

## Child Poverty Unit needs Treasury support to succeed

**T**he Government has announced the creation of a new Child Poverty Unit. The Unit will take a cross-government approach to eradicating poverty.

Formed of officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Children, Schools and Families, it will also work closely with the Treasury, local government and government agencies.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has given the Unit a cautious welcome, but is concerned that Treasury officials are not within the unit. Chief Executive, Kate Green, said: 'The limited Treasury involvement is a concern as the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests around £4 billion annual investment is needed to meet the 2010 target, which is essential to meeting the 2020 target for eradicating child poverty.'

'Investment will do much more to restore public trust in the Government's commitment to the targets.'

Government Ministers accepted that progress has stalled, but restated their commitment to eradicating child poverty. Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, said: 'Ending child poverty is a simple moral imperative; it has no place in modern Britain. There has been an enormous programme of social reform over the past ten years that has lifted 600,000 children out of poverty – but this must accelerate, not plateau.'

A focus of the Unit's activity will be on increasing employment of parents, particularly disabled parents and lone parents. Secretary of State for Work and

Pensions, Peter Hain, said: 'I know that work is the best route out of poverty and worklessness deprives too many children of a fair chance in life. I have set out plans to help more people, such as lone parents and disabled people, get the right support and training.'

While work can be an important route out of poverty, CPAG believes greater recognition is needed that over half of children living below the poverty line are in working households.

Kate Green said: 'The promise to parents must be that you will not be forced into work that fails to take your family out of poverty. We need high quality jobs that last, with good pay and family friendly employers.'

CPAG is looking forward to engaging with the new Unit as the principal stakeholder organisation in the UK exclusively focused on child poverty and will strongly reiterate the importance of the 2010 target.

### Month of Action to End Child Poverty



The Month of Action for the Campaign to End Child Poverty, of which CPAG is a member, ran from International Day of Poverty Eradication on 17 October to 21 November. Events included an opportunity for children to directly question three Secretaries of State, Alistair Darling, Ed Balls, and Peter Hain, and Treasury Minister Jane Kennedy.



## In the House

Disappointment from child poverty campaigners greeted the **Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)** and the **Pre-Budget Report**. The **Chancellor, Alistair Darling**, announced only an extra 48p a week for the poorest children, which does little to take us closer to the 2010 target to halve child poverty. The **Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Andy Burnham**, received a thorough grilling before the **Treasury Select Committee** as he was questioned on the expected Bills in the Queen's Speech and on why the CSR did not clearly set out the resources that would achieve the 2010 target. Both Alistair Darling and Andy Burnham gave clear commitments to the 2010 and 2020 targets before the committee.

The **Queen's Speech** saw the announcement, as expected, of a **Children and Young Persons Bill** on services for looked-after children, a **Child Maintenance Bill**, to be completed from the previous session and an **Education and Skills Bill** that will raise the age of compulsory participation in education or training. An expected **Employment Bill** was heralded with an new announcement of an extension to the right for parents to request **flexible working**. Another very welcome addition to what had been expected is the **Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill** which will release millions of pounds of investment into **youth facilities**.

Labour MP **Karen Buck** questioned the **Prime Minister, Gordon Brown** on his commitment to the child poverty targets in Prime Minister's Questions, resulting in significant media interest. She has also secured a debate on **welfare reform** in which she put important questions to the Minister on the major problems and potential harm from moving **lone parents** into the JSA system. She argued for development of the successful New Deal for Lone Parents instead, along with much better childcare provision and a focus on sustained good quality jobs.

The **Work and Pensions Select Committee** is pursuing an inquiry on *The best start in life? Alleviating deprivation, improving social mobility and eradicating child poverty*. **CPAG** has submitted written evidence and **Chief Executive, Kate Green**, has been an oral witness.

## Fuel poverty increases for children

The number of children in fuel poverty has increased from 220,000 in 2003 to 750,000 in 2006.

National Energy Action (NEA), the leading national fuel poverty charity, has warned that expected further rises in fuel costs could mean even more children are in fuel poor homes this winter.

Jenny Saunders, NEA Chief Executive, said: 'For millions of families and individuals, winter brings poor health, isolation, debt and worry. We believe that this is unacceptable.'

Fuel poverty is defined as spending more than 10 per cent of household income on fuel costs. The Government promised to end fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010 and for all households by 2016. However, there is growing concern that the Government will abandon the 2010 target as rising fuel costs are putting it so far out of reach.

CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green said: 'Family incomes have not kept up with the steep rises in fuel bills in the last few years. The Government has failed to ensure benefits were raised sufficiently and many employers simply are not paying parents a living wage to meet their fuel bills.'

'This leaves families deciding between putting the heating on and putting food on the table. Investing the £4billion needed to halve child poverty by 2010 will leave fewer families with this unacceptable choice.'

Many families still pay a 'poverty premium' as billing methods for the poorest households often result in the most expensive tariffs. CPAG is supporting calls for social tariffs for vulnerable customers and lobbying Government for investment in family incomes that will allow families to stay out of fuel poverty.

The 14th edition of CPAG's *Fuel Rights Handbook* will soon be published. This handbook is essential for any adviser helping clients cope with fuel bills, debt and related problems with fuel supply. See [www.capg.org.uk/publications](http://www.capg.org.uk/publications) for more information.

## Oxford CPAG supporters say 'Make Child Benefit count!'

CPAG in Oxford has surveyed people in the area on their views on child benefit.

Currently, the Government gives a family £18.10 a week for the eldest child but just £12.10 a week for younger children. The *Make Child Benefit Count* campaign for which CPAG is lead member, is calling for child benefit to be equalised for younger children to the amount received for the oldest child.

Over 90 per cent of survey participants with children said that child benefit is important to their family and 80 per cent thought it should be the same for every child. Several commented that they did not know what they would do

without the support it provides for clothes, nappies, food, milk, childcare and bills or for sports and music for their children. Over 60 per cent of the parents in the survey have two or more children, so would be particularly helped by an increase to child benefit for younger children to match the oldest child amount.

Child benefit is easy to claim and reaches more children than many other benefits and tax credits. The Government believes increasing the rate of child benefit for younger children would lift at least 250,000 children out of poverty, particularly helping larger families which are more likely to be poor. This would be a significant step towards achieving the goals of halving child poverty by 2010 and eliminating it by 2020.

make  
child benefit  
count

# End Child Poverty update: Month of Action special

**The Campaign to End Child Poverty (ECP) ran its second annual Month of Action from 17 October to 21 November.**

The month started with the *Minimum Social Wage* conference at TUC, hosted by the Unemployed Workers Centre in support of the Campaign. There were workshops on benefit rates, social housing and social services, and an emphasis on discussion and participation. Campaign members called on the Government to properly calculate the cost of child poverty to the UK economy (eg, through ill health, low employment and crime) and a keynote speech was delivered by Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Peter Hain.

2 November was ECP's *Visit Your MP Day* on which supporters visited their local MP to ask her/him to write to the Chancellor in support of the child poverty targets and to support initiatives in their own area that will help end child poverty.



*The politicians' panel get the thumbs up from a young questioner.*

A rally on 7 November saw 300 campaigners descend on Whitehall blowing whistles and calling for the Chancellor to invest in ending child poverty. Many of the children on the rally then went to Downing Street where they met with the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, The Secretary of State for Children Schools and Families and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

CPAG assisted in the planning of a *Question Time* with the Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, and her Conservative and Lib Dem Shadows, Tim Loughton and Annette Brook. This event closed the *Month of Action* and gave 60 children and young people the opportunity to put questions directly to the politicians – and enjoy a Pugin tea in the House of Commons! The young people responded to the politicians' answers by raising a red card if they did not like it, a yellow card if they were not convinced either way, or a green card for a good answer. They did not give the politicians an easy ride and felt very strongly about the need to do more on child poverty, the importance of education and the unfairness faced by children and young people seeking asylum.

These were just some of more than 20 events and activities that took place during the Month. There was a very positive level of interest from politicians. The Campaign was particularly pleased that several Cabinet Ministers took part in activities as it gave a strong indication of their ongoing commitment to ending child poverty.

CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green, who is a trustee of the Campaign said: 'Once again the Month of Action has been a great success, attracting a great deal of media interest and involving many senior politicians. A really exciting programme of activity is now taking shape for the Campaign in 2008. CPAG will be playing an active role with other Campaign members over the next 18 months, which are essential to meeting the target of halving child poverty by 2010.'

## Welfare rights advisers strengthen their voice

CPAG and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) held a special workshop on 28 November on *Expanding Influence and Impact* for welfare rights advisers.

The joint venture formed part of JRF's work on 'Changing Public Attitudes to Poverty' and CPAG's work on expanding the role of 'grassroots' welfare workers in influencing public attitudes and policy.

