

Child poverty bill plans published

THE Department for Children, Schools and Families has launched a consultation on the forthcoming Child Poverty Bill. The legislation will enshrine in law the target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

The plans for the Bill were welcomed by CPAG's Chief Executive, Kate Green, who said: 'Why should so many more British children have to live in poverty than in other wealthy countries? The original ambition by the Government to end child poverty can now be enshrined in law and shared as a national mission by all politicians and the public.'

Ahead of the consultation, members of the Campaign to End Child Poverty, including CPAG, published a set of principles that the Bill must meet.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, said: 'We all must redouble our efforts to make sure tackling child poverty is a priority for all of us and a shared mission for our society.' Yvette Copper, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said: 'The credit crunch makes it even more important to commit to ending child poverty in a generation', and she described the Treasury as 'determined to help families through the tougher times now and to build a better future for children too.' This will give encouragement to those hoping that the Chancellor will follow the example set by President Obama and focus a new round of fiscal stimulus on low-income households.

The proposals in the consultation go a significant way towards meeting a set of principles released in a statement by the Campaign to End Child Poverty that the Campaign's members believe are needed for the legislation. In particular the principles called for the headline measure of relative poverty to be kept, along with measures of material deprivation and persistent low income. It is hoped the consultation process will allow a proposed Commission on Child Poverty to take the shape of a strong independent scrutiny body that will sit until at least 2020. Campaigners have also called for the consultation's suggestion of 'milestones' towards 2020 to take the form of firm interim targets to keep progress on track.

The Director of the Campaign, Hilary Fisher, said that the forthcoming Bill further highlighted the importance of meeting the 2010 target to halve child poverty. She said: 'Without the Government keeping its promise for 2010, the legislation and future strategy for ending child poverty in 2020 will have no firm foundation. This year's Budget will be pivotal for the future life chances of millions of children.'

Kate Green added: 'In October 10,000 people marched through London demanding the 2010 promise be kept, so expectations are running high. President Obama has already put poor families ahead of corporate bailouts in his fiscal

Kerry McCarthy is CPAG's first MP of the Year!



Kerry McCarthy has been awarded the accolade of being CPAG's first ever MP of the Year, judged by a panel of CPAG staff and trustees. The panel recognised her tremendous efforts to get 70 of her Labour colleagues to join her in writing the Chancellor and the *Observer* newspaper ahead of the Budget in 2008 to call for investment in poor families.

As well as Kerry's success in helping secure a £1 billion investment for low income families in the 2008 Budget she has stood out as

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stimulus package, so we need to see the same priorities in the UK. Not only do the economists say it is the best way to tackle the recession, but it keeps the promise our politicians have made to our poorest children.'

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Typeset by
Boldface
020 7833 8868

Printed by
Wernham Printers Ltd
020 8805 8026

Next edition
May 2009



In The House

The first 2009 CPAG MP of the year nominee is **John McFall, Chair of the Treasury Committee**. Under his stewardship, each report the committee has published on a Budget or PBR has commented on the extent to which measures support progress towards the 2010 target to halve child poverty. January's report on the PBR did not allow the financial crisis to sideline child poverty. It criticised the Government for having no new measures in support of the 2010 target. John said: 'We are disappointed at the lack of progress on the child poverty front in this year's PBR. The Government must take decisive action in the 2009 Budget if we are to have any hope of achieving the 2010 child poverty target.'

The Second Reading of the **Welfare Reform Bill** was followed by a very swift move into committee. Government whips have only given time for six sittings of the committee – half the number of the last welfare reform bill, despite the current Bill being longer!

Work and Pensions Committee Chair, **Terry Rooney**, asked the Secretary of State if he would support a claimant's charter,

so that 'rights and responsibilities are clearly delineated' and the rights of the claimant to support are not diminished.

Liberal Democrat Work and Pensions spokesperson, **Steve Webb**, warned against 'ratcheting up the coercion on sets of people who are legitimately on benefit' during a recession. He believes sanctions can mean: 'Not only will the benefit claimant suffer, but so will the children.'

There was great concern in the House that the Bill enables the Government to make major changes through secondary legislation without anyone being sure of the detail of what is planned. Several members called for draft regulations to be made available ahead of committee scrutiny of the Bill. But they were dismissed by the Minister, **Tony McNulty**, who promised nothing more than a 'grid' and an expression of the 'direction of travel'.

