

New department must lead for children

CPAG is calling for the major changes to the structure of government, which have increased Cabinet representation on education and children, to ensure ending child poverty and children's services are given greater priority.

Kate Green, CPAG's Chief Executive, has welcomed the changes the new Prime Minister has made to the structure of government, which allow an important opportunity for policy across government to better meet the needs of children. She said: 'A government that is better organised for a strategic approach to ending child poverty and recent announcements on new funding for children's services will help improve the chances of meeting the targets to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it by 2020. This commitment must be sustained across government and backed by sufficient investment to improve the incomes of the poorest families.'

The new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), headed by the Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, has a remit to raise educational standards so that more children and young people reach expected levels, lift more children out of poverty and re-engage disaffected young people. It will also have a lead role across government to improve outcomes for children, including work on children's health and child poverty. In his first major speech to an audience of children's services experts, at a National Children's Bureau sponsored conference, the new Secretary of State set out his aspirations, saying: 'We must provide excellent universal services for all children and their families; be able to identify potential problems early, before things go wrong; and when children are at risk, do something quickly to help children and their families get back on track.'

The Ministerial team at the DCSF includes the Rt Hon Beverley Hughes,

who retains her role as Minister for Children. In a clear sign of the increased importance attached to her role, she will now attend Cabinet meetings when issues relevant to children are discussed.

A flurry of announcements from the DCSF, mostly related to the Comprehensive Spending Review, has included:

- £4 billion new funding for Sure Start, early years and childcare across three years;
- £184 million new funding for youth facilities;
- £1.1 billion for extended schooling capital projects;
- £396 million to continue the Children's Fund for a further three years;

- £60 million over three years to put mental health practitioners in schools;
- a new strategy for teenage mothers, young fathers and their children.

Kate Green said: 'We encourage the Department to continue this good start with further Comprehensive Spending Review announcements on increased funding for schools, particularly for those serving the most deprived communities. But Ed Balls must ensure that recent proposals made by the DWP do not undermine his own department's agenda for improving children's lives by hitting poor families with benefit sanctions and forcing parents into poorly paid unsuitable work'.

CPAG's policy award



Child Poverty Action Group's Chief Executive collected an award from the Social Policy Association. The award was given for 'Outstanding contribution from a non-academic organisation' in recognition of CPAG's work to develop and promote clear and effective policy that brings closer the eradication of child poverty.



In the House

As MPs left for their summer break, there was a tangible sense of relief across the House that the transition to Gordon Brown had at last taken place and all can finally engage with the new order – albeit as a supporter or an opponent!

A wave of new Ministerial and Shadow appointments swept across the House, including **The Rt Hon Ed Balls MP** as the new Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, shadowed by **Michael Gove MP** for the Conservatives and **David Laws MP** for the Lib Dems. **The Rt Hon Peter Hain MP** is the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and is shadowed by **Chris Grayling MP** for the Conservatives and **Danny Alexander MP** for the Lib Dems.

The **Child Maintenance Bill** was halfway through Committee Stage in the Commons when the summer break started. CPAG has been working in partnership with organisations including One Parent Families, Resolution and Citizens Advice to provide briefings and proposals for amendments to Committee members.

The **Work and Pensions Select Committee** has published a report on its **benefits simplification** inquiry, for which CPAG gave both written and oral evidence. We welcomed recommendations for a Welfare Commission to give consideration to benefits simplification and for the Social Security Advisory Committee be given an extended remit to include tax credits. However, the ‘massive simplification’ that the Committee calls for must be approached with caution. Claimants’ experience of making benefit claims must be simplified, but welfare provision must still respond to the complexity of people’s lives, or the full needs of the poorest families may not be met.

An innovation from the new Prime Minister has given us advance notice of Parliament’s work next year. In July, **Gordon Brown** unveiled a **draft Queen’s speech** in a statement to the House. Of interest to CPAG are forthcoming bills on **Children in Care**, to give looked after children more stability and support their performance at school; **Education and Skills**, which will raise the school leaving age to 18 and implement recommendations from the Leitch Review; and **Employment Simplification**, which the Prime Minister said will deliver a simpler and fairer enforcement of the minimum wage.

