abuse, and neglect. The main concerns leading to registration on a Child Protection Register in Scotland in 2020 were domestic abuse (43%), neglect (42%), emotional abuse (39%) and parental mental health (39%).⁸ These are factors which are often intertwined with, and exacerbated by, poverty, yet research indicates in social work practice, poverty is rarely identified or described as a risk factor for children.⁹

Poverty does not cause child abuse and neglect: abuse and neglect are present across all spectrums of society, and the vast majority of families living in poverty love and care for their children. However, there is a complex link between poverty, child abuse and neglect, and the cumulative effect of stresses and difficulties of living with poverty may be the tipping point for some families.¹⁰ Poverty can impact directly on families through material hardship; and also through neighbourhood conditions and parental stress, stigma and shame. These impacts can interact with other factors known to affect the prevalence of child

⁵ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2021) [Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress 2020-2021 Scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission](#)

⁶ Scottish Government (2021) [Children's social work statistics 2019-2020](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government

⁷ Gilbert, R., Spatz-Widom, C., Browne, K., Fergusson, D., Webb, E. & Janson, S. (2009) 'Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries.' *The Lancet* 373: 68-81.

⁸ Scottish Government (2021) [Children's social work statistics 2019-2020](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government

⁹ Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G. & Webb, C. (2018). 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364-372

¹⁰ Scullin, K & Galloway, S (2014) [Challenges from the frontline: Supporting families with multiple adversity at time of austerity](#), Barnardo's & NSPCC.

abuse and neglect, such as parental substance use; domestic violence; parental health (both physical and emotional), lower education levels, learning disability and social isolation.¹¹

A 2016 Joseph Rowntree Foundation evidence review led by Professor Paul Bywaters on the relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect found a strong association between families' socio-economic circumstances and the chances that children will experience child abuse and neglect.¹² There is a very strong association between the level of neighbourhood deprivation and the proportion of children who are 'looked after' or on a children protection register.¹³ In Scotland, children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods were found to be around 20 times more likely to be looked after or on the child protection register than children in the least deprived 10%.¹⁴ Despite this, poverty, and the unnecessary stigma and social exclusion this brings, are often overlooked as a factor contributing to children experiencing formal interventions in their care and protection.

In addition to the disproportionate impact of poverty on children in need of care and protection, evidence indicates poverty and financial precariousness continue to have a significant and detrimental impact on the lives of many care experienced people into adulthood.¹⁵ Leaving home at an earlier age than many young people and often lacking the safety net of financial support from family, care leavers are much more likely to be encounter the effects of debt and poverty.¹⁶ At a time in history where young people in general have to depend on their families for emotional, financial and practical support for longer, young people leaving care are expected to cope with the financial demands and complexities of independent living at a much younger age.¹⁷ This is recognised by the Scottish Government, with a number of policies designed to enhance financial support for care leavers, such as the Care Experienced Student Bursary¹⁸ and the Care Experience Grant (yet to commence, but announced in the 2021-22 Programme for Government)¹⁹. In Wales, this has resulted in the prioritisation of care leavers for entitlement to a Universal Basic Income, which

¹¹ Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) [The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review](#), York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹² Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) [The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review](#), York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Pg.3

¹³ Bywaters, P, et al. (2020) 'Child welfare inequalities in the four nations of the UK', *Journal of Social Work*, 20(2), pp. 193-215

¹⁴ Bywaters, P, et al. (2017) [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 4: Scotland](#)

¹⁵ Ayre, D, et al (2016) [The Cost Being Care Free](#). London: The Children's Society

¹⁶ Eisenstadt, N. (2017) *The Life Chances of Young People in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government;

McGhee, K. (2017) [Care leavers and council tax exemption](#). Glasgow: CELCIS

¹⁷ Stein, M (2005) [Resilience and Young People Leaving Care: Overcoming the odds](#). Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹⁸ https://www.celcis.org/application/files/7415/8376/8320/care-experienced-bursary-faqs_.pdf

¹⁹ Scottish Government (2021) [A fairer, greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government

is currently being piloted.²⁰ The British Cohort Study evidence indicates being 'looked after' as a child has a sustained impact on a number of socio-economic outcomes, including reduced income, lower socio-economic status and unemployment.²¹ Researchers and authors are clear that rather than a further source of shame or stigma for families, policy and practice must address these findings.

