



Overview of key policy asks 2024

August 2024



Challenge Poverty Week 2024: An overview of our key policy asks



What is Challenge Poverty Week?

Challenge Poverty Week was launched by the Poverty Alliance in 2013. We wanted to highlight the injustice of poverty in Scotland, and to show that collective action based on justice and compassion can create solutions. The week is an opportunity to raise your voice against poverty and unite with others in calling for a just and equal Scotland. Each year, hundreds of organisations in Scotland do just that, including elected representatives, charities and NGOs, local authorities, faith groups, businesses, school and colleges, trade unions, professional bodies and more. This year, Challenge Poverty Week will take place between the 7th and 13th of October.

1. Introduction

Too many people across Scotland, including 240,000 children, are having their life chances restricted by the injustice of preventable poverty.¹ This is not acceptable. The ongoing cost of living crisis is compounding existing inequalities, contributing to a rising tide of poverty as people struggle to access the incomes necessary to live in decency and dignity. The inadequacies of our social security system and structural issues in our labour market have been further illuminated by these dual crises. As the climate emergency continues to have a disproportionate impact on people living on low incomes, this will likely compound pre-existing issues of income adequacy. It has never been more important to raise our collective voices against poverty.

Every year, Challenge Poverty Week places emphasis on a number of key policy asks that will help us to free people from the grip of poverty. These policies are designed to turn our shared values of justice and compassion into action, and to highlight to our elected members the action required to build a Scotland free from poverty. This year's policy asks were developed in collaboration with a working group with representation from public bodies and a variety of civil society organisations.² We would like to thank these organisations for their participation in this process.

¹ Scottish Government (2024) *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23*. Available at: [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)

² The membership of the working group included: Abundant Borders, ALLIANCE, Carers Scotland, CHAP, Citizens Advice Scotland, Eildon Housing Association, Fauldhouse and Breich Valley

Ahead of Challenge Poverty Week and the Scottish Government's Programme for Government, we are calling for substantive action to ensure Scotland is a place where we all:

- Have access to an adequate income for a decent and dignified life
- Have a safe, secure and sustainable home.
- Can get to where we need to go, enabling access to employment, education and essential services.
- Live without hunger.
- Support our communities and volunteers

In placing emphasis on food, housing and transport, these policy asks are focused on meeting people's basic needs, and realising the human rights of people in Scotland. **It is time to build a fairer Scotland where everyone has access to an adequate income that allows for a dignified and decent life.**

2. Poverty in Scotland

Poverty interacts with, and has far-reaching consequences for, Scotland's national outcomes. The injustice of poverty is not only bad for individuals, but for our economy too, stifling economic benefits and contributing to negative health and wellbeing outcomes. We cannot realise Scotland's ambitions of a just transition and a wellbeing economy without action to tackle poverty and inequality.

There is an economic cost to inaction on poverty. The IPPR make clear that failure to bolster individuals' financial security through adequate social security systems and fair work holds back Scotland's collective prosperity, adding a significant cost to public services while limiting economic contributions.³ Estimating just some of these costs, IPPR Scotland found that:

- £2.3 billion of Scottish health boards' budget is directed to responding to the impacts of poverty;
- A quarter of a billion pounds may be being spent each year on addressing the consequence of poverty in our schools and working to increase educational attainment – but often coming too late; and
- The lost income due to historic child poverty in Scotland is, at a conservative estimate, between £1.6 and £2.4 billion per year.

Financial insecurity and poverty are key drivers of poor mental health. We are concerned about the impact of the cost of living crisis on our collective wellbeing, particularly as statutory health services continue to face significant challenges. Research from the Mental Health Foundation has shown that people struggling to pay their rent or mortgage, feed their families, or cover essential bills are at higher risk of developing mental health problems including anxiety and depression. Coupled with figures from December 2023 that show 12% of Scots had accumulated debt over £300 paying essential bills in the last 12 months, it is unsurprising 40% of

Community Development Trust, Fullarton Connexions, Grassmarket Community Project, Magic Breakfast, Marie Curie, NHS Tayside Charitable Foundation, Survivors of Human Trafficking Scotland and Women's Support Project. Please note the policy asks and content of the accompanying briefings may not reflect the organisational views of each member of the working group.

