

Scottish Borders
Local Child Poverty Action Report
2020/21

DRAFT

Introduction

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets out the Scottish Government's statement of intent to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030.

Although the greatest impact on child poverty will occur through nationally set policies and strategies, it is recognised that local agencies and communities have much to contribute to achieving the outcomes desired. As a result, the Act requires Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare a Local Child Poverty Action Plan Report describing activities planned locally to contribute towards the child poverty targets set out in the Act.

The national Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022, 'Every Child, Every Chance', recognises that poverty comes about as a result of three main drivers: household income, living costs, and social security arrangements. The national Delivery Plan uses these three drivers as the focus for action. It also recognizes the importance of preventative measures to improve children's quality of life and help families manage the impacts of poverty. Even if these actions have no immediate impact on the targets, building children's resilience in the face of poverty and other adversity is expected to boost their long-term outcomes.

Building on the first Scottish Borders Local Child Action Report published in June 2019, and the subsequent Annual Progress Report published in September 2020, this Action Report sets out planned activities to help alleviate Child Poverty in the Scottish Borders, and in particular, provides specific actions in relation to the impact of COVID-19.

We recognise that partnerships are key to the achievement of the outcomes we plan for our children, young people and families in the Scottish Borders and thank the Child Poverty Planning Group and the Community Planning Partnership for their contribution to the Plan.

National context and targets

According to the Scottish Household Survey, **17.3%** of Scottish children live in families that had low income in 2017 and could not afford at least 3 out of a prescribed list of “basic necessities”, such as a new refrigerator or a new coat for school. This is before housing costs (BHC), such as rent or mortgage payments, are taken out. After housing costs (AHC), the figure is understandably worse, at **20.7%** of Scottish children, or **one in five**.

According to the Scottish Government publication “Persistent poverty in Scotland 2010-2018”, **17%** of children in Scotland were in persistent poverty after housing costs between 2014 and 2018. This compares to **15%** in 2013-2017.

The Scottish Government has set itself ambitious targets to reduce child poverty by 2030. The four key measurements, after housing costs (AHC) are as follows:

- less than 10% of children live in relative poverty (relative poverty is less than 60% of average UK household income for the year taking account of the size and composition of the household)
- less than 5% of children live in absolute poverty (absolute poverty is less than 60% of average UK household income for the financial year beginning 1 April 2010)
- less than 5% of children live in combined low income and material deprivation (low income is defined as less than 70% of average UK household income for the year, material deprivation is when families are unable to afford three or more items out of a list of basic necessities)
- less than 5% of children live in persistent poverty (persistent poverty is where a child has lived in relative poverty for three out of the last four years).

The most recent child poverty statistics, published in March 2020, relate to the period from April 2018 to March 2019.

	Latest statistics	2023 target	2030 target
% of children in relative poverty	23% (2018-19)	18%	10%
% of children in absolute poverty	20% (2018-19)	14%	5%
% of children in low income + material deprivation	12% (2018-19)	8%	5%
% of children in persistent poverty	17% (2014-18)	8%	5%

Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-second-year-progress-report-2019-20/pages/5/>

