



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



# Bringing Hope, Building Futures

Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan  
2026-2031

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## Ministerial foreword – First Minister

My commitment to eradicating child poverty in Scotland stems from my belief that all children should have the opportunity to flourish regardless of the situation they are born into. Supporting the children who need help the most is a moral imperative. It makes Scotland a better place for all of us, with a stronger economy and a brighter future. That is why I have made this the top priority for my government.



The Scottish Government has made significant progress since 2018. Our groundbreaking Scottish Child Payment is a great example – it has supported more than 244,000 parents since 2021, putting almost £1.5 billion directly into the pockets of low-income families.

But our work cannot stop here. Our job is not done until every child in Scotland has enough to eat; a safe, warm home to live in and the chance to fulfil their potential.

The shared consensus behind the 2030 child poverty targets, which were endorsed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in 2017, reflects a national commitment to this ambition – one that goes beyond any single administration and speaks to the kind of country we want Scotland to be.

The context remains extremely challenging – the cost of living is still high, and people are feeling that pressure every day. While the removal of the two-child limit from April is welcome, families will continue to face significant financial pressures as long as the benefit cap remains in place. As a result, we will need to make some difficult decisions to continue to mitigate the UK Government's lack of action.

This plan sets out an ambitious package of action designed to deliver the greatest impact for the people of Scotland.

Collectively, these measures will help to transform how our public services work for families – creating a system of wrap-around Whole Family Support that is more joined-up, easier to navigate, and shaped around what families really need.

I see every day how vital social security is for families across Scotland. It is essential national infrastructure and a core investment in our people, and in the face of harmful UK Government welfare policies, our approach must be both compassionate and sustainable. That is why this plan includes decisive actions to protect and enhance the available support and promote the take-up of the benefits people are rightly entitled to.

It reflects what I hear consistently from families and those who support them: that secure, fairly paid work can transform lives and provide a lasting route out of poverty. We are taking action to build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive economy, and to tackle the barriers in childcare and transport that too often limit parents' ability to take up employment, training, or other opportunities.

This transformation cannot be achieved by government alone – its success relies on collaborative delivery. We will work side-by-side with our partners across Scotland, whose experience, insight and dedication are essential to making this ambition a reality. Our £20 million investment in the new Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund is one example of this in action – supporting community organisations to provide families with an accessible front door to public services that feel connected and work around their needs.

This plan sets a solid foundation for an incoming government to build on. But its impact depends on continuity. Eradicating child poverty is, and must remain, a mission for all of Scotland, and it is essential that the

next government maintains the momentum we have set and continues to deliver for Scotland's children.

Above all, this plan is anchored in hope. A hope grounded in the real progress we have already made and the purpose that unites us. Hope for our children's futures, for the strength of our communities, and for the transformational change we can deliver when we act together. We can build a Scotland where every child grows up free from the grip of poverty and able to imagine, and realise, a brighter future.

**Rt Hon John Swinney**  
**First Minister**

# Ministerial foreword – Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

This is the final Delivery Plan the Scottish Government will publish under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 and it represents far more than a statutory milestone. It reaffirms our commitment to eradicating child poverty and transforming the lives of children and families across Scotland.



Scotland remains the only part of the UK to have set in statute targets to significantly reduce child poverty. This reflects the scale of our ambition, and I am proud of the difference our actions since 2018 have made. Our offer of free bus travel for everyone under the age of 22 in Scotland is estimated to save families over £3,000 across their child's life. We have expanded our Free School Meal offer to all children in Primary 1-5, and we have delivered 65,044 affordable homes through our continued investment in the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

This progress has been achieved through bold, coordinated action at every level – nationally and locally, across the third sector, local government, public sector, and the private sector – and I am deeply grateful to the many stakeholders, partners and communities whose commitment has driven this work.

Yet despite this progress, there are still too many children living in poverty in Scotland. Too many children who are not able to reach their full potential because of

a lack of resources. This cannot continue. Many families are struggling as the cost of everyday essentials remains high – and this hits hardest for priority family groups, who tend to spend more of their income on these essentials.

While we are determined to do everything we can, our ability to respond at the pace families need is constrained by the UK Government's continued control over key levers such as the minimum wage, living hours, and Universal Credit. These limits make an already difficult situation even harder.

That is why our commitment is unwavering. We need to go further and move faster. This plan is not just a programme of work – it is a catalyst for the progress we must make to reach our 2030 targets. It sets out 15 areas where focused action is needed in the life of the next Parliament, alongside specific actions that will be taken in the year ahead to deliver real, tangible change for families.

Our vision is clear: every family should be able to get the support they need, when

and where they need it, to progress out of poverty. The Plan sets out a mixture of national offers – such as breakfast clubs for primary school aged children, and our funded childcare offer for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds – alongside more tailored, place-based support that will make it easier for families to get help in a way that works for them.

By reinvesting funds that were previously committed to mitigating the UK Government's two-child limit, we have been able to significantly enhance our overall support for families, creating the strongest package of financial support available anywhere in the UK. We are continuing to deliver the initiatives that are already making a real difference, including uprating our Five Family Payments in line with inflation and mitigating the UK Government's bedroom tax, while at the same time taking new action to respond to the emerging challenges families are facing. Taken together, our action is estimated to keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty next year.

We have kept priority family groups at the centre of our approach. I hear too often from people who are doing everything they can but still face a system that puts barriers in their way – and these challenges are often exacerbated for women, especially disabled women, and those within our ethnic minority communities. Women's poverty is children's poverty, and that is why we have taken a gendered approach to this plan. We cannot accept a Scotland where a person's opportunities, security, or dignity are constrained simply because the system is stacked against them.

We know that the targets set for 2030 are ambitious – never more so than now, when families across Scotland are facing real and growing pressures. But we need to be ambitious. To break the cycle of child poverty, we must hold ourselves to account, stay focused, and bring the full force of our collective effort to this mission.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville**  
**Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice**

# Introduction

**This Delivery Plan marks a decisive step in our shared mission to eradicate child poverty and improve the lives of children and families across Scotland.**

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 ('the 2017 Act') sets in statute ambitious targets to significantly reduce rates of child poverty in Scotland so that by 2030:

- Fewer than 10% of children in Scotland live in relative poverty
- Fewer than 5% of children in Scotland live in absolute poverty
- Fewer than 5% of children in Scotland live in combined low income and material deprivation
- Fewer than 5% of children in Scotland live in persistent poverty

Scotland remains the only part of the UK to have such targets, reflecting our determination to break the cycle of poverty and create a fairer future for every child.

Since 2017, the Scottish Government has taken a wide range of action to drive progress towards the targets. Through our two previous Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans: [Every Child, Every Chance](#), and [Best Start, Bright Futures](#), we have: delivered new devolved employment support and benefits, including the Scottish Child Payment; provided more affordable homes; expanded free bus travel for young people and Free School Meal provision; and provided 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare for eligible families.

These actions have made a significant difference, with rates of relative child poverty in 2023-24 falling to the lowest level in almost a decade. Compared to the UK as a whole, rates of both relative and absolute poverty were nine percentage points lower in 2023-24.

This progress has been supported by a wider, whole of government effort to reform public services and build a stronger wellbeing economy, and it demonstrates the scale and seriousness of Scotland's ambition. It has been achieved despite a challenging backdrop: years of austerity from successive UK Governments and the impact of harmful policies like the benefit cap and the bedroom tax; as well as external shocks including Brexit, the COVID pandemic, Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the ongoing cost of living crisis. Together, these pressures have placed significant strain on households and the Scottish budget, working against our collective efforts to eradicate child poverty.

The latest statistics showing Scotland's progress towards the 2030 targets will be published on 26 March 2026.

## An enduring framework to drive progress

The 2017 Act received unanimous support from parties across the Scottish Parliament, demonstrating that this is a truly cross-party mission.

With the Scottish elections due to take place in May 2026, this plan is designed to give the next administration a strong foundation to build on, while allowing them to set their own policy priorities and decide how best to speed up progress. It sets out the actions we will take in 2026-27, with further action to be outlined within annual progress reports on child poverty by an incoming Scottish Government.

Since 2017, we have built a strong [evidence base](#) about what works to tackle child poverty. We have also listened widely – speaking with parents, young people, organisations and experts – to help shape the themes, areas of intervention, and the actions committed in this plan. We have engaged with more than 90 parents with lived experience of poverty and over 180 young people, supported by key partners including the Poverty Alliance, Changing Realities, Young Scot, Child Poverty Action Group, and Aberlour. We have also received [advice](#) from Scotland’s Poverty and Inequality Commission, which has helped guide our approach.

We heard clearly that the three drivers of poverty reduction we identified in 2018 still resonate with people today:

