

Addressing Poverty and Child Welfare Intervention: What do we need to do differently in Scotland?

July 2018

A joint briefing paper produced by CELCIS, Children 1st and Social Work Scotland

Introduction

Children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in Scotland are nearly 20 times more likely to be 'looked after' or on the Child Protection Register than children in the least deprived neighbourhoods. This is the central finding for Scotland of a new study, funded by the Nuffield Foundation (2015-2017), designed to quantify how unequal children's chances are of being a looked after child or on a Child Protection Register across the four UK countries and what factors underpin these inequalities. As Professor Paul Bywaters concludes for Scotland: **'It is time to pay serious attention to the impact of poverty and inequality on children's chances of experiencing child welfare interventions'**.¹

Across the UK, decision-makers and practitioners are starting to consider what the findings mean and how they can be addressed in their local context. In Scotland we have seen the introduction of statutory targets relating to child poverty and a focus on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap alongside a growing understanding and awareness of the impact of childhood trauma on adult lives.

This paper attempts to position the research within this context and asks: how can we address these findings relating to child welfare intervention and poverty within this landscape?

Part One: Child Welfare Inequalities Project

The Study

The Child Welfare Inequalities Project (www.coventry.ac.uk/CWIP), funded by the Nuffield Foundation, was carried out by a team of researchers based in seven Universities across the UK, led by Professor Paul Bywaters of Coventry University. The project's aim was to establish child welfare inequalities as a core concept in policy making, practice and research in the UK and internationally. It focused attention on preventing harm by studying populations, structures and systems and by providing evidence that will help re-shape the direction and focus of children's services.²

¹ Bywaters, P. et al. (2017) [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 4: Scotland](#) (pg6)

² Bywaters, P (2017) [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare and Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 2: UK Four Country Quantitative Comparison](#) (pg2)

The project objectives were to:

- Identify the relationship of deprivation, policy and other factors to inequalities in key child welfare intervention rates through separate and comparative studies in the four UK countries.
- Develop and begin to test a theoretical framework for understanding the causes of inequalities in intervention rates, focusing in particular on the inverse intervention law.
- Establish the necessary empirical, theoretical and methodological foundations for new directions in research, policy and practice to reduce avoidable child welfare inequalities.
- Build research capacity for the study of child welfare inequalities.
- Influence the role and direction of children's services in the UK, by promoting evidence-informed discussion of inequalities by professionals, policy makers, politicians and the public.

The Scottish element was led by the Centre of Child Wellbeing and Protection at the University of Stirling by Professor Brigid Daniel. There were two parts to the study in Scotland:³

- Analysis of the national statistics about children who were looked after or who were on the child protection register (CPR) in Scotland at 31st July 2015. Ten Local Authorities (LA) took part, making up approximately 53% of children in Scotland (0-17). LAs provided anonymised annual returns relating to the CPR and looked after children for the year 2014-15. The final sample included 1,531 children on the CPR and 8,418 looked after children in total (of whom 4,063 were not at home or with friends or relatives).
- To analyse the impact of deprivation not just on LA level but also at small neighbourhood level, LAs were asked to include the postcode or data zone of origin address for all individuals in the data. The ten LAs contained 3,433 (52.8%) of the 6,505 2001 data zones in Scotland.
- Case studies were undertaken in relatively deprived neighbourhoods within two relatively less deprived LAs to examine in depth how decisions about individual children and families are made, what factors influence them and how social workers respond to inequality and family poverty.

Key Findings for Scotland

The research found that *'in every country, children in some places are much more likely to be looked after... these differences are systematically linked to how poor their families are. This is seen for children of different age groups, for boys as well as girls and for child on Child Protection Plans as well as for looked after children'* (Bywaters, 2017:2).

'The number of children in Scotland in out of home care continues to rise. Episodes of care longer than five years have doubled since 2008, whilst numbers of children on the child protection register have risen by 34% between 2000 and 2015 (Scottish Government, 2016). At 31 July 2015, there were 15,404 children 'looked after' by the state and 2,751 children on the child protection register. Placing children on the child protection register or taking children into

³ Bywaters, P et al., (2017) [Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 4: Scotland](#) (pg. 1-2)

care are very powerful state actions. If these powers are carried out inconsistently or inequitably between children with different identities or backgrounds or from different places, important issues of social justice are raised' (Bywaters, 2017:2).

