

# Child Poverty Bill Consultation Report

## Stakeholder submissions and the Government's response

### Contents

Introduction to report	Page 2
Summary of the government's response to the consultation	Page 3
Overview of stakeholder responses	Page 10
Stakeholder responses to establishing the vision and strategy	Page 12
Stakeholder responses to targets and accountability measures	Page 17
Stakeholder responses to progress at the local level	Page 21
Ends	Page 28

Annex A: Statistical analysis of responses by respondent 'type'.

Annex B: Summary of events held with children and young people

## Introduction

In January this year, the Government published *Ending Child Poverty: Making It Happen*, a consultation document which outlined the Government's proposal to legislate for its commitment to eradicate child poverty.

The consultation closed on 11 March. We were delighted with the level of response and engagement throughout the consultation and the Child Poverty Bill is now being introduced in the House of Commons during the fourth (current) 2008-09 Parliamentary session.

239 responses were received from national charities, local government and individual members of the public. Our officials also conducted a series of meetings and presentations alongside well-attended consultation events (with one national event). They also sought the views of a technical group of academic experts specifically set up to provide advice related to technical issues on the measurement of child poverty. In addition, they commissioned Save the Children to conduct a number of consultation events with 129 children from across the country.

Respondents were supportive of proposals to enshrine in law our commitment to end child poverty by 2020. This report provides the Government's response to the consultation and summarises responses received.

## The Government's response to the consultation

The Government is very grateful for the responses which helped to shape the Child Poverty Bill. The Government's aim is that the Bill makes certain that child poverty remains a priority for the future and is a shared mission for our society. Only if tackling child poverty is a task shared by all, can we ensure that no child's life is scarred by poverty and that every child has the chance to reach their potential.

There was a great deal of support expressed for the intention to legislate and we are looking forward to continued engagement. The Bill will widen the consensus and build the momentum around the 2020 target. It will make it clear that tackling child poverty requires a focus on ending deprivation, raising incomes and ensuring that children do not suffer from socio-economic deprivation.

Legislation will ensure a clear goal for ending child poverty by 2020 and provide a national and local accountability framework for delivering it.

### In summary the Bill will:

- Establish four **income targets** which must be met by 2020;
- Require the UK Government to publish a **UK child poverty strategy**, which must be revised every three years. The strategy will set out the policies that will put in place to meet the targets;
- Require **Scottish and Northern Irish ministers** to publish child poverty strategies (a strategy has already been published in Wales);
- Establish a **child poverty Commission** to provide advice on the development of the child poverty strategies;
- Require the UK Government to publish **annual progress reports**;
- Place duties on **local authorities and other local and regional delivery partners** to work together to tackle child poverty, conduct a local needs assessment, produce a child poverty strategy and take child poverty into account in the production and revision of their Sustainable Communities Strategies.

The Bill will set a UK wide framework for tackling child poverty and reporting on progress. Whilst recognising that the Devolved Administrations were best placed to determine how to tackle child poverty in their jurisdictions in line with their particular priorities, responses to the consultation emphasised the importance of co-ordinated action to address the barriers to ending child poverty across the UK.

## Strategy and vision

### Respondents' views:

Responses to the consultation have contributed an important and useful set of views on the vision and scope of the Bill and the child poverty strategy.

The majority of respondents supported the Government's vision to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to enshrine this commitment in legislation. At the same time there was a concern that legislation on its own would not be enough to eradicate child poverty and that identifying and disseminating good practice, alongside a fully joined up and coherent approach would be vital to meet the targets.

Most respondents believed that the proposed building blocks were rightly identified as key areas for those most at risk of poverty: parental employment and skills; financial support; improved outcomes for children and families (including health, education and social services); and housing and neighbourhood environment. As respondents noted, the analysis in the strategy will need to bring out the interrelationships and connections between the building blocks, rather than treating them in isolation.

Respondents also highlighted a need to consider what specific measures are required by the groups of children and parents who are most vulnerable to poverty, such as disabled people, ethnic minority groups and children of asylum seekers and refugees.

Stakeholders have highlighted a number of specific policies that they would like to see included in the strategy. Some pointed out that it is difficult to comment on the proposed scope of the strategy until they have seen more detail of what it will contain.

### The Government's response:

In line with those views, the Child Poverty Bill sets out a clear vision of what the Government wants to achieve by 2020: a society where rates of child poverty have been reduced to the best in Europe and a society where children are not adversely affected by economic and social deprivation. The Bill will ensure continued momentum against this vision for 2020 through duties on government to publish regular child poverty strategies and annual progress reports.

The legislation enshrines a broad approach to tackling child poverty, which extends beyond income measures and related policy responses. The building blocks are a useful way of developing the strategy, but the analysis in the strategy will need to bring out complex interrelationships and connections between the building blocks, rather than treating them in isolation. The Government's Child Poverty Unit is working across all key departments to ensure that policy areas are integrated effectively.

The Government agrees with respondents that part of its task in developing the strategy will be to identify the appropriate policy responses to meet the needs of all children, especially those most at risk of living in poverty.

Although, it is not appropriate to include specific policy measures in primary legislation, the Bill allows for all the relevant areas of policy to be covered in the strategy. As the strategy is developed, it will therefore be essential to continue to

engage stakeholders, drawing on their expertise, knowledge and experience as the Government's analysis progresses.

The Government believes the Bill itself should not be too prescriptive about the content of the strategy which will need to account for changing circumstances and emerging evidence about barriers to eradicating child poverty between now and 2020. Stakeholders will be consulted closely and kept informed of emerging evidence and approaches as the strategy develops.

### **What the Bill will do:**

The Bill will ensure an overarching strategy sets out how to meet the income targets and ensure that children do not suffer from socio-economic disadvantage.