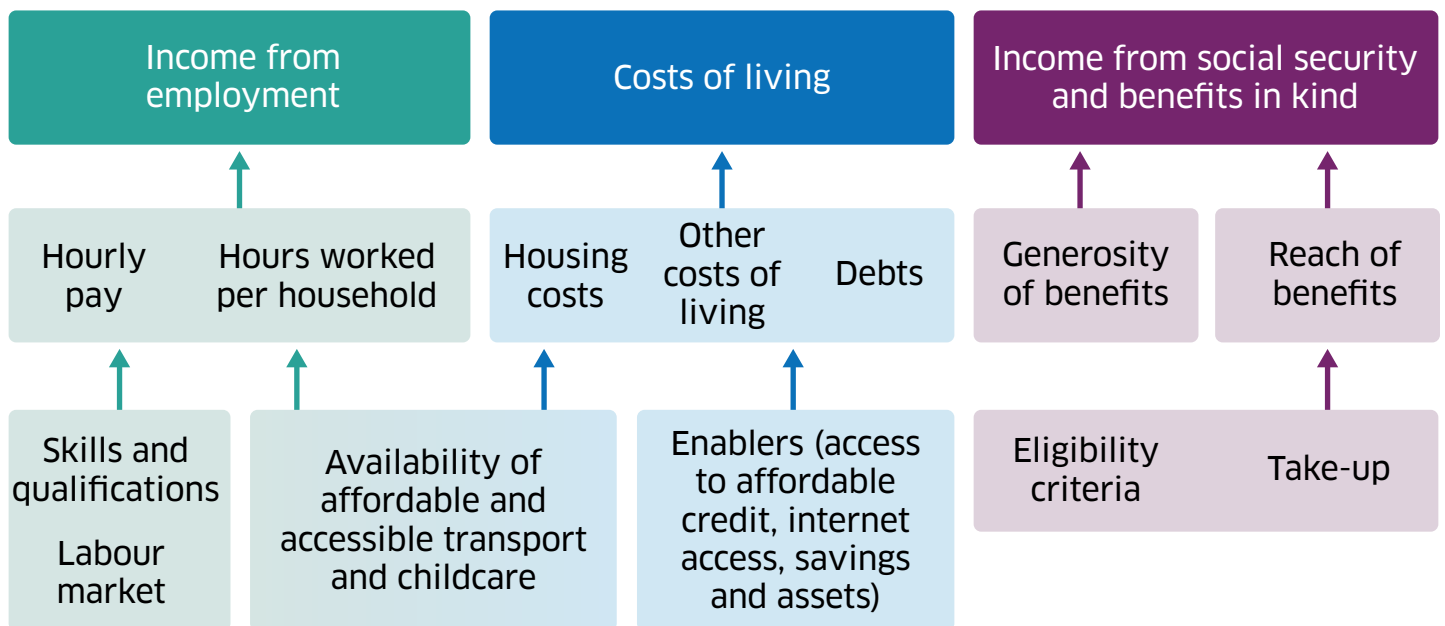


Figure 1: Drivers of poverty reduction

Informed by the views of those who shared their experiences with us, this plan focuses on four key themes and 15 interconnected areas where further action is needed. These are set out below:

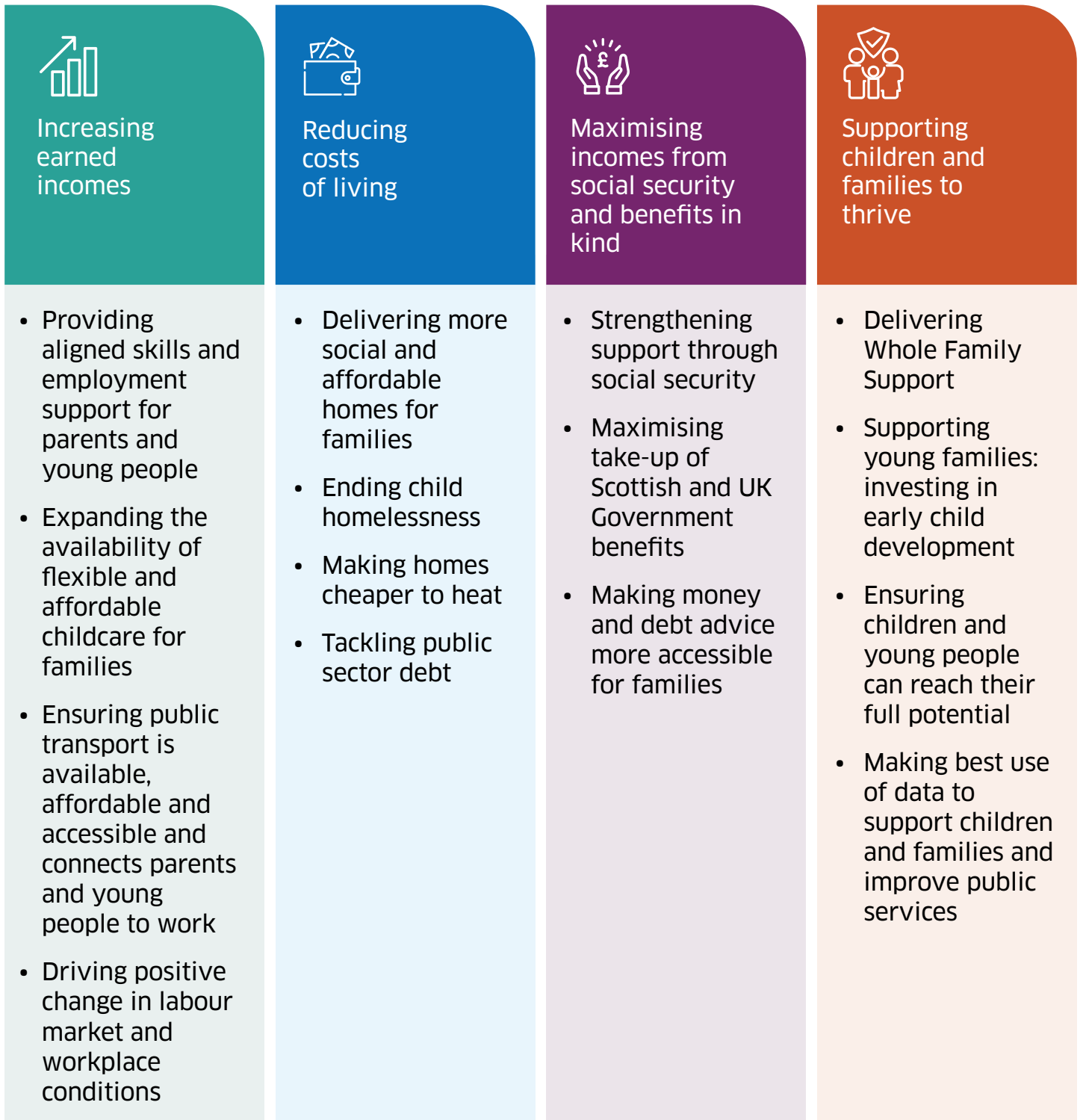


Figure 2: Themes and areas of intervention

Enabling Whole Family Support is at the heart of our approach. This means creating the conditions for partners to deliver person-centred services that interact seamlessly so that families across Scotland can get the right support, at the right time, in the right place, for as long as they need it. In collaboration with local partners, we are reshaping our system to make this our default way of working.

Alongside this plan we have published an updated [Cumulative Impact Assessment](#), which estimates that Scottish Government policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty in 2026-27, and projects rates of both relative and absolute poverty to 2030. The modelling now includes the potential impacts of wider changes in areas like childcare, and we will continue to strengthen this analysis to guide future action.

No single action on its own will deliver the systemic shift needed to eradicate child poverty. We need all these actions working together, involving all of Scotland, to make a real, lasting difference for families and break the cycle of poverty.



## Building on the action we have taken to date

Across all 15 areas where further action is needed, this plan sets out how we will drive further progress in the year ahead. Some of the actions we will take are highlighted below.



To help families increase their earned incomes we will:

1. **Invest £11 million to support parents to access the skills and education they need to enter, sustain and progress in work.** This includes investment of £9 million in the college sector to provide new opportunities, with support with childcare and transport, and £2 million for a new Training Access Fund.
2. **Deliver a national breakfast club offer for primary school aged children by August 2027, backed by over £100 million across three years.** This is estimated to support over 125,000 children each year, providing additional flexibility to help parents access work and saving money on childcare costs.
3. **Invest up to £19 million to develop a new Transport to Employment offer for low-income parents.** This will support parents with transport costs to access training and employability support whilst also increasing the availability of transport options for parents accessing work.
4. **Deliver a new £10 million Flexible Workforce Development Fund to incentivise employers to support employment and progression opportunities.** Focused on families at risk of poverty, this will help more parents access the skills they need while promoting workplace practices that reduce barriers for parents.



To reduce the cost of living for families we will:

5. **Invest a record £4.1 billion over the next four years as part of a wider investment of up to £4.9 billion in affordable homes.** This is estimated to support delivery of 36,000 affordable homes and provide up to 24,000 children with a place to call home.
6. **Invest a further £9 million in mitigating the impact of the freeze in Local Housing Allowance rates.** This will support up to an estimated 18,000 families to meet their housing costs and will help to prevent homelessness.
7. **Invest a further £1 million in our Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund, supporting vulnerable island households.** Working in partnership with island local authorities this will deliver targeted initiatives tailored to local needs, including in support of fuel payments and energy costs.
8. **Allocate over £2 million to the Council Tax Debt project across Scotland.** This will provide support for up to 15,000 people experiencing council tax and water charges debt and will continue to develop and share good practice across local authorities to drive lasting change.



To maximise family incomes from social security and benefits in kind we will:

9. **Develop the systems and legislation needed to increase the value of our Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week for all children under the age of 1.** Commencing in 2027-28 this will help an estimated 12,000 children, further strengthening support available in the critical first year of life.
10. **Deliver a national, multi-channel Parental Employability and Financial Support campaign to help families access available support.** This will include relevant devolved and reserved benefits, including Universal Credit, to help families get the support they are entitled to.
11. **Invest over £27 million in welfare, income maximisation and debt advice services over the next two years through multi-year grants.** This will provide stability and certainty for the sector, improving staff retention and therefore service quality, which we expect will support at least 80,000 households each year.