Part Two: Policy Implications

What is currently being done?

Much of the policy and legislative landscape in Scotland is shaped by an intention to place the best interests and voices of children and young people at the heart of service provision and support and by a growing awareness and understanding of children's rights. The 2018 Programme for Government commits to a renewed focus on early intervention and prevention and to addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as well as to consider full incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law. The Government's flagship Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach continues to develop across Scotland, aiming to put the best interests of children at the heart of policy and practice and progressive examples of rights-based local practice are highlighted in the State of Children's Rights Report 2017.

In 2018, the Year of Young People, we have seen the passage of ground-breaking legislation on domestic abuse and will see the introduction of proposed laws to ensure children and young people have the same legal protections from assault as adults. The age of criminal responsibility will also be raised, in line with recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

A plethora of policies relating to looked after children and care leavers have been produced over the last decade, including 'These Are Our Bairns', 'Staying Put Scotland', 'Getting It Right For Looked After Children and Young People Strategy' and legislative measures relating to continuing care, aftercare and corporate parenting in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. In 2017 the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced a 'root and branch' review of the Care System, with the intention of finding new and innovative ways to ensure that children and young people who are care experienced feel safe, secure and loved, with the ultimate goal of improving their future outcomes.

Addressing child poverty is on the political agenda. Since 2011, there has been a national Child Poverty Strategy and associated reports as required under the UK Child Poverty Act, 2010. The Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland, 2014-2017 includes a clear commitment from First Minister Nicola Sturgeon that "tackling child poverty remains of fundamental importance to the success of our country". The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 extends the provision of high-quality early years childcare to all looked after two year olds and those children on Kinship Care Orders.

Following the abolition of the UK Child Poverty Act, 2010 the Scottish Parliament introduced their own legislation with ambitious targets for 2030, establishing Scotland as the only part of the UK with statutory income targets on poverty, with a long-term ambition to completely eradicate child poverty. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 introduces a duty on local authorities and health boards to report annually on action they are taking to reduce child poverty. The targets for children living in households in Scotland are that by 2030:

- Less than 10% of children live in relative poverty and less than 5% in absolute poverty.
- Less than 5% of children live in combined low income and material deprivation and less than 5% in persistent poverty.⁴

The Act also identifies interim targets for 2031 and establishes a statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission to work towards meeting the targets. The Scottish legislation on social security aims to transpose the eleven social security benefits onto a Scottish legislative platform, allowing Ministers to shape a distinctly Scottish, rights- based benefits system that places dignity, respect and support at the centre.

More to be done

Despite these positive political steps forward, meeting the aspiration to make Scotland the “best place in the world to grow up” and matching the encouraging political rhetoric with reality seems a long way off.

It is difficult to quantify the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Scotland. Every year over 13,000 children are referred to the Scottish Children’s Reporter on grounds of Care and Protection.⁵ In 2016/17 the Children’s Reporter states that 1,868 referrals were made due to a child being a victim of a physical, emotional or sexual offence and 6,609 referrals were made due to a “lack of parental care”. There were 58,810 recorded incidents of domestic abuse, over 2,000 of which involved children in the home.⁶ As of July 2017, 14 897 children are ‘looked after’ by Scottish local authorities; although there are a myriad of reasons why compulsory measures of care are required, a significant number of children will have experienced abuse and neglect.⁷ In 2017, approximately 2,631 children were ‘at risk of significant harm’ thus on a Child Protection Register.⁸ There are also children who are in need of care and protection who may not be detected, reported or recorded within formal child protection systems.⁹

There has been a dearth of research on the economic circumstances of parents and carers where children are in need of care and protection. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation evidence review on the relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect found, despite the limited evidence base, there is a strong association between families’ socio-economic circumstances and the chances that children will experience child abuse and neglect.¹⁰ The evidence review highlighted that poverty is overlooked as a factor contributing to children who become looked after. Furthermore, the 1970 British Cohort Study found ‘that being looked after as a child has a sustained impact on a number of socio-economic outcomes including: reduced income,

⁴ Poverty & Inequality Commission (February 2018) Advice on the Scottish Government’s Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018, <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-Final-Version-23-February-2018.pdf>

⁵ Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (2017) [Statistic Analysis 2016/17: Ensuring positive futures for children & young people in Scotland](#). Glasgow: SCRA.

