



Local action to tackle child poverty in Scotland

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An independent review for Save the Children after the first year of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*

Summary

To accomplish the ambition of eradicating child poverty by 2020 as required by the *Child Poverty Act 2010*, the first national *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* requires action at the local level. This report presents the findings from a survey of senior figures (Chief Executives and Council Leaders) and Council officers with an interest and/or responsibility for tackling poverty (hereafter, 'Council officers' for shorthand) within Scottish local authorities conducted one year after the introduction of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*. It aims to document and analyse their thoughts – as key informants – on how child poverty is being tackled locally across Scotland. Among the main findings from the survey are the following:

The scale of the challenge

- Chief Executives and other senior officials, elected Council Leaders, and Council officers are aware of the level of child poverty in their area and recognise that child poverty is a problem. However, less than one half of Council officers feel that child poverty is a political priority in their authority.

Delivery of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* at local level

- Council officers are aware of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*. The majority believe that it has already had an impact on, or corresponds with, existing local action
- It is not evident that Scottish local authorities have developed intensive and innovative approaches to implement the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* locally. Only 16% have developed a local child poverty action plan, and only 5% have established a child poverty development group or have undertaken a child poverty impact assessment.
- Although almost one half of Single Outcome Agreements (SOA) include a *general* local poverty outcome and 56% of Council officers reported that their authority has a *general* target to reduce poverty in their area, no respondents reported that their authority had specified a local *child* poverty target; two thirds of Scottish local authorities address child poverty as part of a more general anti-poverty strategy.
- Responses suggest that there is an emergent trend towards developing explicit approaches to tackling child poverty by local authorities.
- Two thirds of Council officers do not think that their SOA reflects the full range of local child poverty activity in their area.

Local approaches

- The majority of those who responded agreed that local authorities have a multi-faceted role in tackling child poverty, which includes prevention, enabling families to leave poverty and ameliorating its impact.

- Greater clarity about the approach to tackling child poverty is required within many authorities: less than one third of respondents reported an understanding of how child poverty was being addressed in their area that was consistent with that reported by other survey respondents from their local authority.
- The majority opinion was that tackling local child poverty is a shared responsibility between government (UK, Scotland and Local), the Third Sector, local businesses and people with experience of poverty.
- Council officers report that there is much co-operation with the main public and third sector organisations to address child poverty locally, but it is reported that only 1 in 6 authorities work directly with private sector or social enterprises. There is also low engagement with families and children, with only one third of authorities reported to work directly with households experiencing poverty.

The extent to which local efforts are making a difference

- Responses to the surveys suggest that it was difficult to identify signs of progress in tackling child poverty at local level. Almost half of Council officers report that either evidence is not available or they are not aware of evidence in their local authority that demonstrates success in tackling child poverty. In addition, many felt it was too soon after publication of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* to be able to determine the extent of any progress.
- On a more positive note, a significant majority of Council officers were able to identify good practice in tackling child poverty and in establishing effective partnerships.
- Barriers to tackling child poverty locally are acknowledged by Council officers. Particular concern is expressed that the good work of the local authority may be counteracted by: (i) trends in the wider economy; and (ii) the policies being pursued by the UK government.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Child Poverty in Scotland

Both the UK government's and the Scottish government's preferred way of estimating child poverty and the measure preferred by anti-poverty lobbyists suggest that there has been no significant and sustained reduction in child poverty in Scotland for six years, and that many of Scotland's children are still living in poverty.¹ Whether the number of children in poverty is 170,000 or 17% (using the government's preferred measure) or 220,000 or 21% of all children (using the measure favoured by anti-poverty lobbyists) the scale of the problem is significant (see Appendix 1).² Furthermore, to meet the target to eradicate child poverty by 2020, as required by the *Child Poverty Act 2010*³, requires continued political commitment. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that without further action, relative child poverty in the UK will increase from the current level of 19.6% to 24.4% in 2020⁴. Jim McCormick, Scotland Advisor of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, warned the Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee that without additional measures 'the big picture ... is an increase in poverty which winds the clock back to the date when this Parliament began in 1999, in terms of child poverty levels'⁵.

However, there is a strong community of interest - both within and outwith government - concerned to tackle child poverty in Scotland.

1.2 The Importance of Local Action to Tackle Child Poverty

Until recently, tackling child poverty in the UK has been primarily associated with the UK Government. The pledge made by then Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999 to eradicate child poverty within a generation provided a political focus that was hitherto absent⁶ and subsequently the number of children living in poverty fell steadily across the UK. In Scotland, the number fell from 360,000 in 1996/97 to 250,000 in 2004/05 (see Appendix 1). This UK national commitment to tackling child poverty was reinforced in 2010 with the passing of the *Child Poverty Act 2010*, which commits the UK government to make substantial progress toward ending child poverty by 2020 and requires each of the devolved national governments to demonstrate how they will contribute to this outcome.

¹ Children are regarded as living in poverty in the UK if they live in a household with an income less than 60% of the UK median income, adjusted for household size and composition. See Scottish Government (2010) - *Child Poverty Strategy Consultation - Analytical Paper*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/304557/0107230.pdf>

² Scottish Government (2012). *Poverty And Income Inequality In Scotland, 2010-11*. The difference between the two figures is due to whether poverty is measured before or after housing costs. The UK government favours the before housing costs (bhc) measure, which is comparable to European data; however many campaigning organisations favour measuring poverty after housing costs (ahc) have been considered as this provides a better measure of households' disposable income. See <http://www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk/Measuring-Child-Poverty>

³ According to the 2010 Child Poverty Act 'eradicating' child poverty means achieving three outcomes:

- (i) Reducing the proportion of children living in households with income less than 60% of median UK income (i.e. relative poverty) to less than 10%
- (ii) Reducing the proportion of children living in relative poverty and experiencing material deprivation to less than 5%
- (iii) Reducing the proportion of children living in relative poverty for three years or more to less than 10%

⁴ Brewer, M. et al (2011). *Child And Working Age Poverty From 2010 To 2020*. Institute for Fiscal Studies.

⁵ Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee 13th March 2012. <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6905&mode=pdf>

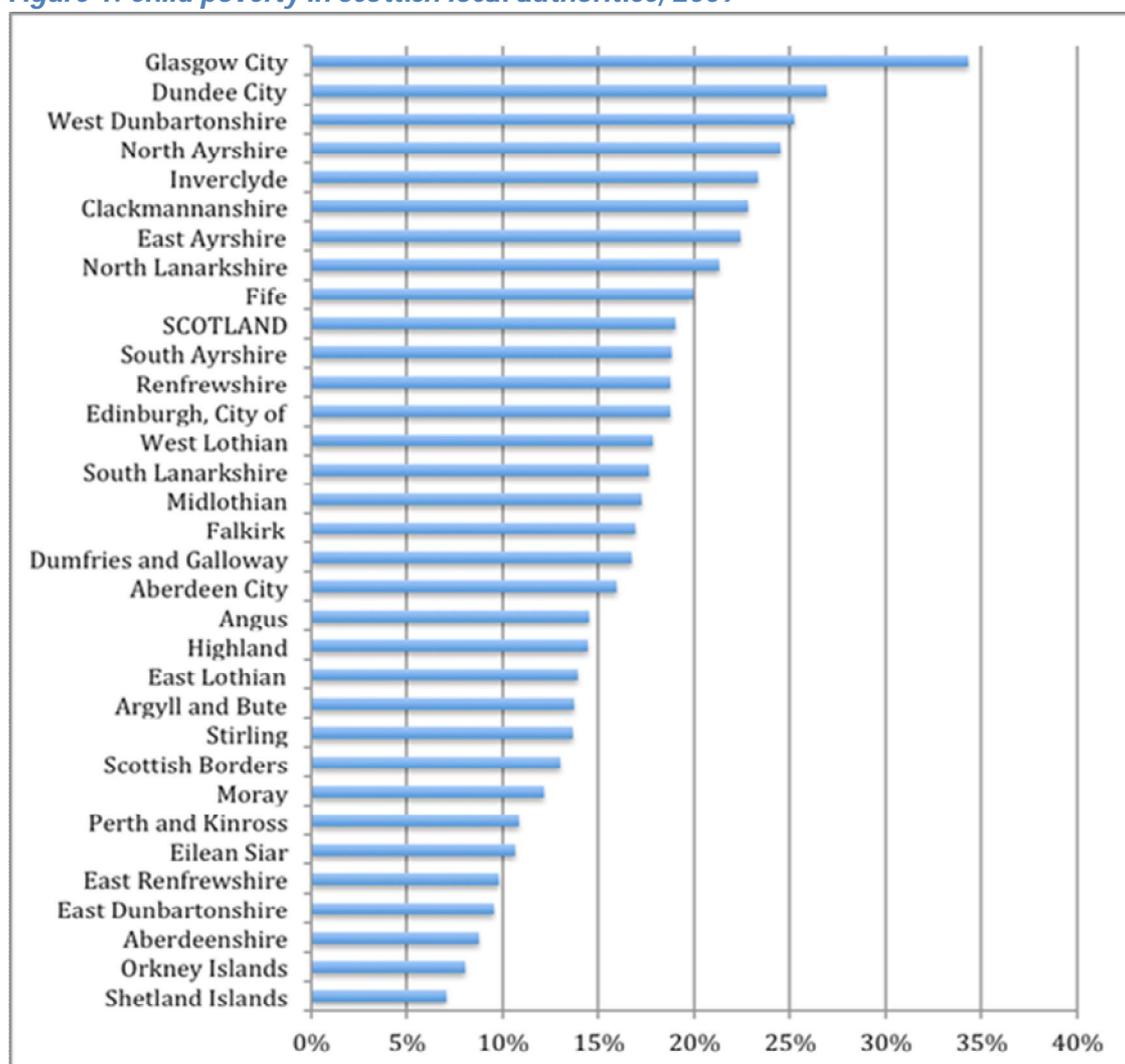
⁶ Tony Blair 'Beveridge Revisited: A Welfare State For The 21st Century'. Speech given at Toynbee Hall, 18th March 1999

The control of taxation, welfare and tax credit policy by the UK Government justifies the national focus on tackling child poverty. However, equally important to ameliorating the impact of poverty and enabling children to live life beyond poverty are the statutory and discretionary services provided by local government and other groups working in the community or at the local level. Significantly, the *Child Poverty Act 2010* acknowledged the key role of local authorities in tackling child poverty and committed those in England to undertake local child poverty needs assessments and establish child poverty strategies. In Scotland, the decision about the appropriate local activity to reduce child poverty was left to the discretion of local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships.

