



Scottish Government Policy Priorities & recommendations for government and others to support single parent families

July 2021



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

Scottish Government Policy Commitments and their first 100-day priorities

The 2021 Scottish Parliament election again returned an SNP government, but it has fallen just short of an overall majority. This briefing on the Scottish Governments' priorities details those areas of relevance to single parent families and includes the 100 days commitments. It also covers what single parents have told us should be policy priorities.

Policy commitments on which the SNP were elected for the next five years covers key areas of policy key affecting the people of Scotland, including single parents and other vulnerable groups [1].

Single parents will be directly and indirectly affected by the priorities set out which will form part of the Programme for Government. It will be the case that the relationship with opposition parties, especially the Greens, will be key to the Scottish Government implementing its planned policies.



Key policy commitments of particular relevance to single parent families include:



- Building 100,000 new homes by 2032 (70% of which set aside for social rent).
- Launching a National Care Service.
- Implementing a women's health strategy to improve care and reduce health inequalities of women and girls.
- The Baby Box provision will continue whereby new parents receive practical help – a package of essentials and a safe place for baby to sleep.
- A commitment to provide at least 1% of frontline NHS spending for CAMHS support and related services - the mental health strategy will help re-shape how CAMHS is delivered underpinned by the principles of 'Ask once, get help fast'.
- Building on the Neonatal Expenses Fund, the SG will also introduce a Young Patient's Family fund to support families visiting children who are receiving inpatient care.
- Introducing a Minimum Income Guarantee, ensuring that everyone in Scotland can live healthy and fulfilling lives.
- Introducing the 'Right to Food' – supporting families through providing free school breakfasts and lunches to every primary school pupil, supporting more families to cook from scratch through Parent Club.
- Providing a cash grant of £520 in four quarterly investments to every family with children in receipt of free school meals until the full rollout of the Scottish Child Payment has been completed.



- Doubling the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per child by the end of the Parliamentary session to lift thousands of families out of poverty.
- Publishing a new four-year delivery plan to lift children out of poverty, backed by a £50 million fund.
- Providing easily accessible and affordable childcare to families – whilst also bringing together a package of measures to tackle the ‘motherhood penalty’ and encourage more flexible and family friendly working.
- Halting the interest on student loans during maternity leave and continue funding for a Women Returner’s programme to help women get back into work.
- Ensuring that single parents are a priority group in the expansion of Connecting Scotland through the provision of laptops and tablets.



Other proposed actions

The document 'First Steps' lays out the priorities for the first 100 days of Scottish Government. [2] It commits to publishing an NHS recovery plan, beginning a consultation on the National Care Service and creation of a Council to shape a ten-year Economic Transformation Strategy.

It also identifies the climate crisis as a key priority in its first 100 days. To this end, there is a proposal to extend the free bus pass initiative and begin to rollout free bikes to children who cannot afford them.

Other proposed actions for the first 100 days in office, which will directly affect single parent families include:

-
- Establishing the Young Patients Family Fund to support families visiting children who are receiving inpatient care.
 - Publishing the recommendations of the Women's Health taskforce and producing a Women's Health Implementation plan.
 - Making flexible and family friendly practices and opposition to hire and rehire processes criteria in the Fair Work First Programme – using the Government's procurement process to deliver fairer work.
 - Opposing any legal challenge to children's rights from the UK Government.
 - Completing the roll-out of 1,140 hours of free, high quality early learning and childcare, and begin work on extending wrap around childcare.
 - Introducing free school lunches for primary 4 children. This commences the strategy to deliver free school breakfasts and lunches for all primary school pupils.
 - Increasing Best Start Food funding to £4.50 per week. The aim being to help families with children under three to buy healthy foods.





- Increasing the School Clothing Grant to at least £120 for primary school children and £150 for secondary school age young people.
- Abolishing core curriculum charges for all pupils. This will enable children to take the subjects they want without families having to struggle to meet costs of resources and materials for practical lessons.
- Beginning the planning for provision of tablets and laptops to all schoolchildren.
- Inviting all groups and organisations supportive of a Minimum Income Guarantee to start planning how this can be delivered.
- Investing a further £5 million this year to support frontline organisations which tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence to deal with outstanding demand that has built up over the past year of the pandemic.
- Paying £100 as part of the £520 support for low-income families - the equivalent of the Scottish Child Payment.
- Delivering 40,000 digital devices as the SG heads towards 60,000 by the end of this year as part of the plans to end digital exclusion by getting 300,000 households online over the next five years.





There are 144,000 lone parent families with dependent children in Scotland – 25% of all families with dependent children in Scotland. [3] We know that poverty means lacking the resources needed to live in modern Scotland, with income the primary resource that is lacking.

In practice this means people making impossible choices between paying bills, putting food on the table or getting into debt. It means children being unable to fully participate at school and experiencing poorer education and health outcomes. It too often leads to the indignity of relying on food banks or going hungry.

In Scotland today 25% of children are living in poverty, with over two thirds are living in working families. Some children are at even greater risk, including children living in single parent families (38%), children in families affected by disability (29%) and children in minority ethnic families (38%). [4]

The drivers of poverty are inadequate income from work; inadequate income from social security; and household costs. Poverty is not inevitable. Policy interventions have successfully reduced poverty. Between the mid-1990s and early 2010s child poverty in Scotland fell from 33% of all children to 19%. [5]



In 2017 all political parties in the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act. [6] The Act sets legal targets that require the Scottish government to ensure fewer than 18% of children are living in poverty by 2023/24, with less than 10% in poverty by 2030.

