

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

Cost of Living Crisis: Impact on children, young people and families

Tuesday 25th October 13:00 – 14:30

Minutes

Chair: Jeremy Balfour MSP

Present

MSPs

Michael Marra MSP
Fulton MacGregor MSP
Jeremy Balfour MSP

Invited guests

Martin Canavan, Aberlour
Laura Miller, Fife Gingerbread
Salena Begley MBE, Family Fund
Jennifer Ba, SCOREscotland

Non-MSP Group Members

David Mackay, Children in Scotland
Chris Ross, Children in Scotland
Dana Vreeswijk, Children in Scotland
Leah Duncan-Karrim, Children in Scotland
Arran Goodfellow, Children in Scotland
Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland
Ben Hall, Shared Lives Plus
Brian Magee, COSCA
Caitlin Forrest, Together Scotland
Cat Malone, With Kids
Finlay Allmond, Magic Breakfast
Fiona O'Sullivan, Edinburgh Children's Hospital

Fionnuala Contier-Lawrie, The Promise Scotland
Ghzala Khan, WSREC
Helen Forrest, Children's Health Scotland
Jennifer Forsyth, Obesity Action Scotland
Joan Mowat, Strathclyde University
Judi Martin, Together Scotland
Kelly Munro, Carers Trust
Kirsten Shield, Salvensen Mindroom Centre
Kirsty-Louise Hunt, Barnardos
Lauren Murray, Salvensen Mindroom Centre
Meg Thomas, Includem
Megan Farr, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
Rosie Moore, Celcis
Ruairidh Smith, Generations Working Together
Sarah Anderson, LGBT Youth Scotland
Todd Henshaw, FCSS
Toni Groundwater, Families Outside
Ashley Cameron, Families Outside
Alice Pelan, YouthLink Scotland
Charlie Dexter, Michael Marra MSP Office
Eddie Nisbet, YouthLink Scotland
Glen Reynolds, Karen Adam MSP Office
Sarah Robertson, YouthLink Scotland
Toni Valbonesi, One Parent Families Scotland
Kevin Kane, YouthLink Scotland

Welcome from chair

Jeremy Balfour MSP welcomed members of the CPG to the first meeting of the new parliamentary term. Jeremy informed members that the meeting would also be the AGM for the group – which would be covered at the start of the meeting. Following this, the meeting would focus on the impact of cost-of-living crisis on children, young people, and families, which was acknowledged as being a topic of high importance.

He said the meeting would include a panel discussion, featuring representatives from four member organisations, which would focus on the living cost crisis and the impact it is having on families they support. The panel included Laura Millar from Gingerbread Fife, Martin Canavan from Aberlour, Salena Begley MBE from Family Fund, and Jennifer Ba from SCOREscotland.

Following this, he said members would have the opportunity for more in-depth discussion on the cost-of-living crisis in breakout rooms facilitated by members of the secretariat.

Chris Ross (Children in Scotland) ran through a range of housekeeping measures and reminded all attendees that the chat function was available for questions and comments.

CPG Business and AGM

a. Convenors

Jeremy stated that Kaukab Stewart MSP and Meghan Gallacher MSP were happy to continue in their convening roles of the group. Meghan is currently on maternity leave and so will not have active involvement in the group over this period; Jeremy agreed to share chairing duties with Kaukab until Meghan returns.

Proposer: Chris Ross, Children in Scotland

Seconder: Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland

b. Members of the group

The current 5 MSPs who are members of the group expressed their willingness to continue in their role. These are:

- Jeremy Balfour MSP
- Michael Marra MSP
- Fulton MacGregor MSP
- Colin Beattie MSP
- Karen Adam MSP

Proposer: Chris Ross, Children in Scotland

Seconder: Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland

c. Secretariat

Children in Scotland stated they were happy to continue in their role as the Secretariat for the Cross Party Group.

Proposer: Sarah Paterson, YouthLink Scotland

Seconder: Jeremy Balfour, Scottish Conservative Party

d. Treasurer

YouthLink Scotland were happy to continue in their role as the Secretariat for the Cross Party Group.