1.3 Should Child Poverty be a Concern for Every Local Authority in Scotland?

As Figure 1 shows, the level of child poverty varies across Scottish local authorities, with the risk of children living in poverty ranging from as many as one in every three children in Glasgow to less than one in every ten children in the Shetland Islands, Orkney Islands and Aberdeenshire.

Figure 1: Child poverty in Scottish local authorities, 2009



Source Scottish Government, *Local Authority Level Proxy Poverty Data*.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty/LAdata>

It appears obvious that child poverty will be a concern for the city of Glasgow and those other authorities that have the highest levels of child poverty (at the top of Figure 1). However, child poverty affects children in all Scottish local authorities, and the consequences of the poverty experienced by the 9% of children recorded in Aberdeenshire are just as serious as that experienced by the 25% of children in West Dunbartonshire. There are also wards with high levels of child poverty even in local authorities where the overall poverty rate is low⁷.

1.4 Scottish Child Poverty Strategy

The first *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* (CPSS)⁸ was published in March 2011 about the same time as the UK government published its strategy, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives*⁹. The CPSS shares the belief expressed by the UK government that poverty means more than a lack of income and that 'interventions and responses ... must address the underlying causes of poverty, not just the symptoms'¹⁰. Another common theme is the view that preventative measures are required to tackle child poverty and that this requires 'shifting resources into early intervention and prevention, especially with respect to the first few years of a child's life'¹¹. Similarly, an emphasis on supporting parental employment has characterised anti-poverty strategies in the UK since the late 1990s. However, the Scottish Government's support for a living wage and commitment to include this in future public sector pay awards is distinctive.

Other distinctive features of the CPSS are the guiding principles of 'ensuring that the child is at the centre' of policy and promoting an 'assets-based approach' to tackling deprivation, i.e. one which 'invite[s] individuals and communities to take control of managing positive changes to their circumstances by co-producing the interventions by which they can be supported out of poverty'¹². The Scottish Government has argued that its existing devolved power 'restricts our ability to tackle poverty'¹³ and the *Annual Report of the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* published in March 2012 argues that 'UK Government measures are conflicting with their stated aims to reduce poverty and meet the targets in the *Child Poverty Act 2010*'.¹⁴

The two key aims of the CPSS focus on devolved areas over which the Scottish Government believes it has the greatest opportunity for impact:

- maximising household resources and reducing pressure on household budgets among low income families; and
- improving children's wellbeing and life chances and tackling the underlying social and economic determinants of poverty

⁷. See Mair, C. Zded, K. and Markie, K. (2011). *Making Better Places: Making Places Better: The Distribution Of Positive And Negative Outcomes In Scotland*. Improvement Service

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/344949/0114783.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/CM-8061.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/1>

¹¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/1>

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/2>

¹³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/1>

¹⁴ www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00390269.doc

The *Strategy* largely drew upon the three anti-poverty strategies already operating in Scotland: *Achieving Our Potential*¹⁵, *Equally Well*¹⁶ and the *Early Years Framework*¹⁷, with reference also to the *Getting It Right For Every Child*¹⁸ social care programme. However, the CPSS *Annual Report* also refers to a number of 'social wage' measures which are intended to contribute to the aim of maximising household resources, such as extending the eligibility for free school meals and addressing fuel poverty. The proposed Children and Young People Bill¹⁹ is also intended to extend early learning and childcare provision as part of a programme to increase employment opportunities for parents; but the CPSS admits that 'it is unlikely that the Scottish Government or local partners will be able to devote significant new resources to supporting the costs of childcare in the immediate future'²⁰.

The CPSS emphasises the importance of the contribution of local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships to tackling child poverty (sect 3.4.1), and justifies its decision not to impose a statutory duty to do so (as exists for local authorities in both England Wales) on the grounds that 'decisions are best made at a local level... and we believe that the current structure provides the right balance between accountability and sensitivity to local circumstances'²¹.

Three Outcomes in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework²² relate to child poverty:

- 'We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society'
- 'Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed'
- 'We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk'

There were no specific child poverty indicators in the National Performance Framework when the CPSS was published, however a new indicator was added to the Framework in December 2011 - to reduce children's deprivation; measured as the percentage of children experiencing both material deprivation (based on questions in the *Family Resources Survey*) and low income (below 70% of UK median income). The Scotland Performs website notes that the percentage of children experiencing deprivation by these indicators has remained at around 15-16% since 2006/07²³. The CPSS *Annual Report* notes that the most recently available *Household Below Average Income Statistics* relate to 2009/10 - the year before the *Strategy* was published.

The CPSS is a strategic document rather than an action plan, and expresses aspirations rather than the details of specific policies. The principles it sets out may be widely shared, but it remains unclear how some of the intentions expressed will be delivered by the actions proposed, in particular how the strategy will realise the aspiration to 'invest in eradicating child poverty and reducing inequality, including income inequality'²⁴.

15 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/246055/0069426.pdf>

16 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/229649/0062206.pdf>

17 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/257007/0076309.pdf>

18 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1141/0065063.pdf>

19 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/legislation>

20 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/3>

21 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/3>

22 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms>

23 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicator/childdeprivation>

24 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/1>

1.5 Local Outcome Indicator

The percentage of children living in poverty was added to the menu of Local Outcome Indicators in November 2011²⁵. Although a proxy measure, these data approximate the relative child poverty measure used in the *Child Poverty Act 2010*, will be updated annually, and are available at datazone and local authority level.

1.6 About this Report

This report is a summary of, and commentary on, how child poverty is being tackled by local authorities across Scotland according to responses received to a survey of local authority senior figures (Chief Executives and Council Leaders) and officers working in this area²⁶. The report is organised into seven sections, analysing in turn respondents' views on the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* (2.1); the scale of the local challenge (2.2); the role of Scottish local authorities and the local priority attached to child poverty (2.3); responsibility for and partnership working to address child poverty (2.4); local approaches to tackling child poverty (2.5); the barriers to reducing child poverty and preferred solutions to these (2.6); and whether local efforts are making a difference (2.7).

1.7 Authors

Save the Children invited John McKendrick and Stephen Sinclair of the Glasgow School for Business and Society at Glasgow Caledonian University to develop a 'base line' of local authority activity to tackle child poverty across Scotland toward the end of year 1 of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* and to identify the following features of local action:

- the priority given to tackling child poverty at the local level;
- the strategic approaches used to tackle child poverty at the local level;
- what aims, outcomes and policy areas are seen as contributing to reducing child poverty by those addressing poverty within local authorities;
- the extent to which local authorities are using and/or delivering the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* to develop their approaches;
- good practice and gaps in approaches to tackling child poverty in Scotland; and
- whether local authorities require or would like additional support in developing their approaches to tackling child poverty.

In recent years, the authors have made many contributions to understanding child poverty and the effectiveness of policy solutions to tackle child poverty in Scotland.²⁷ The research brief was to

²⁵ <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/local-outcome-indicators/>

²⁶ For brevity, this group may be referred to as 'Council officers' in this report. It includes policy officers, managers and practitioners. The group shares an interest, and expertise, in tackling child poverty locally (see 1.7 below).

²⁷ For example, McKendrick, J.H. (2011). *et al. Poverty In Scotland, 2011*. Child Poverty Action Group; Sinclair, S. and McKendrick J.H. (2009). *Child Poverty In Scotland: Taking The Next Steps*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Employability & Tackling Poverty Toolkit - Local Action To Tackle Child Poverty - www.employabilityinscotland.com/gatewaychildpoverty.aspx

undertake a study at the end of the first year of the Scottish *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* to review the actions taken by Scottish local authorities. The authors were responsible for the choice of methods, specific survey questions, analysis and interpretation of results. Members of the End Child Poverty Coalition reviewed the study design and Save the Children commented on earlier drafts of this report. Advice on the questionnaire was also received from the Improvement Service. The report is an independent analysis in response to the research brief, and responsibility for the analysis outlined in this report lies with the authors.

1.8 The Surveys

Two surveys were devised to address the research brief. A short survey of 6 questions was distributed to Chief Executives and Council Leaders, and a longer survey of 25 questions was distributed to Council officials with an interest in, or responsibility for, anti-poverty work. The longer survey was structured into five substantive sections: asking respondents about child poverty in their area; a formal description of how child poverty is measured and tackled locally; general approaches to tackling child poverty in their area; their views on the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*; and what they felt was needed to tackle child poverty in their area. The shorter survey replicated some key questions from the Officers survey (see Appendix Two).

The aim of the Council Officer survey was to canvass opinion from those who were well placed to comment on work to tackle child poverty that was being undertaken within their local authority. Appropriate 'key informants' from each local authority in Scotland were selected as being those who either: had responded on behalf of their local authority to the Scottish Government's consultation on tackling child poverty in 2011²⁸; were a member of COSLA's Tackling Poverty Officers Group; were a member of the Tackling Poverty Rural Network²⁹; were a member of the Employability and Tackling Poverty Learning Network³⁰; or were a member of the Child Poverty Community of Practice³¹. The aim of the Council Leaders and Chief Executives survey was designed to canvass opinion from those who were best placed to comment on the strategic importance of tackling child poverty in their authority.

Potential respondents were initially sent an e-mail, which introduced the research and invited them to respond to an online version of the survey. One week after the initial e-mail they were sent a hard copy of the survey with a stamped addressed envelope for return. Two weeks after the initial e-mail, non-respondents were sent a follow-up e-mail, which also contained a link to the online version of the survey. A final e-mail reminder was sent before the survey was closed.

Response rates were highly satisfactory: 25 responses were received from Council Officers (78% response rate) and 38 responses were returned from the shorter survey sent to more senior council figures (59% response rate). The distribution of responses across local authorities was also satisfactory, with a broad spread of returns from officers working in authorities with above average, average and below average levels of child poverty. Aggregate responses for the 'leaders' survey were similarly spread, with a slightly higher Chief Executive Officer (CEO) response rate from authorities with an above average level of child poverty being counteracted by a slightly higher Council Leaders response rate from authorities with a below average level of child poverty. 10 of the 22 responses from CEOs were completed by nominees (each of whom held a senior position in the authority). Additionally, two local authorities requested that a corporate response was provided that covered both officer and Chief Executive. Two thirds of those responding to the officers' survey described themselves as being 'managers'.

²⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/01/28152742/0>

²⁹ The TPRN is a sub-group of COSLA's Tackling Poverty Officers' Group.

³⁰ <http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/learning-network>

³¹ <http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/comm/landing-home.do?id=1362979>

2. Key Findings³²

2.1 The *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*

The survey sought to determine awareness of the CPSS among Council officers and to canvass opinion on the extent to which it was influencing the work of local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships at a local level.

Awareness

All officers were aware of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* and most had read it in its entirety

All the local authority officials – surveyed on account of prior interest in tackling poverty - reported that they were aware of the CPSS. This vindicates the choice of these respondents as key informants for this research. On the other hand, one in three of these respondents indicated that, while they were aware of the CPSS, they had not read the whole of it.