A Child Poverty strategy will identify the steps that will be taken, the progress that the Government expects to make, and how it will contribute to the 2020 goals, in each of the following areas:

- Parental employment and skills;
- Financial support;
- Health, education and social services;
- Housing and communities

The Government will be required to prepare the strategy through to 2020, to be refreshed at three year intervals. The strategy will evaluate progress towards the 2020 vision and set out future action across a range of policy areas.

## **Establishing targets**

### **Respondents' views**

Most respondents believed that measures of success should be expanded.

Beyond relative income, combined low-income and material deprivation and persistent low income, over half of all respondents believed the inclusion of an absolute income measure would provide additional value.

However, many were of the opinion that the absolute low income measure was not the best indicator and should not be confused with the more important relative low income indicator.

There was some support for other measures including an 'after housing costs' measure, because families could appear to be living above the poverty line but with actual disposable income below it.

Others thought that indicators should correlate with the four building blocks and that income indicators were not necessarily the most effective indicators.

Some felt that the 5-10% target for relative low income was not appropriate and not ambitious enough to eradicate child poverty, while others focused on the importance of persistent poverty indicators as an informative way of directing strategies to tackle child poverty.

### **The Government's response:**

Setting targets in legislation on four indicators will, the Government believes, reflect the reality that income, the length of time experiencing low income and the lived experience of poverty matter. If we meet our targets in 2020 and maintain them into the future, we can be confident that we have made a substantial and sustainable impact on children's lives.

Whilst some respondents felt that child poverty should be measured after housing costs, the Government believes that the income measure before housing costs would not only allow transparent comparisons with other European countries (who measure poverty in this way) but also more accurately reflect relative standards of living. Our combined low income and material deprivation indicator also picks up children in families who have incomes above 60% median (this indicator uses a 70% of median threshold), but are experiencing material deprivation, which may be because high housing costs are affecting their living standards.

Focusing targets on income measures will stop children growing up in low income families and lacking the experiences and opportunities that their peers enjoy, thus breaking the link between circumstances at birth and later life chances. The Government also strongly believes that it's important to tackle child poverty across the whole of Government, and at a local level. This is why the strategic framework will drive policy across the spectrum of policy areas outlined in the building blocks.

The Government is strongly committed to eradicating child poverty and wants to set a realistic and ambitious target. The Bill will set out a target to reduce the proportion of children in relative low-income to less than 10 per cent and a target of material deprivation of less than 5%. This would be a major achievement. This is firmly in line with the current best in Europe, and the lowest UK figure since records began in 1961.

### **What the Bill will do:**

The Bill will place a duty on the Government to meet the following child poverty targets:

- Relative poverty: Less than 10% of children living in relative low income poverty by 2020 (i.e. in households with less than 60% of the median income).
- Material Deprivation: Less than 5% of children living in combined material deprivation and low income (i.e. in households with less than 70% of median income).
- Persistent Poverty: Percentage of children living in relative poverty for three out of four years (target level to be set by the end of 2014 as data are currently unavailable)
- Absolute low income: Less than 5% of children living in absolute low income poverty by 2020 (i.e. in households with an income below 60% of median income in the financial year beginning 1 April 2010, uprated annually in line with inflation)

## Monitoring and accountability

### Respondents' views:

Respondents stressed the need for a clear and transparent accountability framework, with co-ordination across the UK and with local partners. Most agreed that a strategy informed by an expert poverty Commission that monitored and reported on progress would be a driver for action. Respondents stressed that the Commission should have a clear rationale and that there must be mechanisms to scrutinise progress made.

Respondents believed that the strategy must include agreements between devolved administrations, as well as service providers and delivery partners and highlighted the role. Close links between the Commission and local partners would be essential to drive action.

Respondents also believed that the Commission must consult and involve stakeholders and organisations who had direct experience and understanding of poverty. Respondents also said that the commission must reflect on what was needed at national level and a strategy should adopt a consistent approach to guide local authorities.

There were many proposals on how the Commission should monitor and report on progress, but there was a consistent view that any reports must be transparent, accessible and made available to all interested parties. Respondents said the Commission should have independence and authority.

### The Government's response:

The Government believes that defining what success looks like, developing a strategy to achieve that vision and establishing a clear and transparent accountability framework will drive progress towards the 2020 goal at both national and local levels.

The Government agrees that the strategy be extended across the devolved administrations with UK wide targets, strategies and reports, alongside a UK wide Child Poverty Commission.

Expert advice provided by the Commission will help the Government develop a strategy and any revised strategies that will offer children in, or at risk of, poverty the maximum benefit. The Commission is incredibly important to ensure the strategy is informed by the best possible advice. By publishing their advice, the Commission will help the public hold Government to account for the effectiveness of its strategy.

### What the Bill will do:

The Bill will ensure that that progress on child poverty is clearly and transparently monitored by:

- Establishing an accountability framework to drive progress towards the 2020 target at national and local level.
- Requiring the Government to ask for, and have regard to, the Child Poverty Commission's advice on the development of the strategy and subsequent revised strategies towards 2020. This advice must be published.

- Requiring the Government to demonstrate progress towards the targets and on the implementation of the strategy through annual progress reports to Parliament. If the strategy has not been implemented, the report must set out the reasons why.

Scottish and Northern Irish ministers will be required to publish a child poverty strategy demonstrating how, in relation to devolved matters of policy, they will contribute to meeting the 2020 targets. An equivalent duty is not being placed on Welsh ministers, as they have already introduced a child poverty measure.

Importantly, the vision set out in the Bill is to eradicate child poverty in the UK, and to do so in a sustainable way by 2020 and beyond. The Bill therefore includes a duty to meet the targets by 2020 and maintain the target levels thereafter, giving the UK Government the power to set out the steps that the government will take to maintain the targets after 2020.

