

Coalition to keep 2020 child poverty promise

The new coalition government has included a commitment to ending child poverty in the formal coalition agreement. The agreement, which is a programme for action by the new government, states: 'We will maintain the goal of ending child poverty in the UK by 2020.'

Both Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties voted in parliament to support the Child Poverty Act earlier this year, which included statutory targets for ending child poverty by 2020. The Coalition agreement has reassured campaigners that there will be no backtracking. It is a victory for Child Poverty Action Group and our partners in the End Child Poverty campaign as one of our key campaigning objectives has been to ensure that action on child poverty would continue across a change of government.

However, the Coalition Government has yet to unveil its strategy for ending child poverty. The Child Poverty Unit will play a central role in drafting the strategy, but some elements of it are expected to differ from the approach taken by the previous government.

The Child Poverty Act also requires the establishment of an independent Child Poverty Commission to scrutinise the Government's strategy to end child poverty and the success of its implementation. Campaigners believe this will help prevent government action steering away from evidence-based policy to ideological territory.



The New Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have agreed to keep the promise to end child poverty.

Imran Hussain, CPAG's Head of Policy, Rights and Advocacy, said:

'The goodwill and ambition of the Coalition Government on ending child poverty is clear. But progress also needs dogged commitment year on year. Political courage is needed to challenge unfairness and undeserved inequality at the top as well as the bottom. Without this courage and leadership the inequality gap won't close and the resources will not be found to ensure every family has an adequate income and access to essential services they need.'

Campaigners are now developing new objectives for a changed situation. With the interim target to halve child poverty still not met, a new government in place, the worst economic crisis in 60 years

and implementation of the Child Poverty Act about to begin, there is a mix of new challenges, dangers and opportunities.

Imran Hussain said: 'The next ten years will be more challenging than the last ten years if we are to keep the promise of ending child poverty by 2020. But public and political commitment has never been stronger. Our new objectives need to mobilise public support and bring forward the direct voices of families facing economic disadvantage so they are heard in the corridors of power and across the media. The Government must know that not only will the public support them in taking the tough choices needed to guarantee a fair society, but that we will not forgive them if they don't.'

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In The House

The House returned with 226 new members out of 650 and CPAG is working hard to re-establish links with returned MPs and get to know new MPs.

It is a returned MP, the Liberal Democrat 'Voice of Colchester', **Bob Russell** who is the first **MP of the year** nomination in the new par-



Bob Russell MP

liament. Bob has secured an Adjournment Debate on child poverty and tabled two Early Day Motions noting recent research studies on poverty and inequality calling on the government to pursue policies to eradicate poverty and promote equality.

Parliament has barely had time to sit before the newsletter went to press, but already the new Government has also taken an early interest in discussing poverty in parliament. It gave time to a debate in the main chamber on **UK poverty**.

A new **Welfare Reform Bill** will be keeping anti-poverty campaigners busy this session. It is not yet certain if there will be a green paper or a white paper and how quickly the Bill will be drafted. CPAG is calling on the Government not to rush drafting a new Bill and to fully consult.

Iain Duncan Smith promises new Welfare Reform Bill

The new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, has made a speech indicating the agenda of his new department. He said: 'I want this Department to be at the forefront of strategy to improve the quality of life for the worst off.'

One of the main initiatives is to be a Welfare Reform Bill that will replace all the existing Back to Work programmes in the benefit system with a single Work Programme. The first existing scheme to be singled out for scrapping is Pathways to Work, following the publication of a National Audit Office report that was unable to find any benefit for the money spent on it.

Although Lord Freud is now the Minister for Welfare Reform, it remains unclear to what extent the reforms will continue along the same path of those he formulated as an adviser for the previous government, prior to being made a Conservative Peer.

There are signs that Downing Street and the Cabinet Office may push for an approach in line with the Big Society agenda. This would be opposed to the kind of top-down large-scale bureaucracy that was in Freud's plans. An approach in keeping with the Big Society would give claimants greater autonomy over how the resources are used to support their ambitions to gain employment. It may more closely resemble personalised learning accounts or personal budgets for disabled people in having a bottom-up structure.

The extent to which conditionality may be increased or scaled back under the forthcoming Bill remains unknown. The Secretary of State gave a clear commitment to the principle of conditionality in the benefits system. However, evaluations have failed to show sanctions are effective for work outcomes and reducing poverty; their use also runs counter to evidence from behavioural science and economics on motivation.



'I want to improve quality of life for the worst off'

A commitment was given by the Secretary of State not to continue spending money on programmes that fail. This may provide campaigners with the opportunity to call for alternative approaches with a better evidence base to be piloted, such as 'positive welfare' approaches that work with claimants' ambitions to nurture motivation instead of embedding all activity in a 'carrot and stick' bureaucracy where claimants must follow orders.

Child Poverty Action Group has made a priority of engaging with the new government on welfare reform. We will encourage proposals for 'dynamic benefit' changes that help work pay by changing withdrawal rates. We will also call for a move away from the failed sanctions bureaucracy and a focus on minimum income standards.

End Child Poverty sets sights on 2020

Child Poverty Action Group has taken over hosting the Campaign to End Child Poverty.