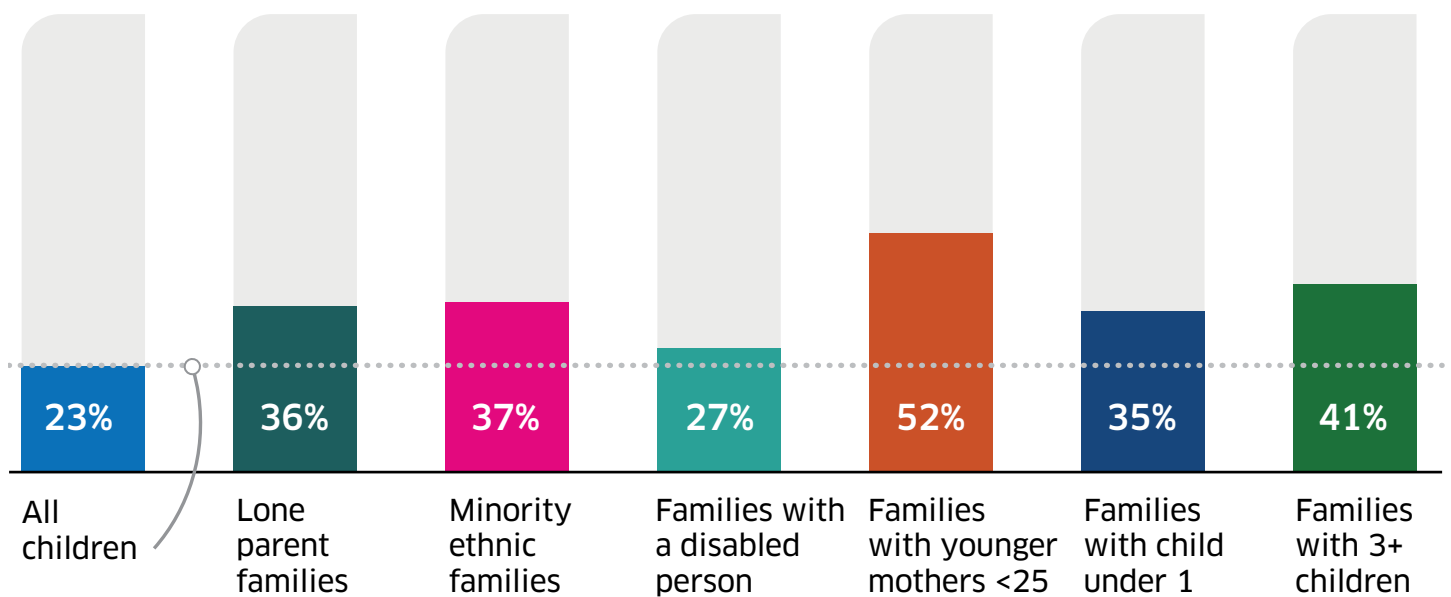
To support children and families to thrive we will:

12. **Expand the Family Nurse Partnership Programme to an additional 500 first time mothers.** This will enable more young parents to access intensive support from early pregnancy until their child reaches two – helping build the confidence and skills they need to access the right support for their baby and give them the best start in life.
13. **Expand the MCR Pathways school-based mentoring programme for care experienced and disadvantaged young people.** Backed by an additional £1 million this will enable up to 5,500 young people in schools across Scotland to benefit from this support.
14. **Establish a £20 million Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund.** This will enable third sector organisations to provide more support that wraps around families in their communities, making connections to public services and helping to break the cycle of poverty.
15. **Invest £2 million in developing and implementing a ‘Once for Scotland’ Data Exchange programme to raise capacity and technical expertise across the public sector in Scotland.** This will help to unlock the use of data to ensure that services and support reach families who need it most.

## A continued focus on those at greatest risk of poverty

This plan maintains our focus on the families and groups at greatest risk of poverty.

We know that around 90% of all children in poverty live in the [six priority family types](#) identified in our first delivery plan:



**Figure 3: Priority families, children in relative poverty**

As well as focusing on the barriers faced by the six priority family types, this plan considers other factors that affect families' lives so we can better support those at most risk of poverty:

- **Gender.** Child poverty is women's poverty. Across the family types at greatest risk of poverty, many are households led by women. This means we can only deliver meaningful progress on child poverty by tackling the inequalities women face.
- **Other marginalised groups.** There are many factors that shape how individuals and families experience poverty – including homelessness, rural or island living, experience of the care system, being a victim or survivor of domestic abuse, or being kinship carers. Understanding how these factors interact with gender, disability and ethnicity is essential to designing policies that respond effectively to lived experience of poverty.
- **The depth of poverty.** Around two thirds of children in poverty live in families considered to be in deep poverty – with incomes further below an acceptable standard of living. This plan brings together actions that go beyond income and living-cost support to ensure that families receive the wider help and services they need.

- **Families who are at risk of falling into poverty.** Families move in and out of poverty over time, with many living just above the poverty line. By taking a preventative approach, offering support early to those who may be at risk, we can help families feel more secure and better able to handle future pressures.

Our actions take an intersectional approach that considers how different factors overlap to shape someone's experience of poverty. This enables us to address systemic barriers more effectively and design policies that respond to the complex, deep-rooted inequalities families face. Working closely with stakeholders and families, we will ensure that our actions genuinely improve people's lives.





# Driving further progress on child poverty



Increasing earned incomes



Reducing costs of living



Supporting children and families to thrive



Maximising incomes from social security and benefits in kind

# Increasing earned incomes

Since 2018, to help families increase their earned incomes we have:



**Transformed Scotland's employability landscape**, supporting over 30,000 parents through our No One Left Behind approach since April 2020, with more than 8,400 starting work.

Taken steps to design additional childcare offers for parents, supporting almost 7,000 children and their families through funded **school age and wrap-around childcare** services.



Increased the **total student support package** from £7,625 in 2017 to £11,400 in the 2025-26 academic year, with a record 17.4% of entrants to full-time first degree courses at Scottish universities in 2024-25 coming from the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland.

Increased **funded early learning and childcare** from 600 hours in 2017 to 1140 hours for every three and four year old, and eligible two year olds - if families paid for the funded childcare on offer it could cost around £6,000 per year per eligible child.



Funded 9,000 new breakfast club places through our **Bright Start Breakfasts fund**, impacting up to 20,000 children.



Expanded **free bus travel** to all children and young people under the age of 22 in Scotland with over 274,000 free bus journeys made.



**Removed peak fares on Scotrail services for good** and expanded free travel on ferries for young islanders.

Taken action to ensure Scotland remains the highest **real Living Wage** paying nation by rates across the UK, with 88.7% of workers over 18 earning this in 2025 including 88% of women, through our focus on fair work.



Become the first country in the world to pass national **Community Wealth Building** legislation, promoting investment in local communities to create jobs and drive economic growth.



“Affordable childcare, access to flexible jobs and extracurricular activities for kids, would assist in breaking the poverty cycle and provide every child a fair chance to flourish.”

**Bernie O, Changing Realities**

Employment offers a sustainable route out of poverty for many families, so increasing earned incomes is a critical element of our approach to meeting the 2030 targets.

However, too often parents – and particularly women – are effectively locked out of the labour market or unable to increase their earnings as a result of systemic barriers. Many lone parents and parents of young children are already working as much as they can while balancing their childcare commitments. Disabled parents are more likely to be underemployed and face extra barriers to accessing employment, including inaccessible public transport and discrimination. Women often come up against gendered assumptions and structural barriers, which mean they are more likely to reduce their earnings if they have children – and these challenges are even greater for people with multiple intersecting protected characteristics, such as disabled women.

We must take action to remove these barriers and support parents into work.

We must also support today’s young people to access the labour market – including by expanding access to training and learning and tackling the inequalities of opportunity and outcomes experienced by young care leavers, young disabled people, young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and other groups.

By supporting parents and young people to realise their economic potential, we can raise household incomes for those in or at risk of poverty through a stronger, growing Wellbeing Economy.

While employment plays a critical role in eradicating child poverty, we know that it is only part of the solution. Many families are not able to work, or work enough, because of their personal circumstances. That is why the wider measures in this plan are essential to making sure every family gets the support they need.

To drive further progress we will take action focused on:

- Providing aligned skills and employment support for parents and young people
- Expanding the availability of flexible and affordable childcare for families
- Ensuring public transport is available, affordable and accessible and connects parents and young people to work
- Driving positive change in labour market and workplace conditions

## Providing aligned skills and employment support for parents and young people

“At some point in the future I would like to have a career instead of just having whatever wee job fits in around the children. I just don’t know how I could do that just now.”

**Parent/carer, Save the Children**

By delivering skills and employability support that is better connected and easier to navigate, we can help parents and young people unlock their potential and access fulfilling employment.

The ongoing review of Scotland’s post-school education and skills landscape and wider public service reform provide a solid foundation for further progress. We are also working with Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) and employers to better connect the support available and strengthen its impact, ultimately helping more parents to enter and progress in work.

In the year ahead to maintain the progress we have made, we will:

- Invest £90 million per year in employability support throughout the Scottish Spending Review period. In 2026-27 this includes over £40 million for Parental Employability Support, and £5 million for the delivery of Specialist Employability Support ensuring parents, particularly those in the priority family groups, continue to receive tailored help to move towards, enter and progress in employment.

We will also go further to address barriers to employment by:

- Investing £9 million in the college sector through the RISE (Raising Income through Skills and Education) initiative to support families at greatest risk of poverty to access the skills and education they need to enter, sustain and progress in work. RISE will use whole-family approaches, including providing childcare and transport, to support up to 2,400 parents in 2026-27.
- Introducing a new £2 million Training Access Fund to provide access to training opportunities for people in low-paid work. Together with the RISE initiative, the Fund will strengthen our adult upskilling and reskilling offer, especially for those who need it most, including the six priority family groups.
- Investing up to £4.2 million in 2026-27 to strengthen NHS Scotland's employability infrastructure and deliver 200 paid placements for parents at greatest risk of poverty. This will harness the scale of our NHS workforce and empower Health Boards to advance their role as anchor institutions, working with LEPs to create pathways into fair work.



## CASE STUDY

### Helping parents to access flexible employment

Under 'Best Start, Bright Futures' we committed to providing stronger, more tailored employability support for parents.

Jane\* first heard about Family Finances parental employability support through weekly parent drop-ins at her son's secondary school. At the time, she was struggling to balance unpredictable hours working bank shifts for the NHS alongside caring for her disabled son. She hoped to retrain and find flexible, home-based work, but didn't know where to begin.

Her keyworker met her first at the school and later in the local library to make travelling easier. They explored learning options together and, after engaging with Jobs & Business Glasgow, identified an online Data Analyst course Jane could study during school hours. As the course cost over £1,000, the keyworker helped her to apply successfully to the local Training and Support Fund.

To help Jane focus on her own development, her keyworker also supported her son to build a social routine by joining local boxing and swimming clubs and finding volunteering opportunities for the school holidays.

Jane completed her course, supported by weekly motivational check-ins with her keyworker. She then received job-search support and secured a part-time home-based Business Support Worker role with an energy company, earning a salary of £10,450, with flexible leave including time for a family holiday. With additional help from Money Matters, she accessed Carer's Allowance for her son, increasing her income by £81.58 per week.

