

Scottish Budget

2026-27

MSP Briefing | January 2026



**One Parent
Families Scotland**

changing lives, challenging poverty

Summary

With the Scottish Budget approaching, national charity One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is calling for the Scottish Government to act on the issues that matter most to people in Scotland by:

- **Increasing the Scottish Child Payment to a minimum of £40**, with targeted further increases for single parent families, families with a disabled child, and families with a baby under the age of one.
- **Funding face-to-face support for parents using the Child Maintenance Service**, where separation is complex, as part of holistic family support.
- **Increasing funding for income-maximisation services**, with targeted investment in services best able to reach priority families, including single parents.
- **Extending free school meals to all primary school pupils** and commit to introducing universal free school meals for all secondary school pupils, reducing costs and stigma for families.
- **Increasing the value of the School Clothing Grant** so that it covers the real cost of school clothing and ensure this includes auto-enrolment for families in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment, along with annual inflationary uplifts in line with other Scottish social security payments.

This Scottish Budget is a crucial opportunity for the Scottish Government to deliver for single parent families.

Strengthening social security for children and families

Every child should be able to grow up in a Scotland where their rights to development, health, and social security (UNCRC Articles 6, 24, and 26) are respected, protected and fulfilled. However, at present, too many children are living without the resources that they need to realise these rights - as a direct result of their experiences of poverty.

While recent policy initiatives, such as the Scottish Child Payment, have made a welcome impact on child poverty levels in Scotland - with 23% of children still living in poverty in 2023/24, further and faster action is needed to meet statutory child poverty targets of 10% by 2030.

The number of children growing up in poverty increases to 36% for children in single parent families, highlighting a need for targeted intervention for this priority family group.

OPFS is urging the Scottish Government to use this Budget to accelerate progress on tackling child poverty through targeted investment to increase incomes for single parent families. This should include a priority family-targeted supplement to the Scottish Child

Payment for single parent families, families with a disabled child and families with a baby under the age of one, all of whom face additional income barriers and increased costs (e.g. increased requirement for childcare, challenges accessing or increasing employment).

It should also recognise the crucial role that income maximisation services play in ensuring that families are able to navigate complex systems and access support that they have a right to.

One single parent supported by OPFS said:

"I don't know how we would survive without the Scottish Child Payment; it pays for the extra things that the children need – without it I don't think I would even be able to cover the weekly shop."

Increasing incomes through child maintenance

Modelling by IPPR Scotland shows that 20,000 Scottish children could be lifted out of poverty if families were properly supported to navigate the child maintenance system and access the money that they are owed. When child maintenance is not paid, our children lose out – but with the right support, that money could reach thousands of children across Scotland and help cover essentials like food, heating, and clothing.

While the child maintenance system is reserved, broader support for families lies within the Scottish Government's competence. The Scottish Government should therefore ensure that signposting to the child maintenance system is included as a standard provision within income maximisation services, and that support and signposting is available for families impacted by domestic abuse as they navigate the child maintenance process.

Charlotte, a single parent from Fife, shared her experience of navigating the Child Maintenance Service (CMS):

"I think one of the hardest things for me in this experience is trying to protect your kids from the stress of it all. One minute you're on a call to the CMS having to update the call handler on your situation and trying to get the answers you need, and the next you have to be 'mum' again, putting a brave face on."

So many parents are already distressed before they get in touch with CMS. Some have experienced abuse in their relationships and need someone who can listen patiently and with kindness."

Supporting children to thrive at school

While primary and secondary education is free to access in Scotland, OPFS knows all too well that there are many hidden costs to the school day.

Costs for items such as school supplies, school uniform, school meals and transport can add up quickly, making it harder for families on low incomes to provide everything that their child needs to thrive in education. This creates an inequality in the quality of learning for children, threatening their rights to learn and develop their personality, talents and abilities to their full potential (UNCRC Articles 28 and 29).

The Scottish Government can support children in Scotland to thrive at school by ensuring that no child must learn on an empty stomach. This should be done through provision of free school meals to all primary school aged pupils in the first instance, with expansion to secondary school pupils at the earliest opportunity.

The School Uniform Grant is similarly crucial in ensuring that children are able to come to school ready to learn – without placing families in financial hardship. This payment should be sufficient to cover the real costs of school uniform and should increase with inflation. Additionally, it should be an auto-enrolled provision where possible (e.g. where a family is in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment).

Charis Chittick, Head of Policy, Communications and Strategy at OPFS said:

"The decisions made today by the Scottish Government matter. This Budget is an opportunity for politicians to get today's decisions right so we can build a better future. It is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to demonstrate that they are serious about tackling child poverty. Investing in single parent families is not just the right thing to do, it is essential if every child in Scotland is to get the best possible start in life."

About One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland is the national organisation for single parent families. Our vision is of a Scotland where single parent families are celebrated in all their diversity, are treated fairly and live free from discrimination and poverty.

We support family wellbeing, empower single parents with the right advice and information and enable parents to access training, employment and education. Our national advice and information service and family hubs in six local areas reach thousands of single parent families each year.

We campaign for improvements in the here and now and for structural and systemic change alongside single parents who are experts in their dual role of caregiving and providing for their children. We take an intersectional approach, recognising most single parents are women and that many BAME, disabled and young single parents face multiple structural barriers affecting access to services and opportunities.

For further information please contact Leah Duncan-Karrim, Policy and Influencing Lead, at leah.duncan-karrim@opfs.org.uk



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One Parent Families Scotland,
2 YorkPlace, Edinburgh EH1 3EP

Tel: 0131 556 3899

www.opfs.org.uk

