

CHILD POVERTY (SCOTLAND) BILL

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Bill was introduced by Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Social Security and Equalities, Angela Constance MSP on 9th February, 2017.

The Bill will see Scotland become the only part of the UK with statutory targets in a bid to reduce the number of Children experiencing the damaging effects of Poverty by 2030. The Bill is currently at Stage 1. (See below for detailed stages of Bill).

The Bill has two main elements. The first is a set of income-based targets against which Child Poverty is to be measured. The second is a set of reporting mechanisms, which include requirements on the Scottish Ministers to set out their proposed actions to tackle child poverty and to report progress against these actions. Local Authorities and partner Health Boards are also to jointly report on their activity to address child poverty at a local level.

The four statutory targets set out in the bill are:

- Less than 10% of children live in households that are in relative poverty.
- Less than 5% of children live in households that are in absolute poverty.
- Less than 5% of children live in households that are in combined low income and material deprivation.
- Less than 5% of children live in households that are in persistent poverty.

Each of the four targets is defined on the face of the Bill along with related terms necessary to understand the *measures* being adopted; specifically 'net household income' and 'child'.

The Bill has been brought forward as a direct response to the repeal of significant sections of the UK Child Poverty Act 2010, notably the previous income-based targets for child poverty. While the Bill mirrors many of the provisions that were previously in the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Scottish Government has made the decision that the new statutory targets for Scotland will be measured on an after housing costs basis, whereas the UK measure has a before housing costs measure. After housing costs refer to the costs associated with rent, water charges and similar. It does not include mortgage capital, fuel costs or council tax.

The Scottish Government will publish a three-year Child Poverty Delivery Plan by April, 2018 which will be updated every five years, along with Annual Reports to measure progress. The targets are to be met in financial year commencing 1st April 2030.

Stages to Pass Bill:

Stage 1

The bill is sent to a Parliamentary Committee for consideration and the committee writes a report. Parliament may refer the bill back to the Committee for a further report. Parliament then considers the general principles of the bill. The whole Parliament votes on whether the bill should proceed, taking the committee's report into account. If Parliament agrees then the bill will proceed. If Parliament does not agree then the bill will fall

Stage 2

The bill then undergoes more detailed "line-by-line" scrutiny, either by the appropriate Committee, the whole Parliament, or a combination of the two. Amendments (changes) may be made at this stage

Stage 3

The bill is considered by the whole Parliament. Amendments can be made at this stage. Up to half of the sections of the bill may be referred back to stage 2 for further consideration. Only amendments that were

referred back for consideration at stage 2 are debated now. The Parliament then votes on the bill. If Parliament agrees, the bill is passed. If Parliament does not agree the bill falls

Once a bill has been passed there is a four week period when the bill may be challenged by the Advocate General, the Lord Advocate or the Attorney General or by the Secretary of State for Scotland. This would normally occur if the bill is deemed to be outside the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament (i.e. not a devolved matter) or if it would adversely affect reserved matters, or the Parliament wishes to reconsider the bill.

Royal Assent

After the four week period has expired the Presiding Officer submits the bill for Royal Assent. Once the bill receives Royal Assent it becomes an Act of the Scottish Parliament. All bills passed by the Scottish Parliament must be signed by the monarch before they can become law. This procedure reflects the fact that Scotland remains part of the UK and all UK legislation must get the Royal Assent.

At each stage the bill is scrutinised. Individuals, pressure groups and parties are given an opportunity to examine and debate the proposals. For example, at stages 1 and 2 the relevant committee will ask witnesses to give evidence to support the bill, or highlight possible difficulties or recommend changes (amendments). These witnesses may be experts in a particular field, researchers, members of pressure groups or any individual the committee considers can offer information. The committees will also question relevant ministers on issues such as providing adequate funding for the proposed measures.