Perceived impact of the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland

The *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland* was considered by officers to have had some impact on the work of Scottish local authorities, although there is little evidence of it having a major impact

On the question of the perceived impact of the CPSS on local work, the most common opinion among officers was that it has had ‘some impact’ (54%), with another significant proportion of respondents reporting that the CPSS ‘already reflected the work that we do’ (17%). The extreme positions of the CPSS ‘not generally being considered’ on one hand (8%), or ‘having a major impact’ on the other (4%), were minority viewpoints.

Character of local approaches to tackle child poverty

Scottish local authorities reported that they are tackling child poverty in ways that are consistent with the key principles and aims of the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*

The CPSS has two aims and is grounded on three principles. Local commitment to these principles and aims would illustrate the extent to which there is a shared sense of purpose between central and local government in Scotland. Both senior council figures and officers were asked to describe whether their local authority’s work reflected the key aims (Figure 2) and principles (Figure 3) that underpin the CPSS.

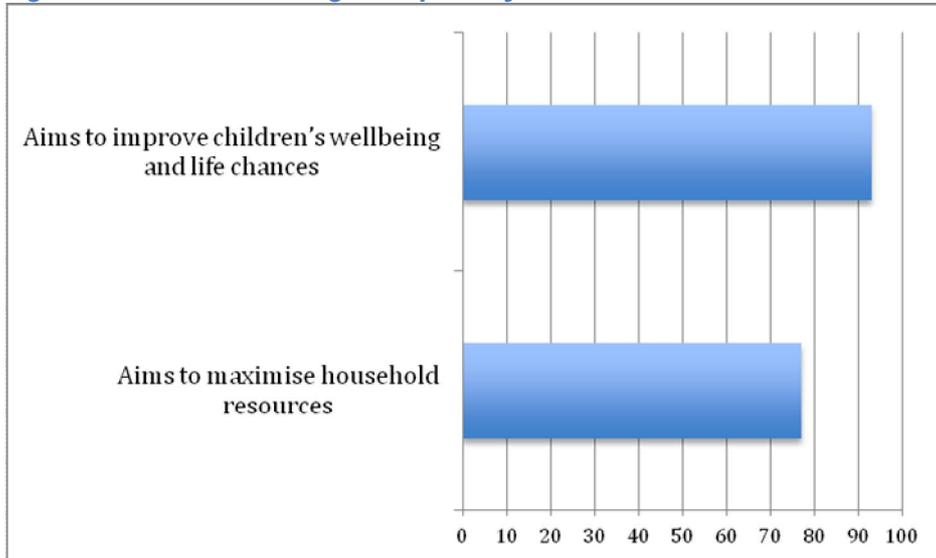
³²

Throughout the results section of this report, reference is made to senior figures or senior Council figures (Chief Executives or their nominees and Council Leaders) and officers or Council Officers (policy officers, managers or practitioners with an interest and expertise in tackling poverty).

Aims

On the whole, there appears to be strong local commitment to the aims of the national CPSS; ranging from three-quarters who agree that their local work should aim to maximise household resources, to an almost universal commitment to an approach designed to improve children's wellbeing and life chances (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Aims for tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities

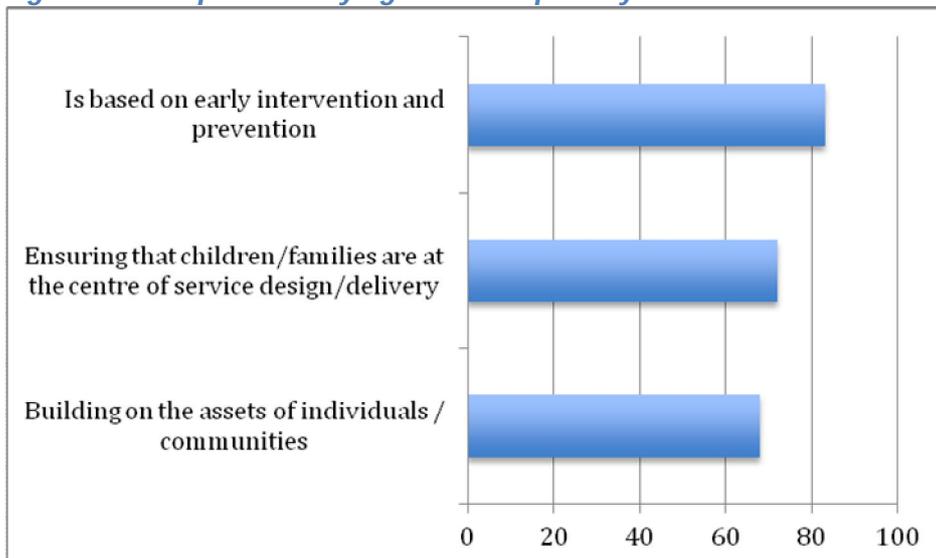


Although this would appear to indicate strong affirmation of the CPSS, there are also some significant differences of opinion. Senior council figures were significantly more likely than officers to perceive that their local work aimed to maximise household resources (86%, compared to 64%).

Principles

Similarly, there is evidence of strong local commitment to the principles that underpin the national CPSS; four-fifths of respondents commit to a principle of early intervention and prevention, and two-thirds agree that their local work aims to build upon the assets of individuals and communities, and is grounded on a commitment to ensure that children and families are at the centre of service design and delivery (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Principles underlying how child poverty is tackled in Scottish local authorities



There were also differences of opinion beneath these headline figures. Senior figures were significantly more likely than officers to consider that their work placed children and families at the centre of service delivery (83%, compared to 56%).

Taking principles and aims together, and given the pattern of response to each, it is not surprising that, on the whole, senior figures were much less likely than officers to report that few of these features were reflected in their local work: 44% of officers considered that their local work reflected three or fewer of these aims and principles compared to only 17% of senior figures. Similarly, CEOs were more likely than Council leaders and their nominees they had asked to be complete the survey (other senior managers) to report that their local work was characterised by more of these aims and principles.

2.2 Understanding the Scale of the Local Challenge

Equally important to answering the question of who should tackle child poverty locally is the issue of the scale of the problem. Council officers were asked to comment on the level of child poverty in their area, to contextualise their estimates of local child poverty and to assess the extent to which they considered child poverty to be a problem locally. Senior officials were also asked to comment on the level of child poverty in their area. All but two of the 60 respondents were able to estimate the level of child poverty in their area.

Scale of the problem

Officers understand the scale of the challenge in tackling child poverty locally

Officers were asked to estimate the level of poverty in their area using a four-point scale, without a midpoint (very high, high, low, very low, plus a don't know option). This estimate of the perceived local level of child poverty need not necessarily result in an even distribution across the four response options, as it is not an estimate of levels of child poverty *relative* to other Scottish local authorities. In effect, it is an estimate of the *absolute* level of child poverty locally; having a lower level of child poverty *relative to other local authorities* might still be perceived as a high level of poverty.

For example, it is entirely reasonable for an officer to consider that the (below Scottish average) rate of 16% child poverty in Aberdeen constitutes, in itself, a high level of poverty. Indeed, one of the reasons for not providing a midpoint in the rating scale was to ascertain whether there was a tendency to view local child poverty as either high or low.

The results suggest that officers tend to perceive that local levels of child poverty are high: 20% rating the level of local child poverty to be 'very high' and a further 44% rating it as 'high'.

Most importantly, officers' estimates of the local level of child poverty are accurate. There are virtually no anomalies between officers' estimates of local child poverty and actual local levels of child poverty³³. For example, all of the officers responding from local authorities that might be considered to have a high level of child poverty (above 20%) perceived that the local level of child poverty was either 'high' or 'very high'. Similarly, all of the officers responding from local authorities that might be considered to have a low level of child poverty (below 17%) perceived that the local level of child poverty was either 'low' or 'very low'.

³³

For example, as estimated using tax credit claimant data from HMRC - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty/LAdata>

This accuracy in estimating local child poverty might reflect the improved availability and quality of poverty data at the local level and would seem to suggest increasing levels of familiarity and expertise among local authority officers with these data.

The scale of the problem in context I: comparisons with other local authorities

Senior figures and officers have a fairly accurate understanding of how the local level of child poverty compares to that of other local authorities in Scotland

Both officers and senior figures were asked to compare the level of child poverty in their area against Scottish local authorities as a whole. In both cases, a five-point scale with a midpoint was used (much higher, higher, about the average, lower, much lower, plus a don't know option).

For officers, one sixth considered that their level was 'about the average for Scottish local authorities' (16%), with roughly equal numbers of the remainder split across 'higher' or 'lower' than average. For senior figures, two thirds considered that their level was 'about the average for Scottish local authorities' (32%), with roughly equal numbers of the remainder split across 'higher' or 'lower' than average.

Although senior figures had a greater tendency to gravitate toward average, on the whole, both officers and senior figures conveyed a broadly accurate understanding of the how child poverty in their area compared to that of other Scottish local authorities.

For example, ten of the eleven responses from senior figures in local authorities with a low or very low relative level of child poverty (below 17%) rated their authority to have a 'lower' or 'much lower' level of child poverty than other local authorities in Scotland. Similarly, eleven of the sixteen responses from officers in local authorities with a high or very high relative level of child poverty (above 20%) rated their local authority to have a 'higher' or 'much higher' level of child poverty than other local authorities in Scotland.

It should be acknowledged that there were more anomalies in these ratings of relative standing than there were for the officers' rating of absolute levels of local child poverty. For example, two Council Leaders from areas with 'average' rates of child poverty estimated that the level of child poverty in their area was 'very high' and conversely one from an authority with a 'very high' level of child poverty estimated that the level of child poverty in their area was 'average'.

Arguably, it is more important to have an awareness of local realities than it is to have an understanding of relative standing. However, child poverty has been identified as a problem that has to be tackled in Scotland and it is incumbent upon local officials to be aware of the extent to which their local child poverty contributes to this national problem. The local child poverty profiles recently published by Save the Children may assist Council Leaders and other elected representatives in better understanding the nature and scale of child poverty in their areas³⁴.

³⁴ <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Child-Poverty-in-Scotland-ocal-snapshots.pdf>

The scale of the problem in context II: contextualised against local profile

A significant minority of officers consider that their authority has higher levels of child poverty than it should have.

It is conceivable that child poverty could be considered to be high in itself and/or higher in relation to other local authorities, but that these levels should be expected given the broader profile of the local authority. For example, although one in four children in West Dunbartonshire are estimated to be living in poverty (a rate that is higher than most other Scottish local authorities), this level of child poverty might be expected given the recent economic history of the area and socio-demographic profile of its residents. Thus, it is important not only to consider the level of child poverty in an area (measured in absolute or relative terms), but also to consider whether it is higher or lower than might have been expected given the character of that area. Council officers are well placed to make such a judgement. Of particular interest is the extent to which levels of child poverty are considered to be higher than would be expected.