CPAG at the party conferences

CPAG is holding joint fringe events with NUT at this year’s party conferences on the theme: *Education – closing or increasing the poverty gap?*

Liberal Democrat Conference

1–2pm, 17 September, Empress Room, The Grand, Brighton. *Speakers:* Stephen Williams MP, Kate Green (CPAG), Steve Sinnott (NUT), Prof John Howson (Chair)

Labour Conference

12.45–2.15pm, 26 September, San Michel Marquee B (next to the Marriot Highcliffe Hotel), Bournemouth. *Speakers:* Jim Knight MP, Kate Green (CPAG), Steve Sinnott (NUT), Fiona Millar (Chair)

Conservative Conference

5.45–7pm, 1 October, Arena, Winter Gardens, Blackpool. *Speakers:* Michael Gove MP, Kate Green (CPAG), Steve Sinnott (NUT), Alex Frean (Chair)

Lone parents need support, not sanctions

The DWP has published a new Green Paper on welfare reform proposals. *In work, better off: next steps to full employment* has been published in response to the review of child poverty strategy in DWP by Lisa Harker and the review of welfare to work policy by David Freud.

Proposals in the paper that would move lone parents onto jobseeker’s allowance when their youngest child is just seven years old have met strong criticism from many children’s organisations. CPAG’s Chief Executive, Kate Green, said:

‘Lone parents should not be forced to face benefit sanctions when their children are still at primary schools. Taking money away from families that are already poor will worsen poverty for many children and put their health and wellbeing at risk.’

The proposals also state that wraparound childcare will be universally available by 2010. However, no funding commitment has been made that would put the financing of childcare in the UK on a comparable level to those EU countries with the best provision – and the highest levels of lone parent employment – such as Denmark and Sweden.

CPAG believes voluntary employment programmes have repeatedly been shown to be far more effective. The Government should concentrate on improving and extending high quality employment support, which at present is not able to meet demand from the majority of lone parents who want to find a good quality job that can be balanced with parenting demands.

The paper also proposes greater use of the voluntary and private sector in delivering services, although the extent to which this will happen is still uncertain as the Treasury has yet to make a decision on funding the initiative. Caution is needed in extending the role of the private and voluntary sectors to deliver services to long-term claimants. CPAG is concerned that if charities take on the role of administering the benefits system, the relationship of openness and trust with their clients that is a key factor in their success will be damaged, and vulnerable individuals will lose the protection of independent advocates who can stand up for their rights.

CPAG is making a formal response to the paper and lobbying politicians from all parties about our concerns.



Congratulations and thanks to Sarah Warburton (pictured) whose five-day Hebridean challenge has raised over £1,000 for CPAG. Go to www.cpag.org.uk/marathon/hebridean.htm for her post race account.

Campaign to End Child Poverty update

Two Cabinet Ministers, Peter Hain and Ed Balls, joined the Campaign to End Child Poverty and 150 children at a picnic organised jointly with the Daycare Trust. The event was part of the Campaign's activity focussing on four key themes during the new Prime Minister's first 100 days: employment and childcare, incomes, education and housing. Supporters of the campaign are encouraged to email the new Prime Minister through their website: www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/Gordon. The End Child Poverty Month of Action will begin this year on 17 October 2007 and its website will give details of all events and activities.



Peter Hain and Ed Balls join children at the Campaign to End Child Poverty and Daycare Trust picnic

Conservatives looking for breakthrough

Breakthrough Britain, Iain Duncan Smith's Social Justice Policy Group's recommendations for tackling 'social breakdown', was published in July. The report, weighing in at a hefty 671 pages, dubs itself as offering 'radical new proposals for the welfare society'. Following the Conservative's adoption last year of the aspiration to end child poverty by 2020, the Group's final report reaffirms the importance which the Party now attaches to the social justice debate.

Chapters focus on 'family breakdown', 'economic dependency and worklessness', 'educational failure', 'addiction', 'serious personal debt' and the service delivery role of the third sector. The report rightly recognises weaknesses in the tax credits and benefits systems, highlighting the complexity of the benefits system, the work disincentives created by high marginal deduction rates, and the lack of financial support for carers. It notes the devastating effects of educational inequality, and the importance of the early years of a child's life.

But too often the policies it proposes will do little to eradicate poverty, appearing to respond more to habitual Conservative fixations rather than evidence of 'what works'. Nowhere is this clearer than in relation to the proposals to reward married couples through the tax system. Child poverty experts and campaigners have warned this would divert some £3.2 billion to providing 'symbolic recognition' of the institution of marriage, which would mostly reach better off families and do little for children growing up poor.

The Conservative Party's recent commitment to addressing poverty is welcome, but it must now decide which of the report's recommendations to follow. CPAG and many of our partners in the Campaign to End Child Poverty are engaging with the Party to persuade it that its aspiration to end child poverty must be matched by policies that will achieve that goal, rather than adopting recommendations that will divert vital resources away from poor families.