Meanwhile, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill has begun in the House of Lords and will go to the Commons later in the year. CPAG is concerned that some proposals could deny many children access to state funds because of the immigration status of their parents. We are lobbying peers to amend the Bill so that all children receive equal protection from poverty, regardless of the nationality and status of their parents.

4in10: London project promotes best practice

4in10 has held its first workshop, focussed on supporting London parents into work. '4in10' refers to the number of children in the capital living in poverty and it is the London Project of End Child Poverty.

As well as raising awareness and strengthening campaigning on the issue, the project is identifying successful child poverty related projects and schemes coordinated by local and voluntary community organisations and helping to spread good practice. One of the major findings of the London Child Poverty Commission's final report was that excellent initiatives were happening across London, but in isolated pockets without a mechanism for sharing good practice.

The 4in10 workshops will bring together voluntary and community organisations from across London to fill this gap. Other workshops will focus on child development, education

and wellbeing; housing; and support for black and minority ethnic groups.

CPAG supported the event's workshops on benefit take-up. Kate Green said: 'Supporting parents in accessing benefits and returning to work is a crucial area. The workshops allowed for an excellent exchange of ideas about how a return to work can be managed in ways that protect and benefit both children and parents. Some great ideas have been shared too about maximising benefit take-up by disadvantaged families. More of London's communities can now start putting these successful methods into practice so more families benefit.'

If you are interested in supporting the 4 in 10 project, or learning about future events, contact the Campaign's London Development Manager, Liz Thorne at liz@ecpc.org.uk or 020 7278 3404.

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one of the strongest campaigners from the parliamentary benches on child poverty throughout 2008. She told CPAG why she believes the child poverty targets, and action to ensure they are met, are so important:

'I joined the Labour Party because of its commitment to tackling poverty and social injustice. I represent an urban seat, including an inner-city ward with the highest child poverty rates in the South West. I simply don't think that I can, as the MP, stand by and watch the current generation of children condemned to a future of living in poverty, and their children and their grandchildren too.'

Kerry added her encouragement to government and campaigners to keep up the commitment to end child poverty: 'We know that we can abolish child poverty – we just need the political will to do so. This Government has dem-

onstrated its commitment, with its historic pledge to abolish child poverty within a generation – we need a concerted effort from MPs, campaign groups and others who care about this issue to make sure that this pledge is fulfilled.'

Kerry was congratulated by CPAG's Chief Executive Kate Green: 'Kerry has a tremendous grasp of the issues behind child poverty and the complex needs of families facing economic disadvantage. We need more MPs like Kerry who will be tireless campaigners inside Westminster for poor children and who can dissect policy from across government to ensure it is poverty-proofed to protect our poorest children.'

Kate also gave an honourable mention to Dai Davies, one of the other nominated MPs: 'No other MP did as much to support the Keep the Promise rally and he has started 2009 with the same commitment to action on child poverty. He is a great supporter of CPAG and we look forward to working with him this year.'

'Free' education costs £1,200 a year

A new report from the Department for Children, Schools and Families has found that parents spend on average £683.79 for a primary school child and £1,195.47 for a secondary child on extra school costs.

The report looked at costs including uniforms, PE kit, lesson materials, school trips, school dinners and transport. It found that more than a third of parents find it difficult to meet these costs, with low income families unsurprisingly having the most trouble.

CPAG's Kate Green said: 'School costs take far too big a bite out of family incomes. This excludes the poorest children from many activities and leaves families struggling to pay for school uniforms, school trips, and school meals.'

'The cost is already 5 per cent of income for average families, but for the poorest families it can be a massive 20 per cent of income. This is education poverty.'

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, said he was very concern-



ed that some schools were not following the rules on charging and school uniform: 'The rules on charging are crystal clear and no child should be disadvantaged or penalised because they cannot afford out of class activities. It is completely unacceptable for schools to levy compulsory charges for activities which are part of the school curriculum.'

CPAG's 2 skint 4 school campaign is calling for all schools to follow best practice on school costs and for the Government to give greater recognition to the disadvantage caused to poor children if family incomes are not sufficient to meet extra school costs. You can find out more at: www.cpag.org.uk/2skint4school

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.