Section 1: Impacts of stigma

1. What is the scale and extent of poverty-related stigma in Scotland?

While stigma has a pervasive impact on people living in poverty, additional forms of stigma also impact on children, young people and families who are in need of care and protection. Negative views about care impact on children and families' relationships and their inclusion in communities and school life. Being singled out, bullied or treated differently, the use of stigmatising language, limited respect for privacy, and the proliferation of negative statistics about life chances are just some of the experiences of stigma encountered by children and families and heard by Scotland's Independent Care Review.²² When talking about experiences of social work and child protection practice, families have spoken of feelings of shame and stigma from simply having professionals involved in their lives.²³ For many children, young people and families in need of care and protection then, there is an intersectionality of experiences of stigma, both in terms of poverty related stigma, and stigma associated with state intervention in family life. The shame induced by poverty related stigma can prevent people from reaching out for help, and so it is even more difficult to understand the true extent of poverty related stigma in Scotland.

2. What are the key impacts of poverty-related stigma on you and/or the people that your organisation works with?

Poverty related stigma has real psychological impacts, and is strongly associated with feelings of shame.²⁴ Alongside the direct experience of poverty and the stress of managing without enough money, shame leaves individuals with feelings of low self-worth, powerlessness and feeling blamed for their situation. Despite the fact that surviving on a low income requires significant skills, people living in poverty continue to be stigmatised and experience shame, particularly

²⁰ Welsh government (2022) *Press Release: Basic income for care leavers in Wales, pilot announced.* <https://gov.wales/basic-income-care-leavers-wales-pilot-announced>

²¹ Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Pg.3

²² Baker, C., Griesbach, D. & Waterton, J. (2020) 'Stigma: The experience of stigma for children and young people in care.' *Evidence Framework*, Independent Care Review.

²³ Gupta, A. (2015) Poverty and shame: messages for social work. *Critical & Radical Social Work* (3)1 131-39.

²⁴ Lister, R. (2013) 'Power, not pity: poverty and human rights', *Ethics and Social Welfare* 7(2) 109-23.

related to parenting.²⁵ One study²⁶ described parents feeling "'horrible', 'embarrassed', or 'dreadful' about having to accept help from others or not managing to provide for their families... and responses of 'feeling guilty', 'feeling rotten', 'awkward', 'useless', 'letting myself down', or 'ashamed' were common in relation to how they viewed their inability to provide for children" (Chase and Walker, 2014: 164).

Behavioural responses to shame can include withdrawal and social isolation, as well as avoidance of feelings of shame through coping mechanisms such as substance use and self-harm.²⁷ For parents, this can not only exacerbate difficulties which may be posing risks to their children, but also act as a barrier to seeking or engaging with support, for fear of being further shamed, judged, or of failing. Shame and stigma associated with poverty is thought to cause considerable underreporting of challenges faced by families experiencing poverty.²⁸ Shame and stigma can make people feel so awful that that they choose not to access their entitlements, because the onerous requirements to prove eligibility are themselves shaming.

Failure to understand the complex nature of poverty-related inequality has a direct impact on child welfare interventions.²⁹ When professionals (for example, social workers, health visitors, education practitioners, etc.) are involved in families' lives, the impact of poverty-related stigma can prevent parents from truly voicing their circumstances, experiences and the reasons for the decisions they make. Instead, this leaves them beholden to the preconceptions of professionals who may individualise risk and judge or blame parents rather than recognise the complex interaction between structural and individual factors on families' lives. Where families anticipate shaming or disrespectful responses, it is understandable that they may avoid or resist such interactions. The attitudes and behaviours of practitioners who fail to critically reflect upon the experiences and impact of poverty, and to be poverty aware, leaves families feeling othered, unrecognised, disrespected and dismissed.³⁰ Inappropriate support plans may be developed where families are not properly listened to and understood. For example, referrals made to parenting programmes to change parental behaviour, rather than tackling the root causes of issues resulting from material deprivation by providing the funds or material things families need.³¹

