

Scottish government needs to end 'sticking plaster' approach to eradicating child poverty

The Scottish government needs a long-term strategic programme to eradicate child poverty rather than relying on short term "sticking plaster" projects, West Lothian Council has agreed.

Holyrood ministers have been told that simply throwing money at the issue will not solve the problem and there is a call for a more holistic approach including investment in housing education and transport schemes.

And as the Scottish Government prepares plans to take it to the 2030s there was a division across the Livingston chamber as to how practical and successful Holyrood's work so far has been.

West Lothian cites the evidence that child poverty levels have risen to almost 25% in the years since the first Child Poverty act was introduced in 2017.

Councillor Susan Manion, the depute leader of the Labour group said child poverty has been gradually getting worse despite the Scottish Government legislation and its successes.

She used the analogy: "The operation was a success, but the

patient died.”

Councillor Pauline Stafford, the SNP depute group leader, said the Government’s response meant that Scotland was only part of the UK where children poverty levels were starting to fall.

She told a meeting of the Executive that the responses prepared by officers to the government’s Tackling Child Poverty Plan 2026-2031 were “detailed, constructive and balanced.”

She added: “It is good to see that there’s a recognition of the gendered nature of child poverty. The Scottish women’s budget group has done a lot of good work to look at this. Women are often the shock absorber of poverty. They often go without essentials to protect their children so I think we should always bear that in mind in any decision we are making in this chamber.

“It is also good to see recognition of the Scottish Government’s positive impact that their plans are now having. It’s really important to contrast, we have a government that has taken sustained and decisive action which has seen Scotland as the only part of the United Kingdom where child poverty has started to fall. If you compare this with the so-called Labour government which has taken the decision to suspend its MPs who called for an end to the two-child cap.”

“The Scottish Government should be commended for the positive action it has taken. West Lothian itself has received £39m since the Scottish Child Payment was introduced.”

Councillor Manion responded: “This is such a good response from officers because it highlights the complexity of the issue.

“We need a more holistic approach, and we need more synergy between the Scottish Government and local councils in tackling poverty and looking at the cause and effects when it comes to

education, housing and transport.

“There does seem to be a gap in terms of the policies that come out of the Scottish Government linked to a lack of funding which makes it very difficult for us to work cohesively together.”

Anti-poverty Service manager Nahid Hanif told the Executive: “In West Lothian, the latest child poverty estimates from the End Child Poverty Coalition and Loughborough University indicate that 24.6% of children were living in poverty in 2022/23 (compared to the Scottish national average 24%).

“When compared to other local authorities in our local authority family group we can see that over an eight-year reporting period from 2014/15 to 2022/23, there has been an increase in the proportion of children in poverty across all local authority areas.”

In one of the responses agreed by councillors officers suggested: “The focus should be on addressing long-term structural issues rather than short-term measures. Short term funding is a perennial problem for local authorities. It is really limiting and inefficient this needs to be reviewed.”

Consultation with those who had experienced poverty produced surprising results, including the suggestion that simply relying on top-up payments to counter the two-child cap for large families, would not end child poverty.

It called for wider involvement in an investment in the Third Sector to work with families and added: “Any policies, actions or approaches that the Scottish Government may look to implement should be multi-year funded in order to deliver strategic, impactful solutions to eradicate child poverty rather than operating under a ‘sticking plaster’ approach.”

Ms Hanif told the meeting: “The Scottish Government hopes to gather evidence about how well the current policies and

actions are working and what new ideas or approaches might help to achieve reductions in child poverty.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter