

Ending child poverty: a manifesto for success

On the 10th anniversary of the Government's pledge to eradicate child poverty, CPAG published *Ending child poverty: a manifesto for success*.

CPAG's Chief Executive Kate Green introduced the manifesto at a launch reception in Westminster supported by the National Union of Teachers. In a keynote speech the Children, Schools and Families Secretary, Ed Balls, spoke of the tremendous impression child poverty campaigners have made on him. He recalled the young people he met who were part of the crowd of 10,000 people in Trafalgar Square for the Keep the Promise rally. The audience welcomed his expression of the Government's continued commitment to the child poverty targets.

Messages of support were also sent to CPAG by the leaders of the three main parties and read out by Kitty Wordsworth, Nassim Ikhlef and Alexander Fish from Holland Park School. All three leaders expressed their support for the eradication of child poverty by 2020. In his recommitment to eradicating child poverty, the Prime Minister's message said: 'Every single child is precious, unique and born endowed with a contribution only they can make. That is why it is such a grave injustice for any child's life to be derailed by poverty before their journey has even begun.'

Kate Green said: 'We can end child poverty in the UK. Other wealthy coun-



Kate Green, Secretary of State Ed Balls MP and Kerry McCarthy MP at the launch.

tries do much better and there is no reason why Britain alone should continue to fail so many of our children. Our manifesto shows how we can succeed. We will now campaign towards the next election for all the parties to take on board the steps we have outlined that will end Britain's child poverty shame.'

The manifesto focuses on the 10 key areas for action to ensure child poverty is eradicated by 2020. Immediate action is needed to help employers protect jobs. The income safety net must be mended, with greater use of universal benefits in tandem with progressive taxation, rather than over-reliance on means testing and accumulation of excessive wealth at the top.

Investment is needed in affordable childcare, decent homes and public services that successfully reach those who need them most. Policy should move from simply putting employment first, to considering children's needs above all. Barriers to work and in-work poverty must be addressed too, with an excessively complex and punitive system transformed into a system of positive entitlement to the support individual parents need to gain and keep decent jobs.

A summary of the manifesto is on p2. You can read the full CPAG manifesto and sign up to our campaign alerts at www.cpag.org.uk/manifesto.

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In The House



Karen Buck MP

Karen Buck MP wins this issue's nomination for CPAG's MP of the Year both for her standout speech at the Report Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill; and her article for the influential Labour campaign group, Progress, calling on the Chancellor to recognise that ending child poverty is not just a moral imperative, it could help beat the recession as well.

Karen and Terry Rooney MP had jointly table a series of CPAG sponsored amendments at Report Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill to protect claimants' welfare rights. In her speech, Karen warned that the Government was pushing ahead on work-related requirements for lone parents before the necessary support and childcare was in place to meet the particular needs of many such parents. She called for much greater flexibility and for more choice and financial incentives for parents as a mechanism of engagement.

Other excellent speeches and amendments included those by Lynne Jones MP, John McDonnell MP, Steve Webb MP, Paul Rowen MP and John Mason MP. However, the Bill completed its Commons stages little changed and CPAG believes fundamental flaws must now be addressed by members of the House of Lords.

The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill has completed its passage through the House of Lords. The Liberal Democrats' Lord Avebury spoke in support of CPAG sponsored amendments aiming to ensure equality for all those parent who will be affected by a new 'active citizenship' process, which will affect the time taken before citizenship can be achieved. CPAG will be continuing to push for improvements to this part of the Bill as it moves to the Commons.

The Fuel Poverty Bill had its Second Reading in the House of Commons, led by its sponsor David Heath MP. A tremendous effort by campaigners had helped produce a high turnout of MPs who have usually returned home on a Friday. However, Energy and Climate Change Minister, Joan Ruddock, talked out the bill after a closure motion was only 11 MPs short of the support needed to see the Bill safely pass the reading. Its Second Reading will resume later this year, but it is now unlikely to complete its passage before the end of the parliamentary year.

A parliamentary motion in support of an end to child poverty now has the support of at least 140 MPs. EDM 288 highlights the damage caused to children growing up in poverty as well as the cost to the country and calls on the Government to keep its commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The motion is remarkable in the balance of support across all three main parties with over 40 MPs from each party having signed the motion so far.

