



Supporting Families, Ending Child Poverty

Scottish Parliament Election 2026

Introduction



"I hope political parties do what young people have asked, like ending child poverty."

- Young person supported by Aberlour

More than 1 in 5 children in Scotland continue to live in poverty.

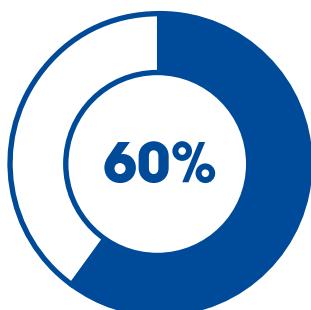
The next Scottish Parliament must be the parliament where we prioritise ending child poverty above all else.

Our most disadvantaged families remain in the midst of a cost of living crisis, and much more action is needed in Scotland over the next five years to advance and sustain reductions in child poverty. Aberlour Children's Charity is urging all political parties to go much further and faster if we want to achieve real and meaningful progress on reducing child poverty and meet Scotland's statutory child poverty targets by 2030/31.

Children have a right to grow up free from poverty and for their families to get the help and support they need to help them to thrive and flourish. Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament have a duty to uphold these rights.

Social security support alone won't lift families out of poverty in the long-term. It must be combined with practical action to better support families who need extra help. We must connect work across Government and the wider public sector to tackle child poverty, to support families and to Keep The Promise. This means ending the housing emergency, strengthening routes into fair work, reducing drugs harm for children and families, removing barriers faced by children and families living with a disability and tackling the public debt crisis. Immediate support is needed for those in greatest need alongside longer-term strategies to build community capacity and create sustainable routes out of poverty for families.

Aberlour is calling for the next Scottish Government to move from managing poverty to ending it and to take forward our calls to improve the lives of Scotland's most disadvantaged children, young people and families.



More than 60% of Scots would like to see the Scottish Government increase support for the poorest families.

Aberlour says the next Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament must...

-  End child poverty
-  Tackle the public debt crisis
-  Support families who need extra help
-  Keep families in recovery together, where it's safe to do so
-  Improve the lives of families living with a disability

Evidence and analysis to support our calls and information shared in this document can be found at aberlour.org.uk



End child poverty



"I'm stuck in a rut and without financial support from people like Aberlour, I don't know what I'd do. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a hole and I can see the ladders but I can't reach them."