⁶ Bentley, H., O’Hagan, O., Brown, A., Vasco, N., Lynch, C., Peppiate, J., Webber, M., Ball, R., Miller, P., Byrne, A., Ha zi, M. & Letendrie, F. (2017) *How safe are our children?* NSPCC, London.

⁷ Scottish Government (2018) [Children’s Social Work Statistics Scotland 2016/2017](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) [The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review](#), York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

lower socio-economic status, reduced educational attainment, increased homelessness and unemployment'.¹¹ However, authors strongly state that these findings should not be used as a further source of shame and stigma for disadvantaged families, rather they should be addressed in anti-poverty policies as a social justice issue.

McAra and McVie found that 'poverty is a strong driver of violent offending amongst young people'. Using four measures for poverty including low socio-economic status of the head of the household and neighbourhood deprivation, the study found that 'poverty had a significant and direct effect on young people's likelihood to engage in violence at 15, even after controlling for a range of other factors', positive and negative, including poor family functioning, drug use, impulsiveness, strong relationships with parents.¹²

Naomi Eisenstadt, the former Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality, states that almost a quarter (22%) of children are living in relative poverty in Scotland.¹³ End Child Poverty figures reveal that poverty affects children in every part of Scotland, estimating that in Glasgow 34% of children are living in poverty.¹⁴

The Children's Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment, as part of the development of the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-2022, sets out some key recommendations relating to child poverty through consultation with children and young people facilitated by the Children's Parliament, Young Scot and Prince's Trust.¹⁵ The main themes were:

- Increasing incomes and reducing costs (cost of school day, heating, travel, etc.)
- Work and earnings (minimum age, flexible working, zero hours contracts, etc.)
- Social security & housing (benefits, social housing, etc.)
- Quality of life for children living in poverty (help with activity expenses, mental health support, money management in school, access to technology, help with career pathways)

The UNCRC clearly identifies the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (article 27), the right to protection from abuse (article 34, 37) and the right to access physical and psychological recovery from trauma (article 39) however these rights are not being met across Scotland.

Understanding the problem – beyond the material

Poverty does not cause child abuse and neglect. We know that child abuse and neglect is present across all spectrums of society and the vast majority of families living in poverty love and care for their children. Research from the University of London has explored how social workers engage 'neglectful parents' from affluent backgrounds in the child protection system, finding that neglect in affluent areas often went "under the radar".¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid. pg.5

¹² Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, <http://www.esytc.ed.ac.uk/>

¹³ Eisenstadt, N (2016) [Shifting the Curve](#) Scottish Government statisticians published relative poverty figures *after* housing costs (AHC) – (pg.5).

¹⁴ <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2018/>

¹⁵ Scottish Government (2018) [Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022](#) (Annex 4 Children's Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment), Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

¹⁶ Bernard, C (undated) [An exploration of how social workers engage neglectful parents from affluent backgrounds in the child protection system](#), Goldsmiths, University of London.

However, as the Child Welfare Inequalities Research has shown, there is a complex link between the two and poverty may be the tipping point for some families. Poverty is a multidimensional issue. We know that poverty not only affects children's life chances, but also their likelihood of becoming subject to child protection measures,¹⁷ becoming involved in crime or coming to the attention of mental health services and that children living in poverty are more likely to be referred to the Hearings system and made subject to statutory supervision.¹⁸

There are clear links between child welfare and levels of deprivation—links that are not peculiar to Scotland but are replicated in international studies as well.¹⁹ In Scotland, levels of poverty are increasing on an annual basis. The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-22 states, 'if we do nothing, projections suggest that more than one in three children could be growing up in Scotland in poverty by 2030'.²⁰ Between 2013-14 and 2015-16 Children 1st saw a 7% increase in the number of individuals we support experiencing financial hardship. This is supported by a recent NSPCC study, which found that:

*'The cumulative effect of benefit sanctions, benefit delays, price rises in basic commodities such as food and energy is tipping more families into crisis and aggravating pre-existing difficulties, such as mental health problems, substance misuse and relationship breakdown.'*²¹

Whilst there is little robust data directly exploring linkages between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and poverty, discussion papers, such as the one produced by John F Tomer in 2014 in the World Economic Review highlighted: '*more and more children from lower income, lower socio-economic backgrounds seem to be coming from broken homes and have single parents. There is at least some reason to believe that these are the children most likely to have high ACE scores and less likely to have a secure attachment with a parent*'.²²

Some researchers have stated that poverty itself is an ACE.²³ However, in Scotland experts on poverty, such as Dr Morag Treanor are clear that poverty is a structural issue governed by political and economic factors—but recognise that there is a significant proportion of families living with unresolved trauma who also experience poverty. The link is twofold: poverty can exacerbate unresolved trauma and unresolved trauma can exacerbate poverty.

Research tells us that complex trauma can have significant impacts on a family in the absence of protective factors, such as strong and supportive relationships, to build emotional resilience. We know that for many families dealing with economic uncertainty, job insecurity or unemployment and poor housing, children can find it hard to form secure attachments with caregivers, or to feel safe. It is this feeling of safety that has a direct relationship to resilience:

¹⁷ See papers: <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/inequalities-child-welfare-intervention-rates>

¹⁸ <http://www.criminallawandjustice.co.uk/features/Link-Between-Poverty-and-Crime>

¹⁹ Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress, Executive Summary*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

²⁰ Scottish Government (2018) [Every Child, Every Chance: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

²¹ Scullin, K & Galloway, S (undated) [Challenges from the frontline: Supporting families with multiple adversity at time of austerity](#), Barnardo's & NSPCC.

²² Tomer, J. (2014) [Adverse Childhood Experiences, Poverty and Inequality: Toward an Understanding of the Connections and the Cures](#), World Economic Review, 3: 20-3

²³ Ibid.

if resources to meet your most basic of needs are scarce, you don't feel safe and are less able to cope with what you may perceive to be a 'hostile' world. This means that a person experiencing poverty is systemically disadvantaged, with adverse experiences having a disproportionate effect on them.

Many families use strategies to cope with the trauma of poverty or unresolved issues from their own childhoods or what they are currently experiencing, including poor mental health, domestic abuse and the use of drugs and alcohol which can have lasting impacts on children. For this reason, we know that many families who have experience of ACEs and who are living in poverty end up involved with social work and/or the child protection system. There can be a complex interaction between poverty and neglect; however, as Professor Brigid Daniel and others highlight, one of the barriers of identifying neglect is a cultural acceptance of neglect where there are 'overwhelming numbers of neglected children within a context of entrenched poverty'.²⁴

Poverty and its tendency to contribute to complex trauma over time therefore needs to be understood as a possible contributor to ACEs. Rather than stigmatise families who are struggling with parenting, or ignore systemic issues relating to poverty, we need to recognise the heightened risks that families in poverty face. The complex link should be seen as an imperative to support and understand what families may need, rather than to label them.

Researchers, academics, practitioners and children and families have spoken for a long time about the links between child protection and socio-economics: but are we doing enough?

Certainly it seems that across Scotland we are not seeing the type of investment into preventative services in the way that the Christie Commission envisaged in 2011 by shifting investment away from crisis management. There a growing awareness in Scotland of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) following the publication of Anda and Felitti's study in 1998 and a wide body of research on the importance of providing early help and support to families as early as possible, particularly during the first three years of life.²⁵ This is also generally accepted as being key to disrupting intergenerational poverty.