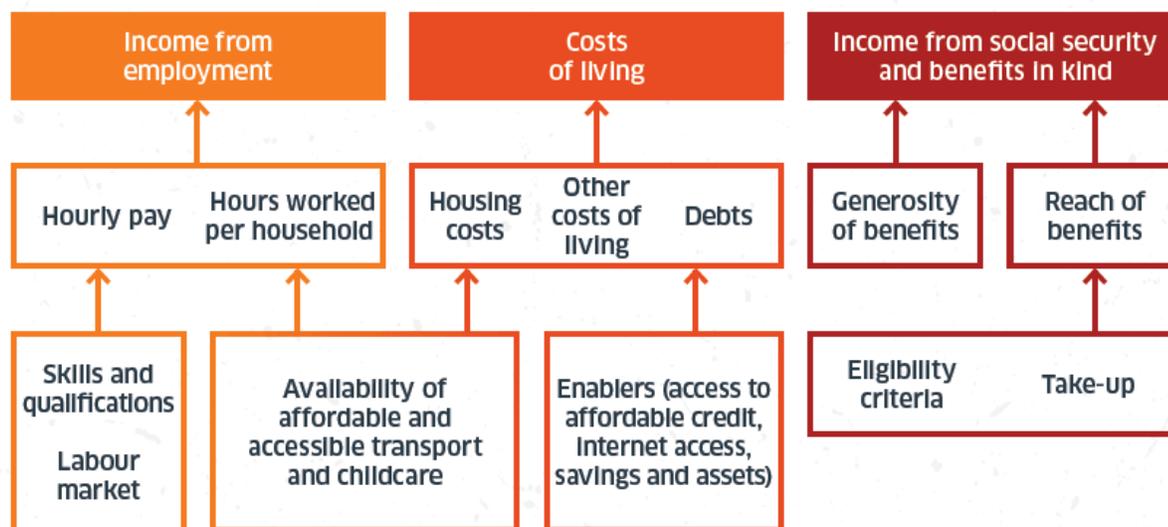
Public Health Scotland was formed in April 2020 and promotes the six national Public Health Priorities agreed by Scottish Government and COSLA in June 2018. These priorities are intended to support national and local partners across Scotland to work together to improve healthy life expectancy and reduce health inequalities in our communities.

- Priority 1 - A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities
- Priority 2 - A Scotland where we flourish in our early years
- Priority 3 - A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing
- Priority 4 - A Scotland where we reduce the use of and harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Priority 5 - A Scotland where we have a sustainable, inclusive economy with equality of outcomes for all
- Priority 6 - A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active

Drivers of Child Poverty

The direct drivers of poverty fall in to three main categories – income from employment, costs of living and income from social security. The relationship of those drivers to wider thematic areas is summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Direct drivers of poverty



Key risk groups and targeted interventions

Child poverty action reports are expected to describe measures taken in relation to children living in households where income and/or expenditure are adversely affected as a consequence of a member or members in a household having one or more protected characteristics. The national Child Poverty Delivery Plan also identifies certain priority groups to be targeted as beneficiaries (see Figure 2 below), and notes the need to take account of local geography and demographic profile. For the Scottish Borders, rurality is a key factor. There is also a requirement to report on income maximisation measures taken in the area to provide pregnant women and families with children with information, advice and assistance about eligibility for financial support; and assistance to apply for financial support. This includes work by the NHS Borders and partners to embed financial inclusion referral pathways in health care settings, as well as other settings.

Figure 2 - Nationally identified priority groups at high risk of poverty



COVID-19 and implications for Child Poverty

For children and families already living in poverty, the impact of COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate their issues and potentially cause family stress and trauma. There is also likely to be an increase in the number of children and families experiencing poverty for the first time due to a loss of income caused by temporary or permanent job losses as a result of the pandemic. Digital exclusion is likely to deepen further too if actions are not considered to alleviate this growing problem.

The following table gives an indication of how COVID-19 may impact on the drivers of child poverty:

Driver		
Income from Employment	Job Loss	A direct consequence of COVID-19. A rise in the number of children in workless households.
Income from Employment	Loss of income	If people need to self-isolate, many employers only award sick pay Some may not work enough hours to qualify for sick pay Women in lower paid jobs may need to give up work to care for children if no child care is available.
Income from Benefits	Benefits	Difficulties in navigating a complex social security system can result in delays to payments of benefits Families who do not have digital devices may be disadvantaged from claiming benefits as face to face support became limited
Costs of living	Impact on families	Actions such as borrowing, using high cost credit, selling assets and gambling all impact on a families' ability to cope with initial hurdles of the pandemic
Costs of living	Housing and household costs	People spending more time at home is likely to increase costs of heating and electricity, causing fuel poverty.
Costs of living	Food insecurity	Food insecurity may arise as a result of loss of income to buy food Self-isolation or shielding may have caused problems with accessing food
Costs of living	Digital exclusion	Limited or no access to the internet has caused problems for families to access advice, information and benefits Mental health could be compromised Access to learning resources for children is an issue

Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and other partners are committed to undertaking actions in the short term to mitigate issues that children and families are experiencing. Additional demands have arisen on a range of public services as a result of the key issues arising from Covid-19 identified above. The key issues are translated into priority actions for the Scottish Borders, and Appendix 1(a) sets out how partners plan to tackle these.