Jane has described the support she received as 'life changing'. She now has flexible work that fits her family's needs perfectly, she and her son have grown in confidence, her finances have improved, and she says her home is 'a happier place overall.'

Under 'Bringing Hope, Building Futures' we will continue to strengthen the support available to parents to increase their income from employment. We will maintain investment in our No One Left Behind approach and build on this with further support intended to help parents upskill and progress at work, including through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund and Training Access Fund.

\*All names in the case studies in this plan have been changed for anonymity

## Expanding the availability of flexible and affordable childcare for families

“We cannot currently afford any extra childcare costs; I have had to decline extra working hours because childcare would not be covered by the extra pay.”

**Parent, Parenting across Scotland**

Childcare is essential infrastructure which not only supports children’s development, but also enables parents to access work, training and learning in the knowledge their child is safe and well looked after.

Our early delivery of a targeted school age childcare offer has shown that many less affluent communities do not have sufficient childcare services beyond the funded 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). Parents consistently tell us how important it is to have services that genuinely wrap around the school day – including breakfast clubs, which provide a nutritious breakfast for children and give parents more time to work, train and learn.

Expanding our childcare offer will make a real difference for families, helping children to flourish while supporting parents to access fulfilling employment. This is particularly important for women, who are far more likely to take on childcare responsibilities and reduce their working hours to accommodate family demands.

In the year ahead to maintain the progress we have made, we will:

- Invest over £1 billion in 2026-27 in funded ELC, providing 1140 hours of funded childcare for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds – supporting parents to access work, training and learning, and giving children the best start in life.
- Continue to work with local authorities to reach more younger children through maximising uptake of our ELC offer for eligible two-year-olds, with a focus on families most at risk of poverty and on areas with some of the lowest take-up rates.
- Invest a further £13.4 million to enable staff delivering services to continue to be paid at least the real Living Wage, impacting up to 13,000 staff in ELC settings. With women making up the majority of the workforce this will help drive progress on gender equality and improve outcomes for children in these settings.
- Fund school age childcare services for over 7,000 children and families most at risk of living in poverty through our existing school age childcare programme, including through our childcare Early Adopter Communities and Extra Time partnership with the Scottish Football Association.

Building upon our existing funded childcare offer and investment in school age childcare services, we will drive further progress by:

- Delivering a national breakfast club offer for primary school aged children with provision in all primary and special schools by August 2027, backed by over £100 million of investment across 2026-29 – estimated to support over 125,000 children each year.
- Investing £15 million in providing the childcare that priority families need to enter and stay in employment. This will support families for whom childcare costs present a barrier to employment or to sustaining or increasing hours.
- Increasing wrap-around activity clubs for primary school age children through an additional £2.5 million of investment each year. Building on our Extra Time programme, this will reach even more families most at risk of living in poverty and include a range of sports and wider activities.
- Working with DWP and HMRC to improve the take-up of help with childcare costs that they offer, through awareness raising and person-centred support, and by sharing learning which will help the UK Government to minimise barriers for families where possible.



## CASE STUDY

### **Bright Start Breakfasts improving attendance and wellbeing**

Pitreavie Primary School serves an urban community in Dunfermline where many families face transport barriers and real financial pressure. For one family, who live at the edge of the catchment area, the removal of the school bus has made it much harder to get the children to school each day.

Three of the five siblings were recording very low attendance levels. If one child struggled to get ready or cope with the morning routine, it affected the whole family, and everyone often stayed at home. Mornings were stressful and unpredictable, and this was affecting the children's learning and wellbeing.

The school offered all three children places at the Bright Start Breakfast Club. This gave them a calm, welcoming space at the start of each day, with a healthy breakfast, a consistent routine, and support from staff who knew them well. One child, who often struggled emotionally in the mornings, had a regular check-in with a trusted adult to help them settle.

One of the children said, "I feel happier knowing I'm coming to Breakfast Club before going to class. I like playing with the toys and being with my brother at school before I go to class. I like seeing Mrs C because she is my friend."

Since joining the club, all three children attend school more regularly and have had fewer prolonged absences from school. They arrive calmer, more focused, and ready to learn. The gentle start to the day has reduced anxiety and helped build positive daily habits.

Their mum reflected that, "Coming to breakfast in the morning makes a huge difference to our morning. A and C particularly respond well, in that it is much easier to get them motivated to get ready and out to school. A still has tricky days but knowing she has a check in and a softer start to the day with Mrs C is a real settling factor for her."

Under 'Bringing Hope, Building Futures' we will build on the success of Bright Start Breakfasts by delivering a national breakfast club offer to all primary school children across Scotland.

## Ensuring public transport is available, affordable and accessible and connects parents and young people to work

“Transport is another issue...if you really want to go out maybe apart from to our local park...you need to take the bus...which costs like £5.40... I only do it once in a while.”

**Mother, Save the Children**

Scotland’s public transport system is a key enabler for growth and opportunity, helping families to get to where they live, learn, work and spend time together. But travel costs can put real pressure on household budgets, especially for low-income families and those in rural areas where services are limited. Many parents have to make several journeys each day for nursery, school and work, and they need to feel safe using public transport – especially early in the morning or late at night.

Families need transport that is safe, affordable and easy to use, which supports them to take advantage of opportunities and keeps more money in their pockets.

In the year ahead we will build upon the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Provide free bus travel for over 2.4 million people, including all children and young people under 22 and disabled people, backed by investment of £465.8 million, saving families over £3,000 across their child’s life and connecting almost 800,000 children and young people to new opportunities and activities, including work, training and learning.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Investing up to £19 million in 2026-27 to develop a new Transport to Employment offer for low-income parents. This will support parents with transport costs to access training and employability support whilst also increasing the availability of transport options for parents accessing work. It will also focus on addressing challenges faced by lone parents and families in areas where accessibility, availability and affordability of transport can affect pathways into work.

## Driving positive change in labour market and workplace conditions

“With some employers it can feel like a crime to have a child, when there are emergencies – there is a stigma there.”

**Panellist, Get Heard Scotland**

To offer a sustainable route out of poverty, we need a labour market that provides secure jobs with fair pay and conditions for everyone – regardless of gender, race or disability.

Only by tackling labour market inequalities will we be able to drive sustainable progress towards our 2030 targets through employment. This means continuing to work with employers to promote fair work through the likes of our [Fair Work resource hub](#); addressing the higher rates of in-work poverty experienced by women and young people; supporting lone parents who are already in work to increase their hours; preventing part-time working being a barrier to earning sufficient income or achieving progression; and supporting more disabled people into jobs which make use of their skills and experience.

While key powers over employment law remain reserved to the UK Government, including in relation to the National Minimum Wage and parental leave, we are firmly committed to driving change in the labour market through our investment and action. The actions in this plan will be supported by legislative change we can take, including amending the regulations which support effective performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty to extend the scope of pay gap reporting to race and disability following consultation with the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Leverage the impact of Scottish Government investment through implementation of our Fair Work First approach to public spending, which requires employers receiving public sector grant funding to pay at least the real Living Wage and to provide effective worker voice channels. Between July 2023 and March 2025, Fair Work First criteria have been applied to an estimated £6 billion worth of public sector grants.
- Provide support to Living Wage Scotland to encourage Scottish employers to accredit as real Living Wage and real living hours employers, continuing our action which has seen at least 72,000 workers in Scotland benefit from a pay rise as a result of employer accreditation since 2015.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Introducing a new £10 million Flexible Workforce Development Fund intended to incentivise employers to support upskilling and progression opportunities for parents and priority family groups in their workforce, incorporating mechanisms for recognition of prior learning to help individuals build on the skills and experience they already have – supporting business productivity and helping parents to increase their earned incomes.

## CASE STUDY

### Supporting parents to build new skills and thrive at work

The new Colleges RISE initiative and the Training Access Fund (TAF) will provide targeted, person-centred support for adult learners, helping to equip parents with the skills and opportunities they need to access secure and better paid jobs.

RISE through colleges will give low-income parents and carers practical help to build new skills – offering training they can fit around family life, along with essential support with childcare, travel, and study costs. The TAF will support adult learners experiencing, or at risk of, in-work poverty to access higher-level skills training, giving them the chance to earn more and build a career that offers stability and real opportunities to grow. The new Flexible Workforce Development Fund is intended to complement RISE by incentivising businesses to offer upskilling and progression opportunities for parents and priority families within their workforce.

In practice, this could mean a low-income lone parent working part-time in retail uses the TAF to take a digital skills course they couldn't otherwise afford. With those new skills, they are able to: move into a stable office job with standard working hours and better pay; reduce the number of childcare hours they need; and gain more opportunities to develop and progress in their career.

# Reducing the costs of living

Since 2018, to reduce the cost of living for families we have:



Delivered 65,044 affordable homes, including 48,623 homes for social rent, through our continued investment in the **Affordable Housing Supply Programme**, with action to keep social rents substantially lower than market rents benefitting approximately 140,000 children in poverty each year.



Delivered the **Housing (Scotland) Act 2025** that will support the introduction of long-term rent control to help support affordability of homes in the private rented sector and introduce new homelessness prevention duties that will make the prevention of homelessness everybody's business.



Continued to invest in the **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**, benefitting over 100,000 households with children, and saving recipients on average over £900 in 2025-26.



Supported households to maintain their tenancies and avoid homelessness through our investment in **Discretionary Housing Payments**, which includes supporting around 10,000 children each year through mitigation of the UK Government's benefit cap.

Continued to invest in our **Warmer Homes Scotland Scheme** supporting over 7,300 households in 2024-25 saving households around £450 a year on average on their fuel bills.



Maintained investment in our **social contract**, including free prescriptions and free tuition, and introduced access to free period products for anyone who needs them.



Supported over 15,000 people, including over 4,000 with council tax arrears, through the Citizens Advice Scotland **Council Tax Debt project** - with households seeing debt written off or support through Council Tax Reduction worth a total of £2.69 million.



Provided over £2.8 million to clear historic **school meal debt** and continue to work with COSLA to support the management of school meal debt going forward.

“It’s not normal to go weeks without a proper wash because hot water is too expensive... to do nothing outside of school because sports cost money.”