Yet we are finding that funding for early help is unsustainable and uncertain and the political rhetoric about early intervention and prevention is not matched by what is happening on the ground. The Care Inspectorate found that, even where services recognised that investing in new approaches (which often relate to early help), local partnerships were finding it increasingly challenging to identify resources despite recognising that this could produce longer-term savings.²⁶ An Audit Scotland report highlighted the reductions in services and has already flagged that there are risks that reducing costs further could affect the quality of services.²⁷

While interventions at a later stage, for example through acute child and adolescent mental

²⁴ Daniels, B., Burgess, C. & Scott, J. (2012) [Review of Child Neglect in Scotland](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government (pg.7)

²⁵ Felitti, V.J. et al. (1998) *Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study*, Am J Prev Med; 14(4):245-28, May 1998. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9635069>

²⁶ Care Inspectorate (2016) [Joint Inspections for services for children and young people 2014-2016](#), Dundee: Care Inspectorate.

²⁷ Audit Scotland (2016) [Social Work in Scotland](#), Edinburgh: Audit Scotland.

health services (CAMHS), accommodating children in care and youth justice responses can make a difference, the difficulties that lead children and young people to require these services, could often be prevented at a much earlier stage. The Early Intervention Foundation 'The Cost of Late Intervention' analysis from 2016 estimates that in England and Wales the state spends £17 billion, or around £287 per person per year on late intervention for children and young people.²⁸ The analysis only looks at spend on acute services during childhood. Add to that the significant costs of additional acute support for adults relating to issues rooted in their childhood and the urgent need to increase preventative support for children, young people and their families is clear.

Across Scotland, money is spent on expensive out-of-authority residential care placements, leaving limited funds for the type of early help and support that would help to prevent families from reaching a point of crisis where more expensive services and supports need to be in place.²⁹

The social and economic cost of delaying early help for families is almost beyond measure. North Ayrshire Council has indicated it is now experiencing second and third generation homelessness as the trauma and often distressed lifestyle of parents' impact on children.³⁰ As an NSPCC study noted, *'increasing severity and complexity of need leading to higher thresholds, and the impact this has on early intervention policy, will need to be addressed in the future design of children's services'*.³¹

There are things that can make a difference to families: investment in Family Group Decision Making has saved Edinburgh City Council over half a million pounds in a year³² and evidence demonstrates that difference that investment in systemic family support that is tailored around a family's needs—and can encompass money advice and support to claim benefits or manage debt—can make.³³ Part 12 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places duties for local authorities to provide relevant services, including Family Group Decision Making Services and support for parenting services, where children are at risk of becoming looked after, and the implementation of this legislation is currently being reviewed.

Improving children's wellbeing is critical; however, the Child Poverty Strategy and corresponding Child Poverty Measurement Framework³⁴, does not refer to any metrics on child maltreatment. There is no recognition of correlation between the rates of looked after children and child protection registration and deprivation.

²⁸ Chowdry, H & Fitzsimmons, P. (2016) [The Cost of Late Intervention: EIF analysis 2016](#), London: EIF.

²⁹ Sinclair, A., (2018) *Right from the Start: Investing in parents and babies*, CCWB Press.

³⁰ Scottish Parliament, Local Government & Communities Committee Report on Homelessness, 2018 http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_Local_Gov/Inquiries/20170614_Homelessness_SimonCommunity.pdf

³¹ Scullin, K & Galloway, S (undated) [Challenges from the frontline: Supporting families with multiple adversity at time of austerity](#), Barnardo's & NSPCC.

³² See, for example, Children 1st evidence to the Education Committee in advance of the Minister for Childcare and Early Years' evidence session on care experience, March 2018

³³ See, for example, Coalition of Care and Support Providers, Scotland, research on family support: <http://www.ccpScotland.org/resources/ccps-family-support-services-research-project/>, Action for Children research into the Cost- effectiveness of intensive family support: <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/research/cost-effectiveness-of-intensive-family-support/>

³⁴ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/fairerscotland/tacklingpovertyinScotland/CP/MeasureFW>

Part Three: Where do we go from here?

Reducing structural inequalities

The Scottish Government is clear that the current UK wide programme of welfare reform and austerity measures will continue to impact on the effectiveness of Scottish policy intentions.³⁵

It is important that we concentrate our efforts on those children who remain living with their families and that we view early help and community based supports as integral, and not additional, to improving outcomes for children. This cannot be addressed by statutory children's services alone, and/or within current budget allocation, particularly in an environment of spending reductions and increased demand.