Ten steps to put children first

CPAG's manifesto, *Ending child poverty: a manifesto for success*, argues that, as a society, we must put children first. It lays out 10 tangible steps, summarised below, that will reduce inequality and put children's needs at the heart of Government action.



- **Protect jobs.** Parental job loss is a fast track to child poverty. Government must protect existing jobs by investing in people, as well as institutions.
- **Mend the safety net.** The income safety net leaves many families well below the poverty line. Benefits must rise to a fair minimum income with higher rates of take-up.
- **Move away from means tests.** Tax credits and means-tested benefits are complex, error prone and expensive to run. Universal benefits combined with progressive tax are cheap, fair and easy to run.
- **Remove barriers to work.** Expensive childcare, low skills and employer discrimination keep parents out of work. A right to high quality employment support is needed with zero tolerance of employer discrimination.
- **Stop in-work poverty.** More than half of poor children have a parent in work. Decent jobs and pay can bring these families out of poverty and stop taxpayers subsidising poverty pay.
- **A child-first strategy for childcare.** Childcare's first role is to support children's wellbeing and learning. It can also help parents move into work, but services should primarily be child-first, not work-first driven.
- **End the classroom divide.** Children growing up in poverty do worse on average at school. Ending child poverty outside the school gates will reduce educational inequalities in the classroom.
- **Fair public services.** Low-income families need the best services but often receive the worst. Patterns of service usage must be tracked and provision adapted to better meet the needs of struggling families.
- **End poverty premiums.** Poor families pay more for basic goods and services, and a higher income proportion in taxes. Regulators must get tough, special treatment for the low-tax elite must end and tax must be fair and affordable for struggling families.
- **Decent homes for every family.** The quality of a home is key to children's health, relationships and education. New high quality social housing must be built so all children live in good homes.

Celebrating 10 years of minimum wage

Celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the national minimum wage have taken place and a campaign by UNISON and TUC to protect and improve it is gathering momentum.

A celebratory birthday party took place in the House of Commons on 1 April with campaigning partners and beneficiaries of the minimum wage including CPAG, the British Youth Council, The Institute of Employment Rights, the National Union of Students and the YWCA.

Hosted by James Anthony, UNISON's young member representative, the event was addressed by UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis who cut the cake alongside Sheri Dobbs from YWCA England and Wales. Other speakers expressing their support for the minimum wage included Harriet Harman MP, Judy Mallaber MP and Heather Wakefield from the Low Pay Commission.

Campaigners are urging the Low Pay Commission – which has delayed the announcement of a new rate on the grounds that this is the first year the minimum wage has faced a recession – to resist calls from business to reduce it. CPAG's Policy

Officer, Gabrielle Preston, said: 'Given that high levels of in-work poverty are a source of concern, now is the time to protect and extend an initiative that has already helped more than a million vulnerable workers. We are backing UNISON and the TUC in calling on the Low Pay Commission and the Government to ensure that low paid workers do not suffer during the recession.'

David Blunkett MP was the first signatory to a new parliamentary motion, (EDM 1163) which supports significant improvements to the minimum wage and notes that the current economic climate provides an opportunity to support the economy through increasing the spending power of the low paid. Other MPs supporting the motion include Tony Lloyd, David Anderson, Jon Cruddas, Lindsay Hoyle, Andrew George and Mark Durkan.

CPAG's *Ending child poverty: a manifesto for success* endorses the campaign to increase the national minimum wage and extend its scope to apprentices. Please show your support by contacting your MP to ask her/him to sign up to EDM 1163 too.

Tools for take-up

CPAG has been working with the Local Government Association (LGA) to produce a new support package to help welfare rights advisers promote benefit take-up work. Revising information from the 2003 *Quids for Kids* campaign, the initiative is now being provided as part of the *Child Poverty Toolkit* developed by CPAG and Inclusion. It aims to encourage welfare rights advisers in local authorities and the voluntary sector to focus efforts on supporting families and children to access their full welfare entitlement.

Promoting benefit take-up is essential to family security, especially during a recession. It protects wellbeing at a time of tremendous stress and worry for increasing numbers of families facing reduced hours, redundancy and much greater competition for access to work, as well as keeping cash circulating in the local economy.