## **Duties at the local level**

### **Respondents' views:**

The consultation has been extremely important in providing insights into how to increase progress and support local authorities to tackle child poverty. Responses to the consultation demonstrated the clear need for effective partnership working to tackle child poverty, at both the regional and local level.

Respondents supported the introduction of new duties to tackle child poverty. Many also felt it was important that local delivery partners were explicitly given a shared duty to tackle child poverty but that this duty should be delivered through existing local arrangements such as Local Strategic Partnerships.

Some respondents pointed out that legislation alone will not improve the lives of children and families experiencing poverty. While, it provides a framework for change, respondents also identified the need for improved support for local authorities and their partners and for better dissemination of effective practice.

### **The Government's response:**

The Government believes that tackling child poverty must be a priority for everybody. It is not just a priority for central government departments – it should also be a core part of what all local authorities and their delivery partners do. It is only with the involvement of local services, and the co-ordination of local and national action, that we will eradicate child poverty in a sustainable way - breaking years of intergenerational poverty.

The Government believes that local authorities and their delivery partners can make tackling poverty one of the most important and fulfilling parts of their jobs and use their resourcefulness to change children's lives to make a lasting impact.

Alongside the Bill itself, the Government is committed to improving the support provided to local authorities and their partners to help them implement it. For example:

- The Government is currently funding a suite of pilots to test out new and innovative ways of tackling child poverty, over the next three years. The pilots will explore new approaches to tackling child poverty, identifying those that deliver the best results and most sustainable long-term impacts.
- Through the Beacon Council Scheme the Government is facilitating ways to share best practise and highlight creative solutions in tackling child poverty.
- The government has commissioned the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services (C4EO) to help local authorities and their partners develop and put into place child poverty strategies. This will include production of a knowledge review about “what works”; recruit sector specialists to work with local authorities to build capacity and improve expertise in relation to tackling child poverty.

The Government will provide clear guidance on the provisions of the Child Poverty Bill setting out what is expected of local authorities and their partners, in particular in relation to the child poverty needs assessments. The Child Poverty Unit will work with Government Offices to support the implementation of this guidance.

**What the Bill will do:**

The Bill will require local authorities and delivery partners to work together to tackle child poverty and set out the contributions that they will make in their local areas. The Child Poverty Bill will contain:

- A duty on local authorities and named partners to co-operate to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty in their area;
- A duty to carry out a ‘child poverty needs assessment’;
- A duty to produce a joint local child poverty strategy. The local child poverty strategy will set out the contribution that each of the partners are making to tackling child poverty in the area;
- A duty for local authorities to take their duty to reduce, and mitigate the effects of, child poverty into account when preparing or revising their Sustainable Communities Strategy.

## Overview of consultation responses

Respondents to the consultation *Ending Child Poverty: Making it happen* supported the Government's vision to eradicate child poverty by 2020. A key issue stressed by stakeholders was that legislation must ensure a cohesive approach to tackling child poverty, rather than a focus on structures and systems.

Most respondents agreed with the four building blocks and said they were broadly the right elements within the vision. There was a welcome for proposals to publish a strategy every three years, with an annual progress report to Parliament.

Respondents said the main issues that the building blocks must address were to:

- Improve the access to and the supply of better paid flexible employment, and the problem of a lack of good quality part-time jobs
- Increase the minimum wage to improve the income of those already working in order to address 'in-work' poverty
- Reform the current childcare provision, including subsidised out of school care and help with costs through the tax credit system
- Reform the housing benefit system to ease transition to work, and the simplification of how benefits were administered
- Integrate working practices between professionals working in health, education, housing and children's services
- Deliver affordable housing and the building of quality social housing.

Many respondents mentioned that there needed to be a greater commitment, resources and more partnership working on the child poverty issue. They mentioned the building blocks should not just be viewed as part of the child poverty legislation in isolation, but should be used to inform policy across a range of areas and require an overarching strategy. A few mentioned the need for a public awareness campaign to highlight the extent and impact of child poverty in the UK, and sustain public interest.

On measuring success, respondents believed the inclusion of an absolute low income measure was important, while some stressed the need for broader measures to tackle child poverty beyond income. Some respondents felt that the relative low income target should be five percent rather than five to ten percent.

Respondents stressed the need for a clear and transparent accountability framework, with co-ordination across the UK and with local partners. In particular, an expert Commission should be able to scrutinise the progress made by government.

Some respondents said consideration must be given to the role of devolved administrations in the development of a strategy to learn from their experiences about what worked and what didn't.

Many respondents raised the point that some of the pre-requisites to reducing poverty fell outside of the ECM framework and local authority responsibility. They said that central government must ensure that there was a focus on ensuring that national and local strategies were joined up and complementary to each other and

would minimise duplication.

A majority of respondents agreed with the need for a child poverty duty on local authorities and their partners. Some stressed that this should not result in a requirement for new partnerships or structures. There were mixed views on whether the existing local performance framework was sufficient. Some believed that there were already a number of child poverty related indicators in the National Indicator Set, while others said the framework needed enhancing to reflect the new requirements. Over half of the respondents were of the opinion that local authorities should not be required to set a local child poverty target, believing that existing targets, indicators and duties were sufficient. If a target was set, many stakeholders felt that it should be negotiated through the Local Authority Agreements.

As some respondents may have offered a number of options for questions, total percentages listed under any one question may exceed 100%. Throughout the report, percentages are expressed as a measure of those answering each question, not as a measure of all respondents.

The organisational breakdown of respondents was as follows:

Employment Adviser	72
Other*	44
Charity/Third sector	43
Local Authority Officer	36
Parent/Carer	34
Devolved Administration	5
Children’s Trust	4
Regional Agency	1
Politician	1

Annex A provides a statistical analysis of responses by respondent ‘type’

## Summary

### Q1 a) Does the 2020 vision capture the key areas where action is required to ensure the greatest impact on reducing child poverty?