Plans for longer term recovery, including prioritising child poverty and allocating resources to support this are also under consideration.

Local context

Research recently published by the End Child Poverty Coalition shows that levels of child poverty have risen in nearly every Scottish Local Authority since 2014/15 once housing costs are taken into account. This is before the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic is taken into account which is likely to make the situation worse.

The following table illustrates the % of children in the Scottish Borders living in poverty, below 60% median income after housing costs. The table includes other local authorities which are part of the same Local Government Benchmarking Framework family as a comparison. The Scottish Borders percentage point change from 2015 to 2019 is the second highest in the family.

Local Authority	2014/15	2018/19	% point change (2015-19)
Scottish Borders	21.6%	23.9%	2.3%
Moray	21%	22.4%	1.5%
Stirling	20.5%	21.3%	0.8%
East Lothian	22.3%	23.3%	1.0%
Angus	21.6%	24.0%	2.4%
Highland	21.5%	23.0%	1.6%
Argyll and Bute	21.2%	23.4%	2.2%
Midlothian	22.8%	23.2%	0.4%

Source: www.endchildpoverty.org.uk

Other local management information which adds further detail to the picture of child poverty in the Scottish Borders:

Earnings

- Scottish Borders average earnings in 2019 for full time workers only are **£462.30** a week.
- This is **lower** than the Scottish average of **£543.30** and is the 7th lowest out of the 32 Scottish Local Authority areas.

Accessible transport

- **47.6%** of children in Scottish Borders live in areas classified as “Rural” (Accessible-rural or Remote-rural) by the Urban-rural Classification system in 2018

Food insecurity and food costs

- The January 2020 Independent Food Aid network reported six participating independent food banks in the Scottish Borders between April 2018 and September 2019. They gave out **3,915** food parcels, an **8%** increase on the previous year. This shows that there is sustained and increasing food insecurity in the Scottish Borders, which is certain to get worse in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Internet access

- The Scottish Household Survey estimates that **85%** of households in Scotland had home internet access in 2017. Scottish Borders is slightly behind the Scottish average with **81.3%**.

Debt, savings and assets

- **31.4%** of households lived in 'Fuel Poverty' in the Scottish Borders, compared with **27.3%** in Scotland.
- **7.8%** of households are in 'Extreme fuel poverty' in the Scottish Borders, compared with **7.6%** in Scotland.

Other

- **8.1%** (or 4,241) of Scottish Borders households in the 2011 Census were a lone-parent family.
- **6.5%** of first time mothers in the Scottish Borders were aged 19 and under in the 3-year rolling average period up to 2018/19 – this is 76 births.
- There were 205 children in the Scottish Borders in 2018 who were Looked After by the Local Authority in a variety of settings, which is a rate of 9.6 per 1,000 children
- In 2018, in the Scottish Borders, **21.8%** of adults reporting a limiting long-term physical or mental health problem lived in a household with children, compared with **14.9%** in Scotland.

The Scottish Borders Integrated Children and Young People's Plan 2018-2021

The Integrated Children and Young People's Plan 2018-21 sets out the strategic direction for the planning and delivery of services for children and young people in the Scottish Borders from 2018-21. The Plan expresses the commitment of the Children and Young People's Leadership Group to use its combined resources and to work in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our children and families.

Priority 2 of the plan reflects the actions required to support the Local Child Poverty Action Plan and comply with the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. An extract is shown below.

Improving health and well-being and reducing inequalities

What we will do

1. **Play a key part in the development of the Scottish Borders Child Poverty action plan - leading to changes in practice across all partners that impact on the drivers of child poverty**

How will we know

A range of measures will be developed by the Leadership Group eg.

- **Progress in implementing the Child Poverty Action Plan**

The Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index

Poverty and low income remain an issue in an area with one of the lowest wages in Scotland, with many families "just getting by". This has led to "poverty proofing" in all schools, supported by the development of the Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index (CPI), which provides schools and other partners with a more detailed understanding of child poverty as it affects communities locally.

These are experimental statistics using HMRC Children in low income families, free school meals, clothing grants and educational maintenance allowance. The index shows that there are unexpected areas of child poverty. The Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index has 3 years of data and over time, the areas of high or higher levels of child poverty has reduced, however there are areas that consistently have high levels of child poverty.