³ IPPR (2023) *Tipping the scales: The social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland*. Available at: [Tipping the scales: The social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland | IPPR](#)

people on the lowest incomes in Scotland were feeling anxious about their personal finances, and 36% were stressed. This is compared to 25% of people on highest incomes feeling anxious and 23% feeling stressed.⁴

A report by the Cross-Party Group on Poverty in the Scottish Parliament also highlighted that poverty-related stigma is extensive and deep-rooted in Scotland. This stigma continues to manifest in several reinforcing ways, impacting people's mental health and wellbeing, creating barriers to accessing support, restricting educational attainment, and influencing the design and resourcing of policies that can tackle poverty.⁵ Work by the Poverty Alliance with people living on low incomes and with experience of social security in Scotland found that stigma creates a key barrier to the uptake of their entitlements.⁶ Several participants in this work spoke of putting off claiming for as long as they possibly could, to the point of hunger and destitution, due to stigmatising attitudes by staff delivering social security support, narratives progressed by politicians and internalised feelings of shame and stigma.

The risk of poverty continues to be disproportionately high for particular groups including disabled people, women, Black and minority ethnic people, and single parents, over 90% of whom are women. Disabled people's poverty is a growing concern, with data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation finding a significantly greater risk of deep poverty in households where someone is disabled.⁷ However, despite this evidence, the needs and experiences of these groups do not receive sufficient attention by policy makers.

Within child poverty policy-making specifically, the priority families approach identified in Scotland's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans has potential to embed some equalities considerations in policy-making, with these groups accounting for over 90% of families with children in poverty. However, the recent scrutiny report by the Poverty and Inequality Commission concludes that this approach is used inconsistently across the Scottish Government and there is need for clarification as to how the priority family types are used to inform policy development, implementation and monitoring in policy areas related to the three key drivers of poverty.⁸ This inconsistency in approach aligns with the utilisation of other equalities-related tools such as the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Impact Assessments.

Equalities considerations should be mainstreamed into policy-making and service design if we are to build a fairer, more equal Scotland that does not leave anyone

⁴ Mental Health Foundation (2023) *New data shows the cost-of-living is still harming Scots' mental health with a third going into debt to pay essentials*. Available at: [New data shows the cost-of-living is still harming Scots' mental health with a third going into debt to pay essentials | Mental Health Foundation](#)

⁵ Cross Party Group on Poverty (2023) *An inquiry into poverty-related stigma in Scotland: Key findings and recommendations*. Available at <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Summary-briefing-of-the-inquiry-into-stigma-CPG-on-Poverty.pdf>

⁶ Poverty Alliance (2023) *The impact of stigma on benefit take-up: Report of Get Heard Scotland Citizen's Panel* available at [Get-Heard-Scotland-Report-Impact-of-Stigma-on-Benefit-Take-Up-for-Publication-May-2024-1.pdf \(povertyalliance.org\)](#)

⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *Poverty in the UK* available at [UK Poverty 2024: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation \(jrf.org.uk\)](#)

⁸ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2024) *Child Poverty Delivery Plan Progress report 2023-24 Scrutiny report* available at [Poverty and Inequality Commission Child Poverty Scrutiny Report 2023-24 - Poverty & Inequality Commission \(povertyinequality.scot\)](#)

behind. We urge the Scottish Government to adopt robust Equality Impact Assessment processes in the development of the Programme for Government. This approach is critical to realising the potential of the priority families approach, as outlined in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

3. Using our taxation powers to raise the revenue needed to tackle poverty

Better tax builds better budgets, which builds a better future for us all. As outlined in our policy asks, tackling poverty in Scotland requires greater investment in our social security safety net and the public services that are a vital lifeline for people on low incomes. The First Minister has made clear that the eradication of child poverty is the single most important policy objective for his Government. The current fiscal environment necessitates progressive use of Scotland's taxation powers to raise the revenue for this commitment.

The Scottish Social Attitudes Survey found that there is public support for changes to taxation, with nearly two-thirds of people in Scotland supporting increased taxation and spending on health, education and social security. Similarly, 68% said that income should be redistributed from the better-off to those who are less well-off.⁹ In September 2023, more than 50 organisations in Scotland supported a briefing from a range of organisations including the Poverty Alliance; Oxfam Scotland; IPPR Scotland; and the Scottish Women's Budget Group which outlined that our critical national priorities, including action to challenge poverty, cannot be sacrificed due to a lack of funds.¹⁰ This joint briefing outlined a range of options in the realm of taxation, and the Scottish Government must look seriously at those options.