Community Planning Partnerships have a key role to play in addressing child poverty. The way that employability services, education, income maximisation services, money advice services, housing, childcare and local health services are delivered can act either to reinforce the poverty experienced by children or to prevent poverty and support families out of poverty. There needs to be a clearer focus on and recognition of strategic Children's Service Plans as a means of ensuring that action to address poverty cuts across wider action to support and protect children's wellbeing.

A greater focus needs to be on income maximisation by all partner agencies. However, provision of local income maximisation has to be aligned to the Scottish Government's National Standards for Advice and Information Providers. The Scottish Government should look to standardise reporting on these matters across all providers and should consider funding a universal reporting tool.

We understand that parents have advised that the additional monies for early learning for eligible 2 year olds have had a limited impact on their ability to work.³⁶ For families with additional vulnerabilities and/or who require high levels of support, a better approach might be to invest in flexible family based support to work with parents, foster carers or kinship carers in their homes, which recognises and addresses trauma and the importance of establishing good routines for children. This can create the environmental and physical conditions for children to be ready to learn and consequently strengthen the parent's emotional ability to also engage in education/ work.

If the intention is to continue to provide restricted, targeted funding along the lines of the Pupil Equity Fund, consideration should be given to providing similar funding specifically for care experienced children and young people to address their wellbeing needs. This is in consideration of both the attainment data and what we know about what contributes to positive outcomes outside of the school gates.

We need to tackle the welfare system and structural issues to ensure that children either in or at the edges of poverty have their needs prioritised and met, using what strategic levers we can to achieve this. In applying thresholds for support, poverty needs to be recognised in its widest sense. There are hidden costs for those living in poverty related to basic needs such as housing and fuel costs. The levels of indebtedness for those living in or just above the poverty line needs to also be considered as access to credit comes at a significantly higher cost to those on a low income despite the fact that these families already have little to no economic

³⁵ <https://news.gov.scot/news/tackling-child-poverty-2>

³⁶ http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180215_early_learning.pdf

resilience. Policy needs to address this poverty premium. We know that deeper poverty has a more severe impact on children and young people's life chances.³⁷ With respect to those in receipt of benefits, households with children affected by benefit sanctions should be subject to national scrutiny. The Scottish Government should fully implement the recommendations of the Oakley report³⁸ and consider non-financial alternatives to benefit sanctions.

Measures are required to poverty proof the cost of the school day. Evidence shows that pupils are less likely to participate in activities, which incur a cost.³⁹ Guidelines are required at both a national and local level to address the school day costs. Examples of good practice can be found in Child Poverty Action Group 2017 report "The cost of the school day".⁴⁰ Not all people eligible for free school meals or free school uniforms apply. Consideration should also be given to automation of services e.g. a claim to Housing Benefit/Council Tax reduction gives details of household income, which could be used to provide school provisions as an entitlement rather than by a separate application. Cardless payment systems should also be adopted nationally to reduce the stigma of a free school meal.

Crucially, these measures cannot happen in isolation. It is important that clear links to address the structural drivers of inequality are made to other areas that can help increase support to families, such as mental health and trauma recovery to ensure change is sustainable. It is helpful to look to innovative projects such as Children 1st's money advice service which seeks to address both structural issues relating to debt management and provide money advice and also asks what other help families might need, such as relating to parenting skills.

Understanding the implications for children's services of the impact of destitution, poverty and financial insecurity on family life

It is time to pay serious attention to the impact of poverty and inequality on children's chances of experiencing child welfare interventions. We know that early intervention to support families in poverty is key. However some families tell us that issues relating to poverty were ignored by statutory services involved in their lives. The ability to support a family in the early years and /or before any crisis has occurred is crucial to preventing the need for further measures of care. Recognising the impact of trauma on a child's life chances, relationship-based, systemic family support should be appropriately funded. This should include support for the entire family, not just the child, in recognition of recovery and prevention being part of the same continuum. Where parents and families are supported to recover from their own trauma and to draw on their own strengths it is less likely they will need to turn to coping strategies or face mental health problems that restrict their ability to parent effectively.

Child poverty strategies should be aligned with child protection strategies. For example the Child Poverty Measurement Framework for Scotland should include reduction in child maltreatment as one of its metrics.

