

# Prime Minister Brown's legacy must be an end to child poverty

*As the new Prime Minister and Labour Deputy Leader take up their positions, child poverty campaigners call for ending child poverty to be domestic priority*

**C**hild Poverty Action Group's Chief Executive, Kate Green, has written to Gordon Brown to congratulate him on securing the nomination for the leadership of the Labour party, which should see him become Prime Minister on 27 June.

In his time as Chancellor, Gordon Brown has shown strong personal commitment to ending child poverty. Although there are 600,000 fewer children growing up poor than in 1999, 2.8 million children remain in poverty before housing costs and 3.8 million after housing costs. Kate Green has warned the incoming Prime Minister: 'there remains much to be done if child poverty is to be ended.'

CPAG has called for the new Prime Minister to initiate renewed action to meet the Government's targets in areas like addressing inequality, increasing annual investment by £3.8 billion to meet 2010 target, increasing child benefit for younger children, targeting schools funding increases to the children's individual education support needs and deprived communities, ending poverty-pay and investing in skills and childcare.

Kate Green's letter to Gordon Brown stated: 'Of these, the most fundamental is tackling inequality. While tax credits are playing a vital role – and a role that must continue – in targeting support to the poorest families, they are compensating for underlying structural inequality that means the rewards of Britain's

CPAG and End Child Poverty held a special hustings for Labour Deputy Leadership candidates Parliament on 13 June. Labour members and child poverty campaigners questioned the candidates present and representatives of those unable to attend on the strategy and policies needed to meet the Government's child poverty targets.



*L-R: Malcolm Wicks MP, Dan Norris MP, Caroline Flint MP, Kate Green, Hilary Benn MP, Karen Buck MP, John Cruddas MP*

strong economy are shared in a highly unfair and unequal way. This includes a large poverty-pay sector of the work force, who despite their contribution to the UK's success and prosperity, currently have little prospect of working themselves out of poverty.'

As a member of the Campaign to End Child Poverty, CPAG has also asked the incoming Prime Minister, to make a clear recommitment during his first 100 days in office to the targets to halve child pov-

erty by 2010 and end child poverty by 2020. CPAG and other partners in the Campaign to End Child Poverty are committed to winning strong public backing politicians of all parties to make ending child poverty a domestic priority.

*On page 2 of this month's Campaigns Newsletter CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green, explains how and why an end to child poverty must be Prime Minister Brown's legacy.*



## In the House

Liberal Democrat **John Barrett MP** secured a **debate on tax credits** on 16 May in which Lib Dem front bencher, **Danny Alexander MP** backed CPAG's calls for a pause before recovery of overpayments. On 17 May a debate on the **Work and Pensions Select Committee report on the Government's employment strategy** saw a strong contribution from **Natascha Engel MP** on how the employment strategy could be improved to help reduce child poverty. Another strong contribution was provided by Conservative spokesperson, **Andrew Selous MP**, who supported CPAG's concerns about Government plans to restrict rights of lone parents with a youngest child between 12 and 16 to decide if their child's particular welfare needs should be put before their parents' employment.

CPAG has been busy presenting evidence to parliamentarians. We gave a presentation to the **All Party Group on Disability** in late April. The Group and CPAG are now following up on several initiatives that resulted from a very productive meeting. One particular focus of activity is take-up of disability living allowance (DLA). **Lord Ashley of Stoke** used a starred question to initiate **debate on DLA take-up** in the Lords. CPAG's Head of Policy, Paul Dornan, has given oral evidence before the **Work and Pensions Select Committee** for its benefit simplification inquiry.

The **Treasury Committee** has published its **Budget 2007 report**, which includes an analysis of the Budget's role in **progress towards child poverty targets**. It recommends that in reporting on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Treasury must 'state how it intends to meet the 2010-11 target to halve the number of children in poverty and where the resources will come from to meet that target.'

The **Work and Pensions Committee** has published a report on the social fund, for which CPAG gave evidence. **Terry Rooney MP**, the Committee's Chair, said: 'The social fund was set up to help the poorest and most vulnerable people in society and it is some of these very people that it is currently letting down. The Government must now set out its plans for the future of the fund, with a transparent, formal process of consultation as part of the wider financial inclusion agenda.'