²⁵ Featherstone, B., Morris, K., Daniel, B., Bywaters, P., Brady, G., Bunting, L., Mason, W. & Mirza, N. (2019) 'Poverty, inequality, child abuse and neglect: Changing the conversation across the UK in child protection?' *Children and Youth Services Review*, 97, 127-133

²⁶ Chase, E., & Walker, R. (2014). 'The 'Shame of Shame: Experiences of People Living in Poverty in Britain.'. In Chase, E. & Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, G. (Eds.), *Poverty and shame: Global experiences*, Oxford: OUP, 161--174.

²⁷ Gupta, A. (2015) Poverty and shame: messages for social work. *Critical & Radical Social Work* (3)1 131-39.

²⁸ Includem (2021) [VOICES: Families Experiences of Poverty and Services](#). Glasgow: Includem

²⁹ McCartan, C., Morrison, A., Bunting, L., Davidson, G. & McIlroy, J. (2018) 'Stripping the Wallpaper of Practice: Empowering Social Workers to Tackle Poverty'. *Social Sciences*, 7, 193-209

³⁰ Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H. & ATD Fourth World (2018) Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: the contribution of 'the politics of recognition&respect', *European Journal of Social Work*, 21:2, 247-259

³¹ McCartan, C., Morrison, A., Bunting, L., Davidson, G. & McIlroy, J. (2018) 'Stripping the Wallpaper of Practice: Empowering Social Workers to Tackle Poverty'. *Social Sciences*, 7, 193-209

Kinship care is any circumstance where a child is being raised by a friend or family member other than their parent(s). Whilst research suggests children in kinship care feel less stigma than children living with non-relative carers³², evidence based on 2001 census data showed that children in kinship care families are disproportionately living in the poorest households across Scotland, and there are particularly complex issues surrounding kinship carers' access to financial support and social security payments.³³ Poverty-related stigma is a further factor impacting on kinship carers who are often suddenly and unexpectedly asked to take on full time care of one or more children, which entails significant financial responsibilities.

For children, the impact of poverty related stigma can affect social relationships and sense of self. All children strive to form friendships, belong to social groups and take part in activities. Poverty can not only restrict children's direct access to opportunities, leaving them marginalised, but also has a pervasive impact on their feelings and confidence. Children experience embarrassment, anxiety, shame, worry and sadness: high emotional costs, impacting on self-esteem and self-worth.³⁴

3. How does poverty-related stigma impact on communities that are more likely to be affected by poverty?

Powerful constructions and false narratives of deprived neighbourhoods as "no-go areas" contribute to stigma which associate physical spaces and places (and those within them) with risk, decay and anti-social or morally questionable behaviour.³⁵ Myths are perpetuated that all individuals living in a particular area belong there due to poverty, that they are there because of their own fault, and also that everyone that is poor lives in 'rough areas' and is uneducated.³⁶

Further impacts include a lack of investment in the local environment and limited activities/amenities for children, despite safe use of public spaces being essential for children with limited space at home.³⁷ This lack of apparent investment for the buildings, physical environment and cultural experiences in communities can serve to ensure that people living there do not feel valued and can exacerbate their sense of shame.