The Scottish Borders COVID-19 Vulnerability Index

The Scottish Borders Covid-19 Vulnerability Index has been developed to provide a way to identify areas within the Scottish Borders that may need support to recover from the wider impact of Covid-19. There are several publicly available resources which provide a context but it was felt that a Scottish Borders specific tool would be useful and the matrix developed may inform decisions that will help the Scottish Borders recover from Covid-19. The matrix will be used in conjunction with the Scottish Borders Child Poverty Index to pinpoint areas where children and families are in specific need of support.

Money Worries App

NHS Borders and Partners (Scottish Borders Council, CAB, and a Local Youth Project) are developing a Money Worries App. The App will be available for iPhone and Android devices and is designed to help people find services that can help with issues such as money/debt advice, benefits, housing and homelessness, home energy/bills and some mental health and wellbeing services at both a local and national level.

There will be four main categories: Money, Housing, Health, and Work. Each of the categories will have sub categories and these will lead to information and contacts for people to use depending on their query.

The App also analyses how people use it and will report on what information is looked up so that services and resources can be planned to meet requirements.

It is planned to launch the Scottish Borders Money Worries App in January 2021.

Specific Themes

Appendix 1 sets out current actions underway in Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders and with Community Planning Partners. The Action Plan shows a wide range of activities which all contribute to the aim of eradicating Child Poverty. Specific examples to highlight the multi-agency approach are:

Housing	<p>Housing plays an important role in poverty, housing can mitigate or exacerbate the impact of poverty on people's lives.</p> <p>Increasing the supply of affordable housing increases the number of housing available for social rent. An increase in supply means an increase in access to the sector, especially at a time when owning a house or renting privately isn't an option for some households. The Local Housing Strategy monitors the level of affordable housing being built and through the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) strategic investment priorities for affordable housing are set out over a five year period.</p> <p>The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) sets out how the Local Authority and partners plan to shift towards a rapid rehousing approach. This means stepping up activities to prevent homelessness, maximising supply of and access to a wide range of settled housing options, reducing the time people spend as homeless, especially in temporary accommodation, and ensuring tailored support is available as and when people need it.</p>
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	<p>Providing housing options is a person centred, holistic approach that provides housing support at an early stage to provide information on housing solutions, this can also include information on money advice, employment and health. One of the key aims is to avoid a housing crisis. This is monitored through the LHS and RRTP.</p>
<p>Tackling Digital Exclusion</p>	<p>The Connecting Scotland Programme is a national initiative which is working to provide digitally excluded households with devices, skills training and technical support so they can get online. The first phase saw £5 million worth of devices, data, skills training and technical support reach 9,000 people on low incomes who were without an internet connection and shielding from COVID-19.</p> <p>Recipients were gifted an appropriate internet enabled device, access to connectivity, and paired with a digital champion to develop their skills and confidence online.</p> <p>Of the Borders 217 allocation, SBC were awarded 48 devices, with the remaining allocation distributed to Registered Social Landlords, Live Borders and a number of third sector organisations.</p> <p>Following the successful pilot, Connecting Scotland has launched a 2nd phase. With £15 million in funding, phase 2 aims to reach around 22,000 households across Scotland with pre-school and school age children and young care leavers on low incomes.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria for this phase aims to provide iPads, Chromebooks and support to develop digital skills for individuals who are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. digitally excluded – do not have an appropriate device and/or are not connected to the internet at home; AND 2. on low incomes so cannot afford to buy a device or pay for internet access. <p>The two target groups for Phase 2 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • households with children, or where a child is normally resident (this includes pregnant women with no child in the household) • care leavers up to the age of 26 (in line with eligibility for aftercare support)
<p>Fuel Poverty</p>	<p>Providing energy efficient homes means households can heat their homes properly and reduce their fuel bills – helping to reduce fuel poverty. Living in a warm home that is affordable to heat has many benefits for everyone including children. Providing households with information and advice is an important part of reducing fuel poverty. This is monitored through the Local Housing Strategy and through the Affordable Warmth and Home Energy Efficiency Strategy.</p> <p>Partners work with Home Energy Scotland who give free and impartial advice and support on fuel poverty and energy efficiency. During COVID-19 NHS Borders have promoted Home Energy Scotland information to prevent/tackle fuel poverty. This included a series of DVD's aimed at householders with practical advice and support links and information about</p>