Media stories about welfare recipients are typically in a negative vein. This has an impact on public attitudes to poor families and on politicians responses through policy proposals on welfare reform and investment incomes for the poorest families.

At CPAG's annual conference in London this year, several welfare rights workers raised the importance of communicating real-life stories to make the case for public support for their clients. The workshop provided a chance to develop those ideas, share experiences advisers already have of advocacy and formulate plans for the way forward – with a particu-

lar focus on the use of stories and narratives of disadvantage and 'case studies' to illustrate the truth about UK poverty.

Sessions during the day considered public attitudes to poverty, the impact of the media and how to influence media coverage of poverty, influence in the local community and with local and national government.

CPAG's Press and Parliamentary Officer, Tim Nichols, said: 'It is important that families who find themselves dependent on their welfare rights have a strong voice. Advisers already provide important advice and advocacy support. We want to help them give their clients a stronger public voice to defend their rights.'

Future work discussed at the end of the day included the creation of a welfare rights voices case studies network.

A further workshop is being considered for next year. If you are interested in attending, please contact CPAG's Press and Parliamentary Officer, Tim Nichols, on 020 7812 5216 or [tnichols@cpag.org.uk](mailto:tnichols@cpag.org.uk).

# CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

## SNP conference fringe

**CHILD  
POVERTY  
ACTION  
GROUP**  
in SCOTLAND

It was standing room only at the Education and Child Poverty fringe meeting at the SNP's October conference. Over 60 delegates at the event, organised by members of End Child Poverty in Scotland and chaired by CPAG in Scotland's John Dickie, participated in a life size game of snakes and ladders with Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram MSP (pictured). The interactive session highlighted the many 'snakes', such as the nine month deficit in 'school readiness' by age three, facing children growing up in poverty and the 'ladders' that might help overcome those barriers, with a focus on the importance of improving family incomes if educational inequalities are to be narrowed.



### 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](http://www.cpag.org.uk).
- Set up a **standing order** through your bank to make a regular gift.
- Make a will and leave us a **legacy**.
- Set up **Give As You Earn** (payroll giving) with your employer.

#### Add Value. Gift Aid It!

Donations to CPAG qualify for tax relief. For every £1 that you donate we can claim an extra 28p. Anyone who pays income tax (on a salary, a pension or investments) or capital gains tax can complete a Gift Aid declaration form.

For more information visit our website [www.cpag.org.uk](http://www.cpag.org.uk), email [staff@cpag.org.uk](mailto:staff@cpag.org.uk) or write to CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

## Scottish Budget

Responding to the Scottish Budget Spending Review, CPAG in Scotland welcomed commitments to reduce income inequality, reduce poverty, and extend free school meal entitlement on a universal basis to all primary years 1 to 3 children and to all pupils in families in receipt of maximum working tax credit.

However, CPAG has called for additional detail from the Scottish Government on how these commitments will be implemented and resourced.

In written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee scrutiny of the Budget, John Dickie, head of CPAG in Scotland has said: 'Given the significant additional discretion on spending proposed for local authorities it is vital that the proposed Single Outcome Agreements between local councils and the Scottish Government clearly define anti-poverty expectations and include mechanisms for measuring the impact of spending on reducing child poverty.'

## Welfare Reform Campaign

CPAG in Scotland is helping reignite the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform in response to the UK Government's latest welfare reform proposals. Over 20 national organisations have joined forces to raise concern around proposals to ratchet up conditions attached to benefits for lone parents and jobseeker's allowance claimants, pointing to real gaps in the availability of childcare and good quality jobs.

The Campaign is calling for the UK Government to reconsider proposed increases in the level of conditions attached to benefits; clarify proposals regarding how it will ensure devolved childcare and skills support policies are in place before the removal of current benefit rights; allow for implementation to be delayed in Scotland until the right support policies are in place; pilot proposals in Scotland before they are rolled out; extend the lone parents 'better off pledge' to all claimants and define the commitment to ensure lone parents are better off in paid work on the basis of lifting families out of poverty, rather than simply being better off than on income support.

Commenting on the demands John Dickie said: 'These welfare reform proposals fail to address the woeful inadequacy of current benefit rates, rates that leave tens of thousands of people in Scotland below the poverty line. Yes, we need to see people given more support and opportunities to work. But that needs to be done by removing the barriers they face and offering decent jobs, not by threatening to cut already meagre benefits and plunging people into even deeper poverty.'

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