## New PM's child poverty challenge

CPAG congratulates Gordon Brown on becoming Prime Minister. For anti-poverty campaigners, this is a time for hope. Brown's passionate commitment to tackling child poverty is well known, and with time running short to meet the target of halving child poverty by 2010, Brown will want to prioritise measures that will ensure that a target with which he has personally been so closely associated can be achieved.



by *Kate Green, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group*

CPAG is in no doubt that the target to halve child poverty can be met. But with progress having slowed – even begun to go backwards – in recent years, the effort and investment needed remain substantial. Chancellor Brown pursued a twin track policy of supporting parental employment and direct financial support for families with children through tax credits. Both have helped to lift 600,000 children out of poverty since 1999. But on their own they are not sufficient – Prime Minister Brown must do more.

Complexity in the tax credits scheme and the hardship caused by the recovery of overpayments has led to lower than expected take-up, with not all families benefiting as they should. And despite historically high rates of employment, too many parents are still forced into poverty-pay jobs with unsocial working hours that damage family life. More investment in universal child benefit, and in tackling inequality and Britain's low pay economy must be priorities for the new PM.

But Brown must also look to the long-term. He may not be Prime Minister by the time the 2020 target date for ending child poverty is reached, but he knows that it's the policies and investment that are put in place now that are vital if that target is to be met. His is the premiership in which the irrevocable steps can and must be taken to ensure that child poverty is ended. History will surely judge him on achieving that.

## Funding for disabled children

The Government has published *Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families*, which marks the culmination of the Treasury's Disabled Child Review. It outlines the Government's commitment to invest £340 million from 2008-11 improving outcomes for disabled children. It includes:

- £280 million for short breaks for disabled children;
- £5 million to fund parents of disabled children having a voice in local empowerment;
- £19 million for a Transition Support Programme into adult life;
- a national disabled child indicator as part of the new set of priority public service agreements;
- funding via the NHS settlement for children with complex healthcare needs; and

- a childcare accessibility project underpinned by £35m through the general Sure Start grant.

The report indicates that some families miss out on support because of backdating rules relating to the disability elements of child tax credit, but it does not directly engage with low take-up of disability benefits. CPAG's report *Out of Reach: benefits for disabled children*, highlighted the difficulties families experience accessing disability benefits for their children. Gabrielle Preston, the author of *Out of Reach* said: 'While the report's call for streamlining the notification procedure between the DWP and the Revenue is welcome, the Government must prioritise take-up of disability benefits – particularly disability living allowance, which reduces poverty and improves outcomes for disabled children and their families.'

# End Child Poverty announce 2007 Month of Action

The Campaign to End Child Poverty will be holding a 'Month of Action' for the second year running. Last year the month gained a great deal of press attention and the involvement of over 80 MPs. This year the Campaign and its member organisation have plans to surpass last year's activities. The month will begin on October 17, which is International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and will end on 20 November, which is Universal Children's Day. If you would like to be involved in any local or parliamentary activities during the month of action, please contact Laura Payne: [laura@ecpc.org.uk](mailto:laura@ecpc.org.uk).

## Barnardo's publish child poverty report

In March, child poverty rose for the first time in six years. Given the commitment to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate child poverty by 2020 the Government must look for new ideas for how to start making progress again.

It is against this background that Barnardo's launched its report, *It doesn't happen here: the reality of child poverty in the UK*. Barnardo's has brought together analysis of what is needed to meet the targets on child poverty with a number of powerful first hand stories of the impact of poverty on children and their families. The report looks at the situation of groups of children facing particularly high risks of being poor, linking these in with stories from some of the families accessing Barnardo's services.

The report strongly backs the Government's pledge to end child poverty, with the foreword by Martin Narey, Barnardo's Chief Executive, describing it as 'the boldest, most exciting and potentially most far-reaching social goal'. The report contains six central recommendations:

- invest what is needed to meet the halving target (estimated to be £3.8 billion if this is done through the tax credit system);
- establish a UK commission on child poverty chaired by the Prime Minister or Chancellor to provide a road map to 2020;
- aim to use all government funding in ways that benefit the poorest children the most;
- improve access to childcare;
- tackle hardship in school holidays by compensating families for the loss of free school meals and by improving access to holiday activities and childcare through this period;
- tackling fuel poverty by reducing the costs the poorest families pay for fuel.