	crisis support in the form of energy vouchers.
Food Poverty	<p>Food poverty is a growing concern in the Scottish Borders and there are many food distribution schemes being used to assist families who are struggling to provide food for their children eg. Fareshare, Foodbanks.</p> <p>A Scottish Government Food Fund was made available during COVID-19 to enable Partners to assist Scottish Borders residents in need. Scottish Borders Council has been able to provide supermarket gift cards through this scheme where needed.</p> <p>Youth Work Services in the Scottish Borders are able to help alleviate food poverty for young people and this has been welcomed by many families during lockdown with the provision of food parcels delivered to their homes. In normal circumstances, the youth group settings provide free meals to young people and teach them to cook for themselves.</p> <p>Community Assistance Hubs were formed to assist in localities in lockdown for those most vulnerable and in need. The hubs were able to build up a vast knowledge of what food offerings are available in the Scottish Borders. With so many activities relating to food available, it is hoped to set up a Food Network in the Scottish Borders to raise awareness of, and promote opportunities for children and families.</p>

Case Study

The following case study illustrates how poverty issues can arise, and how one of the Local Authority's Community Assistance Hubs were able to help during the Coronavirus Lockdown.

Food and Finance – Father got in touch to say due to a move in household at beginning of lockdown, they were struggling with money – there had been a mix up with universal credit payments, found himself with no money and lots of mouths to feed. Also, some of their kitchen appliances had broken down.

The family were not able to apply for a crisis grant as they still had a little money in the bank to cover some bills. A community care grant was an option but this would take a number of weeks. The Financial Inclusion Team confirmed that there were no further benefits he was entitled to. Our local Home Start Service was closed due to Covid and local funding pots were closed as they had ran out of money and could not fundraise at this time.

A charity bought the family what they needed to replace broken down equipment, and the local Resilience Team also contributed from their Covid fund.

The Community Assistance Hub gifted them food vouchers and another charity also gifted them vouchers.

Free school meals options were explored further with the family too and they benefitted from picking these up on a regular basis.

There is no specific plan for this family for ongoing assistance, but awareness of local funds is helpful and links to partner agencies who can assist and inform in wider funding areas is very supportive.

Monitoring and reporting

The Child Poverty Action Planning process relates directly to the work of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Progress of the Local Child Poverty Action Plan is monitored through a multi-agency planning group and reported through the CPP. A review of how data and evidence is used to measure progress and ensure effective evaluation and monitoring methods is currently being undertaken.

Current and planned actions to address child poverty in Scottish Borders

In developing this plan we recognise that partners are already undertaking a wide range of activities and delivering projects to prevent or mitigate the impact of child poverty.

Appendix 1 sets out the actions that services and partners are carrying out in 2020/21. Local Authorities and NHS Boards are specifically required to report on income maximisation measures taken in the area to provide pregnant women and families with children with information, advice and assistance about eligibility for financial support; and assistance to apply for financial support. This includes work to embed financial inclusion referral pathways in health care settings, as well as other settings, and is reflected in the actions set out.

Planning ahead, Scottish Borders Council have formed a Member/Officer working group who are working on the production of an Anti-Poverty Strategy for the Scottish Borders. This Strategy is likely to encompass the Child Poverty work that is underway and planned for future years.

One of the early tasks of this group is to agree an approach to working with people who have direct lived experience of poverty and child poverty. It is important that we listen to families, children and young people with first-hand experience to get their views so that we can agree actions which will help to alleviate poverty and agree how we can measure the impact of such actions. The Poverty and Inequality Commission highlights this in their review of Local Child Poverty Action Reports published in November 2019.

Other challenges and future focus will be around Brexit and how that may impact on Child Poverty as well as implications arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill to ensure that children's rights are respected and protected in the law in Scotland.

Finally as we progress through 2020/21, the impact of COVID-19 will become clearer in terms of job losses and loss of income from employment, and whilst we are taking steps to alleviate this for children and families in our Action Plan, it will be necessary to carry out further focused work in the future.

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