A majority of almost two thirds of officers consider that the level of local child poverty - given the local economy and population profile - is 'about the level that would be expected' (64%). A significant minority (28%) consider that the local level of child poverty is 'higher than would be expected', which suggests a need for particular action in these areas. In essence, this is recognition of a particular local problem.

Responses from the officers who considered that their local authority had a high level of child poverty were interesting. The vast majority were evenly split between considering that the level was 'higher than would be expected' and 'about the level that would be expected'.

There is no clear Scotland-wide understanding among officers working in areas of high child poverty of whether local levels of child poverty are higher than expected.

Severity of the problem

Without exception, local officers acknowledge that child poverty is a problem in their area

Local incidence of child poverty is not necessarily a determinant of, nor proxy for, level of concern. Indeed, unlike the strong correlations between the actual and perceived levels (relative or absolute) of child poverty discussed above, there is no clear association between the local level of child poverty and degree of concern with tackling child poverty locally.

Rather, an overwhelming majority of officers report that child poverty, 'is a problem that requires local action' to be taken (80%). A minority of officers report that it is the 'most pressing' problem in their area (8%) while a slightly larger minority acknowledge other more pressing problems (12%). Significantly, nowhere is it recognised that child poverty is 'not a problem'.

2.3 Understanding the Role of Scottish Local Authorities

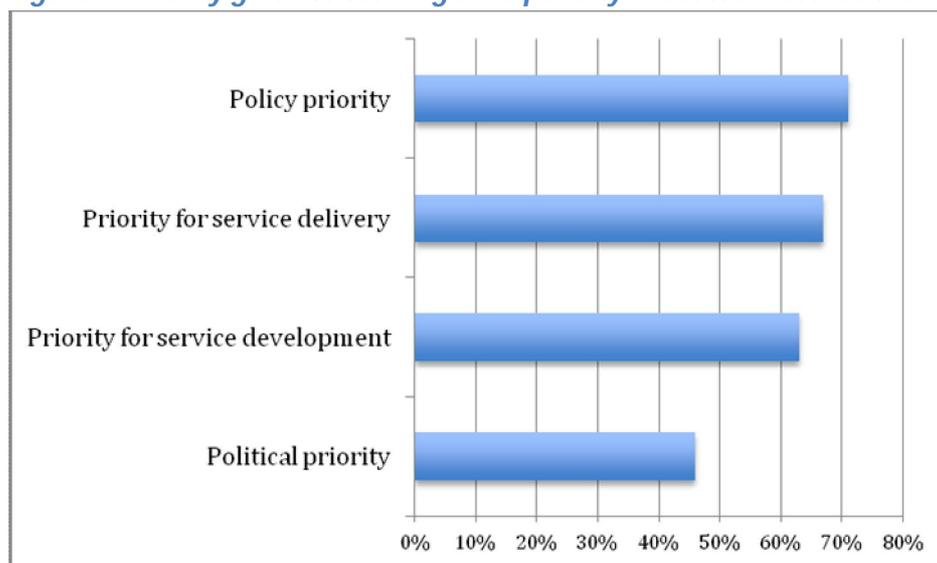
Priority

Child poverty is considered to be a priority for Scottish local authorities, although not necessarily a political priority

Officers were asked to assess the ways in which child poverty might be considered a priority in their area (Figure 4). Almost three quarters reported that tackling child poverty was a priority for local policy, and around two thirds considered that it was a priority for service delivery and service development.

On the other hand, less than half thought that it was a political priority. It is interesting to compare this finding to that reported in Figure 10 below, which shows that a lack of political commitment was generally not perceived to be a *barrier* to tackling poverty; this suggests that local political factors do not impede but also do not particularly enable local anti-poverty activity.

Figure 4: Priority given to tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities



Single Outcome Agreement

SOAs underestimate the range of activity that Scottish local authorities undertake to tackle child poverty locally

Single Outcome Agreements are important statements of Scottish local authorities' priorities and how progress toward these will be measured. In 2009, the End Child Poverty Coalition was critical of the lack of prominence given to tackling child poverty in these key local strategies³⁵. It would appear that the majority of officers in Scottish local authorities also share these concerns in 2012; two thirds consider that their SOA underestimated the work that was being undertaken to tackle child poverty in their area (68%).

Role of Scottish Local Authorities

The majority of both senior figures and local officers consider that local authorities should perform a multi-faceted role in tackling poverty which includes prevention, enabling mobility (leaving poverty) and ameliorating its impact

Officers and senior figures were asked to consider the primary role of their local authority with regard to tackling poverty. Collectively, there is a strong common understanding that Scottish local authorities should adopt a multi-faceted approach to tackling local poverty. Two thirds consider that they should be concerned with improving the quality of life of those experiencing poverty, improving the chances of people living in poverty to escape poverty, directly lifting people out of poverty and preventing people on the margins of poverty from slipping back into it (64%).

Almost all of the remainder considered that Scottish local authorities should be primarily concerned with improving the chances of people living in poverty to escape it (32%). Thus, together with those who favour a multi-faceted approach, almost all respondents express a strong local commitment to increasing the chances of those living in poverty to escape it (64% plus 32%).

Some differences in emphasis can be discerned. The majority opinion for both Council Leaders and CEOs was that the primary role of their local authority should be improving the chances of those experiencing poverty to escape it (50% and 55%, respectively); council officers (25%) and nominees of CEOs (0/10 respondents) were less inclined to emphasise this and were more inclined to favour a multi-faceted approach.

³⁵

Telfer, C. et al (2009) *Single Outcome Agreements 2009: An Analysis By Members Of The Campaign To End Child Poverty In Scotland*. Campaign to End Child Poverty in Scotland

2.4 Responsibility and Partnership

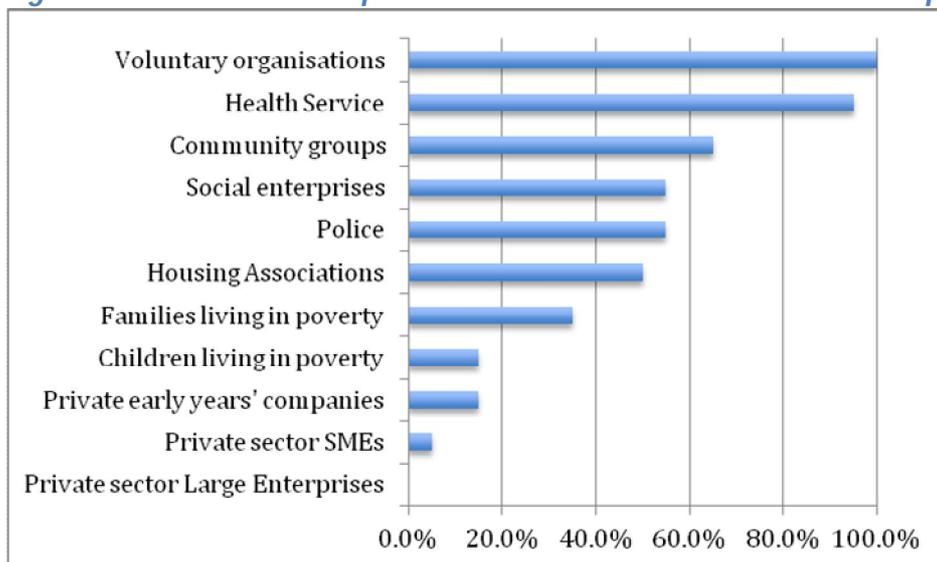
Although the survey was concerned to improve understanding of the role of Scottish local authorities in tackling child poverty, this is not to suggest that local authorities are monolithic entities, nor that the anti-poverty work of other agents (either locally or nationally) should be ignored. Working in partnership is a statutory duty of local authorities in Scotland, and it is important to appreciate the contribution of Community Planning Partnerships to addressing child poverty at the local level.

Partners – in practice

Almost without exception, the health service and voluntary organisations are reported by local officers to be direct partners in tackling child poverty locally

Officers were asked to identify partners with which they co-operated directly to tackle child poverty locally. A wide range of local partners is reported. Voluntary organisations and the Health Service are almost universally involved as partners (100% and 95%, respectively), while two thirds of local authorities identified community groups (65%). Half of local authorities identified housing associations, the police and social enterprises. With an average of five partners being recognised across local authorities, it is evident that tackling child poverty locally is a collaborative task.

Figure 5: Partners that co-operate with local authorities to tackle child poverty locally



However, direct work with the private sector is less prevalent, with only one in six respondents reporting working in partnership with private sector enterprises that serve the early years (15%).

Similarly, few respondents report prominent partnership working with children living in poverty (15%) or families living in poverty (35%). There is clearly scope for greater involvement of a wider range of stakeholders. Indeed, if Scotland is serious about 'putting children and families at the centre of service delivery' as declared in the CPSS, then there is much to be gained by working more directly with them as partners in service delivery.

Most important potential ally in tackling child poverty locally

The majority of both senior figures and local officers consider that a mix of public, private and Third Sector bodies have a key role to perform in tackling child poverty locally

In addition to asking local officers to identify those who were already co-operating as partners in tackling child poverty locally (Figure 5), the survey also asked officers and senior figures which group or organisation had the most important role to play in tackling child poverty in their area.

Two responses were forthcoming when senior figures and officers were provided with a list of agents who might be most responsible for tackling child poverty in their area. First, the minority view was that 'government' was responsible (41%). Interestingly, within this group, responsibility was accorded to either local or UK government and not to the Scottish Government. This is likely to reflect beliefs about how child poverty can be tackled effectively: either through tax and welfare reform (reserved to the UK government) or through local service delivery (the responsibility of local government).

Second, not all respondents were able to limit their response to one partner. Indeed, the majority opinion was that tackling local child poverty was a shared responsibility of government (UK, Scottish and local), the Third Sector, local businesses and people experiencing poverty themselves (56%).

Officers and senior figures shared broadly similar opinions, but some differences could be discerned among senior figures, specifically with regard to which arm of government was the most important. Council Leaders were evenly split in identifying the UK, Scottish and local government as most important, whereas CEOs were split between the UK and local government, and nominees of CEOs (other senior managers) considered that the most important role was played by the UK Government.