**Young person, Young Scot**

Supporting families with the cost of living is essential to reducing child poverty and improving life for parents and children.

The ongoing cost of living crisis is putting ever greater pressure on household budgets, with families continuing to pay much more for essentials like housing, food and energy than they did before.

This particularly impacts priority family types, who tend to spend more of their income on these costs, and the [National Advisory Council on Women and Girls](#) has highlighted the multiple ways in which women are disproportionately affected. Women often function as ‘poverty managers’ in the home, taking on responsibility for stretching budgets to meet household needs.

Our action to date has made a real difference. Research from the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) suggests that our investment in affordable homes has helped to keep child poverty rates in Scotland six percentage points below the UK average in recent years - equivalent to keeping 60,000 children in Scotland out of poverty.

But we know that families urgently need more support. Our engagement highlighted ongoing worries about the cost of housing, fuel and food. People told us they want more social housing, more help with energy and utility costs, and action to reduce the number of children living in temporary accommodation.

By taking action to reduce living costs, we can help families meet their basic needs and make sure no child is left cold, hungry or without a safe home.

To drive further progress we will take action focused on:

- Delivering more social and affordable homes for families
- Ending child homelessness
- Making homes cheaper to heat
- Tackling public sector debt

## Delivering more social and affordable homes for families

“Since moving into our own property, my daughter and I have experienced a significant improvement in our lives. We finally have the independence and stability we always longed for. The regular check-ups and updates from the housing association make us feel valued and secure. Moreover, the chance to apply for extra funding during challenging times has been truly helpful. We are incredibly grateful for the positive impact this has made in our lives.”

**Katie, parent** - [Housing Associations Charitable Trust engagement](#)

Housing is the single biggest cost many families face every month, leaving less money for other essentials like food and energy. Children need safe, secure and warm homes to grow up in, while access to affordable, high-quality housing helps parents manage household costs, reduce financial stress, and build a stable foundation for work, training and education.

By continuing to invest in the delivery of more affordable homes – including through the establishment of More Homes Scotland – and taking action to strengthen protections for families living in the private rented sector, we will help to reduce the cost families face and ensure they have a strong and stable foundation for their lives. We must do more to ensure our Affordable Housing Supply Programme helps the families who need it most – particularly families in rural areas, households with a disabled person and others at risk of poverty.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Mitigate the UK Government’s bedroom tax and benefit cap, backed by a record £106 million of investment in Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), helping families to maintain their tenancies. This will give approximately 20,000 children support with bedroom tax, 10,000 children support with benefit cap, and will include families who receive little to no help from the removal of the two-child limit as a result of the benefit cap.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Investing up to a further £9 million in DHPs to support up to an estimated 18,000 families impacted by the UK Government’s ongoing freeze to Local Housing Allowance rates – reducing housing-related poverty and helping prevent homelessness.

- Investing a record £4.1 billion over the next four years as part of a wider investment of up to £4.9 billion in affordable homes. This is estimated to support delivery of 36,000 affordable homes and provide up to 24,000 children with a place to call home. This planned investment supports our continued commitment towards the delivery of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which at least 70% will be for social rent and 10% in rural and island communities as well as our wider all-tenure ambition.
- Introducing Awaab's Law in the rented sector on 6 October 2026, subject to Parliament's agreement, starting with damp and mould, to ensure landlords promptly address issues hazardous to tenants – improving the quality of homes for families.

## CASE STUDY

### Discretionary Housing Payments help reunite a family

DHPs are administered by local authorities and provide extra financial support to people struggling with their housing costs.

A local council recently supported a family experiencing housing pressures by using DHPs to secure an affordable private rented tenancy. The family did not have enough space in their council property, so they had been forced to live apart. One parent stayed in the council flat with three of the children, while the other parent and their baby were sofa surfing at a relative's home. This was putting real strain on the whole family's daily life and wellbeing.

The council recognised that the family needed to be rehoused into a bigger property where they could all live together. They found a suitable private rental property, but the rent was higher than the Local Housing Allowance rate, leaving a shortfall the family could not afford.

By using additional funding for DHPs announced as part of the housing emergency action plan, the council were able to award a payment to cover the rent shortfall. This meant that the family could secure the tenancy, reunite, and move into a stable home that met their needs.

Under 'Bringing Hope, Building Futures', we will continue to invest in DHPs to ensure families across Scotland can access safe, warm and affordable homes.

## Ending child homelessness

“Staying in a hotel is hard, there is nowhere to wash your clothes, nowhere to cook your own food, the hotel food is cold.”

**Young person, Scottish Refugee Council “Your Voice Matters”**

Scotland has some of the strongest protections in the world for people experiencing homelessness. But too often, people are unable to get help until it is too late. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, people should be offered a settled home as soon as possible. This approach – known as rapid rehousing – is the cornerstone of Scotland’s homelessness strategy.

Temporary accommodation is an important safety net for families, but it needs to be safe, good quality and used only for a short time. We have committed to reducing the number of children spending long periods in temporary accommodation through our [housing emergency action plan](#).

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Invest a further £8 million in 2026-27 in the transition to rapid rehousing, which aims to reduce the need for many forms of temporary accommodation.
- Learn from the 15 homelessness prevention pilots to inform the development of guidance and regulations for the ask and act duties to help families maintain tenancies.

Recognising that women and children who are experiencing domestic abuse are at much higher risk of housing insecurity and homelessness, in the year ahead we will drive further progress by:

- Strengthening support for women experiencing domestic abuse by requiring all social landlords to have a domestic abuse policy and bringing Part 2 of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 into force from 1 August 2026 – giving social landlords greater control to transfer a tenancy to a victim-survivor.
- Investing a further £2 million in our national Fund to Leave in 2026-27, giving women more choices and more control by helping to pay for the essentials needed for them to leave an abusive partner and build a more stable future for their children and themselves. The fund will be open to women across Scotland, regardless of their housing tenure, including those in the private rented sector, social housing, or owner-occupied properties.

## CASE STUDY

### Fund to Leave

Fund to Leave provides financial support to help women leave an abusive partner.

J is a 40-year-old mother of two children, a 16-year-old and an 8-month-old. She was experiencing domestic abuse from her partner, as well as harassment and intimidation from the perpetrator's family.

J presented to her local authority for homelessness assistance, and she and her children were placed in temporary accommodation. The temporary accommodation was not a safe or suitable place for them, and both J and her 16-year-old daughter felt frightened and distressed there.

J was being supported by her local Women's Aid group and was prioritised for a place in a refuge. However, she needed ongoing treatment for a medical condition and was worried about moving too far away. The refuge was not immediately available and she faced a two day wait – a situation that can put women at real risk of returning to an unsafe home.

J was awarded £560 from the pilot Fund to Leave, which allowed her and her family to stay in a safe hotel for two nights while waiting for the refuge space. The fund also paid for taxis to take the family to the hotel and to the refuge when available, as well as covering the food and essential clothing they needed as they were not able to bring clothes with them when leaving.

J said: "I could never have done this myself, you've saved us and given us hope, we're so grateful can't thank you enough."

## Making homes cheaper to heat

“Paying bills can make things difficult, can cause arguments.”

“If people can’t afford, say, electricity or heating or stuff like that, it can affect their living conditions, it can affect their standard of life, and it can affect their mental health. It puts a lot of stress on families.”

**Young people, Child Poverty Action Group**

Heating and energy bills are unavoidable for families, and no one should have to cut back on heat or power to make ends meet. As of 2024, around one in four households with children experienced fuel poverty, with those living in remote and rural areas at greater risk.

Fuel poverty is primarily driven by energy prices, which have risen sharply in recent years. The UK Government continues to hold the main levers that could bring energy costs down, including energy market reforms and the energy price cap. We are calling on them to introduce a social tariff as soon as possible, so people automatically receive a targeted discount that makes their energy bills affordable.

In the meantime, we want to ensure that Scotland’s vast energy wealth directly benefits the people who need it most, and we are committed to working with partners to make homes more energy-efficient so people can keep warm for less. This is in addition to the targeted support we already deliver, such as our Child Winter Heating Payment and Scottish Welfare Fund.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Tackle fuel poverty and support greater energy efficiency through Warmer Homes Scotland and Area Based Schemes (ABS) delivery programmes, with the 2026-27 budget including up to £64 million in funding for locally designed and delivered ABS projects. Heating, insulation and renewable measures installed through Warmer Homes Scotland saved households around £450 a year on average on their fuel bills in 2024-25.
- Invest a further £1 million in our Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund, supporting vulnerable island households, with a specific focus on tackling child poverty. Working in partnership with island local authorities this will deliver targeted initiatives tailored to local needs, including in support of fuel payments and energy costs.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Drawing on the Fuel Poverty Panel's [recommendations in response](#) to our [Periodic Report on Tackling Fuel Poverty 2021-24](#) to ensure that a future strategy meets the ambitions and challenges of tackling fuel poverty, as we undertake our duties under the Fuel Poverty Act 2019.



## Tackling public sector debt

“My debt contributes to my poorer mental health. It’s definitely something that’s always on my mind... I worry about it. I would much rather be working and able to earn a decent amount of money. I just feel like I can’t at the moment. At the same time, not being able to do that and being in this position financially does make me feel a bit worse.”

**Single mother participating in Aberlour public debt research**

Debt, including public debt related to council tax, rent arrears and benefit overpayments, reduces the money families have to spend on essentials and can trap them in poverty. [Evidence](#) from Aberlour and others shows that women are disproportionately impacted by public debt, especially women who are single parents or who live in a household with a disabled person.

Despite the action we have taken, families are still feeling the strain. [Research](#) shows that years of UK Government austerity, the COVID pandemic and the cost of living crisis have placed increasing pressures on household finances – with debts rising as a result.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made to support people with their public debt, including by continuing to:

- Allocate over £2 million to the Council Tax Debt project across Scotland in 2026-27 to ensure extra capacity for advice for those experiencing council tax and water charges debt, and to continue to develop and share good practice across local authorities – estimated to support up to 15,000 people.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Working with local authority partners to explore how sharing Social Security Scotland data can help target support to households with children that hold council tax debt.