³² CELCIS (2020) *Inform: Spotlight on kinship care*. Glasgow: CELCIS

³³ Gillies, A (2015) *Coping with complexity: financial support for kinship carers in Scotland*. London: CPAG, p5; CPAG (2020) [Kinship care and benefits – the essentials](#). London: Child Poverty Action Group; CPAG

(2021) [Kinship carers and universal credit](#). London: Child Poverty Action Group

³⁴ Ridge, T. (2011) 'The Everyday Costs of Poverty in Childhood: A Review of Qualitative Research Exploring the Lives and Experiences of Low-Income Children in the UK' *Children & Society*, 24, 73-84; <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/effects-poverty>

³⁵ Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G. & Webb, C. (2018). 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364–372

³⁶ The Poverty Truth Commission (2016) [Poverty in Scotland](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government

³⁷ Ridge, T. (2011) 'The Everyday Costs of Poverty in Childhood: A Review of Qualitative Research Exploring the Lives and Experiences of Low-Income Children in the UK' *Children & Society*, 24, 73-84.

4. Does poverty-related stigma impact on the ways that public services are delivered? If yes, please give examples.

Poverty related stigma undoubtedly has an impact on the ways in which public services are delivered and experienced by children and families in need of care and protection.

Rather than being integrated into assessments and support plans, evidence indicates a detachment within social work case work of poverty from families' lives. Poverty is seen as the "wallpaper" (Morris et al, 2018: 370) of practice: present, but impossible to tackle and so familiar it is no longer noticed.³⁸ Instead, there is both limited consideration of socio-economic factors within social work assessments (meaning practice attention is directed elsewhere), and assumptions related to poverty influence practice, such as a belief that families are to blame.³⁹ This in turn perpetuates the stigma already felt and experienced by families.

Limited consideration of the needs and circumstances of children and families experiencing poverty and in need of care and protection impact on the way some public services are delivered. For example, a lack of consideration of both bureaucratic barriers and the 'digital divide' (between those who do and do not experience digital exclusion due to poverty and/or lack of digital equipment, data and literacy⁴⁰). We are currently seeing this with access to services such as free bus travel for young people in Scotland. There are barriers to applying to the scheme for many children and young people with care experience, with complicated requirements for identification, especially when a child is not living with their parents. This causes stress and difficulty for carers too, for example, kinship carers who may be navigating complex family situations and dynamics, and for whom 'proving' a child is resident with them can be more complicated than for other families. Children and young people whose lives are affected by poverty will be those who benefit most from schemes such as these, and it is vital that they are designed to be easily accessible for them. Ensuring the views and perspectives of these children and young people are central from the earliest point of service design is crucial. As one individual with lived experience commented to us during consultation for this evidence, it can be easier to write about stigma than to portray the very real feelings experienced day-to-day:

"Imagine not having the money to get the bus. How that would make you feel, to see a bus pass you by as you walk home in the rain? How it would make you feel not to ask your mum for bus money because you had seen

³⁸ Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G. & Webb, C. (2018). 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364–372

³⁹ Gupta, A. (2015) Poverty and shame – messages for social work. *Critical and Radical Social Work* (3)1 131-39; Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G. & Webb, C. (2018). 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364–372; Featherstone et al (2018) Let's stop feeding the risk monster: towards a social model of 'child protection', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 7(1) 7-22;

⁴⁰ McGhee, K. & Roesch-Marsh, A. (2020) [Bridging the digital divide for care experienced young people in Scotland: If not now, when?](#) CELCIS Inform. Glasgow: CELCIS

her put back food in the supermarket as she was short at the checkout and seeing those looks from people?”

An often overlooked element is where there has been limited investment in the buildings and facilities of public services (and access to them). This can serve to ensure those using such services do not feel valued and can exacerbate their feelings of shame. For example, essential services located at a distance from regular public transport, and centres/offices which are dishevelled, unwelcoming or contain broken items (such as toys in waiting rooms).

5. Do particular groups of people living on low incomes (for example women, disabled people, Black and minority ethnic people, young people) experience stigma in different ways? If yes, please give examples.

Children, young people and families in need of care and protection are at risk of experiencing an intersection of stigma, both poverty-related stigma, and stigma associated with state intervention in family life.

Women in particular circumstances disproportionately feel the impact of poverty-related stigma. For example, there is a narrative concerning people accused of exploiting the housing system. This is wholly stigmatising, with little regard to individual needs or circumstances and can be directed at mothers or expectant mothers. Furthermore, women living with domestic abuse can experience poverty and be further trapped in abusive relationships where a partner's coercive control and economic abuse limits her ability to work and access other opportunities. Welfare reforms and practices that deliberately emphasise personal responsibility and labour market activation, rather than removing barriers, put individuals who are on a low-income and experiencing domestic abuse at risk of welfare sanctions due to non-compliance with work requirements.⁴¹

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland are legally 'looked after', and may experience stigma and discrimination directed towards them on the basis of their ethnicity, as well their involvement with the care system. For an unaccompanied young person whose asylum claim is denied by the Home Office, there are additional financial barriers which can exacerbate the poverty related stigma they may experience. For example, although as a care leaver the local authority would retain some responsibilities for their welfare, these young people are denied social security payments and are unable to open a bank account.⁴²

Section 2: Causes of poverty related stigma

6. In your view, what is the primary cause of poverty-related stigma?

⁴¹ Fahmy, E., Williamson, E. & Pantazis, C. (2016) *Evidence and policy review: Domestic violence and poverty*. JRF & University of Bristol.

⁴² Ramsay, A. (2020) [Social work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Scotland](#). IRISS Insights 51. Glasgow: IRISS

Extensive work has been undertaken by a range of organisations (such as the [Poverty Alliance](#), the [Poverty and Inequalities Commission](#), the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), and the [FrameWorks Institute](#)) to examine and understand poverty-related stigma. Drawing on their work, the primary cause of poverty-related stigma can be identified as the prevalence and perpetuation of unhelpful narratives which blame people in poverty for their situations and deny the reality of systemic and structural causes of economic inequality.⁴³ Language plays a significant role, for example referring to social security payments as 'benefits' undermines the fact that these payments are a right for all, under the welfare state.

7. What role do you believe the media, including social media, play in causing poverty-related stigma?

The mainstream media and social media play a considerable role in causing and perpetuating poverty-related stigma. Narratives of people experiencing poverty as 'scroungers' who are exploiting the system still often dominate the media, in print and on screens. People who rely on social security are depicted as undeserving of such financial support, perhaps claiming this fraudulently⁴⁴, and instead should be in employment. Portrayals of people living in poverty as being involved in criminal behaviour, or engaged in problematic alcohol and substance use, build a picture of deviance, and result in further stigmatisation and individual blame. Concerted efforts in the UK to shift these narratives⁴⁵ to reflect an understanding of how systems and structures produce poverty have resulted in small changes, yet unhelpful and stigmatising narratives continue to prevail. Cultures of consumerism and the activities of some social media commentators put additional pressure on children and young people who face judgement or experience shame when the reality of their lives is very different to the images of success seen online.

8. What role do you believe public figures (politicians, business leaders, celebrities, and others) play in creating and/or perpetuating poverty-related stigma?

Public figures, alongside the media, play a significant role. For example, welfare policy and politics are significantly important in influencing the narratives around social security.⁴⁶ Politicians, political debates, political parties and parliamentary committees are the voice of policy and politics, and if the language used by these public figures and within these arenas is stigmatising and individualises the causes and consequences of poverty, this continues to reinforce unhelpful narratives and feeds directly into media portrayals. Instead, if public figures use their voices to share different narratives, this could be a powerful asset. For example, speaking about 'in-work-poverty' rather than simply poverty shifts the

⁴³ Miller, T, Volmert, A. Rochamn, A. & Aassar, M. (2021) [Talking About Poverty: Narratives, Counter-Narratives, and Telling Effective Stories](#). Washington DC: FrameWorks Institute

⁴⁴ Bell, K. (2013) [Poverty, social security and stigma](#). Poverty Bulletin, 144, London: CPAG.

⁴⁵ Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). [Talking about poverty: How experts and the public understand poverty in the United Kingdom](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁴⁶ Bell, K. (2013) [Poverty, social security and stigma](#). Poverty Bulletin, 144, London: CPAG.

arguments and debates about causes and solutions, and has an influence on the public and decision makers.