Co-operation within local authorities

The majority of officers and senior figures believed that a range of local authority departments are involved in explicit and direct action to tackle child poverty

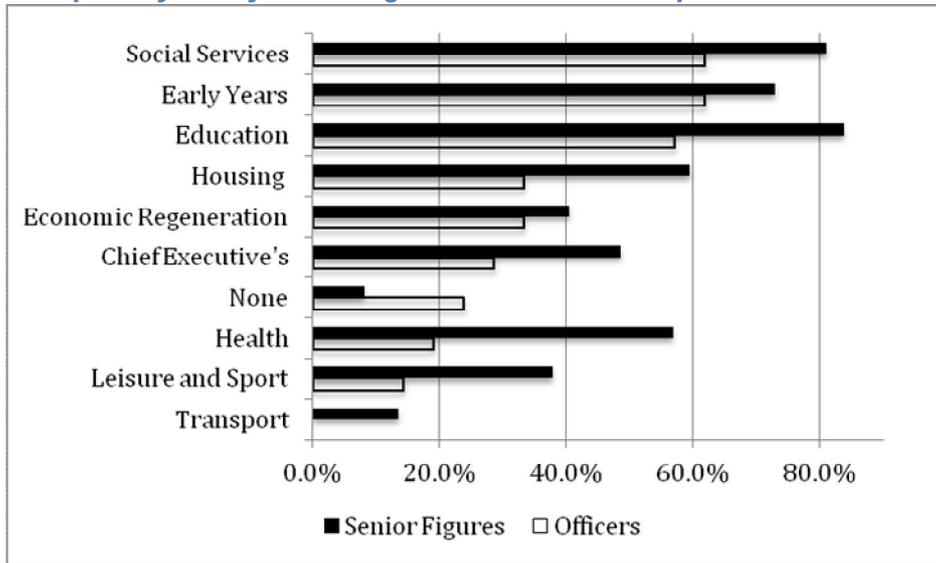
It cannot be assumed that all arms of local government assume equal responsibility for tackling child poverty. Although many parts of local government could make some effective contribution to tackling child poverty³⁶, it would be unlikely that all departments would be tasked with taking an explicit and direct role to this end.

Local officers and senior figures were both asked to identify the departments that had explicit and direct responsibility for tackling child poverty in their area.

³⁶ <http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/povertysensitivedecisions.aspx>

McKendrick, J.H. (2011). *Desperately Seeking Poverty (Alleviation): Towards Poverty Sensitive Budgeting In Local Government*. Oxfam Whose Economy? Seminar Paper. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/desperately-seeking-poverty-alleviation-towards-poverty-sensitive-budgeting-in-146175>

Figure 6: Local authority departments perceived to take an explicit and direct role in tackling child poverty locally: senior figures and officers compared



Taking the responses from officers and senior figures together, it was found that one in ten respondents considered that none of their departments took an explicit and direct lead in tackling child poverty.

Education, social services and early years' services were most commonly reported to play a key role. Chief Executive departments, housing, economic regeneration and health were acknowledged by half of the respondents to be directly involved in tackling child poverty. Those policy areas which were considered to be less prominent were leisure and sport, and transport.

The majority of respondents considered that at least three departments made an explicit and direct impact on tackling child poverty.

There were some differences of opinion between officers and senior figures, with officers being more likely to report that fewer departments were involved in making an impact on child poverty - 50% of officers considered that three or fewer departments made such an impact, compared to 23% of senior figures.

Among senior figures, CEOs were more likely than Council Leaders to report that more of their departments made an explicit and direct impact on child poverty. Officers were more likely than senior council figures to report that the following departments were not making a significant impact on child poverty - Chief Executives, Education, Housing, Health, Leisure and Sport, and Transport.

2.5 Approaches to Tackling Child Poverty Locally

Although the survey did not seek to report on the specific interventions that were used to tackle child poverty, a range of information was collected on how local authorities across Scotland were tackling child poverty.

Approach to tackling child poverty

There is an emergent trend toward developing an explicit approach to tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities

Survey responses show that all local authorities were concerned to tackle poverty in general, with all but one local authority also reporting that tackling child poverty was a key objective. In understanding how Scottish local authorities focus on child poverty, it is important to consider its strategic status and delivery mechanisms used to address it.

Despite reporting a strong interest in tackling child poverty, two thirds of local authorities in Scotland do not have a specific approach to doing so, instead endeavouring to tackle child poverty as part of a broader approach towards poverty and deprivation (68%).

On the other hand, one in four Scottish local authorities reported that they were currently developing an explicit approach to tackling child poverty (24%). One authority reported that it already had an explicit approach to tackling child poverty. Most, but not all, of the authorities expressing or reporting an interest in developing an explicit approach to tackling child poverty have 'high' or 'very high' rates of child poverty (over 20% of children).

Delivery mechanism

More clarity and understanding of the approach taken by Scottish local authorities to tackle child poverty locally is needed

Both officers and senior figures were asked to describe the character of how they approached tackling child poverty. Differences of opinion on the local approach to tackling poverty were reported between Council Leaders, CEOs and key officers in the majority of Scottish local authorities. A common understanding among officers and senior figures of the local approach to tackling child poverty was evident in less than one third of those authorities.

For example, in one authority it was reported by one respondent that (i) 'child poverty is tackled as part of a broader approach to tackle [sic] poverty and deprivation', with a second respondent reporting that (ii) 'tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a central or cross-departmental group in the local authority has responsibility', while a third respondent from the same authority reported that (iii) 'tackling child poverty is a key objective for which a partnership group has primary responsibility'. Although it could be argued that each of these responses might reflect one aspect of that particular local authority's work, a clearer understanding of how child poverty is approached should be possible and would be preferable. In other authorities, the discrepancies were more difficult to reconcile, e.g. in one it was reported that (i) 'we do not have a key objective, [we] tackle child poverty as a result of delivering core Council services', while a colleague considered that, (ii) 'tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a partnership group has primary responsibility'.

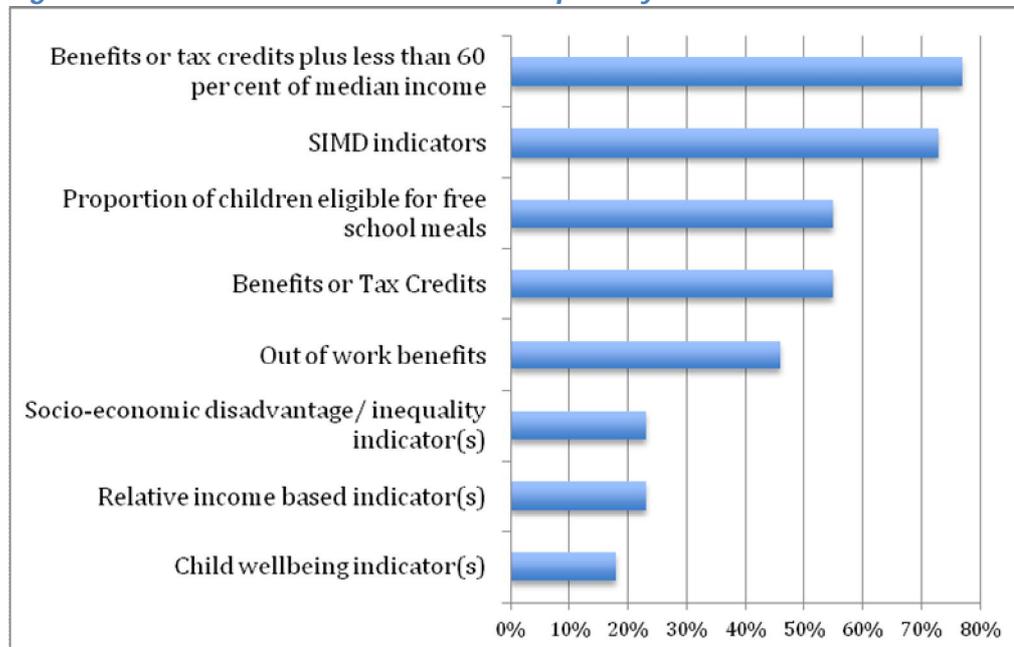
Measurement

There is no common approach to measuring local levels of child poverty across Scottish local authorities but the most common indicator is the new (2011) Local Outcome Indicator

National monitoring of child poverty in Scotland has benefitted from the development of a framework of four indicators at UK level, which collectively allow Scotland's child poverty to be compared directly and systematically to that in other UK nations and in the former Government Office Regions in England. A common element across all of these indicators is the threshold of living in a household whose equivalised income is below 60% of the household median UK income. The most widely used indicator in the UK framework to measure levels of child poverty is this 60% threshold to estimate contemporary levels of child poverty.

Until recently, there was no robust way of estimating the level of child poverty for individual local authorities in Scotland, and given this absence, it is not surprising that a range of approaches have been used in Scottish local authorities to estimate child poverty (Figure 7). On average, officers reported that between 3 and 4 different indicators were used to estimate local levels of child poverty. Although this would appear to be similar to the multi-indicator framework used to estimate child poverty nationally, it is not clear whether the indicator sets used by local authorities are designed to make use of whatever data are available locally, or whether they make selective use of available data in a careful conceptualisation of child poverty.

Figure 7: Indicators used to estimate child poverty in Scottish local authorities



SIMD indicators were reported to be used to estimate child poverty by almost three quarters of officers. There are several reasons why it is problematic to apply SIMD to measure aspects of poverty and deprivation beyond that of small area multiple deprivation in urban Scotland³⁷. The use of SIMD may be indicative of the 'traditional' limitations in the data available to understand child poverty locally.

It is not suggested that Scottish local authorities should ignore the insights that can be gleaned from the array of local indicators listed in Figure 7. However, it must be acknowledged that the wider the range of indicators used, the more problematic it can become to interpret local trends and distributions. This complexity is compounded by the particular limitations of each of the 'alternative' local measures of child poverty.³⁸

The introduction of the new Local Outcome Indicator for child poverty in November 2011 - extending the availability of the UK Government's National Indicator 116 to Scotland and providing estimates for micro-areas within Scottish local authorities (datazones) - was a welcome development³⁹. Although not a panacea to the problem of estimating child poverty locally, this provides a stable and reliable way of comparing local levels of child poverty for local authorities and areas within them to the rest of Scotland and the UK as a whole. It is particularly encouraging to report such a speedy and widespread adoption of this indicator among Scottish local authorities.

Target Setting

There is an absence of local targets for reducing child poverty among Scottish local authorities

No local authority in Scotland reported having a specific target for the level of child poverty which they hoped to achieve, although two local authorities (Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) had included local outcomes to reduce child poverty in their 2009 Single Outcome Agreements. In fairness, more than half of officers reported that their authority had a general tackling poverty target that applied to children as part of the general population (56%).

Moves toward a specific child poverty target were reported in one in five local authorities, with 16% noting that they are planning to introduce such a target, and one authority noting that they planned to discuss whether such a target should be introduced. Those authorities that were considering introducing child poverty targets were those with higher levels of child poverty (i.e. above 20%).