There were 229 responses to this question.

Yes 121 (53%)

No 76 (33%)

Not Sure 32 (14%)

There were mixed views in answer to this question. Although the majority supported the Government's vision to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to enshrine this commitment in legislation, many respondents were of the opinion that legislation on its own would not be enough to eradicate child poverty. Respondents believed that the proposed focus on additional legislation could mean that the focus was on structures and systems, rather than identifying and disseminating good practice. They said it was essential that the Government took a cross departmental fully joined up and coherent approach to tackle poverty or else the targets would not be met.

29 (13%) respondents mentioned that there should be more provision of high quality, accessible and affordable childcare. They believed childcare was a key element in tackling child poverty and was crucial in allowing parents to work, to travel to work, or to train and return back into work. It was mentioned that some primary schools operated breakfast clubs and after school clubs, which would be of benefit to parents, and there should be more facilities such as these.

29 (13%) asked for clarification on what was meant by child poverty. Some believed that the consultation failed to clearly define the concept of child poverty in terms of whether it was relative or absolute. Some believed that the level set for relative poverty was too high and this could still leave families without basic necessities i.e. food, clothing and warmth. Respondents also believed that child poverty was not always linked to low wages and material possessions.

25 (11%) respondents said parents should be responsible for the upbringing of their children both financially and emotionally. They said that the vision seemed to ignore issues relating to parental substance misuse disability or mental health issues which impacted on child poverty and something should be done to regulate how benefits were spent. A few respondents said that some parents purely saw children as a means of obtaining more benefits. Respondents believed that parents should be encouraged to attend parenting classes and think about the size of their family.

24 (10%) believed a co-ordinated strategic focus was needed to reduce child poverty and suggested that this would be achieved by multi-agency working.

24 (10%) respondents did not think that the Government had reflected sufficiently upon the impact of the recession in its approach to ending child poverty. They thought this was especially crucial during a time of economic turbulence when public funds would be limited and careful expenditure of proven effectiveness was of primary importance. It was suggested that there should be a more balanced strategy that was adequately prepared for the economic contingencies of the coming decade, including predicted rising levels of unemployment and greater numbers of families in

low paid work.

There were many other diverse issues raised by respondents in answer to this question and these are listed below:

- There should be more family friendly policies (time off while children are ill/part-time/job share)
- Value parenting/families
- Increase working and child tax credit/welcomes working/child tax credit tax
- There was no incentive to work – benefits pay more
- Stop paying benefits to people who kept having children
- Benefit lost whilst working i.e. losing free school meals equals less income
- Respondents mentioned that many families found themselves economically disadvantaged during the transition from receiving benefits and moving into work
- Training/education needed on how to budget/bring up children
- General education to be improved
- More benefits for those in work
- Raise the minimum wage
- Encourage the family unit/2 parent families
- The vision was unrealistic/unachievable
- Do not phase out income support
- Make those on benefits work or contribute in some way
- Raise the minimum wage
- Ensure fathers pay maintenance
- Why should tax payers pay more?
- Free school meals needed.

**Q1 b) Are the building blocks the right ones to make progress towards 2020, including for those groups at particular risk of poverty?**

There were 159 responses to this question.

Yes 94 (59%)

No 42 (26%)

Not Sure 23 (15%)

The majority of respondents were of the opinion that the proposed building blocks were the correct key areas of concern for those who were most at risk of poverty. However, there was some concern that the four building blocks did not develop as discrete silos as the issues they addressed were related.

32 (20%) believed that the provision of education, healthcare and family support was crucial to tackling child poverty. Respondents said the vision must include a stronger relationship between tackling poverty and promoting the social inclusion of all children. They thought that increasing the access to services that prevented poor outcomes associated with poverty was vital. It was suggested that including health care into the building blocks was particularly needed, as current access to services such as dentists, mental health care and speech/language therapists was difficult.

31 (19%) reiterated the need for quality affordable childcare and felt that this needed more prominence within the building blocks. Respondents said this was a barrier to the Government's aim of eradicating child poverty and suggested that a reform to current childcare provision was needed. Respondents believed that the employment and childcare agendas must be more closely coordinated, as parents who could not access affordable high quality childcare would be reluctant to enter the labour market. Specific suggestions put forward were as follows:

- More subsidies for out of school childcare
- More help with childcare costs through the tax credit system
- Free childcare from birth would enable public services to provide support and build in resilience to the most vulnerable
- There was a gap between paid child care and free childcare entitlements of over a year
- Free childcare entitlement was for 15 hours a week for 3 year olds and 10 hours a week for 2 year olds, whilst a job must be for 16 hours or more to enable a parent to come off benefits
- The need for not just childcare, but care for ageing family members, as it was important there was sufficient support to enable people to maintain skills, employment and income whilst caring for sick or elderly relatives.

28 (18%) believed it was important that financial support was recognised as a building block, but said that the current tax and benefit system did not provide a positive financial environment in which to achieve the Government's vision. Respondents noted that the current complexity of the benefits, tax and credit systems were causing problems for low income families. They were of the opinion that the government should overhaul these systems; with a view to making the processes simpler and the forms for claiming benefit and tax credits easier to understand and complete.

27 (17%) respondents mentioned that if child poverty was to be eradicated by 2020 then housing must play an integral role in the strategy. They believed providing a

safe and cohesive community was essential, and said without a secure and safe home environment children would not experience the support they needed to develop both physically and mentally. Again there were many diverse opinions raised by respondents and the key issues were as follows:

- Town planners and developers must consult with families and children to ensure that the infrastructure, public services, play areas and transport were provided that could be used by families
- Address how to ensure there was secure accommodation i.e. children were not constantly moving around and losing touch with services
- There must be reforms to the housing benefits system to ease the transition into work
- The administration of housing benefit must be simplified
- Alleviate the impact of high rents and low pay
- Deliver more affordable homes and provide more social housing, and stop overcrowding
- Greater protection for home owners particularly during the economic recession.