9. How do public bodies and public services contribute to poverty-related stigma? Please provide examples if possible

Stigma operates in a range of ways, from the personal (one's own feelings of stigma/shame, which may in turn prevent individuals from accessing help), the social (the felt experience of the judgements of those in society), to the institutional (stigma or shame that is systemic, arising either intentionally or unintentionally from processes and policies).⁴⁷

Public bodies and public services contribute to poverty-related stigma through approaches and/or language which are punitive and which 'other' people experiencing poverty. This encompasses a hugely broad range of institutional practices which include, for example:

- children being singled out in school because they don't have the 'right' equipment for the day ahead, to visible markers identifying people in poverty - for example, through issuing food vouchers rather than cash to families in need);
- practices which demonstrate a lack of trust of people experiencing poverty - such as strict requirements to provide receipts if cash support is issued, even for small sums;
- the barriers in place to access many services. Public services are often set up on the false assumptions that people who need to use them will have the means, both materially and psychologically, to do so. Such barriers can include locating services in places which are in places which are difficult to access by affordable and regular public transport, or are so unfamiliar that they feel intimidating, with unwelcoming staff and/or have security personnel present;⁴⁸
- barriers that may unnecessarily require expensive forms of identification like passports and driving licences. Documentation can be a particular issue for young people with care experience.

Furthermore, the pervasive attitudes that people accessing the social security they are entitled to are 'out to get something' - the use of the word 'benefits' is particularly unhelpful here - rather than realising a right and entitlement in recognition of need, is a narrative that should be strongly countered by all public services.

In services such as social work (and other services who work to support children and families, such as health and education), if practitioners are not supported by leaders, managers and the wider organisational infrastructure to critically reflect on families' experiences of poverty, the impact of this on their lives, and the

⁴⁷ Inglis, M. (2016) The Stigma of Poverty. The Poverty Alliance, online at https://povertyalliance.wordpress.com/2016/10/19/the-stigma-of-poverty/#_ftn5; Bell, K. (2013) *Poverty, social security and stigma*. Poverty Bulletin, 144, London: CPAG

⁴⁸ Ridge, T. (2011) 'The Everyday Costs of Poverty in Childhood: A Review of Qualitative Research Exploring the Lives and Experiences of Low-Income Children in the UK' *Children & Society*, 24, 73-84.

support they require as a result, the public service response families receive can further contribute to their experiences of stigma. There is a danger that poverty is mistaken for neglect, families feel threatened by social work involvement because their lives are not properly understood, and practice is not effective because it fails to address the underlying needs of the family.⁴⁹ Social workers capacity to practice using poverty-aware approaches⁵⁰ can be limited due to limited training, high caseloads preventing them from spending enough time thinking about poverty with families, or due to feeling powerless to affect positive change or lacking the resources to make a difference.⁵¹

10. Are there any other bodies, organisations or individuals that you believe play a role in creating and/or perpetuating poverty-related stigma? If so, please detail.

Poverty-related stigma is a societal issue, which every person in society, and at all levels and positions of public and private organisations and institutions, has a role in creating, perpetuating or dispelling.

Section 3: Tackling and ending stigma

11. What is the key change that can be taken that would help tackle poverty related stigma?

In the broadest sense, tackling poverty-related stigma requires a cultural shift from the unhelpful narratives many in society hold about poverty, which individualise the issue, perpetuate negative stereotypes, and blame people for their circumstances; to a more productive understanding of what poverty is, how it is caused, and what eliminating it would involve.⁵²

More specifically, in relation to social work practice with families living with poverty, a conscious effort to bring poverty awareness, from a perspective of lived experience, to the fore is key, not only to tackle poverty related stigma but also to ensure more effective social work practice and support for families.⁵³ Crucial to this is for social work practitioners to view poverty as a social justice issue, rather than a problem for which an individual is to blame. Promoting dignity and independence are central to anti-poverty practice.⁵⁴ In light of this, several resources have been produced to support practitioners to adopt anti-poverty social work practices, namely the British Association of Social Workers