Proposer: Chris Ross, Children in Scotland

Seconder: Jeremy Balfour, Scottish Conservative Party

e. New members of the group

The following organisations asked to join the CPG:

- Generations Working Together
- Obesity Action Scotland
- Scottish PNA
- Plus Forth Valley

- WSREC
- Shared Lives Plus
- With Kids

All members were in agreement for the above-mentioned organisations to join the group.

Jeremy needed to leave the call at this point and handed over to Sarah Paterson and Chris Ross who took over for the remainder of the meeting.

Sarah Paterson then handed over to the four speakers to discuss the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the children, young people, and families they support– as well as the sector.

Laura Millar, Strategic Manager – Fife Gingerbread

For information

Fife Gingerbread support and empower Fife's lone parents and families in need for better todays and brighter tomorrows.

At Fife Gingerbread it's never 'mission accomplished'. Fife Gingerbread continue to support those who need help most and champion for change on their behalf. They pride themselves in recognising specific needs and gaps in provision and strive to influence policy makers both locally and nationally.

Laura discussed the additional stress that the living cost crisis is having on the households they support and how this is affecting children and young people. Some of the key issues raised were:

- Material deprivation – including families being unable to afford baby and toddler developmental toys.
- The impact of mental health and the additional stress put on families due to increasing living costs.
- The increase in the number of households running out of essential items at home; families are also experiencing this at a higher frequency.

Martin Canavan, Head of Policy and Participation, Aberlour

For information

Aberlour is Scotland's largest, solely Scottish children's charity. They work with disadvantaged, discriminated against and marginalised children, young people and families throughout Scotland, providing services and support in communities around the country.

Martin echoed many of the points raised by Laura. He discussed how families do not have fundamental everyday essentials for life. He said the families they encounter are frightened due to the desperate situation they find themselves in, where incomes are not stretching to meet basic needs to provide for themselves and their families.

Martin stated that the saying of 'heating or eating' has now become worse as some cannot afford either.

- Martin raised concerns that the situation is only going to worsen and that Aberlour as an organisation is struggling to help people, for example, they had to close their hardship fund to new applications which has acted as a lifeline for many. The situation provides a scary insight as to what else may happen if there are to be further cuts and resources being removed.

Salena Begley MBE, Family Fund

For information

The Family Fund is the UK's largest charity providing grants for families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people. Last year, they provided over 150,000 grants or services worth over £48 million to families across the UK.

Their purpose is to improve the lives of low-income families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people.

Salena discussed the difficulties facing families with disabled children and how these can often be overlooked by many. Families have been disadvantaged since before COVID-19 with the additional costs in dealing with disabilities, but the issue is getting worse. There needs to be more awareness of the challenges facing these families, and advice such as getting a better paid job are not often feasible for those with disabled children as parents have care responsibilities. Families with disabled children often face extra costs and are often less able to cut back, such as not being able to change food to cheaper alternatives due to sensory issues or needing to keep the heat at a certain level.

Salena agreed with Martin regarding families being frightened. Children are being disadvantaged due to the lack of access to therapies, specialist care, and play equipment. Families have stated they need help with cash grants, help with debt, and knowing who to turn to for advice. Salena stated there is a need for long term change and an urgent need for family support as having a disabled child should not mean you are doomed to live in poverty.

Jennifer Ba, Youth and Children's Development Officer, SCOREscotland

For information

SCOREscotland's mission and purpose for existence is to work in partnership with others to address the causes and effects of racism and to promote race equality. SCOREscotland seek to break down barriers to the full participation of minority ethnic communities in all aspects of civic life.

Jennifer discussed several examples of how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting families. She shared how her organisation started a community fridge service as part of a climate challenge fund. Food that was destined for landfill was handed out to

people, and this soon become a lifeline for many in the community. However, their funding ended, and the service is now almost entirely run by volunteers with some donations from Fare Share and others. There is the worry that due to the higher costs of living, volunteers may not be able to dedicate as much time to volunteering.

Additionally, Jennifer discussed how black, and minority ethnic children faced some of the highest rates of poverty in Scotland pre-pandemic and this is only going to get worse. They are seeing issues with neglect and safeguarding issues due to children being left at home as families cannot afford childcare.