³⁷ See McKendrick, J. H. et al. (2011). *Our Rural Indicators Are Not Enough*. Table 2 (p. 20).

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/learningnetworks/cr/publications/ruralnumbersnotenough>

³⁸ For a discussion of the potential and limitations of different ways of estimating child poverty in Scotland see McKendrick, J. H. (2011) 'How Do We Measure Poverty?' in *Poverty In Scotland, 2011*. Child Poverty Action Group

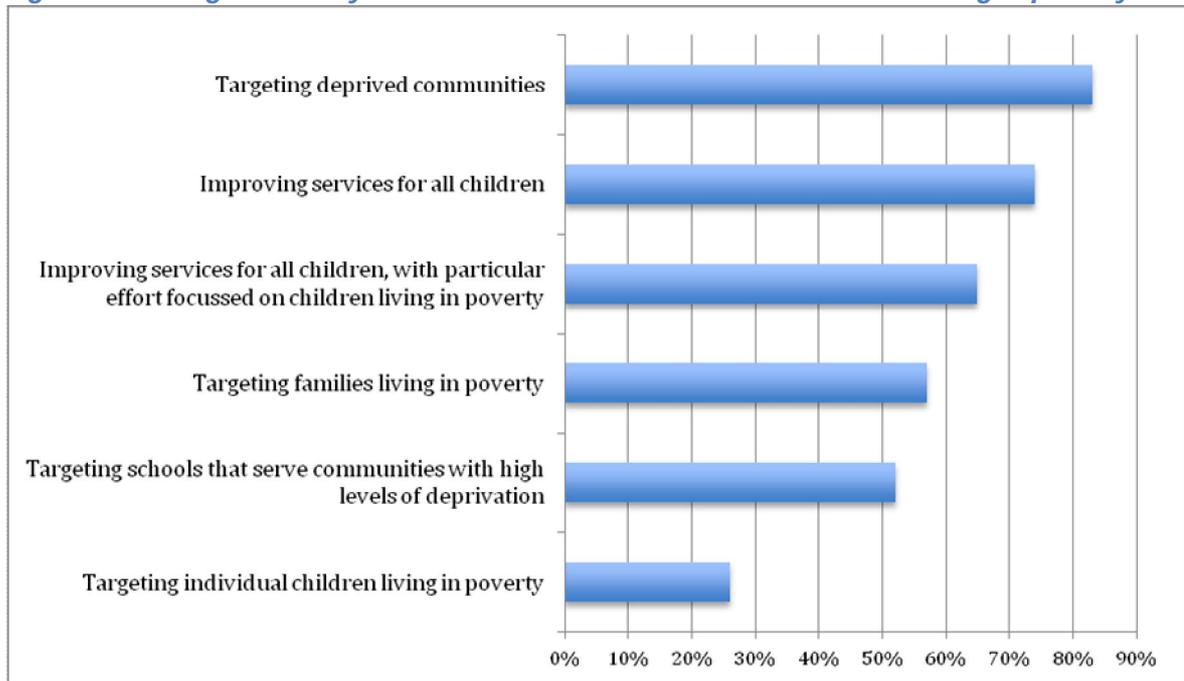
³⁹ National Performance Indicator 116 in the UK government's Performance Framework for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships is the proportion of dependent children in a local authority who live in household whose equivalised income is below 60% of the contemporary national median

Service delivery

It is reported that a range of approaches is used to ensure that services reach children living in poverty, with most effort devoted to targeting broader populations living in poverty which would include children

Whether or not child poverty *per se* should be targeted raises the question of how local authorities should arrange services to reach children living in poverty. As might be expected, officers report that a range of strategies are used (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Strategies used by Scottish local authorities to reach children living in poverty



The most common strategies for service delivery are through improving services for all children (74%); through improving services for all children, with an additional focus on children living in poverty (65%); or through targeting deprived communities (83%).

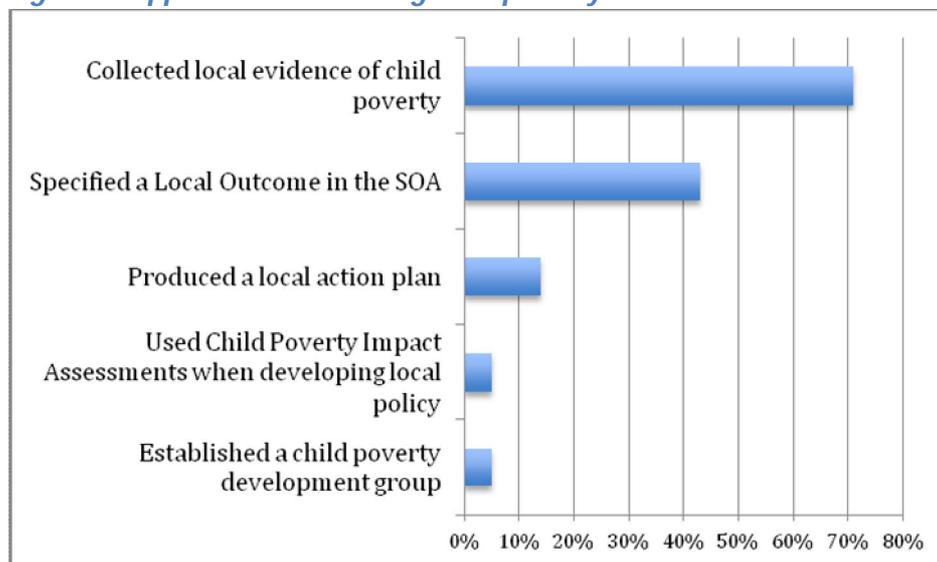
Officers from over one half of local authorities reported that they either target schools serving communities with a high level of child poverty or families living in poverty (57%). One in four reported specifically targeting children living in poverty (26%).

Child poverty specific strategies

Information gathering rather than child-focused corporate initiatives tends to be the most common actions to tackle child poverty undertaken in Scottish local authorities. Only a small minority of local authorities have produced local child poverty action plans, used child poverty impact assessments in policy development or developed child poverty groups to drive activity

Officers report that the most common strategic activity undertaken by local authorities in Scotland in relation to child poverty has been to collect local evidence of the issue. This is not surprising and while commonplace, perhaps the greatest surprise is that one in five local authorities do not report having undertaken such an exercise.

Figure 9: Approaches to tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities, 2011-2012



The importance of Single Outcome Agreements in the work of Scottish local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships is reflected by the finding that two-fifths report that they have specified a local poverty outcome in their SOA. Less common are the more intensive approaches that could be used to tackle child poverty - local action plans (16%), working with a child poverty development group (5%) and undertaking Child Poverty Impact Assessments (5%) are the exception, rather than the norm among Scottish local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships.

Although the range of activity that is reported is welcome, it is clear that the primary activities (information gathering and SOA work) are those that were routine activities prior to the *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland*. The first year of the CPSS would not appear to have been accompanied by either a proliferation nor acceleration of innovative child poverty focused work.

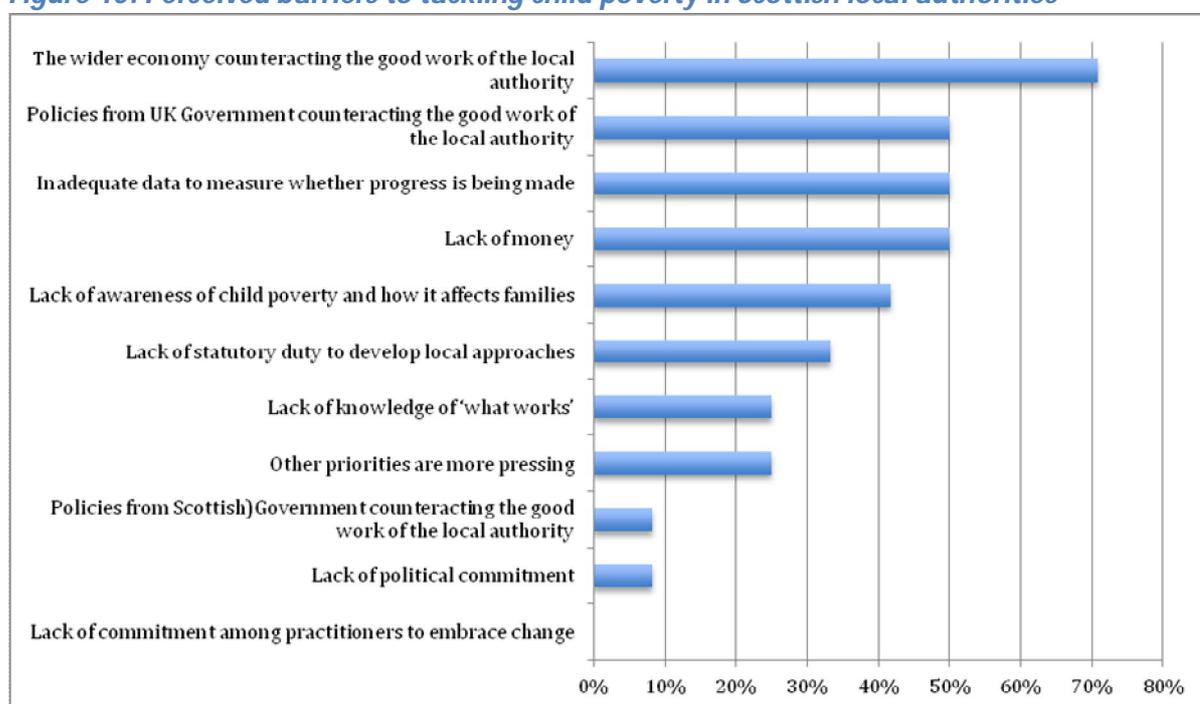
2.6 Barriers and Solutions

Barriers

The majority of local officers are concerned that the wider economy will counteract the positive work of their own local authority

Many factors are considered to be barriers to introducing and implementing an effective approach to tackling child poverty locally. As Figure 10 shows, officers consider that some of these perceived barriers are 'internal' to local authorities, while others are 'external' to it.

Figure 10: Perceived barriers to tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities



The most widely held concern among council officers is the threat of their work being counteracted by downturns and depressed conditions in the wider economy (71%). This is not the only significant perceived 'external threat' to the work of Scottish local authorities: 50% of officers expressed concern that the policies of the UK Government will counteract their local work, and while few are concerned that the policies of the Scottish Government will counteract their local work (8%), one third expressed concern over the lack of a statutory duty enforcing the development of local approaches to tackling child poverty in Scotland. More generally, a 'lack of money' to address child poverty is considered a threat by 50% of respondents.