³⁷ <http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG-Poverty143-relative-pov-measure.pdf>

³⁸ Oakley, (2014) [Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013](#), London: DWP.

³⁹ Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland & Save the Children (2014) [Learning Lessons: Young people's views on poverty and education in Scotland](#), Edinburgh: CYPCS.

⁴⁰ CPAG (2015) Cost of a School Day report, London: CPAG. See more resources and activity in Scotland: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/cost-school-day-activity-across-scotland>

Using robust data to better understand reasons behind inequalities and patterns of involvement with children's services

There is a need to collect much better data about the families' socio-economic circumstances children are looked after and/or involved in the child protection system in order to track whether services are being fairly distributed and to inform policy for child wellbeing and children's social work services. The Review of Child Neglect in Scotland report suggested that one of the key barriers to gauging prevalence of neglect is the lack of cross-reference between child protection systems and the Scottish Children's Reporters Association database.⁴¹ In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child concluded that the UK should "strengthen the systematic collection of data and recording of information on violence against children" including, "abuse and neglect, in all settings". Developing better local and national detection and gathering data systems around the prevalence of neglect in Scotland could conform to this.⁴²

There needs to be robust data available on the prevalence of poverty and the links to child welfare. Against a background of reducing budgets, many local authorities cannot collate all the data required on local incidences of poverty moreover data is more likely to tell you what you already know if we continue to gather it in the same way. Reporting on child poverty should be linked to the local outcomes in education, health improvement, child protection, housing and income maximisation etc. The Scottish Government should take the lead on this and collate local information and the analysis of poverty throughout Scotland as if we continue a culture of silo reporting within the spectrum of inequity of local resource provision across Scotland, we will be where we are now and not where we want to be. This will increase the inequalities of opportunity for all of us to nationally target our most vulnerable children.

There is an urgent need for more in-depth comparative analysis of the rates of children being removed from home across the UK in order to understand whether the apparently higher rate in Scotland is due to different practices, different recording or both.

There is need to analyse the way in which scarce resources are deployed across and within local authorities in order to assess equity of services for all children and their families. This needs to be considered alongside more in-depth comparative analysis to ensure that services are as effective as they can be.

Recognising the value of investing in prevention & the strengths of the family

This measure has been recommended repeatedly by various numbers of organisations, third sector bodies and professionals as well as by children and families themselves. Against a backdrop of financial pressure it is increasingly difficult for families to access early help and support to prevent problems from escalating. However, failing to ensure that families have easy accessible access to services to help them to address systemic issues relating to poverty such as housing and employment support, income maximisation and debt management in addition to systemic family support means that more families are impacted by high levels of poverty combined with unresolved trauma. The consequences for children, families and Scottish society in not addressing these issues are huge.

⁴¹ Scottish Government (2012) [Review of Child Neglect in Scotland](#) Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

⁴² United Nations (2016) [Committee on the Rights of the Child: Concluding Observations](#). Geneva

Questions for Roundtable Discussion

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework states:

- We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential
 - We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
 - We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally
1. Is the current activity reflective of what we think Scotland can and should be doing to mitigate the effects of and lift children, young people, families and communities out of poverty?
 2. Does the action link enough to evidence and understanding about Adverse Childhood Experiences and unresolved trauma?
 3. Have we got our priorities right? What more needs to be done and mindful of competing demands on resources, what action should be prioritised?
 4. How can we begin to have a more courageous conversation about what the research tells us about child welfare inequalities in a way that challenges the existing rhetoric and status quo, but is compassionate and understanding and not judgemental or stigmatising?
 5. How can we best collectively co-ordinate and support activity to address poverty in Scotland to have the greatest effect on improving children's circumstances and life chances?

This early paper has been compiled to spark discussion and debate for a Roundtable Event: Addressing Poverty and Child Welfare Intervention: What do we need to do differently in Scotland? In August 2018. The authors are Dr Louise Hill (CELCIS, University of Strathclyde), Chloe Riddell (Children 1st) and Belinda McEwan (Social Work Scotland). Please feel free to contact Louise for any further information and discussion: Louise.Hill@Strath.ac.uk