# Maximising incomes from social security and benefits in kind

Since 2018, to maximise family incomes from social security and benefits in kind we have:



Deliberately built a radically different social security system, with dignity, fairness and respect at its heart - delivering 17 benefits, seven of them brand new and only available in Scotland.

Delivered **Five Family Payments**, including our Scottish Child Payment. From April 2026, they could be worth over £11,000 by the time an eligible child turns six and around £26,000 by the time they turn 16. This compares to less than £2,000 for families in England and Wales, where support ends when a child turns four.



Introduced the strongest package of winter support provided anywhere in the UK, including our **Child Winter Heating Payment**, which is only available in Scotland - forecast to support over 48,000 people in winter 2026-27.

Made almost 1.4 million **Carer's Allowance Supplement** payments, totalling over £390 million, to over 186,000 Scottish carers.



Made significant progress in **maximising take-up** of devolved Scottish benefits, including our Five Family Payments, with Scottish Child Payment take-up estimated at 94 percent for 2024-25.

Supported more than 244,000 parents and carers through our **Scottish Child Payment** - putting nearly £1.5 billion into the pockets of low-income families and keeping an estimated 50,000 children out of relative poverty in 2026-27.



Taken a positive and compassionate approach to delivering the **Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment** - ensuring that more disabled people get the support they are entitled to.

Continued to invest in free-to-access **debt, income maximisation and welfare advice**, with our Money Talk Team supporting over 41,000 people from priority family households since 2018.



“When a family is in a better financial situation, it means children... can focus more on what they want to do without financial stress.”

**Young person, Young Scot**

Social security is one of the most powerful ways to keep children out of poverty, because it puts money directly into families’ pockets. Reaching the 2030 targets will only be possible with ongoing investment in social security and by making sure families can easily access the benefits they are entitled to.

Our investment in the Scottish Child Payment is already showing the real difference social security can make, with this payment alone estimated to keep 50,000 children out of poverty in 2026-27. Modelling estimates that improving the take-up of both UK Government and Scottish Government benefits could help to reduce child poverty rates by as much as a further three percentage points in 2030 – representing an additional 30,000 children who would not be in poverty.

Social security is an essential part of the support system we all depend on at different points in our lives. Due to circumstances beyond their control, some families rely more on social security, particularly where they have young children or a disability which limits their ability to work. But too many people still miss out on the support they are rightly entitled to because of stigma or fear about claiming. UK Government welfare policies also continue to make life harder for certain groups, including young parents, families impacted by the benefit cap, and families who face a shortfall on their housing costs due to frozen Local Housing Allowance rates.

By strengthening the support offered through our social security system and working with partners to improve take-up of reserved and devolved benefits, we can put more money in families’ pockets and make real progress toward our 2030 targets.

To drive further progress we will take action focused on:

- Strengthening support through social security
- Maximising take-up of Scottish and UK Government benefits
- Making money and debt advice more accessible for families

## Strengthening support through social security

“Rising prices mean essentials like energy, housing, and food are difficult to afford, even when you are working... direct financial support such as free school meals, rent and the Scottish Child Payment help are vital, and go a long way”

**Lou, Child Poverty Action Group, [Cost of a child in Scotland in 2025](#)**

During our consultation, people told us they need stronger support from social security to improve their standards of living. This included calls to increase the value of the Scottish Child Payment.

We welcome the UK Government’s overdue decision to abolish the two-child limit, but more action is needed. Harmful welfare policies like the benefit cap, the young parent penalty, and the five-week wait for Universal Credit continue to push families into hardship. We will keep pressing the UK Government to match our action and investment so families can get the support they need.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Uprate our Five Family Payments, including our Best Start Grants, Best Start Foods and Scottish Child Payment, in line with inflation. Backed by £524 million in 2026-27, this will see our Scottish Child Payment increase to £28.20 per week, forecast to benefit over 330,000 children. Investment in our Scottish Child Payment alone is estimated to keep 50,000 children out of poverty in 2026-27.
- Support low-income households to deal with emergencies through the Scottish Welfare Fund. Backed by further investment of £41 million in 2026-27, more than a third of awards are made to families with children.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Introducing a Scottish Child Payment Premium for children under 1, which will increase the total payment amount to £40 per week during 2027-28 benefitting an estimated 12,000 children. With families with a baby more likely to live in poverty or deep poverty, this will provide vital additional support in the first year of a child’s life.
- Delivering, from April 2026, a one-off £2,000 payment for care leavers as they move out of the care system and into independent living, estimated to benefit around 1,300 care leavers each year.

## CASE STUDY

### Scottish Child Payment supporting families to thrive

The Scottish Child Payment is a weekly payment a family receives for every child they look after who is under 16. It is unique to Scotland, and is one of the Five Family Payments a family may be able to get from Social Security Scotland.

Michelle, a mother of three from Edinburgh, has shared the difference the Scottish Child Payment has made for her family.

“One of my daughters has autism and ADHD, and Scottish Child Payment allows me to do activities that calm her down and make her happy and that makes a massive difference.”

“Scottish Child Payment is something that helps you and helps your children when you’re in a difficult financial situation. I think there’s sometimes a stigma around applying for it, especially as a single mother, but I highly recommend that those who have yet to apply for it do so.”

We want every family to receive the support they are entitled to. Health visitors and family nurses, who already build trusted relationships with families from an early stage, will play an important role by offering clear advice and signposting families to financial support such as the under-1 premium.

## Maximising take-up of Scottish and UK Government benefits

“For me [eliminating] the stigma associated with poverty... would then mean more people are more happy to claim what they’re entitled to and more likely to talk about poverty and ask for help when they need it”

**Young person, MCR Pathways**

Social security is an investment in the people of Scotland, and we want to make sure families receive all the support they are entitled to.

Stigma still prevents many people from accessing social security, with families in rural areas and minority ethnic communities facing particular barriers. We will continue to raise awareness of entitlements and challenge the stigma that stops families seeking support. As well as promoting our benefits, we will explore opportunities for automation and auto-award so families do not have to navigate complex applications. We have already introduced auto-award of Best Start Grant Early Learning and School Age Payments for families receiving Scottish Child Payment.

We will drive further progress by:

- Delivering a national, multi-channel Parental Employability and Financial Support campaign to help families access available support. This will include locally targeted and tailored signposting to information, advice and support to apply for benefits they are entitled to – including reserved benefits such as Universal Credit.
- Publishing the next Benefit Take-up Strategy for Scottish Government benefits, setting out how we will support take up of devolved benefits over 2026-2031.
- Working with public and third sector partners to identify additional opportunities to share Social Security Scotland data to support income maximisation. This will include specific projects like the one to explore data sharing with local authorities so that they can identify families with children experiencing council tax debts and target additional support.
- Setting out options to pilot client referrals between Social Security Scotland and other public and third sector organisations.
- Taking forward a pilot with a local authority partner to proactively and safely share Social Security Scotland’s data, including Scottish Child Payment data, to enable more targeted support for families, with a view to a wider roll out.

## Making money and debt advice more accessible for families

“I am very concerned about my mum’s mental health and physical health especially as she owes so many bills that add up to over £2k and there’s nothing she can do apart from paying it in small chunks monthly. It’s upsetting because she can’t afford to treat herself or use the money wisely.”

**Young person, Young Scot**

Families need access to trusted, high-quality advice to help them understand their rights, boost their incomes, and deal with financial pressures like debt. Advice services can also help families save money on essentials like energy and internet.

During our consultation, people told us how important these services are, particularly for disabled people, and stressed that advice must be genuinely accessible and underpinned by secure, long-term funding. [Research](#) from One Parent Families Scotland, Fife Gingerbread and IPPR Scotland also highlights the need for the UK Government to transform child maintenance to ensure that all families, especially lone parents, can access the support they need.

Since 2018 we have continued to invest in free-to-access advice on debt, income maximisation and welfare, and we will maintain progress by continuing to:

- Invest over £27 million in welfare, income maximisation and debt advice services over the next two years through multi-year grants, providing stability and certainty for the sector, improving staff retention and therefore service quality, which we expect will support at least 80,000 households each year.
- Provide funding of £6 million for the Advice in Accessible Settings Fund by the end of 2028-29, which we expect will support over 7,500 people each year.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Providing up to £275,000 to One Parent Families Scotland and Fife Gingerbread to help more separated families access regular and reliable child maintenance payments. Primarily benefitting lone parents, the majority of which are women, this will improve the quality of information available to parents, help to upskill advice workers across Scotland to feel more confident in speaking to parents about child maintenance and ensure expert support is available for the most complex cases.

- Making good quality advice and support on income maximisation more easily available by sharing existing best practice more widely and working with education, health and advice sectors to review how to sustainably embed advice in schools and increase confidence to have conversations on family finance as part of routine care.
- Working in partnership with third sector and local authority advice providers to better understand workforce development needs and to support longer term workforce development to maximise the sustainability and quality of advice services.



## CASE STUDY

### Advice as an entry point to holistic support

Under 'Best Start, Bright Futures' we committed to expanding access to advice. This has enabled more families to access their entitlements, maximise their income and equip themselves with the resources, skills and support they need to thrive.

In Glasgow, Caroline – a young mum living with her parents and infant daughter – was referred to One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) by the Family Nurse Partnership for support with multiple challenges including anxiety, depression, low confidence and social isolation.

OPFS provided Caroline with 1:1 family support and invited her to join their Best Beginnings Group for young parents. Their Financial Inclusion team carried out a full benefit check and helped her apply for the support she was entitled to, including Universal Credit, Scottish Child Payment, Child Benefit, and Adult Disability Payment. They also provided financial help to ease the pressure of rising living costs and the Young Parents Penalty within Universal Credit.

OPFS connected Caroline with Say Women, a specialist organisation that supports young women aged 16-25 who have experienced sexual abuse, so she could receive the emotional support she needed.

Alongside this practical and emotional help, Caroline connected with other young mums which boosted her confidence and self-esteem. She said:

“Before I started the group, I didn't think I was a good mum. Coming here made me realise I'm trying my best, and that's enough for my [child]. I feel stronger now.”