Apart from impacting on children and families, child poverty has a huge impact on the public purse, running to at least £25 billion every year according to research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The LGA believes councils should be taking a lead in helping communities through the recession, and benefit take-up is crucial to provide a safety net for people in need.

The support materials are designed to be relevant and practical. They include a policy briefing which sets out the powerful arguments in favour of take-up work, supported by facts and figures, top tips for successful take-up work and practical case studies from people who have achieved positive results. The *Quids for Kids* logo can be downloaded for use in locally based take-up campaigns. Further materials are planned, including an A-Z list of benefits and leaflets that support focussed campaigns, such as those targeted at families with a disabled child and/or adult.

The case studies from councils and the voluntary sector show the importance of actively reaching out to parents and providing them with support as they apply for benefits. Different players need to work together and help communicate to parents in ways and places that work for them. The evidence is that take-up work, and investment in welfare rights staff, can have a significant effect on the amount of benefit received.

The *Quids for Kids* materials are available at www.childpovertytoolkit.org.uk where you can also draw upon local data, policy and strategy briefs within the wider toolkit.



quids for kids

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'.
- By **credit card** online at 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.

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

Welfare reform campaign goes to Scottish party conferences

CPAG joined other members of the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCoWR) in organizing well attended and lively fringe meetings at the Scottish Labour and Liberal Democrat party conferences in March. Before 60 delegates, Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy, heard Citizens Advice Scotland's David McNeish describe the Welfare Reform Bill's proposals as 'frankly, dreadful. They focus almost exclusively on the claimant – and fail to recognise their wider obligations to their partner, their children, their other caring responsibilities, let alone the obligations of the employer and the state'. In response to these and other concerns from the floor Mr. Murphy and Anne McGuire MP, chairing the meeting, continued to defend the Bill as a way of supporting more of those people too often excluded from work into the labour market.

Speaking at the packed Liberal Democrat event, chaired by Lord Wallace of Tankerness, Danny Alexander MP described the current welfare reform proposals as the 'wrong bill at the wrong

time'. John Dickie, head of CPAG in Scotland, described the Bill's provisions on 'work for your benefit' and wide sweeping powers to abolish income support and increase the conditions and threat of sanctions attached to benefits as 'more punitive than supportive'. He argued that it is 'doubly problematic to impose such conditions without taking account of the very different childcare, skills and employability support provision in Scotland where crucial bits of the vital jigsaw of support are devolved' and



'The wrong bill at the wrong time' – Danny Alexander MP

called for Liberal Democrat support for amendments to the Bill that would ensure the proposals are not introduced until sufficient affordable and flexible childcare is available across Scotland.

During MPs' deliberations on the Welfare Reform Bill, a SCoWR amendment aimed at delaying introduction of provisions on work for your benefit and abolishing income support until adequate childcare is in place was tabled by John Roberston MP. Welfare Reform Minister Tony McNulty argued that the amendment was 'unnecessary' because parents on JSA 'will not be sanctioned if they fail to participate in "work for your benefit" because they cannot access appropriate childcare'. Elsewhere however, the Secretary of State, James Purnell, said that it will be Jobcentre Plus advisers, not parents, who will 'in the end' judge the appropriateness of a claimants' childcare decisions. SCoWR will continue to press amendments to the Bill in the Lords on this and other concerns to protect families from increased risk of benefit sanctions.

CPAG Manifesto requires action from Scottish and UK governments

Speaking as CPAG launched its Manifesto Ending *Child Poverty: a manifesto for success* John Dickie, Head of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, said:

'It is vital that the UK and Scottish Government work constructively together. Both governments are committed to eradicating child poverty and both have important powers to help do so. As a

matter of absolute urgency UK ministers must channel an economic stimulus through benefits and tax credits for families in poverty.'

He added that the manifesto also demands action from the Scottish Government: 'Holyrood ministers need to build on the groundbreaking free school meals policy and tackle the other high

costs that too often blight children's education. They must also do more to remove barriers to work and make affordable childcare available to all parents, as well as invest in housing so that all our children grow up in warm, healthy and safe homes. CPAG in Scotland will campaign for all Scottish politicians to adopt our manifesto policies.'