26 (16%) respondents put many forward many other issues for this question:

- Local partners could only influence financial and material support – only central government could actually achieve this policy
- Recognition that national policy did not seek to impose a ‘one size fits all’ solution, and that local partnerships were provided with the flexibility to respond effectively to local conditions
- Local authorities would need devolution of powers from government agencies to effectively deliver the building blocks
- Acknowledgment that child poverty was related to other characteristics such as BME, lone mothers, and reducing teenage pregnancy
- Poverty affected the lives of children more in rural areas than in urban – there was a lack of facilities; activities and transport constraints and the vision must seek to address this
- Greater cooperation between the Government and devolved administration was paramount in realising these aims.

26 (16%) said that employment alone would not raise income and eradicate child poverty as many families were caught in ‘in work’ poverty. It was mentioned that a growing problem was that many children were living in poverty in working households. Respondents were of the opinion that this must be addressed by increasing the minimum wage and allowing benefits such as housing benefit to continue during the transitional period between benefits and work. Many noted that the loss of free school meals, free prescriptions, and council tax payments reduced family income when parents went back to work. It was also mentioned that parents did not have confidence in the Working Tax Credit system because of overpayments and the consequent repayments and felt the system was too complicated and unaccountable.

24 (15%) respondents were of the opinion that improving adult skills would be extremely important if the Government was to achieve its 2020 targets. They believed instilling more skills in low skilled adults in low paid jobs would be beneficial

and of value to employers. Respondents suggested increased support and information must be available to improve the access to skill enhancement opportunities. However, once again respondents noted that funded childcare would be needed to enable families to access this skills training.

21 (13%) said the building blocks did not identify the specific disadvantages faced by disabled people, and believed that breaking the links between disability and poverty was vital if the Government was to achieve its aim to end child poverty. Respondents were of the opinion that parents of disabled children were a group who often found it difficult to balance caring responsibilities with employment commitments outside the home and were more likely to live in relative low-income poverty (i.e. only one parent working) as non-disabled people. They suggested that families who had caring responsibilities needed more support to either help them to remain in the home; or to enter the employment market without having to risk living in poverty, and this must be recognised in the vision and developed into the building blocks.

18 (11%) thought the building blocks needed further detail of the measures proposed before they could decide if they would be the right ones to make progress towards 2020. Respondents specifically mentioned that the document stated the Government would 'provide a strong and progressive financial support system' without defining what was meant by this. They said there was no acknowledgement that the current system was not providing financial support, and there was no information on what would change in order for it to do so within the given timescale.

16 (10%) respondents believed that legislating to eradicate child poverty should mean that the Government was committed to making an investment to ensure the building blocks were fit for purpose and effective; and funding and resource must be provided to ensure this.

**Q2 a) Should the measure of success be expanded beyond relative income, combined low income and material deprivation, and persistent low income to also include absolute low income?**

There were 150 responses to this question.

Yes 76 (51%)

No 32 (21%)

Not Sure 42 (28%)

Over half of all respondents believed the inclusion of an absolute income measure would provide additional value. However, many respondents believed that the absolute low income measure was not a good indicator of children's life chances, and could be confused with the more important relative low income measure. It was also mentioned that this measure became irrelevant over time and was too problematic to define and measure. Some respondents thought the absolute low income measure would be useful only if the definition/measure was agreed and the data available more often than the 10 year census.

42 (28%) were of the opinion that other measures should also be included. They felt an 'after housing costs measure' should be used to determine the level of poverty, because many families could appear to be living above the poverty line but their actual disposable income fell well below. Other aspects of poverty they thought should also be considered and were linked to the four building blocks were: a lack of access to good health care; quality housing; neighbourhood environments; education; and progression opportunities within work. Respondents were of the view that there were specific issues for more rural areas, such as low income combined with isolation, poor transport and lack of access to essential services which they thought could impact on overall poverty. Another issue identified was the impact of technology on children's lives which they believed to be significant in terms of educational achievement.

26 (17%) said that income levels and material possessions were not necessarily effective indicators of poverty. Respondents said many families chose to lead a low level income or a less materialistic lifestyle and were happy living that way. They thought that vital factors in determining the quality of their lives should include educational inequality; the quality of public services; the availability of decent work and the strength of their communities.

21 (14%) were supportive of the idea of the inclusion of a measure of absolute low income. They felt that this would provide an additional measure for analysis and would be beneficial in the measurement of success in combating child poverty. Respondents said that measures of success should be expanded to include the absolute low income to enable an all round view of child poverty. They considered that this would provide accessible data to all partners as a means of measuring their approaches to tackling child poverty.

15 (10%) felt that factors would change over time and would need to be updated regularly; a range of respondents' views included the following:

- That income tended to rise long term
- That accurate data needed to be available on a regular basis

- That the indicator needed to be linked to inflation and periodically reviewed to take into account factors such as general access to IT
- That data should be available more often than the 10 year census and was incorporated into a regular 'refresh' programme
- Data based on census information was not responsive to changes in local or national circumstances.

15 (10%) said a 5-10% target was not appropriate and not ambitious enough to eradicate child poverty. Respondents were of the opinion that the relative low income target should be set at a precise numerical target of 5%, and this had already been achieved elsewhere in Europe. It was mentioned that the UK has never had a child poverty rate below 10% on this measure since records began, and suggested that setting a 5% target meant relative low income was more likely to approach this figure than if the wider margin was set.