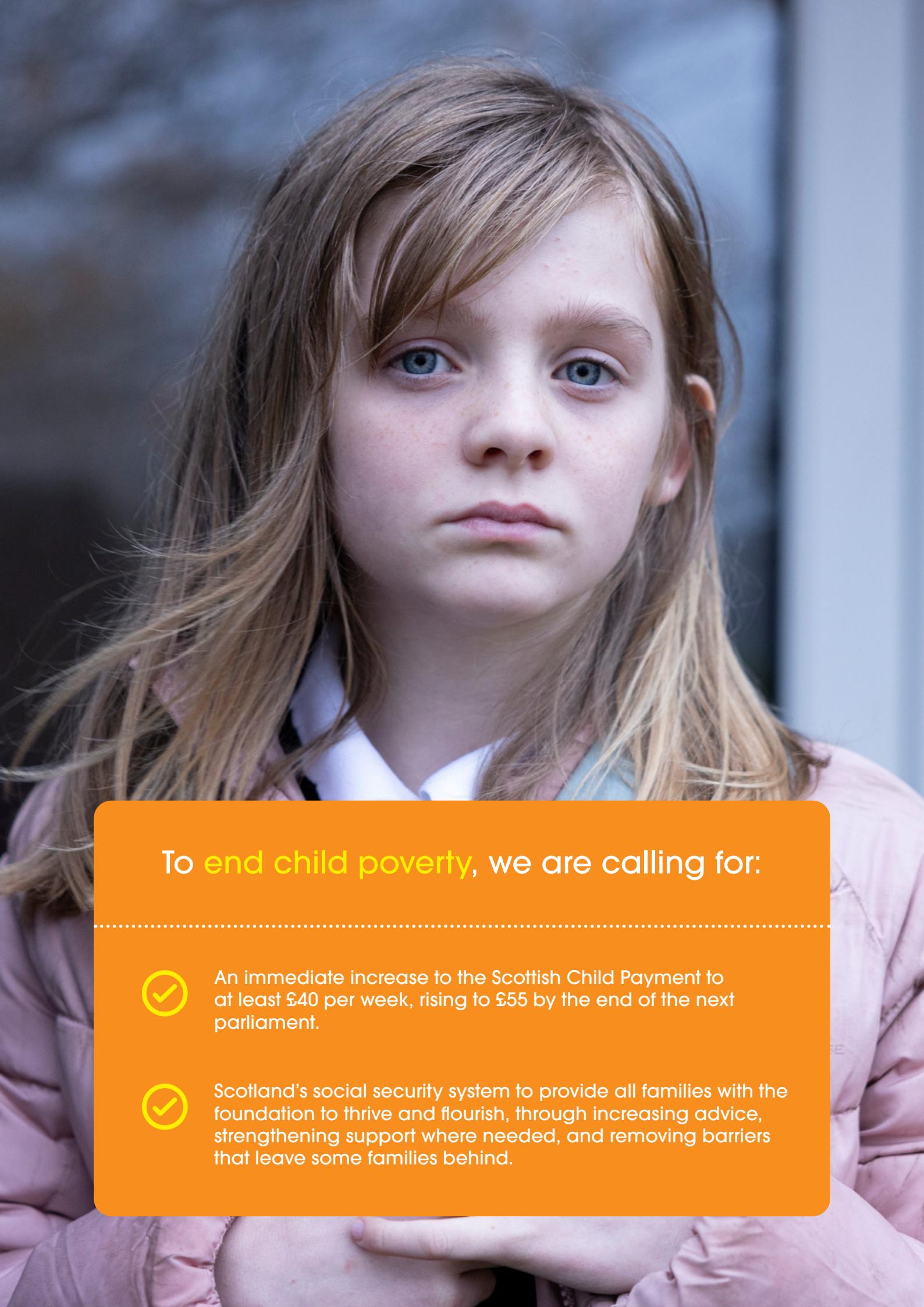
- Parent supported by Aberlour

Ending child poverty must remain the number one priority of the next Scottish Government.

The next five years will be vital for setting out a clear action plan to achieve this, including delivering investment that will enable government and partners across public, third and the private sector to help realise this ambition.

We recognise the challenges, but we believe it is achievable if the Scottish Government prioritises clear targeted actions and investment, working across government (including with the UK Government) to use all available levers to improve the lives of our most disadvantaged children and families. The Scottish Child Payment has been the key anti-poverty measure contributing to a reduction in child poverty.

Increased investment in social security, particularly a significant rise in the Scottish Child Payment, is essential.



To end child poverty, we are calling for:



An immediate increase to the Scottish Child Payment to at least £40 per week, rising to £55 by the end of the next parliament.



Scotland's social security system to provide all families with the foundation to thrive and flourish, through increasing advice, strengthening support where needed, and removing barriers that leave some families behind.



Tackle the public debt crisis



"Debt is like a shadow that you can't escape."

- Parent supported by Aberlour

Scotland's poorest households are in the grip of a public debt crisis.

Public debt intensifies and sustains child poverty. The systems put in place to recover public debt often have the effect of pushing families further and deeper into poverty. The most common debt of this kind is council tax arrears, but often also includes housing and rent arrears, benefit payments deductions, and school meal debt. Public debt is felt most sharply by families on the lowest incomes and too often traps families in poverty.

Nearly £1 billion will be lost by low income households in Scotland over the next parliamentary term due to Universal Credit deductions. 55% of families with children receiving Universal Credit in Scotland have public debt. Around half of those accessing debt advice services across Scotland are seeking help with public debt. In 2023 alone, 30,000 children in Scotland and their families had school meal debt. Women are disproportionately more likely to be impacted by public debt, in particular single parents

and women living in households affected by disability. Tackling the public debt crisis facing disadvantaged families in Scotland is a moral imperative and a practical necessity for building a more equal society. Urgent and compassionate reforms to public debt recovery are required to tackle child poverty, support families, uphold children's human rights, and ensure every child and family has the opportunity to thrive.



To tackle the public debt crisis, we are calling for:



Legislative, policy and practice changes to the way Scotland recovers public debt aligned to existing children's rights and human rights duties.



A Public Sector Debt Bill that puts in place legal protections for those most at risk from experiencing problem public debt and better protects the most disadvantaged and financially insecure households in Scotland.



An end to school meal debt and hidden school hunger for good by expanding free school meals to all low income families and continuing the School Meal Debt Fund until it is no longer needed.



Support families who need extra help



"There needs to be more support (for families) and it needs to be easier to find."

-Young person supported by Aberlour

Alongside continued support to increase family incomes through social security, our politicians must go further and faster to reach child poverty targets by 2030/31.

This demands further targeted actions to tackle the specific and often intersecting challenges in families' lives and help lift the most disadvantaged families across Scotland out of poverty. Keeping The Promise means guaranteeing all families the help and support they need, for as long as they need it. The right to family support must be recognised on an equal footing to a child's right to health services and education. We must remove the root causes of poverty and disadvantage, such as inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to education and fair work.

Poverty is preventable not inevitable, but only with system change, not more of the same. Scotland must develop a new model of holistic whole family support to lift families out of poverty for good. All families who need

extra help should have access to the support they need within their community. Families experiencing the greatest disadvantage should benefit from targeted and individualised support that tackles the intersecting issues which are trapping them in poverty. Public service reform means adapting and improving how our services work for families.



To support families who need extra help, we are calling for:



Significant investment to create sustainable routes out of poverty through whole family support for all families across Scotland who need extra help.



A relentless focus on tackling child poverty, through individualised support for families which includes income maximisation, energy and debt advice, and a pathway of support toward securing and sustaining fair work.



A measurable and evidence-based framework for delivering a whole family support pathway at scale to demonstrate a reduction in levels of child poverty and help meet child poverty targets by 2030/31.



Keep families in recovery together, where it's safe to do so



"There is so much stigma around addiction and mental health but there is a trust there and it took just one person to see a wee bit of hope and things are totally different. I'm proud of the mum I am now. My wee girl has changed my life and I am entirely there for her."

- Parent supported by Aberlour

Scotland has the highest rate of drug related deaths in Europe, with the most recent statistics showing that deaths recorded in 2024 were nearly four times higher than in 2000. More than a quarter of drug deaths in Scotland are women.

Poverty is a key driver of drug deaths with those from the most deprived areas 12 times more likely to die as a result of drugs. Substance use is a direct risk factor in maternal deaths and women affected by substance use are at significant risk during the perinatal period. Every year the lives of thousands of children across Scotland are damaged by the impact of alcohol and drugs. Children too often end up in care due to the impact of parental substance use.

Women-specific services – both community-based support and residential services – are vital to reduce drugs harm affecting women and their children, and to tackle the drug deaths crisis. Continuity of support for women and their children as they transition from

residential rehabilitation and recovery services to community support is a crucial part of the recovery journey. Research shows that every £1 spent on intensive community-based family support services for women in recovery and their families can save £14 by keeping families together and preventing children being taken into care. Scotland must Keep The Promise for women in recovery and their children by keeping families together, where it is safe to do so.

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, light brown hair smiling warmly at the camera. She is holding a baby in her arms. The baby is wearing a light blue onesie and a blue pacifier with a white and orange design. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a domestic interior.

To keep families in recovery together, we are calling for:

- More dedicated residential and community-based services for women in recovery and their children, to help reduce drugs harm, tackle the drug deaths crisis and help keep families together.
- Additional capacity in community services including perinatal services to be available until a child's second birthday.
- Agency for individuals to choose which supports and services are best for them.
- An end to child poverty to reduce the likelihood of alcohol and drugs harm and related deaths amongst women.



Improve the lives of families living with a disability



“Trying to get the packages and communicate all the needs is a hard and emotional fight.”

- Parent of a child supported by Aberlour

Despite the progress made through incorporation of the UNCRC, it is clear there is still much work to be done to protect, respect and champion the human rights of children, young people and families affected by disability in Scotland.

Aberlour delivers services across Scotland that support children, young people and families living with a disability, through community, residential and short breaks services. Families tell us about the intersecting challenges in their lives and additional barriers they face to get the help and support they need for their children. Transitions for disabled young people from children's to adult services are often a time of significant anxiety and stress for young people and their families and too often young people are failed by a drop off or reductions in support at the time they need it most.

For families living with a disability there is an increased risk of financial insecurity. The value of disability benefits often fail to reflect the

true costs and financial pressures families face as a result of caring for a disabled child. 55% of disabled children are in a single parent family and are at greater risk of growing up in poverty. Single parents with a disabled child are at nearly 40% more at risk of council tax arrears, and families living with a disability are disproportionately more likely to experience public debt or benefits arrears, and to need to use a food bank.

To improve the lives of families living with a disability, we are calling for:



An end to the financial insecurity faced by families living with a disability by expanding financial support, including full council tax exemptions for all families living with a disability in receipt of means-tested benefits and extending means-tested winter fuel payment to all households with a disabled child.



Removal of the 'cliff edge' drop in care and support for children and their families when a young person transitions out of children's services as soon as they turn 18.



Scotland to Keep The Promise for all disabled children and young people by guaranteeing the necessary investment in community, short break and residential services for disabled children, young people and their families to enable them to thrive.



Contact Us

For further information about our manifesto asks, please contact:

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Policy and Influencing at Aberlour Children's Charity

We stand up for children, young people, and families. Their voices and views guide everything we say and do.

We are involved in a range of activities with the aim of influencing both policy and practice, and creating positive and lasting change for everyone we support. This includes:

- Championing children and young people's issues in Scotland
- Running public campaigns
- Conducting research and sharing findings
- Lobbying the Scottish Government and other decision makers

To find out more about our latest campaigns and influencing work, please visit:

aberlour.org.uk





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