Children of single parents are mentioned in the Act and the delivery plan as a key target group. [7] Along with this there is a legal commitment to put human rights at the heart of the social security system, [8] and the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish law. [9] This provides an important infrastructure on which to build the detailed policies required to meet the child poverty targets.

All parties also supported the introduction of the Scottish child payment. Since Feb 2021 this provides an additional £10 per week for each child under 6 living in families in receipt of universal credit or equivalent legacy benefits. It will be rolled out for children under 16 by the end of 2022. This is a game-changing use of Scotland's social security powers to directly tackle child poverty.

Other welcome support is being provided through Social Security Scotland Best Start payments and additional Covid hardship grants for low income families. However, the stark reality is that even before Covid-19 child poverty rates were rising. The pandemic has pulled families even deeper into hardship, and many are living in poverty for the first time.

Recommendations for government and others to support single parent families

OPFS welcomes that all parties are committed to at least doubling the value of the Scottish child payment to £20 per week. To ensure interim 2023/24 child poverty targets are met the evidence now shows this needs to happen urgently and as a first step. [\[10\]](#),[\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#)

Doubling the Scottish child payment in the first year of the new parliament is the top priority to keeping families afloat, and the next step needed to ensure statutory child poverty targets are met. Budgets need to ensure the payment is increased so that, whatever the impact of other policies, less than 18% of children are living in poverty by 2023/24.

Meeting the targets set out in the Act must be at the heart of the Programme for Government and Scottish budget process. Reducing child poverty is critical to wider economic, health and education recovery.

Increasing the Scottish Child Payment must be the foundation on which wider action to end child poverty is built. Employment, education, transport, and childcare policies must be developed with the goal of preventing and ending child poverty at their heart. The following are key areas for single parents.



The following are key areas for single parents:



- Challenging the stereotype view of single parenthood and judgemental attitudes and discrimination single parents face in everyday life.
- To develop a minimum income guarantee in Scotland over the long term. As a first step to raise the Scottish child payment to £40 by the end of the parliament and to consider introducing a lone parent premium to the Scottish child payment in order to help those families in deepest poverty. [13]
- Single Parents in crisis need expert help but it's often not available when they need it most. Investment in more Debt, Money and Welfare Rights Advice is a priority.
- The Covid-19 lockdown has shown how vital it is that we have enough provision for families who are not online and the need to ensure we tackle digital exclusion.
- Ensuring clearer support for single parents whose children need to self-isolate.
- Despite the pressures on Single Parents – financial hardship, family pressures, mental health issues – most must comply with conditionality to receive universal credit. Specialist and tailored employability support is therefore crucial to enable single parents achieve their potential.
- Economic recovery and business support policies must contribute to achieving child poverty targets - companies accessing public money must offer good quality work opportunities, and support those with caring responsibilities. Increasing opportunities for flexible working.
- Barriers to work for mothers and for parents affected by disability must be removed, and the labour market inequality they face tackled head on.

Recommendations



- Public procurement and public body wage setting powers must be used to drive improvements in the quality of work, including addressing low pay, particularly in female dominated sectors such as social care and childcare.
- As well as responding to families in crisis, investment in a preventative model of family support is required which offers single parent families tailored practical, emotional and financial inclusion support wrapped around the individual needs of families.
- Improving access to mental health services for single parents and their children.
- The need for foodbanks must be ended by 2026 including by maintaining enhanced investment in the Scottish Welfare Fund and ensuring a cash-first approach to income crises replaces the distribution of emergency food.
- The provision of funded, good quality and flexible childcare must be boosted, including comprehensive, school-age and holiday childcare and help with the upfront costs for single parents.
- Policies to remove financial barriers to education, including the costs of curriculum materials, digital devices and connectivity, school trips and school clothing. To build on the roll out of free, healthy school meals to all primary pupils and ensure a healthy school meal is part of the school day for all secondary age children as well as under-fives in daycare.



- Public transport is key to easing the financial pressures on low-income households. We support free bus travel to Universal Credit and other low-income benefit claimant and to all young people under 25 years.
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP): increase the DHP budget and direct local authorities to target additional funds towards those affected by the benefit cap. By increasing the DHP budget, the benefit cap should be fully mitigated.
- School Clothing Grants: increase school clothing grant payments to cover the realistic cost for primary and secondary children by a standard amount across Scotland.
- We support Shelter Scotland's campaign to empower private renters and for more social homes to be built, to help to protect single parents from homelessness, provide hope for parents struggling to get by.

UK Government recommendations:



As an organisation which advocates for single parent families, OPFS is very concerned by some of the UK Government's policies which are having a detrimental impact on their day to day lives.

We encourage Scottish Government to support calls on the UK Government to:

- Remove policies that penalise single parent families such as the working age benefits freeze, the two-child limit, the benefits cap and benefit sanctions for pregnant women and parents.
- Protect Universal Credit by making the £20 uplift permanent and extending to people on legacy benefits.
- End the young parent penalty by restoring the adult rate of Universal Credit to single parents under 25 years.
- Introduce a root and branch' review of the Child Maintenance Service.



OPFS is part of a coalition of organisations led by Oxfam which recently launched a joint call for a new National Outcome on 'valuing and investing in care'. [14]

The 11 National Outcomes in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework describe "the kind of Scotland it aims to create". [15] Yet none is focused on care, despite its critical importance to people's wellbeing and the economy.

We are calling for a specific National Outcome on Care to build on the lessons from the pandemic and to lock-in expressions of political and public solidarity with those providing care, both paid and unpaid.



One Parent Families Scotland
2 York Place, Edinburgh
EH1 3EP
Tel: 0131 556 3899

Lone Parent Helpline:
0808 801 0323