15 (10%) mentioned the importance of persistent low income/poverty level indicators. They viewed this to be a useful and informative means of tackling child poverty, and saw this as a way of confirming that living standards were improving. Some were also concerned about the detrimental effects of living in persistent poverty which could lead to low level aspirations and the increased likelihood of experiencing a range of poorer outcomes.

**Q2 b) Will proposals to publish a strategy, informed by an expert child poverty commission, and proposals to monitor and report on progress, drive the action needed?**

There were 154 responses to this question.

Yes 79 (51%)

No 34 (22%)

Not Sure 41 (27%)

Most respondents agreed that a strategy informed by an expert poverty commission that monitored and reported on progress would be a driver for action, and it would be important not to delay the setting up of this commission. Those who disagreed said there was already a range of strategies in place so a national strategy was not needed. Those who were unsure said the model in the consultation would need strengthening, would not be sufficient on its own and would need a more joined up focus across all government departments to be successful.

34 (22%) said in order to drive the action forward there must be coordination across the UK. Respondents believed that the strategy must include agreements between devolved administrations, as well as service providers and delivery partners and highlighted the importance of the role of other government departments to provide a joined up focus. It was suggested that close links between the commission and local partners was essential and together this would drive the action needed.

30 (19%) respondents felt that for the strategy to be effective in alleviating poverty across all groups, the commission must consult and involve those stakeholders and organisations who had direct experience and understanding of poverty. Respondents believed this would then allow the commission to draw on the evidence needed to drive the action forward.

27 (18%) felt the proposal to establish an expert child poverty commission to monitor, report on progress and drive action was an effective way of ensuring that activity towards the 2020 target was kept on track and was coordinated.

24 (16%) respondents said the commission must reflect on what needed to be done nationally to provide a guide for local authorities and believed the strategy should be based on national evidence to ensure a consistent approach. However, because of the overlap between child poverty and parental lack of work, the strategy must also take account of the proposals for local strategic partnerships to prioritise employment and employability.

22 (14%) respondents put forward many proposals on how and what the commission should monitor and report progress on, and said any reports must be transparent, accessible and made available to all interested parties. They said the reports should cover a wide range of issues and raised the following:

- Advice was needed on specific and technical issues
- Include data on the extent of child poverty to highlight progress and set future priorities
- Include firm targets with levers to monitor continued progress over the next 10 years
- Include information on new funding, or existing funding streams which could be used to benefit the poorest families
- Reports must be laid before parliament.

20 (13%) said an external commission which was independent of the Government and not created just to 'rubber-stamp' government proposals was required. Respondents also thought the commission must have authority, expertise and have a commitment to regular reporting.

### **Q3 a) What are the main constraints to tackling child poverty at the local level?**

There were 103 responses to this question.

35 (34%) were of the opinion that a constraint would be around the effectiveness of partnership working. They said a coordinated joined-up and consistent approach between public and other statutory bodies, and children's services would be essential.

27 (26%) respondents believed that local government faced considerable pressure with their budgets and spending, and thought that funding would be a major constraint at local level.

24 (23%) thought that establishing ownership of a range of complex issues would create problems, as some partners would not understand that they had to make a contribution, or even that it was part of their remit to do so. It was suggested that there must be more awareness between agencies that their services could have an impact on reducing child poverty

21 (20%) respondents said that the biggest constraint would be having the necessary resources available to commissioners and those responsible for the planning, delivery and evaluation of services that impacted on children and families to support those in poverty. They particularly mentioned having personnel with the skills and expertise would make a real difference, and it would be vital that local authorities used local resources efficiently.

16 (16%) thought the availability of data would be a barrier to tackling child poverty. Respondents mentioned that limited availability of accurate and timely data could make progress difficult at local level. Respondents also said that a constraint would be sharing service user's data between agencies, and said there must be an improvement in the way personal data was shared within and between agencies.

16 (16%) respondents said that the cost of living in London in particular needed a higher living wage than other regions. It was mentioned that regional variations in standards of living required an approach that allowed flexibility, but also consistency to avoid post-code lotteries occurring. Respondents also mentioned that it should be recognised that government spending should be consistent with the stated aim of reducing the economic prosperity gap between the north and south, as currently some London councils received additional resources per child for education.

14 (14%) believed housing was a key factor in determining and tackling child poverty. Respondents mentioned that barriers existed for housing professionals when tackling worklessness such as reliance on internal funding and the complexity and multiplicity of local arrangements. There were also constraints for people wanting to get into employment who would lose their housing benefits if they did so. Respondents also mentioned the poor condition and availability of housing, and the high level of private landlords was a possible barrier.

10 (10%) respondents believed it was important to increase skills and qualifications so people could take advantage of employment opportunities. They were of the opinion that a big constraint was poor education and skill levels in today's parents.

They also said there was a need to help parents access work through more self-confidence coaching courses to support them in overcoming the practical and emotional challenges of entering the workplace.

### **Q3 b) How can central Government support local authorities in overcoming these constraints?**

There were 97 responses to this question.

40 (41%) said there needed to be more effective partnership working, standardisation and a requirement for all partners to collaborate. Respondents were of the opinion that government departments must not operate in silos and a more cohesive approach was needed to ensure all government departments were sending out a joined up message to local authorities and other statutory bodies.

27 (28%) respondents thought there was a need to identify areas of good practice and to share innovations across local authorities. They reiterated that dissemination of best practice and guidance was important so local authorities could implement efficient schemes and 'quick wins' easily. Respondents believed this would then allow them to focus resources on more complex local problems rather than spending their resources on duplicating work other local authorities had already done successfully. Respondents also said they would welcome research summaries and thought further examples and guidance would provide local partners with the tools to reduce poverty.