Other barriers which respondents highlighted might be considered to be addressable by and among local authorities. One in four are concerned about a lack of knowledge over what works (25%) and two in five express a lack of awareness of child poverty and how it affects families (42%). More positively, few consider that there is a lack of political commitment (8%) and even fewer report a lack of commitment among practitioners to embrace action to tackle child poverty locally (4%).

Solutions through funding

The most commonly held view among local officers was that the most effective funding strategy to support their work would be more effective partnership working

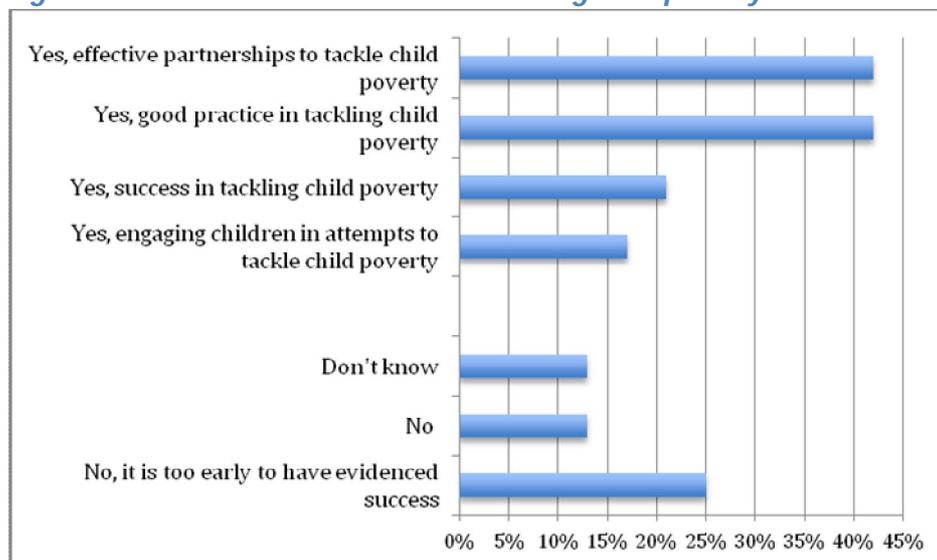
Respondents were asked to identify the most effective funding strategy to support the work of the local authority in tackling child poverty locally.

Interestingly, requesting more money was considered to be less important than using existing resources more effectively, perhaps reflecting the realism (or resignation) of the local government sector in a period of retrenchment. Increases to the overall budget (13%), securing project funding for specific activities (13%) and securing funding for activities to be delivered in partnership (25%) – all of which implied or specified extra funding - were less prevalent as preferred funding strategies than 'more effective working with local partners' (33%). Furthermore, almost one in five sought more effective internal targeting of resources (17%).

2.7 Making a Difference?

The majority of local officials consider that their local authority does not have evidence of good practice, effective partnerships, success in tackling child poverty nor success in engaging children locally

Figure 11: Evaluation of successes in tackling child poverty in Scottish local authorities



It might appear that the evidence one year on from the introduction of the CPSS is discouraging: almost one half of officers are unable to identify signs of progress, i.e. some officers report that they don't know if progress has been made (13%), others report that progress has not been made (13%), while others suggest that it is too early to evidence success (25%).

More positively, 42% report examples of (i) good practice in tackling child poverty, and (ii) effective partnerships. Less common are reports of successfully engaging children (17%) and evidence of success in tackling child poverty (21%). However, even here, these are minority opinions – in each case, it is more common for officers to report that evidence of success is not available.

3. Conclusions

According to the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services, 'at least two years is required to develop whole-area child poverty strategies'⁴⁰. The survey on which this report is based was undertaken one year after the UK and Scottish governments published their initial child poverty strategies, in accordance with the *Child Poverty Act 2010*. It may therefore seem premature to expect Scottish local authorities to show significant progress in developing effective local action plans.

However, child poverty has been a prominent feature of national policy since the pledge to eradicate it was made in 1999. Since the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Scottish local authorities have been obliged to develop Community Planning Partnerships with key local public agencies, third sector organisations, community groups and private sector representatives in their area. Furthermore, under the terms of the Concordat agreed with the Scottish Government in 2007, Scottish local authorities have been obliged to develop Single Outcome Agreements setting out their strategic objectives and corresponding priority actions. Developing a local strategy to reduce child poverty is therefore neither a new nor unprecedented challenge for local authorities in Scotland, and it not unreasonable to gauge the progress which they and their Community Planning Partners have made in addressing the ambition to eradicate child poverty in the UK.

There are some positive signs and grounds for optimism evident from this review of current activity. There is evidence from our survey of strong commitment to tackling child poverty at the local level, with all but one authority reporting that tackling child poverty is a key objective. The principles and aims which the Scottish Government has proposed to reduce child poverty have been widely accepted by local authorities. There have also been significant improvements in the level of knowledge of the evidence and scale of child poverty at the local level. The fact that a more robust indicator has been widely adopted so quickly should help in the development of a common approach to understanding and measuring child poverty across Scotland.

However, while there is evidence that local authorities in Scotland have embraced the child poverty agenda there are also indications that the practical action required to achieve this ambition still lags behind this commitment. In particular, only half of local authorities have examples of good practice in tackling child poverty, with slightly fewer able to point to evidence of impact, and there remains insufficient clarity about how child poverty is tackled locally.

Further scope remains for improving efforts to address the specific challenge posed by poverty among children. For example, the Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee (2009)⁴¹ recommended that 'policies should be poverty-proofed so that their impact on poverty and on child poverty can be assessed during policy development'; so far, few local authorities and Community Planning Partnerships have adopted this recommendation. Other features of effective local strategies also remain under-developed, such as ensuring that agencies involved in delivering policy have clear plans outlining their respective responsibilities for delivering outcomes.

⁴⁰ C4EO (2010). *Child Poverty: Key Messages*. Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Service.

⁴¹ Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee (2009). *Report On Child Poverty In Scotland*. 10th Report, 2009 (Session 3). SP Paper 267. LGC/S3/09/R10

As the joint report from the UK Treasury and Department for Work Pensions in 2008 noted, ending child poverty is *Everybody's Business*⁴². With their community leadership role and vital status in delivering services, local authorities are strategically important in the campaign to reduce child poverty in Scotland and the UK. To achieve this they must include the full range of organisations and services which impact upon child poverty in developing and delivering policy, which is why more engagement is required with the private sector, community groups and the families and children who actually experience poverty.

Overall, the survey found a gap between the increased awareness of child poverty at the local level and the political priority that local authorities appear to attach to this, particularly in terms of developing an explicit, coherent and strategic approach to tackling the problem. An example of this is the finding of conflicting views between officers responsible for tackling poverty in local authorities and more senior council figures regarding how many local authority departments played a direct role in addressing child poverty.

Local strategies display a mix of universal and targeted approaches; the latter including examples of focusing on particular deprived communities, or on the poorest families and children (Figure 8). It is not clear either why these approaches vary between authorities; it is also not clear which are the most effective. There is reason to suspect that such variations are not always based on evidence of best practice, as roughly one quarter of respondents indicated that they had insufficient knowledge of what works. There is now considerable public information and guidance available to help those tackling poverty at the local level⁴³ but more efforts may be required to ensure wider awareness of this.

It is interesting to note that almost one third of respondents regarded the absence of a statutory duty to develop local child poverty strategies to be a barrier to progress, although local authorities in England, who do have such a duty, have expressed concern over the lack of statutory guidance and direction from central government which they feel is necessary to make this duty more effective⁴⁴. In both cases it appears that there is still an important role for national governments in assisting local authorities to realise their aims.

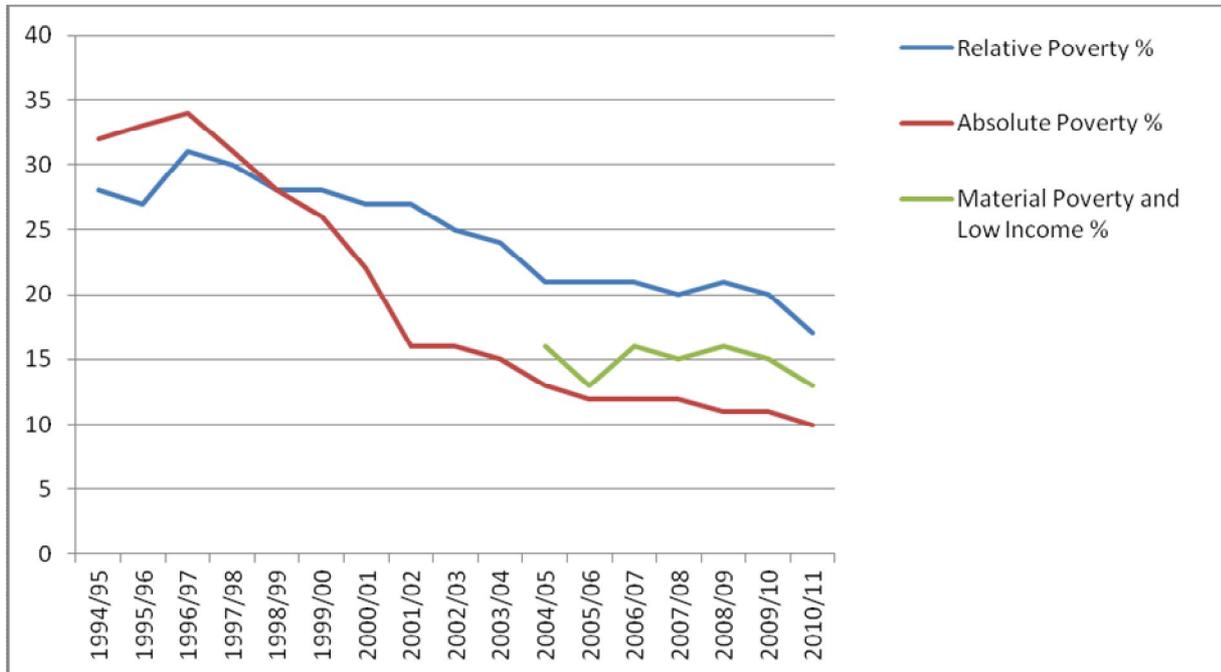
The pledge to eradicate child poverty in Scotland and the UK was ambitious and the cross-party commitment to meet this aim unprecedented. It is evident that child poverty is part of the national and local policy agenda in Scotland, and there is also evidence of widespread commitment to tackling it. However, current economic difficulties make the challenge of eradicating child poverty by 2020 both more pressing and more daunting, and considerable further efforts are required to get back on target towards achieving this ambition.