Questions from membership

Sarah Paterson thanked the speakers and opened the floor to questions and responses from the CPG membership.

Toni Groundwater asked: What are some solutions to prevent children and families affected by imprisonment being pushed into poverty – as well as looking at wider areas?

- Laura Millar said: No matter how much work they do to deal with the immediate, internal barriers, the external systemic issues are restricting them. We would want to see more funding structured where it allows charities to allocate money where it's really needed. Also, funding cycles are problematic as you cannot plan past 6 months or a year.
- Martin Canavan said: Funding and resources in the third sector limit what they can do in terms of bigger picture issues. We need to look at the issues through a child lens, ensuring all children have the best quality life to thrive. Social security needs to be stronger in Scotland – [The Scottish Welfare Fund](#) needs to work better as people were being turned away during pandemic. The [Scottish Child Payment](#) has been an important way to support families, especially since its recent increase. We're also calling to reintroduce the [Winter Support Fund](#) which allowed third sector to reach families who weren't eligible for universal credit or the welfare fund.

Joan Mowat said: Not everything comes down to money, although it is important. There is a strong link between school exclusion and imprisonment – we need education reform and change of school culture.

- Sarah Paterson asked: With the deepening of the energy crisis, cuts to services, austerity over the past decade and the pandemic – are we completely failing the next generation and children, young people and families? What needs to change?
- Jennifer Ba said: We need guidance and stability as a nation from politicians as service users turn to charities, but they do not have the answers. We would want to see black and minority ethnic representatives in the decision-making process.
- Laura Millar said: The research hasn't changed in the last 10-12 years – we need better long-term investment. We are also seeing an issue where people who previously didn't require help but with the last couple years and this

crisis, they are going to be pushed into trouble without knowing where to go for help.

Michael Marra MSP said: It's difficult to talk about this stuff without becoming overtly political. I don't see radically uncertainty changing any time soon within the political sphere. We need to be thinking about national clarity around what our response is going to be. Essentially some of the services we have don't really exist – an 18-month waiting list for mental health services isn't really a service. I would appreciate any evidence and examples from members to show the extent of provision dropping in areas, the removal of resources and how it is affecting people.

- Martin Canavan said: We are running out of names for what it is we are living through – we need coherence in the political sphere to be able to respond effectively and help children and young people.
- Salena Begley MBE said: Carers need access to respite, and there needs to be a change where parents and carers can improve their quality of life and earn money.

Further discussion took place in the chat due to the time restrictions on the meeting, with material also shared by different members. A topic which was raised by several members was the issue of debt – particularly to public bodies. Members have seen families fall into debt to public bodies, including housing and rent arrears, and school meal debt. Additionally, data was shared from the most recent Family Poll which highlighted 55% of families in Scotland expect to incur further debt in the next 6 months, 16% of families have 'benefits debt', and 26% have council tax arrears. Additionally, members stated that the basic needs of individuals are not being met, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups. In terms of finances, there was a discussion around families being incredible at budgeting and making their money stretch, but the issue is there is simply not enough.

A number of resources and evidence were suggested by members, including:

- [The Growing Cost of a Healthy Diet – Obesity Action Scotland](#)
- The Cost of Caring: [A report exploring the challenges facing families raising disabled children](#)

Breakout rooms discussion summaries

Following the panel discussion and Q&A session, members were placed into breakout rooms facilitated by members of the secretariat. Questions discussed are as follows:

- What are the biggest impacts you are seeing on the children, young people and families you work with?
- What do you see as the potential impacts over the coming months?
- What evidence do you already have that you could share?

The main points raised by the groups were as follows:

- There is a need for greater collaboration to put pressure on the government to better support families.
- There is a need to pull together the current research and create a report with recommendations to advocate with a single voice to show a clear message.
- It is important to ensure that all are being represented in a united message – especially the families, children and young people who are most likely to be affected.
- There is a strong need to address the challenges with staffing, education, budgets.

Close

Chris Ross thanked attendees for attending and announced the date next meeting will be announced shortly, and it will be on Zoom, online. The Secretariat agreed to take forward a new piece of work to gather evidence on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on families in Scotland.