19 (20%) said that the Government's financial strategies needed to be targeted on supporting the parenting function. They thought that funding should be available to introduce workshops to inform parents on how to tackle poverty. They believed that the importance of a strong family bond should be repeatedly emphasised and people helped to reach their potential in parenting and be encouraged to attend parenting classes. Respondents said that preventing family breakdown and encouraging healthy couple relationships e.g. through relationship education programmes, was vital in helping to reduce family breakdown and improving family outcomes. They suggested that local authorities should provide information for the assessment of benefits where it had already been collected and verified at a local level this would expedite decision making to ensure fairness and prompt allocation of benefits.

19 (20%) raised concerns over the lack of funding and said solutions to end poverty would require significant investment as local government finance depended heavily on central government. Respondents mentioned that there must be more government funding for employment, education, benefits and housing to enable local providers to achieve child poverty targets.

13 (13%) said that the consultation document made no specific reference to the invaluable role of the voluntary and community sector and the use of the terminology 'delivery partners' was vague and did not reflect the vast amount of good practices and essential services that were provided by the voluntary sector. Respondents said that it was the requirement of all partners to address child poverty through collaboration and encourage voluntary agencies and organisations to deliver more services more locally. Some believed that by refraining from the "mother knows best" attitude and involving other sectors, especially the unbiased voluntary sector, central government would provide much better targeted assistance to the right people. A few said that local authorities should work in conjunction with faith communities and the third sector as they had an important influence and contribution to make to the reduction of child poverty.

13 (13%) thought that the Government should look at legislation such as the Data Protection Act to ensure that the sharing of data between partner organisations and professionals working to support families and communities was facilitated, and allowed them to work together more effectively. It was mentioned that more guidelines should be issued to enable wider data sharing and there should be more freedom/flexibility around data exchange between organisations with a duty to co-operate.

12 (12%) some respondents said that for local authorities to achieve their aims partnerships would need to be supported with sufficient resources and expertise together with clear structures for accountability. Some respondents thought that there should be a dedicated child poverty expert, who was fully funded and had clear defined responsibilities, who could ensure that there was access to an appropriate budget. Respondents thought that specific resources should be provided to high child protection areas.

12 (12%) said the Government must ensure that they did not place too many restrictions on local authorities and flexibility was essential to allow them to tackle their own priorities.

10 (10%) said that withdrawing income support was the worst constraint for local authorities. Respondents mentioned that some families chose to be materially poor in order to live a more frugal life, and felt withdrawing this support would be discriminatory.

#### **Q4 Is the existing local performance framework sufficient to ensure that all local areas take the necessary action to tackle child poverty?**

There were 114 responses to this question.

Yes 45 (39%)

No 33 (29%)

Not Sure 36 (32%)

There were mixed views on whether the existing local performance framework was sufficient to tackle child poverty. Most respondents believed that the framework already had a number of indicators relating to child poverty which would be satisfactory, whilst others said the framework would need to be developed and enhanced in order to reflect the new requirements. Some were concerned about the reliability of data, and felt that the level of information currently available was limited and sometimes too out of date to be a true reflection of the of the current position.

14 (12%) respondents said that although specific information would be obtained via National Indicator (NI) 116 from all local areas in England, they were conscious that only 45 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) adopted NI 116 with targets for improvement. The Government needed to target support to all local authorities, not just the 45 with NI116 in their LAAs. Respondents also thought that in terms of the NI set, there was a specific shortfall of any indicator which related to working families in poverty. They said whilst N151, 152 and 153 related to unemployment and take-up of worklessness benefits there were no corresponding indicators for the take up of 'the working benefit' which were administered at local level.

**Q5 a) Should a duty on local authorities and delivery partners (options one and/or two in paras 2.24 and 2.25) be introduced, in addition to the existing local performance framework to incentivise more authorities to prioritise action to tackle child poverty?**

There were 135 responses to this question.

Yes 56 (41%)

No 48 (36%)

Not Sure 31 (23%)

Again there were mixed views to this question. Although most respondents agreed with the need for a duty to be introduced, many did not support the introduction of additional duties and targets, and said more appropriate incentives were already in place.

22 (16%) respondents said that it was particularly important for the Government to recognise the complexities of tackling child poverty could not be done by local authorities alone, and this duty should be equally shared with partners. They also thought that the Government needed to look at other options for promoting partnership working and to ensure best use of targets that already existed; such as PSA 12, 13 and 18.

19 (14%) said they were opposed to the introduction of such a duty, and were concerned with the increased bureaucracy associated with it. Respondents believed that introducing a new duty would be counter productive and would simply add another layer within the Local Performance framework that would become an extra burden on local authorities.

17 (13%) respondents said that child poverty was experienced locally so the local focus was vitally important, and arguably actions taken at this level could have a greater impact than national initiatives. They also believed it would be helpful to introduce a general duty to have regard for the impact on child poverty of actions taken by local authorities and delivery partners. This could be made a responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnerships, whether or not NI116 was within the Local Area Agreement. Respondents also suggested that it would be helpful if the Government clarified either within the Bill, or within the local performance framework which existing duties and indicators had a direct relationship with child poverty, so that local partners developed broader understanding and were supported in prioritising their actions. Respondents also mentioned that to enable effective implementation, there needed to be local leadership, discretion and ownership and not centrally imposed targets.

14 (10%) Respondents believed that the existing LAA framework and the CAA should be sufficient mechanisms to ensure LAs were able to prioritise action to tackle child poverty.

**Q5 b) If so, what form should the duty take?**

There were 59 responses to this question.

There were different opinions between respondents about the choice of options. Some agreed with option 1, and thought this was the stronger option as it recognised

the size and importance of the issue. Others preferred option 2 and said this would compliment the approach afforded by the use of national indicator sets within the LLAs and CAA.

22 (37%) said it was essential that the duty was on all partners and not simply local authorities as tackling child poverty required a multi-faceted and multi-partnership approach.