The report is an important contribution to the debate on how to make further progress on child poverty. It demonstrates the importance of the task and it shows current policy will not succeed without new investment. As power changes hands within the Government, new ministers will need to read the report carefully.

## Cameron holds strong on rejection of new grammar schools

**Fierce internal debate has followed Shadow Education Secretary, David Willetts, speech to the CBI on the Conservatives rejection of new grammar schools.**

Mr Willetts provided a powerful marshalling of the evidence that, regardless of any benefits in the historical setting in which they were conceived, grammar schools now entrench disadvantage. The party's policy is now focussed on increasing the supply of city academies, which Mr Willetts claims have a better record on social mobility and are popular with parents.

The rejection of new grammar schools was welcomed by CPAG. Head of Policy, Paul Dornan, said: 'Maintaining a commitment to a discredited schooling system that marks children as failures at 11 years old would be absurd and completely at odds with the Conservatives' aspiration to end poverty for all children by 2020, as grammar schools only help the few.'

However, a major blind spot in the party's policy remains. The impact of a child's home environment on their ability to take full advantage of the educational opportunities provided by whatever school they attend has not yet been considered. Evidence shows it is much harder for a child to progress without middle class advantages like a decent nursery place and a good home learning environment with their own room, books and a computer. Other disadvantages include not being able to afford school outings or after school activities, or having to care for a disabled parent and younger siblings. It is therefore vital for progress in education that all parties commit to the £3.8 billion extra annual investment that the Institute for Fiscal Studies says is needed to halve child poverty by 2010.

### CPAG conference 2007 – Welfare reform: whatever next?

Thursday 6 September 2007, 10am – 4.30pm

The London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, Holloway Road, London

Workshop sessions: Employment and support allowance; The revised test for incapacity for work; Local housing allowance; Welfare reform and lone parents; Welfare reform – an overview.

For further information see [www.cpag.org.uk](http://www.cpag.org.uk) or contact Judy Allen, CPAG, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF; fax on 020 7837 6414; email [jallen@cpag.org.uk](mailto:jallen@cpag.org.uk).

### 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.

A new Parliament and a minority SNP Government means challenges and opportunities for CPAG in Scotland. With both main parties, SNP and Labour, going into the election with commitments to extend free school meals, CPAG's long running free school meals campaign looks like bearing fruit (see below). The new Government has already announced a pilot universal approach to free school meals for primary 1 to 3 pupils in deprived areas.

With no majority party or coalition in the new Parliament, CPAG in Scotland joined the Poverty Alliance in calling on all political parties to make poverty their top priority so the 'new politics' in Scotland has a real impact on all Scottish citizens' well being. Manifesto commitments from the SNP to ensure increases in the proportion of national wealth held by those on lower incomes, and from Labour to target support to end poverty, challenge politicians to work together and step up a gear in the fight against child poverty.

John Dickie, Head of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland said: 'Commitment to ending child poverty must be top of the new Parliament's agenda and must be reflected in the programme of the new Scottish Government. Recent years have shown that progress can be made, but has stalled. More needs to be done to achieve real change. We look forward to seeing the new Ministerial team and all parties working together to end child poverty in Scotland.'



Alex Salmond, SNP leader

## 'Important step forward' for school meals campaign

A clear majority of MSPs in the new Scottish Parliament was elected on commitments to substantially extend free school meals. The new Scottish Government has already announced the piloting of free school meals for all primary 1 to 3 children in the most deprived areas.

CPAG in Scotland's Head, John Dickie, said: 'This is an important step forward for the campaign to ensure every child, whatever their background, gets at least one healthy meal a day. Current means-testing of free school meals leaves tens of thousands of our poorest children missing out on healthy school meals. Universal free school meals could make a huge impact in tackling family poverty and improving children's health and ability to learn.'

We already know from experience in Hull, and further afield in Finland, that universal provision has a dramatic effect on take-up and on pupils' concentration and behaviour, so the sooner the new Scottish Government rolls out free school meals to all children the better. It is also vital that Ministers ensure that targeting the initial pilots so narrowly does not undermine the potential value of a universal approach.'