⁴² HM Treasury and Department for Work Pensions (2008). *Ending Child Poverty: Everybody's Business*. Office of Public Sector Information

⁴³ For example <http://www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk/>

⁴⁴ Nelson, J, O'Donnell, L. and Filmer-Sankey, C. (2011). *Local Authority Progress In Tackling Child Poverty*. National Foundation for Educational Research

Appendix One: Child Poverty in Scotland, 1994/95 - 2010/11



Source: Scottish Government (2011). *Poverty And Income Inequality In Scotland, 2010-11*.
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/06/7976/3>

Appendix Two: Survey Questionnaires

Questionnaire to Officials with Lead responsibility for Tackling Child Poverty

About You. We ask the following questions as we are interested in the professional background of people who have an interest and responsibility for tackling child poverty in Scottish Local Authorities.

① **In which Department/Directorate/Division are you based?**
Please tick *one* option

Chief Executive's Office	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

② **What is your current role?**
Please tick *one* option

Executive Director	<input type="checkbox"/>
Head of Service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practitioner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

③ **What best describes your expertise in your career to date?**
Please tick *one* option

Education practitioner/manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Work practitioner/manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing practitioner/manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Services practitioner/manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Policy and Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Child Poverty in Your Area. We ask the following questions as we are interested to find out how child poverty is viewed locally throughout Scotland.

① **What is the level of child poverty in your area?**

- Very high
- High
- Low
- Very low
- Don't know about child poverty, we focus on overall levels of poverty
- Don't know

② **Compared to other local authorities in Scotland (SLAs), is the level of child poverty in your area ...**

- Much higher than in other SLAs
- Higher than other SLAs
- About the average for SLAs
- Lower than other SLAs
- Much lower than in other SLAs
- Don't know

③ **Given your local economy and population profile, is the actual level of child poverty in your area ...**

- Higher than would be expected
- About the level that would be expected
- Lower than would be expected
- Don't know

④ **In your opinion, how much of a problem is the level of child poverty in your area ...**

- It is the most serious problem that we face
- It is a problem that requires that we take local action
- It is a problem, but we have other more pressing problems to address
- It is not a problem
- Don't know

Formal Description of How Child Poverty is Measured and Tackled in your Area. We ask the following questions as we are interested to find out about the variations in how tackling child poverty is approached across Scottish local authorities.

① **How do you define and measure child poverty in your area?**

Please tick all that apply

We don't use agreed/ consistent indicators	<input type="checkbox"/>
SIMD indicators	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relative income based indicator(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Families in receipt of out of work benefits or in receipt of in-work tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent of median income.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of children living in households in receipt of out of work benefits or in receipt of Child Tax Credit rather than the family element	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out of work benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proportion of children eligible for free school meals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child wellbeing indicator(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socio-economic disadvantage/ inequality indicator(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>	

② **Did your last Single Outcome Agreement adequately demonstrate all the things your local authority did to tackle child poverty?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, it underestimated the work that we were doing	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, it overestimated the work that we were doing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

③ **What is the status of your local authority's APPROACH to tackling child poverty?**

Please tick *one* option

We do not have/do not seek to develop, an approach to tackle poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
We tackle child poverty through our general tackling poverty work	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are considering developing an explicit approach to tackling child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are developing an explicit approach to tackling child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have an explicit approach to tackle child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have an explicit approach or strategy to tackle child poverty, please send details of this to XXX.

④ **On the whole, what best describes the approach to tackling child poverty in your area?**

Please tick *one* option

Tackling child poverty is not a key objective of the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not have a specific approach to tackle child poverty. We tackle child poverty as part of a broader approach to tackling poverty and deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not have a specific approach to tackle child poverty. However, we tackle child poverty as a result of delivering core Council services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a central/cross-department group in our local authority takes responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which one of our local authority departments has primary responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a partnership group has primary responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>

⑤

Does your local authority have a specific TARGET to reduce the number of children living in poverty?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, but we have a more general target to reduce the level of poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, but we are planning to introduce a child poverty target	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, but we are planning to discuss introducing a child poverty target	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have an explicit approach or strategy to tackle child poverty, please send details of this to XXX.

General Approach to Tackling Child Poverty in Your Area. *We ask the following questions as we are interested to find out about the variations in how tackling child poverty is approached across Scottish local authorities*

① **Which of the following actions have been taken in your local authority to tackling child poverty**
Please tick *one* option

Specified a Local Outcome in the SOA	<input type="checkbox"/>
Produced a local action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established a child poverty development group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used Child Poverty Impact Assessments when developing local policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collected local evidence of child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

② **In your opinion, is tackling child poverty a priority in any of the following respects in your local authority**
Please tick all that apply

It is a political priority	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is a policy priority	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is a priority for service development	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is a priority for service delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

③ **Which of the following is strongly characteristic of your local authority's approach to tackling child poverty in your area**
Please tick all that apply

Aims to maximise household resources	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aims to improve children's wellbeing and life chances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is based on early intervention and prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building on the assets of individuals / communities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensuring that children/families are at the centre of service design/delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

④ Which of the following approaches is used by your local authority to deliver services to children living in poverty in your area Please tick all that apply

- Improving services for all children
- Improving services for all children, with particular effort focussed on children living in poverty
- Targeting deprived communities
- Targeting schools that serve communities with high levels of deprivation
- Targeting families living in poverty
- Targeting individual children living in poverty
- Don't know

⑤ Which of your local authority's service areas takes EXPLICIT and DIRECT action to tackle child poverty in your area?

Please tick all that apply

- None of our departments take explicit and direct action to tackle child poverty
- Chief Executive's
- Education
- Early Years
- Social Services
- Housing
- Economic Regeneration
- Health
- Leisure and Sport
- Transport
- Other (please describe in box below)

⑥ Which, if any, of the following co-operate directly as 'partners' with your local authority to specifically tackle child poverty in your area

Please tick all that apply

Housing Associations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Private early years' companies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social enterprises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Private sector Small and Medium Enterprises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large private sector businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary organisations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children living in poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Families living in poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	

⑦ Does your local authority have any evidence of progress in tackling child poverty locally?

Please tick all that apply

Yes, we have evidence of success in tackling child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, we have examples of good practice in tackling child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, we have examples of effective partnerships to tackle child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, of successfully engaging children in attempts to tackle child poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, it is too early to have evidenced success	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have an explicit approach or strategy to tackle child poverty, please send details of this to XXX.

Scottish Child Poverty Strategy. We ask the following questions as we are interested to find out the extent to which the Scottish Child Poverty Strategy has shaped work in Scottish Local Authorities

①

Are you aware of Scotland's national Child Poverty Strategy?

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, but I have not read it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, but I have not read it fully	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, I have read the whole strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>

②

On the whole, what best describes the impact of Scotland's national Child Poverty Strategy on work in your local area?

Please tick *one* option

The Strategy is not generally considered when shaping the work that we do	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Strategy already reflected the work that we do	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Strategy has had some impact in shaping the work that we do	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Strategy has had a major impact on shaping the work that we do	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

What you need to Tackle Child Poverty in Your Area. *We ask the following questions as we are keen to provide support to Scottish Local Authorities.*

① **Which of the following would you consider to be a barrier to introducing and implementing an effective approach to tackling child poverty in your area?**

Please tick all that apply

- Lack of money
- Other priorities are more pressing
- Lack of political commitment
- Lack of knowledge of 'what works'
- Lack of commitment among practitioners to embrace change
- Inadequate data to measure whether progress is being made
- The wider economy counteracting the good work of the local authority
- Policies from UK Government counteracting the good work of the local authority
- Policies from Scottish)Government counteracting the good work of the local authority
- Lack of awareness of child poverty and how it affects families
- Lack of statutory duty to develop local approaches
- Other (please describe below)

② **Which of the following funding strategies would you consider to be the MOST EFFECTIVE way to support your local authority to tackle child poverty in your area?**

Please tick *one* option

- Overall increase in budget
- Through internal targeting of resources within the local authority budget
- Through working more effectively with local partners
- Through securing external project funding from the Scottish Government for specific activities
- Through securing external funding from the Scottish Government for specific activities that are delivered in conjunction with other agencies

③ **Who do you think has the most important role to play in tackling child poverty in your area?**

Please tick *one* option

- No-one, it is an economic issue
- UK Government
- Scottish Government
- Your local authority
- Voluntary organisations and community groups
- Local businesses and employers
- Households with children

	All of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please describe in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

④

Finally, and thinking more generally about tackling poverty, what do you think should be the primary role of your local authority in tackling poverty in your ~~their~~ area?

Please tick *one* option

Improving the quality of life of people experiencing poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving the chances of people living in poverty to escape poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directly lifting people out of poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preventing people on the margins of poverty from falling into poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
All of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questionnaire to Council Leaders and Chief Executive Officers

① **What is the level of child poverty in your area?**

Very high	<input type="checkbox"/>
High	<input type="checkbox"/>
About the average for Scottish local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly lower than most Scottish local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Much lower than most other Scottish local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know about child poverty, we focus on overall levels of poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

② **On the whole, what best describes your approach to tackling child poverty in your area?**
Please tick *one* option

Tackling child poverty is not a key objective of the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not have a specific approach to tackle child poverty. We tackle child poverty as part of a broader approach to tackling poverty and deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not have a specific approach to tackle child poverty. However, we tackle child poverty as a result of delivering core Council services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a central/cross-department group in our local authority takes responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which one of our local authority departments has primary responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling child poverty is a key objective, for which a partnership group has primary responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>

③ **Which of the following is strongly characteristic of your approach to tackling child poverty in your area?**
Please tick all that apply

Aims to maximise household resources	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aims to improve children's wellbeing and life chances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is based on early intervention and prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building on the assets of individuals / communities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensuring that children/families are at the centre of service design/delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

④

Which of your service areas takes EXPLICIT and DIRECT action to tackle child poverty in your area?

Please tick all that apply

None of our departments take explicit and direct action to tackle child poverty

Chief Executive's

Education

Early Years

Social Services

Housing

Economic Regeneration

Health

Leisure and Sport

Transport

Other (please describe in box below)

<input type="checkbox"/>

⑤

Who do you think has the most important role to play in tackling child poverty in your area?

Please tick *one* option

No-one, it is an economic issue

UK Government

Scottish Government

Your local authority

Voluntary organisations and community groups

Local businesses and employers

Households with children

All of the above

Don't know

Other (please describe in box below)

<input type="checkbox"/>

⑥

Finally, and thinking more generally about tackling poverty, what do you think should be the primary role of your local authority in tackling poverty in your area?

Please tick *one* option

- Improving the quality of life of people experiencing poverty
- Improving the chances of people living in poverty to escape poverty
- Directly lifting people out of poverty
- Preventing people on the margins of poverty from falling into poverty
- All of the above
- Don't know
- Other (please describe in box below)