18 (30%) supported option 2 to 'introduce a new duty on all public bodies for child poverty'. They mentioned it was important for the Government to recognise that the complexities on child poverty could not be tackled by local authorities alone, and the duty must be shared equally with partners. They were of the opinion that option 1 had the potential to limit the impact that would be felt by all agencies locally sharing responsibility for tackling child poverty.

16 (27%) supported option 1 to 'introduce a duty on local authorities to tackle child poverty'. Respondents believed local authorities were key players in developing local drivers to end child poverty through their leadership roles in local strategic partnerships and children's trusts. They were of the opinion that option 2 was unlikely to be effective and was more likely to increase the administration burden than result in any real outcomes.

14 (24%) said a combination of both options 1 and 2 should be introduced to give an incentive to local authorities and their partners to prioritise action to reduce child poverty. Respondents mentioned option 1 would put a duty on them to take a strong lead, and option 2 would ensure that the other local public bodies recognised the local authority lead and worked with them.

9 (15%) said if a duty was put into place, then the application of the same duty must be applied across all local partners, rather than differentiating between local authorities and other organisations.

6 (10%) respondents mentioned there could be problems with the availability of up to date data if option 1 was introduced, and this could make measuring effectiveness difficult. Respondents believed that local authorities would need better data collection systems.

**Q6 a) Should the Government consider requiring all local authorities to set a specific child poverty target or a target from a 'basket of indicators' (option three in para 2.26)?**

There were 129 responses to this question.

Yes 45 (35%)

No 67 (52%)

Not Sure 17 (13%)

There were mixed views on the requirement for local authorities to set a specific child poverty target, or a target from a 'basket of indicators'. There was some confusion to this question as respondents were given a yes/no option to a multi-part question, and some respondents could not answer the question correctly. However, over half of all respondents were of the opinion that local authorities should not be required to have a target, and said existing targets, indicators and duties were sufficient. It was also suggested that requiring local authorities to set a specific child poverty target would

not work without significant government funding to support its achievement. They believed the human and financial resources required would put a significant strain on local budgets.

25 (19%) were of the opinion that if the Government decided to introduce a mandatory target around child poverty, then it should be from a 'basket of indicators' rather than a single target. Respondents said this would allow flexibility to decide their own priorities based on local need. They thought it was vital that local authorities had the freedom to develop their own strategies for dealing with the particular challenges in their local areas. They felt that prescriptive targets would do very little to empower local areas to develop innovative and effective ways of tackling poverty and poor life chances.

19 (15%) believed that all local authorities should be required to set a specific child poverty target, rather than a target from a 'basket of indicators'. They said this would ensure a robust measure of real progress across the country; and within this specific target local authorities and delivery partners could focus attention and determine their priorities for action. Respondents were concerned that selecting a target from a basket of existing indicators could dilute the overall effort to tackle child poverty.

**Q6 b) If a target is set, the Government would be grateful for views on how this should be negotiated.**

There were 39 responses to this question.

18 (46%) said if such a target was set then it should be negotiated through the local area agreements (LAAs). Respondents thought this would enable some consistency of target setting and monitoring. They thought it was important that the targets should be based on a realistic assessment of what was possible. Respondents also said placing a requirement on local authorities outside of the local performance framework contradicted the focus on understanding the needs of local people in setting local priorities, and would weaken the progress made on LAAs to date.

8 (21%) respondents mentioned that there could be more use of the economic well-being of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. Respondents said the ECM outcomes already covered the more general child welfare indicators.

8 (21%) said local targets could be improved and further developed through liaising and negotiating with multi-agency partners and other community groups.

7 (18%) suggested that areas must be able to retain flexibility to choose the most appropriate indicators for their locality and set targets more appropriate to their local circumstances. They said this was the principle on which local area agreements were established and it was vital this was retained in relation to child poverty.

7 (18%) said sufficient targets were already in place. Respondents believed that instead of legislation, it would be more appropriate to support local areas to measure, monitor and improve data collection on this issue and re-focus their activity around existing duties, powers and statutory processes.

**Q7 Are there other, more effective steps that could be taken, within or outside new legislation, to incentivise more local authorities to prioritise taking action on child poverty?**

There were 109 responses to this question.

Yes 74 (68%)

No 16 (15%)

Not Sure 19 (17%)

21 (19%) said that effective sharing of data and best practice was needed, and that the strategy needed to promote joined-up working between the range of organisations involved. It was suggested that ‘champions’ on child poverty could be employed to highlight and advocate good/best practice across regions, and aid local authorities in meeting their targets. It was considered that the focus should be on ‘what worked’ and sharing evidence on this would be crucial to eradicating child poverty. There was mention that any new legislation should provide levers to improve partnership working and should not act as a barrier to work already underway. There was also the view that the Child Poverty Unit could have a role in disseminating support and guidance.

15 (14%) believed that a more general approach was needed, and that it would be more effective to raise the minimum wage or increase welfare benefit levels and/or tax credits. Some respondents indicated that payment of Income Support should remain in force and that the welfare/life choices made by individuals ought to be taken into account.

14 (13%) commented on issues surrounding funding. A range of their views included the following:

- That pump-priming of resources was needed to support this agenda, and to support sector led and local response such as funding locality project managers
- That further progress would ultimately rest upon the ability of the Government to commit further resources, as well as overall direction to achieve the target set for 2020
- That it was also vital to ensure the flexible free early years entitlement was adequately funded and fairly apportioned by councils, so that it maintained choice and was free to providers as well as parents
- That funding should be targeted towards local need
- That closer evaluation of how funding had already been spent and what it had achieved was necessary
- That steps’ must be taken to ensure that that funding was directed at ‘additional activity’ rather than mainstream activity and that funding should be increased year on year, depending on the value added performance towards child poverty targets.