Lib Dems announce new poverty policies

The Liberal Democrats have published a new policy paper *Freedom from Poverty, Opportunity for All: Policies for a fairer Britain*. The proposals are intended to lift five million people out of poverty by 2020. If endorsed by Party members at conference, the policies should appear in the next election manifesto.

Lib Dem leader, Sir Ming Campbell, recently signed the party up to the target of ending child poverty by 2020. Headline measures to achieve this are a £5 increase in child benefit for the oldest child and £1.5 billion for a 'pupil premium' for those from a deprived background. The £3 billion required to fund these measures is not new money but from cuts to working tax credit (WTC) for the most wealthy qualifying families and administration reforms including a return to fixed payments. Other commitments CPAG has welcomed include £600 million extra funding for early years and childcare and one million more affordable houses by 2020.

Sir Ming's previous declaration of support for increasing child benefit for younger children up to the same level as for the oldest child has been relegated to an unfunded aspiration. This is a major disappointment for Make Child Benefit Count campaign supporters and the paper's proposals will increase income inequality for larger families. A promise to increase support for couple families through a premium within WTC also depends on 'when it is financially viable'. The Party's Treasury team, which is currently looking at funding priorities across all policy areas, will need to agree the allocation of new resources for these two commitments to appear in the election manifesto.

CPAG will respond to the proposals and discuss them with DWP and DCSF shadow secretaries Danny Alexander and David Laws. We have already informed the Party that as a member of the Campaign to End Child Poverty we will be critical if they do not support the extra £4 billion investment needed to halve child poverty by 2010.

New Scottish Government commits to child poverty target

Your donations make a difference

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity promoting action for the relief directly or indirectly of poverty among children and families with children. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the causes, extent, nature and impact of poverty, and strategies for its eradication and prevention;
- bring about positive policy changes for families with children in poverty;
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty: improving children's lives today and helping to abolish child poverty tomorrow.

Please make a donation

- Send us a cheque, postal order or Charities Aid Foundation voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
- By credit card online at www.cpag.org.uk.
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- Make a will and leave us a legacy.
- Set up Give As You Earn (payroll giving) with your employer.

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For more information visit our website www.cpag.org.uk, email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

Following campaigning from CPAG, amongst others, Stewart Maxwell MSP, Minister for Communities and Sport, has committed the new Scottish Government to sharing the UK Government target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

Speaking in response to a parliamentary question he said: 'The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to improving the life chances of all Scots and tackling the poverty and disadvantage which far too many Scots suffer.'

'We are committed to sharing the UK Government's long-term target to eradicate child poverty by 2020. We are aware that poverty is about more than a lack of decent income. It is also about ill health, educational achievement, access to services, and maximising opportunities in the labour market for parents. Policies across the Scottish Government are working on all these areas and we will continue to work to maximise the impact these have and ensure they are effectively joined-up at national and local level.'

CPAG in Scotland's John Dickie welcomed the statement saying: 'The Scottish Government has a vital role to play in the fight to end child poverty and the commitment of the new SNP administration to the 2020 target is an important step forward. We look forward to engaging with the new Minister and his colleagues to help shape policies that maximize the incomes of our most disadvantaged families and that tackle the underlying drivers of poverty and inequality.'



Stewart Maxwell MSP

CPAG joins calls for Parliamentary enquiries into poverty issues

CPAG in Scotland has joined calls for the Scottish Parliament to undertake enquiries into fuel poverty and child poverty. Letters signed by CPAG to the convener of the new Communities Committee, Duncan McNeil MSP, highlight the misery caused by fuel poverty for households across Scotland and the still scandalously high levels of child poverty; and call for specific enquiries to review progress, identify additional interventions required and make cross party recommendations.

Free school meal pilot details announced

The Scottish Government has announced further details of its free school meals pilot. According to Schools Minister Maureen Watt MSP primary one to three pupils in the Borders, East Ayrshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire will have access to free nutritious meals during a £5 million trial scheme for six months from October.

Announcing the details the Minister said: 'The pilots will show us the impact universal free school meals have on children's health as we shape our policy on improving nutrition, as well as how schools cope with implementing them.'

CPAG in Scotland has welcomed the initiative as a significant move in the direction of universal free school meals and has requested a meeting with Ministers to discuss how the trials can be best evaluated with a view to a wider roll out as soon as possible.