This progress was echoed by Caroline's social worker and her family nurse:

“It was lovely to see her with her floor mats out and [infant] enjoying sensory play learned being with the group. You are all really making such a difference to both [mum and infant's] life.”

Despite everything she has been through, Caroline is hopeful about the future for herself and her daughter. Through her own determination and with the support of OPFS, she is building a more stable, positive foundation for her family's wellbeing.

# Supporting children and families to thrive

Since 2018, to support children and families to thrive we have:



Delivered over **360,000 baby boxes** to parents, with essential items worth more than £400 to support the first six months of a baby's life.

Delivered the **Family Nurse Partnership** across Scotland, allowing us to provide around 9,000 families with intensive home-based support.



Invested £1.75 billion in the **Scottish Attainment Challenge** - supporting our schools to deliver record low attainment gaps in literacy and numeracy.

Removed **core curriculum charges** from 2021 onward, ensuring that families do not have to meet the costs of resources and materials for practical lessons.



Continued to deliver **Education Maintenance Allowance**, providing financial support of £30 per week to young people aged 16-19 from low-income households.

Continued to invest in **Bookbug** programmes, giving every child at least 14 books by the age of five and encouraging a love of reading from an early age.



Expanded our **Free School Meal** offer - making free school meals available to over 350,000 pupils in Scotland, saving families who take up the offer every school day £450 per child per year.

Invested over £148 million in the **Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme** to transform the local delivery of holistic Whole Family Support.



Established **Fairer Future Partnerships** in 16 local authority areas to bring together services across childcare, education, health and social care, housing, employment and beyond, to provide Whole Family Support.

Introduced guidance to reduce the cost of school uniforms for families and increased the value of the **School Clothing Grant** to at least £120 for primary school pupils and £150 for secondary school pupils.



“Poverty restricts people from living up to expectations, it affects the confidence of children - even their education. The opportunity offered to them should not be based on location or the income of parents.”

**Cara A., Changing Realities**

We want support to be person-centred, seamless and holistic, and to meet families where they are. Families should not have to repeat their stories to different services, nor should they be anxious about accessing support when they need it.

No two families are the same and each will experience different challenges and barriers at different times in their lives. We know the priority family groups may encounter multiple and overlapping challenges, so they need support that fits their specific situation.

By ensuring that families and children in Scotland can access the support they need, when they need it, for as long as they need it, we will help break the cycle of poverty, create the conditions for every child to thrive, and ultimately build a future adult population that is healthier, happier and better able to contribute to society.

To drive further progress we will take action focused on:

- Supporting young families: investing in early child development
- Supporting young people during their school years
- Delivering Whole Family Support
- Making the best use of data to support children and families and improve public services

## Supporting young families: investing in early child development

“The first year is the most important, that’s when they build a secure attachment with their family. That shouldn’t be restricted because of income.”

**Parent, Save the Children**

The earliest years of a child’s life are critical in their development. What happens between pre-birth and age three provides the foundation for longer-term outcomes including lifelong health and wellbeing. When families have the care and support they need during this period, children can grow and thrive.

Poverty makes this much harder. Support must start early – before and during pregnancy and into early childhood – to prevent challenges before they arise and give every child the best start in life. That is why we continue to provide critical core funding to third sector organisations that support early intervention, and we offer the strongest package of financial support for newborns and new parents in the UK.

This approach has been endorsed by those working with children and families, and through our consultation we heard that reliable support makes a real difference. Midwives, health visitors and family nurses play a vital role as key, trusted points of contact for families with young children who are facing adversity.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Further strengthen the role of universal and specialist health services, including health visitors and maternity services, to maximise incomes focusing on prevention and early intervention as part of person-centred care before, during and after pregnancy.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Investing an additional £1.1 million to expand the Family Nurse Partnership to support up to an additional 500 young parents in 2026-27 through this person-centred, evidence-based intervention to address the core drivers of child poverty and to improve early child development.
- Delivering a targeted campaign to promote benefit take-up, employability and practical advice for new parents and people considering parenthood to maximise the support available to them, ensure they understand their rights and can give their children the best possible start.

- Supporting an expansion of Bookbug with £500,000 funding across 2026-28 to increase the provision of Bookbug sessions in SIMD 1 and SIMD 2 areas, provide additional books and resources for Bookbug for the Home families, support parental literacy development and work with national partners such as Home-Start to further embed Bookbug practice to support low-income families.



## Ensuring children and young people can reach their full potential

“Oftentimes, my children face bullying, isolation and stigma due to our immigration status, and miss out on school trips or extracurricular activities as I am unable to afford it... there should be opportunities for every child in Scotland to participate in extracurricular activities, and school trips, without barriers.”

**Bernie O., Changing Realities**

School plays a crucial role in a young person’s life – a place where they learn, develop new skills, make friends and discover new opportunities. Young people have told us that teachers and school staff are important role models and trusted adults for them. But poverty can hold young people back, affecting their learning, confidence and ability to fully take part in school life.

We have heard from young people that the costs associated with the school day can cause real stress, leaving them feeling stigmatised or left out. They highlighted the importance of creating inclusive and non-judgemental school environments where every young person can take part.

We want every young person to have a positive and fulfilling experience at school. To make this possible, we must empower our headteachers to put the right support in place for young people and their families to help close the poverty-related attainment gap. Every child should be able to go to school feeling comfortable, confident and ready to learn.

In the year ahead we will maintain progress by continuing to:

- Invest up to £200 million and review the evidence of the impact of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to support the improved attainment and outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty. This includes Pupil Equity Funding allocated to schools for headteachers to implement local approaches to meet the needs of their children, young people and families.
- Fund the provision of Free School Meals for all pupils in primary 1-5, pupils in primary 6 and 7 whose families are in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment and eligible pupils from P6-S6.
- Provide increased funding of £14.6 million in 2026-27 to support local authorities to maintain the School Clothing Grant.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Expanding the MCR Pathways school-based mentoring programme for care experienced and disadvantaged young people to reach up to 5,500 young people in schools across Scotland.
- Working with local authorities to expand Free School Meals to children from families in receipt of Pension Credit and increase the Administrative Earnings Threshold – enabling a further 5,500 pupils to access nutritious and healthy food, by investing up to £3 million.



## Delivering Whole Family Support

“My perfect family support service would be a service where parents are fully involved in the making of the support, more visits, more information, more communication between all services... The care must be more individual and suited to the child and family’s needs.”

**Parent, Glasgow Promise Project Consultation Report**

Families told us that poverty and the challenges it creates need to be addressed holistically – bringing together practical help, with safe and secure housing as a foundation, alongside financial advice and emotional support.

This will require major changes to how services work. We need to remove barriers between services; align policy, funding and delivery; and hold ourselves and our partners accountable for progress. Staff should be empowered to work across organisational boundaries, while leaders focus on people and place, tackling root causes early and driving long-term change. Communities should also have a stronger voice in shaping local priorities, supported by public bodies that share power and resources.

We recognise that this type of system-wide change will take time. In line with our work to keep the Promise, we are committed to working with partners throughout the lifetime of this plan to realise a transformative shift in how Scotland’s support system operates – and, most importantly, how families in the centre of this system experience it.

At the same time, families need support now. So while we drive this longer-term change, we will also enhance our support for those organisations delivering Whole Family Support today.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made, including by continuing to:

- Deliver and invest around £6 million in our Fairer Futures Partnership programme, which will enable close partnership working with 16 local authorities to further test and embed improved delivery of holistic support for families in or at risk of poverty, and providing Adopt and Adapt funding to all remaining local authorities, giving them the capacity to embed emerging learning in their work to deliver Whole Family Support.

- Provide investment of £50 million and support to local areas to improve and scale holistic Whole Family Support through the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme. Enabling local areas to respond to the needs of their communities and shift towards a sustainable approach to investment in early, preventative support that will help to keep the Promise and tackle poverty.
- Invest a further £15 million in our Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults, continuing support for grassroots community projects providing a range of mental health and wellbeing supports and services across Scotland. By prioritising people at higher risk of poor mental health, including families at greatest risk of poverty, this will help to tackle inequalities and support communities across Scotland to build resilience.
- Invest in innovation through our Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund to support action to strengthen local approaches to tackling child poverty, with £1.9 million committed across 2026-28.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Establishing a £20 million Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund. This will enable third sector organisations to provide more support that wraps around families in their communities, making connections to public services and helping to break the cycle of poverty.
- Developing an integrated Whole Family Support programme which brings together our work across Fairer Future Partnerships, Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and Whole Family Support Early Adopter Areas from April 2027. This will streamline and strengthen approaches to local systems change – providing a clear offer to local areas that supports the implementation of Whole Family Support approaches that best meet the needs of local communities.
- Investing £2.2 million to expand Whole Family Support in General Practice, initially doubling coverage in Glasgow and preparing for expansion to other localities from 2027-28 onwards. This will provide highly targeted, preventative support for 500 families, making the most of General Practice's unique position in the health service.

## CASE STUDY

### CentreStage helping young people realise their potential

Under 'Best Start, Bright Futures' we committed to coming together and working differently to focus on delivery, testing transformational change through the Social Innovation Partnership and Fairer Futures Partnerships\*.

CentreStage is a long-standing Social Innovation Partnership partner and is embedded in the East Ayrshire Fairer Futures Partnership.

The CentreStage Village is an integrated, community-led model of early intervention, tackling the drivers of child poverty by connecting families to opportunity, wellbeing, skills and support in one accessible, place-based setting, seven days a week.

Tina's experience of CentreStage shows how this Social Innovation Partnership has helped young people develop.

Tina had struggled with attending school and left with few qualifications. At home, pressures were high as her mum was also a foster carer supporting a child with autism, Ashley. Tina had a wellbeing score aligned with clinical depression, and her responses to assessment showed low energy, poor confidence and limited connection with others.

CentreStage had already been working with Ashley through its Rising Stars activities, and a conversation with the family led to them connecting Tina with Skills Development Scotland. This was significant – it was the first time in weeks she had left the house. Tina, who has a strong creative talent, was directed toward a creative industries course. Although initially very quiet and withdrawn, she attended consistently and gradually built trust with staff.