Please make a donation

- Send us a **cheque**, **postal order** or **Charities Aid Foundation** voucher made payable to 'Child Poverty Action Group'.
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For more information visit www.cpag.org.uk/support email staff@cpag.org.uk or write to:
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94 White Lion Street
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Heath turns up heat on fuel poverty

A Bill to take action on fuel poverty has been picked up by David Heath MP, the Liberal Democrat member for Somerton and Frome.

David's second place in the private members ballot means the Bill should be given enough parliamentary time for a full passage through Parliament. The same coalition of organisations that CPAG worked with on the Fuel Poverty Charter drafted the Bill and is now preparing it for a Second Reading.

The Bill would require the Government to undertake an extensive programme of work to

bring all housing up to high fuel efficiency standards, starting with homes occupied by vulnerable households. As construction work on new housing has stalled, the Bill could also result in important investment that keeps skilled construction workers in employment during the economic downturn. It will also help economic efficiency by lowering fuel consumption with millions more fuel poverty proofed homes.

Speaking at a seminar on fuel poverty, Chief Executive, Kate Green, gave the Bill CPAG's firm support, saying: 'The infrastructure investments

that make most sense in a recession are those that keep jobs, support the poorest and make the UK more efficient for the future. The Fuel Poverty Bill scores a perfect three and the Government should see it as a valuable opportunity to fill a notable gap in its legislative programme.'

Strong support from backbench MPs will be crucial to the Bill's success. Please contact your MP and ask if s/he will give her/his backing to the Bill and be in Parliament to support it when it is read.



Kate Green and Alan Simpson MP, Chair of the Warm Homes Group

End child poverty call to Scottish Secretary

CPAG in Scotland joined representatives of Barnardo's Scotland and Save the Children in Scotland to take the case for urgent investment to tackle child poverty to the Secretary of State for Scotland Jim Murphy in January.

As members of the campaign to End Child Poverty in Scotland we urged Mr Murphy to use his position to make the case for the investment needed in this year's Budget. We stressed that the 2010 target to halve child poverty in Scotland and across the UK is still achievable, but the Government will need to invest a further £3 billion in 2009. This would not only markedly improve the lives of millions of children but is the most effective form of fiscal stimulus needed to boost the economy. The delegation discussed how families in poverty immediately spend any additional income, putting money straight to work in the economy.

CPAG also raised concerns with the Minister about the new Welfare Reform Bill, stressing the need for a well resourced system that treats people with dignity, lifts them out of poverty, and fits with devolved delivery of childcare and



Scottish Secretary, Jim Murphy MP

skills investment. Inadequate benefit levels and risks to some of Scotland's most vulnerable families from new benefit conditions were discussed in the context of a lack of the necessary childcare, skills support and high quality of job opportunities needed in place in Scotland.

The Secretary for State restated his long standing commitment to ending child poverty, but stressed the difficult spending decisions Ministers had to make and the need for more pressure from voters to ensure ending child poverty is pushed higher up the agenda.

CPAG supporters in Scotland can add to this pressure by contacting the Secretary of State at scottish.secretary@scotland.gsi.gov.uk calling for the urgent investment in child benefits and tax credits needed to halve child poverty by 2010.

UK and Scottish Government must work together on child poverty

CPAG in Scotland has welcomed the UK Government's consultation ahead of publishing a Child Poverty Bill, but stressed the need for ministers in Westminster and Holyrood to work together. Legislation must drive anti-poverty action by government in Scotland as well as across the rest of the UK.

John Dickie, the Head of CPAG in Scotland said: 'With a scandalous one in four of Scotland's children still living in poverty, a Bill to enshrine in law the

target to eradicate child poverty across the UK is extremely welcome.'

'Action to drive change on the ground is needed if we are to end child poverty across Scotland once and for all, but this will only happen if the UK and Scottish governments properly coordinate their action. The need for Scottish legislation to underpin the vital contribution needed from devolved and local government should now also be considered.'

'So far, the lack of high quality child-

care and punitive welfare reforms for parents have undermined progress on child poverty. This keeps parents out of decent work and leaves those without work stigmatized and further cut adrift from the mainstream of society. Ministers in Westminster and Holyrood must work together to ensure that much better childcare and a strong welfare safety-net are in place, with the emphasis on high quality employment support, not harsh sanctions.'