⁴⁹ McCartan, C., Morrison, A., Bunting, L., Davidson, G. & McIlroy, J. (2018) 'Stripping the Wallpaper of Practice: Empowering Social Workers to Tackle Poverty'. *Social Sciences*, 7, 193-209

⁵⁰ Davis and Wainwright coined the term 'poverty-aware approach' as a call upon social workers to develop a 'detailed understanding of poverty's impacts on their clients on the individual, organizational, and social levels' (p. 261) (Davis, A. & Sue Wainwright, S. (2005) 'Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: Implications for Social Work Education', *Social Work Education*, 24:3, 259-273)

⁵¹ Morris, K., Mason, W., Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G. & Webb, C. (2018). 'Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions'. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364-372

⁵² Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). [Talking about poverty: How experts and the public understand poverty in the United Kingdom](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁵³ Gupta, A., Blumhardt, H. & ATD Fourth World (2018) Poverty, exclusion and child protection practice: the contribution of 'the politics of recognition&respect', *European Journal of Social Work*, 21:2, 247-259

⁵⁴ McCartan, C., Morrison, A., Bunting, L., Davidson, G. & McIlroy, J. (2018) 'Stripping the Wallpaper of Practice: Empowering Social Workers to Tackle Poverty'. *Social Sciences*, 7, 193-209

(BASW) [Anti-Poverty Practice Guide for Social Work](#)⁵⁵, and [the Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland](#)⁵⁶. These guides are detailed practice tools, providing background information to challenge assumptions and support an understanding of poverty, as well as providing practice responses social workers can use, including relationship-based approaches, critical reflection, community involvement, anti-oppressive practice, advocacy, income maximisation and inter-agency communication. Practice in accordance with these guides requires to be embedded across all social work training and education programmes, as well as throughout the current workforce.

12. What changes can the media make to help end poverty-related stigma?

The impact of the [narrative change initiative](#) led by the FrameWorks Institute and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the UK is evidence of the positive steps the media can take to help tackle poverty related stigma. This concerted work has focused on shifting narratives from those which deny poverty exists, or blame individuals for their experiences, to those which reflect the reality of systemic inequality, low pay and insecure work, and social exclusion, and more importantly, how these realities can be changed. FrameWorks report the impact of the initiative as having a powerful effect on the way in which the story of poverty has been retold in the UK media, and in turn we are beginning to see the language of politicians and the public shifting.

Actively seeking the perspectives of individuals and groups with lived experience prior to producing, airing or publishing stories gives a valuable insight or ideas to contextualise or reframe unhelpful narratives too and there are many organisations and individuals who are working to assist the media with this including [On Road Media](#).

13. What role can public figures play to help end poverty-related stigma? Please give examples of existing good practice where possible

Public figures are able to use their influence to challenge poverty-related stigma, and to demand change. This has been successful in high profile examples such as the impact of and political and public response to footballer Marcus Rashford's recent campaign to tackle child food poverty which clearly demonstrated to both public and politicians that families themselves were not to blame for their situations; and rugby player Maro Itoje's campaign to address the digital divide.

Of critical importance is ensuring the experiences and views of people with lived experience of poverty-related stigma are listened to. Whether this is through the day-to day interactions of all practitioners working with families, who must take

⁵⁵ BASW and CWIP (2019). *Anti-poverty Practice Guide for Social Work*. Birmingham: BASW

⁵⁶ Office of Social Services (2018) *Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland*, Reflections Anti Poverty Frameworks. Belfast: Department of Health NI

every step to ensure their participation is at the centre of support; or through individuals, groups or organisations working together to ensure the views and experiences of those with lived experience have the necessary platforms to be heard and influence change.