After a couple of months, Tina's confidence had noticeably improved, and she felt motivated to apply for college and was accepted onto a social science course for 2026. Leading up to college enrolment, Tina is volunteering with Little Arts School and CentreStage to continue to build skills for the future.

This early intervention has improved Tina's wellbeing, strengthened family relationships, and supported Tina to engage in further education, strengthening her future employment options. CentreStage estimates that this support could result in a public financial saving of up to £35,000 over five years.

\*Referred to as 'local pathfinders' in Best Start, Bright Futures

## Making best use of data to support children and families and improve public services

“I have to make five different calls to five different people, repeat the same thing again and again, try to make that understanding that I had with one person, one of the authorities – it’s a lot of repetition, and at the end of the day you are put on a waiting list, saying ‘we’ll get back to you’ - it puts a lot of people off asking for help.”

**Panellist, Get Heard Scotland**

We know that better use of data can help create public services that are not only more efficient, but more targeted, preventative and person-centred – designed for and with people and communities. People have told us that we need to use data more effectively to join up services, identify families who need support and to target help where it will make the biggest difference. This will be a key part of enabling Whole Family Support.

Data is complex and comes with legal and ethical responsibilities, and we know there are barriers that prevent organisations from using it effectively. Data is only useful if organisations are equipped to securely process, handle and store it, and ultimately to use it to shape better, more responsive services. That is why working with local authorities to help them make the best use of data – and working with citizens to understand their views on how data should be used to eradicate child poverty – will be central to all our data sharing activities.

Building on progress to date and the recent Digital Strategy and Public Service Reform Strategy, we will take action to help public services use data more confidently and effectively to help families access the right support.

In the year ahead we will maintain the progress we have made by continuing to:

- Work with the UK Government Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to expand the data sharing powers in the UK Digital Economy Act 2017 to support policies to eradicate child poverty and to provide Whole Family Support. These arrangements will support fairer and more effective debt recovery, help identify vulnerable debtors earlier, and increase take-up of benefits by identifying eligible households who are not yet receiving it.

We will also drive further progress by:

- Working with local authorities and other partners to support the implementation of data sharing intended to enable proactive support to be put in place for families and improve public service delivery.
- Investing £2 million to develop and implement a 'Once For Scotland' Data Exchange programme. This will help make the Scottish public sector more confident to unlock the potential of data, ensuring families get the services and support they need.



## Our approach to Delivery

Eradicating child poverty is the Scottish Government's top priority, but it is also a mission that belongs to all of us. Only by working together – across local government, the NHS, third sector and employers – can we create the conditions to allow every child and family to thrive.

Within government, we will continue to ensure there is strong leadership, collaboration and accountability for the delivery of the actions in this plan and that we create an enabling environment for our delivery partners. We will continue to lead by example, including by putting child poverty at the heart of both the [Scottish Budget for 2026-27](#) and the [Scottish Spending Review](#).

At a national level, we will keep working with the third sector, COSLA, SOLACE, Public Health Scotland, the Improvement Service and other partners to strengthen local action and share learning. This collaborative approach will enable our partners – including councils, third sector and community organisations – to make the greatest possible difference for the communities they know best.

As part of our commitment to collaborative delivery, we will develop an agreement with the third sector to strengthen its voice and improve lives. The Third Sector Partnership will be co-designed with the sector, guided by the key principles put forward by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, to set out how government and the third sector can work together to enhance services.

Our partners and their local governance and planning structures are critical to delivering this plan. From the role of local authorities and LEPs in delivering employability services, to the role of the third sector and other community organisations in delivering Whole Family Support – local partnerships help link services together so families can have an easy, positive experience and get the support that best meets their needs. We will continue to work with local planning and delivery partnerships to drive progress together, in line with our shared approach to Public Service Reform.

Alongside this, we will continue to work with the UK Government as they implement their [Child Poverty Strategy](#) to maximise the impact of our collective efforts. We will also continue to call on the UK Government to go further in areas where they are not taking sufficient action. This includes, for example, the introduction of an Essentials Guarantee, fundamental reform to the UK social security system including abolition of the bedroom tax, benefit cap and young parent penalty, enhancing parental leave and targeted discounts to reduce fuel bills for households.

The publication of this plan is the start of the next phase of our joint delivery of the actions needed to eradicate child poverty in Scotland. Underpinned by [our updated evaluation strategy](#) we will continue to strengthen our evidence base to guide our future action and inform the next steps we take. We will continue to work with our partners to oversee

the implementation of actions set out in this plan, and to ensure a shared approach to accountability for delivery – with families at the heart of everything we do together. Crucially we will also ensure that those with lived experience of poverty help shape both how we deliver and how we assess impact.

## CASE STUDY

### Working together to deliver Whole Family Support

Through the introduction of the Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund, we recognise the crucial role our third sector partners play in providing targeted and innovative support to families in need. This will increase the impact of our integrated Whole Family Support systems change programme – providing an accessible front door to an increasingly integrated, person-centred public service landscape.

Yipworld is among three third sector organisations embedded in the East Ayrshire Fairer Futures Partnership. Through their Families First Initiative, Yipworld has provided housing advocacy, emotional support, access to employability services, and essential household items for lone parent Katie and her two children.

Katie's children are Martha, aged eight, who has Additional Support Needs; and Beth, aged sixteen, a school leaver with persistent nonattendance and no qualifications. The family rely on social security, and their income reduced when Beth left education, increasing pressure on an already strained household.

The family's housing application progressed in September 2025. With support from Yipworld, Katie moved in on 8 October. Immediate practical help was provided, including bedding, household essentials, and kitchen items.

Ongoing support included successful applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund for flooring and a cooker, Christmas food parcels and gifts, benefits advice, and help setting up utilities. The family were also linked into employability services.

This holistic, person-centred approach reduced duplication across agencies, prevented rent arrears, and minimised reliance on public funds. Beth is now engaging with employability support and Katie feels more settled.

This integration of third and public sector support, drawing on the strengths of both, is what we will continue to deliver through the Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund and Whole Family Support Integrated Change Programme working in tandem, nationally, to make Katie's experience the norm and not the exception.

## Conclusion

Eradicating child poverty and delivering on the 2030 targets is the central mission of the Scottish Government. The actions taken since 2018 have already made a real and measurable difference for children and families across the country, and this plan builds on that progress with further bold, ambitious measures.

In [Every Child, Every Chance](#), we set out two scenarios for 2030. One showed the impact of taking no action, where as many as one in three children would have their lives limited by poverty. The other showed what could be achieved through concerted effort: meeting the 2030 targets, reducing both the number of children in poverty and the depth of that poverty, and lessening its impact on families' lives.

Meeting the 2030 targets would be nothing short of transformational – reshaping outcomes for children and parents across Scotland and enabling every family to thrive and contribute to our society. This is the future we have been working towards since our first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, and we must continue to drive that work forward with urgency and determination.

Poverty lies at the heart of the challenges we face as a country. It shapes children's educational outcomes and their lifetime earning potential, affects their health and wellbeing, and ultimately influences how long they will live. Its impact extends far beyond individual households – placing sustained pressure on our public services, including the NHS, and holding back the potential of communities across the country.

Only by eradicating child poverty can we unlock Scotland's full potential – creating a fairer, healthier and more prosperous nation, and making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up, work and live.

Eradicating child poverty is a national mission and it cannot be achieved by the Scottish Government alone. By working in partnership with the UK Government, local government, and our wider partners in the public sector, third sector, and business, we can deliver the radical, lasting change needed to transform the lives of children and families across Scotland.

This plan outlines the 15 interconnected areas where focused action is needed over the life of the next Scottish Parliament, and what we intend to do in 2026-27 to accelerate progress at the pace and scale needed. At its heart is a commitment to ensuring that public services truly wrap around families – providing support that is proactive, connected, and shaped around the realities of their lives.

We cannot accept a future where children grow up in poverty, where parents and young people are locked out of the labour market, or where those at greatest risk face barriers that limit their potential.

By working together, across Scotland, and delivering on the actions and ambitions in this plan, we can create the conditions for lasting, transformative change. This is our collective mission, and together, we can make it a reality.



## Related Strategies and Delivery Plans

This Delivery Plan outlines some of the key actions we will take to tackle and reduce child poverty in Scotland.

Further detail of relevant action, and strategic approaches, can be found in the documents detailed below:

- [No One Left Behind: employability strategic plan 2024 to 2027](#)
- [Developing the Young Workforce](#)
- [National Transport Strategy](#)
- [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)
- [Scotland's Population Health Framework](#)
- [Public Sector Pay and Workforce Policy](#)
- [NHS Agenda for Change](#)
- [Housing to 2040](#)
- [Tackling Scotland's Housing Emergency: Housing Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [Tackling fuel poverty in Scotland: a strategic approach](#)
- [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018: benefit take-up strategy](#)
- [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\)](#)
- [Getting it right for everyone \(GIRFE\)](#)
- [Keeping the Promise implementation plan](#)
- [Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#)
- [Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland](#)
- [Digital strategy for Scotland: sustainable digital public services - delivery plan 2025-2028](#)
- [National Islands Plan](#)

# Supporting Documents

[Children's version of Bringing Hope, Building Futures](#)

[Easy read version of Bringing Hope, Building Futures](#)

[Annex 1 - Child Poverty \(Scotland\) Act 2017 Requirements](#)

[Annex 2 - Analysis of Consultation and Engagement](#)

[Annex 3 - Child Poverty Evaluation Strategy \(2026 update\)](#)

[Annex 4 - Child Poverty Measurement Framework \(2026 update\)](#)

[Annex 5 - Cumulative Impact Assessment](#)

[Annex 6 - Impact of Policies on Child Poverty](#)

[Annex 7 - Equalities Impact Assessment \(EQIA\)](#)

[Annex 8 - Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment \(CRWIA\)](#)

[Annex 9 - Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment \(FSDIA\)](#)

[Annex 10 - Islands Communities Impact Assessment \(ICIA\)](#)

[Annex 11 - Consumer Duty Impact Assessment \(CDIA\)](#)

[Annex 12 - Health Impact Assessment](#)



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