In particular, we urge the Scottish Government to end the damaging impasse and deliver the long-awaited fundamental reform of our unjust system of council tax. There must also be exploration of how we can move to better tax wealth, a key driver of inequality in Scotland. Finally, poverty and the climate crisis are the two biggest, and interlinked, challenges facing Scotland today. Fair tax reform should target wealth, while also making polluters pay, so that Scotland can invest in the actions needed to deliver a wellbeing economy for people and planet.¹¹

We have welcomed the action that the Scottish Government have taken to put justice at the heart of our taxation system, including reform to Income Tax. However, we must go further. The Scottish Government must explore opportunities to harness Scotland's wealth to tackle poverty, utilising Scotland's powers over taxation to raise the revenue necessary to invest in our critical public services and social security safety net.

⁹ Scottish Government (2022) *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021-22*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-2021-22/pages/5/>

¹⁰ Oxfam Scotland, IPPR Scotland, Poverty Alliance et al (2023) *The Case for Fair Tax Reform in Scotland* available at https://oxfamapps.org/scotland/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-case-for-fair-tax-reform-in-Scotland-Joint-briefing-FINAL_September-2023-1-2.pdf

¹¹ Oxfam (2022) *Time to Tax*. Available at https://oxfamapps.org/scotland/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Time-to-Tax_Briefing-paper_Oxfam-Scotland_December-2022.pdf

4. What are we asking for, and how do we get there?

This briefing provides an overview of our key policy asks, and the action that is required to achieve our shared ambitions. More details on the individual asks can be found in the accompanying policy briefings on the Challenge Poverty Week website at povertyalliance.org/cpw.

Ahead of Challenge Poverty Week 2024 we are calling for the Scottish Government to take action to create:

A Scotland where we have safe, secure and sustainable homes

What are we calling for?

Ensure that everyone has a secure, sustainable and accessible home that meets their needs.

How do we get there?

- Adequately fund the delivery of new social homes through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, and ensure existing social homes are well-maintained and suitably adapted to meet people's needs.
- Ensure all tenants are aware of, and can exercise, their rights by making advocacy services fully available and accessible.
- Adequately fund - and advertise - advice and financial support to improve energy efficiency in the home, including grants for those on the lowest incomes, disabled people and those living with long-term or terminal conditions.

A Scotland where we can all get where we need to go

What are we calling for?

Improve the affordability, accessibility and reliability of public transport so all of us have the same freedoms to access essential services, employment and leisure.

How do we get there?

- Expanding concessionary travel to under 25s, people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits and unpaid carers.
- Integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram.
- Ensure public transport funding is directed towards networks which are affordable, reliable, safe and meet the needs of local people.

A Scotland where we all have enough to live a decent and dignified life

What are we calling for?

The Scottish Government should ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income by taking the steps needed to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee.

How do we get there?

Initial steps to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee should include action to:

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week.
- Increase the funded childcare entitlement and ensure greater flexibility in the delivery of pre-existing entitlements.
- Prioritise the pre-existing commitment to model a Minimum Income Guarantee for unpaid carers.
- Maximise incomes through full coverage access to advice services, and collective working between the Scottish Government, UK Government and local authorities to automate social security support to increase uptake and reduce stigma.
- Ensure that any changes to our social security systems through the Work Capability Assessment continue to support disabled people on a day-to-day basis so that they can fully realise their rights to independent living and equal participation in society.

A Scotland where we live without hunger

What are we calling for?

Ensure people have dignified access to good quality, healthy and sustainable food.

How do we get there?

- Improve dignified and 'cash first' food insecurity responses, including boosting the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items.
- Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland.

A Scotland where we value our communities and volunteers

What are we calling for?

Introduce fair and sustainable funding of three years or more for the third sector.

How do we get there?

To do this, the Scottish Government must provide funding for community and voluntary organisations that is:

- Fair and recognises the value of the third sector.
- Longer-term, guaranteeing income of three years or more.
- Sustainable, including awards that cover the payment of the real Living Wage, inflation-based uplifts and full costs, including core operating costs.
- Accessible through providing proportionate, and consistent approaches to applications and reporting.
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