14. What changes can public services and public bodies make to help end poverty-related stigma? Please give examples of existing good practice where possible

Social workers and other practitioners who work to support children and families (including all multiagency partners who work together under Scotland's Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach – such as education, health, children's hearings, police, and third sector organisations) require the necessary time, knowledge, skills and leadership support to undertake anti-poverty practice. Guidance resources identified in our response to Question 11 are helpful tools, however guidance alone is insufficient to achieve practice change. Rather, concerted attention to the effective implementation of guidance in the day-to-day work of practitioners, including clearly defined practice, supportive infrastructure including resources, time, training and coaching are crucial to ensuring consistently high-quality practice.⁵⁷

Examples of innovative, preventative work enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic have allowed a recognition of families' strengths and assets, leading to increased trust and a more equal partnership approach between families and services. One example CELCIS has been part of was working with a local authority who worked with families to make direct payments to them rather than providing vouchers or goods, as a simpler, non-stigmatising way of meeting basic needs, which allowed for families to determine what would best help the wellbeing of their children at that time.⁵⁸ Changing the 'traditional' ways in which financial support is offered to families (for example, via vouchers or provision of goods which do not enable an element of personal choice) can contribute to tackling poverty-related stigma. Furthermore, shifting the onus from families and individuals to seek out and 'claim' their rights and entitlements to a responsibility on public services to actively seek out those who will benefit and promote access to their rights and entitlements would help shift stigmatising narratives.

In addition to changes to public services which work directly with children and families, public bodies and public services more broadly can also take action to help end poverty-related stigma through ensuring an underpinning ethos which is non-stigmatising. One example of an agency working in this way is Social

⁵⁷ Fixsen, D.L., Naoom, S.F., Blase, K.A., Friedman, R.M. & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature* (FMHI Publication No. 231). Tampa: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network.

⁵⁸ Emerging Principles and Characteristics, and Practice and Service Innovations, stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic, CELCIS, Glasgow: September 2020. Further examples of practices and learnings on meeting the challenge of Covid-19 are available at: <https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/spotlight/meeting-challenge-2/>

Security Scotland, the executive agency which administers benefits on behalf of the Scottish Government, whose commitment to values of dignity, fairness and respect, and to working in partnership with people who use the service, have resulted in very positive experiences from the point of view of service users.⁵⁹ This is in stark contrast to the experience of accessing forms of UK-wide welfare payments such as Universal Credit, which are not administered via Social Security Scotland, and where punitive strategies are felt to be designed to deter and sanction claimants.⁶⁰

15. What other bodies or organisations do you believe have a responsibility for helping to end poverty-related stigma, and what particular changes can they make?

It is the responsibility of each and every individual, body, and organisation (public or private) to play their part in ending poverty-related stigma. To do this firstly requires awareness, and the campaign work by a range of organisations, including the Poverty Alliance ([Stick Your Labels](#)), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (through the [Grassroots Poverty Action Group](#)), and the Child Poverty Action Group (for example, through their [Cost of the School Day](#) project) to tackle poverty-related stigma is crucial to this. Furthermore, listening to the voices of those with lived experience, and ensuring narratives, policies, services and supports are co-produced with these voices at their heart, is fundamental to ensuring meaningful and lasting change. Through participative approaches, the invaluable perspectives of individuals accessing and experiencing services can be learned from and services improved.

Learning may also be developed from [NHS Inform's ongoing campaign](#) to tackle drug and alcohol stigma, which promotes similar messages about structural rather than individual factors in drug and alcohol use, and raises awareness that people affected require help and support, rather than judgement.

16. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us in relation to the drivers, impacts and solutions to poverty-related stigma?

N/A.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond, we would be happy to provide further information in respect to any of the areas discussed here.

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⁵⁹ Social Security Scotland (2021) *Client Survey 2018-2021*. Social Research. Social Security Scotland, online at <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/asset-storage/production/downloads/Client-Survey-2018-2021-Summary-Report.pdf>

⁶⁰ McHardy, F., Robertson, L., Cloughton, B. & White, G. (2021) [Living through a pandemic: Experiences of low-income families in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde](#). Poverty Alliance & Get Heard.

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