The Campaign, which was first launched nearly a decade ago, did not previously have a guaranteed life past the 2010 interim target for halving child poverty. However, despite some great successes, the large number of children still below the poverty line provides an imperative for it to continue with a focus on the 2020 target to end child poverty.

Campaign successes have shown that together

to end child poverty. The Campaign was also instrumental in getting the Child Poverty Bill into the last government's legislative programme, then strengthening it through coordinated lobbying on amendments.

The new structure of the Campaign means CPAG taking a coordinating lead. However, the essential capacity to deliver high quality policy and lobbying, and high profile public campaigning, will continue to be provided by all the campaign member organisations.

CPAG's Head of Policy, Rights and Advocacy, Imran Hussain, said: 'The Campaign now has over 160 members. Our objectives will focus on



the member organisations can make a stronger impact on public understanding of UK child poverty, political support and government action. An evaluation of the Campaign suggested it played an instrumental role in achieving greater targeting of investment to low income families in recent Budgets and securing cross party commitments

growing from a campaign into a major civic movement with a vision for a fair and just Britain for all our children. Public demand for a fair society will strengthen our political lobbying so that we can ensure our politicians take the actions necessary to keep their promise to end UK child poverty.'

Hardwire fairness into deficit decisions

Child Poverty Action Group has joined with other leading children's charities and organisations including the Equality Trust and the TUC to ask government to apply a 'Fairness Test' to decisions on the deficit.

The test would be an inequality impact assessment for any tax rises or spending cuts. It would look at whether any measures are likely to worsen inequality of incomes, assets or access to services. The End Child Poverty campaign is also backing the Fairness Test proposal in its lobbying of the Treasury.

One of the signatories to the letter is Professor Ruth Lister, who is a member of the National Equality Panel. A major report from the panel earlier this year warned: 'In the wake of the financial crisis and the recession, Government faces the challenge of rebalancing the public finances. How this is done will probably be the most important influence on how the inequalities both within and between groups evolve.'

During the election campaign, the leaders of all three parties were written to asking them to

back the Fairness Test proposal. Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, said he would. The Conservative leader, David Cameron, would not confirm backing for the test, but he did say, 'We will ensure that fairness is at the heart of our approach to tackling the deficit.'

The organisations have written to the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister again since the coalition government was formed, asking them to now make a joint statement in regard to the Fairness Test and encouraging them to retain the commitment previously made by Deputy Prime Minister.

Government ministers must meet the new duty in the Equality Act to have regard to the inequality outcomes resulting from socioeconomic disadvantage when making strategic decisions. The letter argued that it is not possible for Ministers to meet this duty without high quality information to inform the decisions. The inequality impact assessments that would be at the heart of the Fairness Test will provide this information and help ministers meet their legal obligations.

Help us make a difference

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of child poverty in the UK and for a better deal for low-income families and 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; *and*
- enable those eligible for income maintenance to have access to their full entitlement.

Your donation will help us to fight the injustice of poverty.

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Concern as child poverty increases in Scotland

CPAG in Scotland responded with deep concern to the latest official child poverty statistics. Published in May, the figures from the Scottish Government and UK Department of Work and Pensions showed a slight increase in the number of children living in poverty in Scotland in 2008/09. While across the UK the number of children living in poverty fell, the figures showed that in Scotland 210,000 children were still living in poverty using the government's headline child poverty measure, which is 10,000 more than in the previous year. On the 'after housing cost' measure, 20,000 more children were living in poverty compared to 2007/08, leaving a staggering quarter of Scotland's children living in poverty.

Commenting on the figures John

Dickie, Head of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, said:

'The rise in child poverty in Scotland for the first time in ten years is a matter of serious concern. These figures represent real children whose lives are being cut short, damaged and diminished because their families are being denied the resources they need to give them a decent start in life. If the new UK Government is serious about its commitment to eradicating child poverty we need to see further increases to child benefit and tax credits, not cuts.

'We know this policy works. When government invests properly in families child poverty goes down and children's wellbeing improves. Child poverty across the UK has come down slightly. Without the previous government's investment

in child benefit and tax credits these figures would have been even worse as rising unemployment hit families across Scotland. The UK and Scottish governments must build on that investment or child poverty will rise even further, and even more of our children will suffer the devastating consequences.'

Along with other members of the End Child Poverty coalition in Scotland, CPAG has signed a joint letter to the First Minister, the new Secretary of State for Scotland and the President of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) calling for an urgent and coordinated review across all layers of government of the current approach to tackling child poverty in Scotland. The Child Poverty Act requires a Scottish strategy to be published in early 2011.

Cost behind drop in school meal take up

Responding to recent concerns expressed by school caterers in Scotland that pupils are rejecting healthier school meals due to 'draconian' nutritional regulations, CPAG in Scotland has pointed to cost, and the current means testing of free school meals, as a key barrier to take up of healthy school meals. According to the official research, price is a key factor in choosing not to eat a school lunch for up to a third of Scotland's pupils.

John Dickie, head of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland and a leading member of the Scottish Free School Meals Campaign, said: 'When the Scottish Government piloted universal free healthy school lunches take up jumped from 53

per cent to 75 per cent. Even amongst children already entitled to free school meals take-up rose. It is clear that if local authorities and ministers are serious

about boosting the take up of healthy school lunches then providing them free to all pupils is by far the most effective action they can take.'

